

South Asia Newsletter

Centre of South Asian Studies, SOAS
<http://www.soas.ac.uk/csas>

No 57

April 2004

FROM THE CHAIR

It seems much less than three years since I became Chair of the South Asia Centre, although when I look back I am amazed at the contribution that Centre members and others have made to our seminars, projects and lectures. I am delighted that Subir Sinha will be taking over as Chair from 1 July. I am sure that Subir will bring a fresh approach to the Centre and I look forward to an exciting programme over the next three years.

The current issue of South Asia Research is a special issue which includes Ashis Nandy's annual lecture on the culture of food in South Asia and several of the papers from the accompanying workshop. I hope that more publications from other workshops we held on food will follow and there are plans for at least one more workshop on the topic.

The essays on Keywords in South Asian Studies are due in July, and will be put online over the summer. The seminars continue this term with Rupert Snell on 'Hindi' and Shabnum Tejani on 'secular'.

I am glad to announce a one-day workshop on Gujarat, 14 May 2004: Engagements with Tradition in the Gujarati World. This has been organised by Dr Samira Sheikh. Please see below for details.

Last term we had two visiting Fellows from the Charles Wallace Trust: Mr Farooq Dar (CWT, Pakistan) and Dr Vijayabaskar (CWT, India). The Trust gave them both very welcome opportunities to develop their research in London and SOAS was glad to have them contribute to our activities.

I would like to thank members of the Management Committee (Rupert Snell, Werner Menski and Daud Ali) for their advice over the year. I should also like to thank Barbara Lazoi for running all the administration of the Centre over the last three years in such a patient and dedicated way.

Rachel Dwyer
April 2004

KEYWORDS IN SOUTH ASIAN STUDIES**Wednesday, 1-3pm, Room B111, Brunei Gallery, SOAS**

28 April Dr Rupert Snell, SOAS
 '**Hindi**'

12 May Dr Shabnum Tejani, SOAS
 '**secularism**'

ONE-DAY WORKSHOP ON GUJARAT, FRIDAY 14 MAY 2004
'ENGAGEMENTS WITH TRADITION IN THE GUJARATI WORLD'

Room G59, School of Oriental and African Studies,
 Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG

For reasons that are not entirely clear, there has been a relative lack of scholarly work on Gujarat in comparison to other regions. As a result, there is little of substance for the specialist or general reader to turn to when historical, cultural or political analyses of Gujarat are needed. As a first step towards addressing this need, it was felt that bringing together scholars and students of Gujarat to a common platform would provoke debate and raise the profile of Gujarat as an arena of study.

We hope that the theme of Gujarati tradition would be of interest to specialists on Gujarat whose interests range from anthropology, art history, literature and politics to diaspora studies, development and economics. We also hope that others who do not work exclusively on Gujarat will also take this opportunity to reflect on Gujarati tradition and identity. Above all, we hope that this will be an opportunity for Gujarat-specialists to meet each other.

Although Gujarat came into being as a separate state of independent India only in 1960, questions of identity and belonging to the Gujarati world had been around for several decades. A major marker of such belonging was and continues to be the Gujarati language, which was carried across the world by the active Gujarati diaspora. Gujarati-ness was also a contested identity, encompassing a variety of communities and religious groups, each with their own claims on Gujarati-ness and the Gujarati language. These included regional and caste groups in Gujarat, Saurashtra and Kutch as well as Jains, Vaishnavas, Sunni and Ismaili Muslims, Parsis, Christians and so on.

Perhaps it would be useful to examine how groups and individuals engaged with the question of Gujarati-ness and Gujarati tradition as they grappled with the emergence of Gujarat as a distinct political and cultural region in the last century. Saurashtra and Kutch also have a distinct regional and cultural identity which is often contrasted to that of eastern Gujarat. Questions of tradition and belonging to Gujarat or a Gujarati identity have also structured politics, mercantile activity, industry and labour.

The theme of tradition might draw together those working on a variety of themes from political economy and development to religious studies, art history, literature and archaeology. We hope

speakers will draw upon their recent research or fieldwork experiences to bring a range of scholarly perspectives to bear on the theme of tradition and the Gujarati identity.

All welcome, no registration required.

For further information contact Samira Sheikh (samira.sheikh@wolfson.ox.ac.uk)

PROGRAMME

9:00-9:15 **Introduction**

9:15-10:45 Session 1 Perspectives on Kacch

1. Dr Edward Simpson (London School of Economics), “What is Kachchh?”
2. Christopher Joshi Hansen (DPhil candidate, Oxford), “Infrastructure as exclusion: distributed electricity generation in Kachchh”
3. G A Nadri (PhD candidate, Leiden), “Exploring the Gulf of Cutch in the middle of the 18th century”
4. Professor Gregory Possehl (University of Pennsylvania), “The Gujarati seafaring tradition: its beginnings in the third millennium BC”

10:45-11.15 **Coffee Break**

11:15-12:45 Session 2 Histories and Imagined Identities

5. Dr Riho Isaka (University of Tokyo), “The Gujarati identity and Parsis in the late nineteenth century”
6. Dr Zulfikar Hirji (Wolfson College, Oxford and Institute of Ismaili Studies, London), “(Re)imagining the Gujarati Ismaili ‘community’ on the East African coast (c 1900)”
7. Dr David Hardiman (University of Warwick), “A medical mission to the Bhils of northeast Gujarat”
8. Dr Kaushik Bhaumik (Open University), “Rapacious ministers versus masked saviours: Bombay cinema, the princely states and the nation, 1921-1928”

12:45-2:00 **Sandwich Lunch (provided for the speakers)**

2:00-3:30 Session 3 Belonging and Boundaries in Gujarat and Beyond

9. Dr Alison Spiro (Harrow Primary Care Trust), “Sanskar through the rituals of childhood – Gujarati Hindu and Jain practices in Harrow”
10. Laila Halani (DPhil candidate, Oxford), “Case study of a multi-cultural slum in Ahmedabad: redefining identities through cultural exchange”
11. Nikita Sud (DPhil candidate, Oxford), “‘There are no non-Gujaratis in this village’ / ‘We can recognise a Waghri from his chaal’ : constructing and contesting a Gujarati-Hindu identity in contemporary development and politics”
12. Dr Pierre Lachiaier (Ecole française d'Extrême-orient, Paris), “A Darshan of the Trading Floor”

3:30-4:00 **Tea Break**

4:00-5:15 Session 4 Religion, Culture and Identity

13. Professor Françoise Mallison (EPHE, Paris) “The Bhajana culture of religious Gujarat: the textual transmission and thematic convergence”

14. Dr. Eiluned Edwards (PRASADA, Leicester) “Dress and identity among the Rabaris of Kachchh”
15. Dr. Helene Basu (Berlin) “Praying and drumming – Sidi at the junction of African spirit possession and Sufism in Gujarat”

5:15-5:45 Summing up

7 pm Dinner for participants at an Indian restaurant

TWO-DAY CONFERENCE

‘NARRATIVES OF “HOME” IN SOUTH ASIAN LITERATURE’

24-25 June 2004, Room VG01, Vernon Square Campus, SOAS

The notion of 'home' has been central to mankind throughout history. Modernity problematised this notion, gave the search for 'home' new poignancy. The modern individual, living in a universe where 'all that is solid melts into air' has had to redefine the concept of home in relation to the changing roles of man and woman, to renegotiate his/her identity within his/her specific histories and locations. The widespread experience of migration has required a re-mapping of connections between the self, home and the community. 'Home' has acquired a new importance in today's 'global village' of transnational corporations where large categories like 'nation', 'first/third world', etc. have been dramatically destabilised. Moreover, quests for the culturally perfectly located 'homes', exemplified by religious fundamentalism, neo-Nazism, etc., point to the urgent need to address the politics of home today.

The search for the location in which the self is 'at home' has been one of the primary projects of modern literature all over the world. This workshop's objective is to map the narratives of 'home' in South Asian literature from the advance of modernity on the subcontinent till the present day. It aims to read more than the domestic into representations of the home, to explore not only the geographical, but also the psychological and material connotations of 'home'. Its goal is to disassemble the concept of 'home' in all its incarnations - as confinement, as stability, as security, as myth and as desire.

Our objective is to problematise 'home' and its experience in different contexts and in different ways. Martin and Mohanty, for instance, engage with the notion of 'being home' ('the place where one lives within familiar, safe, protected boundaries') and of 'not being home' ('the realization that home is an illusion of coherence and safety based on exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of differences even within oneself'). We aim to investigate if and how home changes its significations when articulated from different locations, in different languages and by different subjects, paying particular attention to ideological determinants like gender and class. The parameters of 'home' in Diaspora writing and media, particularly film, will also be explored.

The deadline for submission of paper proposals is 1 March 2004.

Abstracts and the conference programme will be publicised on the CSAS website in due course.

For further information, please go to www.soas.ac.uk/csas or contact Lucy Rosenstein (lr1@soas.ac.uk).

**Werner Menski, *Hindu Law. Beyond Tradition and Modernity*,
New Delhi: OUP 2003, xxii, 648 pp. ISBN 0195665031, Rs. 995/£40.**

This book critically analyses the conceptual development of Hindu law from the most ancient historical periods to its current emergence as a postmodern phenomenon. It is argued that Hindu law must be viewed both as an ancient, constantly evolving conceptual entity and a living legal system. Hindu law has recently experienced a process of conceptual remoulding through the justice-conscious interventions of an activist judiciary. The book shows that academic scholarship has remained focused on inadequate modernist discourses that do not match with socio-legal realities in India and also do not take account of legal developments among the diasporic Hindu communities all over the world.

A launch of this book, presided over by Professor Lord Bhikhu Parekh, will be held at the **Nehru Centre in London at 7pm on 26 April 2004.**

GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT

This one-year project, funded by the British Council in Mumbai, brought together scholars and activists from the ILS Law College in Pune (Dr. Jaya Sagade and Mrs. Shobhana Patil), an NGO working on village development (MASUM, led by Dr. Manisha Gupte) and from SOAS (Dr. Werner Menski and Ms. Laila Caruso). The focus was on training local health workers and legal literacy trainers on aspects of women's rights to reproductive health. The intention was to explore to what extent international human rights norms could be usefully transported through legal literacy work to the local level, with a special focus on the health concerns of rural women. It was found that the language of human rights needs to be adjusted to the specific needs of local people, who are very well aware of problems they experience, but may not be able to view them in a wider context and to work on sustainable solutions. The main focus of the work was on empowering local women to express their concerns and to share their experiences through this training programme.

The project was completed in a two-day workshop on 27 and 28 March 2004 in Pune, held in Marathi to facilitate local participation, in which academics and activists from all over Maharashtra took an active part. Papers on a variety of subjects were discussed, including rights-based approaches, right to health, reproductive health care, abortion, child marriage, violence against women in various domestic contexts, and access to health services and consumer protection mechanisms.

The successful completion of this project has given rise to a new project proposal on the control of women's sexuality, which will be put forward by the University of Pune and SOAS during 2004, involving Dr. Swati Shirwadkar (Sociology, Pune) and Dr. Werner Menski (Law, SOAS).

TRIBAL TRANSITIONS: CULTURAL INNOVATION IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH, INDIA October 2002 – October 2007

‘Tribal Transitions’, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, is a collaborative project between the School of Oriental and African Studies, The British Museum, Arunachal University, the Government of Arunachal Pradesh, the Centre for Cultural Research and Documentation (Arunachal Pradesh) and the British Council in New Delhi. The main aims of the research are to develop a new analysis of innovation in tribal culture; to document and analyse cultural change in Arunachal Pradesh; and to contribute to academic and public debates about the place of tribal cultures in the modern world. The project Director is Dr S Blackburn.

The research team of folklorists, anthropologists, photographers and film-makers from the UK, USA and Arunachal Pradesh will conduct fieldwork and archival study. The fieldwork will concentrate on the ritual practices, oral traditions and material culture of five specific tribes. Archives of photographs, films and objects in the UK and India will be examined to identify cultural change over time. Copies of approximately 500 photographs from these collections will be donated to institutions in Arunachal Pradesh.

The planned outcomes are a travelling exhibition in India, an exhibition at The British Museum, a series of documentary films, an extensive collection of photographs and various monographs on tribal life.

Website: tribaltransitions.soas.ac.uk

Dr Stuart Blackburn is attached to the South Asia Department, SOAS, as a Research Associate.

‘VALMIKI STUDIES’

Report on one-day workshop

On Saturday 21 February 2004, a workshop on ‘Valmiki Studies’ was held at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London. It is the first time that an academic institution anywhere in the world has organised a meeting of this kind. The convenor of the workshop was Dr Julia Leslie from the Department of the Study of Religions at SOAS. The participants numbered approximately 140, filling the Khalili Lecture Theatre. They included academics from all over the UK, members of all the Valmiki Sabhas in Britain, both young and old, and representatives of other interested parties including several key groups: Valmiki Interest Based English Speakers (VIBES), Castewatch UK, and Voice of Dalit International (VODI). The result was a lively occasion, both intellectually and emotionally.

The full title of the workshop was ‘Text, Belief and Personal Identity: Creating a Dialogue’. As Dr Leslie explained in her keynote address, the starting-point for the workshop was a dispute in Birmingham (UK) four years earlier. In February 2000, British Valmikis were caught up in a difference of opinion regarding their religious tradition as it was understood within the South Asian community in Britain. The Bhagavan Valmiki Action Committee was formed. In the subsequent dispute, academics were brought in on both sides. The academic consulted by the BVA Committee was Dr Julia Leslie from SOAS. She wrote a formal report for the Committee, followed by a book: *Authority and Meaning in Indian Religions: Hinduism and the Case of Valmiki* (Ashgate, 2003). This book constitutes her attempt to bring some of the more significant issues found in the report into the academic arena. In the process of researching the

book, Dr Leslie held a series of discussions with members of the British Valmiki community. It was from these discussions that the Valmiki Studies Workshop 2004 emerged.

The workshop had two main aims: to provide British Valmikis with access to academic research on Indian religions, ‘diaspora Hinduism’, and the Valmiki tradition; and to begin to bridge the uncomfortable and potentially dangerous gap that is currently in place between academics researching Indian religions and the practitioners of those religions. It was hoped that the workshop would establish a dialogue_a *two-way communication*_between practitioners and academics, a dialogue that may in due course lead to greater access to academic sources for the former and more sensitive academic research by the latter.

The workshop was chaired by Professor Kim Knott (University of Leeds) who welcomed the participants, introduced the speakers, orchestrated the questions, and gave the final summing up at the end of the day. It was the task of Professor Colin Bundy, Director of SOAS, to launch Dr Leslie’s book and to delineate the significance of the work for SOAS and the academic world as well as for the Valmikis. Dr Leslie then spoke about her book in her keynote paper, entitled ‘The Significance of Valmiki for British Valmikis’. As she explained, the problem at the heart of the book is the well-known legend that Valmiki was once a dacoit. In her book, Dr Leslie examines the earliest Sanskrit texts for the legend and, quite simply, it is not there. She then traces the development of the three distinct elements that make up the legend: the motif of the ascetic enclosed within a termite mound, the motif of the sinner redeemed, and the idea that the sinner in question is low caste. The earliest Sanskrit text in which all elements are in place is the *Adhyatma Ramayana*, usually dated to the fourteenth or fifteenth century of the common era. She concludes that the resulting legend evolved in response to the rise of devotional religion in north India, and that it is never attributed to Valmiki in more ancient texts.

The rest of the morning was taken up with further academic papers: ‘The origins of caste and the notion of untouchability’ by Dr David Mosse (SOAS), ‘The idea of the true Brahmin and the implications of Brahminhood’ by Brian Black (SOAS), ‘The story of Ekalavya in the *Mahabharata*’ by Dr Simon Brodbeck (University of Edinburgh), ‘The label Hindu’ by Dr Eleanor Nesbitt (University of Warwick), and ‘The Valmiki identity and the Yogavasistha’ by Lekh Raj Manjadarria (convenor of the Bhagavan Valmiki Action Committee, 2000–2002).

The afternoon was devoted to discussion groups chaired by members of the British Valmiki community: Rena Prasad (Acting Chair of VIBES), Sukhbinder Gill, Jaswinder Kalyan and Parmeish Thapper. The questions under discussion were: ‘What do you see as the main problems facing British Valmikis in the understanding of their religious tradition?’ and ‘What role does (or could) academic research play in your understanding of your religious tradition?’ These sessions were both innovative and exciting as Valmikis took this rare opportunity to share their views about their tradition and their hopes for the future. Summaries of these sessions will be published as part of the proceedings of the workshop.

The Valmiki Studies Workshop 2004 proved to be such a success that plans for a second one in 2005 are already being discussed.

SOUTH ASIA HISTORY SEMINAR
Summer Term 2004 Tuesday 5.00pm Room G59, SOAS

- 27 April** Projit Mukharji (SOAS)
 Bangali Ayurved: emulation or innovation?
- 4 May** Nitin Sinha (SOAS)
 Some early colonial representations of railways in India
- 11 May** Jonathan Brooke (SOAS)
 Model converts, model heathens: constructing missionary conceptions, 1800-1810
- 18 May** Azaruddhin Mohammad Dali (SOAS)
 Internal security in India: the activities and propaganda of Japanese agents in India, c. 1930-45
- 25 May** Prabhu Bapu (SOAS)
 The Emergence of the Hindu Mahasabha in colonial UP 1915-1922
- 1 June** Siyako Miki (SOAS)
 Merchants, monopoly, and smuggling: the salt trade in early nineteenth century Bengal
- 8 June** Jangam Chinniah (SOAS)
 Nurturing Dalit space and identity in the Telugu Country 1900-1950

Convenor: Dr Daud Ali (da7@soas.ac.uk)

Asian Studies Centre, St Antony's College, University of Oxford

SOUTH ASIAN HISTORY SEMINAR

Tuesdays, 2.00pm, The Deakin Room, Founder's Building, St Antony's College

- 27 April** PRS Presentation
 Thomas Welsford (All Souls)
 The Tuqay-Timurid takeover of Uzbek Transoxiana, 1598-1604
- 25 May** Dr Suparna Gooptu (SAM at St Antony's and Calcutta University)
 Transformation of women's lives in colonial India: Cornelia Sorabji, India's first woman lawyer
- 1 June** PRS Presentation
 Paul Feinstein (St Antony's)
 Commerce in the Chola Empire, 11th - 13th centuries

All welcome

Convenor: Dr D.A. Washbrook

Enquiries: e-mail: asian@sant.ox.ac.uk

Telephone 01865 274559

SOUTH ASIAN STUDIES PROGRAMME and OXFORD CENTRE FOR HINDU STUDIES
WORKSHOP 'INDIAN TEXTS IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT: PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES'
Friday 7 May 2004
Dahrendorf Room, Founder's Building, St Antony's College, Oxford

Organiser: Professor Sanjay Subrahmanyam (St Cross/Oriental Institute)

- 10.30am Patrick Olivelle (University of Texas-Austin)
Textual history and social reality in the Manavadharmasastra
- 11.30am Francis Clooney S.J. (Boston College and OCHS)
Exegesis, Normativity, and Structures of Authority in the
Srimadrasahasyatrayasara of Vedanta Desika (14th century)
- 2.00pm James Benson (Wolfson/Oriental Institute)
Pandits and Grammarians in 16th and 17th century Northern India
- 3.00pm Sanjay Subrahmanyam (St Cross/Oriental Institute)
Rethinking Niti Texts in medieval and early modern South India
- 4.00pm Nile Green (Lady Margaret Hall)
A'zam al-karamat: making 'Muslim' saints in early twentieth century
Hyderabad State

All welcome

Enquiries: Jennifer Griffiths <asian@sant.ox.ac.uk>, telephone 01865-274559.
South Asian Studies Programme, Asian Studies Centre, St. Antony's College, University of
Oxford

Queen Elizabeth House
CONTEMPORARY SOUTH ASIA SEMINAR
Mondays, 4.00 - 5.30pm, Garden Room, Queen Elizabeth House, 21 St. Giles, Oxford

- 26 April** Arif Hasan, (Orangi Pilot Project, Karachi)
The Orangi Pilot Project and the larger Pakistan context
- 3 May** Barbara Harriss-White (QEH, Oxford)
Rural commercial capital under W. Bengal's left front
- 10 May** Ananya Mukherjee Reed (York University, Canada)
Corporate capitalism in contemporary South Asia
- 17 May** Aijaz Ahmad (Frontline and York University)
India after the elections
- 24 May** M.S.S. Pandian (Visiting Fellow, CSAS, Cambridge)
Multiple connotations: language politics in colonial South India

All welcome

Please check: <http://www2.qeh.ox.ac.uk/teaching/diary.html> for updates/changes.

Convenors: Rajesh Venugopal and Judith Heyer

Indian Art Circle
Spring/Summer 2004 Lecture Programme

Thursday 22 April

'Tribal Transitions: Report on Recent Fieldwork in North-East India'

Richard Blurton (Curator, Asian Department, British Museum)

Room B111, SOAS, 7.00pm

Wednesday 5 May

The 6th Annual Toby Falk Memorial Lecture, in association with the Islamic Art Circle.

'The Urban environment of Gulbarga: the second capital of the Bahmanis in the Deccan'

Helen Philon (Independent scholar, ex-Curator Islamic Department, Benaki Museum, Athens)

Khalili Lecture Theatre (Main Lecture Theatre), SOAS, 6.30pm

Thursday 27 May

'New perspectives on Tibetan jewellery'

John Clarke (Curator, Asian Department, Victoria and Albert Museum)

Room B102, SOAS, 6.30pm

Friday 18 June

'Deccani Painting'

Robert Skelton

Khalili Lecture Theatre (Main Lecture Theatre), SOAS, 6.30pm

The IAC is a non-profit organisation under the auspices of the SOAS Art and Archaeology Department and supported by the Society for South Asian Studies, dedicated to the promotion of scholarship in Indian art. The series of monthly lectures are followed by drinks and an invitation to join the speaker for an Indian meal. For any questions about IAC please contact <Jasleen.Kandhari@bl.uk>, Assistant Secretary, Indian Art Circle.

SOUTH ASIA RESEARCH

South Asia Research is a bi-annual interdisciplinary area journal for the South Asia region, now published by Sage Publications in London and edited by Werner Menski. From Vol. 25 (2005) onwards, it will appear thrice a year. The topics covered include modern and pre-modern history, politics, economics, anthropology, literary and visual culture, language and literature. Its primary aim is to give rapid access to current research work and to provide opportunities for publication to research students as well as to established scholars. In addition to reports of research in progress and book reviews, review articles are welcome. *South Asia Research* also publishes 'thought pieces' and interpretive essays that address issues and problems arising from new research.

Vol. 24, No 1, May 2004**RACHEL DWYER***Editorial: The Cultural Meaning of Food in South Asia***ASHIS NANDY***The Changing Popular Culture of Indian Food: Preliminary Notes***VIRINDER S. KALRA***The Political Economy of the Samosa***BHASKAR MUKHOPADHYAY***Between Elite Hysteria and Subaltern Carnavalesque: The Politics of Street-food in the City of Calcutta***BARBARA HARRISS-WHITE***Nutrition and its Politics in Tamil Nadu*

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email address

Centre of South Asian Studies

School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS)

University of London

Thornhaugh Street

Russell Square

London WC1H OXG

Telephone: 020 7898 4892

Fax: 020 7898 4489

Email: csas@soas.ac.uk

<http://www.soas.ac.uk/csas>

Chair **Dr Rachel Dwyer** (rd3@soas.ac.uk)

Executive Officer Barbara Lazoi (bl1@soas.ac.uk)