

KHABAR

FALL 2025

A FUTURE WITHOUT TITLE VI?

by Dr. Anirban Gupta-Nigam,
Associate Director, Institute
for South Asia Studies



Since 1965, when Title VI was authorized under the Higher Education Act, the US Department of Education has maintained a portfolio of grant and fellowship programs to bolster foreign language learning, area studies research and pedagogy, professional development for teachers, and curriculum development at the K-12, graduate, and postsecondary levels.

The ecology of South Asia Studies at Berkeley has, over the years, benefited greatly from successive Title VI awards. They comprise two distinct pillars: the Foreign Languages and Area Studies (FLAS) fellowships program and designation as one of nine US-based South Asia-focused National Resource Centers (NRC).

THE PRECARIOUS FUTURE OF TITLE VI

Since the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s and longstanding political attempts to trim the Department of Education's budget, international and area studies programs organized under Title VI have frequently been confronted by the specter of budget cuts.

Today, however, Title VI's future looks more precarious than at any other point since its inception, rendering the future of the work enabled by Title VI uncertain at Berkeley and beyond. In addition to extensive and immersive training in South Asian languages, Title VI funding has helped Berkeley develop and institutionalize dedicated research infrastructures for South Asia Studies, as well as a dynamic menu of public programming.

In anticipation of a year when the final tranche of our 2022-6 Title VI grant may not be released by the Department of Education, we reached out to faculty affiliated to the Institute to ask them both about the importance of this funding to their work, and to request them to contemplate what the future may hold in its absence.

"The prospect of a future without Title VI funding is deeply concerning—not only for our Institute, but for the broader intellectual and pedagogical ecosystem at UC Berkeley", Dr. Sugata

Ray, Associate Professor of the Art History, told us. He added: "Title VI has never been about funding alone. It has allowed us to build an ecosystem where languages, scholarship, public engagement, and global responsibility thrive in concert. Without it, we risk profound institutional contraction—and a dimming of the vibrant, critical inquiry that defines ISAS's place at Berkeley."

THE VALUE OF FLAS FELLOWSHIPS

The FLAS Fellowships allow an extensive study of languages to be woven into the timeline and structure of graduate programs—a preciously important feature of the program in an era when the humanities and humanistic social sciences seem to be engaged in perennial battles to preserve funding.

On this count, Dr. Alexander von

Rospatt, Professor of Buddhist and South Asian Studies and Director of the Group in Buddhist

Studies, noted that "the FLAS awards for the study of Sanskrit language are crucial for recruiting Sanskrit PhD students in the Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies (SSEAS), and also for Buddhist Studies students working with Sanskrit sources. Without the FLAS awards, SSEAS and Buddhist Studies would not have the flourishing PhD programs we have."

INTERDISCIPLINARY REACH

One of the virtues of the FLAS program is the interdisciplinary nature of inquiries the grants support, allowing as easily for deep learning to intervene in archival debates as for skill development to address

urgent, contemporary social questions. As Dr. Lawrence Cohen, Professor of Anthropology and former Director of ISAS, observed, ISAS's awards have funded research in areas as diverse as "tuberculosis control, climate resilience, cancer, maternal and child health, urban transport, the gig economy, legal reform, opioid addiction,

and new social and political movements."

Dr. Abhijeet Paul, Lecturer in Bangla Studies, agreed with Dr. Cohen on this point. He observed: "FLAS is integral to campus culture at Berkeley. FLAS has enabled students to conduct research in critical areas such as health, development, infrastructure-building, sociopolitical histories, business and marketing, digital access, and many other subjects and disciplines."

A sentiment also echoed by Dr. Vasugi Kailasam, Assistant Professor of Tamil Studies, who said that the "availability of Foreign Languages and Area Studies Fellowships has been truly invaluable in attracting exceptional students to pursue Tamil and Telugu at Berkeley, enhancing their academic training, and enriching our campus culture. These fellowships have opened up meaningful career paths by equipping students with critical language skills and regional expertise."

VASUGI KAILASAM
These fellowships have opened up meaningful career paths.

TRANSFORMATIVE STUDENT EXPERIENCES

Recalling his own experience as a graduate student, Dr. Rahul Bjorn Parson, Assistant Professor of Hindi Studies, told us: "FLAS was a major part of my funding as a graduate student. The funding allowed me to study not only Hindi, but also Urdu and Bangla. My cohort of graduate students, who now teach at universities across the US and elsewhere, largely have FLAS to thank for their language training."

RAHUL BJORN PARSON
FLAS was a major part of my funding as a graduate student.

Dr. Paul emphasized the potentially transformative nature of the educational experience as well, writing that "getting a FLAS can be a life-changing event, especially in an undergraduate context: for some students, the program not only exposes them to a foreign language expert, but also to a network of FLAS recipients and scholars, some of whom have done cutting edge research

ABHIJEET PAUL
FLAS can be a life-changing event, especially in an undergraduate context.

(cont'd on p.3)

A VIEW FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear friends,

I remember a conversation with a colleague in 2021–22, as we emerged from Covid, where we agreed that we could now gather ourselves, because, surely, we would not have to face anything as historically disruptive for a long, long time. Yet today, the impact of Covid on the Institute seems tame when we compare it to the abrupt and total loss of federal funding we are experiencing. In Covid we were able to maintain most of our functions (barring the ability to program in-person events); but the current crisis fundamentally threatens decades of efforts to educate and support people seeking to learn about South Asia in the United States.

For decades, the Institute for South Asia Studies (formerly the Center for South Asia Studies) was part of a small constellation of area study centers supported by federal Title VI funds—resources intended to deepen U.S. knowledge of South Asia and expand proficiency in South Asian languages. Title VI funding accounted for roughly 30% of ISAS's budget. In some specific areas, its role was greater. In others, less so. For example, our contributions to ORIAS (a campus unit devoted to internationalizing public education by training K-12 teachers), library acquisitions, and summer language study grants were 100% federally supported. Year-long foreign language fellowships were about 50% supported, staff salaries were partially supported, and language instruction in Bangla, Punjabi, Telugu, and Urdu relied on federal contributions ranging from 20–40%.

The consequences of the loss of federal funding are profound. Our South Asia-focused library acquisitions program cannot survive without this assistance, nor will our fellowships program to train students in South Asian languages. But the hidden damage is often worse in partially supported programs. To give you one example. Berkeley is unique in offering instruction in seven South Asian languages—the most outside the region itself. Federal cuts do not just affect Bangla, Punjabi, Urdu, and Telugu, but ripple outward to Hindi, Sanskrit, and Tamil as well, as resources are shifted and offerings potentially reduced. This threatens our ability to train the next generation of language specialists—graduates who have historically gone on to careers in academia, government, NGOs, and the private sector. Likewise, our capacity to host 75+ annual events, support faculty initiatives, build partnerships with South Asia-based institutions, and serve as a hub for the larger South Asia-focused educational ecosystem in the U.S. is now deeply strained.

What makes this situation especially painful is that we have been working for years to reduce our dependence on Title VI funding. Tamil, for instance, is now funded entirely through community contributions. Punjabi's reliance on federal funds has dropped from 67% in 2018–22 to 40% in the last cycle; Bangla's from 50% to 20%; and we have endowments that offer partial support for both Urdu and Telugu. But Title VI was also the foundation that allowed us to expand and grow the Institute's offerings. Our ability to highlight federal support for Punjabi enabled the creation of the Sabharwal Program in Sikh Studies (2022), which welcomed its inaugural lecturer this semester. Similarly federal support for Bangla and Urdu led to the establishment of the Tagore Program on Literature, Culture and Philosophy (2019) and the Mir Research Fellowships in Urdu Studies (2022). More recently, Emeritus Professor Bruce Pray established a fund for undergraduate research, graduate fellowships, and faculty workshops—an investment in our dynamism, which was itself possible only because of the Institute's long record of federally supported excellence.

In recent months, several questions have come up repeatedly in the context of funding cuts. The first is why we cannot simply ask the state of California to make up for our losses. The challenge here is that the state's contribution to the UC system has been declining for years as it faces other budgetary priorities. At Berkeley, less than 10% of our budget now comes from the state—down from nearly 50% in the late 1990s. Even if the state wished to step in, it would

take a long time for any new support to reach us, by which point the effects of the current cuts would already be deeply felt. Another question is whether private donors can help. The answer is yes, but even in the best of times, it is difficult to fundraise for areas like languages, libraries, or graduate student training. Today, with many philanthropists stretched thin, the challenge is even greater. All of this leads to the most frequent question: will the Institute shut down? My answer is clear—no. We will continue to champion the study of South Asia at Berkeley and across the U.S. This means sustaining our vibrant programming wherever possible, awarding more than 30 student grants each year, supporting three PhD prizes, fostering new faculty-led initiatives (including one launching in Fall 2025 on South Asia's political economies), and attempting to safeguard language instruction. The road ahead will be difficult, but it also offers us an opportunity to reflect on what we have built and to chart the next stage of our journey. More than ever, we will need your partnership, your ideas, and your support. My door is always open. Please come by for a chai and a conversation.

In the meantime, please visit our website for upcoming events, research opportunities, and funding calls. And do encourage friends and colleagues to join our mailing list via the link at the bottom of our homepage.

Fiat lux and Go Bears!

Munis

THE INSTITUTE FOR SOUTH ASIA STUDIES

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA AT BERKELEY



The ISAS team (clockwise from left) Puneeta Kala, Anna Chek-Wing Wong, Dr. Anirban Gupta-Nigam, & Dr. Munis D. Faruqui

ISAS TEAM

DIRECTOR

MUNIS D. FARUQUI, Sarah Kailath Chair of India Studies, Associate Professor of South & Southeast Asian Studies, Director of Global, International & Area Studies

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

ANIRBAN GUPTA-NIGAM

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

PUNEETA KALA

WORK STUDY

ANNA CHEK-WING WONG

!! *The current crisis fundamentally threatens decades of efforts to educate and support people seeking to learn about South Asia in the United States... Berkeley is unique in offering instruction in seven South Asian languages—the most outside the region itself. Federal cuts do not just affect Bangla, Punjabi, Urdu, and Telugu, but ripple outward to Hindi, Sanskrit, and Tamil as well... All of this leads to the most frequent question: will the Institute shut down? My answer is clear—no. We will continue to champion the study of South Asia at Berkeley and across the U.S."*

—Munis D. Faruqui

in their respective fields at Berkeley. Campus culture is always enriched when students are given wider exposure to global languages and cultures.”

Along similar lines, Dr. Ray noted that the fellowships “are a cornerstone of our global education ecosystem—empowering students at both undergraduate and graduate levels with the resources to pursue intensive language study, area research, study abroad, and impactful careers. FLAS funding has demonstrably broadened curriculum offerings, elevated research capacity, and helped position graduates as global scholars.”

NATIONAL AND GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS

Taking a broad overview of this landscape, Dr. Cohen explained: “Without FLAS, the ability of this and other universities to be competitive nationally and globally will diminish. American students will lose the edge in a competitive research climate as their access to first rate language training will decline. The FLAS awards have been crucial to our recruitment of graduate students in Anthropology and Medical Anthropology, and as importantly to our ability to train students in South Asian languages enabling their becoming first-rank scholars and teachers. I currently have advisees who came to Berkeley because of our FLAS-based resources in Bangla (Bengali) and in Tamil; recent graduates in our Anthropology programs were able to do impressive scholarly work because of FLAS based training in Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu; and over the years our students have benefitted from the other languages FLAS supports. I should note that as students in our program work around the world, FLAS support over the years has enabled research across Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America.”

LAWRENCE COHEN

Without FLAS, the ability of universities to be competitive nationally and globally would diminish.

LANGUAGES AT RISK

As well as supporting undergraduate and graduate language fellowships and research, Title VI has been key to subsidizing language instruction at Berkeley over many decades. Unfortunately, four languages depend particularly heavily on Title VI funding: Bangla, Punjabi, Telugu, and Urdu. Combined enrollment in these languages is over 200 students annually.

Without Title VI funding, the Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies may be forced to cut back instruction in these key languages or spread the pain of language cuts across all seven South Asian languages currently taught in the department (the others being Hindi, Sanskrit, and Tamil). The consequences of doing so were explained by one faculty member who did not want to be named. They noted: “We (i.e. the US) are only hurting ourselves by giving up on instruction in these languages. Each of these languages represents rapidly growing communities in the US. Telugu, for instance, may be the fastest growing language in the US and one of the most important languages in the Bay Area and Silicon Valley. I also cannot imagine trusting anyone to really understand the Rohingya crisis without some knowledge of Bangla. Ditto for Pakistani politics

and Urdu, or developments related to the Punjab or the Sikh experience and Punjabi. These four languages have over 700m global speakers in some of the most troubled parts of the world. How

can we give up teaching them? Now, more than ever, is when we should be doubling down on these languages, rather than throwing in the towel.

Talk about hitting an own goal!”

NETWORKS AND COLLABORATIONS

Beyond supporting language instruction and individual research, Title VI funds have been key to building institutional networks to augment a national ecosystem for research on South Asia.

In ISAS’s case, Title VI has cemented the Institute’s connections with the South Asia Summer Languages Institute (SASLI) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the American Institute of India Studies, the American Institute of Pakistan Studies, the American Institute of Bangladesh Studies, the American Institute of Sri Lanka Studies, and the Council of American Overseas Research Centers (among others).

It has also generated long-standing collaborations between the faculty and staff at different area studies institutes and centers on Berkeley’s campus. Among them is the Office of Resources for International and Area Studies (ORIAS), which exists to help K-12 and community college teachers improve their understanding of global issues and better incorporate World History and other international topics into their courses. Such relationships have fostered critical collaborations, conversations, and intellectual and professional partnerships over the decades.

Although Title VI was conceived and rolled out during the Cold War years with a view to fostering greater knowledge about world areas of national importance to the United States, the initiatives gathered under Title VI grew to exceed the parameters of geopolitical strategy, allowing generations of scholars to cultivate an interest in learning something about others—societies, cultures, peoples, politics, histories. This broader mission ties into the work Title VI NRCs do in funding infrastructures to sustain scholarship on the region. The library is an essential component here.

LIBRARY RESOURCES UNDER THREAT

Mr. Adnan Malik, Curator and Cataloger for the South Asia Collection in the South/Southeast Asia Library at Doe Library, told us that Title VI funding has been critical to developing the South Asia collection at Berkeley into one of the best in the world: “In earlier years it provided funding not only for collection development and student worker wages, but also partially funded the salary of a curatorial assistant.” Despite reductions in funding in recent grant cycles, “Title VI has continued to enable the library to promptly meet faculty and student acquisition requests, especially from Euro-

ANONYMOUS

Now, more than ever, is when we should be doubling down on these languages.

pean publishers, and also help us stretch our budgets to acquire more expensive acquisitions, like digital resources and expensive e-books. Any loss of Title VI funding will have a permanent and significant impact on our South Asia collection.”

Dr. Ray seconded this assessment, particularly since the loss of Title VI funding would affect the collection of “vernacular materials, threatening one of the most important South Asia collections in North America, with long-term consequences for global scholarship.”

LOOKING AHEAD

Recognizing the interwoven nature of the Institute’s work, Dr. Kailasam expressed concern about ISAS’s “ability to sustain South Asian language instruction, institutional collaborations, library resources, and public programming for two major South Indian languages, Tamil and Telugu” in the absence of Title VI, especially since these “languages are not only foundational to a range of scholarly inquiry—from classical literature to contemporary media—but are also spoken by large numbers of immigrant communities in the Bay Area.”

Dr. Ray voiced similar concerns about public programming and institutional collaborations, cornerstones of ISAS’s mission, being significantly curtailed:

“Title VI enables us to host lectures, symposia, and teacher training workshops that bring South Asia into urgent dialogue with contemporary global issues.

These programs are not just outreach—they are a core part of how we connect the university to the world.”

Indeed, Title VI has allowed ISAS to catalyze a wide range of independent and privately funded partnerships dedicated to South Asian Art, Pakistan, Himalayan, Sikh and Punjabi Studies, Telugu & Tamil Studies (among others) encompassing lectures, grants, research awards, dissertation prizes, visiting lecturer opportunities, and research collaborations. Both the Subir and Malini Chowdhury Center for Bangladesh Studies, the only Center of its kind in North America or Europe (estb. 2014), and the Center on Contemporary India (estb. 2020) have thrived in a context where Title VI funds complemented their activities.

Ultimately, their vibrancy notwithstanding, such initiatives cannot compensate for the substantial financial blow dealt by the loss of Title VI funding. As readers of Khabar will know, we are proud to host nearly 45 South Asia-focused events cutting across disciplinary perspectives every semester. You can expect to see increasing gaps in our programmatic calendar as the effects of the federal cuts deepen. Combined with diminished instructional opportunities, library support, and funding for student and faculty research, we find ourselves on the precipice of a moment when an ecosystem painstakingly and carefully built over the course of 75 years is on the verge of being substantially weakened and, possibly, disappearing—if not overnight, then slowly by a thousand cuts. ♦

SUGATA RAY

Title VI enables us to host lectures, symposia, and teacher training workshops that bring South Asia into urgent dialogue with contemporary global issues.

INDIA @ BERKELEY

—bringing together signature programs from the Center on Contemporary India to major lectures and partnerships to advance research, engage students, and spark dialogue on India’s politics, economy, culture, and society.

THE INDO-AMERICAN COMMUNITY LECTURE IN INDIA STUDIES

March 7, 2025

SIDDHARTH VARADARAJAN —NAVIGATING CHANGE: POLITICS, MEDIA, AND DEMOCRACY IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA



(From L) Sharik Laliwala, Uttara Chaudhuri, & Siddharth Varadarajan

The Institute for South Asia Studies hosted journalist and founding editor of *The Wire*, Siddharth Varadarajan, for the Indo-American Community Lecture on India’s democratic challenges and the role of independent media under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. A highlight of the event was the lively exchange with UC Berkeley PhD students Sharik Laliwala (Political Science) and Uttara Chintamani Chaudhuri (English), who

ESTABLISHED IN 1990–91 WITH SUPPORT FROM HON. SATINDER K. LAMBAH, THEN CONSUL GENERAL OF INDIA IN SAN FRANCISCO, AND THE INDO-AMERICAN COMMUNITY, THIS LECTURESHIP BRINGS PROMINENT VOICES FROM INDIA TO BERKELEY FOR LECTURES AND DIALOGUE WITH CAMPUS AND COMMUNITY.

THE BHATTACHARYA LECTURE ON THE FUTURE OF INDIA

May 8, 2025

RAHUL RAM —REINVENTING TRADITIONAL INDIAN MUSIC FOR TODAY’S WORLD

The Institute for South Asia Studies hosted the 7th Bhattacharya Lectureship on the Future of India with Rahul Ram, celebrated bassist and vocalist of the legendary Indian fusion band Indian Ocean. In a lively conversation moderated by Dr. Rahul Parson, Assistant Professor of Hindi Literature at UC Berkeley, Ram reflected on the creative process of reimagining regional Indian music and modern poetry of resistance for contemporary audiences.

Opening remarks were delivered by Dr. Munis D. Faruqui, Director of the Institute for South Asia Studies, who welcomed Ram as not only a pioneering musician but also a committed social activist. A member of Indian Ocean since 1991, Ram shared stories from more than three decades in music, from composing for Bollywood films like *Black Friday*, *Peepli Live*, and *Masaan* to performing with the satirical group *Aisi Taisi Democracy*.

Interspersed with the conversation, Ram presented several of Indian Ocean’s most iconic songs—*Ma Rewa*, *Kandisa*, *Chitu*, *Bandeh*, and *Jhini*—while describing the inspirations, histories, and creative decisions behind each piece. His reflections revealed the blend of cultural

served as discussants. Their probing questions and incisive commentary drew out fresh perspectives, connecting the conversation to broader debates on press freedom, political accountability, and the evolving relationship between media and democracy.

Varadarajan, known for his investigative reporting and incisive political analysis, brought a seasoned journalist’s

tradition, political commentary, and artistic experimentation that defines the band’s work.

The evening concluded with closing remarks from donor Shankar Bhattacharya, who expressed his gratitude and said how deeply impressed he was by the performance and the discussion. The event left the audience with a renewed appreciation for the power of art to challenge, inspire, and unite. ❖



Upcoming
FRI, NOV 7, 2025

BHATTACHARYA LECTURE ON THE FUTURE OF INDIA

CHITRALEKHA ZUTSHI

KASHMIR AND THE NORTHEAST IN THE MAKING OF INDIA: A VIEW FROM THE MARGINS



(From L) Shankar Bhattacharya, Dr. Anirban Gupta-Nigam, Dr. Rahul Ram, & Dr. Munis D. Faruqui

ESTABLISHED BY SHANKAR & THE LATE KIMI BHATTACHARYA, THIS SERIES ASKS LEADING SCHOLARS AND PUBLIC INTELLECTUALS TO ADDRESS THE POSSIBILITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR INDIA IN THE FUTURE.

insight to these issues, making for a dynamic and thought-provoking discussion that resonated with students, faculty, and community members alike. ❖



(From L) Siddharth Varadarajan, Dr. Munis D. Faruqui, & Puneeta Kala

Ongoing CCI Program

SOUTH ASIA SUMMER READING GROUP

A virtual book club for graduate students and scholars—brings together lively discussions on cutting-

edge research in South Asian politics.

The Summer 2025 session explored themes of nationalism, governance, democracy, gender, and social change through recent works by Roluah Puia, Yamini Aiyer, Louise Tillin, Lisa Björkman, Naila Kabeer, Alexander Lee, Adnan Naseemullah & Pradeep Chhibber, Jennifer

Bussell, Atul Pokharel, and Tanu Kumar. The group fosters dialogue across disciplines and creates a vibrant intellectual community each summer. ❖

SARG 2025



Upcoming:

SAT, NOVEMBER 15, 2025

ISAS-VSB CONFERENCE ON RELIGION IN THE MODERN WORLD

ARISE, AWAKE!

THE 125TH ANNIVERSARY OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA’S VISIT TO THE BAY AREA AND HIS MESSAGE FOR OUR TIMES

On November 15, 2025, the Institute for South Asia Studies, in collaboration with the Vedanta Society Berkeley, will host a day-long program marking the 125th anniversary of Swami Vivekananda’s historic visit to Northern California. The event, which will take place in *The Sanctuary, First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley* (407 Dana St, Berkeley, CA 94704), will bring together leading scholars of religion, history, and philosophy to reflect on Vivekananda’s life, ideas, and global impact, while also highlighting his enduring relevance to contemporary debates on spirituality, intercultural exchange, and social change.

Highlights of the program include a keynote lecture, *Vivekananda: A Global Guru*, delivered by Dr. Ruth Harris (All Souls College, Oxford), followed by an

in-depth conversation between Dr. Harris and Dr. Robert P. Goldman (UC Berkeley).

The day will also feature a roundtable, *Transnational Vedanta and the Making of Global Hinduism*, showcasing new research and perspectives from Dr. Ajay Rao (University of Toronto), Dr. Christopher Key Chapple (Loyola Marymount University), Dr. Rita Sherma (Graduate Theological Union), and Dr. Luther Obrock (UC Berkeley). ❖



THE INSTITUTE AND THE VEDANTA SOCIETY BERKELEY HAVE LONG PARTNERED TO BRING LEADING SCHOLARS OF WORLD RELIGIONS TO CAMPUS, FOSTERING DIALOGUE ON RELIGION’S ROLE IN MODERN SOCIETY. PAST SPEAKERS INCLUDE PHILIP LUTGENDORF, ROBERT THURMAN, AND TONY K. STEWART. THIS YEAR, THE COLLABORATION TAKES THE FORM OF A DAY-LONG CONFERENCE.

PAKISTAN @ BERKELEY

— an area studies initiative dedicated to fostering wide-ranging conversations on the history, religion, culture, economics, and politics of Pakistan and the Urdu-speaking world.

THE MAHOMEDALI HABIB DISTINGUISHED LECTURE ON PAKISTAN

April 20, 2024
FAISAL DEVJI
— A PROPHET
DISARMED

On April 20, 2024, the Institute for South Asia Studies hosted the eleventh Mahomedali Habib Distinguished Lecture on Pakistan, delivered by Professor Faisal Devji, historian of South Asia and Fellow at St Antony's College, University of Oxford. In his talk, Dr. Devji offered a wide-ranging historical and conceptual analysis of the controversies surrounding insults to the Prophet, tracing their origins in nineteenth-century India and their globalization at the end of the Cold War. He argued that these controversies stem from the erosion of the Prophet Muhammad's combined religious and political authority, rendering him vulnerable to being perceived as an ordinary figure open to insult. The intense reactions among Muslims, Devji suggested, reflect an effort to recover a lost theological language and experience for modern Islam. The lecture drew a strong audience, sparking engaged discussions about history, politics, and the shifting nature of religious authority. ♦



Dr. Faisal Devji with Tatheer Hamdani of Habib University



Dr. Devji with UC Berkeley students during the post-talk reception

Upcoming
FRI, OCT 10, 2025

THE MAHOMEDALI HABIB DISTINGUISHED LECTURE ON PAKISTAN

GREGG JAMISON

SEALS OF THE INDUS TRADITION: INSIGHTS INTO THE PEOPLE AND CULTURES WHO MADE & USED THEM



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. PAST SPEAKERS HAVE INCLUDED OSMUND BOPEARACHCHI, SALIMA HASHMI, ATIF MIAN, RAZA RUMI, DAVID GILMARTIN, JONATHAN MARK KENOYER, CHRISTOPHE JAFFRELOT, AYESHA SIDDIQA, AND ASMA JAHANGIR.

THE SYED SHARIFUDDIN PIRZADA DISTINGUISHED LECTURE ON PAKISTAN

November 21, 2024

SIDRA KAMRAN
— BETWEEN STATUS AND STIGMA: FEMININITY, CLASS, AND LABOR IN PAKISTAN'S SERVICE ECONOMY

The Institute for South Asia Studies hosted the 2023 S. S. Pirzada Lecture on Pakistan, featuring Dr. Sidra Kamran, winner of the 2023 S. S. Pirzada Dissertation Prize for her doctoral work, *Work, Class Ambiguity, and Multiple Femininities: Women Beauty and Retail Workers in Pakistan's New Service Economy*.

The event included commentary by Dr. Lawrence Cohen, Professor of Anthropology, and was moderated by Dr. Munis D. Faruqui, the Faculty Director of the Institute.



Dr. Sidra Kamran with (from left) Dr. Munis D. Faruqui, Rafat Pirzada, Dr. Amna Jaffer, and Dr. Sadia Saeed

ESTABLISHED BY RAFAT PIRZADA AND HIS WIFE, DR. AMNA JAFFER, AND NAMED AFTER RAFAT PIRZADA'S FATHER, SYED SHARIFUDDIN PIRZADA, THIS ENDOWMENT SUPPORTS TWO PROGRAMS: THE SYED SHARIFUDDIN PIRZADA DISSERTATION PRIZE ON PAKISTAN—AN ANNUAL DISSERTATION PRIZE FOR THE BEST WORK IN THE HUMANITIES, SOCIAL SCIENCES, LAW, OR PUBLIC HEALTH ON PAKISTAN, AND THE SYED SHARIFUDDIN PIRZADA LECTURE ON PAKISTAN—AN ANNUAL LECTURE GIVEN BY THE WINNER OF THE DISSERTATION PRIZE.

Alumni Spotlight

ALUM AWARDED FOR EFFORTS TO EDUCATE EVERY CHILD IN PAKISTAN

by, Amy Cranch, Berkeley News

Khadija Bakhtiar says she came to UC Berkeley in search of a purpose that would inspire the best of her. While working toward her master of public policy from the Goldman School of Public Policy, she found that purpose when she discovered Teach For America, a program that recruits promising leaders early in their careers to teach for two years in public schools with limited access to educational opportunities.

"How amazing would it be if a program like this existed in Pakistan," said Bakhtiar, who is from Pakistan. "A crucible for developing future generations of empathetic leaders who can write policy, mobilize collective power, and build systems that advance the rights of the most marginalized."

After a year of research and planning — and with support from Berkeley that enabled her to explore the idea's viability — Bakhtiar announced the launch of Teach For Pakistan. Since then, the organization has recruited about 600 talented young Pakistanis to teach more than 30,000 students in high-needs public schools. She has also catalyzed a national movement to eliminate educational inequity, pushed for government investment in teacher-leadership models,

Based on ethnographic fieldwork in Karachi's women-only Meena Bazaar and the budget store Delight, Dr. Kamran examined the rise of beauty and retail work for women in Pakistan's expanding service economy. She introduced the idea of "gendered class ambiguity" to

describe how these jobs placed women between working and middle class, and between idealized and stigmatized femininities. This liminal status enabled strategic navigation of class and gender norms but also fostered tensions rather than solidarity. Her work urged expanding South Asian gender and class studies to include the emerging "new working classes." ♦

Upcoming
THU, NOV 10, 2025

PIRZADA
DISTINGUISHED
LECTURE ON
PAKISTAN

M. NABEEL JAFRI

ORATING KNOWLEDGE:
URDU SHI'I KHITĀBAT
IN CONTEMPORARY
KARACHI



Chancellor Rich Lyons presents Khadija Bakhtiar with the 2024 Elise and Walter A. Haas International Award at the Class of 2024 Winter Commencement.

and influenced policy changes around teacher recruitment and training.

"It was the people of this great institution who emboldened a fairly inexperienced 26-year-old to think she could start an organization capable of national impact," Bakhtiar said.

Recognizing her efforts and achievements, UC Berkeley honored Bakhtiar with the 2024 Elise and Walter A. Haas International Award, given annually to an alum with a distinguished record of service to their country. Chancellor Rich Lyons presented her with the award and a cash prize of \$35,000 at the Class of 2024 Winter Commencement.

"Given the international character of our faculty, student body, and curricula, the global orientation and impact of our university, and the extent to which we are driven to make our world a better place, I am hard-pressed to think of an award that is more closely aligned with our mission and purpose," said Lyons. "Khadija is the (cont'd on next page)

PUNJABI & SIKH STUDIES @ BERKELEY

— an area studies initiative dedicated to fostering wide-ranging conversations on the history, religion, culture, economics, and politics of Punjab, Sikh communities, and the Punjabi-speaking world.

RAF SAPERRA BRINGS PUNJABI BEATS AND STORIES TO CAL

On October 1, 2024, the Sikh and Punjabi Studies Program hosted an unforgettable evening with British-Punjabi singer and lyricist Raf Saperra,



Raf Saperra and Bobby Kang speaking with Cal students

the rising musician combining Punjabi folk with East Coast hip-hop, contemporary electronic, and dance sounds. The artist, accompanied by his producer Bobby Kang,

was in town for a tour of concerts but made time to connect with the UC Berkeley community.



(From left Dr. Munis D. Faruqi, Raf Saperra, and Bobby Kang

In a lively, wide-ranging conversation with Dr. Jvala Singh, Punjabi Language Lecturer at UC Berkeley, Saperra spoke about his South London upbringing, his family's roots in Sargodha, Punjab, and his journey from covering Punjabi legends to creating hits like *G'lassy Riddim*, *Milli-1 Life*, and *Snake Charmer*.



Raf Saperra and Puneeta Kala

A highlight of the discussion was a deep dive into *boliyan*—traditional Punjabi folk couplets—exploring their cultural

significance, performance traditions, and enduring role in celebrations.

More than 100 students attended, many inspired by the way Saperra wove heritage and innovation together. ❖

(cont'd from previous page) perfect embodiment of all that the award seeks to celebrate and support."

Commenting on her journey, Bakhtiar said that people didn't think the program would work in Pakistan "because children from low-income backgrounds can't make such rapid progress, or because public schools and school systems are too far gone to change," she said. "It felt like I could see what lies beyond the mountain but others couldn't."

But staying the course has reaped rewards. "I would have missed the moment where students are no longer 'beneficiaries' of a teaching program but ask in every school and classroom I visit, ... 'Tell us how we can help the

New Faculty Announcement

DR. PUNINDER SINGH NAMED INAUGURAL SABHARWAL LECTURER IN SIKH STUDIES AT UC BERKELEY

The Institute for South Asia Studies (ISAS) is proud to share some exciting news: in Fall 2025, UC Berkeley will welcome Dr. Puninder Singh as the inaugural Sabharwal Lecturer in Sikh Studies. This year-long visiting appointment, jointly hosted by ISAS and the Department of South & Southeast Asian Studies, marks an important milestone for Sikh Studies on campus—one that will connect students, faculty, and the broader community with fresh perspectives and meaningful conversations about Sikh history, thought, and practice.

The Sabharwal Lectureship was made possible by the Dr. Ranjit Singh Sabharwal Endowed Fund for Sikh Studies—a generous and visionary gift from Dr. Sabharwal's friends, family, and others dedicated to advancing the field. Thanks to their commitment, Berkeley will have an enduring platform for welcoming distinguished scholars whose work engages with Sikh traditions in ways that inspire dialogue, deepen understanding, and strengthen community ties.

ABOUT DR. PUNINDER SINGH

Dr. Singh earned his PhD in Linguistic Anthropology from the University of Michigan in 2024. His research explores the powerful role of language—and ideas about language—in shaping religious experience, focusing on the Sikh tradition. His current book project examines the emergence of a new Sikh intellectual formation between 1920 and 1940, following the Singh Sabha reform movement. In addition, he studies the Sikh tradition's long history of linguistic and cultural exchange with neighboring communities, stretching from the early modern period to the

present. His scholarship blends history, anthropology, linguistics, and religious studies, offering an unusually rich lens on Sikh life and thought.

A NEW LEARNING OPPORTUNITY FOR BERKELEY

In Fall 2025, Dr. Singh will offer *Introduction to Sikhism*, an interdisciplinary course tracing the tradition from its founding by Guru Nanak in the 15th century to the present day. Students will explore Sikhism through historical, philosophical, anthropological, and sociological perspectives, gaining a nuanced and multi-layered understanding of its evolution, beliefs, and practices. Beyond the classroom, Dr. Singh's public lectures and community programs promise to spark vibrant discussion and engagement, making this appointment a gift not only to Berkeley but to the wider Bay Area Sikh and South Asia-interested community. ❖



Dr. Puninder Singh

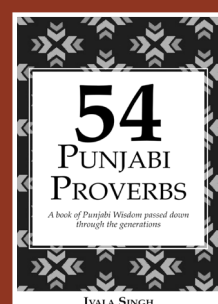
Upcoming:

THU, OCTOBER 2, 2025

NEW DIRECTIONS IN SIKH STUDIES

A panel on the present and future of Sikh Studies, featuring leading scholars sharing new research and emerging questions shaping the field. With:

- DR. PUNINDER SINGH, Sabharwal Lecturer in Sikh Studies
- DR. JVALA SINGH, Lecturer in Punjabi
- DR. SUPREET KAUR, Associate Professor, Department of Economics, UC Berkeley
- SONIA DHAMI, Independent Curator of Sikh Art



54 PUNJABI PROVERBS by Jvala Singh

A collection of classic Punjabi sayings with transliterations, English translations, and cultural notes, offering a lively glimpse into Punjabi wit and heritage. Each proverb is a wonderful way to better understand Punjabi culture and the playful manner of the Punjabi language.

Dr. Jvala Singh is the Punjabi Language Lecturer at UC Berkeley. He is also the creator of *The Suraj Podcast*.

larger movement," she said. "I might not have seen the young people who were floundering and overwhelmed in their first months teaching grow to become school leaders, teacher trainers, entrepreneurs, [or] government advisers supporting learning for hundreds of thousands kids."

Tooba Akhtar calls herself "one of those people" whose life was "fundamentally altered" by Bakhtiar's work. Destined for a job at a top multinational company, Akhtar joined Teach For Pakistan's first cohort in 2011 instead and taught 150 girls.

"My students, who could not read a single word of English in grade 6 at the start, were able to not just write

academic essays by the end of the two years, but more importantly, had the will, ability, and desire to pursue their own ambitions," she said.

Beyond this professional achievement, Akhtar has also found a sense of hope — despite the fact that many of her peers have left Pakistan for opportunities elsewhere.

"I have continued to stay," Akhtar said, pursuing a purpose "that one day, all of Pakistan's children will experience an education that enables them to be loving, thinking, and engaged people." ❖

Article previously published in *Berkeley News*. Reprinted here with permission.

BANGLADESH@ BERKELEY

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

Spotlighting Chowdhury Center Fellow

CHOWDHURY FELLOW PUBLISHES IMPORTANT REPORT ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND LABOR RIGHTS IN BANGLADESH



Cara Schulte

The Chowdhury Center is proud to share that Cara Schulte, the 2024 Malini Chowdhury Fellow on Bangladesh Studies and doctoral candidate in Public Health,

has published a report with Climate Rights International, *My Body Is Burning: Climate Change, Extreme Heat, and Labor Rights in Bangladesh* (July 2025).

Drawing on her fellowship research, Schulte documents the severe health and human rights consequences of rising temperatures for workers in Dhaka. Extreme heat is pushing workers—particularly in the garment, construction, and transportation sectors—into increasingly dangerous conditions. Accounts of fainting, dehydration, kidney damage, and deaths from heatstroke

underscore the urgency of the crisis. Pregnant women face heightened risks, often forced to work without rest, hydration, or medical care. These dangers are compounded by low wages, forced overtime, and workplace harassment.

The report calls for urgent action from governments, employers, corporations, and the international community. Key recommendations include stronger heat safety standards, expanded labor protections, fair wages, improved workplace conditions such as ventilation and water access, and safeguards for vulnerable groups. It also stresses the need for climate adaptation financing and greater accountability from global brands whose supply chains expose workers to heat-related risks.

Schulte credited the Chowdhury Center for making this work possible, noting how the fellowship supports research that advances knowledge, amplifies urgent voices, and shapes global conversations on labor rights and climate justice. ❖

Read the full report at: chowdhurycenter.berkeley.edu/Schulte-Report-2025

THE BANGABANDHU SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN LECTURE

On September 20, 2024, the 2024 Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Research Award Lecture was delivered by Bertie Kibreah, Assistant Professor of



Dr. Kibreah (left) & Dr. Brent Eng

Ethnomusicology at the University of South Florida's School of Music. His talk, *Debate on the Dais: Shrine Performance and Discursive Devotion in Bangladesh*, explored how

musical performance at shrines serves as a space for theological debate, the nego-

tiation of authority, and expressions of devotion in contemporary Bangladesh. Dr. Brent Eng, Postdoctoral Fellow in Anthropology at UC Davis, served as discussant, linking Dr. Kibreah's research to broader questions of religious practice, performance, and cultural change. The event concluded with a lively exchange of ideas, as audience questions deepened the conversation and connected scholarly insight with public interest. ❖

SUPPORTED BY THE US BANGABANDHU PARISHAD, THIS AWARD BRINGS EMERGING SCHOLARS FROM THE US & EUROPE TO UC BERKELEY TO PRESENT RESEARCH ON BANGABANDHU & BANGLADESH

An event report

THINKING FROM BANGLADESH, BUILDING WITH JUSTICE

— Celebrating 10 Years of the Subir & Malini Chowdhury Center for Bangladesh Studies

On October 12, 2024, we marked the 10th anniversary of the Chowdhury Center for Bangladesh Studies at the David Brower Center in Berkeley with a full day of reflection and dialogue.

The program opened with a keynote by Marina Tabassum—renowned Bangladeshi architect, educator, and one of Time Magazine's 100 Most Influential People in 2024. In her talk, *Architecture of Transition*, Tabassum reflected on “the architecture of relevance,” exploring how design can address urgent questions of survival, building, and human flourishing in the face of climate change. She was joined in conversation by Dr. Isha Ray.

A roundtable followed, featuring Dr. Adnan Morshed on “*Building Freedom*” and Dr. Naveeda Khan on “*Householding on a Warming Earth*,” with responses from Dr. Zachary Lamb, Dr. Sugata Ray, and Dr. Ahmed Badruzzaman.

The day concluded with a spirited performance by Dil Se, UC Berkeley's premier a cappella group. ❖



Marina Tabassum (3rd from L) with Dr. Raka Ray, Dr. Elora Shehabuddin, Puneeta Kala, Dr. Sanchita Saxena and Dr. Isha Ray



(From L) Dr. Ahmed Badruzzaman, Dr. Sugata Ray, Dr. Zachary Lamb, Dr. Adnan Morshed, & Dr. Naveeda Khan

THE SUBIR & MALINI CHOWDHURY CENTER FELLOWSHIPS FOR BANGLADESH STUDIES

The Subir Chowdhury Undergraduate Scholarship

2025 Recipient
Alicia Phaviseth (South & Southeast Asian Studies)

The Malini Chowdhury Fellowship on Bangladesh Studies

2025 Fellow
Pronoy Chakraborty (PhD Student, South and Southeast Asian Studies): *Riverine Monastic Networks in Medieval Bangladesh: Connections and Ruptures between Tantric Buddhist/Nātha Siddhas and Later Mārfati (Gnostic) Sahajiyās*

The Subir Chowdhury Fellowship on Quality of Life in Bangladesh

2025 Fellow
Anika Sohaana (MA Student, City and Regional Planning): *Envisioning Dhaka's Waterscapes: Design and the Uneven Burdens of Climate Adaptation in Bangladesh's Contested Capital*.

SELECT CHOWDHURY CENTER EVENTS 2024 -2025

Oct 1, 2024
Sultan Mehmood | The 1970 Bhola Cyclone and the Birth of Bangladesh

Oct 14, 2024
Adnan Morshed | From Threat to Asset: Good Density for Dhaka



Adnan Morshed

Nov. 7, 2024
Mehnaaz Momen, Saborna Roychowdhury, & Nadine Murshid | Crafting Home: A Feminist Gaze on Identity and Belonging in the Bengali Diaspora



Mehnaaz Momen, Nadine Murshid, & Saborna Roychowdhury

November 8 -10, 2024
Bangladesh Reimagined: The

Next Half-Century

November 9, 2024
Tarfia Faizullah | The Seashore of Endless Worlds



Tarfia Faizullah

Feb 27, 2025
Apala G. Egan | Unveil-

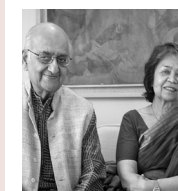
ing Voices:
A Discussion with the Translator of Jyotirmoyee Devi Sen's *Behind Latticed Marble: Inner Worlds of Women*

April 4, 2025
Ananya Jahanara Kabir | Kaise Bani: Transoceanic Transformations as a Method for South Asian Studies



Ananya J. Kabir

April 9, 2025
Rounaq Jahan & Rehman Sobhan | Fifty Years of Bangladesh: Economy, Politics, Society and Culture



Rounaq Jahan & Rehman Sobhan

April 23, 2025
Hasan Mahmud | Remittance as Belonging: Global Migration, Transnationalism, & the Quest for Home

May 1, 2024
Hans Harder | Mother, Lover, Śakti: Female Protagonists in Tagore's Novels

TAGORE @ BERKELEY

—The first of its kind in the US, the Tagore Program on Literature, Culture, and Philosophy is dedicated to fostering a deep understanding and appreciation of the literary, cultural, and philosophical contributions of Rabindranath Tagore. Currently, the programs that anchor Tagore studies at Berkeley are: the Tagore Spring Institute; the Maya Mitra Das Annual Lecture; and the Khashu Research Award.

TAGORE SPRING INSTITUTE

An annual seminar dedicated to exploring the works and ideas of Rabindranath Tagore. Each year, the program invites a distinguished scholar to lead in-depth discussions on a selected theme, offering participants an opportunity to engage closely with Tagore's literary, philosophical, and educational contributions



MICHAEL COLLINS
Associate Professor of Modern and Contemporary British History, University College London

TSI 2025 DISAGREEING WELL?: CONVERSATIONS WITH TAGORE

- Mar 17: Tagore, dialogue, and disagreement
- Mar 19: Tagore, Gandhi, and the pursuit of Indian freedom
- Mar 21: What is a university for? Tagore's 'Visva-Bharati'
- Mar 21: *Tagore Visiting Scholar Lecture for 2025: Tagore and 'Disagreeing Well'.*

The Tagore Program on Literature, Culture, and Philosophy at UC Berkeley welcomed Dr. Michael Collins as the 2025 Tagore Visiting Scholar. In March, Dr. Collins led the Program's fourth Spring Institute, which brought 14 students together for an in-person exploration of the ideas of Rabindranath Tagore, the Indian philosopher, poet, education- alist, and public intellectual.

Over the course of three closed seminar sessions titled *Disagreeing Well?: Conversations with Tagore*, participants examined Tagore's thinking on the role of diverse cultures, dialogic debate, and the practice of democratic disagreement. The first session introduced Tagore's philosophical approach to dia- logue, situating it within broader theo- ries of democratic discourse. The second



Dr. Collins with some of the participants of TSI 2025 at the conclusion of the seminars

delved into his famous disagree- ments with Mahatma Gandhi over national- ism—dif- ferences that were as spirited as they were re-

The Institute for South Asia Studies is deeply saddened by the passing of Dr. Sakti Das, the visionary founder of the Tagore Program on Literature, Culture, and Philosophy. Dr. Das was not only a distinguished medical profes- sional but also a passionate advocate for Rabindranath Tagore's humanistic ideals, which he sought to share with the world through his academic and philanthropic efforts.

Dr. Das's lifelong dedication to Tagore's legacy was embodied in his establishment of the Tagore Program at UC Berkeley. Under his patronage, the program became a vital platform for the interdisciplinary exploration of Tagore's contributions to literature, cul- ture, philosophy, and education. Dr. Das was committed to advancing dialogue on Tagore's vision of a more inclusive, enlightened world, and his work with ISAS fostered important conversations around these themes at the heart of South Asian studies.

A native of Kolkata, Dr. Das was profoundly shaped by Tagore's writ- ings from an early age. This intellectual and cultural influence stayed with him throughout his life, culminating in the creation of a program that brought to- gether scholars, artists, and thinkers to explore Tagore's rich and diverse oeuvre. Dr. Das believed deeply in Tagore's con- cept of a holistic, human-centered edu- cation, and through the Tagore Program, he ensured that future generations of students and scholars at Berkeley and beyond could engage with these ideas.

In addition to his contributions to the humanities, Dr. Das was an interna- tionally renowned urologist. A Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons in Edin- burgh and Canada, as well as a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons, Dr. Das was Professor of Urology at the

spectful. The third explored Tagore's phi- losophy of education and the founding principles of Visva-Bharati, the university he created in Santiniketan, near Kolkata.

The Institute concluded with a public lecture, *Tagore and Disagreeing Well*, in which Dr. Collins reflected on the chal- lenges of respectful disagreement in an age of so-called "culture wars." He noted growing concerns that divergent ideas and political antagonism have become increasingly difficult to navigate, par- ticularly on university campuses. Draw- ing on Tagore's writings, artistic work, and edu- cational practice, Dr. Collins argued that Tagore's example—most famously his abil- ity to challenge Gandhi while remaining a devoted friend— offers a model for sustaining principled yet respectful rela- tionships across deep differences. In an era of heightened polarization, he suggested, Tagore's commitment to dia- logue and engagement with "otherness" remains a vital lesson for the twenty-first century ❖



Dr. Collins with (from left) Dr. Munis D. Faruqui, Dr. Maya Mitra Das (co-founder of the Tagore Program), and Dr. Rahul Parson

IN MEMORIAM DR. SAKTI DAS (1939-2024)

Founder of the Tagore Program on Literature, Culture, and Philosophy at UC Berkeley



University of California, Davis. He authored nearly 200 scientific articles and book chapters, and edited or co-edited 11 textbooks, training numerous urology residents and fellows throughout his career. He also served as the historian for the American Urological Association and was recognized with numerous awards, including the AUA's Humanitarian Rec- ognition Award in 2022.

Dr. Das's compassion extended far beyond the medical field. In retirement, he continued to champion global hu- manitarian efforts, supporting primary education centers and orphanages in India, Kenya, Bangladesh, and Niger. His commitment to social justice and philanthropy, alongside his academic and medical accomplishments, exempli- fied the ideals that Rabindranath Tagore himself espoused.

Dr. Das is survived by his wife, Dr. Maya Mitra Das, an oncologist, poet and writer, and their son, Rajarshi "Raja" Das.

The Institute for South Asia Studies mourns the loss of Dr. Sakti Das, whose leadership, vision, and generosity have left a lasting imprint on our academic community. Through the Tagore Pro- gram, his legacy will continue to inspire students and scholars to engage with the profound humanistic values that he held so dear.

We extend our deepest condolences to Maya di, Raja, their family, friends, and all those whose lives he touched. ❖

MAYA MITRA DAS LECTURE ON TAGORE

Established in 2022 as part of UC Berkeley's Tagore Program on Literature, Culture, and Philosophy, this lectureship brings a distinguished scholar to cam- pus each year to speak on Rabindranath Tagore's contributions. The 4th lecture featured Dr. Hans Harder, Professor of Modern South Asian Languages and Literatures at Heidelberg University. Dr. Harder's lecture, titled, *Mother, Lover, Śakti: Female Protagonists in Rabindranath Tagore's Novels*, explored Tagore's portray- als of women as mother, lover, and Śakti, and how these roles navigate questions of gender, identity, and social change in early 20th-century Bengal.

Moderated by Dr. Rahul Parson, faculty lead of the Tagore Program, the event brought together students, faculty, and community members for a lively discussion on literature, gender, and history, fur- thering the Program's mission to deepen understanding of Tagore's multifaceted legacy. ❖



Dr. Harder (on left) with Dr. Maya Mitra Das (co-founder of the Tagore Program), and Dr. Rahul Parson

THE 2025 SAAI ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

IMRAN QURESHI BRINGS MUGHAL PAINTING TRADITIONS INTO THE PRESENT AT UC BERKELEY

In Spring 2025, the South Asia Art Initiative (SAAI) at UC Berkeley welcomed internationally acclaimed Pakistani artist Imran Qureshi as its 2025 Artist/Scholar in Residence. Over a week-long program, Qureshi—celebrated for his mastery of the miniature painting tradition and its transformation into a contemporary visual language—invited Bay Area audiences to explore the intersections of South Asia's artistic heritage with the urgencies of the present.



Imran Qureshi

Qureshi's residency opened with *Look! with Imran Qureshi* at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA), where participants studied Mughal paintings from the museum's collection. Qureshi offered rare insights into centuries-old techniques, materials, and symbolic forms, linking them to his own practice, which often meditates on themes of violence, resilience, and beauty.



Imran Qureshi with Dr. Sugata Ray on left at the BAMPFA viewing session

In his public *Artist Talk*, Qureshi traced his artistic journey from the National

College of Arts in Lahore to major international platforms, including the Venice Biennale and the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Roof Garden Commission. Speaking with candor and generosity, he described how the formal precision of the miniature tradition becomes, in his work, a vessel for urgent commentary on contemporary life.

A highlight of the residency was *Between History and the Present*, a public conversation between Qureshi and Dr. Qudsia Rahim, Executive Director of the Lahore Biennale Foundation. Together, they probed questions of tradition,



Imran Qureshi with Dr. Qudsia Rahim

innovation, and the global circuits through which South Asian art now moves.

The week concluded with *Make! with Imran Qureshi*, a

hands-on workshop where participants prepared pigments and experimented with techniques rooted in the South Asian miniature tradition. For many, it was a first encounter with the tactile processes behind these luminous works.

In addition to these public engagements, Qureshi created a striking mural on the walls of the Institute for South Asia Studies. This site-specific work, now a permanent feature of

the Institute, extends his practice of transforming architectural spaces into immersive environments where historical forms and contemporary themes converge.

Born in Pakistan in 1972, Qureshi is the recipient of



Imran Qureshi with (from left) Dr. Atreyee Gupta, Puneeta Kala, Dr. Anirban Gupta-Nigam, Dr. Deepti Mathur, and Dr. Asma Kazmi at reception after the Artist's Talk

SOUTH ASIA ART@BERKELEY

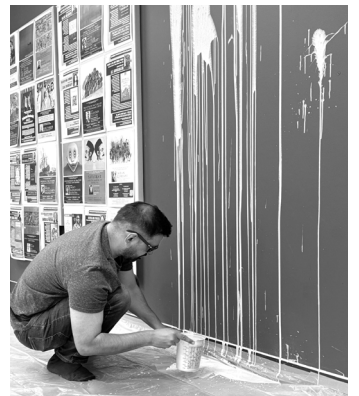
—The South Asia Art Initiative (SAAI) at UC Berkeley supports research, dialogue, and collaboration on the arts of South Asia and its diasporas, spanning ancient to contemporary times. In addition to hosting lectures, conferences, and its Artist/Scholar/Curator-in-Residence program, SAAI presents two annual awards: the South Asia Art & Architecture Dissertation Prize and the South Asia Artist Prize.

numerous honors, including the *Sitar-e-Imtiaz* from the President of Pakistan, the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres of France (2025), and the U.S. Department of State's International Medal of the Arts (2017). His work—spanning works on paper, monumental canvases, and site-specific installations—has been exhibited globally, from the Venice Biennale to the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Roof Garden Commission.

Presented in collaboration with the Lahore Biennale Foundation, Qureshi's residency at UC Berkeley underscored not only the enduring vitality of the miniature tradition but also its capacity to speak to today's most pressing political and human concerns. ❖



Students prepare pigments and explore South Asian miniature techniques



Imran Qureshi working on his site-specific mural at the Institute

THE SOUTH ASIA ART & ARCHITECTURE PRIZES

THE 2025 AWARD RECIPIENT

The South Asia Art & Architecture Dissertation Prize



Dr. Nubras Samayeen

Nubras Samayeen

Architecture of The Land: Louis I. Kahn's National Assembly Building complex in Dhaka, Bangladesh and the Construction of a National Identity.

Dr. Samayeen is Assistant Professor of Architecture at the University of Texas at Arlington.

Note: The UC Berkeley South Asia Artist Prize was not awarded in 2025

More information at
SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/
FUNDING-OPPORTUNITIES
Deadline: JAN 10

SAAI Faculty Spotlight

SAAI FOUNDING MEMBER ASMA KAZMI TO CO-LEAD \$2M UC CLIMATE ACTION ARTS NETWORK

The South Asia Art Initiative (SAAI) is proud to share that its founding member and former faculty director, Dr. Asma Kazmi, is playing a pivotal role in the newly funded UC Climate Action Arts Network (CAAN)—a groundbreaking, nearly \$2 million project that positions the arts at the forefront of the climate crisis conversation.

An acclaimed artist and educator in UC Berkeley's Department of Art Practice, Kazmi has long explored the intersections of culture, environment, and community in her work. Now, as co-lead of UC Berkeley's participation in CAAN—alongside fellow Art Practice professor Jill Miller—she will help guide an ambitious, system wide initiative that spans all 10 UC campuses.

CAAN harnesses the transformative

power of art and design to inspire public engagement with climate resilience and sustainability. By integrating creative placemaking with climate justice, the project aims to address some of the most pressing environmental challenges of our time. Kazmi's leadership will be instrumental in ensuring that the arts not only serve as a vehicle for expression but also as a catalyst for collective action.

Working in collaboration with artists, designers, researchers, and communities across California, Kazmi and her CAAN colleagues seek to bring diverse voices into the conversation—envisioning and enacting a more sustainable and equitable future. This bold, interdisciplinary approach underscores UC Berkeley's role as a leader in arts-driven responses to the climate crisis, with Kazmi at the heart of its vision and impact. ❖



Dr. Asma Kazmi

FROM SOUTH ASIA TO BERKELEY: MFA INSTALLATION CHALLENGES HOW MUSEUMS ERASE DISABLED BODIES

Priyanka D'Souza, a graduate student at UC Berkeley, showcased her Master of Fine Arts thesis installation, b. Call in Sick, at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA) from May 14 to July 27, 2025. The exhibition invited viewers to reconsider the role of rest and accessibility in cultural institutions, highlighting how museums and galleries often exclude disabled bodies, creating spaces that are not truly welcoming to all. Drawing on UC Berkeley's legacy of free speech and disability activism, D'Souza's work challenged traditional norms and advocated for greater inclusion, rest, and equity.

by A J Fox, Berkeley News

When the Master of Fine Arts (MFA) exhibition opened on



Priyanka D'Souza, who graduated in Spring 2025, pictured before various works created for "b. Call in Sick." (Daria Lugina/BAMPFA)

Wednesday, May 14, at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA), Priyanka D'Souza was finally able to get some rest. As one of six MFA students graduating from UC Berkeley that spring, D'Souza had spent the past year collaborating with her cohort on the exhibit, the latest installment of an annual tradition that began in 1970 when Berkeley launched the former University Art Museum. Since then, more than 300 artists have showcased their work in the annual presentation, including future art luminaries like Jay DeFeo, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Shirin Neshat, Alicia McCarthy, and Brontez Purnell.

Each of this year's MFA graduates charted a unique path at Berkeley, but D'Souza's was more distinctive than most. Her work explored how bodies move through and interact with public



D'Souza's contribution to the MFA exhibition was created using campus protest photos from the Berkeley archives that she transformed into semi-abstract renderings using a combination of embossing, stenciling and architectural plotting techniques. (Daria Lugina/BAMPFA)

and institutional environments, particularly museums, with a focus on rest, access, and the politics of presence. "Everyone needs and deserves rest," D'Souza said, describing the thought she put into the seating around her installations. "Your attention to the work is different if you're sitting

instead of standing."

Originally from Mumbai, D'Souza participated in a formative artist residency at the Delfina Foundation in London in 2022, where she noticed how many of the city's prestigious museums lacked meaningful accommodations for visitors. In response, she created the Instagram page Resting Museum, blending artistic practice with institutional critique to examine accessibility in cultural spaces. The page grew into an artist duo with D'Souza's collaborator, Shreyasi Pathak, a former archivist at the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad, India. Together, the two artists investigated themes of access, queerness, and rest through self-described "crip humor," with a focus on how these topics manifest in archives, museums, and cultural discourse. D'Souza said she is very intrigued by the human spectrum between ability and disability. "Like in the case of big museums, like The Met in New York, which only has the option of a wheelchair or seeing the exhibits while standing, and nothing in between."

"How does a body interact with an art object?" D'Souza asked. "A painting in a gallery or museum is typically hung at the eye-level of a Caucasian male who has dominated global design standards for eons." For her BAMPFA installation, D'Souza made the conscious choice to display her drawings on angled shelves and provide seating so that it "privileges a seated person or a child's position over a standing person's position." Her attention to the viewing experience of a museum goer was reflected in the seats themselves — a set of wheeled stools — so that viewers could roll from one work to the next without needing to stand up again. "Having a rolling stool changes the way someone can move through and engage with the space. It offers more than comfort; it offers choice," she said.

Part of what drew D'Souza to Berkeley was its legacy as the birthplace of the Disability Rights Movement — a heritage that endures to this day in the form of uncommonly robust support systems for students with disabilities. But when it came time to formulate her work for the MFA exhibition, D'Souza turned her attention toward a different strand of Berkeley's activist history: freedom of speech.

Her interest was sparked by a moment of bureaucratic friction on campus when she was required to meet a certain score on the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) exam given to graduate students from non-English-speaking countries before they could teach undergraduates. She aced the written portions of the test but initially didn't pass the speaking portion due to her disability-related speech impediment being misinterpreted as a language incompetency. Although Berkeley's Disabled Students Program stepped in to correct the mistake, this "very stressful" experience made D'Souza reflect on the physiological and political dimensions of speech at an educational institution.

When museum goers encountered D'Souza's work at BAMPFA, many recognized protest scenes from the Free Speech Movement that electrified Berkeley during the 1960s. Originating from the university's archives, these

photographs were recreated by D'Souza through many technically challenging processes as embossed drawings. The archival photographs were traced by hand, laser-cut into stencils, and embossed onto paper. The campus architecture depicted in these photographs was abstracted into line drawings placed

on the embossments with a Zund machine, an architectural plotting tool. The end result was a set of historical images transformed into textured embossings, introducing an element of abstraction into the photographic material.

An accompanying handout in the installation examined the politics of these campus spaces, particularly Sproul Plaza — a popular site for demonstrations since its construction in 1962, including the recent March 20 "Rally to Defend our University," represented in the last of D'Souza's drawings.

Next to her detailed drawings were steel plaques, reminiscent of commemorative



The title of D'Souza's work, b. Call in Sick, references an instructional pamphlet that was distributed to protestors during Berkeley's Free Speech Movement. (Daria Lugina/BAMPFA)



D'Souza holds an element of her art installation: a crowd control stanchion with a barrier that reads "fall in line" in all capital letters. (Daria Lugina/BAMPFA)

plaques on campus, laser-engraved with an archival document from the 1964 Free Speech Movement titled "Instructions for Walkout Coordinators." "I was interested in this idea of walkouts, and we had recently had a walkout for Gaza on campus," D'Souza explained. "But if you can barely walk, how do you walk out in protest?" In this document, there were multiple ways to participate in protest. The first was to openly walk out; the second was to call in sick. D'Souza found this particularly interesting, considering that sick bodies have trouble accessing protest sites. She wondered how the photographic archive would tell the story of protest if all the bodies in it had called in sick.

Accordingly, D'Souza's thesis installation was titled simply: b. Call in Sick. ♦

Article previously published in Berkeley News on May 13, 2024. This lightly edited version is reprinted here with permission.



D'Souza creates work as one half of the artist collective Resting Museum, which highlights issues of disability access in museum spaces." (Daria Lugina/BAMPFA)

SAAI Field Trip

CARVED CONNECTIONS: EXPLORING AN AHMEDABAD-INSPIRED HOME IN OAKLAND

by Brishti Modak & Eloisa N Penner

In April 2025, the Art Histories of South Asia Working Group traveled to Oakland to visit a house designed through the collaboration of the Ahmedabad Wood Carving Company (AWCC) and American designer Lockwood de Forest. De Forest, formerly a member of the Associated Artists group (1879–1883), an interior design firm in New York City, oversaw the group's wood design projects and imported all of his architectural wood from Ahmedabad, India. For decades, he continued to rely on the AWCC, commissioning their craftsmanship while also sending his own designs to be executed by the company's artists. The AWCC artisans drew inspiration from prominent public and private buildings in Ahmedabad—such as the stone traceries of the Siddi Saiyyid Mosque—to create models for their workshop. These reproductions of architectural elements were displayed in museums across Lahore, London, and New York before eventually making their way to Oakland, where they were incorporated into Bay Area domestic architecture.

The house itself reflects this history of exchange. Its façade is adorned with teak relief carvings, most notably in the wooden brackets with their intricate floral designs. The main structure follows a colonial-revival architectural framework but incorporates an eclectic mix of “oriental” design elements that lend the space a distinctive character. Wood carving remains the home's most striking feature, drawing on the traditional craftsmanship of Gujarat, with roots in the 16th century.

Inside, the experience expands. Entering the main room, visitors are surrounded by Asian artistic and architectural components transposed

into a Californian context. The space recalls the broader cultural moment of the Arts and Crafts Movement in early 20th-century North America, when global influences shaped local design. The house reveals itself gradually, its maze-like layout encouraging a sense of exploration as each corridor opens to another room. Dominated by warm browns accented with yellow, white, and blue, the interiors are filled with carved wooden furniture, bronze vessels, tiled and jeweled ceilings (one that lights up), tapestries, Persian carpets, and even tiger



Entire room of teak wood and teak furniture



Detail from ceiling woodcarving

skin rugs. The sheer abundance of objects transforms the residence into something akin to a museum.

Among the most remarkable rooms is a playroom that houses a Chinese opium bed, accompanied by smoking pipes, cans, and tool stands. This curious space, like much of the house, underscores the layered histories of orientalism embedded in its design and collections. The sense of spectacle extends outdoors as well, where a lush back garden enhances the grandeur of the home.

The visit was made possible thanks to the South Asia Art Initiative, Dr. Padma

Dorje Maitland (the Associate Curator of Art of the Indian Subcontinent), Drs. Atreyee Gupta and Sugata Ray, and the homeowner. Students from History of Art, South and Southeast Asian Studies, and Architecture joined the tour, which offered a rare opportunity



Pointed arch enclosing an indoor fireplace



Detail of woodcarving from exterior facade

to experience, firsthand, the complex entanglements of artistry, design, and cultural exchange that shaped this unique Oakland residence. ♦

Brishti Modak & Eloisa N Penner are PhD students in the History of Art Dept.



Teak Opium bed



Main room of the house



Tiger rug laid out in a separate area of the main room

Bringing Traditional Folk Theater to UC Berkeley

PRINCESS NAUTANKI

On March 14, 2025, the Institute for South Asia Studies, in collaboration with UC Berkeley's Department of Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies, staged *Princess Nautanki* at the Durham Theater. The sold-out performance marked the fourth time the Institute has brought *nautanki*, North India's folk opera tradition, to campus—part of its ongoing mission to introduce the UC Berkeley community to the diverse cultural and artistic traditions of South Asia.

At its heart, the play told a timeless story of love and defiance: a princess falls for a commoner

who sneaks into her palace in disguise. When his identity is revealed and he is sentenced to death, she risks everything to save him, ultimately earning her father's reluctant consent. Familiar though the plot may be, this *nautanki* offered something new. The dialogue moved seamlessly between Hindi and English, a choice that welcomed non-Hindi speakers into the world of the play while preserving the musicality and rhythm that define the form.

The production thrived on the energy of its ensemble. From the impassioned lovers to the courtiers, guards, and king, each character contributed to the humor, drama, and emotional sweep of the evening. Live percussion and harmonium filled the hall, creating a soundscape that was both rustic and theatrical. The staging was kept deliberately simple, ensuring that music, costume, and performance commanded full attention.

Princess Nautanki was written and directed by Devendra Sharma, Professor of Communication and Performance at California State University–Fresno. A

seventh-generation performer of *swang*, *nautanki*, and *raaslila*, Sharma combined insider knowledge with a talent for adaptation. His bilingual script underscored the form's adaptability across audiences and settings. Sharma is also the author of *Nautanki: The Musical Theatre of North India* (Bloomsbury, 2025), the first comprehensive study of the genre's historical and contemporary life.

With this latest production, the Institute for South Asia Studies reaffirmed its commitment to bringing the living traditions of South Asia to Berkeley. *Princess Nautanki* was not just an evening of theater—it was a reminder of how folk performance continues to travel, transform, and resonate, connecting audiences across languages and cultures. ♦



A scene from the play, with Dr. Devendra Sharma, who played the lead role, on left.



Dr. Rahul Parson making opening remarks

STUDENT FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

THE INSTITUTE OFFERS A WIDE VARIETY OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES TO 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.

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE VISIT [SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/GRANTS-AWARDS](https://southasia.berkeley.edu/grants-awards)

FLAS FELLOWSHIPS

Each year the Institute provides U.S. Dept. of Education funded Foreign Language & Area Studies awards to support students studying Bengali, Hindi, Persian, 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 2025 Award Recipients for Summer:

HINDI: **Mohammad Azeem Khan** (PhD Student, History), **Kevin Gadiel Morales-Bernabe** (PhD student, History of Art)

TELUGU: **Mayadevi Bhavani Murthy** (PhD Student, South & Southeast Asian Studies)

NEPALI: **Eloisa N. Penner** (PhD Student, History of Art)

URDU : **Ross Ethan Rosenthal** (MA Student, Asian Studies)

More information at [SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/FUNDING-OPPORTUNITIES](https://southasia.berkeley.edu/funding-opportunities)

Deadline: **EARLY FEB**

THE BERREMAN-YAMANAKA HIMALAYAN STUDIES GRANT FOR

Established in memory of UC Berkeley Professor of Anthropology, 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.

The 2025 Award Recipients

Kirtika Kandel (Master of Development Practice): Bound or Beyond: Understanding Environmental Challenges and Human (Im)mobility in Tharu and Chepang Communities of Nepal

Shrabya Timsina (Ph.D Student, Department of Landscape Architecture & Environmental Planning): Ecotopes and Flows: Stories of Landscape Practice in Alpine Nepal

More information at [SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/FUNDING-OPPORTUNITIES](https://southasia.berkeley.edu/funding-opportunities)

Deadline: **APRIL 1**

THE PADMANABH S. JAINI GRADUATE STUDENT AWARD IN BUDDHIST STUDIES

Established in 2009 with a gift from Dr. Padmanabh S. Jaini (1923 – 2021), Professor Emeritus of Buddhist Studies, this award supports graduate students in Buddhist Studies at UC Berkeley and honors Professor Jaini's important legacy in the field of Buddhist Studies at UC Berkeley and beyond.

The 2025 Award Recipient:

Chih-ying Wu (Buddhist Studies), for her research in early Indian Buddhist Philosophy (2nd–7th Century).

More information at [SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/JAINI-AWARD](https://southasia.berkeley.edu/jaini-award)

THE PREMCHAND AWARD FOR HINDI LITERATURE

The Premchand Research Award in Hindi Studies, an award in support of research in Hindi literature, provides upto \$2000 grants to students 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 2025 Award Recipient

Kartik Maini (PhD Student, South Asian Languages & Civilizations, University of Chicago): The Nation and Its Ascetics: Swami Sahajanand Saraswati and the Making of the Gītāhṛday

More information at [SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/FUNDING-OPPORTUNITIES](https://southasia.berkeley.edu/funding-opportunities)

Deadline: **APRIL 1**

THE BHATTACHARYA GRADUATE FELLOWSHIP

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

The 2025 Award Recipients

Britt Leake (PhD Student, Political Science): Strategic Ambiguity: Navigating Multiculturalism in Indian Democracy

Sahana Sridhar (PhD Student, Department of Psychology): The Relationship Between Math Conception and Math Anxiety in Indian Elementary and Middle-School Students

Kamya Yadav (PhD Student, Department of Political Science): Guarding the Gates: How Parties Constrain Women's Political Ambition and Rise in Urban Politics

More information at [SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/FUNDING-OPPORTUNITIES](https://southasia.berkeley.edu/funding-opportunities)

DEADLINE: **APRIL 1**

THE MIR RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP IN URDU STUDIES

Endowed by Sadia Azmat & Muhammad Umair Shaikh, members of the Institute's Urdu Language Advisory Board, the Mir Research Fellowship in Urdu Studies supports UC graduate students whose scholarship focuses on a topic related to Urdu. It provides for one or more graduate research awards (max: \$5k) on a topic related to Urdu.

The 2025 Award Recipients

Daniyal Channa (PhD Student, Middle Eastern Languages & Cultures, UC Berkeley): Framing the Nation: Tradition and Reform in the Post-Partition Urdu Sphere

Muhammad Souman Elah (PhD Student, Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, UCLA): Unveiling a Wali: Didactic Sufi Texts in Urdu in Early Twentieth-Century India

More information at [SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/FUNDING-OPPORTUNITIES](https://southasia.berkeley.edu/funding-opportunities)

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 two grants of \$2500 towards Telugu Studies or research in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

The 2025 Award Recipients:

Praveen Maripelly (PhD Student, Performance Studies, UC Davis): Chai Stories (in Prayogillu, Vellulla Village, Telangana, India)

Charitra Shreya Pabbaraju (PhD Student, Political Science, UC Berkeley): Comparative Inquiries in Algorithmic Policing

More information at [SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/FUNDING-OPPORTUNITIES](https://southasia.berkeley.edu/funding-opportunities)

Deadline: **APRIL 1**

SUPPORT THE ISAS

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DONATE ONLINE AT [SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/GIVE-BIG-SOUTH-ASIA](https://southasia.berkeley.edu/give-big-south-asia)

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES CONTD.

THE **BRUCE R. PRAY**
FELLOWSHIPS & GRANTS

Thanks to Professor Emeritus Bruce R. Pray (South & Southeast Asian Studies), the Institute is pleased to offer the following funding for UC Berkeley students and faculty:

BRUCE R. PRAY GRADUATE STUDENT RELOCATION FELLOWSHIPS

Grants of \$3000 to assist incoming South Asia-focused graduate students relocate to Berkeley.

The 2025 Fellows

- **Meher Gandhi** (incoming PhD Student: South and Southeast Asian Studies)
- **Tanmai Vemulapalli** (incoming PhD Student: Ethnic Studies)

BRUCE R. PRAY GRADUATE STUDENT CONFERENCE GRANTS

Grants of up to \$1000 for presenting at the Annual South Asia Conference in Madison-Wisconsin. Deadline for submission: September 15.

The 2024 Recipients

Pronoy Chakraborty (PhD Student, South and Southeast Asian Studies): *Mystic Power and the Riverine Networks: Probing the Relation of the Kaibarta Rebellion in 11th century Northern Bengal and a Caryā Song by Bhusukupa*

Aparajita Das (PhD Student: History) *Energies in the Forest: A Close Look at Bhil Hunt in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Courtly Visions*

Sourav Ghosh (PhD Student, History): *The Way of Water: Environmental Migration and State Formation in Early Modern India*

Srihari Nageswaran (PhD Student, Anthropology): *Dravidianism and the Crisis of Quasi-Federalism*

Tausif Noor (PhD Student, History of Art) *Framing Sovereignty – The 1971 Liberation War and Documentary Mode*

Revanth Ukkalam (PhD Student, South and Southeast Asian Studies): *Hating the Muslim from the Lion-Hill: theology and communalism in an 18th century Telugu Śataka*

BRUCE R. PRAY JUNIOR FACULTY AND LECTURER BOOK WORKSHOP GRANTS

\$4,000 grants for UC Berkeley South Asia-focused tenure-track assistant professors and early-career/pre-6 lecturers with a completed book manuscript. Deadline for submission: September 15

The 2025 Recipient

- **Matthew Shutzer** (History): *Subterranean Lands: India, Fossil Fuels, and the Limits of the Earth.*

More information at
[SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/
FUNDING-OPPORTUNITIES](https://southasia.berkeley.edu/funding-opportunities)

THE **HART** FELLOWSHIP 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 \$900 for travel to South Asia to undergrads.

The 2025 Hart Research Fellows

Shreya Chandra (PhD Student, Agricultural & Resource Economics): *Conflicting Worker and Firm Preferences in Tamil Nadu's Garment Cluster*

Srihari Nageswaran (PhD Student, Department of Anthropology): *Regionalism and Labor Politics in Late Colonial Madras.*

The 2025 Hart Conference Fellow

Morgan J Curtis (PhD Student, Committee on the Study of Religion, Harvard University): *Naccinārkkiniyar on Making the Cīvakacintāmani a Tamil Classic*

More information at
[SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/
FUNDING-OPPORTUNITIES](https://southasia.berkeley.edu/funding-opportunities)
Deadline: APRIL 1

THE **SOUTH ASIA FORUM**
—Funding student-led initiatives

The Institute supports undergraduate students in creating meaningful and engaging events by providing financial and in-kind resources. Our goal is to foster a vibrant campus community and encourage student leadership and initiative. Over the past year, the Institute has sponsored several student-led events, including:

SOUTH INDIAN CINEMA

In Fall 2024, students of the class, *South Indian Cinema*, led by Cal undergrad, Reyansh Neha Sathishkumar, took a field trip to the Fremont Ciné Lounge to watch *Pushpa 2*, a 2024 Telugu-

Pakistani students, promote Pakistani culture, and provide a platform for students to connect with one another and engage in cultural and social activities. The Institute helped arrange a campus screening of *The Glassworker*, Pakistan's first hand-drawn animated movie (Dec. 8, 2024) and a launch of *Zareen's Pakistani Kitchen*, a new book on the rich and vibrant flavors of Pakistani cuisine (March 19 2025).

SPEAKER SERIES INDIA @BERKELEY

The "India @ Berkeley" Speaker Series is a student-run platform at UC Berkeley that hosts distinguished speakers to discuss various aspects of Indian culture, politics, and society. Last year, the Institute supported talks featuring *Shashi Tharoor* (Sept. 30, 2024), *Javed Ali* (Oct. 13, 2024), *Smriti Irani* (Apr. 16, 2025), and *Rohan Srinivasan* (Mar 17, 2025).

STEEPED IN TIME: THE PAST & PRESENT OF ASSAM TEA

In May 2024, the Institute for South Asia Studies, with the Blum Center and South/Southeast Asia Library, presented *Steeped in Time: The Past & Present of Assam Tea* by UC Berkeley undergraduate Shreya Chaud-

huri, recipient of the 2024 Bruce R. Pray Undergraduate Research Grant. The exhibition traced Assam tea's journey from colonial roots to today's global market, using archival images, histories, and worker voices to capture the culture and industry behind this iconic beverage.

DIL SE: SOUTH ASIAN A CAPPELLA

Over the years, the Institute has showcased *Dil Se* at its annual receptions and major celebratory gatherings, giving the group a platform to share their talent with diverse audiences. Most recently, they delivered a spirited performance at the 10th anniversary celebration of the Chowdhury Center in Fall 2024.

BERKELEY MIDDLE EASTERN MUSLIM SIKH & SOUTH ASIAN COALITION (MEMSSA)

In Spring 2024, the Institute, partnered with MEMSSA to host a book talk by author Zara Chowdhary. The event featured Chowdhary discussing her acclaimed memoir *The Lucky Ones*, which reflects on the 2002 Gujarat violence and its lasting impact.



Fall 2024 field trip to Fremont to watch Pushpa 2

fiction action film written and directed by S. Shankar.

PAKISTANI STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

The Pakistani Student Association (PSA) at UC Berkeley is a student-run organization that aims to foster a sense of community among



Zareen & Umair Khan signing copies of their book at the post-talk reception.



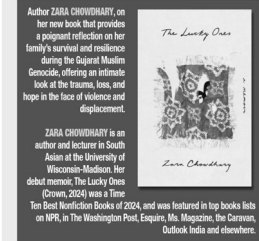
Dr. Shashi Tharoor during his campus visit in Fall 2024



Shreya (at podium) on traditional Assamese tea



Dil Se performing at a Chowdhury Center event.



Event poster

FACULTY & STUDENT NEWS

ANGANA P. CHATTERJI
AWARDED \$1.125M
GRANT AND MULTIPLE
FELLOWSHIPS FOR
SOCIAL JUSTICE WORK
IN SOUTH ASIA



Angana P. Chatterji

The Center for Race & Gender's Dr. Angana P. Chatterji has been awarded a five-year, \$1,125,000 grant for her research and public work advancing social justice. As Founding Chair of CRG's Political Conflict, Gender and People's Rights Initiative, she will study the impact of majoritarian rule on rights and accountability in two South Asian hotspots. In Spring 2025, she also received three fellowships: Research Fellow at UC Berkeley's Human Rights Center; Global Fellow at the Center for Law and Transformation, Norway; and Distinguished Fellow at the Rafto Foundation for Human Rights, Norway. These honors recognize her global, interdisciplinary work on South Asia.

Gaurav Banerjee (PhD Student, South and Southeast Asian Studies) was awarded the John L. Simpson Pre-Dissertation Research Fellowship in International & Area Studies in support of his research on early modern South Asian history.

Daniyal Channa (PhD Student, Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures) was awarded the John L. Simpson ABD Research Fellowship in International & Area Studies as well as the Mir Research Fellowship in Urdu Studies for his project *Framing the Nation: Tradition and Reform in the Post-Partition Urdu Sphere*.

Uttara Chaudhuri (PhD Student, English) received the North American Victorian Studies Association's Sally Mitchell Prize in November 2024 for her paper, *Outward Forms: Gandhi, Wilde, and Late Victorian Aesthetics*. The prize recognizes outstanding scholarship in the field of Victorian studies.

Sharik Laliwala (PhD Student, Political Science) was awarded the Global Democracy Commons Fellowship and the John L. Simpson ABD Research Fellowship in International & Area Studies for his research on residential segregation along religious lines in Indian cities.

Britt Leake (PhD Student, Political Science) received the Yusuf Hamza Abduljawad Student Fellowship and the Bhattacharya Graduate Fellowship in support of his research, *Strategic Ambiguity: Lessons on Multicultural Democracy from India, Lebanon, Spain, and Canada*.

Srihari Nageswaran (PhD Student, Anthropology) received the Global Democracy Commons Fellowship, the John L. Simpson Pre-Dissertation Research Fellowship in International & Area Studies, the Hart Fellowship for Tamil Studies, and the American Institute of Indian Studies Academic Year Fellowship in support of his project, *Regionalism and Labor Politics in Late Colonial Madras*.

Charitra Shreya Pabbaraju (PhD Student, Political Science) was awarded a John L. Simpson Pre-Dissertation Research Fellowship in International & Area Studies and the Telugu Society of America Research Award for her research titled, *Comparative Inquiries in Algorithmic Policing*. She also published a scoping review with the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative on data and analytical methods in early warning systems for mass atrocity prevention.

Ishaan Sharma (PhD student, South and Southeast Asian Studies) was awarded the John L. Simpson ABD Research Fellowship in International & Area Studies for his research in Sanskrit studies.

VASUGI KAILASAM
HONORED WITH
PRESTIGIOUS
PRYTANEAN FACULTY
ENRICHMENT AWARD



Vasugi Kailasam

Dr. Vasugi Kailasam, Assistant Professor of South and Southeast Asian Studies, is the 2024 recipient of the \$35,000 Prytanean Faculty Enrichment Award, recognizing her outstanding scholarship and service to the campus community. A specialist in modern Tamil literature, Kailasam's work examines Tamil identity, migration, and transnational politics in literature and visual culture. She will use the award to host a Tamil Studies conference at UC Berkeley and conduct archival research for her second book. The Prytanean Women's Society, founded at UC Berkeley in 1901, is the nation's first women's honor society and annually presents this prestigious faculty award

Akshita Todi (PhD student, South and Southeast Asian Studies) was awarded the Guru Gobind Singh Fellowship for her research on gender, religion, and literature in modern South Asia, as well as the Arts and Humanities Teaching Award in recognition of her exceptional commitment to undergraduate teaching.

Amar Zaidi (PhD student, History) received the Reinhard Bendix and Allan Sharlin Fellowship, the Leo Löwenthal Prize, and the Yusuf Hamza Abduljawad Student Fellowship in support of his research on early modern South Asian history.

OUR NEW PHD GRADUATES: NEW BEGINNINGS We celebrate the achievements of our recent PhD graduates, whose groundbreaking research spans history, literature, politics, and culture across South and Southeast Asia and beyond. This year, they move on to exciting new academic appointments, continuing to advance scholarship in their fields.



Anurag Advani

ANURAG
ADVANI

PHD 2024, SOUTH
AND SOUTHEAST
ASIAN STUDIES

DISSERTATION:
*Unshackling
the Brain: Mad-*

ness and Mental Illness in Mughal India, c.1500–1700

This summer, Dr. Advani will join Hamilton College as Visiting Assistant Professor in Asian Studies.



Sourav Ghosh

SOURAV
GHOSH

PHD 2024, HIS-
TORY

DISSERTATION:
*Kings in the
Empire: Sov-*

*ereignty and
State Formation in Early Modern India
(1583–1694)*

In Fall 2025, Dr. Ghosh will join Lehigh University's History Department as an Advancing Future Faculty Developmental Postdoctoral Fellow.



Johnathan Guy

JOHNA-
THAN GUY

PHD 2025, POLITI-
CAL SCIENCE

DISSERTATION:
*Decarboniza-
tion and Its Dis-*

*contents: Elite
Strategy in the Age of Climate Crisis*

Beginning in July 2025, Dr. Guy will be a Postdoctoral Research Associate at Columbia University's Political Economy of Climate Idea Lab within the Center for Political Economy.

Faculty Spotlight

CHOWDHURY CENTER DIRECTOR DISCUSSES RESEARCH, LEADERSHIP, AND IMPORTANCE OF GLOBAL STUDIES

by, Jessica Park, Berkeley News

As UC Berkeley Global Studies chair, Dr. Elora Shehabuddin promotes a strong and supportive academic community for her faculty colleagues and students. From learning about foreign policy decisions to climate change and resource conflicts, Global Studies students gain in-depth knowledge about the world around them.

Born in Pakistan, and raised in Europe and the Middle East, Shehabuddin brings a range of perspectives to the Global Studies program. She also serves as a Cal professor and equity advisor in Gender & Women Studies and director of the Subir and Malini Chowdhury Center for Bangladesh Studies.

Shehabuddin earned her A.B. in Social Studies from Harvard University and a Ph.D. in Politics from Princeton University. She worked at UC Irvine and Rice University before joining UC Berkeley in 2022, where she continues her research on Muslim Bengali women's activism in different arenas.

Professor Shehabuddin recently spoke to Berkeley Social Sciences about her academic career. The interview has been edited for clarity.

RECENT ISAS FACULTY TO BE INDUCTED INTO THE SOCIETY OF HELLMAN FELLOWS

The Society of Hellman Fellows is an endowed program at all ten University of California campuses that provides research funding to promising Assistant Professors who show capacity for great distinction in their chosen fields.



2024

LUTHER OBROCK (South and Southeast Asian Studies)

Islamic Poetry in Sanskrit Verse: A Bilingual Edition and Study of Śrīvara's Kathākaṭuka

Professor Obrock's research interest is in the literary and cultural history of second millennium South Asia, particularly the production of Sanskrit literature during the Sultanate period. With his Hellman award, he will be able to complete the publication of a bilingual edition, translation, and study of the *Kathākaṭuka* (The Marvel of Story), a unique translation of a mystical Islamic romance into a Hindu-oriented poem. Obrock believes a careful study of Śrīvara's *Kathākaṭuka* allows insight into the early phase of Hindu-Muslim encounter in Kashmir. ❖



2024

RAHUL BJØRN PARSON (South and Southeast Asian Studies)

Calcutta's Raking Lights: Marwaris and Hindi Literature in New India

Professor Parson specializes in Hindi literature and literary history, with a focus on Hindi movements in Bengal. His Hellman project supports the development of his book *Calcutta's Raking Lights: Marwaris and Hindi Literature in New India*, which maps the overlooked landscape of Hindi literature in Bengal. The monograph uncovers the dynamism and syncretism of this literary world, drawing on affective archives and migrant narratives. It also pioneers research on the literatures of displaced and migrant communities in South Asia, using cultural texts to illuminate the lived experiences of women and migrants. ❖



Elora Shehabuddin, Professor of Gender & Women's Studies; Director, Global Studies Program; and Director, Subir and Malini Chowdhury Center for Bangladesh Studies

Global Studies, specifically, appealed to me as an institutional home because it is both interdisciplinary and, yes, "global!" I appreciated my own undergraduate training in an interdisciplinary program (called Social Studies) and the freedom it afforded me to choose my classes and focus. Also, although I've now been in the U.S. for many years at this point, I did live and attend schools in several countries. So I also appreciate the importance of looking at something seemingly familiar from different perspectives.

JP: What does an average day look like for you as Global Studies Chair?

ES: Mostly a lot of emails and meetings! But it's been really lovely to have this opportunity to get to know my GS colleagues better, and to work with them on ways to make the undergrad and grad programs stronger and more meaningful for both students and faculty. It isn't a traditional discipline, so the students who become GS majors, minors or master's students are here because they want to be here. They are a pretty dedicated and special group! We want to be able to regularly offer the classes they need and want to offer financial support for those who want to do independent research.

JP: What kind of skills do you think Global Studies students gain?

ES: Global Studies offers undergraduate students the chance to gain in-depth knowledge about a particular part of the world, including learning a relevant language, while also specializing in a certain track, like Societies and Cultures, Development, or Peace and Conflict Studies. But they also have to take classes that push them to think of themselves as citizens of the world and that complicate connections between their own lives and those of people around the world — whether through the climate crisis, our government's foreign policy decisions, or the clothes and food they consume.

JP: Could you describe an experience, book or individual that has impacted your perspective on global issues?

ES: It's hard for me to name just one. I'd say my personal background, my life experiences, my own research in transnational feminist activism, as well as the courses I teach, have all helped to shape how I view the world and my place in it. ❖

Article was previously published on Berkeley News on April 7, 2025. Reprinted here with permission from the author.

NEW SOUTH ASIA FACULTY



AMARA ALI joins the Department of South & Southeast Asian Studies in Fall 2025 as the new Urdu Language Lecturer. She is a PhD Candidate at the Department of Asian Cultures and Languages at the University of Texas at Austin, where her research explores the intersections of Islam in South Asia, Urdu, Hindi, and Kashmiri literature, as well as Shia and Sufi devotional traditions. Her doctoral work focuses on the Kashmiri *marsiya*—a moving elegiac poetic form that commemorates the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. Amara Ali holds an MPhil from the University of Cambridge, where she examined the works of Mirza Ghalib and Faiz Ahmed Faiz. Her teaching reflects her commitment to fostering cross-cultural understanding through literature and her skill in connecting historical texts with contemporary issues. She looks forward to building a vibrant Urdu-learning community at Berkeley and mentoring students in the language’s literary and cultural traditions.



OWEN CORNWALL will join the Department of South & Southeast Asian Studies in Fall 2025 as an affiliated scholar specializing in Persian, Arabic, and South Asian literatures. He earned his PhD in 2016 from the Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies at Columbia University. Before coming to Berkeley, Dr. Cornwall was a visiting scholar at the Center for Humanities at Tufts University and taught in the Departments of Classical Studies, International Literary and Cultural Studies, and Religion at Tufts, as well as in the Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies at Columbia. Dr. Cornwall is the co-author, with Frances W. Pritchett, of *Ghalib: Selected Poems and Letters* (Columbia University Press, 2017), a critically introduced and meticulously annotated bilingual edition. His current projects include two books on the historical memory of Alexander the Great in Islam—one on his identification in the Qur’an, and another on his role in Persian literature and Persianate identity.



MATT LOWE joins the Department of Economics in Fall 2025 as an Assistant Professor. He comes to Berkeley from the Vancouver School of Economics at the University of British Columbia, where he was an Assistant Professor and a CIFAR Azrieli Global Scholar. Dr. Lowe’s research uses field and natural experiments to investigate questions in behavioral, development, and political economy. Informed by social psychological and economic theory, he studies the nature and malleability of relations between groups—whether relating to religion, caste, politics, race, or gender. His current projects examine intergroup relations in India, the health and economic effects of psychedelics, and the causes and consequences of religious change. He earned his PhD in Economics from MIT in 2018 and was a postdoctoral fellow at the briq Institute from 2018–19. Matt is also a faculty affiliate of the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab, the Center for Effective Global Action, and the Bureau for Research and Economic Analysis of Development.



MATTHEW SHUTZER joined the Department of History in Fall 2024 as Assistant Professor of Environmental History, specializing in South Asia. His research and teaching examine the place of the environment in global history since the eighteenth century, with a focus on how science, economy, law, and infrastructure have transformed landscapes—and how these transformations have shaped global politics. His book in progress, *Subterranean Lands: India, Fossil Fuels, and the Limits of the Earth* (Princeton University Press), explores contestations over land and nature in India’s coal and petroleum-producing regions since 1800, linking them to the histories of empire, decolonization, and post-colonial development. Matthew is also pursuing projects on extractive economies and social movements, the history of concrete and “Third World” urbanism, and the concept of “energy” in development economics. Before Berkeley, he taught at Duke University and held fellowships at Harvard and UC Berkeley.



SHIBBAN BANERJI joins the Department of History of Art as Associate Professor of Architecture and Urbanism. His research examines the rhetorical and performative dimensions of architecture, asking how architects—from early modern Europe to the 20th-century ex-colonial world—have engaged political oratory, mediated colonial-era publics, and used architectural media to shape perception and consciousness. He is the author of *Lineages of the Global City* (University of Texas Press, 2025), which explores the conjunction of planning and occultism in early twentieth-century visions of global civic life, and coeditor of *In the Shadows of Democracy* (Intermezzo, 2025). His current projects include *Time on the Road to Civil Rights* and an anthology on “spirit” in 20th-century thought. Formerly Faculty of the Year at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Shibban contributes to Oxford *Bibliographies* in Architecture, Planning, and Preservation. He earned his PhD and MCP from MIT, and his BA from Columbia University.



RANDEEP SINGH HOTH will join the Department of Anthropology in Spring 2026 as an Assistant Professor. He is currently a Chancellor’s Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of California, Los Angeles, affiliated with the Asian American Studies Center. Randeep earned his joint PhD in Anthropology—specializing in linguistic anthropology—and Asian Languages and Cultures from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, in 2023. His research examines how mass mediation shapes political imagination in the Sikh diaspora, exploring the ways media connects communities across borders and histories. His work has received support from major institutions, including the Social Science Research Council, Wenner-Gren Foundation, National Science Foundation, American Institute of Indian Studies, and the Institute for Citizens and Scholars. Randeep’s scholarship has been published in *Cultural Anthropology* and the *Journal of Legal Anthropology*.



GAUTAM RAO is an Associate Professor in the Haas School of Business and the Department of Economics. His research brings insights from psychology to economics, focusing on issues in developing countries. His current work centers on the economics of mental health, while past projects have examined how better sleep affects workers’ productivity in India, how the endowment effect shapes loan demand in Kenya, how research evidence influences policy decisions by Brazilian mayors, and how socioeconomic integration in Indian schools affects students’ social preferences. Rao co-directs the Behavioral Development Lab in India with Frank Schilbach and Heather Schofield. He is also a Faculty Research Fellow at the National Bureau of Economic Research and a faculty affiliate at the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab. From 2018 to 2020, he served as an Associate Editor at the *Journal of Political Economy*. Dr. Rao received his Ph.D. in Economics from UC Berkeley in 2014.



PUNINDER SINGH will join the Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies in Fall 2025 as the inaugural Sabharwal Lecturer in Sikh Studies. Dr. Singh earned his PhD in Linguistic Anthropology from the University of Michigan in 2024. His research explores how language—and ideas about language—shape religious experience, with a focus on the Sikh tradition. His current book project examines the rise of a new Sikh intellectual formation between 1920 and 1940, following the Singh Sabha reform movement. Dr. Singh also studies the Sikh tradition’s long-standing linguistic and cultural exchanges with neighboring communities, from the early modern period to today. His work draws on history, anthropology, linguistics, and religious studies. In his first semester, he will teach *Introduction to Sikhism*, an interdisciplinary survey of the tradition from its founding by Guru Nanak in the 15th century to the present, integrating historical, philosophical, anthropological, and sociological perspectives.

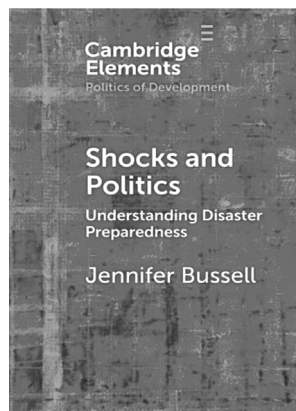
***Shocks and Politics: Understanding Disaster Preparedness* (Cambridge University Press, 2025)**

Jennifer Bussell (Author)

When will elites prepare for natural hazards? This book challenges the view that governments act only after disasters. It shows ruling elites may invest in preparedness, especially when memories of past catastrophes and pressure from strong opposition make future hazards a threat to survival. In such circumstances, readiness becomes not merely public safety

but also a calculated political strategy. Drawing on evidence from ten African nations, three South Asian countries, and subnational cases in India, the book highlights how political will and state capacity interact. Effective preparedness depends not only on leaders' motivation but also on institutions' ability to implement robust plans.

Jennifer Bussell is Associate Professor of Political Science and Public Policy, UC Berkeley.

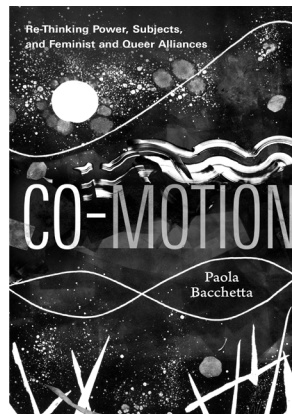


***Co-Motion: Re-Thinking Power, Subjects, & Feminist and Queer Alliances* (Duke University Press, 2026)**

Paola Bacchetta (Author)

This work proposes a new lexicon for analyzing power, subjects, and alliances. Introducing "theory-assemblages," it shows how diverse theoretical and political approaches shape movements, generate solidarities, and produce shifting, often unexpected, forms of resistance. It highlights the inseparability of colonialism, capitalism, racism, caste, misogyny, speciesism, and other power relations, and how their combinations, operability, and effects vary across contexts and subjectivities. Focusing on France, India, Italy, and the United States from the 1970s to the present, it engages an expansive activist and artist archive. Through this, it develops innovative approaches for analyzing and transforming power while imagining and enacting freedom.

Paola Bacchetta is Professor of Gender and Women's Studies, UC Berkeley.



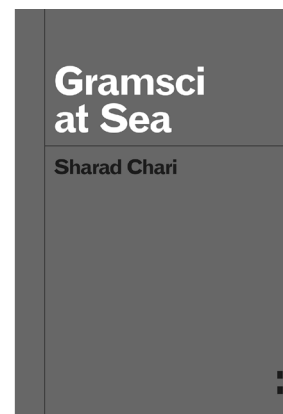
***Gramsci at Sea* (University of Minnesota Press, 2023)**

Sharad Chari (Author)

How might an oceanic Gramsci speak to Black aquafuturism and other forms of oceanic critique? This succinct yet layered work carefully reads Antonio Gramsci's writings on the sea, focused in his prison notes on waves of imperial power in the turbulent inter-war oceans. Sharad Chari argues that the imprisoned militant's method is oceanic in form, and that this oceanic Marxism can attend to the roil of

sociocultural dynamics, waves of imperial power, and shifting geopolitical currents across continents and empires. It also engages Black, Drexian, and other forms of oceanic critique to "storm" us on different shores, offering imaginative, fresh ways of rethinking power, resistance, and solidarity across oceans.

Sharad Chari is Associate Professor of Geography and Critical Theory, UC Berkeley.



***Non-Aligned: Art, Decolonization, and the Third World Project in India* (Yale University Press, 2025)**

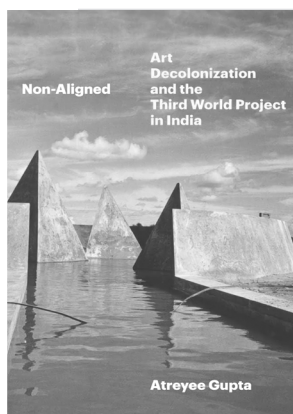
Atreyee Gupta (Author)

A study of Indian modernism and its role in decolonization, *Non-Aligned* reframes modernism in India as part of a wider Global South movement rooted in the interwar and postwar waves of antifascism, decolonization, and the Non-Aligned Movement. Gupta uncovers a

modernist internationalism shaped by Third World political struggles, challenging Western cultural dominance and linking art to the ideals of liberation, anti-imperialism, and modernization. Following the far-reaching networks of Indian artists and intellectuals—such as

Mulk Raj Anand, Francis N. Souza, and Abanindranath Tagore—who engaged with global interlocutors from W. E. B. Du Bois to Octavio Paz, the book traces artistic and intellectual exchanges across Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas. Richly illustrated, it offers a compelling new perspective on the intertwined histories of art, politics, and freedom.

Atreyee Gupta is Associate Professor of Global Modern Art and South and Southeast Asian Art at the University of California, Berkeley

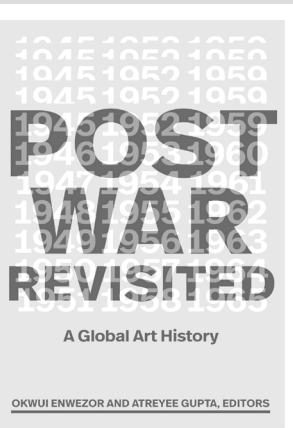


***Postwar Revisited: A Global Art History* (Duke University Press, 2025)**

Atreyee Gupta (Co-Editor)

Building on Okwui Enwezor's landmark 2016 exhibition *Postwar: Art between the Pacific and the Atlantic, 1945–1965*, this volume explores a transformative period when Western artistic and philosophical frameworks were unsettled after Auschwitz and Hiroshima, and decolonization unleashed diverse, interconnected, radical creative energies across the globe. Through the work of

modernist artists, collectives, architects, influential exhibitions, and evolving patronage, it rethinks the global art of the postwar era and its reciprocal ties to politics, culture, intellectual debates, shifting aesthetics, and the Non-Aligned Movement. Bringing together multiple perspectives, it offers fresh insights for readers interested in global modernism, the intersections of art and decolonization, and the layered, complex, dynamic history of the Cold War.

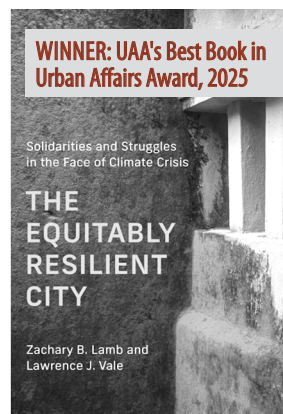


***The Equitably Resilient City: Solidarities & Struggles in the Face of Climate Crisis* (The MIT Press, 2025)**

Zachary B. Lamb (Co-Author)

An examination of how cities—particularly in the Global South—adapt to climate threats in ways that support vulnerable communities. Drawing on twelve case studies, including one from Pune, India, Lamb with co-author Lawrence Vale (MIT) show how adaptation in South Asia must address both climate risks and entrenched socio-political exclusion. Their model for equitable resilience rests on four domains: environmental vitality, security from displacement, dignified livelihoods, and enhanced self-governance—the four LEGS of resilience. Case studies range from hillside favelas in South America to flood-threatened mobile home parks in the United States and canal-side settlements in Southeast Asia. Across contexts, they demonstrate how planning, design, and community action can foster urban resilience grounded in justice, struggle, and solidarity.

Zachary Lamb is Assistant Professor of City and Regional Planning, UC Berkeley.

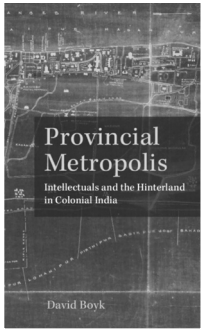


PUBLICATIONS BY ALUMNI

PROVINCIAL METROPOLIS: INTELLECTUALS & THE HINTERLAND IN COLONIAL INDIA (*Cambridge University Press, 2025*)

David Boyk (Author)

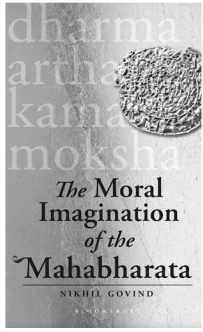
David Boyk (PhD, History, 2015), is Associate Professor of Hindi-Urdu language and South Asian history at Northwestern University.



THE MORAL IMAGINATION OF THE MAHABHARATA (*Bloomsbury Publishing India, 2025*)

Nikhil Govind (Author)

Nikhil Govind (PhD, South and South East Asian Studies, 2011), is Head and Professor of Literary Studies at the Manipal Centre for Humanities, Manipal University.



BUILDING SOCIAL MOBILITY: HOW SUBSIDIZED HOMEOWNERSHIP CREATES WEALTH, DIGNITY, & VOICE IN INDIA (*Cambridge University Press, 2025*)

Tanu Kumar (Author)

Tanu Kumar (PhD, Political Science, 2020), is a Governance Specialist in the World Bank's Public Institutions and Data Analytics Unit

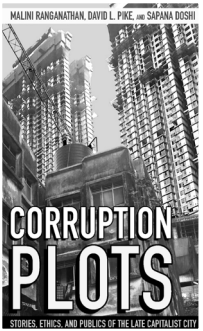


CORRUPTION PLOTS: STORIES, ETHICS, AND PUBLICS OF THE LATE CAPITALIST CITY (*Cornell University Press, 2023*)

Malini Ranganathan (Editor)

(with co-editors David Pike and Sapana Doshi)

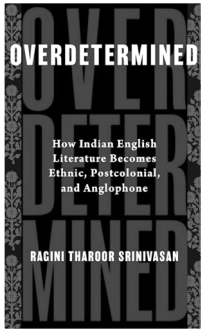
Malini Ranganathan (PhD, Energy & Resources Group/ Global Metropolitan Studies, 2010), is Associate Professor at American University



OVERDETERMINED: HOW INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE BECOMES ETHNIC, POSTCOLONIAL, AND ANGLOPHONE (*Columbia University Press, 2025*)

Ragini Tharoor Srinivasan (Author)

Ragini Tharoor Srinivasan (PhD, Rhetoric, 2016), is Assistant Professor of English and Creative Writing at Rice University.



REALITY SCRIBES

Vasundhara Sirnate (Host)
(with co-host Sumit Chaturvedi)

A new podcast on the history of Indian journalism, from the first newspaper in the late 1700s to the changing news cultures and information networks that have shaped the nation over time.

Vasundhara Sirnate is a political scientist and journalist who studies Political Science at UC Berkeley



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• *New ISAS Initiative in 2025*

• **THE SOUTH ASIAN**

• **POLITICAL ECONOMIES**

• **INITIATIVE**

• **W**e are excited to announce the launch of the South Asian Political Economies Initiative, a new program designed to foster research collaborations and public programming that deepen our understanding of the interlocking crises shaping South Asia today—including climate change, social inequality, and the rise of majoritarian politics—through the lens of political economy. Taking an expansive approach, our hope is that the Initiative will highlight how neofeudal and social formations such as caste, kinship, and gender continue to structure South Asian capitalisms in complex and enduring ways. By creating space for dialogue across disciplines and institutions, the Initiative aims to generate new frameworks for thinking about the region's past, present, and possible futures. ♦

Upcoming Conference:
September 12–13, 2025

SOUTH ASIAN CAPITALISM(S)

A two-day workshop, co-organized with IIT–Bombay and UMass–Amherst, on how capitalist accumulation is socially structured across South Asia. Keynote events include:

- **CAPITALISM & MAJORITARIANISM** With Katharina Pistor (*Columbia University*) & Thomas Blom Hansen (*Stanford University*)
- **GAIL OMVEDT AT BERKELEY & BEYOND: CASTE & DEMOCRACY** With Patrick Heller (*Brown University*), Sumeet Mhaskar (*OP Jindal University*), & Aarti Sethi (*UC Berkeley*)

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF POVERTY: RETHINKING POLICY THROUGH HUMAN BEHAVIOR

Dr. Supreet Kaur, Associate Professor of Economics at UC Berkeley, recently delivered a talk titled, "The Psychology of Poverty," as part of the Berkeley Economics Speakers Series. Read the summary below, and watch the full talk on YouTube @ socialsciencesatucberkeley8843

How do we win the fight against poverty? For Supreet Kaur, professor of economics at UC Berkeley, the answer starts with rethinking what poverty actually means. Speaking at *The Berkeley Economics Speakers Series*, Kaur argued that in both rich and poor countries, escaping poverty is far harder than public narratives suggest. Even with access to free schooling, community colleges, or safety net programs, most people born into poverty remain there. The problem, she said, isn't simply about "trying harder" — it's that these opportunities are incomplete, and policy often misses the psychological realities of being poor.

BEYOND THE POVERTY LINE

Economists tend to define poverty as not having enough income to meet basic needs, an approach that drives anti-poverty policies such as cash transfers, food stamps, or universal basic income. While these measures are essential, Kaur noted, they overlook the lived experience of poverty: volatile earnings, unpredictable expenses, unsafe neighborhoods, discrimination, poor-quality services, and chronic stress. These factors not only make life harder but also change how people think, decide, and perform.

WHEN STRESS DRAINS FOCUS

Kaur highlights research showing that low-income households face constant income and expense swings — from

cancelled work shifts to medical emergencies — fueling anxiety and eroding cognitive capacity. In one global study, poor students' attention waned faster on standardized tests than wealthier peers'. A low-cost fix—20 minutes of sustained practice each school day, modeled on the approach taken in richer students' schools—boosted attention spans, IQ test results, and grades.

MONEY TIMING MATTERS


Financial strain affects adults, too. In an Indian factory study, paying workers part of their wages a few days early improved focus, reduced mistakes, and increased output — effects seen only among poorer workers. Similarly, data from the U.S. and India show that when money is tight, parents talk less to their young children, with implications for language development.

WHY SAVING IS SO HARD

Even experienced low-income households often overestimate how much they can save and underestimate future expenses, a "planning fallacy" common across income levels. In rural Zambia, a simple visual budgeting tool helped families plan for the year's costs. The result: 15% more savings, fewer seasonal food shortages, greater farm investment, and higher crop yields — matching the impact of costly aid programs at a fraction of the cost.

SMARTER, NOT JUST BIGGER, POLICY

For Kaur, the lesson is clear: poverty is as much a psychological and cognitive challenge as it is a financial one. By designing policies that address both dimensions — often with low-cost, behaviorally informed interventions — governments can make anti-poverty efforts more effective and humane. ♦



Supreet Kaur

Spotlighting Faculty Research

UC BERKELEY SCIENTISTS UNLOCK INDIA'S GENETIC DIVERSITY

A comparison of more than 2,700 complete genomes from South Asians uncovers a wealth of ancient and recent diversity and genetic links to disease.

By Robert Sanders, Berkeley News

With around 5,000 different ethno-linguistic and religious groups, India is one of the most culturally and genetically diverse countries in the world. Yet, it remains under-represented in genomic surveys, even when compared to other non-European groups, such as East Asians and Africans.

A new analysis of Indian genomes — the largest and most complete to date — helps untangle these groups' complex evolutionary history, uncovering a 50,000-year history of genetic mixing and population bottlenecks that shaped genetic variation, health and disease in South Asia.

The analysis, led by researchers at the University of California, Berkeley, the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in New Delhi, India, the University of Southern California (USC) and the University of Michigan, was published on June 26 2025 in the journal *Cell*.

"These findings fill a critical gap and reshape our understanding of how ancient migrations, archaic admixture and social structures, like endogamy, have shaped the Indian genetic variation and risk of diseases, and will help inform precision health strategies in India," said Priya Moorjani, a senior author of the paper and a UC Berkeley assistant professor of molecular and cell biology.

Because of the complex history of gene flow and endogamy, or within-community marriages, Moorjani said, some groups within India are as genetically different from each other as Europeans are from East Asians. Studying diverse individuals across India thus helps to understand how ancient ancestry, geography, language and social practices interacted.

The researchers analyzed genomes of 2,762 people from major linguistic, ethnic, and geographic groups, sequenced through LASI-DAD, a study of genetic variation and the causes of aging and related diseases in India.

The UC Berkeley team found that most of the genetic variation in India can be explained by a single migration of humans out of Africa about 50,000 years ago. These populations interbred with now-extinct relatives — Neanderthals and Denisovans — and then spread throughout Europe and Asia, including India. As a result, Indians and Europeans both carry about equal amounts of Neanderthal genes — between 1% and 2% of the entire genome.

"Potentially, there were earlier waves out of Africa to India, but it's likely that those groups either did not survive or left little genetic impact on today's populations," said Elise Kerdoncuff, a former UC Berkeley postdoctoral fellow and

one of two lead authors of the paper.

Surprisingly, Indians have a greater variety of Neanderthal DNA segments than other populations around the world. According to Moorjani, the European populations sampled by earlier studies share among them about 30% of the Neanderthal genome.

The much smaller sample of Indian genomes, however, contained Neanderthal ancestry segments representing half of the Neanderthal genome.

"One of the most striking and unexpected findings was that India harbors the highest variation in Neanderthal ancestry among non-Africans," said co-lead author Laurits Skov, a former UC Berkeley postdoctoral fellow. "This allowed us to reconstruct around 50% of the Neanderthal genome and 20% of the Denisovan genome from Indian individuals, more than any other previous archaic ancestry study."

"This is because of the complex history of South Asians," Moorjani explained. "They've had multiple mixture events over the past 10,000 years, followed by strong bottlenecks in many groups. Together, that leads to a very complex mosaic of different ancestries, such that when you compare the Neanderthal segments in two individuals, they're often not shared."

NEOLITHIC FARMERS FROM IRAN

The earliest inhabitants of India may have been hunter-gatherers, who were ancient ancestral South Indians whose closest genetic relatives today may still be living on the isolated Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal. People from the south of India have higher levels of this ancestry than those in the north.

Archaeological evidence, including from the Mehrgarh site in present-day Pakistan, indicates that agriculture in South Asia began 8,000–9,000 years ago, likely introduced by Neolithic farmers from West Asia. Analysis of 14 ancient populations points to fourth millennium BCE farmers and herders from Sarazm, Tajikistan, as the closest match.

Archeologists had previously documented trade connections between Sarazm and South Asia, including connections with agricultural sites of Mehrgarh and the early Indus Valley Civilization. Kerdoncuff noted that "it is striking that one of the two Sarazm individuals in our study was found with shell bangles that are identical to ones found in Neolithic sites in India and Pakistan, and made from sea shells originating from the Indian Ocean or the Arabian Sea."

The genome analysis also confirmed evidence in India for steppe pastoralist ancestry, ranging between 0-45% among present-day individuals. Together, these three groups — farmers, pastoralists and hunter-gatherers — gave rise to the genetic variation now seen throughout India.

THE ROLE PLAYED BY ENDOGAMY

After this complex mix of cultures, however, India experienced a shift toward strong endogamy, the practice of marrying within one's community. Endogamous marriages increase the prevalence of deleterious variants and the chance that an individual would inherit two, homozygous copies of a bad gene, if the parents are related or from a small population. In a previous paper, Moorjani and her colleagues determined

UC BERKELEY'S PRIYA MOORJANI RECEIVES NSF CAREER AWARD FOR GROUNDBREAKING ANCIENT DNA RESEARCH



Dr. Priya Moorjani, Assistant Professor of Genetics, Genomics, Evolution, and Development at UC Berkeley, has been awarded a prestigious NSF CAREER grant for

2024–2029. Her project will develop new statistical tools to study "archaic introgression" — the traces of DNA inherited from ancient human relatives like Neanderthals and Denisovans. By applying these methods to large, diverse, multi-ethnic datasets, Moorjani aims to uncover how this ancient ancestry has shaped modern human biology and health.

that these types of bottlenecks, or founder events, occurred between 3,500 and 2,000 years ago. A founder event is when a small number of ancestral individuals gives rise to a large fraction of the population, often because war, famine or disease drastically reduced the population, but also because of geographic isolation — on islands, for example — or cultural practices.

"With these founder events, members of a group become much more related because they're exchanging genes just within the community," Moorjani said. "So if a deleterious variant is present in the community, it can drift to high frequency in the population because there's less variation."

One example of such a recessive trait is a mutation in the butyrylcholinesterase (BCHE) gene that causes muscle paralysis and other severe reactions to anesthetics like micavarium. It is particularly prevalent in communities such as the Vysya in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, Moorjani said, but present at very low frequency across the rest of India and not present outside India. Identifying such variants is crucial for genetic screening and improving medical interventions, she said.

The team also identified numerous rare and population-specific pathogenic genetic variants, including variants linked to blood disorders, congenital hearing loss, cystic fibrosis and phenylketonuria.

Moorjani and her colleagues are continuing to analyze the Indian genomes in the LASI-DAD study, which is part of the LASI study that has collected over 70,000 individuals, and aims to sequence a subset to study epigenetic differences, metabolomics and proteomics to understand aging and age-associated diseases in India.

"Our expertise is in leveraging the evolutionary history to do more reliable disease mapping, because this complex history highlights how critical it is to incorporate ancestry and homozygosity in future medical and functional genomics research in India," Moorjani said.

Moorjani and her UC Berkeley team were supported by grants from the National Institutes of Health. ❖

Article previously published in Berkeley News on June 26, 2022. This lightly edited version reprinted here with permission.

ECOTOPES AND FLOWS: STORIES OF LANDSCAPE PRACTICE IN ALPINE NEPAL

Shrabya Timsina is a PhD student in the Department of Landscape Architecture & Environmental Planning. His research focuses on the management, design, and planning of complex working landscapes that integrate multiple land uses, ecosystems, and human settlements. Prior to joining Berkeley, he worked on professional research projects involving silviculture, plant propagation, and natural resource management across private and communal lands in rural Nepal. Shrabya holds a Master of Forestry from Yale University and a Bachelor's degree in Biological Sciences from the University of Chicago.

Tell us about your research project and your fieldwork?

My dissertation at Berkeley explores the historic and contemporary practice of landscape planning, design, and management in alpine villages in the Nepal Himalaya. Over years of professional and academic engagement in the region, I grew fascinated by how people's livelihoods and stories—both collective and personal—move across a patchwork of forests, farms, and pastures.



With Chandra Bikram Shahi (left), the kind elder who shared the old manuscripts, during our final chat—while I pleaded with his grandchildren for a little peace.

In 2022, my friend Jeewan Shahi invited me to his hometown of Juphal in Dolpa. There, I recorded stories from his family and discovered a 140-year-old manuscript of resource-use agreements—an entry point into a long tradition of local landscape governance. This past summer, I returned to Dolpa to gather more documents and immerse myself in village life. I joined rituals, worked alongside residents in daily tasks, and spoke with community members and administrators.

Through this, I began to see how clans and deities shaped the landscape's history, how people, livestock, and goods circulate annually across more than 200 sq. km., and how stories of place are layered into both memory and practice. I also recorded geospatial data linked to these narratives, with the hope of mapping them to trace how the landscape has changed over time.

How did your time in the field shape or shift your research questions or approach?

On earlier visits, I engaged with the community through projects with concrete goals—such as botanical surveys or infrastructure initiatives—that naturally encouraged people to share stories while we worked or rested. This time, without a tangible project or immediate benefits like short-term employment, conversations unfolded more cautiously.



My friend Jeewan Shahi from Juphal in the alpine meadow of Ruppattan, where he once spent childhood summers collecting cordyceps.

Although many valued my interest in documenting the history of their landscape, personal stories were not offered as freely. Realizing I couldn't gather accounts from across all social groups, I focused instead on deepening relationships with families I already knew. This approach still gave me access to diverse perspectives and a nuanced understanding of landscape dynamics, though not the broad, evenly stratified sample I had hoped for. In the future, I would like to return with a project that provides more immediate benefits to the community alongside my research.

What are some of the highlights of your fieldwork experience?

One of the most memorable moments was uncovering the history of how the villages of Taali and Juphal—separated by a full day's walk—came to share the alpine meadow near Taali. After visiting the meadow, I spoke with residents of both villages, who held differing views of the agreement, from pride to quiet resentment. In Juphal, a village leader mentioned that an elder might still have a manuscript of the original pact. I had been treating this elder for an eye infection, and once he recovered, he showed me a remarkable collection of documents, including a 100-year-old manuscript of the Taali-Juphal agreement and several more recent accords. These revealed a centuries-long continuity in how the meadow was shared, as well as the shifting actors and institutions involved. I later brought many of these documents to Kathmandu for digitization.

What are some of the challenges you've faced during fieldwork?

After three weeks my Garmin GPS failed, erasing the travel tracks and site coordinates I had carefully recorded. Though I managed to reconstruct some of this using satellite imagery, many waypoints were lost. I hadn't expected such a sturdy device to fail and later realized I should have backed up the data on an SD card.

The greater challenge, however, has been ongoing and internal: writing about a landscape that is not only terrain but also people. Communities offered different versions of the same events, and I constantly worried about misrepresenting them or overlooking key details. At times, I felt this work should belong to a local researcher—like my friend who first invited me. After many conversations, we decided together to share authorship of whatever publications emerge from this project.

How do you see this work informing your future academic or professional path?

This experience has convinced me that landscapes are best understood as narrative fields where ecological processes and human lives continually generate new stories. If people make sense of the world through narrative, then landscape practice should explicitly plan for stories, not just for physical sites or ecological parts.

Academically, I see a research agenda that develops theoretical frameworks for “story-centered” landscape practice—bringing together ecological science, ethnography, and design thinking to better explain how narratives shape both place and identity. Professionally, this translates into methods that integrate ecological analysis with ethnographic immersion, so that planning and management strategies honor narrative vitality as much as biodiversity or infrastructure. My aim is to demonstrate how story-centered approaches can enrich scholarship while also producing more resilient, meaningful landscapes in practice. ❖



Helping Jeevan's family ready the paddy field for rice planting.

VIZIANAGARAM: NARASIMHA IN A FORGOTTEN WORLD

Revanth Ukkalam is a PhD student in the Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies at UC Berkeley. He holds a BA in History from Ashoka University and an MA in Sanskrit from Deccan College. His research explores allusions to historical events in the 11th-century Kashmiri Sanskrit text *Kathasaritsagara* and the broader Bruhatkatha tradition. Beyond academia, Revanth runs the podcast *Pravaha*, creates Indian classical art-themed memes (@thesleepingbuddha), and enjoys traveling, music (as a self-proclaimed talented whistler), and doodling.

Tell us about your research project and your fieldwork?

I set out to study the 1730s text *Simhadri Narasimha Satakam* by Gogulapati Kurmanadha Kavi from the Visakhapatnam region. Belonging to the genre of centenary poems, it is devoted to a deity at a pilgrimage site while also addressing social, political, and theological issues. What makes this work unusual is its plea to Simhachalam's Narasimha to descend and punish contemporary wrongdoers—identified broadly as Muslims, under terms such as "*parasika*," "*arabbi*," "*turuka*," "*yavana*," "*khan*," and "*pascatyā*." On the surface, it casts certain figures as villains and the author's community as victims in a devotional frame. Yet I see in it two deeper anxieties: the emerging construction of "the Muslim" as a singular other, and unease within Hinduism and Vaishnavism itself, reflecting doubts about the adequacy of the Hindu God in a world of surrounding monotheisms.

Guided by this text, I sought to explore memory and geography in Bhimasingi, Jami, and Chodavaram—towns where Kurmanadha claims deities vanished after temple raids. Do traces of these shrines or their gods survive, and if so, how are they remembered or worshipped today? Equally, might it be possible to trace the poet himself through these sites, given that his verses remain the most elaborate record of them?

How did your time in the field shape or shift your research questions or approach?

This trip helped me identify many of the temples mentioned in the *Simhadri Narasimha Satakam*.

While the poem describes them vaguely—unclear about their location, distance from Simhachalam and Vizianagaram, age, style, or patronage—the fieldwork clarified some of these uncertainties and pointed toward methods for addressing others. I found that these temples were closely tied to the Vizianagaram court, likely due to their proximity to the city.

On the ground, their histories appeared far more varied than Kurmanadha suggests. Bhimasingi's temple, for example, has suffered great wear and now survives as a small modern shrine on a cliff. Jami, by contrast, remains a vibrant pilgrimage center, though now identified as a Saiva temple. Both Jami and Chodavaram still house their ancient images, which challenges the poem's claim that these deities had "gone missing." In Chodavaram, I even found an inscription recording royal patronage, further contradicting the narrative of abandonment.



Revanth in Vizianagaram



The Vishnu of Chodavaram

What were some of the most memorable moments or key insights from your field experience?

During this fieldwork—much like my earlier travels through rural South India—I moved from site to site in the monsoon mist of the Eastern Ghats. What struck me most was how strongly these shrines reflected the patronage of the Vizianagaram court—something Kurmanadha's poem obscures by framing their story solely through

the fate of the gods. What I encountered was not forgotten temples or vanished deities, but shrines resilient enough to outlast the state's grip.

Equally striking was the silence around Padmanabham, Ramatirtham, and Mannargudi—major temples not mentioned in the *Satakam*. If they had been attacked, surely they would have appeared in his verses. Their omission suggests they remained largely untouched—surprising given their prominence—and casts doubt on his claims about other sites. Reconciling these contradictions between text and material record became a central challenge, forcing me to question the poet's agenda and his choice to erase resilience and ongoing worship.



A friend I made at Padmanabham

How do you see this work informing your future academic or professional path?

One of the most surprising discoveries during this fieldwork was an architectural pattern I began to notice across the temples of Jami, Padmanabham, Ramatirtham, and Mannargudi in Vizianagaram. Unlike Simhachalam—where the Kalinga-Nagara and Dravida styles sit side by side in a visibly segmented way—these temples revealed something different. Their towers, pillars, and ornamentation felt less like a combination of two traditions and more like a natural fusion, as if the two styles had melted into one another over time.

Standing before them, I realized this wasn't just a variation on familiar patterns but perhaps a new aesthetic altogether, one that spoke to the confidence of local builders and the imprint of Vizianagaram's patronage. It left me wondering whether these temples could represent an unrecognized branch of Dravidian architecture. I've started to think of it as a "Kalinga-Dravida" style—or maybe even a "Vizianagaram School." For me, this realization was both exciting and humbling: what I had thought of as a small detail might, with further study, open up an entirely new way of understanding the region's architectural history. ♦



Bus tickets around the temples of Vizianagaram

MONKS, MANUSCRIPTS AND MAGIC: THE MULTIPLE LIVES OF JAIN DEVOTIONAL MANUSCRIPTS

Alexandra Ciolac is a PhD candidate working on Sanskrit materials and illustrated manuscripts of devotional texts in ancient and medieval South Asia. Her project highlights the sacred text as object in Jain ritual culture at the intersection of tantric and bhakti movements. She is also interested in local histories of trade communities that shaped Jain devotional practices in the early modern period in Northwestern India. Alexandra completed her undergraduate studies at U.C. Berkeley in Religious Studies and Art History, and an M.A. at Yale University, where she was introduced to illustrated Jain manuscripts.

Tell us about your research project and your fieldwork?

My research examines Jain devotional hymns in Sanskrit and Prakrit, beginning in the 7th century with the monk Manatunga's *Bhaktamara Stotra* ("Hymn of the Immortals"). This hymn holds a special place in Jain literary history: it is the first Jain Sanskrit *laghu-kavya* (courtly poem) and is regarded as the earliest example of *bhakti* (devotional expression) in Jainism. Over time, it inspired other hymns, extensive commentaries, and manuscripts, many of which were carefully preserved and sometimes richly embellished.

My project is principally archival. I set out to trace illustrated manuscripts of the *Bhaktamara Stotra* and related texts, and to understand their circulation and preservation. Over eight months, I worked in *bhandaras* (manuscript libraries) in Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Gujarat, examining collections often housed within active temple complexes. I then continued in European repositories in Germany, the UK, Italy, and France, where Jain manuscripts arrived through colonial and scholarly networks. At each site, I studied manuscripts' material features, contents, and condition, and, when permitted, photographed them for detailed analysis. This combination of Indian and European archives has allowed me to see broader patterns of transmission and the many ways communities valued these texts.

How did your time in the field shape or shift your research questions or approach?

At first, my plan was to locate and document illustrated copies of the *Bhaktamara*, which are quite rare since the hymn is not canonical. However, I soon discovered that the *Bhaktamara* was frequently copied together with other hymns and commentaries. These manuscripts were usually not illustrated in the narrative sense but instead embellished with ornamental flourishes and motifs. The pigments used often matched those throughout the manuscript, suggesting the decoration was completed by scribes rather than painters. What this revealed was that even when not elaborately illustrated, these manuscripts still received special attention. This realization shifted my project: I began to focus less on images alone and more on the contexts of production, patronage, and preservation that shaped these manuscripts as objects of devotion.

What are some of the highlights of your fieldwork experience?

There were countless memorable moments. Studying some of the oldest surviving manuscripts in Gujarat and Maharashtra was awe-inspiring, as was a long conversation with the caretaker of the Ranakpur temple about the continuing significance of the *Bhaktamara*. On another occasion, I found

myself speaking—somewhat haltingly—in Sanskrit with a knowledgeable archivist to bridge a language gap, a humbling reminder of how manuscript traditions remain deeply connected to living scholarship. A particularly striking episode came when I nearly skipped an Italian archive, assuming its holdings would be irrelevant due to sparse cataloging. To my surprise, it held an exceptional collection, underscoring the value of persistence in archival work.

Beyond the manuscripts themselves, one of the most valuable outcomes was meeting mentors and colleagues: Dr. Shrikant Bahulkar at the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in Pune, Professor Julia Hegewald in Bonn, and many other generous archivists and scholars across India and Europe. Their insights have deeply influenced how I now approach manuscripts.

What are some of the challenges you've faced during fieldwork?

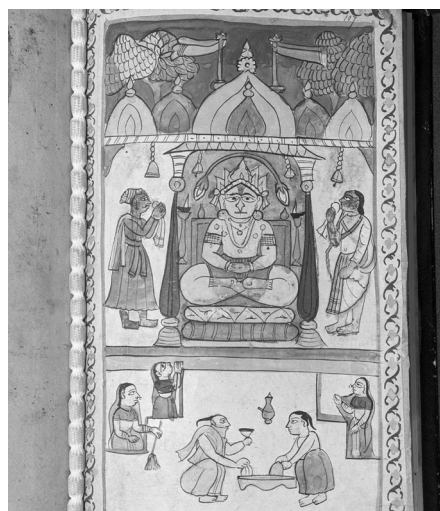
Fieldwork inevitably comes with challenges. Extended travel alone across India brought the expected difficulties—extreme heat, long train journeys, and impassable roads during the monsoon. But an unexpected obstacle was timing: many *bhandara* keepers were unavailable during the hot months, when the small, enclosed repositories were too difficult to access. As a result, I missed several smaller yet important collections, particularly in Rajasthan. At first this felt like a major setback, but it taught me an essential lesson: archival research is always partial, iterative, and long-term. The expectation of examining every relevant manuscript in one visit is not only unrealistic, but also unproductive. Recognizing this changed the way I now approach research.

How do you see this work informing your future academic or professional path?

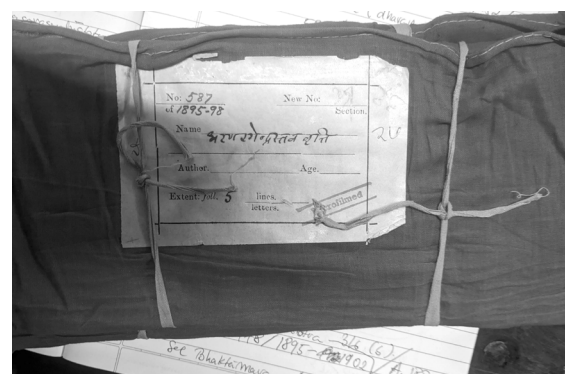
I look forward to returning to the field—to revisit archives with fresh eyes, to access sites I missed, and to pursue new questions that emerged only after organizing my notes and photographs. The process of sorting this material has been as valuable as collecting it, teaching me to refine my methods and develop more efficient strategies for future research.

Perhaps the most enduring outcome of this project is that it confirmed the importance of treating manuscripts as material objects. What began as a primarily textual study has grown into a study of material culture, attentive to how texts were made, used, and preserved. Some of the most intriguing manuscripts I encountered may not appear in my dissertation, yet they have already opened new lines of inquiry that I hope to pursue in the years ahead.

This project has given me not only a deeper understanding of Jain devotional literature but also a sense of how the materiality of manuscripts can shape the study of religion more broadly. ❖



Folio from an illustrated manuscript in the style of the *Bhaktamara Stotra* at the British Library.



Bound manuscript and traditionally preserved at BORI, Pune.



Alex with fellow PhD student, Anurag Advani, during a visit to Deccan College in Pune

NEGOTIATING FLEXIBILITY: WORKER–FIRM CONFLICTS IN TAMIL NADU'S GARMENT INDUSTRY

Shreya Chandra is a Ph.D. student in Agricultural and Resource Economics at UC Berkeley, researching firms and labor markets in developing countries, with a focus on India. She has also studied women's empowerment, digital technologies, and microfinance in Tanzania, Kenya, Chile, and Bangladesh. Previously, she was a research associate at Harvard Business School, MIT Sloan, and the Harvard Kennedy School. She holds degrees from Yale University (M.A. Economics) and the University of Delhi (B.A. Economics), and outside academia is a certified yoga teacher who enjoys climbing, tennis, and painting dog portraits.

Tell us about your research project and your fieldwork?

My research explores how flexible work arrangements shape the lives of workers and firms in Tirupur, one of India's largest apparel clusters. Interviews revealed that many tailors—men and women alike—chose small firms not simply for flexibility, but because poor public infrastructure, such as a weekly water supply, forced them to take time off for household needs. This often pushed workers away from large export-oriented firms, raising the broader question: are small, informal firms better for worker welfare than larger ones typically praised in policy discourse?

At the same time, most owners acknowledged that flexibility reduced productivity but hesitated to impose stricter schedules, fearing hiring and retention challenges. Many also empathized with workers' household demands. Small firms thus absorbed these costs, prompting the question of whether welfare gains outweigh the losses in productivity.

To study this trade-off, I am conducting a randomized controlled trial with 100 small firms. Half are offered incentives to enforce stricter start times, with workers eligible for bonuses worth 15–25% of daily earnings. By tracking attendance, output, and revenues, I aim to measure how much workers value flexibility and whether the benefits justify the costs for firms.



Collecting production data from the firm owner and workers



Shreya in a garment factory in Tirupur

How did your time in the field shape or shift your research questions or approach?

Five months of fieldwork reshaped both my questions and methods. Conversations revealed how workers juggle domestic and workplace demands, and how owners balance productivity with retention. These insights confirmed the significance of my central question for both policy and academic debates.

Fieldwork also pushed me beyond open-ended interviews. A survey showed that small firms offered more flexibility, strengthening my design and helping secure funding for a pilot. Embedding myself in two firms for two weeks gave me firsthand experience of production rhythms, task organization, and practical ways to measure output—lessons that made my protocols both rigorous and workable in informal settings.

What were some of the most memorable moments or key insights from your field experience?

What struck me most in Tirupur was the sense of unity between owners and workers, in sharp contrast to labor-management conflict in large export firms. Seeing this mutual understanding deepened my appreciation of small firms as institutions that mediate between household needs and workplace demands.

On a personal note, I learned to ride a motorbike to navigate Tirupur's industrial landscape—an unexpected boost to both mobility and confidence. I remain deeply grateful to the team that guided me through study design, funding, and implementation; their support shaped my growth as much as the project itself.

What are some of the challenges you've faced during fieldwork?

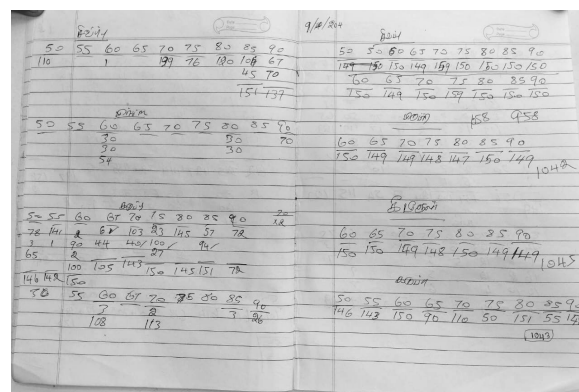
Fieldwork was demanding, physically and emotionally. Though I am from India, I do not speak Tamil, the dominant language in Tirupur, which made daily interactions harder. Having previously worked as a research associate, I was not new to fieldwork, but doing it independently as a graduate student proved to be one of the most difficult experiences of my life.

Identifying appropriate field sites also required persistence. Tirupur's Economic Census, last updated in 2013, was difficult to use: official location names rarely matched those used locally, complicating my efforts to locate clusters of small firms. Even after identifying them, building trust with owners took patience. Many early encounters ended with vague responses like "I am busy, come later," and no follow-up, while in some cases I discovered that those I had spoken to were tailors posing as owners.

How do you see this work informing your future academic or professional path?

Looking ahead, I plan to pursue an academic career focused on the interaction of firms and labor markets in developing countries. The fieldwork and RCT in Tirupur represent only the beginning of a broader research agenda. The rich data I have collected will generate new questions about the organization of small firms, the value workers place on different job attributes, and the institutional contexts that shape labor markets.

Building on my fieldwork skills, I aim to continue identifying novel insights from the field and applying the tools of economics to pressing research and policy questions. Just as importantly, I hope to work closely with local policymakers, translating academic research into interventions with tangible, real-world impact. This project has convinced me that careful empirical work rooted in field realities is essential not only for advancing scholarship, but also for shaping policies that respond to the lived experiences of workers and firms. ♦



Owner's order and delivery records



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