

Interview: Gautam Premnath, English Department

Gautam Premnath is Assistant Professor of English. He joined the UC Berkeley faculty in 2004.

CSAS: Please tell us about your background and how you came to be interested in studying literature.

GP: I am an Indian citizen who has spent most of his life outside India. At the age of six my family moved from Bombay to Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, which is where I grew up and received my schooling. Coming to America for college from Dubai was not quite as radical of a leap as it might have been if I'd stayed in Bombay. I came here in the late 1980s, and at first majored in all the sensible things without great success. Eventually, with the support of my parents, I ended up as an English major in my final year of college. I think part of what made that seem like not just a viable choice, but actually an exciting one, was the rise of postcolonial studies and postcolonial theory. I didn't really encounter this work in my classes, but rather on the side in chats with my T.A.s. I had a very breathless embrace of this stuff—it was the hot new thing (this was the early 1990s).

I have since come to have a somewhat more hesitant and even adversarial relationship to it, as is the case with many other critics of my generation. But it's really what brought me to graduate school and what initially defined my interests.

CSAS: Where did you do your undergraduate and graduate work, and how did you arrive at your research inter-

ests?

GP: I was an undergraduate at Yale College. But it was really in graduate school at the University of Pittsburgh where my intellectual interests began to cement and where,

for instance, I developed an interest in Marxist theory and began to have a somewhat critical relationship to the interests that had brought me to the academy in the first place. I ended up doing a PhD at Brown. My work initially had very little to do with South Asian studies per se. I had become interested in the new arguments being mounted about diaspora and transnationalism, and that brought me into a very deep engagement with the work of Caribbean writers based in London in the 1950s and 1960s, and the ways in which London served for them as a site from which to negotiate both with the history of imperialism and the nascent nationalisms in their places of birth. Along the way I was always reading widely in contemporary Indian writing in English. There was so much interesting work coming out and there was an immediate affinity to the stuff for me. I began to be preoccupied by certain tendencies that I thought were both compelling and troubling. At some point my research took a swerve toward the South Asian context,

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CSAS Conducts Fulbright Orientation

On June 28-29, 2005, the Center for South Asia Studies hosted a group of sixteen professors and school teachers at the Women's Faculty Club as they prepared to embark to India on the Fulbright-Hays Seminar

Abroad Program. The participants represented many different states in the U.S. and an array of disciplines. The purpose of the Fulbright program is to provide educators in social sciences and humanities with short-term study and travel seminars in India, so that they can build on their curriculum by improving their understanding and knowledge of the peoples and cultures of other countries.

CSAS Welcomes New Faculty in Bengali and South Asian Islam

The Center for South Asia Studies would like to welcome Abhijeet Paul and Munis Faruqui to UC Berkeley's South Asian Studies Department. Professor Pal arrived in the fall of 2005 as a lecturer in Bengali and South Asian literature. He focuses on colonialism, modernity, and Partition. Professor Pal holds two doctorates in literature, one from Calcutta University and the other from The Open University in the U.K. He previously taught at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Recent publications by Professor Pal include "The Critique of Stagirist History: Badal Sarkar's *Michil* (The Procession 1974)" in *Salzburg Studies in English Literature and Culture*, and a book review of Clinton Seely's *The Slaying of Meghanada: A Ramayana from Colonial Bengal in The Journal of Asian Studies*. Currently Dr. Pal teaches introductory and intermediate Bengali courses and "Bengali Literature and Film."

Professor Faruqui also arrived in the fall of 2005 and is an Assistant Professor specializing in Islam in South Asia. He is currently working on a monograph that focuses on the figure of the Mughal prince to explore questions of state formation, imperial power, and dynastic decline in 16th and 17th century South Asia. His other research interests include Islam's interaction with non-Muslim religious traditions in 17th century India, the imperial harem in Mughal India, and the African diaspora in pre-modern South Asia and the Indian Ocean. Professor Faruqui received his Ph.D. in History from Duke University. This semester he is teaching an upper-division course, "The Mughal Empire through Memoirs, Chronicles, and Other Texts," and a graduate seminar titled "Readings on Islam in South Asia." ●

The theme for this year's program was "Women in Contemporary India." The participants traveled to several Indian cities including Delhi, Jaipur, Hyderabad, and Kolkata.

CSAS conducted a cultural orientation for the teachers, most of whom had never traveled to India before. Daisy Rockwell and Mark Koops Elson offered the participants useful tips on traveling in India and on etiquette in social interactions. The Fulbrighters were treated to a lecture by Raka Ray on "Women in Contemporary India," and to graduate student lectures on "Women and Information Technology" and "Women's Health." The following day, the lectures covered topics of religion, politics, and Indian cinema. The participants were particularly fortunate to have Bharati Ray, former Pro Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University and Member of Parliament, speak about women in politics. The orientation was a great success, and the teachers set off for India with great enthusiasm. They have since shared the results of their curriculum development projects with CSAS, which we will make available to Bay Area teachers in our ongoing outreach efforts. ●

ORIAS Summer Institute

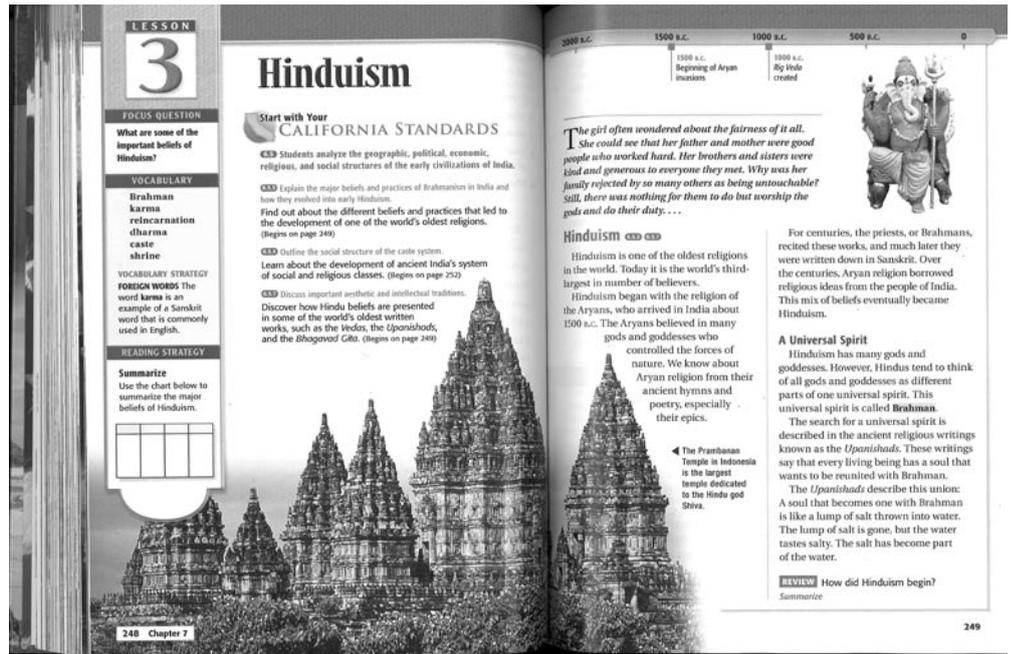
From July 25-29, 2005, the Office of Resources for International and Area Studies (ORIAS) offered its annual Summer Teacher's Institute at UC Berkeley. The purpose of the summer institute is to enhance the scope of curriculum and resources available to K-12 teachers and community college professors specializing in international studies. The topic of the 2005 institute was "Personal Narratives: Studying Cultural Interaction, Exchange and Migration Through First Person Accounts." The Center for South Asia Studies arranged for presentations by Riaz Khan, Assistant Professor at NYU, and Abhijeet Paul, lecturer in Bengali Studies at UC Berkeley, to address the summer institute participants. Khan spoke about merchant navy-men from Sylhet (now in Bangladesh) on British ships, who created one of the first Asian communities in the UK. Paul's talk related stories about India written by British-born Indian civil servants and their wives during the Raj.

The topic of the next ORIAS summer institute, to be held from July 24 to July 28, is "Encountering Nature in World History: How does interaction between human society and the environment influence world history—past, present and future?" It is free and open to all interested educators. For more information, please contact Michele Delattre, Office of Resources for International and Area Studies, at 510.643.0868 or orias@berkeley.edu. ●

CSAS Professors Contribute to Debate on California's Textbooks

On February 27 in Sacramento, a subcommittee of the California Board of Education heard testimony from community groups and scholars regarding proposed changes to the portrayal of Hinduism and ancient India in 6th grade textbooks. A number of highly mobilized Indian community groups, from Hindu associations to secular and leftist organizations, have raised grievances with 6th grade textbooks, and attended the hearing in large numbers. A group of faculty associated with CSAS and with other Title VI Resource Centers in South Asia Studies around the country, submitted a comprehensive list of suggestions regarding editorial changes being considered by the subcommittee. A delegation of these faculty, mostly from UC Berkeley, also made one-minute presentations at the contentious packed-house public hearing. The subcommittee accepted most of the faculty's editorial suggestions at the conclusion of the hearing.

Below we have provided the Title VI faculty group's press release, which outlines their general framework for analyzing the proposed changes to the textbooks, followed by excerpts from statements made by UC Berkeley faculty at the hearing in Sacramento.

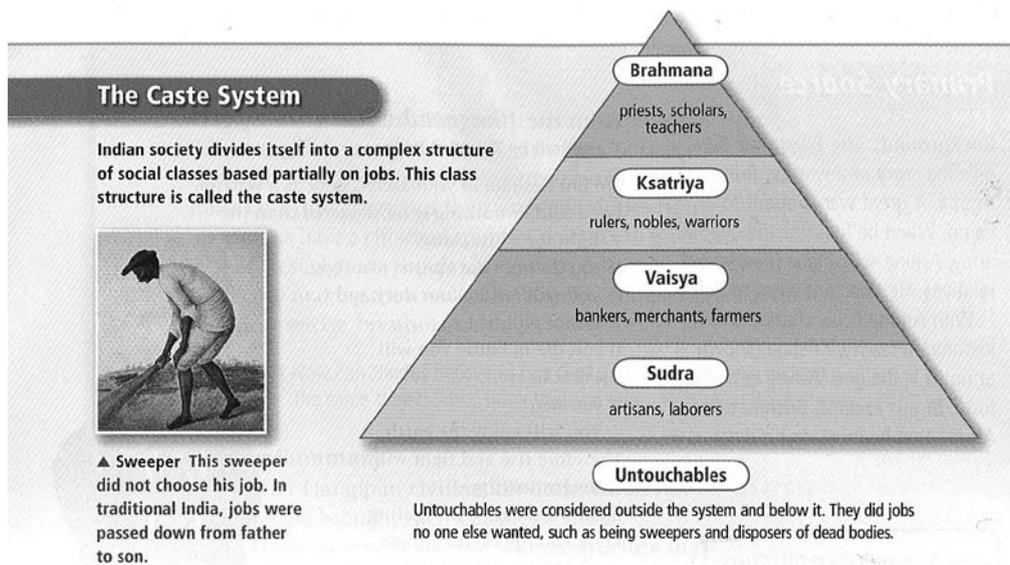


Maintaining Scholarly Standards in California Textbooks: Toward An Accurate Representation of Hinduism and Ancient Indian History

Title VI Resource Centers were established by the Department of Education to foster teaching and research in area studies; outreach to K-12 classrooms is an important part of this mandate. Thus, as faculty in South Asian Studies at a Title VI center, we feel both an interest and an obligation to participate in the ongoing discussion on the representation of Hinduism and ancient Indian history in California school textbooks. Our mission is not to serve as advocates of a particular religious or intellectual standpoint, but rather to present historical and social facts as determined by scholarship. Scholarly standards of balance, objectivity, and accuracy need to be reaffirmed in the current discussion. California schoolchildren deserve no less.

Over the last month a faculty committee chaired by the directors of two Title VI centers, and with participation by over two dozen scholars of South Asia, has reviewed the existing textbooks and the proposed editorial changes. It is clear to us that there is much room for improvement in the textbooks, but also that some of the proposed changes would make matters considerably worse. There should be no room in 6th grade textbooks for narrowly sectarian viewpoints or for speculative or as yet inconclusive historical claims such as those that call into question the current scholarly

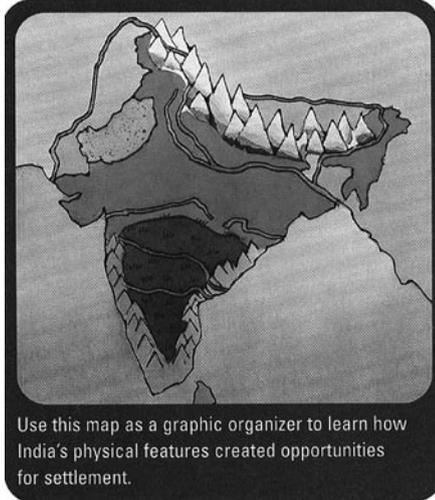
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Aryan Beliefs and Brahmanism The early religion of the Aryans is now called **Brahmanism**, after the name of the Aryan priests, or Brahmins. The Aryans worshiped many nature gods.

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consensus on Aryan migration (we have prepared a separate report on this point). We have submitted to the California Board of Education a detailed report that includes our own set of recommendations for editorial changes. The following broad principles have informed our work:



- *Hinduism is a plural tradition.* It cannot be reduced to a narrowly defined group of texts and precepts.

Many of the proposed changes distort the distinctive character of Hinduism by presenting it as a monolithic revealed religion. In the process, they sideline many vital currents within or alongside Hinduism.

- *Hinduism is an evolving tradition.* It is misleading to present Hinduism as emerging fully-fledged in the ancient period, in light of the continual and ongoing transformation of Hindu religious practice by its interaction with other religions including Christianity, Islam, and Sikhism. Moreover, principles we now associate with Hinduism such as *ahimsa* (non-violence) rose to prominence with Buddhism and Jainism, which emerged as challenges to the caste hierarchies of Hinduism. The textbooks should enable students to discern patterns of both continuity and change from ancient times to the present.

- *The history of ancient India is not reducible to the history of Hinduism.* Using Hinduism as the sole framework for teaching about Ancient India in some textbooks has meant that non-Sanskritic or non-Hindu aspects of this period have been omitted. For instance, the heritage of Classical Tamil and important intellectual landmarks like Panini's Sanskrit grammar cannot be adequately understood within this framework.

- *Hinduism is more than a religion:* it is also the basis for a complex system of social organization in ancient India. Caste and gender hierarchies are integral parts of this system which should not be overlooked or romanticized, and which have an important bearing on how we understand South Asian society in subsequent historical periods. We condemn attempts to eliminate references to groups excluded from the caste system, including Adivasis (so-called "tribals") and Dalits (so-called "untouchables"). We also abhor the attempt to erase evidence of women's unequal treatment in Vedic and other texts, even as we acknowledge that parts of the Hindu tradition which are enabling for women are not yet included in the textbooks.

The textbooks need to be sensitive and respectful of religious sentiments while observing principles of

responsible scholarship. California schoolchildren are ill-served by textbooks that present a distorted and partial view of a major world religion and ancient civilization.

Our reports may be viewed at: <http://southasiafaculty.net>.

Excerpt from statement by Raka Ray, Chair of the Center for South Asia Studies, and Associate Professor of Sociology and South and Southeast Asian Studies, and Sarah Kailath Chair in India Studies.

My name is Raka Ray. I am Chair of the Center for South Asia Studies, a Title VI Resource Center. As you may know, such centers were established by the Department of Education precisely to foster teaching and research in area studies. Outreach to K-12 classrooms is an important part of this mandate, and we at Berkeley hold workshops for high school teachers about how to teach South Asia every summer.

I am accompanied today by colleagues from Berkeley, Riverside, Davis and San Francisco, all scholars and experts on South Asia. As California teachers we believe fully in having multiple cultures fairly represented in the classroom. This is why we regard this discussion on Hinduism and ancient Indian history in our school textbooks as one of great importance. I should also add that this is more than an academic concern for us. Many of us are Hindu and some of us are parents with children in the California system.

You will hear from us about the state of knowledge--that is, what we can most reasonably say, given the evidence--about ancient South Asian history. In particular, my colleagues will address four issues: 1) Hindu pluralism, 2) Theories of Aryan migration, 3) How to think about caste in ancient India, and 4) Understanding gender in ancient India. Our mission is not to serve as advocates of any particular standpoint, but rather to present historical and social facts as determined by scholarship in a sympathetic yet balanced way.

Excerpt from statement by Robert Goldman, Professor of Sanskrit, Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies

I would like to thank those members of California's Indo-American community who have called attention to material in the textbooks currently in use that is outdated and inaccurate.

One of the topics under discussion is the highly contested and poorly understood issue of the so-called "Aryan Invasion Theory." This term is a misnomer and represents an outmoded concept first articulated by European scholars in the 18th century. They believed that the Vedic groups were an invading host that swept into the subcontinent subjugating the indigenous peoples. Recent archeological discoveries have shown this model to be inaccurate.

On the other hand, the best evidence adduced to date by scholars in the fields of archeology, linguistics, and comparative religion and mythology clearly supports the view that the Aryans were affiliated through language

and culture with the other branches of the Indo-European speaking pastoralists. These Indo-European speaking peoples evidently migrated from Central Asia during the 2nd and 3rd millennia BCE, ultimately spreading to and influencing the cultures of regions extending from the Atlantic to the Bay of Bengal. There is no generally accepted evidence that supports the view that the Vedic culture originated in the Indian subcontinent.

Excerpt from statement by Lawrence Cohen, Associate Professor of Anthropology and South and Southeast Asian Studies

My name is Lawrence Cohen, and I am Director of the Medical Anthropology program at UC Berkeley. On behalf of the Title VI Centers' Committee of Scholars, I submit to you a report prepared by us on the genetic evidence for and against what scholars now term Indo-European or "Aryan" migrations from Central Asia into South Asia. This evidence is important as disputed understandings of ancient Indian history revolve around whether India's rich cultural, religious, social, and biological heritage is entirely indigenous or, like the rest of the world, includes the contribution of immigrants. Passions are understandably high as European scholarship has often treated Indian history with theories we would now consider outdated and at times racist, and as Indian religious nationalism has emerged as a potent force in the modern world countering this earlier scholarship with alternative explanations that are, unfortunately, often equally biased. Scientists have turned to the emerging field of genetic tracing of population origins to resolve this question: our report shows that there are many genetic studies making claims for an Indo-European migration *and* many studies making claims against such a migration. That this confusion is tied to a lack of standards and accepted criteria in a field still in its infancy, and given that linguistic and archeological scientific evidence supports a modified migration hypothesis, this must remain the account in our textbooks.

Excerpts from statement by Alexander von Rospatt, Professor of Buddhist Studies, Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies

Quite a few of the suggested changes really do improve upon the old schoolbook text and find my full approval.

However, there are also many changes that are deeply troubling. They put a spin on things and project an image of Hinduism that is driven by a particular agenda and at odds with facts that have been established by incontrovertible textual and historical research. The issue of the so-called Aryan invasion theory has already been addressed by my colleagues. What concerns me

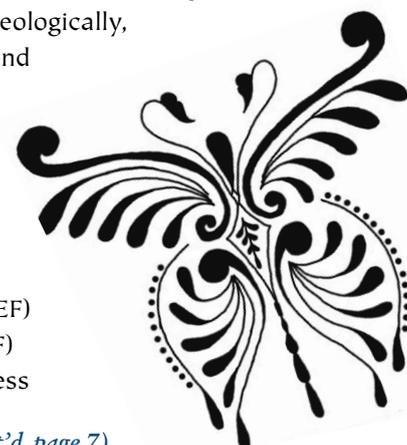
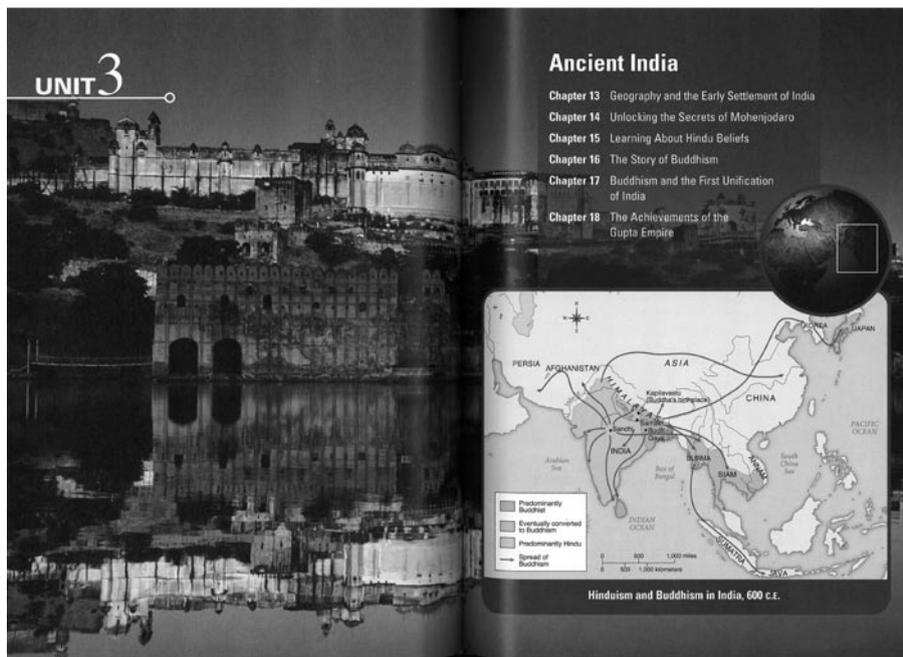
particularly is that the suggested changes privilege a particular theistic and modern interpretation of Hinduism that is ahistorical and ignores the enormous variety of religious phenomena commonly subsumed under the term "Hinduism." The hallmark of Hinduism is precisely that it allowed for the intellectual and spiritual space in which very different

religious traditions could develop. Instead, the suggested changes project a streamlined and monotheistic image of Hinduism that is too narrow and sectarian in orientation and ultimately distorting.

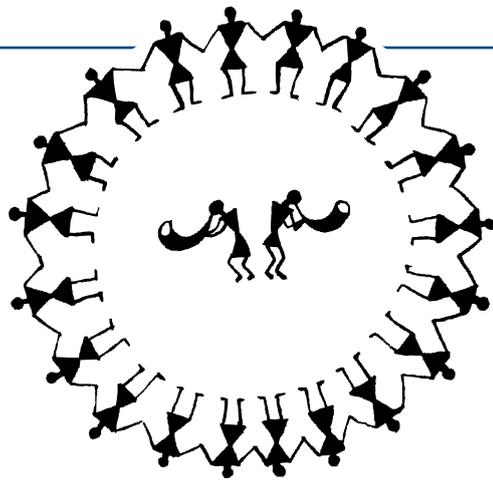
Excerpt from statement by Vasudha Dalmia, Professor of Medieval and Modern Hindi Literature, Magistreeti Distinguished Professor and Director of the Program in Religious Studies

I thank you for the opportunity to speak. As my years of study have shown: the religious traditions of medieval India were extremely diverse, many arose in express reaction to Vedic and Brahminical rites, and most insisted on their autonomy from the rest. But as part of the response to the colonial encounter, modern Hinduism from the 19th century on has tended to represent itself as homogenous—theologically, culturally and socially—and projected this vision back to a glorious Vedic beginning, thus trying to erase its own rich legacy. I urge you to reject the Hindu Education Foundation (HEF) and Vedic Foundation (VF) edits because they suppress precisely this rich legacy.

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FACULTY & GRADUATE STUDENT NEWS



Lawrence Cohen (Anthropology) presented a paper, "Song for Pushkin," at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Annual Conference on South Asia and, in different versions, at the University of Michigan, Duke University, and the University of California-Davis. The paper begins by looking at how the media response to the violent deaths of two men in Delhi last year blamed the victims, focusing on the status of photographs seized by the police at the crime scene. The capture or seizure of images turns out to be a major theme of a variety of recent controversies that focus on the status of testimony in forensic or other legal disputes, particularly in the wake of the violence in Gujarat and the forms state and non-state response has taken. The paper wrestles with the nature of testimony and its relation to what is at stake in the photograph at this moment.

Huma Dar (Graduate Student, SSEAS) presented a paper, "Between the Burqa and the B-2s: Deconstructing Some Discourses Around Muslim Women," at *Windows Into Islam: Pakistan and Afghanistan*, in San Francisco, on November 4th, 2005. Dar was selected to participate in an interdisciplinary dissertation workshop on "Tangled Strands: The Dynamics of Race, Gender, and Sexuality," at the University of California, Berkeley, October 20-23, 2005. She conducted a workshop on "The Politics and Poetics of Gender, Nation and Religion in Bollywood" at *AAROHAN 2003: South Asian Women RISE UP Against Violence*, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, on September 9, 2005. Dar presented a paper titled "From Shahbano to Kausar Bano and Beyond" at the Annual Meeting of AAS, the Association of Asian Studies in Chicago, on April 2, 2005. She was invited to a first ever Muslim Women's Summit organized by KARAMAH (Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights) in Washington D.C. Dec. 4-5, 2004. Excerpts from her Master's thesis titled, "Islamizing the Tawa'if or Tawa'ifing the Muslims: The Lucknow Courtesan Partitioned," will be published by Penguin in 2006, in an anthology edited by Veena Oldenburg.

Munis D. Faruqui (SSEAS) joined Berkeley this fall (see p. 2). He recently completed a 2,500-word encyclopedia piece on the Mughal Empire for the *Encyclopedia of the Modern World* (OUP, forthcoming 2006) and revised an article on the formation of the Mughal Empire; it appeared

in the November 2005 issue of the *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient* (JESHO). He spent a month in South Asia this winter conducting research on Mughal princes.

Saba Mahmood's (Anthropology) book, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton University Press, 2005), won the Victoria Schuck award for the best book on women and politics from the American Political Science Association last year. She was the recipient of the Hellman Faculty Fund grant for her second project on comparative secularisms. An article focusing on her second project was accepted for publication in the Spring 2006 issue of *Public Culture*. She gave invited lectures at the following institutions: University of Helsinki (Finland), University of Groningen (The Netherlands), the Humanities Institute at University of California at Irvine, and the Humanities Center at Dartmouth College.

Gita Pai (Graduate Student, SSEAS) was awarded the Doreen B. Townsend Center for the Humanities Fellowship for the 2005-6 academic year. Gita is currently working on her dissertation: "The King and I: Recasting the Syntax of Sovereignty in Late Medieval South India." Next year, Gita will do extended research with a Fulbright-Hays DDRA in Thanjavur and Pondicherry, Tamil Nadu. Gita is also the recipient of the Fulbright IIE and the AIIS Junior Research Fellowships; however, she declined these awards in favor of the Fulbright-Hays.

Gautam Premnath (English) recently completed his first year at Berkeley, and is now preparing to undertake a research trip to Trinidad with the aid of a Junior Faculty Research Grant from Berkeley. He continues to work on his book project, "Mobile Republics," which examines literary traffic between India and the Indian diaspora. His contribution to a symposium on Amitava Kumar's *Bombay-London-New York* was published in *Rethinking Marxism* in spring 2005; he's also working on an extended review essay on recent materialist critiques of postcolonial theory. In December 2004 he presented two papers at the Modern Language Association conference in Philadelphia on Indo-Caribbean narrative, and on the teaching of Indian diasporic cultural production.

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Faculty/Grad Student News, cont'd

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Matt Rahaim (Graduate Student, Music) presented a paper entitled "Gesture in Hindustani Vocal Music" at the 50th annual Society for Ethnomusicology meeting in Atlanta on November 18th. It will be a condensed version of the CSAS Graduate Student workshop he gave in February 2005.

Harsha Ram (Slavic Languages and Literatures) spent 2004-2005 as a Fellow of the Stanford Humanities Center researching issues related to literary modernism and modernization processes in the early twentieth century as they specifically relate to the non-West (the former Soviet Union, Latin America, South Asia). He is currently in Tbilisi, Georgia, as a Fulbright-Hays fellow doing research on a new book on "peripheral modernisms." His first book, *The Imperial Sublime: A Russian Poetics of Empire* (2003), received an honorable mention for the Scaglione Prize for Slavic Languages and Literature, given by the Modern Language Association.

In August 2005 **Fouzieyha Towghi** (Graduate Student, Medical Anthropology) completed her year-long dissertation research in Balochistan: "Social Implications of Local Midwives' Marginality in Development Practice." She was awarded a writing fellowship from the Al-Falah Program, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, UC Berkeley (2005-06). Towghi published two entries for the *Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures*: "Women, Gender, and Health: Policies: South Asia" and "Medicalization of South Asian Women's Reproductive Health." She also published a book chapter, "Shifting Policies Towards Traditional Midwives: Implications for Reproductive Health Care in Pakistan" in eds. Arachu Castro & Merrill Singer, *Unhealthy Health Policy: A Critical Anthropological Examination*, Altamira Press.

Darren Zook's (Political Science, IAS) most recent article is "Decolonizing Law: Identity Politics, Human Rights, and UN Reform," *Harvard Human Rights Journal* (vol. 19, forthcoming 2006). This past July he was invited to give a talk on "Small States in Asia" at the Centre for Small State Studies at the University of Iceland in Reykjavik. ●

Textbook Debate

(from p. 5)

Excerpt from statement by Munis Faruqui, Assistant Professor of South and Southeast Asian Studies

Hinduism has had a rich tradition of interaction with other faiths over the centuries. Take Islam, for example. Islamic mysticism accommodated yogic and tantric practices; Hindus participated widely in Sufi festivals; Muslim rulers borrowed from Hindu political practices and vice versa; and artists and architects of both traditions borrowed from each other to create "Indo-Islamic" schools.

Now, how did most Muslims understand these interactions? Did they see themselves as interacting with a single religious group with a fixed set of beliefs? The

answer, according to my judgment, is a simple "No." Conversely, did Hindus see themselves as interacting with Muslims as members of a single community or coming from a fixed set of religious beliefs? The answer, again, is "No." Instead, Muslims and Hindus both arguably perceived one another as coming from pluralistic, evolving and flexible religious and cultural traditions. They also rarely saw one another as belonging to neatly defined and fixed religious communities.

This understanding would largely remain true until the 19th Century. It is only in the subsequent period that ideas about Hinduism's and Islam's ostensibly unchanging characters and notions about common communities of believers gathered real currency. Such articulations, however, unfortunately gloss over incredibly complex and, indeed, non-monolithic prior religious histories. Unfortunately, the HEF/VF are part of the process of gradually whittling away at notions of Hinduism's plural past. Given this to be the case, and having seen their proposed California textbook edits, I urge you to not accommodate their judgments.

Gautam Premnath, Assistant Professor of English, was instrumental in composing the faculty's editorial suggestions and press release, but was unable to attend the hearing in Sacramento. ●



Interview, cont'd

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but more specifically toward the relationship between Indian diaspora communities and the Indian nation itself.

CSAS: *What do you find “compelling and troubling” about Indian literature in English?*

GP: I think it’s now a quite well developed body of writing, with a range that makes it dangerous to offer broad generalizations. A lot of what I say about people like Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy doesn’t apply to other figures like Gita Hariharan or Vikram Chandra. But I think it is fair to say that there are certain broad tendencies, of which the most prominent is a suspicion and hostility toward nation-statism. This is almost a definitive aspect of Indian writing in English.

CSAS: *Both writing coming out of India and out of the diaspora?*

GP: Well, it’s the relationship between the two that interests me. There is a certain familiar narrative that goes “In the beginning there was Rushdie,” and as a result a lot of other writers who are doing very different things are read in terms of what Salman Rushdie accomplished in *Midnight’s Children* twenty-five years ago. I see *Midnight’s Children* as a brilliant and compelling work, but also as a symptom of something that’s a bit more longstanding: the breakdown of a certain myth of the nation. If we see the definitive or watershed moment not as the publication of *Midnight’s Children* but rather as the Emergency, I think you have a much more interesting angle upon a lot of the writing that has followed in Rushdie’s wake. A generation of writers that includes Rushdie, Ghosh, and Rohinton Mistry was compelled by the Emergency to situate itself very differently in relation to the nation and nationalism. It’s at this point that the cultural traffic with the diaspora becomes interesting. One of the things I’ve noticed that is really quite striking is that this is also the moment at which V. S. Naipaul’s reputation begins to change. The attitude of

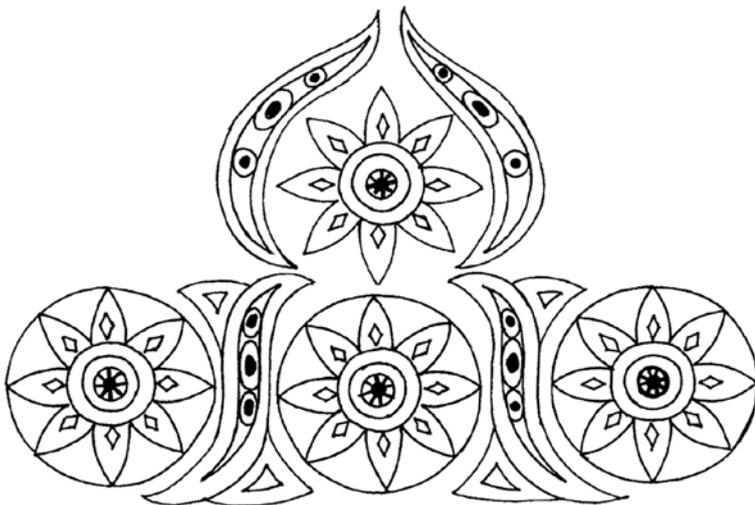
skepticism and even hostility that characterized his reception in India up to this point begins to soften. The kind of uncritical embrace that he’s received from the Indian literary establishment since receiving the Nobel Prize in 2001 is still a long way away. But many of the central concerns of his Indian writings—above all the ways in which he consistently attempts to demonstrate the spuriousness of postcolonial nationalism in general, and Gandhian or Nehruvian nationalism in particular—become matters that many of these writers begin to wrestle with and take on in their own writing. This, for me, became a really interesting way of thinking about how certain kinds of critical detachment from the nation, that had begun to emerge much earlier in Indian diasporic communities in places like Trinidad and Fiji, might have traveled “home” and become, in a paradoxical way, an inheritance for the ancestral Indian culture. It’s long been customary to think about diasporic communities as second-order versions of ancestral culture, and to think about them as sites that have to be redeemed, reclaimed, or rescued. But it seems that there was something profoundly creative going on in the diaspora that came to impinge upon and really affect the national culture in an important way.

CSAS: *So during the post-Emergency period, the Indian literary world started to engage with Naipaul’s work in a more serious way than before? And his critical stance toward the nation-state emerged from his Caribbean experience?*

GP: I don’t know if I would call it critical so much as hostile. It was shaped by the thinking of often profoundly racist Victorian figures like Trollope, Carlyle, and Froude. He’s one of a group of writers (including figures who are not generally viewed in quite such fraught terms, such as Sam Selvon) who were finding ways of detaching themselves from the rise of Caribbean nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s. It’s that broader context of creative ferment that interests me, and the ways in which it travels and helps to shape the Indian conversation. It is certainly open to question whether the work of Indian writers in English can speak to and can stand in for the national culture, or the national conversation, in ways that they’re often made to do. But they do have a specific secular authority that it’s important to recognize, in particular the ways in which they’ve shaped a post-liberalization attitude toward nationalism. Naipaul and this Caribbean itinerary provide one genealogy for that.

CSAS: *Are these trends evident in writing in other Indian languages? And if not, why are they happening in English and not in other languages?*

GP: That’s a really good question and not one that I can



answer with any degree of authority. It is happening, but the terms of the conversation are less familiar to me. When they are familiar to me, they're generally the same ones that manifest in the writing in English. There are a lot of writers, Nirmal Verma comes to mind, who are doing things that you could say are in dialogue with "the West," but it's not necessarily the same West that one discerns in the work of Ghosh or Roy. I think if the trends that interest me are particularly pronounced in English, it's partly because factors like celebrity and global reach are most relevant to Indian writing in English. These are not just the things we need to tune out in order to engage with the text, they're also formative of the texts themselves. And I don't say this to disparage the texts but simply to acknowledge that this has to be part of our way of reading them, because it's part of what makes them interesting.

CSAS: *What's your own response to this prominent tendency to write off the nation-state?*

GP: Some of the breathlessness with which people write obituaries of the nation-state does a profound disservice to people who still have to live in them. As I was saying earlier, diaspora was once thought of in terms of a derivative, displaced relationship to an authentic ancestral culture. Nowadays diaspora is increasingly being embraced as a way of exiting from this whole fraught, problematic, and (for many people) politically bankrupt language of nations and nation-states. The term no longer refers only to forced or catastrophic displacements, but rather to a kind of willed withdrawal from the claims of the nation. This is what P. Sainath is talking about when he says that in India the rich are seceding from the nation, but the issue is more thoroughgoing than such comments suggest. There is now a profound and widespread disconnect from the Nehruvian language that shaped the imaginations of earlier generations. It's in that context that the writers that interest me have acquired what I call their secular authority, because they seem to provide a new language for making sense of the times. For instance, a novel like Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* is (at least in the conversations that I'm privy to) regarded as not just a powerful work of the imagination but also a devastating theoretical undoing of nationalism.

CSAS: *While the NRI (non-resident Indian) diaspora can be represented as seceding from the nation, isn't it also represented at times as a manifestation of India "going global," with firm roots in the home country?*

GP: Sure, although it's important to remember that even the NRI is no longer the timeliest figure for this. Until very recently my parents lived in Bangalore. There are localities in Bangalore, such as Whitefields, where people (some



of whom actually have not spent very much of their lives outside of India) are earning dollar incomes and living in housing enclaves that are off the grid, with their own power supplies, their own water supplies, their own schools, shopping complexes, etcetera. It's a version of the privatized enclosures that Mike Davis has analyzed around Los Angeles. This is a kind of secession from the public sphere that doesn't require "non-residence." But certainly the fact that the NRI has acquired an authoritative standing within Indian public culture is an important sign of the times. In that light it's important to mention that many of the writers that I've alluded to—Ghosh, Rushdie, Mistry—do not live in India. But they are accorded a right to speak about it. Ghosh in particular is given a kind of standing that's very important to think about. Somebody who hasn't lived in India for fifteen to twenty years is very much part of a national conversation, even as he's disseminating powerful ideas about postnationalism.

CSAS: *Tell us about your current book project, Mobile Republics: Indian Writing in English and the Diasporic Turn. How has coming to Berkeley impacted your work on it?*

GP: The book had taken on a certain settled shape in my mind that's been very productively unsettled by coming here! Some of the issues I've been discussing with you, in particular my sense of the formative impact of the Emergency, really stemmed from coming here and feeling that I had time and space to think about the book in more expansive ways. There's an attitude toward research here that's still thankfully somewhat different from much of the rest of the academy: since coming here I've felt less pressure to churn the book out and more of an obligation to make it a work of enduring value. At the same time, part of me is quite eager, even anxious, to get started on my next book project, in which I will return to the work on postcolonial writers in 1950s London that I embarked upon several years ago. That gives me incentive to get my first book out into the world sooner rather than later!

CSAS: *How would you characterize the intellectual atmosphere at Berkeley? How have you enjoyed teaching here?*

(cont'd page 13)

CSAS EVENTS 2005-2006

SEPTEMBER 15

Act Locally, Perform Globally: Suman Mukherjee and his Theater
Sudipto Chatterjee, Assistant Professor of Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies

Suman Mukherjee, Townsend Departmental Resident in the Department of Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies



Rajni Walia and Manjula Padmanabhan

SEPTEMBER 19

The Home & the World: India's Aspirations in a Changing World
Ambassador B. S. Prakash, Consul General of India

SEPTEMBER 19 – OCTOBER 11

Art Exhibition: *The Art of Tantra: Tibetan Thangka Paintings from the Collection of Robert Beer*

SEPTEMBER 22-23

Play: *The Man of the Heart*

Directed by Suman Mukherjee, Written and Performed by Sudipto Chatterjee



Orissi flute maestro Mohini Mohan Pattnaik and tabla player Sudev Sheth

SEPTEMBER 29

CSAS Annual Reception

OCTOBER 7

China India Russia: Investing in Emerging Markets
Conference organized by the Haas School of Business

OCTOBER 13-NOVEMBER 11

Art Exhibition: *India Rozana: Photographs of Contemporary Indian Life*

Dilip Banerjee, Photojournalist

OCTOBER 19

Untouchables: My Family's Triumphant Journey Out of the Caste System in Modern India

Narendra Jadhav, Chief Economist and Principal Adviser, Department of Economic Analysis and Policy, Reserve Bank of India

OCTOBER 20

Founding a New Islamic State in Asia

Jit Singh Uberoi, Professor of Sociology Emeritus, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi



Ahalya Satkunaratanam admires Manjula Padmanabhan's art

OCTOBER 24

Bharata Natyam dance lecture-demonstration by Malavika Sarukkai

OCTOBER 25

Is Remembering a Form of Knowing?

Arindam Chakrabarti, Professor of Philosophy, University of Hawaii

OCTOBER 26

Graduate Student Workshop
Other Backward Classes in Uttar Pradesh
Satendra Kumar, PhD Candidate, University of Delhi

OCTOBER 27

The 2004 Election in Historical Perspective: An Immodest Effort to Say How India has Changed Since Independence
Lloyd I. Rudolph, Professor of Political Science Emeritus, University of Chicago
Susanne Hoerber Rudolph, Professor of Political Science Emerita, University of Chicago

NOVEMBER 1

Globalization and Cultural Practice: Interventions in the National Diaspora, the International Folk, and Grassroots Development
Rustom Bharucha, Regents' Lecturer at UC Berkeley, independent writer, director, and cultural critic based in Calcutta



Jit Singh Uberoi and Lawrence Cohen

NOVEMBER 9

The Indigenous Islamic Performances of Bangladesh as Mechanisms of Hegemony and Resistance
Syed Jamil Ahmed, Professor, Department of Theatre and Music, University of Dhaka
Organized by the Caucasus and Central Asia Program

NOVEMBER 11-12

Conference: *Translating Culture: Sikh and Punjab Studies in Global Perspective*
Supported by a gift from the Sikh Foundation to the College of Letters and Science

NOVEMBER 11 - 13

3rd I San Francisco International South Asian Film Festival

NOVEMBER 11 - 20

Play: *Harvest*
Manjula Padmanabhan, Writer; Sudipto Chatterjee, Director

NOVEMBER 21

Graduate Student Workshop
Panel Presentation on Field Research

DECEMBER 7

Graduate Student Workshop
Global Indian Women & the Cultural Politics of IT India
Smitha Radhakrishnan, Sociology



Vikram Chandra

DECEMBER 2005-FEBRUARY 2006

Art Exhibition: *YES: Prints by Manjula Padmanabhan*

FEBRUARY 2

Graduate Student Workshop
Bombay Dyeing, India Shining, and the Future of Laborers Past
Thomas Asher, Anthropology, University of Chicago

FEBRUARY 17-18

21st Annual South Asia Conference
Vikram Chandra, keynote speaker

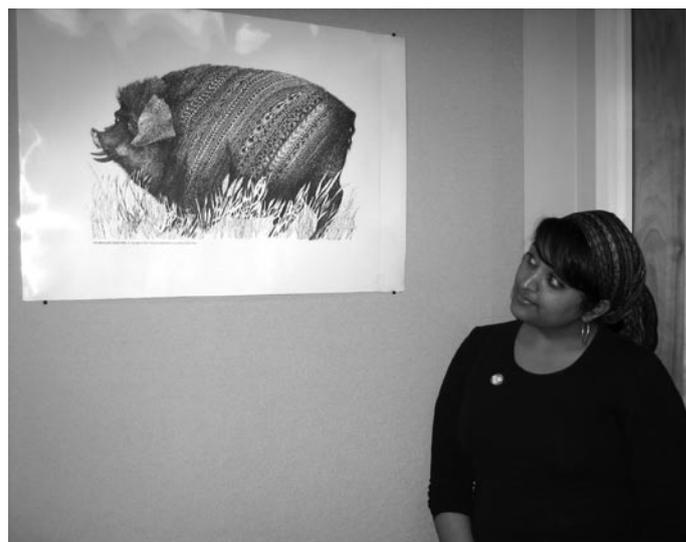
FEBRUARY-MARCH

Art Exhibition: *Badmash! A Retrospective of the Desi Comic Strip*

FEBRUARY 23

Graduate Student Workshop
Short Stories, Long Journeys: Negotiating National Identity in an Early 20th Century Hindi Journal
Sujata Mody, SSEAS

(cont'd next page)



Anita Keshavan and the Brocade Grass Hog



Lawrence Cohen, Raka Ray and Vikram Chandra

MARCH 2

Graduate Student Workshop
Dams and Development on India's Narmada River
Mike Levien, Sociology

MARCH 3

The Jaina-Mimamsa Debate on Omniscience
Olle Qvarnström, Indic Religions Division, Lund University
in Sweden

MARCH 9

Outing Heteronormativity: National Citizenship, Feminist Disruptions (A Study of Sexuality Movements in India since the 1990s)
Nivedita Menon, Department of Political Science, University of Delhi

MARCH 16

India's Global Policy: U.S. Attraction, Multidirectional Initiatives and Internal Debates
Jean-Luc Racine, Senior Fellow, Center for the Study of India and South Asia, EHESS, Paris



Audience listens attentively to Narendra Jadhav

APRIL 4

Hinduising the Dastan or, The Making of a 19th Century Hindi Bestseller
Francesca Orsini, University Lecturer in Hindi, Faculty of Oriental Studies, Cambridge University

APRIL 5–JUNE

Art Exhibition: *Taxi-Wallahs of Berkeley: Photographs and Narratives* by Aditya Dhawan

APRIL 5

Taxi! Cabs and Capitalism in New York City
Biju Mathew, New York Taxi Workers Alliance

APRIL 10

Constructing Orientalism: Translations into English from the Indian Languages in the 19th Century
Harish Trivedi, Department of English, University of Delhi

APRIL 10

The Bush Visit to India: Success or Failure?
Stephen Cohen, The Brookings Institution



APRIL 17

The Future of US-Pakistan Relations
Lecture by His Excellency Jehangir Karamat
Pakistani Ambassador to the United States

APRIL 22–23

The Time of the Cholas: 900–1300 C.E.
Second Annual Tamil Conference

APRIL 29

Security Symposium: The Future of US-India Relations

JUNE 14–SEPTEMBER 17

Edge of Desire: Recent Art in India
Exhibition at the Berkeley Art Museum
CSAS is working with the Berkeley Art Museum and the Asia Society on a number of events surrounding this exhibition, see back page of this *Newsletter*.

CSAS also hosted or cosponsored a number of other events, including lecture-demonstrations by musicians Mohini Mohan Pattnaik and Binay Pathak. ●

Interview, continued

(from page 9)

GP: Because I got my PhD at Brown, which is a very small graduate school, my gaze was always directed outward beyond the institution. While my fellow grad students and advisors were exactly the people I wanted to be working with and having conversations with, I was always conscious that much of the really interesting, exciting work, both in my specific areas of interest and in the humanities in general, was taking place elsewhere. And I think it's very interesting to compare that experience with that of my graduate students here at Berkeley. This campus sometimes seems like its own planet. There are longstanding conversations that are very specifically Berkeleyan, and that have been going on for years, even decades, that don't necessarily have very much to do even with what people are talking about down the road at Stanford. That occasionally leads to problems of involution, but for the most part it makes for a remarkably intense and exciting intellectual experience. I think part of what makes it exciting is that there is a great deal of conversation across departments. I found this especially in the graduate course that I taught this past semester, which had about half of its students from the English department and half from other humanities departments like Southeast Asian Studies, East Asian Studies, Spanish, Comparative Literature, and Africana Studies. It was really quite thrilling to be facilitating this conversation. I sometimes felt like I just assigned the books and showed up and watched what these folks made of them. They were often coming from radically different perspectives and disciplinary formations, but they had an ability to talk to each other that I think is very much part of this place.

CSAS: What was the course about?

GP: It was a course on the literary mode of tragedy and its renewed relevance and interest in the contemporary world, especially in postcolonial contexts. Tragedy is generally thought of as an archaic, Eurocentric, and stodgily traditional literary mode, but I would argue that it offers very powerful ways of thinking about the historical moment we are living through. The compelling feature of Western classical tragedy, at least the version that interests me, is that it's about certain kinds of ethical clashes whose intractability inheres precisely in the inability to clearly delineate right and wrong, good and bad, black and white. I think this speaks very well to the impasses that many of us in the humanities are presently confronting.

CSAS: Can you tell us about the roundtable you're organizing for the 21st Annual South Asia Conference at Berkeley?

GP: I'm looking forward to it, especially because it gathers together several other scholars who are also interested in

theorizing the relationship between diaspora and nation. The session will include people like Gayatri Gopinath who have somewhat different readings of some of the same texts and issues that I work on. I'm hoping there will be scope for a dialogue, but also a debate, in particular about the salience of the nation and the nation-state: not just as something to be deconstructed or problematized, but also as a space around which and within which to mobilize energies and passions toward hopeful ends.

CSAS: How do you see your position relative to South Asian studies at Berkeley, and do you see it changing?

GP: I still do a double-take when I hear myself described as a South Asianist, because that wasn't necessarily how I formed myself or understood my work, and there are many faculty and graduate students at Berkeley who I think are far more well-schooled and well-prepared to speak to South Asianist concerns in general than I am. Yet clearly it is a field that's been decisively important for me. I am already working with several graduate students with interests in South Asian studies, and that has served as my initial point of entry to the conversations that are going on here. I think in general that's how many of the faculty at Berkeley get to know each other, through facilitating and working together on often stunning graduate student research. And now that my feet are wet I hope to have much more to do with South Asian studies at Berkeley in the years to come. 🌊



GIVING

TO THE CENTER FOR SOUTH ASIA STUDIES

By making a gift to the Center for South Asia Studies (CSAS), you are helping to preserve and extend the excellence of South Asia studies at UC Berkeley. We are currently embarking on two principal development efforts: the Bengali Studies Initiative and the Friends of CSAS Fund.

THE BENGALI STUDIES INITIATIVE

The mission of the UC Berkeley Bengali Studies Initiative is to create an endowment that will support the cultivation and development of Bengali literature, humanities, performance arts and social science.

OBJECTIVES:

Short term: We are thrilled to announce that we have raised \$200,000, exceeding our \$150,000 short-term goal, enabling CSAS to hire a full-time instructor to teach courses on Bengali topics, including introductory and intermediate language as well as literature and film, during the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 academic years.

Long term: Our success prepares us for the next step: raising an endowment to ensure full-time Bengali studies instruction on a permanent basis at UC Berkeley. Our fundraising goal is \$2 million, which will establish a permanent endowment to support the study of Bengali society and culture at Berkeley.

The University of California at Berkeley invites tax-deductible gifts at the following levels to establish and sustain Bengali studies:

- \$100,000: The Rabindra Circle
- \$50,000-\$99,999: Benefactors
- \$10,000-\$49,999: Patrons
- \$5,000-\$9,999: Sponsors
- \$1,000-\$4,999: Partners
- up to \$999: Supporters

FRIENDS OF CSAS

The Friends of CSAS Fund has the potential to dramatically strengthen CSAS by supporting events and research not covered by our federal National Resource Center grant, such as student summer research grants, graduate fellowships, and a new seminar room. We also welcome major gifts that permanently endow student summer research grants or annual lectures. Donations can be made at the following levels:

- \$100,000: The CSAS Circle
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CSAS would especially like to thank Asha Jadeja, Sponsor

and Kanwal Rehki, Partner for their outstanding generosity and support.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

If you would like to know more about giving to CSAS, please email the CSAS fundraising coordinator at csasdev@berkeley.edu. For more information on these and other fundraising initiatives, please visit the Giving page of our website at: <http://www.ias.berkeley.edu/southasia/giving.html>.

MAKING A DONATION

Donations to either the Bengali Studies Initiative or the Friends of CSAS Fund can be sent directly to our address as a check payable to UC Berkeley Foundation.

You can also make a secure credit card gift to the Bengali Studies Initiative or the Friends of CSAS Fund at this webpage:

https://colt.berkeley.edu:444/urelgift/ias_south_asia.html, or provide your information below.

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- The Bengali Studies Initiative
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Sikh and Punjab Studies Conference

by Conference Coordinator Michael Nijhawan, York University

On November 11 and 12, CSAS, along with the Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies and the Sikh Foundation, hosted the conference *Translating Culture: Sikh and Punjab Studies in Global Perspective*. The conference brought together a range of scholars who use translation theory to explore issues in the study of Punjabi society, culture, politics, and religion. The participants aim to re-figure current trends in theorizing translation, culture, and religion, and to explore the implications for representations of South Asia.

The conference opened with an introduction by Michael Nijhawan (York University) about translation theory and its implications for the field of Sikh and Punjab Studies. Nijhawan outlined a shift in translation theory from a more traditional approach, in which matters of accuracy are paramount, to a revised notion in which translation is understood as fraught with risks and failures.

This introduction was followed by Arvind Pal Mandair's keynote lecture, "Religion and the Politics of Translation." Mandair (Sikh Studies Chair, Hofstra University) has been at the forefront of using theories of deconstruction to analyze translation. Mandair demonstrated how Hegelian religious philosophy continues to mediate the representation of religion and religious difference in an era of globalization. He noted the ways in which Western ideas about God's existence centered on ego consciousness have been adopted by translators of the Sikh Gurbani, despite the absence of this hermeneutic strategy in the original texts.

A panel followed, titled "Translating the *Adi Granth/Guru Granth Sahib* – Continuing Challenges," and chaired by Pashaura Singh (Sikh Studies Chair, UC Riverside). Nikki Singh (Colby College), who is known for her innovative writings on gender and religion in the Sikh tradition, opened the panel with a paper on "Translating Sikh Scripture without God, Lord, and Soul." She argued that the Sikh Gurus' vision of the transcendent One has been distorted into a male God, reducing their multiple concepts of the Divine to a single concept of a "Lord," and dichotomizing the fullness of their experience into body and soul. Like Mandair, Singh emphasized the need for new translations of Sikh Gurbani, a point also stressed by the following speaker. Veer Bhupinder Singh (Living Treasure Foundation, New York) spoke about fresh interpretations of the Gurbani based on a thorough understanding of vernacular notions, mythological references, and internal grammatical and syntactical patterns. Finally, Balbinder Bhogal (York University) presented his paper "On Being a Ghost Hanging Disoriented in the Unpleasant Middle: Translating the *Adi Granth* as *Guru Granth*." Bhogal challenged the necessity of translation, by linking the question of what it means to translate Sikh Gurbani to the question of *who* translates. Alok Bhalla (Hyderabad University) concluded the Friday afternoon session. He spoke about representations of Sikhs in Hindi and Urdu Partition literature, and the problematic communalization of religious identities in the English translations.

The second day of the conference expanded the focus to the study of translation practices in the broader historical and cultural field. The panel titled "Translation Practices



Farina Mir speaking at the Sikh/Punjab Conference

and the Historical Interplay of Cultural and Religious Traditions in South Asia" began with a paper presentation by Tony Stewart (North Carolina State University), in which he examined the Mughal emperor Akbar's commissioning of Persian translations of Indian epics (the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* in particular). Stewart argued that it was not just the fact that these epic texts are about royal lineages that was of interest, but also their thematic connection in employing both the quest and personal experience of romance. Farina Mir (University of Michigan) followed up with a presentation on Punjabi vernacular literature, in which she focused on two 19th century texts, Ganesh Das' *Car Bagh* and Dobak Surani's *Qissa Hir Ranjha*, arguing that despite the difference in genre and reception, both texts draw heavily on allegories from the *qissa* tradition.

The final session consisted of three papers engaging with contemporary trans-national politics and representations. Karen Leonard (UC Irvine) looked at how religion and society relate in the new cultural formations of both Punjabi and Hyderabad immigrants in the US. A paper by Virinder Kalra (Manchester University), "Cultural, Linguistic and Political Translations: Dhadi 'Urban' Music," focused on musical production by the Immortal Productions label (a musical offshoot of the British Organization of Sikh Students). He demonstrated how these albums mix cutting-edge urban music with normative renderings of *dhadhi* as well as *lok geet* of Punjab. Finally, Jasbir Puar (Rutgers University) presented "Contagious Turbans," inquiring into the various representational modalities of turbans as contagions of terrorism that render Sikh bodies queerly racialized. She connected these post 9-11 discourses of the pathologized masculinity of terrorist-look-alike turbaned Sikhs with turn of the century "tide of turbans" discourses attached to Punjabi immigrants in the northwest U.S.

Conference participants were enthusiastic about this event and the unfolding discussions. A book publication will be compiled that will put the field of Sikh and Punjab Studies in a broader cultural frame. As a first step, five selected papers will be published under Michael Nijhawan's guest-editorship in the December 2006 issue of the journal *Sikh Formations* (Routledge). A call for papers will be distributed before a more comprehensive book is assembled under the editorship of Arvind Mandair and Michael Nijhawan. ●

Edge of Desire: RECENT ART IN INDIA

June 14 — September 17, 2006

The first exhibition of its kind in the United States, **Edge of Desire** brings together an extraordinarily diverse selection of contemporary works by artists from throughout India, echoing the many ethnicities, languages, religions, political ideologies, and social strata that define the modern nation. The Center for South Asia Studies is cosponsoring the following events with the Berkeley Art Museum (BAM):

Lecture

India Goes Global: Art and Modernity

Vishakha N. Desai, President, Asia Society, New York
Sunday, June 18, 2 p.m.
Museum Theater

Film series

Desire Under the Banyan

July and August
PFA Theater

Lecture/ Performance

Meeting the Man of the Heart

Baul Music by Sudipto Chatterjee, UC Berkeley
Professor of Theater and Performance Studies
Sunday, September 10, 3 p.m.

Gallery Lecture

Folk and Fine Arts Flux in India Today

Joanna Williams, UCB professor of Art History
Sunday, September 17, 3 p.m.

Panel Discussion

Chaitanya Sambrani,

Exhibition Curator,
Australian National
University

Nalini Malani,

Exhibition Artist

Lawrence Cohen,

Professor of
Anthropology, UC
Berkeley

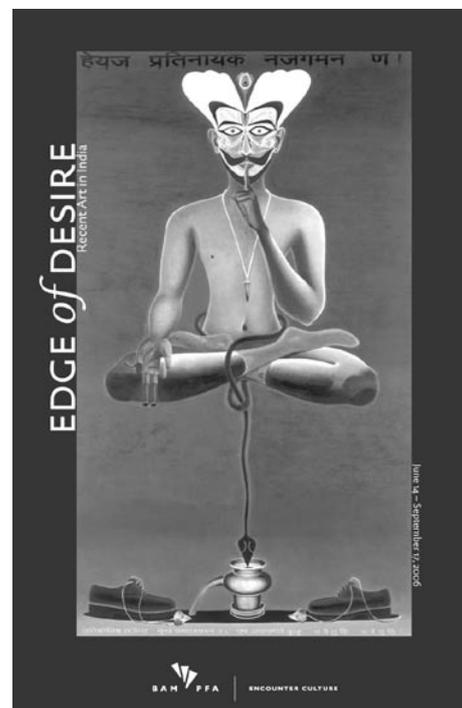
Vasudha Dalmia,

Professor of South
& Southeast Asian
Studies

and others

Saturday, September 16, 3 p.m.
Museum Theater

Guided Tours by scholars and graduate students of Asian art are offered on Sundays at 2 p.m. and selected Thursdays.



For more information, please consult BAM/PFA *Art & Film Notes* or visit the website at bampfa.berkeley.edu.
Edge of Desire: Recent Art in India is co-organized by the Asia Society, New York, and the Art Gallery of Western Australia,
and is curated by Chaitanya Sambrani.

The Berkeley presentation of Edge of Desire is supported by the Consortium for the Arts at UC Berkeley and by Ginger and Moshe Alafi.

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