





SOUTH ASIA
INSTITUTE

SOAS University of London



SSAI Annual Review
2021/22

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A review of the past 5 years



The last five years have brought great change to the world, most obviously through the

COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying uncertainties. Many of SOAS South Asia Institute's initiatives, plans and friendships were disrupted but our work continued behind the scenes. I take this opportunity to review some of the highlights of the period.

The Institutes have remained key to the international profile of SOAS. We engage with the world to support and strengthen our academic departments and enhance the work of attracting students, funds and interesting minds onto our campus. We represent and promote the collective research and engagement of SOAS in each region. We welcome people to SOAS as an accessible public-facing intellectual and organisational focus point.

In this capacity, SSAI has hosted numerous annual lectures,

and hundreds of seminars, film screenings, lectures and book launches. These events have brought thousands of new faces into SOAS (and the return of old friends). In 2018, for example, we hosted Arundhati Roy who delivered a beautiful Noor Inayat Khan Annual Lecture (and complained of mice in an otherwise pleasant hotel) and President Mohamed Nasheed of the Maldives who delivered a hard-hitting and personal account of authoritarianism and resistance on the islands.

Annually we participate in Pongal, the harvest festival, at the Thiruvalluvar statue with friends from the Tamil community and the Indian High Commission and support the TamilStudiesUK fundraising campaign. Each year, the event has grown with larger numbers of visitors, including government ministers and representatives of the Greater London Assembly. Thiruvalluvar is often used as the face of SOAS and his statue requires maintenance and management as a focal point for the Tamil communities in London.

We have partnered with the British Academy, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (as was), Department for International

Development (as was), Médecins Sans Frontières and many others in conferences and knowledge exchange activities. We have established an annual lecture with a focus on Bangladesh and run a series of events with the High Commission.

We have hosted literary festivals, dance and musical performances and celebrations of food. We have been part of delegations to meet national leaders and finance ministers of South Asian countries visiting the UK. Although when Narendra Modi was hosted by the Science Museum in the run up to the Commonwealth Summit, he left Prince Charles to gladhand the university and civil society representatives.

As Director of SSAI, I have spoken at around 50 universities in the last five years, including lecture/alumni tours in West Bengal and North America.



“We engage with the world to support and strengthen our academic departments and enhance the work of attracting students, funds and interesting minds onto our campus. We represent and promote the collective research and engagement of SOAS in each region.”

We have also been to trade and education fairs in India and Pakistan and hosted ten or more Vice Chancellors from Indian universities on the SOAS campus. SSAI has visited Karachi and Kathmandu twice and Avinash Paliwal recently took a trip to Bangladesh.

We host annual Fellows from Charles Wallace India (thanks to Richard Alford and then Shreela Ghosh) and Charles Wallace Pakistan (thanks to Tim Butchard) trusts. We had regular visitors from West Bengal through the Bishwa Bangla Scholarships and our own arrangement for doctoral students from our partners at Jadavpur University.

SOAS is a world-leading institution and home to many of the disciplinary experts. The Institute represents and promotes these research interests in a range of academic and government contexts. We take pride in promoting SOAS through the research undertaken by our members. Across SOAS in the last five years we have run major research projects working in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Myanmar. At the same time, SOAS has had to reduce costs and several cherished colleagues have left the institution, notably, Rachel Dwyer, Steve Hughes, Mike Hutt, Rakesh Nautiyal, Francesca Orsini and Gurharpal Singh.

London is a centre for all manner of interest groups, factions and campaigns relating to South Asian countries and diasporas. Things come together in London in ways that they cannot in South Asia: caste, diplomacy, counter-diplomacy, soft power, Kashmir, party politics, Balochistan, religion, sexuality, Rohingya, beef, dissent.



Nearly everything we have done has upset someone, not least the name of the Institute itself. I thank all of those who have taken the time to write over the last five years sharing concerns, out-rage and indignation. Some of you have become regular correspondents. I thank you for having contributed directly to our awareness and sensitivities.

Finally, I want to thank colleagues for their work over the last five years, the previous Director Mike Hutt, the Deputy Directors Navtej Purewal and Avinash Paliwal, the Honorary Artistic Director Sanjukta Ghosh and Shahrar Ali and Sunil Pun and others for running the office, which is being turned into teaching space this summer, as the big wheel that is university life continues to turn. The South Asia Institute will be back with new activities and plans in the autumn of 2022.

Edward Simpson

Director SOAS South Asia Institute

“Nearly everything we have done has upset someone, not least the name of the Institute itself. I thank all of those who have taken the time to write over the last five years sharing concerns, out-rage and indignation.”

Time, money and process: anthropological explorations of the infrastructural

Artists, academics, and heritage practitioners came together to launch an exciting online exhibition 'take us as we are' involving Indian and South Asian diasporic artists, that was inspired from a line in the poem collection, *When Angels Speak of Love*, by Bell Hooks. A roundtable discussion Polyphony and Poiesis was held on heritage arts with respect to the intersections of gender, race/ethnicity, caste/class, sexuality, and disability in the British Asian diaspora.

SSAI hosted both these events in partnership with GRID Heritage organised by Raminder Kaur (University of Sussex), Parul Dave Mukherji (JNU, India) and Navtej Purewal (SOAS) and is supported by Arts and Humanities Research Council, Indian Council for Historical Research, Jawaharlal Nehru University (India), Sussex Asia Centre and Jena Declaration. Network members consider creativity as a fundamental aspect of all people's lives that inform diverse heritage and arts. The exhibition, 'take us as we are' adopts an equal and equalising platform. Here, people who have made artworks in the home, some who made them for collectives, some as individuals for audiences based in India, some

in the UK, while others have been embraced more widely in national and international circles, having pierced through the veils and barriers that they have encountered against their positional identities. From their unknown to known makers, these artworks transcend the specifics of objects, media, contexts, time-spaces, and art-craft binaries.

Older generations who act as both inspirations and pioneers (Anon, Mohinder Kaur Bhamra, Shyama Devi, Surjeet Hussain, Gian Kaur, Kamal Korla, Malti Rao) are placed next to those whose artworks are appreciated as part of new and upcoming scenes (George Chakravarthi, Amarjeet Nandhra, Rezia Wahid, Sonia Panesar, Rakhi Peswani, Sohaya Visions and Mukul & Ghetto Tigers).

Those who work with and adapt traditional creative media (Dukhushyam Chitrakar, Lutfa Chitrakar, Fouzia Dastango, Tanima Dhar, Surjeet Hussain, Manpreet Kaur) are integrated with those whose craft extends to new media (Bhajan Hunjan, Bishi, Mandeep Singh Manu, Seema Mattu, Mithu Sen). Those whose creative works speak subtly (Meenatchi Gopal, Shilpa Gupta, Amina Khayyam, Ranjeeta Kumari, Malvika Raj,





Bisakha Sarker, Janine Shroff, Dayanita Singh) are merged with those who adopt a more strident tone against social injustices and national borders (Raisa Kabir, Ita Mehrotra, Sudharak Olwe, Mir Suhail, Ikkatar Singh, Tandel Fund of Archives, Kavishri Jatha Rasulpur, and documentary filmmakers, Anuj Deshpande on Kabir Kala Manch in Maharashtra, and Randeep Maddoke on two singers in Punjab, Saida Begum and Jagsir Jeeda).



Images from: Machher Biye (Fish Wedding) by the late Dukhushyam Chitrakar who passed away during the last phase of the project. India DUKHUSHYAM CHITRAKAR | GRIDHERITAGE

SOAS Library Exhibition and SSAI Commemorative Conference

Building up to the 50th year of SOAS Library, the Wolfson Gallery exhibition on Narratives of Refugee Memories curated by Sanjukta Ghosh provides the creative lens to look again at the archives of Partition in 1947 and the post-partition settlement history of displaced people of South Asia and beyond. The emotive history of refuge speaks out loud from a visual line-up of displaced objects framed within a narrative context of home away from home. Such stories are connected to a global history of poverty, challenged by the emerging journalism of social reportage in the post Second World War decades.

The gallery displayed anonymous photo prints, newsletters and illustrations collected from the enormous reels of paper documenting the cross-continental War on Want that impacted the lives of South Asians displaced by Partition and its everlasting legacy.



Narratives of Refugee Memories, Wolfson Gallery Launch, May 2022.

The long shadow of South Asian displacement of millions across borders merges with the timeline of the development of each newly born nation-state – Pakistan, the Republic of India (celebrating 75 years of Independence), and the People’s Republic of Bangladesh. Memories of displacement emerge in the most unexpected quarters among the Asian minorities living in Africa, such as their expulsion from Uganda; or those who flee poverty, social and cultural pressures emanating from the effects of ‘partitioned’ families and seeking refuge in the UK. South Asian diasporic identities bear the brunt of Partition memories in the UK. The British Ugandan Asian exodus connects with such identities, as many experience dual migration and lineages from South Asia, Africa to the UK. The gallery has photos taken by the late Mohamed Amin (The Mohamed Amin Foundation, Kenya), collections from BUA@50 (The India Overseas Trust), and newspaper prints from the Muktokotha archive at Moulvibazar (Bangladesh). Artist input by Amarjeet Nandhra’s Displacement (original textile print); several in original print such as the Journey series and Calamity obtained from the acclaimed paintings by Kamal Koria; collective contributions by Dr Aditi Kumar, Khyati Koria Green, Lata Desai and Diana Attwood. Lagnajita Mukhopadhyay (Dept of Anthropology) left her impressions in the exhibition film made by Sunil Pun, who has been behind the cameras for some time.

Nazes Afroz, the former Executive Editor

for the South and Central Asia region of the BBC World Service, curated the West Wall exhibition Uncertain Landscapes: The Refugee Experience of Kolkata, which featured his photos and research showcasing the trajectory of refugee memories in the city. Presenting the launch talk, he reminisced the moments of his project fieldwork in Kolkata’s colonies and showed a film on the life experience of urban settlers.

SOAS Impact and Knowledge Exchange Fund 2020-21 enabled many outreach activities centred on the refugee exhibition. The launch event brought together the staff who helped shape the project particularly John Langdon (Head of Special Collections), Oliver Urquhart (SOAS Library Director) and John Hollingworth of the Brunei Gallery. Several guided tours involved overseas visitors from Kolkata like Satyam Roychowdhury, Vice Chancellor of Sister Nivedita University and Prof Sanku Bose of Techno India Group. Andrew Whitehead was pleased to see his collections presented for the 75th commemoration. Mark Watson the Head of Flora from Edinburgh Botanical Gardens visited later expressing an interest in cross border traffic. Prof Peter Robb returned to SOAS specially to visit the exhibition saying, ‘the poignant photos told many different stories.’ Prof Michael J Molloy from Carleton University gave the keynote at the Conference on Narratives of Refugee Memories and Resettlements, drew upon his 35 years of experience in international and refugee affairs and direct



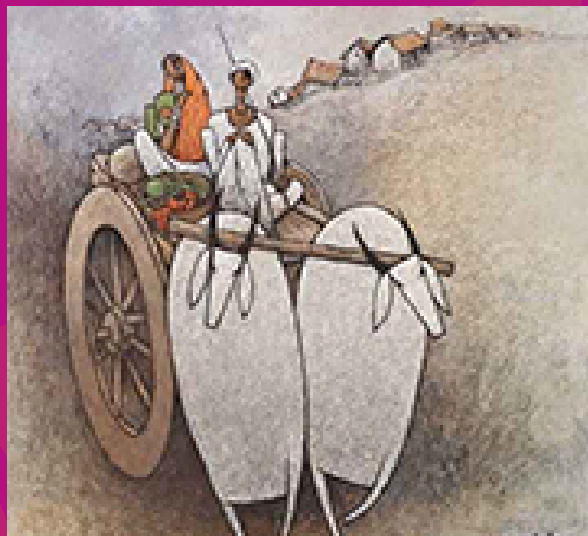
involvement in 1972 to help bring 6,000 Ugandan Asians to Canada. He uncovered the legacy impacts of resettlement on questions of identity and belonging within the East African Asian diaspora. The introductions by Alan Critchley JP Trustee of the India Overseas Trust and Chair of the British Ugandan Asians at 50 years, included the formal launch of oral history videos of survivors.

Among many distinguished speakers and guests, the Conference saw Bhasker Solanki, the photojournalist who filmed in conflict and refugee situations in over 100 countries, talked on 'Filming Refugees from the Uganda experience to the crisis in Ukraine'. While bridging the past with present conditions, he raised awareness points about lessons learnt from commemorations. Paresh Solanki (BBC Midlands) takes us through the implications of conducting oral history interviews in a way that respects the emotional traumas that persist within refugee communities, even after several decades

The exhibition ran several public tours with London Unseen, curated on behalf of the Mayor of London's Commission for Diversity in the Public Realm.

Image Credit: Nazes Afroz, displayed on the West Wall, SOAS Library, May 2022.

SOAS Library Exhibition: Gallery Walk and Talk



Marking the beginning of the 50th year of SOAS Library, 'Unlocking SOAS Collections' offers the opportunity to engage with audio-visual sources that enrich conventional scholarship and research methods. The Wolfson Gallery exhibition on Narratives of Refugee Memories curated by Sanjukta Ghosh provides the creative lens to look again at the archives of Partition in 1947 and the post Partition settlement history of displaced people of South Asia and beyond. The emotive history of refuge speaks out loud from a visual line-up of displaced objects, that are framed in a narrative of 'home away from home.' Such stories are also connected to a global history of poverty, challenged by the emerging journalism of social reportage in the post Second World War decades. The Wolfson gallery comes alive with a Special Collection of anonymous photo prints, newsletters and illustrations collected from

the enormous reels of paper documenting the cross-continental War on Want that impacted the lives of South Asians displaced by Partition and its everlasting legacy. The long shadow of South Asian displacement of millions across borders merges with the timeline of the development of each newly born nation-state – Pakistan, the Republic of India (celebrating 75 years of Independence), and the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Memories of displacement are unearthed in the most unexpected quarters such as among the Asian minorities living in Africa, such as their expulsion from Uganda; or those who flee poverty, social and cultural pressures emanating from the effects of 'partitioned' families and seeking refuge in the UK.

West Wall Gallery Walk and Talk

Nazes Afroz, the former Executive Editor for the South and Central Asia region of the BBC World Service has curated the West Wall exhibition *Uncertain Landscapes: The Refugee Experience of Kolkata* which features his photos and research showcasing the trajectory of refugee memories in the city. He writes:

'The migration of millions of displaced people from East Pakistan to West Bengal started seventy-five years ago following the partition of Bengal in 1947. Most of them reached Kolkata, which was not prepared to deal with the influx of these 'refugees'. A large number of them declined the government's offer to relocate them to the forest areas of Central India, the Andaman Islands or the Sundarbans. Instead, they chose to build their lives against all adversities when they squatted in the districts surrounding the city – in 24 Parganas and Nadia. Thus, came into being the squatters' colonies or the 'refugee colonies' as they were commonly called, which subsequently would become the principal signposts of refugee presence in the state of West Bengal.'

The SOAS South Asian Heritage Month Festival (15-16 July 2022)



Craft Workshop, SOAS SAHM Festival, July 2022

In partnership with South Asian Heritage Month (SAHM), SOAS South Asia institute hosted a hybrid summer festival focused on the theme Journeys of Empire and Dispersed Diasporas which encompassed several aspects of South Asian identity, not only in Britain but across the diaspora that were and continue to be influenced by the journeys of the Empire. The theme also reflected on two anniversaries that marked 2022: the 75th anniversary of Indian Independence, Pakistan, Partition, and subsequent political division of East and West Pakistan; the 50th anniversary of the expulsion of Ugandan Asians by Idi Amin.

The festival brought over twenty programmes composed of various performances (dance, music, songs, theatre), screenings (films and documentaries), educational workshops (literature, art, craft), books and toolkit launches, and input from cultural organisations. These reflected on the experiences of dispersed diasporas connected to the journeys of the Empire impacting their current lives. Sessions explored hidden histories, such as the emergence of dual and triple heritage identities due to exile and migration, social and cultural networks disrupted by the journeys of the Empire and the dispersal of the South Asian communities across the world.

The opening day on 15th July 2022 saw an auspicious beginning at SOAS's iconic site of the statue of Thiruvalluvar, the renowned Tamil poet, and the site symbolic of the legacy of South Asian studies underpinned by regional languages. Suhani Dhanki Mody, the diasporic Bharatanatyam artist, performed outdoors and joined a conversation with Srekala Bharath from Chennai, known for her 50 years journey with the dance form that originated from Tamil Nadu encapsulating the socio-cultural history of India. It was followed by a reflective workshop on poetry led by Manjot Dhaliwal helped us better understand how the past shapes the present and towards envisioning a different future. SAHM theme launched on Partition, and multi-faceted narratives came out through the lens of survivors and later generations. Evening screenings of short films such as Untying the Knot by director Zana Shammi and Maida by director Lubna Yusuf introduced by Anuj Radia revealed the layered societal tensions existing in the region -- the chilling reality of women emancipation trapped in dowry, child marriage, violence, and marital expectations.

On the final day, visitors were treated to a traditional feast accompanying artist-led staged productions. These included the Garba folk performance, considered a social portal for the South Asian dispersed



diasporic community, followed by Tagore songs presented by SOAS alumna Bisakha Goswami. A dance troupe performed adaptation to Afro-Asian beats by Aritri Kundu, trained in the Uday Shankar style, celebrated earlier forms of global fusion music. The in-house sitar band led by Tommy Khosla, a disciple of Anoushka Shanker reminded us of Ravi Shanker's legacy in world music. This was followed by a rendition of classical and blissful sugam Sangeet, Ghazals in Gujrati by Nirmal Joshi. Later, a filmed drama *breadth* based on Covid inequalities, written by Prof Raminder Kaur and directed by Mukul Ahmed, drew out the passion of stage actors.

The language lounge of the Brunei building had innovative art workshops and craft demonstrations reflective of the textile heritage, a display of looms, threads, fabric, beads works and nostalgic food cultures. Bhupinder Singh, also known as PiNs, built a social commentary on visual culture. Expert-led activities in the Senate building saw in-person memory-sharing opportunities, and interactive

open mic sessions for the Memory Box project invited wide-ranging comments on South Asian identities. Farzana Qureshi said, 'The open mic forum brought out the memory of communities commemorating the 75 years of Partition. We reflected on where we are in terms of migration, identity and diasporic narratives through art and culture.' Faraan Irfan, the founder of Saarey music streaming service, commented on the 63-year family legacy of patronage of Pakistani classical music. The mobile technological platform discovers incredible Ustads, Raags, Khayals, Thumri, Kafi, and Qawwali, making music as the cross-border tool for friendship.

The festival brought together art connoisseurs, influential thinkers, and various practitioners to engage with students, art activists, therapists and a new generation of learners involved in South Asian culture and art. Prof Adam Habib (SOAS Director) welcomed the initiative that exemplified SOAS's institutional strength to become the bridge between the UK education



sector and the global south. Oliver Urquhart Irvine (Director of SOAS Library) saw its future as a hub of activities that build up to celebrating 50 years of the library collections.

The festival was co-directed by Sanjukta Ghosh (SSAI) and Farzana Qureshi (SOAS Library) and supported by the Students Union, SOAS Library, SOAS Research and Enterprise, with particular thanks to Andrea Cornwall and Khadir Meer (COO). The SOAS SAHM prelude was in collaboration with Jasvir Singh OBE and Dr Binita Kane with the wider team involved in the month-long celebration in the United Kingdom (similar in spirit to Black History Month and other awareness months).

EVENTS' HIGHLIGHTS

Midnight's Borders: A People's History of Modern India

On 6th October, 2021, SSAI hosted a book launch 'Midnight's Borders: A people's History of Modern India', told through a seven year, 9000 mile journey along its many contested borders.

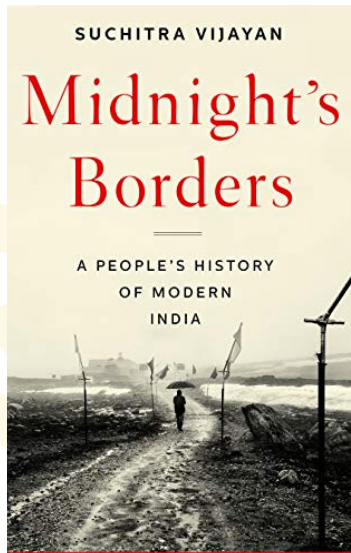
Sharing borders with six countries and spanning a geography that extends from Pakistan to Myanmar, India is the world's largest democracy and second most populous country. It is also the site of the world's biggest crisis of statelessness, as it strips citizenship from hundreds of thousands of its

people—especially those living in disputed border regions.

Suchitra Vijayan traveled India's vast land border to explore how these populations live, and document how even places just few miles apart can feel like entirely different countries.

In this stunning work of narrative reportage—featuring over 40 original photographs – we hear from those whose stories are never told: from children playing a cricket match in no-man's-land, to an elderly man living in complete darkness after sealing off his home from the floodlit border; from a woman who fought to keep a military bunker off of her land, to those living abroad who can no longer find their family history in India.

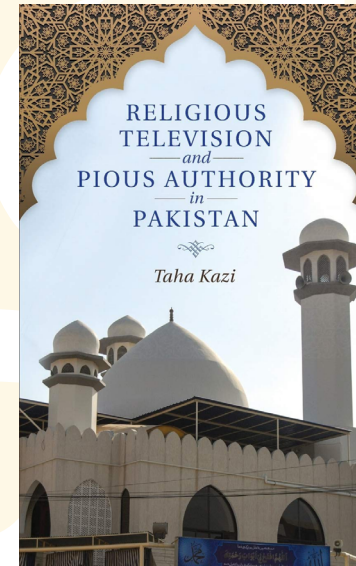
With profound empathy and a novelistic eye for detail, Vijayan brings us face to face with the brutal legacy of colonialism, state violence, and government corruption. The result is a gripping, urgent dispatch from a modern India in crisis, and the full and vivid portrait of the country we've long been missing.



Religious Television and Pious Authority in Pakistan

In Pakistan, religious talk shows emerged as a popular television genre following the 2002 media liberalization reforms. Since then, these shows have become important platforms where ideas about Islam and religious authority in Pakistan are developed and argued. In Religious Television and Pious Authority in Pakistan, Taha Kazi revealed how these talk shows mediate changes in power, belief, and practice. He also identifies the sacrifices and compromises that religious scholars feel compelled to make in order to ensure their presence on television. These scholars, of varying doctrinal and educational backgrounds—including madrasa-educated scholars and self-taught celebrity preachers—are given screen time to debate and issue religious edicts on the authenticity and contemporary application of Islamic concepts and practices. In response, viewers are sometimes allowed to call in live with questions. Kazi maintains that these featured debates inspire viewers to reevaluate the status of scholarly edicts, thereby

fragmenting religious authority. By exploring how programming decisions inadvertently affect viewer engagements with Islam, Religious Television and Pious Authority in Pakistan looks beyond the revivalist impact of religious media and highlights the prominence of religious talk shows in disrupting expectations about faith.



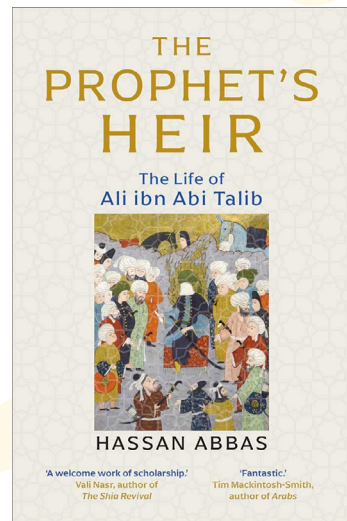
Dance, Divinity and Narratives of Sohanimoksha Troupe

On 13 Oct, 2021, SSAI hosted a virtual event 'Dancing with the Gods' (Roli Books, India, January 2021) is an ode to the mythological heritage of





Bharatanatyam. The visual narrative captured the rich heritage of this temple dance, its original exponents, the Devadasis or handmaidens of the deity, and its repertoire of movements and moods, to bring alive the fascinating stories of Hindu gods and goddesses and their kaleidoscopic lives. The book is inspired by the performances of the Sohini and Sohinimoksha World Dance troupe. Celebrating the Humanism of Rumi, Sufi mysticism, the mesmeric quality of Vedic and Gregorian chants, tracing the cult of the Mother Goddess from its Egyptian roots through pre-Baroque times to the Latin countries to India, the timeless message of Gandhi - all combine in her stagecraft to underline Sohini's, and Sohinimoksha's world-view and mission - Connecting Civilizations. Replete with rare photographs curated from the Sohinimoksha World Dance Stage archives as well as museums and galleries around the world, complemented by a lucid narrative that weaves information, anecdotes and trivia together in the spirit of a popular cultural raconteur.



The Prophet's Heir: The Life of Ali Ibn Abi Talib

On 26 October 2021, SSAI hosted a virtual event on the life and legacy of one of Mohammad's closest confidants and Islam's patron saint: Ali ibn Abi Talib, arguably the single most important spiritual and intellectual authority in Islam after prophet Mohammad. The discussion looked at the discussion of and contestation around Ali in South Asia

COP26 and the Climate Crisis: SOAS Briefing and Regional Perspectives

On Nov 2021, the UK hosted

the UN Climate Change Conference COP26 in Glasgow. COP bought world leaders together to commit to urgent global climate action.

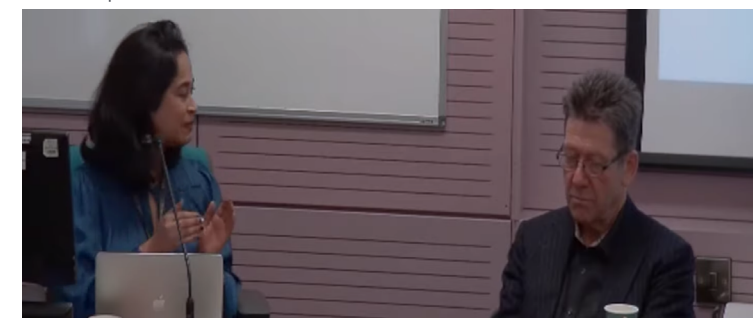
The SOAS Pre-CoP Meeting was hosted by SOAS Regional Centres and Institutes, Centre for Environment, Development and Policy (CDEP) and Centre for Sustainable Finance (CSF). This event is for staff, students and external audiences who want to learn about COP and the issues at stake through the lens of SOAS research and regional engagement.

The Violent Heart of Indian Politics. Reflections on popular sovereignty in India

Since Modi's ascent to power in 2014 Indian democracy and democratic values appeared increasingly fragile and imperiled. While there is

little doubt that the BJP and allies show an unprecedented contempt for democratic process and the rule of law, the seeming decline of democracy and pluralism in India has deeper roots.

In his recent book, Thomas Hansen argues that the most expansive forces in Indian public life are, 1) the notion of the sovereign people, or community, as a source of all legitimate power; and 2) the legitimacy of collective assertion, anger and public violence. The celebration of the Indian Constitution notwithstanding, liberal democratic values are not deeply embedded in everyday life among most Indians. Most major policy and legal changes in India since the 1980s, and before, have emerged after sustained collective campaigns, often accompanied by

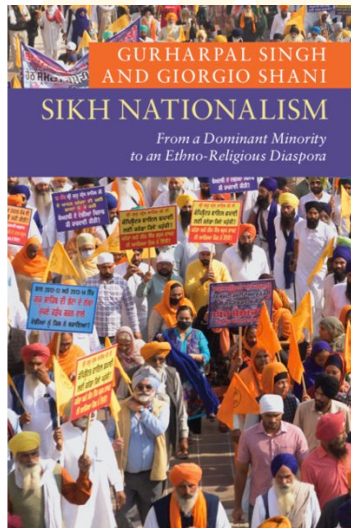


significant public violence. In recent decades, this staging of political life as a 'permanent performance' of legitimate anger and protest has been weaponized in new ways on social media, aided by the routinization of evermore violent and abusive language in most public and media. This may be the moment to reflect on how India became a democracy without democratic values.

Sikh Nationalism: From a Dominant Minority to an Ethno-Religious Diaspora

SAI was pleased to host the book launch of *Sikh Nationalism: From a Dominant Minority to an Ethno-Religious Diaspora* (Cambridge University Press, 2021) by Gurharpal Singh and Giorgio Shani. The volume is a timely reflection on historical and contemporary development that have influenced the politics of the Punjab and much more widely in South Asia and the South Asian diaspora in the West.

Drawing on A.D. Smith's ethno-symbolic approach, the authors use a new integrated methodology to understand



the historical and sociological development of modern Sikh nationalism. By emphasising the importance of studying Sikh nationalism from the perspective of the nation-building projects of India and Pakistan, the recent literature on religious nationalism and the need to integrate the study of the diaspora with the Sikhs in South Asia, the authors provide a fresh approach to a complex subject. Singh and Shani evaluate the current condition of Sikh nationalism in a globalised world and consider the lesson the Sikh case offers for the comparative study of ethnicity, nations and nationalism.

Historicising the Birangona: Tracing the past, present and future trajectories of the Bangladesh war of 1971

In December 1971, in an internationally unprecedented move till date, the Bangladeshi government publicly referred to the women raped by the Pakistani army and their Bengali and non-Bengali collaborators during the Bangladesh war of 1971, as birangonas (war heroines). There exists a public memory of wartime rape since 1971 till today through the innumerable literary and visual representations of the birangona as well as testimonies. The lecture examined the processes through which birangonas have been historicised, the testimonial processes through which narratives of sexual violence is recorded and the limited lens of silence, voice, shame, honour and stigma, through which sexual violence is commonly understood. By calling into question the figuration of the 'traitor' – the enemy within - the lecture will reflect on the past, present and future trajectories of the Bangladesh war of 1971. This will allow us to reflect on the theorisations of genocide and

irreconciliation within historical and contemporary contexts.

Flying Blind: India's Quest for Global Leadership

In recent years, India has repeatedly expressed its ambitions of becoming a global power – or 'jagat guru'. Yet, many believe that India's economic troubles at home are far more pressing and that foreign policy aspirations can wait. But is a proactive foreign policy really a 'luxury' for India, to be postponed until the economy develops; or is it, in fact, a prerequisite for economic growth in a globalized world? Why should the average Indian citizen care about foreign policy – and how can a proactive foreign policy help Indians become more prosperous? Scanning our ever-changing world from East to West, and defining India's national interests and needs, Mohamed Zeeshan passionately argued that India needs a more coherent strategy for its relations with the outside world. Through travels and debates across continents, Zeeshan laid out a vision for how India can champion the cause of global good.



GUJARAT, CRADLE AND HARBINGER OF IDENTITY POLITICS

Ghanshyam Shah and Jan Breman discuss their new book on why and how the ambition for majoritarian hegemony in the form of Hindutva found an early and congenial berth in Gujarat. Acting as a laboratory for turning ideological communal fervour to political ends, a caucus of upper-caste vintage designated a calibrated strategy to canvass votes of intermediate and low castes-cum-classes. Rooted in a heritage of mercantile

capitalism, the course set hailed as a Hindutva model of neo-liberal growth. It has hugely widened the gap between the top and bottom ranks of the population. In this dichotomous divide between inclusion versus exclusion, nationhood is defined in religious terms. Addressed from the vantage point of the marginalized classes and communities of society, the articles in the volume, some written for the book itself and some previously published, focus on the Hindutva authoritarian state practice and its communal rupture of society and politics.



Culinary Tales From Balochistan

Travelling solo across Pakistan's Balochistan province, Nilofer Afridi Qazi takes us on a wonderful series of journeys. Food as a leitmotif as Balochistan's north, south and coastal parts are explored.

If ingredients could speak, what would they tell us?

The reader travels through time, with the many

TAMILSTUDIESUK

The past year has been an eventful one for the fundraising campaign to reinstate Tamil Studies at SOAS, University of London. Awareness of the campaign drive continues to grow within local and international Tamil communities and academic circles through a range of outreach events locally and internationally.

Highlights include on-campus Pongal festival celebrations at SOAS being featured in BBC London news, Zee TV U.K. news, and a range of local and

worldwide Tamil news outlets. Several key guests have also been welcomed to garland the famous Thiruvalluvar Statue at the entrance to SOAS including Nick Rogers, Conservative London Assembly member for Hounslow, Richmond and Kingston on the occasion of the assembly's declaration on Tamil Heritage Month. A successful event in parliament was hosted by TamilStudiesUK's Women's Wing and MP Maria Miller, with an ongoing series of public talks in support of Tamil Studies at SOAS culminated in an opportunity to host Dr K Sivan,

former chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). Other dignitaries who visited SOAS to honour the Thiruvalluvar statue include Mr R.Balakrishnan (Former Indian Civil Servant), Mr.Sivan Ilango (Canadian Tamil Congress President), B.H.Abdul Hameed (Tamil Radio Broadcaster).

For more information about this campaign or how you can donate or volunteer, please write to contact@tamilstudiesuk.org or the SOAS Philanthropy office.



SSAI Sanglaap Annual Concert: AMIR KHANI AUR MERI BANDISHEIN

Introduction by Dr Sanjukta Ghosh (SOAS South Asia Institute) under the rubric SSAI Sanglaap Art and Culture series which hosts music and performance that is created by diasporic artists, featuring transnational musical genres, itinerant objects, experiences and memory.

In this musical tribute concert to the rich lineage of Ustad Amir Khan's Indore Gharana, the Hindustani classical vocalist Ramneek Singh presented some of his popular compositions and her pieces written under the pen name of "Ibaadat", taking inspiration from her guru Ustad Amir Khan considered the father of the Indore Gharana.

Introduced to Indian Classical Music at the tender age of six, and with decades of strict vocal training, Ramneek Singh has a Visharad (degree) from Bhatkhande

Sangeet Vidyapeeth and is considered a purist from the Indore Gharana, a meditative style of Khayal presentation as instituted by Ustad Amir Khan.

Taking the meditative approach, she weaves her own grooming into the representative compositions; reflects on living in India -- the region's historical past through the prism of family history. Ramneek is proficient in musical genres like Khayal, Thumri, Bhajan, Shabad, Sufiana and Folk. She has written several Taranas (a Persian couplet or song) which are inspired by the authentic style of Tarana vocalisation as created by the 13th century Sufi poet, Hazrat Amir Khusrau – a technique that is used exclusively in the Indore Gharana. Her mesmerizing voice, which spans three octaves, comes alive with insights, poetry and lyrics infused with technique and originality.



faces on offer, humanizing food. These tales engage our senses throughout this adventurous cookbook with each chapter revealing layers of Balochistan.

Many of these recipes are obscure for Pakistanis and are absent from the imagination of what is considered Pakistani food, expanding our understanding of what constitutes the cuisine of the country.

This is a collection of thirteen stories with recipes representing Balochistan's vast palate documented for the first time.

Ambedkar in America

On June 2022, SSAI hosted Anupama Rao for talk on 'Ambedkar in America.' B.R Ambedkar, the Dalit leader and social thinker of democracy, attended Columbia University between 1913-1916. As we build out the multimodal Ambedkar Initiative, work in the University Archives at Columbia allows us to think about the relationship between the social space of the university (and its relationship to Harlem), the formation of the social science disciplines, and the global and racial diversity of the interwar classroom as the enabling context for new practices of scholarly production and critique. The speaker explored this moment by considering how works by Ambedkar and Du Bois—Castes in India (1916) a precursor to the Annihilation of Caste (1936), and "Reconstruction

and its Benefits" (1915) which preceded Black Reconstruction (1935)—provided a distinct and distinctively modern understanding of the categories of "caste" and "race." Both thinkers had a deep investment in global historical processes as these had shaped the histories of caste and race, even as they diverged significantly from their forebearers' understanding of the relationship between history and identity, and the work of the concept.

Why Do People Oppose Nuclear Power Projects in India: The Story of Protest Movements at Jaitapur and Kudankulam

Post-colonial Indian state started its nuclear programme by establishing the Atomic Energy Commission in 1948 and the Department of Atomic Energy in 1954 under the direct supervision of the office of the then Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. Since then, India has had gigantic projections of energy from nuclear power. However, even after seven decades the Indian nuclear establishment remains incapable of producing more than 3% of the total energy generated, from 23 nuclear reactors across the country. On the other hand, the protest movements against nuclear power projects have emerged wherever they were proposed, under construction and in expansion. Among these, two major protests were those against



the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Project in the state of Tamil Nadu, southern India, and against the Jaitapur Nuclear Power project in Maharashtra, western India. Drawing on fieldwork conducted in Kudankulam and Jaitapur, Ajmal Khan demonstrates the trajectory of the protest movements, and argues that they emerged on account of the growing understanding and awareness about nuclear power, its inherent vulnerabilities, and the situated perceptions of risks by the fishers, farmers and other locals. However, in Kudankulam, protests did not endure long as the state eliminated challenges in the process of setting up the power projects, though fragmented oppositions continued. In Jaitapur, the opposition has already completed a phase and the protest movement is expected to intensify as the project progresses. Ultimately, Ajmal Khan argues that the everyday experience of the state in the context of protest movements constitutes the nuclear state.

7th March Foundation Lectures 2018-2022

Over the past five years, the partnership between SOAS and 7th May Foundation has primarily centred on the holding of an Annual Lecture on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Bangladesh. This has now been established as an annual event and we feel the basis has been created to enhance the nature and scope of the Lecture itself. This has given us the space to reflect further on how to develop and consolidate the nature and scope of the evolving partnership between the two organisations.

The four annual lectures were delivered by noted and established scholars like Professors James Manor and Rehman Sobhan. They were joined by newer and promising experts like Nayanika Mookherjee and Shohela Nazneen.

The Topics ranged from an overview and reflection by Prof. Manor which emphasised the critical role of Sheikh Mujib as an individual who consistently built up his reputation as a mass leader by his ability to engage in negotiation with adversaries with civility. But when times demanded, he was also capable of "defiant words and action" and "led the way with a shrewd sense of timing when other leaders hesitated, this was vividly apparent in his great speech on 7 March 1971, a turning point in his country's history". Professor Rehman Sobhan, on occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the birth of Bangladesh, cast a wry and at times sceptical look at present day Bangladesh in light of the ideals and values that underpinned its birth. Nayanika Mookherjee examined the radical attitude taken by Bangabandhu in portraying those women who have been raped by the Pakistan Army as "Birangana" in 1971. Sohela Nazneen examined the domain of women's empowerment in Bangladesh.

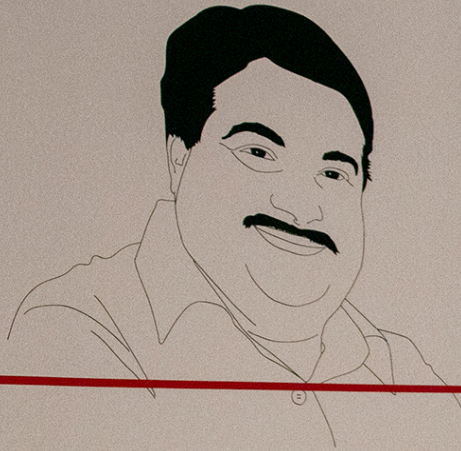
We can confidently assert that the lectures have been able to generate renewed interest within the academic community and have been able to bring forth new audiences. We have been able to demonstrate that it is possible to be critical, transcend political and bureaucratic limitations to debate Bangladesh and the legacy of its founding father.

Having successfully established the Annual Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Lecture, we are in an ideal position to think of innovative ways in broadening the partnership. This could include a wider range of topics, issues and viewpoints to participate in the debate.

There could be creative institutional arrangements to open up areas of research and joint working on the cultural, political and economic features of Bangladesh. We must think aloud to bring together the Bloomsbury academia and the grassroots Brick Lane community in a unique collaboration that is capable of breaking new grounds.



*Nooruddin Ahmed
Chair, 7th March Foundation
25 July 2022.*



Nitin Gadkari is the Minister for Road Transport and Highways in the Government of India. He has built a career out of promoting roads.



The SSAI provides an enriching environment for students coming to SOAS to study the region of South Asia with our active schedule of seminars and events throughout the academic calendar. In addition to modules being offered as options throughout the school as a part of more discipline-based degrees, there are various ways that students can more specifically explore South Asia at SOAS through formal study*:

01

MA South Asian Studies and Intensive Language

The MA South Asian Studies and Intensive Language two-year programme (or part-time, 4-year) is directed at students with a professional and academic interest in South Asia. It provides students with exceptional opportunities for advanced study of one of the world's most diverse and important regions, with an opportunity for an intensive training in a South Asian language (Hindi, Urdu and Sanskrit) as well as studying a range of modules across the disciplines.

Knowledge of a South Asian language is not a pre-requisite for admission.

This MA South Asian Studies programme includes a summer of intensive language which is currently only offered in India

02

MA South Asia area studies (1-year) – School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics

The MA in South Asian Studies provides exceptional opportunities for advanced study of one of the world's most diverse and important regions.

Students can choose to concentrate on pre-modern or modern South Asia and can acquire a basic knowledge of one of the area's languages.

The degree provides a wide-ranging interdisciplinary analysis of the South Asian countries – India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. Disciplines available include Politics, Economics, Anthropology, Law and History.

The programme attracts students from a variety of backgrounds. While some wish to broaden their previous studies or experience of South Asia, others approach the programme without having a South Asian element to their first degree, but with a desire to focus their previous training on the region.

03

MSc Development Studies with reference to South Asia

Students taking the Contemporary India Pathway will develop a specialist understanding of Development Studies in the context of Contemporary India. Development issues in Contemporary India are a major focus of NGO and international organisations that work in the India. SOAS' recognised strengths in this area, including the establishment of the SOAS South Asia Institute, makes this a unique and exciting opportunity for those interested in Contemporary India.

The degree offers students the opportunity to take up a 2-4 week placement in India or with a London-based organisation during the course of their studies.

04

Centre for International Studies and Diplomacy (CISD)

The programme is delivered by the Centre for International Studies and Diplomacy (CISD) in association with the FCO's Diplomatic Academy, using a combination of multi-disciplinary teaching, cutting-edge research and public discussion of diplomacy and international politics in a globalised world.

This programme is available as a Masters, Postgraduate Diploma and Postgraduate Certificate level.

** Please contact the respective departments for information pertaining to these programmes.*

05

MA Global Security and Strategy (Online)

The MA in Global Security and Strategy takes a critical view to traditional strategic studies, encompassing Africa, Asia and Middle East approaches to grand strategy for peace and security, conflict resolution, international collaboration, war technologies and disarmament.

Modules covering South Asian Region:

1. Indian Foreign and Security Policy
2. Afghanistan: Strategic and Geopolitical Perspectives
3. Economy, Politics, and Society: South Asia
4. Pakistan: Religion, Politics, and Security

Professor Sanjay Srivastava

Satellites, Digital Mapping and Urban Futures: An Ethnography of the State, Capital and 'Citizens' at the Margins of the City (British Academy)

Over the past decade, a wide variety of global technology companies have begun to partner with city governments in India to develop and deploy tools of digital governance and planning. This ethnographically driven research project is an exploration of relationships between technologically suffused discourses and policies of urban futures, their subjects and the urban worlds that result. It investigates contexts where top-down discourses of urban improvement through digital, GIS and biometric technologies are confronted by the everyday life of a city characterised by deep social and economic asymmetries. Through a focus on Delhi and the surrounding National Capital Region, an area at the forefront of urban technological governance, the project aims to understand how new technologies are used in planning and policymaking and their effects on the urban poor, who may have little or no say in their formulation. This research focuses on three aspects: digitisation of land records in 'urban villages' within Delhi's built-up area; biometric surveys of street vendors to plan for their relocation to official 'vending zones'; and satellite mapping of bastis (informal settlements) with the apparent objective of infrastructure improvement. Research will involve fieldwork among urban planners, bureaucrats, management



consultants, IT technicians and other professional specialists, street vendors, and residents of urban villages and shanty towns. Through investigating a largely unexplored aspect of Indian urbanisation – the social dimensions of the pervasive emphasis on technology-as-urban policy – the project seeks to better understand how visions of the future are articulated and materially enacted in Indian urban policy and the consequent possibilities and limits for social inclusion and transformation.

'Gendered Violence and Urban Transformations in India and South Africa' (Economic and Social Research Council in collaboration with Professor Manali Desai, Cambridge University), Dr. Nandini Gooptu (Oxford University), Professor Kamilla Naidoo (Johannesburg University) and Dr. Lyn Osome (Makerere Institute, University of Kampala). A significant manner of understanding social relationships – class, caste, gender, ethnicity, sexuality,

etc. – concerns explorations relationships between social identity and space. Further, spaces have a dual identity: they are both sites upon which different social identities play out in different ways, as well as sites for the formation and consolidation of identities. That is, spaces are both objects as well as processes.

Imagining the city as a series of interconnected spaces, this research explores how several such connections – between the home and the street, family and public spaces, religious and non-religious contexts, for example – bear upon the topic of gendered violence and produce lived social reality. This research is particularly interested in relationships between masculinities and the city. It foregrounds the city as the mise en scène of the making (and un-making) of masculine cultures. Urbanisation in the Global South is a site of an extraordinary cultural, social and economic churn, a context of both new forms of masculinities as well as anxieties about its place in the unsettled hierarchies that cities can frequently produce. This research explores how cultures of masculinity define cities and how urban relations of dwelling, mobility, togetherness, work and leisure are affected by the ways in which men inhabit the city. Drawing upon historical analysis, ethnographic research and analyses of popular culture, it analyses the multiple grounds upon which ideas and practices of gendered violence circulate and the connections they have to urban processes.



Nikita Simpson

(joining SOAS in September 2022)

I am thrilled to be joining the Department of Anthropology and the South Asia Institute at SOAS in September 2022. My work focuses on the anthropology of mental health, understanding the ways in which forms of inequality – tribal, caste, class, race, ethnicity, and gender – are experienced in the mind and body as distress or illness. I have worked on these themes as an anthropologist, but also as a practitioner and policy adviser.

I come to SOAS after having completed my doctoral studies and a recent postdoctoral position at the LSE. My doctoral fieldwork, funded through an LSE Doctoral Fellowship, focused on embodied forms of illness and mental distress amongst Gaddi tribal women in Northern India. Based on fifteen months of fieldwork, I focus on the condition of 'tension' as an emic form of distress indexing inequalities of class, caste, gender, and tribe in this community. I argue that attention to such embodied forms can shed light on the intimate experiences of structural change beyond the Gaddi context. My work, published to date in *Home* (Lenhard and Samanani 2019) and the MAQ, has won a number of prizes at LSE including the Firth Prize, the Rosemary and Raymond Firth Prize and the Alfred Gell Proposal Prize.

I have also been following experiences of inequality and distress through the COVID-19 pandemic. Along with Professor

Laura Bear, I founded and led the Covid and Care Research Group, an intergenerational collective of anthropologists who have generated ethnographic insights on themes like social infrastructures, grief, care, trust, racism, healing, and inequality in the UK. Our work has guided policy decisions at both local authority and national government level. We are now integrating it into the EU pandemic preparedness policy conversation, as part of engagements with the PERISCOPE consortium. Through this work, I have been committed to using innovative and participatory methods that engage citizen anthropologists in research processes. This has culminated in the Youth-Led Visions for Change project, that I co-ran with Leaders Unlocked; and a participatory film that I made with Suad Duale and James Rattee. I learnt this commitment to participatory research and intervention design through my role as Joint Head of Research for the SHM Foundation. I have worked with a vibrant team to scale up the Zumbido Health Model, a peer-led digital psychosocial support program, in South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe; and to found Ember Mental Health, an initiative that supports community based mental health organisations.

As I join SOAS, I hope to continue this mix of academic, participatory, and policy-focused research, especially expanding my engagement in South Asia and with its diasporas. I am currently developing a book manuscript titled 'Tension: The Frequencies of Distress' based on my doctoral thesis,



where I pursue a novel approach to inequality, distress, and the body. I'm exploring creative and somatic methods of communicating my research, drawing on insights from trauma and dance studies. I am also continuing to work on healing from the collective trauma of COVID-19 in the UK, alongside citizen researchers in Birmingham and London.



Professor Navtej Purewal

Border Crossings: Exploring Community and History through Virtual Reality at the 75th anniversary of the Partition



The project explores how memories and public narratives of the partition of 1947 have developed and changed over time amongst the South Asia diaspora. Working with

partners Project Dastaan who have a virtual reality installation as well as three films, the project will gather survey data and qualitative reflections, views, and attitudes with a focus on changes or shifts across generations of the South Asian diaspora in the UK. Project Dastaan VR installations will be held at the V&A, BFI/Southbank, Birmingham Museum, Derby Museum and SOAS are scheduled between July and October 2022.

Connected to this is another project Partition in India and Britain which involves working with researchers and archivists at the Partition Museum in Amritsar and Delhi in exploring the experiences of British and European individuals and families who were stationed in the subcontinent before and at the time of partition in gaining a better understanding of this significant time period through interviews and oral histories.

Anandi Rao

I joined SOAS in January 2022 as a Lecturer in South Asian Studies in the School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics. In term 2, I taught undergraduate and postgraduate modules on South Asian cultural studies and the politics of culture in Contemporary South Asia. Along with colleagues from the History (Eleanor Newbigin and Roy Fischel) and Music (Richard Williams) departments I participated in an online event on the Ramayana titled "History as Storytelling and Storytelling as History". The SOAS History Blog has produced a podcast based on this event: https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/soashistoryblog/2022/05/06/soashistoryblog_podcast_ep4_ramayana/

In terms of my research, I have finalised a book chapter on Hindi translations of Romeo and Juliet which will be published in September 2022. Details of the book can be found here: <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/romeo-and-juliet-adaptation-and-the-arts-9781350109209/>. An article on Habib Tanvir's Kamdev Ka Apna Basant Ritu Ka Sapna will be published in a special issue of Shakespeare Bulletin in October 2022. I worked on the latter during a SOAS organised writing retreat at Chapelgarth estate in North Yorkshire in June 2022.

Finally, I was an invited speaker for a webinar organised by the Centre for Studies in Gender and Sexuality at Ashoka University on June 29, 2022. The theme was "Where is the Trans in Translation".

Dr Avinash Paliwal

After a pandemic-imposed hiatus, I took that flight to Dhaka in May 2022. Meant to aid my understanding of Bangladesh, this trip was truly eye-opening. I didn't realise how good Dhaka biryani is, and how closely knit Bangladeshi elite networks are. The idea was to sensitise myself to the history and contemporary politics of Bangladesh, travel the country a little and do the old-fashioned thing that scholars do: talk to people. It was all a success thanks to the warm hospitality and support of friends in Dhaka and Chittagong.

My interlocutors from across Bangladesh's bureaucratic and political spectrum humoured my questions with patience and offered deep insight about their country and how they view the world. I also met with SOAS alumni at the charming Tagore Terrace in Banani thanks to Farasha Bashir, our alumni ambassador in Dhaka. Through a small gathering, I learnt that SOAS has a considerable footprint in Bangladesh and active ties with colleagues at Dhaka University.

As I write my book, which has become bigger than I ever planned it to be, my three-year stint as the Deputy Director of the SSAI has come to an end. These were tough three years for SOAS that witnessed large-scale institutional restructuring and the pandemic, all of which generated challenges and some unique opportunities for the SSAI. I know that I have come out stronger as we look into the future.

I'm in debt to Ed Simpson, a friend and a mentor, who offered invaluable support and guidance throughout these years.

The SSAI is very lucky to have Sunil Pun, Sanjukta Ghosh, and Farida Danmeri as part of its core team. Their patience and perseverance over the last few years ensured that the institute not only weathers storms but also continues to grow and do what it always wants to do: advance the cause of South Asia.



Ed Simpson

Passage Through Passages: On Roads in South Asia

In spring of 2020, the Brunei Gallery at SOAS hosted an exhibition about the history and politics of Roads in South Asia. The material took us on new and recently rebuilt roads across Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Maldives and India. Travelling through the early twentieth century to the central-Indian "Nagpur Road Plan" of 1943 before heading to the hope, promise, acceleration and hubris of later decades. The exhibition took now-impossible journeys across nation-states, on roads after and before conflicts, and onto coralline oceanic edges.

Endoscopic views from the interior of the road system, and forays across the porous membranes through which pride, money, data, climate and vulnerability are connected to it, heighten the sense of developmental possibility, failure, and the deep ambiguity of road achievements. 'A Passage Through Passages' was inspired by in-depth ethnographic and archival work in five field sites.

A multi-screen film work by CAMP, an internationally-renowned artist group based in Mumbai, was the central feature of the exhibition. CAMP was founded in Mumbai in 2007 and has been producing provocative new work in video and film, electronic media, and public



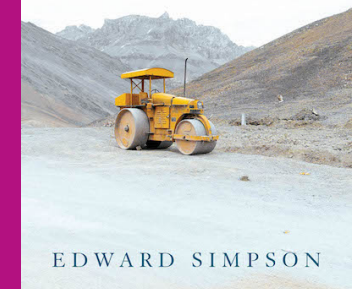
art forms. Their sustained projects have entered modern social and technical assemblies: energy, communication and surveillance systems, neighbourhoods, ships, archives – things much larger than itself.

The exhibition was part of Roads and the Politics of Thought, a European Research Council (No. 616393) funded, 5-year ethnographic study of road-building in South Asia led by Edward Simpson supporting an interdisciplinary team of researchers, curators and administrators from five countries.

The exhibition was accompanied by a programme of talks, discussions and other events – which sadly was brought to an end by the closure of the gallery at the start of the pandemic.

HIGHWAYS TO THE END *of* THE WORLD

Roads, Roadmen and Power
in South Asia



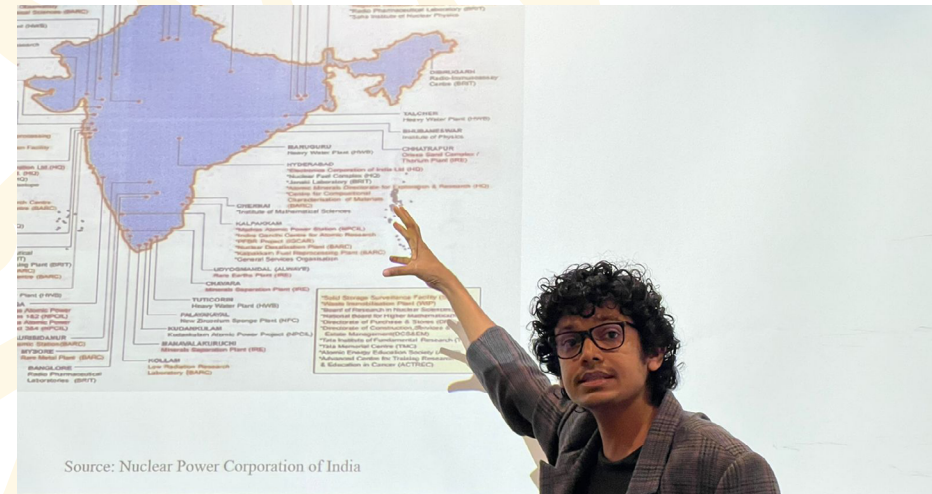
A monograph based on this research material was published in 2022

Dr Ajmal Khan A.T.

I felt honoured and privileged when I was selected as the Charles Wallace Trust Fellow at the South Asia Institute, SOAS, University of London in 2019. However, after two years of uncertainties and multiple travel plans and cancellations due to the covid pandemic and university closure, I arrived in London in the first week of February 2022. I was warmly welcomed by the Director of South Asia Institute, Professor Edward Simpson, Deputy Director, Avinash Paliwal, Executive Officer, Sunil Pun, and Shreela Ghosh from the Charles Wallace India Trust. I came to London with my ongoing work on a book monograph and an edited book that I was working on and mostly worked on them based at the SOAS Library and the British Library. At SOAS, I discussed my work with Edward Simpson and Avinash who provided me with critical feedback and comments, apart from scholars at the South Asia Institute, I gained from my interactions with Thomas Tanner,

Andrew Newsham, Jens Lerche, Barbara Harris White, my co-awardee Sania, and many graduate students and several events held at SOAS, at the British Library and elsewhere in London. I also made use of materials from the SOAS Library and British Library that not only gave me unimaginable access to resources and will further enrich my ongoing projects. At the South Asia Institute, I gave a talk titled “Why do people oppose nuclear power projects in India, the story of Kudankulam and Jaitapur” during the second week of June 2022, presided by Edward Simpson where I received useful questions and comments from the participants. I also had an opportunity to meet Professor Adam Habib, Director of SOAS with Edward Simpson for a friendly chat during a reception organised for the Felix Scholars.

One of my papers titled “Reading Protest Movements against Nuclear Power Projects in the Anthropocene: The Story of Jaitapur and Kudankulam” was selected at a conference on Chemical Exposures organised by the Anthropocene Research Group located at the University College London was an opportunity to learn from the ongoing research at UCL. I went to visit the University of Oxford, Cambridge University, University of Edinburgh, and University of Sussex apart from visiting the London School of Economics, King’s College, University of Westminster, and University College London in



London. I met some academics, scholars, and graduate students from these institutions that enriched my ongoing research and provided me the opportunity to think, expand my horizon and connect with scholars there.

I took the opportunity to visit the National Poetry Library at South Bank as someone interested in poetry and became a member there. I also visited most of the major book shops though books are expensive in the UK! I got books from the comparatively cheaper shops and second-hand books, for the first time I got to read a hard copy of Granta Magazine and The Paris Review. I visited Salisbury to see Stonehenge and prehistoric monuments in the UK. Going to Brighton and swimming in “the Atlantic” for the first time was one of the fantastic experiences that I had during my time

at SOAS. My visit also intersected with Queen’s Platinum Jubilee celebrations and gave me an opportunity to witness the celebratory London and the month of Ramadan in London allowed me to be part of cosmopolitan Iftars conducted in the city. I lived in Elephant and Castle which gave me easy access to a lot of the major attractions in the city like Tate Modern, National Gallery of Modern Art, National Portrait Gallery, National Theatre, British Museum, Albert and Victoria Museum, Natural History Museum, Science Museum, South Bank Centre among others. I made use of my time in London to visit all of them.

I sincerely thank Charles Wallace India trust for this opportunity, and Edward Simpson, Avinash Paliwal, Sunil Pun, Farida Danmeri, and Shreela Ghosh for their help and support throughout.



Dr Sania Muneer

My experience at SOAS.

Being a Charles Wallace Pakistan Trust Fellow at SOAS University of London feels like stepping into a different world where every nation and philosophy has collided yet seems to co-exist. SOAS is a special place especially if one's open to learning. I can't forget a warm welcome by Professor Edward Simpson, Director of the South Asia Institute, Tim Butchard, Secretary Charles Wallace Pakistan Trust and Sunil Pun from SOAS South Asia Institute who were extremely helpful.

The very first day I came to know about the meal...it's courtesy of Hare Krishna stalls that can be found across the city at multiple locations. There's one right outside SOAS every day, so there's no better meal than a free meal when you're on a student budget, especially in a city like London.

During my stay in London, I spent most of my time extensively at the SOAS Library, British Library, and National

Archives at Kew Gardens to access the banned books and archival collection to develop my research project in archival as well as theoretical ways. I got an opportunity to link with different organisations and think tanks such as the Centre for Muslim-Christian Studies and the Centre for Social Justice. At SOAS South Asia Institute, I had opportunities to interact with several faculty members and researchers who were generous with their time and comments. Meeting with Professor Edward Simpson was always a treat. His concern about my research and engaging me with other SSAI faculty members for my research project was incredible. I had a very interesting meeting with Professor Werner Menski Emeritus Professor of South Asian Laws. His comments about my project's theoretical frame helped me shape it in the 'Kite Model' of Law. For this project, the SOAS faculty of law department and religions and philosophies department provided a more vibrant, stimulating, and interdisciplinary research environment. SOAS Library, National Archives, and British Library, specifically British High



Commission's reports on Pakistan's legal framework helped to strengthen the research grounds. I got the opportunity to visit Oxford and Cambridge to meet professors to learn and exchange ideas.

SSAI is in tradition to host renowned scholars and organise lecture series on contemporary issues in South Asia. I attended different lectures in SOAS and the British Library. I found "Why Do People Oppose Nuclear Power Projects in India" by Ajmal Khan interesting.

Finally, student life there is great! London is always alive and great to live in. SOAS has an incredibly diverse student body so I got the opportunity to learn about so many different cultures, it's almost half of the learning experience. And the culture inside the campus was just so alive.

The SOAS South Asia Institute, through the generous support of the Charles Wallace Trust, annually awards two visiting fellowships for a three-month long association with SOAS. These fellowships are awarded to one scholar each from India and Pakistan. It is awarded to those academics who are ready to make the most of a short period of study and discussion at SOAS. Applications are encouraged from those scholars who have had no or little opportunity to do research outside



SYED ALI NADEEM REZAVI

I was a Charles Wallace Visiting Fellow from India in 2007, and perhaps one of the last ones to be “nominated” for it. I was at SOAS for a brief period of 3 months, which perhaps were one of the most academically fruitful in my lifetime: I not only was able to use of the facilities offered to me by the SOAS, and its rich Library, but also make use of British Library, V&A Museum & its Library as well as brief visits to Cambridge and Oxford for a few symposiums & seminars. Having gained many resources not available back home, I was able to not only complete my book *Fathpur Revisited* (OUP, 2013) but also to develop the field of Medieval Archaeology. My academic gains at SOAS, taught me how to use primary sources like the Persian texts of 16th-17th century, along with the evidence gleaned from Mughal miniatures. Both these were used to interpret the structural remains at various medieval sites, specially Fatehpur Sikri. Presently I am trying to combine the visual sources with primary texts in order to further understand the role of the urban professional “classes” of the Mughal period. All this, and much more, became possible due to the exposure which I got as a Charles Wallace Fellow!

ILHAN NIAZ

I spent a summer at SOAS on the Charles Wallace Fellowship in 2006. The research I did there has helped me write two of my books. The first of these is *The Culture of Power and Governance of Pakistan, 1947-2008*. It was published by the Oxford University Press in 2010, and has had multiple editions since then. Presently, a new paperback edition is in process. The second is *The State During the British Raj: Imperial Governance in South Asia, 1700-1947*. This was published by the Oxford University Press in 2019 and is presently being released as a paperback. Both books won the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan’s award for Best Publication in the Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities. *The Culture of Power and Governance of Pakistan* also won the Karachi Literature Festival award for Best Book. I am presently working on my next book, *New World Empires: Cultures of Power and Governance in the Americas* for Routledge, New York. This will serve as the sequel to my 2014 book, *Old World Empires: Cultures of Power and Governance in Eurasia*, which was published internationally by Routledge and in India/Pakistan by the Oxford University Press. What I have been doing is building a framework for understanding governance centred on

South Asian historical experience, which is, in my view, far more relevant to the rest of the world than the evolutionary trajectory of maritime Western powers



Himalay Gohel

Caste Genealogies: Myths and Histories of Dalit castes from Saurashtra, India

My project focuses on Dalit bards, bardic institution and caste histories in Saurashtra, India.

Dalit bards, locally known as Barots primarily write and maintain a record of their patrons' lineage history, socio-economic and religious change and an overall genealogy of members of the endogamous caste group. The patrons are also members of the Dalit castes who solicit these services of bards and in return provide payment in kind. This form of barter system or Gift economy is commonly found in Rajput and other martial castes in western India.

The project, however, limits its focus on the understudied tradition of writing genealogies of Dalit castes within Saurashtra.

The project was a 10-month long ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2020-21 in Gujarat, India.

The fieldwork was funded by the Fürer-Haimendorf Fund and also received fieldwork grant from the Doctoral School, SOAS. It was also during the

months of April and May of 2021 that India recorded the highest numbers of COVID-19 cases. During this highly sensitive and precarious time, Dalit bards and their patrons reflected on the importance of history writing and preservation of heritage. I was able to document one such event of Patrons' names writing in April 2021 which was spread over two days and included a number of rituals, performances and celebrations. The fieldwork also included interviews and photographs, all of which is being

currently organised for writing the dissertation.

Overall, this project analysed the relationship between two caste groups -both of which reside on the margins of Hindu social thought. What is history, belongingness and space for these caste groups? What is personhood for those who have been denied basic dignity?

How does a region play an important role in bardic literature? These are some of the main research questions discussed in this project.



Vidya Venkat



SOAS South Asia Institute and Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), New Delhi collaborated on an online seminar entitled “Unpacking the idea of the people” on April 5-6, 2022, and the eleven essays contributed as part of the workshop have been submitted to Seminar magazine <<https://www.india-seminar.com/>> for publication in the August 2022 issue of the journal titled ‘75 years’. Vidya Venkat, PhD candidate from the Department of Anthropology and Subir Sinha, Reader from the Department of Development Studies collaborated with academics Hilal Ahmed, Associate Professor, and Aditya Nigam, Professor, at CSDS to put together the two-day event.

The seminar used the theme of 75 years of Indian independence as an opportunity to reflect on popular politics and how the idea of “the people” has been deployed in various contexts

to lend credence to specific movements and also in shaping resistance politics. Venkat’s paper, for instance, drew upon her PhD thesis research to demonstrate how the will of the people was incorporated into the Right to Information Act in India, for which civil society played a significant role. Sinha’s paper reflected on the manner in which the right-wing Hindutva discourse in present-day India uses both real and imagined hurts from the past as a finger in the wound to construct the idea of an enemy in the Muslim ‘other’. Other seminar participants included: Prof. Satish Deshpande (University of Delhi), Prof. Nandita Sharma (University of Hawai’i at Mānoa), Prof. Alf Gunvald Nilsen (University of Pretoria), Prof. Sanjay Kumar (CSDS), Prof. Pralay Kanungo (Leiden), Dr. Ankita Pandey (O.P. Jindal Global University), Dr. Harish S. Wankhede (JNU) and Dr. Satish Kumar Jha (University of Delhi).

Megha Kashyup

I joined SOAS in 2019, after receiving the Felix Research Scholarship to pursue my Doctoral Degree. My project at SOAS looks at bodies and borders in South Asia using a mix of community research tools. What motivated me to pursue this project was my years of work in the gender and development space and SOAS’s global reputation for study of Asia, Middle East, and Africa.

I started my career by working with community-based organisations in India then went on to do a professional social work degree. After that, I worked with the Government of Sikkim, a Himalayan state in India, on a project that addressed drug abuse and illicit trafficking. I, later, joined Oxfam India and led a national campaign on gender-based violence against women and girls and managed a multi country project to create safer spaces for women and girls. I was also a global youth advocate for Global Partnership for Education and contributed to their youth engagement strategy.

Once in the UK, alongside my PhD Degree at SOAS, I was working with ActionAid UK, as a Policy Specialist on Women’s Economic Rights, where I developed decolonised knowledge products. One of them is the Black Girl Resists comic book, which breaks down concepts of neoliberalism, neocolonialism, decent work etc. This comic book has now



been translated in 6 languages across the world. NGOs and movements use this as a training tool with unions, domestic workers, and other communities.

I have recently joined London South Bank University, as their first Decolonising Research Fellow, working on interesting stuff as Higher Education in the UK are moving closer towards decolonising academia.

Link to Black Girl Resists:
www.actionaid.org.uk/publications/black-girl-resists-fighting-decent-work

Link to GPE Page:
www.globalpartnership.org/users/mkashyap

Link to LSBU Profile page:
peoplefinder.lsbu.ac.uk/researcher/90z04/ms-megha-kashyap



Zainab Lokhandwala

Indian Farmers and Rights over Bio-Genetic Resources: Towards Greater Food Sovereignty

The conservation and sustainable use of biogenetic resources in agriculture, such as seeds and traditional knowledge, are important elements of food sovereignty. Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound methods. As a legal concept, it has found utterance in many laws and policies across different jurisdictions. In India, many aspects of food sovereignty have been advocated in the past, however the Indian state has largely stood in defence of neoliberal agricultural policies favouring big farmers that engage in technologically intensive and ecologically unsustainable agriculture. There has been a shift in the rights over biogenetic resources, from the hands of farmers to public and private bodies that now control, manage and bear the responsibility to conserve these resources. The diminishing farmers' control and autonomy over biogenetic resources is a consequence of India's neoliberal agricultural policy approach and legal framework that views 'farmers rights' as discursive rights, standing as exceptions to mainstream property rights. These are weak rights and are increasingly becoming irrelevant amidst market changes. This thesis argues that farmers ought to be the primary custodians of rights over biogenetic resources. Food sovereignty and its core elements can provide guidance in theoretically and practically developing stronger biogenetic resource rights that are aimed at benefiting small peasant farmers and reorienting India's food systems.

Publications

- 'Peasants' Rights as New Human Rights: Promises and Concerns for Agrobiodiversity Conservation' (2022) Asian Journal of International Law (here)

- 'Neoliberalisation of Indian Agriculture: Undermining of the Right to Food of Indian Farmers' (2021) Socio Legal Review Forum (here)

Jaffer Abid

Jaffer Abid, a PhD candidate in the School of History, Religions at Philosophies at SOAS, is writing a dissertation on the historical and political thought of Allama Shibli Nu'mani (1857-1914), a seminal figure in the landscape of nineteenth century Muslim reform. Using Nu'mani as a guide to examine the much maligned archive of Urdu history writing for ideas of selfhood and community it demonstrates how India was being imagined as a cosmopolitan, global community which emerges in the encounter between multiple historical and cultural traditions, rather than a national one which is sovereign and limited. Disrupting the dominant narrative that 'secular' Indian and 'religious' Hindu and Muslim nationalisms were the only anticolonial projects in operation, Jaffer's work excavates a vision of India as part of a historically transnational Muslim qawm (Muslim community). In doing so evokes the possibilities of a plural, non-territorially vision of Indo-Muslim self and society that was once being articulated during the late nineteenth and twentieth century in India, complicating the opposition between communalism and nationalism which often structures our understanding of identity during the late colonial period.

**Padma Shri
Dr John Ralston Marr**



Padma Shri Dr John Ralston Marr lecturer in Tamil, Music and South Indian Studies at SOAS 1954–1992, died on 19th May 2022 aged 95.

By his own account, it was Indian music, heard initially on Forces radio during the war, that drew him into a lifelong relationship with the subcontinent. Volunteering for the Indian Army in 1946, he trained in Bangalore and served in Burma and Singapore, alongside fellow officers and troops from South India. Returning to England in 1948 with a collection of records of Carnatic (South Indian classical) music and a fascination for Indian languages and culture, he came to SOAS to study Sanskrit, Tamil, archaeology (under Mortimer Wheeler) and Indian music (under Arnold Bake). PhD research on Tamil poetry took him to Annamalai and Madras (Chennai), where he began formal training in Carnatic vocal music, and developed close friendships with many of the leading Carnatic musicians of the day. In 1954 he was appointed to a Lectureship in the Indology department at SOAS, initially in Tamil. In

the 1960's South Indian Music was added to his brief (his performances of Carnatic vocal music were a highly appreciated feature of departmental events), and in the 1970's he was asked to take on Hindu and Buddhist art history. From this point he concentrated on South Indian art and archaeology, which he taught for the remaining years of his SOAS career, delivering courses that inspired many students. From 1988 he became the Convenor for the Indian module of the highly successful SOAS/Sotheby's Asian art postgraduate Diploma.

On his retirement from SOAS in 1992 he was invited to teach Carnatic music theory at the Bhavan Centre in London, of which he was a founder trustee. He became a central figure at the Bhavan for many years, and his commitment to the education programme was recognised by the award of Padma Shri, one of India's highest civilian awards, in 2009.

John Marr's publications include An introduction to colloquial Tamil, with P Kothandaraman and Arumugam Kandiah (1979), The Pēriya purāṇam frieze at Tārācuram : episodes in the lives of the Tamil Śaiva saints (BSOAS 1979), The eight Tamil anthologies, with special reference to *Puraṇānūru* and *Paṭirrupattu* (1985) and (in Italian) *Letterature dravidiche* (1969).

John had a deep love for India, especially for its music, visual arts and the Tamil language, understanding the interconnectivity of the visual, literary, religious and performance traditions of India, and the importance of oral transmission. Students and friends will remember him for his self-effacing

charm, irrepressible enthusiasm, and encyclopedic knowledge of anything to do with South Asia, not to mention botany, Meso-American archaeology and a dozen other subjects. Generous to students himself, in an interview he paid tribute to the overwhelming kindness he had experienced in India, which had taught him "how to be as well as how to do". He wrote: "Largely through the medium of her music, I have been privileged to share India's tremendous tradition and sense of values of which she has so much to give to the world."

Written by Richard Widdess, Emeritus Professor of Musicology

Rakesh Nautiyal

It was with great sadness that we learnt of the untimely death of Rakesh Nautiyal



on 12 April 2022 due to natural causes. Rakesh was a long-standing colleague, who taught Hindi to generations of students at SOAS until he left in 2020. Rakesh came from a village near Mussoorie, now part of Uttarakhand, and spent most of his life in Mussoorie, where, after a spell in journalism, he





taught Hindi for many years at Landour Language School. Indeed, Hindi teaching and the news were his abiding passions. When not teaching, he would follow Indian political news closely and scour the internet news channels for interesting stories to teach in class.

Rakesh started teaching SOAS students on the Hindi Year Abroad programme in Lucknow in the late 90s, and then came to London and started working at SOAS in 2001. Extremely friendly and approachable, he was a favourite with students and was always happy to offer an extra class, or extra time for catch-up. SOAS was his life, and he could often be found having a smoke by the main entrance of SOAS, chatting with some student or colleague.

With Rakesh's passing we have lost a kind and extremely generous friend who will be remembered with great affection. We extend our heartfelt condolences to his family in India, and to his many friends and former students around the world.

May he rest in peace.

Written by Francesca Orsini, Professor Emerita of Hindi and South Asian Literature

Sunil Kumar

Colleagues at SOAS were deeply upset to learn of the death of Prof. Sunil Kumar on 17th January 2021. World renowned historian of medieval India, Sunil was a member of the History Department at SOAS from 2008-2010.

Sunil's pioneering work on the the Delhi Sultanate revolutionised existing historical perceptions of India's 'Muslim' past, moving beyond a focus on state power to bring to life a rich and vibrant understanding of socio-political relations of this period. With his remarkable research skills, Sunil offered a groundbreaking approach to the way



we should read and understand Persian sources. Through this, he offered a fresh look on the creation of new societies, religious communities, and institutions in a new land, changing the way we conceive this formative period in the history of the subcontinent - and its implication to our days.

Sunil was not at SOAS for very long and indeed, much of his career was based not only in India but in Delhi itself, the city which was at the centre of his work. After two years in London, he returned home to take up the headship of the history department at Delhi University where he has been based until now. But in those two years he left a marked impression on SOAS staff and students alike. Even after his departure, Sunil remained in touch with and attentive to developments in the SOAS history department, particularly in relation to teaching and research on South Asia, and was always happy to offer his guidance and support.

As an outstanding scholar and colleague Sunil will be deeply missed.

Written by Ulrich Pagel

Professor Francesca Orsini

Francesca has been at the forefront of our relationship with South Asia for many years. A literary historian interested in multilingualism, Hindi, Urdu and the public sphere, she has published widely on print history and has been instrumental in redefining several key debates. The quality of her scholarship and the soundness of her professional judgement has been of enduring benefit to all of us at SOAS. Her presence will be missed in many ways.

Francesca first came to SOAS in the 1990s for her PhD, a study which resulted in the indispensable *The Hindi Public Sphere: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism* (2002). She spent some thirteen years lecturing at Cambridge before returning to SOAS in 2006, by which point her research interests had already extended across languages and through time. Having mastered modern Hindi, she progressively added Urdu, Braj Bhasha and eventually Persian to her repertoire, and her publications and projects diversified to match: her second monograph, *Print and Pleasure* (2009) explored commercial publishing across languages and genres in north India in the nineteenth century, for instance. But, and beyond the reams of rigorous and important articles to her name, perhaps her most significant contributions are in the field-defining collections she edited. These emerged from grant-funded collaborative projects, and were particularly striking in the way a range of scholars (not always the best of playmates!) came together to shape critical interventions in key areas of study: whether *Before the Divide* on Hindi-Urdu print cultures (2010), *After Timur Left* on cultural



production in fifteenth-century north India (2014), *Tellings and Texts* on the links between literature, music and performance (2015), or the forthcoming volume on *Hinglish*—Francesca’s collaborators all tell a story of intellectual rigour combined with pathbreaking insights and generous hospitality. And her latest 5-year multi-sited project on *Multilingual Locals and Significant Geographies* promises further key interventions into the Eurocentricity of comparative and world literature.

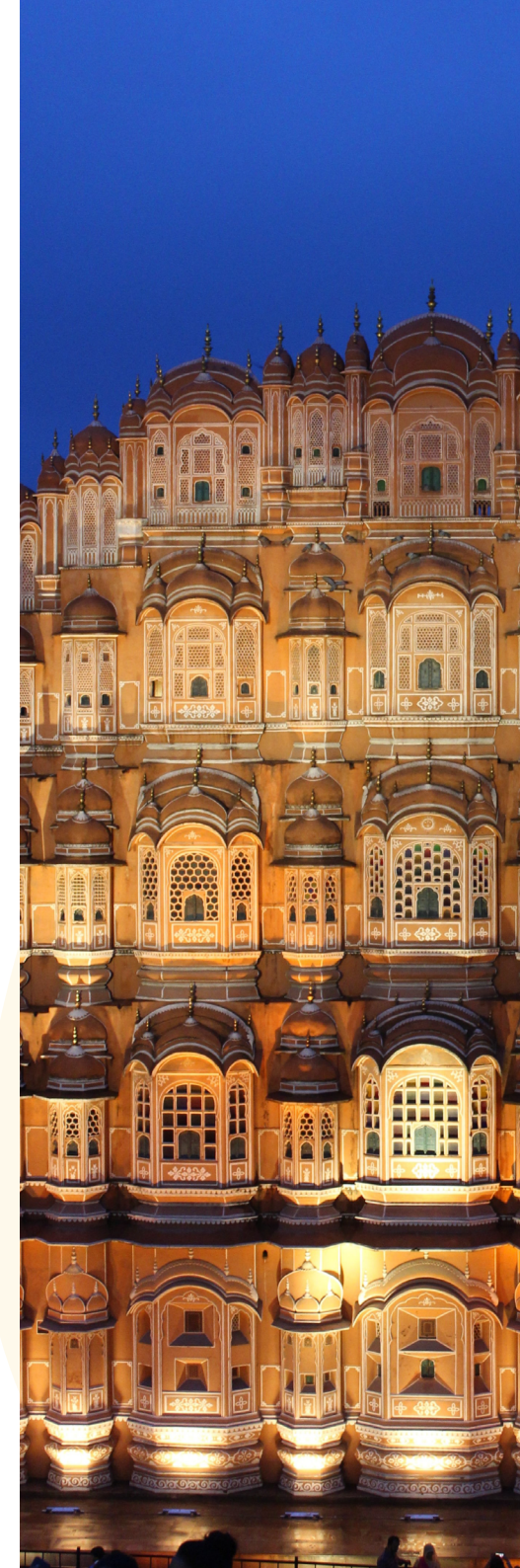
Those same qualities define Francesca as a friend, colleague and for some mentor. That spirit of intellectual inquiry—bordering on indefatigable at times—has always ensured that any seminar she attends will never want for discussion. But if there’s always a question, and perhaps several follow-ups, they were always asked in a spirit of positivity—to explore, develop, collaborate,

and improve. Francesca wore seniority and expertise lightly. Similarly, many colleagues will have benefitted from her keen eye for detail as a research mentor, always encouraging others to reach their full potential—firmly, but empathetically. And her generosity towards friends, colleagues, and students is well known.

Not perhaps inclined to administrative roles, Francesca nevertheless occupied several, including Associate Director of Learning and Teaching in the old Faculty system and, most recently, as REF co-ordinator for the Modern Languages and Linguistics unit. Neither among the most glamorous roles, but each approached with that same spirit of commitment and enthusiasm—even in the face of monstrous bureaucracy—that left her colleagues all the better for her having been there.

Such bureaucracy—including that associated with running a large grant—will now become a thing of the past for Francesca. But we know her research and writing will certainly not stop: with many projects in progress, in the pipeline, or even yet to be conceived of, Francesca’s work will continue to enrich our intellectual lives for many years to come. SOAS South Asia Institute wishes you the very best for whatever is to come next!

Written by David Lunn and Edward Simpson



Professor Rachel Dwyer

It is with a deep sense of personal as well as professional regret that I sit down to write this notice of the retirement of our dear friend and colleague Rachel Dwyer after a bout of ill health. And what to say of an association with SOAS that stretches back to undergraduate days? After her BA in Sanskrit, Rachel moved to Oxford for an MPhil in General Linguistics and Comparative Philology. Then, having spent a couple of years as a computer programmer at British Airways (!), and a curator at the British Library, she returned to SOAS in 1989 as a Training Fellow in Gujarati, and embarked on her PhD on the Gujarati lyrics of Kavi Dayarambhai. Appointed a lecturer in Gujarati in 1991, her 1995 publication of *Teach Yourself Gujarati* marked the beginning of a truly impressive—and extraordinarily diverse—academic publishing career. In terms of authored books alone, this was swiftly followed by *All you want is money, all you need is love* in 2000, the revised PhD on Dayaram in 2001, and *Cinema India* (co-authored with Divya Patel) in 2002. Others included her biography of Yash Chopra in 2002, *Filming the Gods* in 2006, and the 2014 *Bollywood's India* (or, in India, *Picture abhi baaki hai*). And this is not to mention a host of edited volumes, book chapters and articles that have established her as one of the leading experts on Hindi cinema in the world.

Over this long career, quite literally generations of students have been the beneficiaries of Rachel's teaching and mentorship. And the benefits of her extensive connections to the Hindi film world have been felt by many of them. Aside from the many PhDs supervised, and regularly introduced to just the right people in the industry, I know of at least one MA student who was beyond delighted to have a sit-down interview with Amitabh Bachchan thanks to a few well-placed calls.

Of course, all the glitz and glamour of Bollywood might make it appear a less than serious topic of study—and so its detractors have regularly implied. Rachel's work has done much to disabuse academia of that notion, and along with so many of her collaborators has firmly established the importance of taking Indian cinema seriously.

That said, and lest this all get too serious, there's always been a healthy dose of the light-hearted and dare I say mischievous about Professor Dwyer. If I have the story right, I believe it was an old school teacher who once remarked, "I don't know what you're up to, but I don't like it." But this (carefully cultivated?) demeanor masks decades of not just intellectual but also administrative work. Rachel has sat on more committees at SOAS than I'd care to count, including three spells on Academic Board, served twice as Head of Department, and among many other things ran the SSAI's predecessor, the Centre of South Asia, back in the early 2000s. And yet there's also always been the high-profile, crowd-pulling events: Rachel Dwyer "in-conversation" with some of the biggest names in Hindi cinema, be it Vidhu Vinod Chopra, Rishi Kapoor, Karan Johar or Javed Akhtar to name but a few. A well-known face at film and literary festivals in the UK, India, Pakistan and beyond, Rachel has done so much to bring together the popular and the academic understandings of Hindi cinema, albeit in ways in which our brave new world of metrics and "impact" would find hard to quantify.

40 years to the month after arriving at SOAS for her BA, Professor Rachel Dwyer—"Madam Bollywood" as some of her former students nicknamed her—is leaving an institution that we all know has changed profoundly in that time. Happily, it's not an absolute ending: Rachel will retain her links to SOAS as a research associate of the Institute, as well as Professor Emerita



in the department. So, as we look forward to an ongoing association and friendship, and to elephant-related research long in the planning, it seems fitting to end on a note from that magical 1971 Hindi film *Haathi Mere Saathi* (Elephants are my Companions):

Tu yaaron ka yaar hai kitna wafadar hai
Tu pagla na badla sari duniya gayi badal chal
Chal chal chal mere saathi o mere haathi...

You are a friend among friends, how loyal you are,
Oh crazy, don't change, though the whole world has changed,
Come on, let's go, my companion, my elephant...

Rachel, you will be sorely missed, and we wish you well.

by David Lunn

Professor Gurharpal Singh

Gurharpal Singh joined SOAS in 2011 as the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. He overcame a tough field at the presentation and interview stage to take up a challenging role. His period in office saw the creation of the flourishing School of Arts, a major donation from the Alphawood Foundation, and the formation of the SOAS South Asia Institute.

Gurharpal, along with other senior managers in SOAS at that time, had the vision to see how regional Institutes could play significant roles in promoting SOAS in the UK and overseas. He saw that universities are about education, but crucially also mediums for diplomacy and international collaboration. He personally oversaw the process that led to the appointment of Mike Hutt as the first Director. There was enthusiasm and energy around the inauguration of the Institute which attracted a great deal of attention and generated 'buzz'. Gurharpal continued to have an active interest in the Institute when he stepped down as Dean in 2017 to join the School of History, Religions and Philosophies as Professor of Sikh and Punjab Studies.

As Dean, Gurharpal ran the Arts and Humanities faculty on a tight budget, encouraging entrepreneurial activity, and nurturing a future generation of university leaders. He was not afraid of conflict. Looking back, he made some tough calls – perhaps controversial at the time – but generally astute with hindsight.

Before his move to a senior managerial role at SOAS, Gurharpal held named chairs at the universities of Birmingham and Hull. Earlier he taught at De Montford and Birkbeck. In 1976, he was awarded the prestigious Harold Laski scholarship for an undergraduate degree at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He carried on studies in the same institution and was awarded a PhD in 1987 on communism in Punjab.

Gurharpal contributed significantly and generously to

the development and consolidation of Punjab Studies in the UK. In the 1980s, he was a founding member of the Punjab Research Group and later founding editor of the journals *The International Journal of Punjab Studies* (1994) and *Sikh Formations* (2005). His many papers and books display a deep and sincere interest in Punjab, Sikhism and identity and electoral politics. He collaborated widely with colleagues in politics and religious studies, reflected in the many jointly-authored publications.



Gurharpal's research took him into difficult fields. Ethnic and religious violence are sensitive and deeply politicised topics in South Asia and related diasporas. Events in India during his career inflamed lines between religious communities. Iconic moments included: Operation Bluestar, which saw the Indian army storming the Golden Temple in Amritsar in 1984 and the demolition of the Babri Mosque by Hindu nationalists in Ayodhya in 1992. These nation-defining moments raised profound questions about identity politics, secularism and citizenship. At the same time,

Gurharpal was also fascinated by the proliferation of separatist, regionalist and religious movements, whose higher aims were to resist nationalist narratives and hegemony. Taken as a whole, Gurharpal's research explores the tensions and contradictions between these national and local political processes.

Gurharpal's line through contentious terrain has been both pointed and measured. Personally, he was deeply interested in regional studies and loyal to some forms of Punjabi and Sikh exceptionalism. At the same time, he has argued that Hinduism is a form of meta-identity in India which has coalesced around right-wing nationalist politics. His argument, although intended as a critical explanation of the plight of religious minorities, would also be recognised as valid by those he was out to criticise. The skill to employ such deft positioning enhanced by a life studying the way political argument and claims have been made others.

Throughout his career, Gurharpal held numerous visiting fellowships and served professional associations and national peer review panels. In 2018, he was awarded a prestigious fellowship from the Leverhulme Trust to work on a monograph that brought his enduring interests in Sikhism and nationalism into a single frame. I greatly look forward to reading that book, a culmination of research, experience and thinking over many decades.

Being an imported Dean of Faculty is a tough and highly visible way into an Institution. Gurharpal has however also been a scholar and mentor. Even though Faculties at SOAS are momentarily no more, his scholarship and intellectual contributions to knowledge and institutions will endure.

The South Asia Institute wishes you well in retirement and thanks you for the work and connections you have brought to SOAS.

By Edward Simpson

Professor Richard Widdess

What do north Indian classical singers, Nepalese farmers, computer scientists, and Virtual Reality filmmakers have in common? They have all collaborated with Richard Widdess, who retired from SOAS as Professor of Musicology this September, having taught here for a remarkable 41 years.

An ethnomusicologist and scholar of South Asia, Richard is recognised the world over for his contributions to the study of Indian music and musical cultures. He traces his love of Hindustani music back to hearing the celebrated surbahar player, Imrat Khan, in a concert broadcast on the radio. He could not envisage the instruments that produced this kind of sound, and was inspired to seek them out. He studied Music at Cambridge and South Asian Area Studies at SOAS, and then took his Ph.D. on early Sanskrit musicological literature from Cambridge. He was appointed as Lecturer in Indian Music at SOAS in 1979, where he became a founding member of the Centre of Music Studies, which brought together scholars whose leading passion was music but were employed in the disparate regional departments of the university (Richard himself, at first, was teaching Sanskrit). This was pioneering work. The Centre reimagined how music should be studied, by setting the Western canon aside in order to give musical cultures and practices from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and their diasporas the respect and attention they deserved. To this day, Music at SOAS is unique in its approach. In 1997, the Centre evolved into a department in its own right, and over the years Richard served as Head and Research Tutor, as well as working hard to bolster ethnomusicology and the study of Asian Music in the UK.

Richard's research is characteristically meticulous, sensitive, and highly varied in its interests. His earliest work concentrated on historical understandings of raga, from the perspective of Sanskrit musical treatises, grappling with highly technical material and bringing

a critical analysis to the way we think about the evolution of Indian art music. Changing gear, in 2004, he published *Dhrupad: Tradition and Performance in Indian Music*, co-authored with the celebrated singer, Ritwik Sanyal, which provided a comprehensive study of the dhrupad vocal genre, which is generally considered the most prestigious of north Indian classical forms. This book examined the history, evolution, aesthetics, and contemporary culture around dhrupad, and is considered a monumental work in South Asian music studies. While this book cemented Richard's reputation, he moved into yet another direction and began studying traditions of temple singing in Nepal, especially in Bhaktapur. After many years of sitting with singers from farming communities and asking them about their repertoires, he wrote *Dāphā: Sacred Singing in a South Asian City* (2013), which speaks to debates about meaning and performance practices as much as it sheds light on the social and religious life of Nepal. While Richard continues to develop his work across all these areas, he has also worked extensively in the fields of musical analysis and cognitive approaches to music, bringing the arts of South Asia to the attention of researchers with very different disciplinary interests. In recent years, Richard has also developed new ways for the public to engage with Indian and Nepali music, from co-curating exhibitions to working on virtual reality films of temple singing and street music in Bhaktapur.

Over the years, Richard has supervised students across a vast range of subjects and methodologies. I am constantly finding yet more doctoral theses where he appears first in the Acknowledgements. Many of his students have gone on to work in universities with students of their own, forming a collective that is jokingly referred to as the Bloomsbury gharana. Despite always having several research projects and students' dissertations on the go, Richard is extremely generous and open-handed, both as a supervisor and a colleague. He has carried enormous administrative responsibilities, and while his research has been recognised with a Fellowship of the British Academy and the Music Forum



(Mumbai) Award, it is easy to lose sight of his extensive toil on the bureaucratic side of things too. Nonetheless, we are extremely grateful to him for his tireless work, which has helped keep music thriving at SOAS. He will be sorely missed by the School of Arts—now home to the Music department—but we are looking forward to seeing (and hearing!) what new directions he pursues as a Professor Emeritus.

by Richard Williams



Professor Michael J. Hutt



Prof Michael J. Hutt, or Mike as we all fondly know him, has held the unique position of the only Professor of Nepali and Himalayan Studies in the UK, a position that allowed him to carve a deep impact in the field. His 33 years at SOAS saw him in many posts from a Postdoctoral Fellow to Lecturer, Professor, Head of the Department of Languages and Cultures of South Asia (1995-9), Dean of the Faculty of Languages and Cultures (2004-10) and Director of the South Asia Institute (2013-7). Mike has been an enlightening inspiration to so many of us.

With his retirement from SOAS, Nepal studies will lose its London anchor. It has been around him that discussions in the Himalayan Forum Seminars gravitated. Countless meetings, conferences and seminars were organised, and many editions of the European Bulletin

of Himalayan Research were planned. SOAS may lose its long-earned reputation for regional expertise in the Himalayas, that resonates with names such as Ralph Lilley Turner, Christoph von Furer Haimendorf, David Snellgrove, Lionel Caplan, Richard Burkhart and, of course, Michael Hutt.

Rather unceremoniously, the 20th annual lecture of the Britain Nepal Academic Council which Mike co-founded and led (2009-14) will move online in November due to Covid 19 marking perhaps the beginning of a new era for Nepal studies where conceptual engagement rather than location matters.

As Professor Abhi Subedi who held what could be described as the mirror position to Mike's as Professor of English Literature at Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu commented:

Michael Hutt is the only person who has been promoting the study of Nepali language and literature in an English-speaking country. I have not found any other person of his stature and calibre to do that so far. If there were some, we would have already known in so many years. Mike has written on almost all the major themes of Nepali literature.

One has to agree with Professor Subedi but perhaps even more notably, Mike Hutt's pioneering work in the field of Nepali literature, made everyone welcome to discover the marvels of Himalayan literature. Whether those learning to read Nepali through its literature or those accessing Nepali literature through Mike's English translations and discussions of Bhupi Sherchan, Lil Bahadur Chettri and the selected work of Laxmi Prasad Devkota, BP Koirala, Mohan Koirala

and Parijat as presented in his 'Eloquent Hills' (2012).

The well-known author Manjushree Thapa remembers how, despite her heritage, she first learned about Nepali literature through reading Mike's 'Himalayan Voices' (1991) in English which helped to orient herself with the canon of mainstream literature in Nepal. Advanced readers of Nepali were able to work their way through 'Modern Literary Nepali: an Introductory Reader' (1997) which as Rachel Moles one of Mike's former students explained, held its special rewards: 'whenever there was humour in the text, I laughed all the more for having had to work so hard to uncover it'.

Mike taught and laughed in the classroom with generations of students who went to SOAS specifically to learn Nepali from him - perhaps before and often after ploughing on their own through 'Teach Yourself Nepali' (1999) and 'Complete Nepali' (2010). These were the joyful language courses Mike co-authored with Abhi Subedi and Krishna Pradhan who, until recently, taught Nepali language courses at SOAS. Under Mike's guidance students could study Nepali at degree level either as an undergraduate student embarking on a full three or four year programme or as a postgraduate student preparing more swiftly for fieldwork. Many of these students went on to use their language skills in jobs at Reuters, IRC, DFID, GIZ and in many university departments from Vancouver to Hong Kong. More recently Mike's favourite course to teach has probably been 'Politics of Culture in Contemporary South Asia', a course that emphasised his interpretation of cultural studies as a deeply embedded political and critical field, that can only be explored by listening carefully to local voices.





It has been his enthusiasm and profound expertise combined with a curiosity for new topics that made him such an exceptional teacher. I nearly burst out laughing when I recently walked the corridors of SOAS behind a group of his students who exclaimed that he was simply adorable. Students and staff share unanimously positive experiences of working and studying with him, comment on his generosity and his ability to remain unfailingly friendly and supportive. He encouraged us all, allowed us to grow personally and professionally and brought out the best in us.

Of his exceptional work in the field of cultural studies many publications stand out, but are united by the meticulous analysis of voice and text and the fearless tackling of sensitive socio-political topics. Whether amplifying the subdued voices of Lhotshampa refugees (*Unbecoming Citizens* 2003) that made him a persona non grata in Bhutan, or his readings of Maoist memoirs (2012), Mike has never shied away from complex topics that marked injustice. Perhaps his work on self-censorship in the Nepali media (2006) brings this most acutely to light.

Today regarded most highly both in western academia as well as in Nepal where he has gained some kind of celebrity status and is not only frequently complemented in the media for his soft spoken, educated Nepali but requested as lecturer and guest speaker as soon as he touches ground. This has not always been the case. His first edited book *'Nepal in the Nineties'* (1993) united solely white male academic contributors in talking about the subject of Nepal without providing a floor for Nepali colleagues. The volume was rightly criticised for its narrow

editorial choices. But while many academic institutions still discuss decolonisation and attainment gaps, Mike has long made it his mission to read, discuss, quote and promote work on the Himalayas in Nepali and Hindi as well as in English. It still took me by surprise to see that even in his two contributions to *'Nepal in the Nineties'* he exclusively referenced Nepali sources, well, with one exception. As David Gellner put it more aptly: Mike is not only linguistically bilingual but conceptually bilingual.

In the past three years Mike began to work on the human interpretation of disasters with an AHRC/GCRF funded project on the aftermath of the 2015 Earthquakes in Nepal. His recent work discusses post-earthquake power dynamics leading to Nepal's new constitution (*Before the Dust Settled* 2020), the creation of a national icon (*Revealing What is Dear* 2019) as well as discussing poetry and songs written in response to the disaster.

As the pandemic now changes the public sphere in Nepal beyond recognition while shaking its democratic institutions, Mike hopes to further explore the human side and the societal impact of disasters. He applied for external funding that if granted will bring him back to Nepal and to SOAS. We all cross our fingers that this project will succeed and meanwhile wish Mike a nice holiday rather than accepting his intellectual retirement from academia. Whatever his next project, his next translation and his next article will be, we look forward to reading it. Or as Seira Tamang put it so brilliantly, we will all ignore this nonsense talk of 'retirement'.

by Stefanie Lotter

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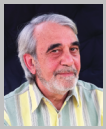
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