



SOUTH ASIA  
INSTITUTE

SOAS University of London

# SSAI Annual Review

2014/15

[www.soas.ac.uk/south-asia-institute](http://www.soas.ac.uk/south-asia-institute)



## From the Director Professor Michael Hutt



Welcome to the 2014-15 Annual Review of the SOAS South Asia Institute, which records the main achievements of the new Institute's first full academic year.

At SOAS we claim that our coverage of South Asia is distinguished by its breadth, its depth and its regional vision, and I believe that our activities over the past academic year have demonstrated the truth of this claim amply and repeatedly.

Indeed, it has been an extraordinarily busy year. The public launch of the Institute on 18 May was our biggest event, and this is reported separately on pages 4-5. In addition to this, we hosted and organised nine workshops and conferences (on topics as diverse as gender justice/injustice; religion and conservation; Dalit Studies; Hindi-English bilingualism; and higher education in South Asia), more than twenty lectures and seminars, and a dozen film screenings, book launches, roundtables and 'in-conversations'. A full listing of events may be found on pages 20-22.

Two members of the Institute secured funding from the European Research Council for major research projects: James Mallinson for his Hatha Yoga project ('Mapping Indian and Transnational Traditions of Physical Yoga through Philology and Ethnography') and Francesca Orsini on world literature ('Multilingual Locals and Significant Geographies: a bottom-up approach to world literature'). With ongoing projects on 'Roads and the Politics of Thought: ethnographic approaches to infrastructure development in South Asia' and 'Asia Beyond Boundaries', this means that academic members of the Institute are now leading three major ERC-funded projects, and are involved in four.

The provision of multi-disciplinary research training for postgraduate students working on South Asia is a priority for us, and we were delighted to welcome students from SOAS and other UK universities, and from France, Germany and India, to our graduate student workshop on 'South Asia Cityscapes' on 8 June.

A HEFCE research training grant also enabled us to take eighteen SOAS Masters students working on South Asia-related dissertations away to Cumberland Lodge in Windsor Great Park later in June for a two-day residential workshop on the use of South Asian languages in dissertation research. We intend to make both of these events regular fixtures in the Institute's calendar.

I made two visits to India during the year, which I report on elsewhere in this Review (see p.11). In July we were delighted to receive the gift of two very large Kalighat pata paintings from the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Smt. Mamata Banerjee, during her visit to London.

The study of South Asia has been core to the SOAS mission throughout the first 99 years of its existence. The South Asia Institute looks forward to providing leadership during the School's centenary year and beyond. During the coming year we will continue to pursue new opportunities to share our expertise more widely, with governments and the corporate sector in particular, and to raise funds for projects, posts and scholarships.

I am enormously grateful to Dr Tej Purewal and Ms Sana Shah for being the best colleagues imaginable, and for their invaluable contributions to our work during the year, and to Jane Savory for her steadfast support of everything we do. Sadly, Sana, who has been with us since day one, took up a new position at Humboldt University in Berlin in August: she will be sorely missed, but we wish her well. I would also like to thank Lauren Welch and her colleagues in Development and Alumni Relations, with whom we have worked intensively and productively, and all the many colleagues, students, alumni and friends who have participated in and supported our numerous initiatives over the year.

## South Asia Across Borders: Launching the South Asia Institute (May 2015)

The SOAS South Asia Institute was publicly launched before an overflowing Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre on 18 May 2015. The event began with speeches from Professor Nirmala Rao, SOAS's Pro-Director for Teaching and Learning, and the Institute's Director and Deputy Director, who explained the purpose, vision and aims of the new Institute.

The centrepiece of the event was a panel discussion of the theme 'South Asia Across Borders'. The panel consisted of the SOAS Honorary Fellow Shiv Shankar Mukherjee, who is a former Indian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom and former Indian Ambassador to Nepal; Maleeha Lodhi, Pakistan's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York; the writer, publisher and co-organiser of the Jaipur Literary Festival, Namita Gokhale; and the author, journalist and Founding Editor of Himal Southasian magazine, Kanak Mani Dixit.

The panel was expertly moderated by the broadcaster Mishal Husain, who began by asking the panelists to reflect on what united the countries and peoples of South Asia. Maleeha Lodhi said that the world needed a new characterization of South Asia, and to move away from the 'three Cs' of 'curry, cricket and conflict' to the three more compelling Cs of 'connectivity, creativity and culture'. Shiv Mukherjee said that beyond the ties of history and culture, South Asia was still conflict ridden, but that we were already seeing a new era of democratisation in the region. Namita Gokhale cited U.R. Ananthamurthy in her reply, saying 'the more you search for unity the more you are struck by the diversity; the more you search for diversity the more you cannot forget the underlying unity'. In this respect, she said, linguistic borders were more important than political lines. Kanak Dixit described much past scholarship on South Asia, rather than on individual nation states, as 'the preserve of innocents, the befuddled and romantics.' This, he said, was why the SOAS initiative was important. South Asia suffered from 'a bifurcation of cultures', he said: the Institute should give depth to the scholarship on connectivity and create new stakeholders in the concept, so that 'the next bomb blast does not take us all back to where we started'.



The discussion then ranged across the challenges and opportunities presented by demographic growth, questions of economic development and educational provision, and the prospect of better relations between India and Pakistan. After a number of questions from members of the audience, including SOAS Honorary Fellow Michael Palin, Mishal Husain brought the proceedings to a close with a cry of 'South Asia Zindabad!'.

Those who attended the launch will remember it as much for the contributions of our students and alumni as for the speeches and panel discussion. As they arrived, guests were greeted in the foyer by the haunting music of the sarangi, played by a Music Department alumnus, Morgan Davis. The formal proceedings opened with a beautiful rendition of Tagore's 'O Je Manena Mana' by Sahana Bajpaie, a SOAS alumna who now teaches our courses in Bengali. Before the panelists took their seats, we were treated to an electrifying performance by a SOAS Masters student, Amrit Kaur Lohia, of her own adaptation of Amrita Pritam's Panjabi poem Ajj Akhaan Waris Shah Nu. And finally Priyanka Basu, who has recently completed her Ph.D on the kobigaan of Bengal, rounded off proceedings with an exquisite performance of classical dance in the Odissi style.

The launch was followed by a reception in the Brunei Suite, featuring drinks and food from the region. A video of the launch event is permanently archived on the Institute's website ([www.soas.ac.uk/ssai](http://www.soas.ac.uk/ssai)) and freely available to anyone who wishes to view it.



Left to right: Namita Gokhale, Kanak Mani Dixit, Shiv Shankar Mukherjee, Maleeha Lodhi, Mishal Husain



## SOAS South Asia Institute Research Themes

### 1. Resources Under Pressure.

The finite nature of natural resources presents pressing challenges to the sustainability of the environment for future generations. South Asia's people face a significant shortage of replenishable water and mass food insecurity, exacerbated by both rapid economic growth and climate change. Our specialists in development studies and anthropology focus on pressures on land, the environment and food and water supplies; the delineation of private and public space; the relationships between agriculture, nutrition and health; the effects of climate change; and the development of infrastructure and roads.

### 2. Citizenship, Rights and Inequality.

Imperatives to address social and economic inequality run across the South Asia region, raising questions about how governments and communities are responding to local and global discourses of inequality and exclusion. Debates on caste and gender-based violence and injustice and the rights of religious minorities and migrants continue to raise questions about political rights in South Asia and in South Asian diaspora communities around the world. SSAI scholars working in the fields of law, history, politics, development studies and migration and diaspora studies focus on inclusion and exclusion on the basis of gender, caste, language and differing ability; migration networks and regimes; the understanding of political rights; and labour and social movements.

### 3. The Politics of Culture and Religion.

The cultural realm transcends many facets of South Asian societies and calls for sophisticated linguistic and cultural analysis. Religion, in particular, shapes the evolution of mainstream processes and politics (whether by overtly representing religious identities or merely utilizing religion to mould vote banks and publics), while also existing on the fringes and margins of society in other forms. Our political scientists and historians and our specialists in language, literature, and religion research constructions of national and religious identities; the exercise of Indian soft power; textual production and circulation; the creation of publics across regions and periods; popular religious movements; and linguistic hybridity.

### 4. Interactions and Interventions in the Arts.

Creative expression and South Asia's cultural industries reflect how South Asian societies interact, respond and intervene through artistic mediums. For example, the Bollywood film industry and the region's burgeoning 'art house' cinema all voice cultural analysis and critiques of society. SSAI researchers working in media, music, film studies and anthropology investigate the production, distribution and consumption of films; urban soundscapes; literary festivals; and patterns of broadcasting, listening and viewing.

### 5. Lineages of knowledge and power.

The means by which power is exercised, and the tools it uses, are widely understood to rely not merely upon force but also (and perhaps more significantly) upon systems of knowledge. The exploration of lineages of knowledge and power is a strength of the SSAI, given SOAS's long tradition of critically analysing historical and contemporary trajectories of power. Our historians research topics including South Asian urban modernities; South Asian knowledge systems; pre-colonial regional identities and non-metropolitan cultures; and justice in the pre-modern period.

### 6. Prospects for the Indian economy.

The fast-growing Indian economy is included in the BRICS group along with Brazil, Russia, China and South Africa, and is amongst the G-20 major economies, according to the WTO. Our economists and our specialists in financial and management studies focus on India in the global economy; changing patterns of trade specialization and public finance; technological and strategic interactions between Indian firms; formal and informal lending; labour-management relations; and Special Economic Zones.

## MA Intensive South Asian Studies

We wish to foster an understanding of South Asia in our students that is of the greatest possible depth and sophistication, and is based upon cultural and linguistic fluency as well as advanced training in an academic discipline. We have intellectual and academic resources to achieve this which exceed those of any other British university.

Such a potent combination of skills cannot be acquired at undergraduate level in any UK university other than SOAS. Nor can it be imparted within the framework of a conventional British one-year Masters programme. Hence the launching in 2014 of the Institute's flagship taught programme, its two-year MA Intensive South Asian Studies.

This programme will produce graduates who are equipped for research at doctoral level, under the expert supervision of one or more of our sixty-five South Asia-focused academics, or for professional roles in or relating to the region.

During their first year of study at SOAS, students take two compulsory courses (one being a course in Bengali, Hindi, Nepali or Urdu, and the other 'The Politics of Culture in Contemporary South Asia'), plus two disciplinary courses chosen from a list of approved options.

After this first year of study at SOAS, students spend one semester (August-December) at a university in the region with which we have a student exchange agreement. This is to continue their study of the language they studied at SOAS during their first year, to take other Masters-level courses, and to gather materials for their dissertations. In exchange for this, SOAS hosts study visits by PhD students from the partner university.

'In 2014, we were able to offer 2.5 fully funded HEFCE studentships to students on this degree. The number of applications we have received for 2015 entry suggest that demand for this unique SOAS Masters degree will increase significantly in the years to come.'

In 2016 we will also welcome the first cohort of students onto our MSc Contemporary India Studies: please see our website for further details of this new degree.



### Are you interested in our MA or MSc?

Please contact:

**SOAS Student Recruitment Office,**  
Ground Floor, Main Building  
SOAS, Russell Square,  
London WC1H 0XG

Telephone: +44 (0)20 7898 4700  
Email: [study@soas.ac.uk](mailto:study@soas.ac.uk)  
Website: [www.soas.ac.uk/sro/](http://www.soas.ac.uk/sro/)

## Recent Achievements by SSAI Scholars

**Somnath Batabyal** is editor of the recently published book *Environment, Politics and Activism: The role of media* (Routledge, 2014), which explores how the discourse of environmental politics is being shaped by media and related technology across the world. This past year, Somnath has also written book chapters on the 2014 Indian elections and urban environmentalism in Delhi.

**Crispin Branfoot's** exhibition on Linnaeus Tripe, the pioneering Victorian photographer of south India and Burma in the 1850s, was on display at the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London throughout the year. He also delivered talks on aspects of Tripe's photography at the Madras Institute of Development Studies and Yale University. Crispin has recently been awarded a Leverhulme Research Fellowship in order to continue his research on the construction, renovation and conservation of religious architecture in south India in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

**Philippe Cullet** organised a workshop on Mining, Law and Equity in May 2014, centred around lessons from India. He also organised three workshops on climate change and groundwater management with the National Law University Delhi (NLUD). In August, Philippe gave a special lecture for the School for Legal Studies at Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University. He is currently drafting a comprehensive water law for the State of Rajasthan. Philippe co-edited *Sanitation Law and Policy in India – An introduction to basic instruments* (2015) and published a book chapter on water regulation and public participation in the Indian context.

**Rachel Dwyer** celebrated the release of her new book *Bollywood's India: Hindi cinema as a guide to contemporary India* (Reaktion Books, 2014) with launches in London and across India (Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai). She also edited four volumes on Bollywood, a Routledge Major Works Collection (2015) and co-edited *Key Concepts in Modern Indian Studies* (Oxford University Press, 2015). She published two chapters in edited volumes. In addition, Rachel helped organise several events in SOAS, including the visit of the Hindi film director and producer, Vidhu Vinod Chopra.

**Peter Flugel** organised the 17th Annual Jaina Studies Workshop at SOAS on Jaina Tantra and the 15th Annual Jaina Lecture at SOAS, delivered by Prof Alexis Sanderson (Oxford) on 'The Jaina Appropriation and Adaptation of Śaiva Ritual: The Case of Pādliptasūri's Nirvāṇakalikā'. He also co-organised with Professor Nalini Balbir (Sorbonne, Paris) the 16th World Sanskrit Conference in Bangkok, at which he chaired the Jaina Panel. He recently published *Jaina Scriptures and Philosophy* (Routledge, 2015), with co-editor Olle Qvarnstrom (Lund University).

**Jonathan Goodhand** secured funding from the ESRC for a major project entitled 'Borderlands, Brokers and Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka and Nepal: War to peace transitions viewed from the margins'.

**Stefanie Lotter** co-organised and presented a paper at the 13th Nepal Study Day, an event ran by SSAI in collaboration with the Britain-Nepal Academic Council. She also presented a paper at the 'Weapons in Anthropology Museums' conference at the Horniman Museum, London, and at the 'Cultural Elites in Contemporary India' conference in Aarhus, Denmark.

**James Mallinson** has been awarded an ERC Consolidator Grant worth €1.85m to conduct a five-year project on the history of yoga entitled 'The Hatha Yoga Project, mapping the history of transnational physical yoga through philology and ethnography'. The project started in Autumn 2015.

**Alessandra Mezzadri** has published several articles and papers this year based on her research into sweatshop regimes and labour practices in the Indian garment industry. Her papers have appeared in *Competition and Change*, *Development Viewpoint*, *CDPR* and she has written articles for *New Internationalist*, *The Conversation UK* and *Open Democracy*.

**Satoshi Miyamura** published two book reviews this year: one in the *Economic and Political Weekly* of Emmanuel Teitelbaum's *Mobilizing Restraint: Democracy and Industrial Conflict in Post-Reform South Asia*, and one in *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* of George J. Kunnath's *Rebels from Mud Houses: Dalits and the making of the Maoist revolution in Bihar*. He has presented on the industrial restructuring of labour in India at a recent Economics Department Seminar at the University of London.

**David Mosse** won the award for Best Book in Hindu-Christian Studies for his monograph, *The Saint in the Banyan Tree: Christianity and Caste Society in India* (University of California Press). His book was the focus of a panel at the American Academy of Religions conference in San Diego, November 2014. David also published the book *Caste and the Conundrum of Religion and Development in India* (Routledge, 2014).

**Francesca Orsini** has been awarded an ERC grant for a project entitled 'Multilingual locals and significant geographies: a bottom-up approach to world literature', comparing north India, the Maghreb, and the Horn of Africa, and incorporating scholars and writers in Morocco, Ethiopia, India, UK and France. Francesca recently co-edited *Tellings and Texts: Music, Literature and Performance in North India* (Open Book Publishers, 2015) with Katherine Scholfield (King's College London) and co-edited *After Timur Left: Culture and Circulation in Fifteenth-Century North India* (Oxford University Press, 2014) with Samira Sheikh (Vanderbilt University). She has additionally published two chapters in edited volumes.

**Nigel Poole** is currently researching agriculture and nutrition value chain linkages with the DFID-funded multi-institutional LANSa research programme in South Asia, covering Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Nigel has been implementing with local partners an exercise mapping agriculture and nutrition stakeholder and policies in Kabul and four Provinces of Afghanistan.

**Navtej Purewal** organised a workshop in February on gender justice and injustice in South Asia with respected academics and activists, including Kavita Krishnan and Tanika Sarkar. She authored a letter to the Independent, signed by academics, activists and voluntary sector signatories, which was cited as part of the parliamentary debate that resulted in the defeat of the UK Criminal Amendment Abortion Bill in February 2015. Navtej has been invited to several public lectures and workshops in the UK, the Netherlands, and the US. In addition, she published two articles (in the *IDS Bulletin* and the *Journal of Ritual Studies*) and a book chapter on Pakistan's Christians.

**Rahul Rao** was awarded a Leverhulme Research Fellowship for a project entitled 'Out of Time: Temporal anxieties of queer postcoloniality'. The project will investigate themes of memory, history and futurity in the work of queer movements in Uganda, India and the Anglophone Caribbean. Rahul has published three journal articles (in *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, *London Review of International Law*, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*) and two book chapters this year.

**Pasquale Scaramozzino** recently published the results of his investigation with economist Antra Bhatt into the relationship between federal transfers and fiscal deficits in India during 1990-2010 in *Public Finance Review*.

**Amrita Shodhan** published an article entitled 'The Sidi Badshah of Western India: The Politics of Naming' in the *Journal of African Diaspora Archaeology and Heritage* (2015).

**John Stevens** was interviewed for NTW Europe television, discussing his research on Keshab Chandra Sen and Bengali. He also appeared on BBC Radio 4's *In Our Time* with Melvyn Bragg, discussing Rabindranath Tagore, and gave a public recitation of a Tagore poem in honour of the Chief Minister of West Bengal during her visit in July.

**Simona Vittorini** published a review of Chris Ogden's *Indian Foreign Policy: Ambition and Transition* in the journal *Commonwealth and Comparative Studies* (2015) and co-edited a book chapter in *Competing Visions of India in World Politics: India's Rise beyond the West* (Palgrave, 2015).

**Burzine Waghmar** was recently elected to the governing body of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute, which will be celebrating its centenary in 2016. He delivered a paper at the 113th session of the Human Rights Council, UN, Geneva on the on-going Baloch insurgency. Throughout the year Burzine has given media interviews on a range of South Asia-related topics.

**Richard Widdess** delivered this year's Alfred Hook Lecture at the Conservatorium of Music, University of Sydney on 'Cognition and South Asian music'. In June, he assisted in organising a Music Day in support of the Department of Music, Kathmandu University, Bhaktapur, Nepal, which suffered structural damage in the April-May earthquakes. Richard was recently elected a Fellow of the British Academy, in recognition of his outstanding research. Richard published an article entitled 'Orality, writing and music in South Asia' in *Musicology Today* (2014) and a chapter on Newar Devotional Music.

## SOAS South Asia Institute in the Media

The South Asia Institute provided expert commentary and analysis on a range of topics and issues pertaining to South Asia during 2014-15. Through pieces written by academics in both print media and electronic sources, alongside citation of scholars providing expert opinions, the South Asia Institute makes its members' expertise more readily available to a wider public, through engagement with the media and beyond. Some examples of our commentary follow.

### Politics

Dr Subir Sinha, Senior Lecturer in Institutions and Development, was frequently cited on various political issues in India, providing commentary on the authenticity of politicians (BBC World Service), government censorship (Times of India), and on the victory of a Muslim party in district elections in Maharashtra (Wall Street Journal). Lecturer in International Relations, Dr Sutha Nadarajah, commented on the implications for Sri Lanka's domestic and foreign relations of the presidential elections and a change in government early in 2015 (Bloomberg).

### Social and Environmental Issues

Following the devastating earthquakes in Nepal, Professor Hutt was widely cited on the damage to historical sites and architectural treasures (The Guardian, Wall Street Journal, Live Science, Taipei Times). Professor Edward Simpson, Professor of Social Anthropology, also described potential reconstructive efforts in Nepal (BBC Radio 4, La Tribune), drawing upon his published research on disaster and development in Gujarat, western India. Other significant and varied issues have provided opportunities for commentary by SSAI members, both in terms of writing individual pieces and in providing expert opinions. Dr Alessandra Mezzadri, Lecturer in Development Studies, has written several pieces on sustainability and ethics in the textile industry (New Internationalist, Open Democracy), as well as being cited in the Huffington Post. Dr Bhavani Shankar, Professor of International Food, Agriculture, and Health has written on the unsustainability of palm oil and Dr Subir Sinha commented on the heatwave that afflicted India in May 2015 (BBC World Service).

### Contemporary Society

Dr Navtej Purewal has been a frequent commentator in the British press on the issue of sex selective abortion, particularly discussing the amendment to the UK's Abortion Act 1967 in February 2015 (The Independent, Vice). Dr Purewal also appeared on BBC Newsnight talking about gender selection. Dr James Mallinson, Lecturer in Sanskrit and Classical Indian Studies, has featured on BBC broadcasts, discussing the first International Day of Yoga in June 2015 and in a BBC documentary about his ordination as a mahant at the Kumbh Mela at Nasik. Professor Rachel Dwyer, Professor of Indian Cultures and Cinema, has commented widely on Bollywood and Indian film culture (Live Mint, The Hindu, The Guardian, NRCQ). Professor Gurharpal Singh, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, commented on the relationship between food and faith, focusing on Sikhism (BBC World Service) and appeared on Channel News Asia offering analysis of India's role in World War II and the impact on post-war India.

### Culture and Languages

Chair of the Centre for the Study of Pakistan, Dr Amina Yaqin, provided expert commentary for the BBC on the role of music in Muslim culture and daily life, broadcast on both BBC Radio 4 and the BBC World Service. Languages and literature have featured widely in print and electronic media this year. Professor Almut Hintze, Zartoshty Brothers Professor of Zoroastrianism, appeared in several Indian newspapers in relation to her taught language course of Avestan (Indian Express, Pune Mirror). Mr Rakesh Nautiyal, Senior Lecturer in Hindi, was featured in a BBC Radio programme, commenting on the languages spoken in India today. Dr John Stevens, Leverhulme Postdoctoral Fellow, provided analysis on a BBC Radio programme on Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore. In addition, Professor Michael Hutt and the SSAI featured as part of extensive coverage of SOAS' memorandum of understanding agreement with the West Bengal government, including academic cooperation on South Asian studies and to advance the study of Bangla, taught at SOAS since its foundation (The Times of India, Forbes).

## Alumni: Taking the South Asia Institute to India

The SSAI Director made two trips to India in 2015. On the first, in February, he was joined by Matthew Gorman, Director of Development, Alumni and External Engagement and together they visited Delhi, Kolkata and Mumbai to introduce the new South Asia Institute to alumni, offer holders, business leaders, philanthropists and friends of SOAS, and to both longstanding and potential new partners.

In each city, friends of SOAS hosted alumni gatherings at which Michael Hutt gave a presentation on the vision and aims of the new Institute. Each was very well attended and convivial and we were glad to welcome several other SOAS academics (Lawrence Saez, Philippe Cullet, Rachel Dwyer) to these gatherings.

Every one of the alumni to whom we spoke during this tour had warm memories of their time at SOAS, and several informed us that it had completely changed their lives. All were enthusiastically supportive of the School's decision to further develop its engagement with and academic focus on India and South Asia.

One of the SSAI's aims is to enhance and deepen SOAS's relationships with institutions of higher learning in South Asia. A notable achievement of the two trips has been the finalisation of a new student exchange agreement with Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in Delhi, and the signing of a new MoU with Presidency University in Kolkata. Michael Hutt also paid visits to the National Law University, Lady Shriram College, Ambedkar University and the South Asian University in Delhi, Presidency University and the West Bengal Government in Kolkata, and Jnanapravaha in Mumbai to explore the scope for new collaborations in teaching and research. Very interesting meetings were also held with senior officials at FICCI (the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry), CII (the Confederation of Indian Industries), the Association of Indian Universities, the Delhi Rotary Club, the Indian Council of Cultural Relations, and the INLAKS Foundation, and with the British Council and British High Commission in Delhi and the Deputy British High Commission in Kolkata.



## Charles Wallace India Trust Fellowship Reports



### March-June, 2015

My stay went very smoothly thanks to the efficiency of the SSAI colleagues. I realized how diverse the research interests of SOAS South Asianists are, ranging from environment and everyday life in Bhutan to questions of multiculturalism and Muslims in Britain. Though my office room was ready with a beautiful view of a Magnolia in full bloom, I must confess that I spent much of my time in the British Library. My research on a women's weaving cooperative society in colonial Assam has been immensely enriched by the extensive material I could access there. The vast reservoir of reports on cooperative societies I consulted for Assam, Bengal and Punjab renewed my perspective on the dynamics of cooperative societies, from the ideological swadeshi programme to the political economy of a colonial society. I had the privilege of sharing my research at a seminar at SOAS on 29 April and I really appreciated the interest with which the audience engaged with my presentation. I also presented a paper at the Writing Women's Lives Conference at Bath Spa University in April, which provided an opportunity to connect with researchers from different universities across the UK. My search for women interveners in colonial Assam took me from the Private Papers of Lady Reid at the British Library to the Papers of Barbara Bruce at Bradford University and eventually to the archives at the Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge.

In between these trips I attended seminars, talks, and exhibitions at several institutes, such as the Feminist Classics Revisited Seminar at Goldsmith College, One Hundred Years of Women's International League for Peace celebration at Queen Mary College, not to mention the completely diverse range of seminars that were being held at SOAS every single day: one was spoilt for choice between a talk on a seventeenth century art dealer and electoral politics in Bangladesh. I had a wonderful time chairing a session and participating in the SSAI's South Asia Cityscapes graduate workshop in June.

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For information on how to apply for the Charles Wallace Trust Visiting Fellowship, please visit:  
[www.soas.ac.uk/south-asia-institute/fellowship/](http://www.soas.ac.uk/south-asia-institute/fellowship/)

SOAS always seemed the place to be for a South Asianist. In India, of course, I hardly call myself one: we work on gender history, vernacular literature, the public sphere and so on— but location does shift the axis of our perspective and I was eager to experience this as I embarked on the CWIT-SOAS journey.

Apart from the great academic environment that SOAS provided, every day brought something new in London, and staying at the nearby Indian YMCA brought many benefits. Strolling along/against the crowd in Central London while I could leisurely walk back from the library or office seemed like a dream, and the best way to discover the nuances of a historic city.

I had the rare privilege of seeing the Vrindavani Vastra (a seventeenth century Vaisnava sacred tapestry woven in Assam) now housed at the British Museum Store at Blythe House. I am grateful to the CWIT Secretary Richard Alford for his interest in my research and for arranging this visit. I would also like to thank Mari Miyamoto, Sana Shah, Michael Hutt, Tej Purewal and Jane Savory, and my friends Lipika Deka, Diganta Nath and Niyor of Loughborough University.

This trip would not have been possible without my parents taking turns to look after Anwesh, who turned eleven while I was away, my husband Dinesh's long distance management, and our help Rina's care of the kitchen. Last but not least, I would like to thank the Charles Wallace India Trust and the South Asia Institute, SOAS for giving me this opportunity to visit and connect with UK academia.

Tezpur, 23 July, 2015.

## Visiting Scholars' Reports

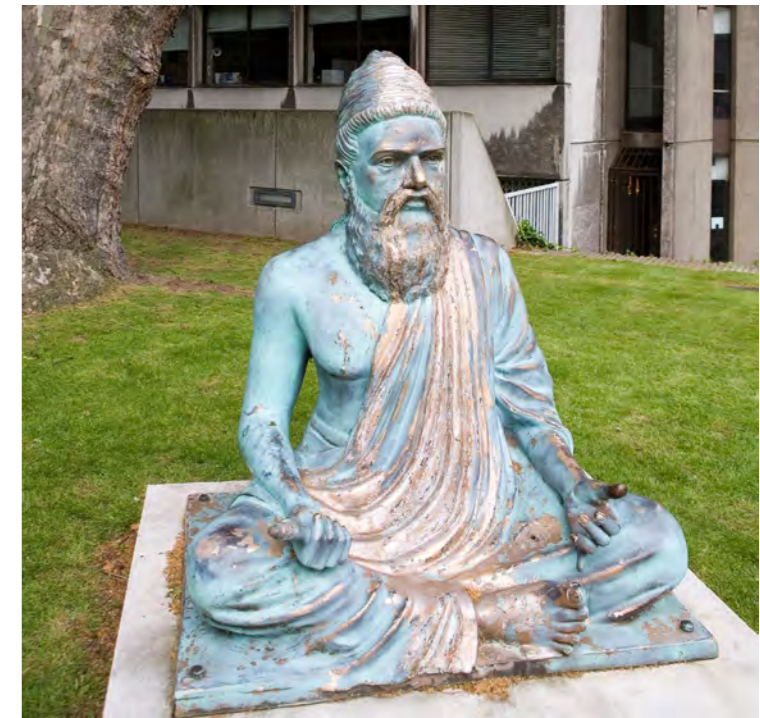
### Mari Miyamoto, Newton International Fellow 2014-2016

2015 for me started with the workshop entitled 'Religion, Environment and Global Concepts of Conservation' organized by myself with the very helpful support of my SSAI colleagues. We received many positive responses to the call for papers from scholars in the UK, the United States, Australia and Japan. We were also able to invite a scholar from a leading Bhutanese institute to contribute, and overall the workshop created a new alternative academic network of scholars from Anthropology, Geography, Biology and Religious Study who share an interest in this field. Given the opportunity, I am hoping to further extend and enrich the intellectual network and develop a theoretical framework to tackle the issues that were raised.

During 2015 I was given the opportunity to present my research at conferences including IAHR and DSA, and to develop my thoughts about the interaction between religion and democracy, with help from the disciplines of religious study and development studies. A book chapter describing the cultural politics over conservation and religion in Bhutan appeared during the year.

The activities of the SSAI have been always attractive and stimulating for me. I attended and chaired panels at the SSAI graduate workshop and the Nepal Study Days organized at SSAI this year. The presentations by young scholars at both workshops were especially challenging and I found many new ideas about research topics on South Asia.

Although my time in SOAS is now drawing to a close, I would like to try to maximize and use this opportunity to develop my study of one of the rare and great spheres for scholars in the world.



### Nishtha G. Singh, Visiting Scholar

In my year as a Visiting Scholar at SOAS during 2014-15 I had multiple opportunities to discuss my work with several of the School's South Asianists, including Francesca Orsini, Shabnum Tejani, Navtej Purewal, Roy Fischel, and Michael Hutt. With these scholars, both learned and intellectually generous, for the first time I found people under "one roof" (SOAS) who had an encyclopedic knowledge of the sources I have used in my research; the period of history I work on; many helpful suggestions regarding the multiple literatures I might situate my work in; and advice about how I might go about publishing it. Meeting and discussing research and scholarship with scholars at SOAS was the high point of the time spent here.

In the past year I was able to ready two articles for publication (both under review), and to start a new research project—'Mobile City: A History of Delhi Through its Taxi and Auto Trades'.

I presented my research at the SOAS South Asia history seminar, and at Shiv Nadar University, India. I also chaired a panel at the SSAI's South Asia Cityscapes Conference in June 2015.

## Academic Members

### Anthropology

#### Dr Stephen P Hughes

##### Senior Lecturer in Social Anthropology

Expertise: India, especially the Tamil-speaking south, and Sri Lanka; popular cinema, media theory, historical anthropology and visual anthropology  
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#### Professor David Mosse

##### Professor of Social Anthropology

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#### Dr Caroline Osella

##### Reader in Anthropology with reference to South Asia

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#### Dr Parvathi Raman

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#### Professor Edward Simpson

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### Development

#### Professor Jonathan Goodhand

##### Professor in Conflict and Development Studies

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#### Dr Feyzi Ismail

##### Senior Teaching Fellow

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#### Dr Jens Lerche

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##### Deputy Director, SOAS South Asia Institute

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### Economics

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### Financial & Management Studies

#### Professor Pasquale Scaramozzino

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### History

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##### Reader in South East Asian and Imperial History

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#### Dr Amrita Shodhan

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#### Dr Shabnum Tejani

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### History of Art and Archaeology

#### Dr Crispin Branfoot

##### Senior Lecturer in South Asian Art and Archaeology

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#### Dr Heather Elgood, MBE

##### Course Director of the Diploma in Asian Art

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#### Professor Rachel Dwyer

##### Professor of Indian Cultures and Cinema

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#### Dr David Lunn

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## Media and Film

### Dr Somnath Batabyal

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## Music

### Professor Richard Widdess

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### Dr Matthew J Nelson

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## Dr Rahul Rao

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### Professor Lawrence Sáez

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### Dr Simona Vittorini

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## Study of Religions

### Dr Peter Flügel

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#### Reader in the Study of Islam

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### Dr Sian Hawthorne

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### Professor Gurharpal Singh

#### Professor in Inter-Religious Relations and Development and Dean, Faculty of Arts and Humanities

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## Research Associates

### Dr Sanjukta Ghosh

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### Professor Peter Robb

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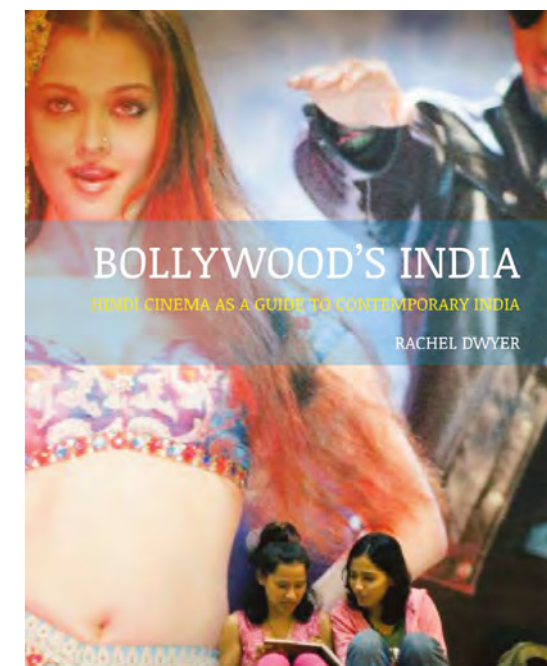
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### Professor Werner Menski

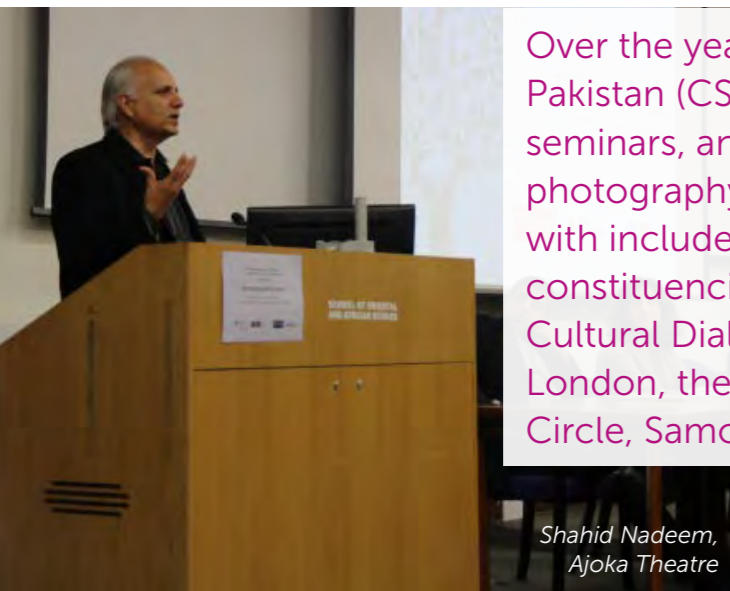
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## Centre for the Study of Pakistan Report



Over the year the Centre for the Study of Pakistan (CSP) hosted and organised twelve seminars, an international literature festival and a photography exhibition. Partners we have worked with include both academic and non-academic constituencies, including the Muslims, Trust and Cultural Dialogue project at the University of East London, the British Pakistan Foundation, the City Circle, Samosa, and Ajoka theatre.

Shahid Nadeem,  
Ajoka Theatre

### Amina Yaqin: Chair of CSP

The one-day literary festival, organised in partnership with our Professorial Research Associate Aamer Hussein and research students from SOAS and UCL, brought together writers from a number of cultural backgrounds whose work interrogates the nature of culture and intercultural experience. The keynote address was delivered by the playwright Howard Brenton, who spoke on the centrality of art and the freedom of speech, and the daytime readings were complemented by an evening of Spoken Word performances by young artists in the JCR. Throughout the day music from South Asia was showcased by the DJ Omer Tariq.

Our second major event was a photography exhibition entitled 'The Art of Integration: Islam in England's Green and Pleasant Land', hosted in partnership with MTCD, the Brunei Gallery and the internationally renowned photographer Peter Sanders. The exhibition, which has already toured more than 64 locations around the world, is a visually poetic reminder that Muslims have been part of British life for well over a century. It showcases a variety of people including physicians, scholars, writers, teachers, calligraphers, rock and roll icons, graffiti artists and police and captures Muslim architectural influences in Britain. A panel discussion on 'You've seen the bad news, now see the good', organised as part of the programme of events around the exhibition, featured Navid Akhtar (CEO Alchemiya), Farah Pandith (Special Representative to Muslim Communities in the US), Shaykh Babakir (Radical Middle Way), Imam Monawar (Oxford Foundation), and Peter Sanders.

Our seminars this year included a high profile panel discussion with the renowned Urdu playwright Shahid Nadeem of the adaptation of his Urdu play 'Dara' for the London stage. The panel included the comedian Atif Nawaz. This partnership event brought CSP together with three non-HEI partners, the British Pakistan Foundation, the City Circle and Samosa.

In the CSP/MTCD occasional seminar series Dr Sadia Toor gave a talk on Pakistani liberals and the war on terror and the organisers of the Bradford Literature Festival Irna Qureshi and Syima Aslam spoke on the power of Sufiana kalam and trust building amongst Asian communities in Yorkshire.

An ongoing series of panel discussions engaged with current events in Pakistan: we organised a seminar on Pakistan's counter-terrorism policy post-Peshawar and a memorial evening in honour of the women's rights campaigner Tahira Mazhar Ali. The panel reviewed the demise of the left in Pakistan and reflected on the killing of the activist Sabeen Mahmud in Karachi. Other seminars included coverage of Sharia and blasphemy laws in Pakistan by the lawyer Naeem Shakir, the role of the private electronic media in framing radicalisation narratives by Dr Kiran Hassan, and neighbourhood strongmen and the culture of illegality in urban Pakistan by Dr Paul Rollier.

In the past year CSP has strengthened its ties with an international group of academics, HEIs, community organisations, charities, and with the Pakistan High Commission. The Centre provides a much needed forum for SOAS PhD students working on Pakistan and supports the unique MA Study of Contemporary Pakistan. Our work is supported by the South Asia Institute and we continue to work closely with the SSAI team.

## Centre for Study of Pakistan – Event Listing September 2014 – August 2015

### 30 October 2014 Seminar

**The role of private electronic media in radicalising Pakistan**

Speaker: Dr Kiran Hassan  
Discussant: Dr David Taylor

### 13 November 2014 Seminar

**Part of the Muslims, Trust and Cultural Dialogue Research Project:**

Positioning Sufiana Kalam at Bradford Literature Festival  
Irna Qureshi and Syima Aslam

### 27 November 2014 Seminar

**Sharia and the blasphemy law in Pakistan: a lawyer's perspective**

Naeem Shakir

### 11 December 2014 Seminar

**How about Electric Shadows: the art of the story**

Professor Aamer Hussein

### 8 January 2015 Seminar

**Part of the Muslims, Trust and Cultural Dialogue Research Project:**

The vanishing wrestler: illegality and criminal mediation in urban Pakistan  
Dr Paul Rollier (UCL)



### 7 March 2015 Literature Festival

**Spring Literature Festival: Cultural Confluences**

Alev Adil, Ikhtisad Ahmed, Rukhsana Ahmad, Ahsan Akbar, Somnath Batabyal, Howard Brenton, Naomi Foyle, Aamer Hussein, Tariq Mehmood, Laksmi Pamuntjak, Sadaf Saaz, Minoli Salgado, Mirza Waheed

### 16 March 2015 Seminar

**Pakistan's Counter-terrorism Policy post-Peshawar: Is it Working?**

Ayesha Siddiqi and Huma Yusuf

### 26 March 2015 Seminar

**The Global and the Local in the Arts: Translating Pakistan's vibrant cultures**

Anwar Akhtar, Shahid Nadeem, Aatif Nawaz and Amina Yaqin

Sponsors: City Circle, British Pakistan Foundation, the Samosa and CSP

### 21 April 2015 Photography Exhibition

**The Art of Integration 'Islam in England's green and pleasant land'**

Photographs by Peter Sanders

### 5 May 2015

#### Panel Discussion

**You've seen the bad news, now see the good - The Art of Integration**

Peter Sanders, Farah Pandith, Navid Akhtar, Imam Monawar, Shaykh Babakir

### 13 May 2015

#### Seminar

**Remembering Tahira Mazhar Ali: Democracy, Feminism and Social Movements in Pakistan**

Amin Mughal, Ammar Ali Jan, Dr Anita Mir, Ayesha Siddiqi

### 21 May 2015

#### Seminar

**Part of the Muslims, Trust and Cultural Dialogue Research Project:**

The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie: Pakistani liberals and the War on Terror  
Saadia Toor



Amina Yaqin, Howard Brenton, Peter Morey

## SSAI – Event Listing September 2014 – August 2015

15 October 2014

### Film Screening and Q&A

**Birth 1871: History, The State and The Arts of Denotified Tribes of India**

Dakxinkumar Bajrange (Director)

16 October 2014

### Round Table

**Awaaz: South Asia Network Roundtable Discussion - Caste and Development under the Modi Government**

Subir Sinha, Vrinda Grover, Pragna Patel, Suresh Grover

23 October 2014

### Book Launch and Panel Discussion

**Battles Of The New Republic: A Contemporary History Of Nepal**

Prashant Jha and Ian Martin

29 October 2014

### Seminar

**The 'rare infliction': The Great War and the abolition of flogging in the Indian Army**

Radhika Singha

12 November 2014

### Seminar

**The Ekta Parishad's Campaign for Rights to Land and to Resources in India**

PV Rajagopal

18 November 2014

### Seminar hosted in partnership with South Asia History Department

**History and Memory in the Making of Delhi's Indo-Muslim Urban Identity, c. 1800-1900**

Nishtha Singh (SSAI Visiting Scholar)

19 November 2014

### Britain-Nepal Annual Lecture

**Britain-Nepal Academic Council 2014 Annual Lecture: Tilaurakot-Kapilavastu: New Archaeological Discoveries in the Nepal's Terai**

Professor Robin Coningham

28 November 2014

### British Association for South Asian Studies 2014 Annual Lecture

**'Only connect...' Interdisciplinarity, South Asian Studies and Gender**

Professor Patricia Jeffery

1 December 2014

### Book Launch and Panel Discussion

**Bollywood's India: Hindi Cinema as a Guide to Contemporary India**

Rachel Dwyer (Author), Faisal Devji, Charlie Henniker

10 December 2014

### Seminar

**The Crucible of Revolution: what it means to be a Nepali Maoist**

Bhaskar Gautam (SSAI Visiting Scholar)

19 January 2015

### Book launch and Panel Discussion

**Checkpoint, Temple, Church and Mosque: A Collaborative Ethnography of War and Peace in Eastern Sri Lanka**

Jonathan Goodhand, Jonathan Spencer, Humeira Iqtidar, Alan Keenan, David Mosse

12 February 2015

### Panel Discussion

**Reflections on gender violence, neoliberalism and the Hindu Right. A panel discussion with Tanika Sarkar and Kavita Krishnan**

Tanika Sarkar and Kavita Krishnan



*Gender Justice/Injustice in South Asia*



*Vidhu Vinod Chopra, Rachel Dwyer, Michael Hutt*



13 February 2015

### Symposium in partnership with the LSE Gender Institute

**Symposium: Gender Justice/Injustice in South Asia: Feminism, Protest, and the Neo-Liberal State**

Convenors: Navtej Purewal and Kalpana Wilson (LSE) and Various Speakers

20 February 2015

### Workshop

**Religion, Environment and Global Concepts of Conservation in South Asia**

Convenor: Mari Miyamoto (SSAI, Newton International Fellow) and Various Speakers

24 February 2015

### Film Screening in partnership with South Asia Solidarity Group

**Muzaffarnagar Baaqi Hai**



### Sangat Dialog Punjab

**Monthly meetings to explore Punjabi poetry through time.**

9 March 2015

Session 1: Baba Farid and Shah Hussain

7 April 2015

Session 2: Baba Nanak

5 May 2015

Session 3: Kabir

9 June 2015

Session 4: Bulleh Shah

7 July 2015

Session 5: Shah Hussain

20 March 2015

### Workshop

**Narratives, histories and categories: Critical paradigms and new directions in Dalit scholarship**

Professor Ram Rawat and Professor Rupa Vishwanathan

22 March 2015

### Festival in partnership with Tongues on Fire

**Women in the Media: Film festival programme, including the Bollywood Director Farah Khan**

27 March 2015

### Talk

**In Conversation with Vidhu Vinod Chopra**

16 and 17 April 2015

### Britain-Nepal Academic Council

**13th Nepal Study Day 2015**

20 April 2015

### Film Screening and Q&A with Director

**The Monsoon Oracle: Dialectics beyond reason and rationality**

Shrenik Rao (Director)

22 April 2015

### Film Screening and Q&A with Director

**Shongram: The struggle for love and survival. Bangladesh 1971**

Munsur Ali (Director) and Salil Tripathi (Author)

29 April 2015

### Seminar

**The weaving cooperatives of the Mahila Samitis in late colonial Assam, India**

Dr Hemjyoti Medhi (Charles Wallace India Trust Visiting Fellow, 2014-2015)

## Muslim South Asia Research Forum (MUSA) 'Big Star, Rising Star' Speaker Series

**Bringing together established academics and early career researchers in conversation.**

20 March 2015

**Corruption and Development: Between Citizen and State in post 1947 India and Pakistan**

Professor Sarah Ansari (Royal Holloway, London) and Dr Daniel Haines (University of Bristol)

29 April 2015

**Music, Art, & Power in India**

Dr Katherine Schofield (King's College London) and Dr Chloe Alaghband-Zadeh (University of Cambridge)

22 May 2015

**Going West: Persian Students and Shahs in Imperial Europe**

Professor Nile Green (UCLA) and Dr David Motadel (University of Cambridge)

12 May 2015

**Film Screening and Panel Discussion in partnership with Centre for Gender Studies**

**The World Before Her**

Professor Francesca Orsini, Dr Navtej Purewal, Akanksha Mehta

18 May 2015

**Launch of the SOAS South Asia Institute**

**South Asia Across Borders**

Shiv Shankar Mukherjee, Namita Gokhale, Maleeha Lodhi, Kanak Mani Dixit, Mishal Husain (Moderator)

27 May 2015

**Workshop**

**Hinglish: Social and Cultural Dimensions of Hindi-English Bilingualism in Contemporary India**

Convenor: Professor Francesca Orsini and Various Speakers

8 June 2015

**Graduate Workshop**

**South Asia Cityscapes: Social, economic and cultural transformations**

10 June 2015

**Seminar**

**Locating tourism in Kathmandu: 1965-1980**

Dr Mark Liechty

17 June 2015

**Seminar**

**Muslims and Family Planning in India: Myths and Realities**

Dr SY Quraishi (Representative on the Indian Election Commission)

27 June 15

**Punjab Research Group Workshop**

**The Politics of the Social and Beyond: Hegemonies, Resistances and Negotiations**

Convenors: Navtej Purewal and Pippa Virdee (De Montfort) and Various Speakers



Graduate Workshop, Cumberland Lodge

## SOAS South Asia Institute Key Staff



### Michael Hutt (Director)

Modern and contemporary Nepali literature is Michael Hutt's home ground. He is interested in developing a sociological approach to literature and in using literature as a lens through which to view social, cultural and political change.

### Navtej Purewal (Deputy Director)

Navtej Purewal's research interests are concerned with marginality, inequality, power/subversion, and social change, particularly in light of neo-liberalism's expansion and penetration into all aspects of South Asian social life.



## Join the SSAI

The South Asia Institute welcomes individuals and groups with an interest in South Asian studies who would like to get involved with our activities.

There are several ways of getting involved:

- **As a Student:** The SSAI runs our own two-year MA Programme, MA Intensive South Asian Studies and (from 2016) a new MSc in Contemporary India Studies. SSAI members also supervise PhD students working on a range of subjects relating to South Asia. We hold seminars and workshop specifically for students.
- **As a Public Member:** We hold many events free and open to the wider public, including our regular seminar series events (Wednesday evenings) and Sangat Dialog Punjab (Monday evenings). Join up to the e-bulletin and receive regular updates about our activities.
- **As a Visiting Scholar or Research Associate:** We welcome applications from interested scholars to join the SSAI. Contact the Institute for further information.

### Contacting the SSAI

Email: Email us at [ssai@soas.ac.uk](mailto:ssai@soas.ac.uk) to receive our weekly e-bulletin.

Telephone: +44 (0)20 7898 4390

Facebook: Like us or follow our page at [www.facebook.com/SouthAsia.SOAS](http://www.facebook.com/SouthAsia.SOAS)

Twitter: Follow and interact with us: [@SOAS\\_SAI](https://twitter.com/SOAS_SAI)

Webpage: [www.soas.ac.uk/south-asia-institute/](http://www.soas.ac.uk/south-asia-institute/)

Blog: [blogs.soas.ac.uk/ssai-notes](http://blogs.soas.ac.uk/ssai-notes)

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