



# The South Asia Newsletter

A Publication of Cornell's South Asia Program

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## **A HAPPY TRANSITION: HIGH NATIONAL RANKINGS AND A NEW DIRECTOR**

The Cornell/Syracuse South Asia Consortium achieved second place among nine successful South Asia applicants in the triennial national competition for Foreign Language and Area Center grants held by the U.S. Department of Education. The national rankings are made by outside academic evaluators judging factors such as range of area courses, quality of language instruction, and relationships with professional schools and other university units. The Center grant provides vital support for Cornell's language program, visiting faculty, lecture series, outreach work, and administrative staff. Now clearly one of the top centers in the country, our program was praised by evaluators as having "made an excellent contribution on the practical side of applied Asian Studies. The Center will grow and adapt to changing disciplinary foci and will have a leadership role."

The main author of the successful application, Daniel Gold, South Asia Program director since January 1991, will be returning to full-time teaching in the Department of Asian Studies in the fall. An historian of religions, Dan is anxious to write up his recent fieldwork on the religious traditions of the Nath caste in Rajasthan. A poll taken among the active South Asia faculty revealed a clear consensus for Shelley Feldman, Associate Professor of Rural Sociology, to take over as director. Since Shelley is scheduled for a well-deserved research leave in 1994-95, Mary Katzenstein has agreed to serve as interim director for a year. A member of the South Asia Council of the Association of Asian

Studies, Shelley is currently director of the Cornell Program in Gender and Global Change. She has worked widely in the subcontinent, and has had extensive experience in Bangladesh. Mary has written a book on ethnicity in Bombay, and is currently working on problems of women and politics. She regularly takes an active interest in the Program's visiting speakers and artists, so we all look forward to an exciting program next year.

## **NEW BHARATI SERIES IN RELIGION AND CULTURE**

A generous donation has allowed the South Asia Program to initiate a new publication series, The Swami Agehananda Bharati Series in Religion and Culture. Born in Austria and ordained as a sannyasi in India, Swami Bharati taught Anthropology until his death in 1990. The new series will provide a forum for the areas of learning to which he was devoted. A member of the Syracuse faculty, the Swami was a vital figure in Hindu cultural affairs throughout the area, teaching Indian religion at Cornell in the summer of 1986. The founding of the new series at Cornell is another sign of the continuing cooperation of the Cornell and Syracuse faculties in South Asian Studies.

The first volume in the series, *Text Into Form* by Bonnie MacDougall, Associate Professor of Architecture at Cornell and former South Asia Program Director, presents a lucid analysis of classical architectural texts from India and Sri Lanka. Authors with specialized academic manuscripts in any area of South Asian religion or culture are invited to make inquiries about publication in the series.



## **FESTIVAL OF INDIAN DANCE**

Two dance concerts and a lecture demonstration were presented at Cornell this fall in a Festival of Indian Dance. The festival, free to the public, began with an electrifying performance by Indrani's dance troupe, featuring Leela Raja and Pasumarthy Vithal in the Bharat Natyam and Kuchipudi styles of dance. Indrani and her performers also gave a presentation with explanations on technique in "Music of the World," a class taught by Professor Martin Hatch.

The following week, Jyothi Raghavan, another internationally renowned classical Indian dancer, performed in the Bharatha Natyam style and held an informal after-dance discussion attended by many interested students. Sponsors for the festival included the South Asia Program, the Departments of Music and Theatre Arts, Cornell Creative and Performing Arts, the Cornell India Association, the Society for India, Ithaca College's Dance Department, and SPIC-MACAY, the Ithaca chapter of which has been active since the summer of 1992. Contributions from local community friends were also appreciated.



*Leela Raja demonstrating concentration and skill in the "Music of the World" class.*

## **FACULTY NEWS**

### **SIR WILLIAM JONES MEMORIAL SYMPOSIUM**

Kenneth A.R. Kennedy was honored to present a paper at a symposium on Sir Williams Jones (1746-1794) which celebrated his legacy of 200 years. The symposium was held at New York University on April 20-22, 1994 with parallel memorials held in Calcutta, Wales, and London. Presentations made in the fields of history, linguistics, law, and South Asian studies will be published in a commemorative volume by New York University Press.

### **FACULTY RESEARCH IN INDIA**

On a recent trip to India, Professor Daniel Gold, Director of the South Asia Program and Associate Professor of Asian Religions, continued his research on the householder Naths of Ajmer District, Rajasthan. Living as householders in villages, the Naths nevertheless see themselves as yogis by birth. From December 1992 to August '93 Dan lived with his family outside the qasbah of Sawar, about half-way between Ajmer and Kota, investigating the traditions preserved among contemporary Naths and remembered by their caste genealogists. Dan's interest in the Naths was sparked when he came across them while examining the poetic traditions of the Sants, on which he has published two books to date: *The Lord as Guru* (Oxford University Press), and *Comprehending the Guru: Toward a Grammar of Religious Perception* (Scholars Press). Although the devotional songs of both Sants and Naths are in many respects similar, their outward practices are strikingly different. This greatly aroused Dan's curiosity, and he focused his attention on the ways in which Naths popularize an esoteric tradition and play out classical tensions between Hindu householders and renouncers. Dan hopes to begin publishing the results of his work in the near future. His fascination and research on householder Naths, he says, is not over.



## HONORARY DOCTOR OF LITERATURE AWARDED TO JAMES W. GAIR

Professor James Wells Gair, Senior Professor of Linguistics, was honored this October with a Doctor of Literature *honoris causa* from the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, in recognition of his outstanding contribution to Sinhala linguistics and Sri Lankan culture. As part of this recognition, Jim was asked to make the convocation address at the annual convention of the University of Kelaniya at which the degree was awarded. This university is the only one of its kind in the country that maintains a full-fledged Linguistics Department. Conversely, Cornell is the only center in the United States that regularly teaches Sinhala. In addition, much of the research on the Sinhala language is conducted at Cornell. Jim has also been affiliated with several other educational institutions in Sri Lanka, including the University of Colombo and Peradeniya University, as well as institutes in India, such as the University of Delhi and the University of Kerala.

Jim, now accorded the honorific title of *Sahitya Chakravartin*, or "a wheel-turner in literature," has contributed much to the field of Linguistics. Notable among his work is the demonstration of the theoretical importance of the Sinhala language in the context of current linguistic theory. Using modern linguistic principles, he has also written several textbooks for teaching both the spoken and literary varieties of Sinhala. Several young scholars working in the language, both here and in Sri Lanka, have studied with him at Cornell or carried out their work in contact with him. Jim has also worked in other South Asian languages: Hindi, Marathi, and especially Pali and Tamil. Recently he has begun to work on Malayalam and Dhivehi (Maldivian). A collection of papers written by him on South Asia linguistics is forthcoming from Oxford University.

Asked how he felt about receiving the degree from Kelaniya, Jim called it an unexpected, but a much appreciated honor, and said it renewed his desire to continue working with the language and culture of Sri Lanka. He remarked, "Sinhala and other South Asian languages are a treasury of lin-

guistic phenomena that often pose challenges to our theoretical assumptions. I feel that I have been very fortunate to have had the opportunity to work on them, and especially fortunate to have had the cultural contact and personal friendships that my work has made possible. The unexpected recognition that this degree represents only intensifies that conviction."

As for future projects, Jim is already working on the translation and commentary of the *Sidat Sangarava* (a medieval Sinhala grammar) with Professor W.S. Karunatilake of Kelaniya University; Karunatilake received his Ph.D. from Cornell and is now a noted Sinhala and Indic linguist. In addition, Jim is busily engaged in a typological project dealing with anaphora in South Asian Languages. In this he is joined by Professors Barbara Lust of Cornell, Kashi Wali of Cornell/Syracuse, and K.V. Subbarao of University of Delhi, along with other scholars. A book representing this work is forthcoming from Mouton de Gruyter publishers. Jim has also been working with Professor Manindra Verma of University of Wisconsin, Dr. Surendra Gambhir of University of Pennsylvania, and others interested in South Asia language teaching, on organizing the new South Asian Language Teachers Association. Jim will be delivering the keynote address at the SALA (South Asian Language Analysis) Conference at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia in mid-May.

## INDIAN AMBASSADOR COMES TO CORNELL

The Society for India, an undergraduate student organization, invited Ambassador Siddhartha Shankar Ray to speak at Cornell on April 15th. The ambassador spoke to a group of 200 students, faculty, and community friends about Indo-U.S. relations, emphasizing free market economy, respect for human rights, and the achievement of tranquility, peace, and harmony through more democratic representation in the United Nations. Ambassador Ray met personally with students and faculty at two receptions and at a private dinner party hosted by the students.



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## DRAMA AND REALITY REVEALED THROUGH EYES OF STUDENT

Ethnic culture in American society is a topic of much heated debate at Cornell, and the South Asian community here has not remained silent on this issue. *Broken Boundaries*, a play written and directed by multi-talented student Sital Kalantry and produced by the Asian American Playhouse, examines the difficulties of an immigrant Indian family as it grapples with the challenges of life in the United States. The play evolved from a short story that Sital originally wrote for a creative writing class, and it was pro-



Nick Salpekar as Mark and Praveena Nallainathan as Anita in *Broken Boundaries*.

duced entirely by students. This was the first Cornell production that dealt specifically with South Asian issues and that was enacted by an all South Asian cast. Says Sital: "I wanted to give South Asian Americans the media representation that has long been denied them."

The two performances, held on May 1st and 2nd, dealt with issues faced by immigrant children, highlighting the tensions between South Asian family expectations and the often conflicting American system of values. The play presented conflicts within an Indian family that emigrated to the United States in the 1960s. The parents want their children to pursue successful careers with the same perseverance that marked their own experience in America, but the children have ideas of their own. These conflicts come to a climax when Anita, the main character, tells her parents that her boyfriend is not South Asian. What further complicates the situation is Anita's boyfriend's lack of understanding and his inability to grasp the seriousness of the issues.

In writing *Broken Boundaries*, Sital was worried about the extent to which she could emphasize the ills on each side of the conflict without stereotyping her characters. "I was apprehensive that a non-South Asian audience may leave the play believing that everyone from that area [India] is rich, classist, and racist," explains Sital.

The play was extremely well done and universally well received. Erica Eisenstein, drama critic for the *Cornell Daily Sun*, wrote that it "was the best performance I have seen at Cornell this year."



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