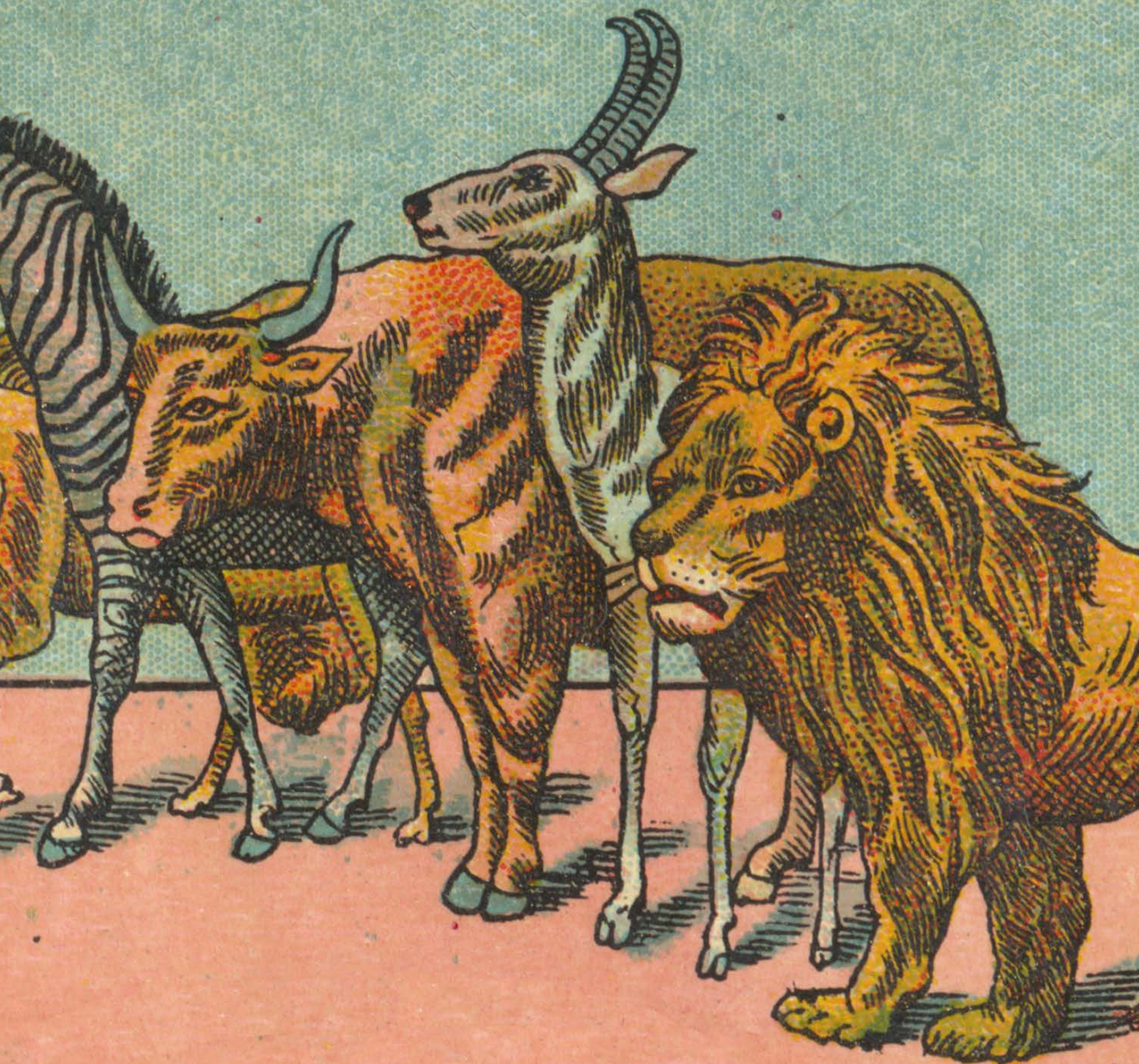




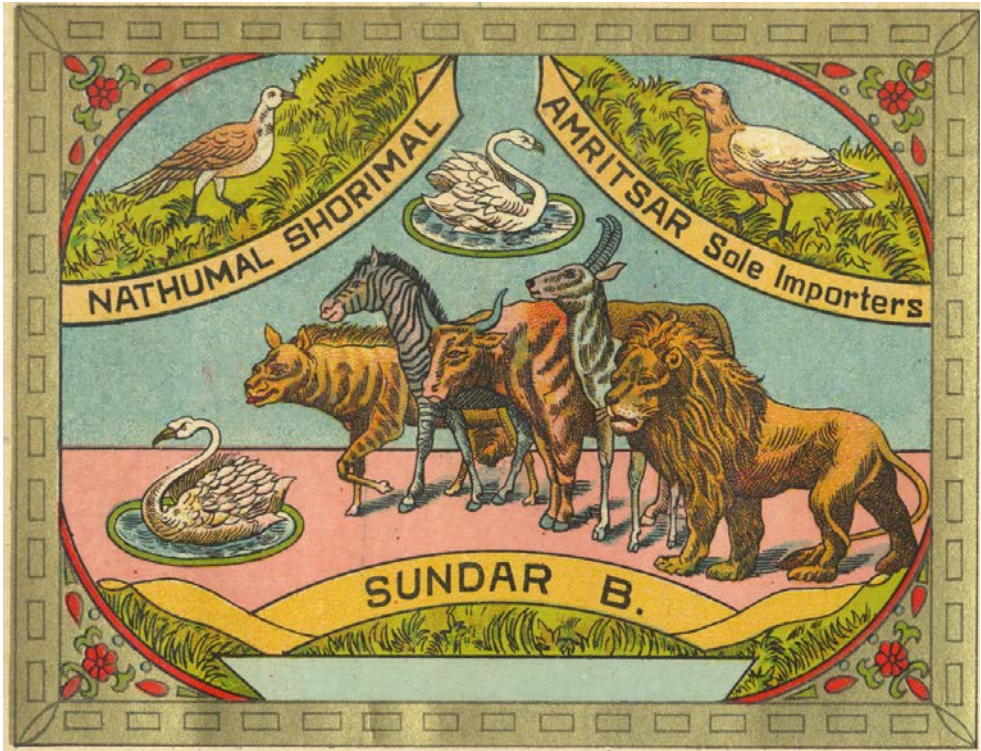
Cornell University

# SOUTH ASIA PROGRAM



2021 BULLETIN





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Cover [detail]: This page: Top, Left Label for fabrics sold in India by Nathumal Shorimal of Amritsar, early 20th century.

Design: Scarlet Duba



p.4

# From the Director

by Iftikhar Dadi, Professor of History of Art & Director, South Asia Program

The 2020-2021 academic year has been busy and consequential for the South Asia Program. While restrictions against holding physical events due to COVID-19 have been limiting in many respects, it also encouraged us to reconceive our programming to exploit the potential of virtual platforms. This has included collaboration with institutions nationally and in South Asia. During Fall 2020, we hosted two events jointly via Zoom with the Marg Foundation in India (p. 21), and during Spring 2021, a panel discussion jointly organized with Columbia University (p. 24).

Many of our speakers have been based in South Asia, and we have had audience members from 48 countries, leading to greater attendance on average, as compared to physical events in prior years. We have also developed programs with Oxfam India, including presentations by Oxfam leaders (p. 22), and internship opportunities for undergraduate students (p. 14-15).

The South Asia Program remains committed to addressing the geographic breath and historical depth of South Asia and its diasporas, with presentations on subjects such as "Agricultural Transformation in an Evolving Nepal," "Kamala Harris and the History of South Asian America," and "The Architecture of Muzharul Islam."

A significant milestone in modern South Asian history is Bangladesh turning 50 this year. Kaushik Basu summarizes the remarkable success the nation has achieved in developing its society and economy (p. 6-7), and in Fall 2021, we are cosponsoring a conference reflecting on this anniversary, organized by a Bangladeshi partner.

The South Asia Program addressed many current social and political issues in the region by bringing perspectives of prominent thinkers to the Cornell community, including Nobel prize-winning economist Amartya Sen, who delivered the Bartels World Affairs Lecture at the Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies, addressing challenges to democracy in India (p. 18). Leading Pakistani poet and human rights advocate Haris Khalique spoke about the role of poetry in registering dissent and nonconformity.

Delhi-based artist Atul Bhalla, who has long been engaged with the imbrication of ecology, nationalism, and urbanization, was a virtual artist-in-residence in Fall 2020, in a program supported by our partner, the Syracuse South Asia Center (p.19). Lastly, prominent Indian political leader Rahul Gandhi gave a frank interview to faculty and students at the Einaudi Center in March 2021 (p.20).

Under COVID-19, the public health infrastructure in South Asia has come under severe stress, as Weill Cornell faculty Jyoti Mathad notes for India (p. 2-3), and this also holds true for the entire region. Karim-Aly Kassam reflects on the wider global implications of the COVID-19 challenge from the standpoint of sustainability and ecological knowledge of indigenous communities of the Pamir Mountains (p. 4-5). Kassam has organized a major conference on this topic, planned for October 11-13, 2021, and an associated exhibition at the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, which will bring diverse perspectives from scholars and practitioners located in Arctic and Asian mountainous regions (p. 25).

Additionally, Neema Kudva and several graduate students received a Cornell Engaged Opportunity Grant to create an archive of local and grounded perspectives on COVID (p. 16). Many graduate students whose research has been impacted by the pandemic also reflect on how their own work, as well as the subjects they focus on, have undergone transformation (p. 8-9). Despite restrictions, our outreach activities engaging with K-12 educators and community colleges in our region have continued, albeit in modified ways, and we remain committed to this vital engagement for the future (p. 19, 26-28).

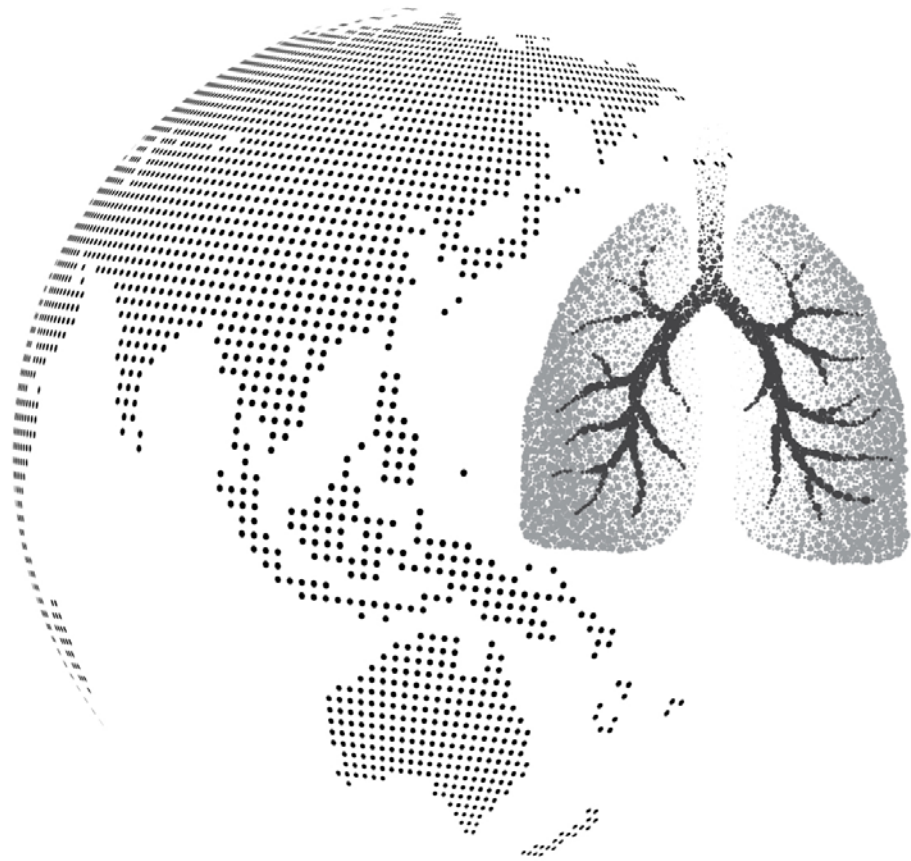
The striking cover image of this Bulletin is based on a new acquisition of colonial-era printed commercial labels by the Cornell University Library (p.17). Arrayed and awaiting, the heterogenous group of animals perhaps serves as an allegory of our times, of the value of diversity in our societies, mingled with the anxiety and anticipation that COVID-19 has exacerbated in the social, political, and economic life of South Asia and beyond.

Finally, we have recently received word that the National Endowment for the Humanities has awarded the South Asia Program a grant (with Dadi as project director), for our project, "The Next Monsoon: Climate Change and Contemporary Cultural Production in South Asia." The grant will enable us to work with partners at the University of Pennsylvania and the School of Environment and Architecture, Mumbai, to organize a three-day conference in 2022 and publish an open access volume on humanistic responses to climate change in South Asia.



# A Doctor's World Turned Upside Down

Jyoti Mathad, Assistant Professor of Medicine, Weill Cornell Medical College



“How many cases? How many deaths?  
Do you have what you need? Are you okay?”

I have been conducting medical research in India for a decade, and these questions are common in our team meetings when diseases like Zika, dengue or chikungunya spring up. But in 2020, for the first time, it was our Indian colleagues asking the questions, and the US-based researchers grasping for answers. The world had flipped upside-down.

You have probably read first-hand accounts from doctors working in New York hospitals in the darkest days of the pandemic. The ventilator beds crammed into every closet, corner, and cranny. The eerie lack of “ordinary” hospital visits. (“Why is no one having a heart attack anymore?” a colleague

wondered.) The impossible questions from families who wanted information we simply didn’t have. (“When will my husband come off the ventilator? When will it be safe for us to be in the same room with him again? Is he going to make it?” “We don’t know. We don’t know. No one knows.”) My most enduring memory will be of holding the phone up to an elderly patient’s face so his son could say goodbye.

Mixed into the tragedy were tiny shafts of light. I nearly cried the first time my neighbors rang cowbells from their balconies, cheering me off to work. The comradery at New York Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center was incredible. Physicians and nurses from surgery to pediatrics heroically

retrained as internal medicine specialists. When a dialysis machine for a young COVID patient in the ICU stopped working, the residents scoured every floor of the hospital until they found one. When we needed resources, they appeared as if by magic.

Layered on top of these common experiences were the private experiences of each individual doctor. You hear less about these, but, believe me, we all had our own stories. Having to shoo away a confused toddler who only wanted to welcome mommy home. (“Not until mommy takes a shower! No, please don’t cry...”). Moving into a hotel for months to avoid contact with an immune-compromised spouse. For me, it was my dad, who had suffered a stroke in my home just before the pandemic began and was struggling to get out of inpatient rehab before the virus arrived. My mom and I cried over the phone as we agreed that, no matter how much they needed my help, I could not come to them. I was a risk to their health.

During this time, as friends in India worried about our safety, it felt as though COVID had erased the privilege gap between us. India—the country Americans should not visit without a slew of vaccinations, the country whose tap water we cannot even think about drinking—was proving surprisingly resistant to the virus, and we were... not.

By the end of 2020, most of my US health care-colleagues had been vaccinated and we felt that the end was in sight. The vaccine deployment seemed to be going smoothly in India. By February 2021, my Indian research team had been vaccinated. For a moment, it seemed like everything would be fine.

Then the world flipped again. COVID finally hit India hard. Despite being vaccinated, my team in India was still falling sick

with COVID. They were running out of hospital beds and PPE. Oxygen was scarce. Every time I spoke with my team via Zoom, someone’s family member or childhood friend had died.

They were scared, just like we had been. Only no one was clapping for them as they trudged to work. Instead, community health workers were being attacked because of stigma and fear. In the past year, we learned so much about how to manage COVID, but knowledge only goes so far. You still need oxygen. You still need remdesivir. Resources did not magically appear in India.

Even when they had supplies, they faced unique challenges. Overuse of steroids to prevent severe COVID led to an equally devastating adverse effect called mucormycosis, a flesh-eating fungus that requires IV medications, which they did not have, and often surgical removal.

The vaccination drive stumbled catastrophically. The home of the world’s largest vaccine manufacturer did not have nearly enough vaccines. India, a country where self-reliance is part of the national ethos, needed help.

My colleagues in India still live in fear. What little vaccine they have struggles against the existing variants, and new variants are popping up all the time. As of early summer 2021, barely five percent of the population was fully vaccinated. In contrast, every time I walk out of my New York apartment, someone offers me a shot. We have the luxury of refusing the vaccine because our numbers are so low. For now.

Over one year since the pandemic began, our team talks are now depressingly familiar. “How many cases? How many deaths? Do you have what you need? Are you okay?”



Covid Center, Sasoon General Hospital, Pune, India



# Anxiety, Climate Change, and the Sacred: Lessons from COVID-19

by Karim-Aly Kassam,  
International Professor of Environmental & Indigenous

The tragedy of COVID-19, with its devastating loss of life and disruption to our food and social systems, will be a walk in the garden compared to the looming catastrophe of human-induced climate change. As we begin to emerge out of this pandemic, our attention is returning to the shattering impact of climate change.

Farmers, fishers, herders, hunters, and even tourism operators depend on seasonal variation for their livelihoods. They are not afraid of anticipated changes; they depend upon them. Seasonal changes in weather are necessary for the health of ecosystems and the organisms they sustain. Historically, complex sociocultural, economic, and ecological systems, such as the Silk Roads by land or Silk Route by sea, depended on climatic variation for exchange of goods and ideas. Similarly, international trade today fundamentally depends on these seasonal changes for our food systems. However, the rapidity, intensity, and frequency of extreme weather events due to human-induced climate change are undermining these systems.

Like COVID-19, the climate crisis exacerbates existing inequities. Indigenous Arctic, coastal, mountain, and rural societies are at the vanguard of its impacts, disrupting livelihoods and food systems and causing a rising number of climate refugees. It is disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable members of our society, even though they did not benefit significantly from the wealth brought by industrialization, the primary cause of climate change. In both cases we have had mixed messages of dangers and cures. Myopic, self-serving leaders have downplayed the deleterious impacts of both on our lives and social structures and have been distressingly slow to react to the innumerable expense to lives and livelihoods.

Anxiety arising from climate change is not just related to the pervasive fear: will we react in time, or how will the collapse of

other communities affect ours? Rather, it is also about an insidious, festering worry on what the future will look like for one's livelihood, children, and grandchildren. These anxieties are hard to perceive, let alone measure by health experts.

Damaging psychological health impacts begin with disruptions to food systems. Increasingly, farmer suicides are being reexamined in many rural and Indigenous societies as the overdetermined effects of climate change. Disruption and anxiety caused by human-induced climate change affects not only their wellbeing but also the food security of large populations in cities who depend on their harvest.

With COVID-19 restrictions, we are not able to attend churches, mosques, synagogues or temples in large numbers. While locked up with others in our homes, many turned to local parks or trails to find relief and connect with something greater than ourselves. Virtual meetings, while helpful, were insufficient. The presence of other life in the outside environment was key to maintaining mental health during this pandemic. These spaces are not only a sanctuary for plants and other animals, but also for us.

Sacred spaces are fundamental to our wellbeing on many levels and will provide succor during the most devastating impacts of climate change. Discussion of the sacred is usually considered a private matter in our secular society. Yet, climate change will turn our social norms upside down as anxiety becomes pervasive. Among the Indigenous communities that I work with in the Pamir Mountains of Central Asia, the Circumpolar Arctic, and the Northern Forest, the sacred is embedded in their ecology and is fundamental to their food and livelihood systems. Just like physical buildings are affected by weather-related hurricanes, tornados, landslides, and tsunamis, sacred spaces may be irrevocably changed by the intensity and rapidity of climate events. Our relationship is characterized by

intimate connectivity, as humans steward these spaces. In turn, these sacred places provide meaning, continuity, and hope. It is a reciprocal relationship which industrial civilization not only damaged, but largely fails to perceive.

Diverse ethnic societies of farmers, herders and hunters in the Pamir Mountains of Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Xinjiang, developed ecological calendars to keep track of time and seasonal change. They used biophysical signs, such as local topography in relation to sunlight, blooming of a plant, the arrival of a migratory bird, appearance of an insect, or breakup of ice to indicate the start or end of specific livelihood activities, like ploughing, seeding, moving herds to pastures, harvesting, or hunting. Our research on these ecological calendars shows that these observations included all the senses as a dynamic process of telling time, such as the soundscape of birds singing, or the feel of heat from the soil.

With industrialization and the imposition of communism, entire populations of Indigenous peoples were displaced in the Pamir Mountains. Furthermore, religious fanaticism imported into Afghanistan through a global war also has had destructive impact. As a result of these external forces, these calendars were actively suppressed, and the knowledge associated with their use subsequently eroded. By recounting these facts, I am neither idealizing nor ignoring the weaknesses of these communities, but simply recounting how imperialism diminished a culture and its body of knowledge. However, their legacy of insight was not entirely erased and can inform our thinking today.

Human society depends on ecological professions, such as farmers and herders, who depend on seasonal change for their livelihoods. This variation always produced a notable amount of anxiety, but the difference is that, in the past, they could

anticipate the difficulties that would befall them. As a result, Indigenous peoples in the Pamir Mountains built into their ecological calendars time for reflection and contemplation. They called these periods *chilla*, referring to the number forty, although the exact number of days could vary significantly. These reflective periods, when livelihood activities were at a minimum, were a time to search for meaning by understanding one's role in a greater web of life.

The COVID-19 pandemic had the same impact on our civilization of hustle and bustle. We were forced to slow down and reflect. Travel was reduced and carbon emissions dropped. We took time to think by taking a look at ourselves and how we treat others, especially the most vulnerable among us. Historically, these moments of reflection in mountain landscapes took place within sacred spaces amid environmental markers, such as streams, caves, and trees, that provide an enabling environment for awareness. The people of the Pamirs have given humanity a legacy of how to deal with stress resulting not just from the strain of seasonal variation, but the day-to-day vagaries of life. Can we consider building into our contemporary calendars, before the impacts of climate change accumulate to unbearable distress and debilitating anxiety, moments to pause and reflect on the impact of our actions and our responsibilities towards each other and the planet?

The global scale of COVID-19 has taught us that behavioral change is possible and can be rapidly achieved when human lives are at stake. Instead of engaging our lives on this planet from a self-centered perspective, COVID-19 offers an important lesson for addressing climate change by reorienting ourselves to a planet-centered self, thus recognizing our integral place in a world teeming with life. Original version appeared in *Medium* (May 4, 2021)

Painting by Frederick McDonald



# BANGLADESH AT 50

by Kaushik Basu,  
Professor of Economics & Carl Marks  
Professor of International Studies



National Parliament House of Bangladesh on Independence Day, 2015 (Photo: Sajeeb Ahmed)

It feels strange to have known a country since its birth. For much of 1971, Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) was engaged in a war for independence. With U.S. President Richard Nixon standing firmly behind Pakistan as President Yahya Khan's army tried to crush the independence movement by resorting to rape and genocide, millions of Bangladeshi refugees poured into India. I was then an undergraduate in Delhi and joined a team of students to work in the sprawling refugee camps that had sprung up in the Indian states of West Bengal and Odisha.

Full-fledged aerial war with Pakistan broke out on 2 December 1971. I vividly remember catching the night train in Kolkata to return to college during a curfew, under orders to keep all the lights off in the compartment.

This was the high point of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's career. She had opened India's doors to the refugees and intervened militarily to support Bangladesh, refusing to cave in to US pressure, which included sending the Seventh Fleet into the Bay of Bengal. Khan's army surrendered to an Indian-Bangladeshi allied force on 16 December 1971. Bangladesh had already declared independence on 26 March, but it was effectively born that day in December.

At independence, Bangladesh was one of South Asia's poorest countries—poorer than India, and much poorer than Pakistan. Described by then-US National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger as a “basket case”, it floundered for several years, a vast archipelago of poverty and deprivation. Things got worse in 1974, when the Nixon administration suddenly cut off food

aid to Bangladesh while the country was in the midst of a famine on the grounds that it was earning some money by exporting jute bags to Cuba.

Today, as Bangladesh celebrates a half-century of independence, the country has become a case study in economic development that few would have predicted. When its gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate surpassed Pakistan's in 2006, many dismissed it as a one-off fluke. But Bangladesh has outpaced Pakistan every year since then, and—astonishingly—is now one of the world's fastest-growing economies.

Bangladesh's GDP per capita now closely rivals India's and significantly exceeds that of Pakistan. Average life expectancy, at 74, is higher than in India (70) and Pakistan (68). The country is a leading global exporter of ready-made garments, and other sectors are taking off, too. Bangladesh's pharmaceutical industry, for example, is thriving. With 300 companies (several of which conduct research) the country now meets 97% of domestic demand, and is beginning to export globally.

True, Bangladesh still has much poverty and hardship, rising inequality, and an uncertain future trajectory. Climate change and rising sea levels continue to pose significant dangers, and political instability could yet re-emerge and disrupt economic progress. Nevertheless, Bangladesh's remarkable economic transformation—the World Bank now classifies it as a lower-middle-income economy—deserves praise and can offer important lessons for today's low-income countries.

Bangladesh's rise is a story of both deliberate interventions

and chance. The country owes a large part of its success to progressive NGOs, most notably Fazle Hasan Abed's BRAC and Muhammad Yunus's Grameen Bank. One particular intervention that played a larger role than anyone expected was Grameen Bank's early decision that microfinance credits would go to the senior female member of the household. I have argued elsewhere that this gave women greater voice in the home, which in turn helped divert household expenditure toward child welfare. This is one of the main reasons why Bangladesh has made strong progress on development indicators such as life expectancy and literacy, and in combating malnutrition.

Bangladesh has one of the world's largest microfinance sectors, which has enabled households to break out of the debt trap and start their own small businesses. Using a computable general equilibrium model, Selim Raihan, S.R. Osmani, and M.A. Baqui Khalily have shown that microfinance did more than just help the households that received money. By bolstering fiscal and monetary policies, it boosted the country's GDP by 9-12%.

But Bangladesh's success has also had a lot to do with luck. The Indian subcontinent has complex labour laws, notably the Industrial Disputes Act, which predates Indian and Pakistani independence in 1947, and has thwarted the emergence of large manufacturing firms able to realize economies of scale. Pakistan repealed the law in 1958, but for the wrong reasons, to enable big corporations to control workers. Moreover, it did so

in a ham-handed way, thereby contributing to labour exploitation and crony capitalism.

Bangladesh, having once been part of Pakistan, was born without the law's baggage. But, unlike Pakistan, the country went on to develop its own labour regulations that were flexible without giving corporations unfettered power. This played an important role in Bangladesh becoming a successful global manufacturing hub.

Finally, a crucial political factor underpins Bangladesh's economic success. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has often been criticized, but she has made one essential contribution to the country's upward trajectory. Although Bangladesh's constitution guarantees religious freedom, it has been challenged by fundamentalist groups that renounce what the prominent Bangladeshi commentator Abul Barkat has described as the “liberal and humanistic origin of Islam in East Bengal.” Sheikh Hasina, who is reputed to be innately secular, has kept these destructive forces at bay.

Many countries have succumbed to religious fundamentalism with disastrous consequences for their economies. Bangladesh is notable for having withstood this danger. Its buoyant, vibrant economy, now with a 50-year track record, is testimony to this success. Originally appeared in *Project Syndicate* (March 25, 2021)





Harman Singh Dhodi ready to travel during a pandemic

# GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH REFLECTIONS

## Harman Singh Dhodi, City & Regional Planning

My pandemic research journey began the day when Cornell first went offline in March 2020. At that time, I was writing my research proposal to submit for grants and awards. Hoping that things would be in control within a few months, I prepared a robust proposal composing fieldwork, surveys and interviews in slums and urban villages in Delhi, India. However, as months passed by, it was clear that my proposal could not be executed, and I had to improvise. I dropped the survey and resident interviews and reduced my sample to a single urban village I was most familiar with. However, I could not replace the field observations and official interviews, especially because it was not possible to connect with officials through online means. The only way to interview them was by going to their office, obtaining their contact information, and then scheduling a telephone or virtual interview. Therefore, I began my application for Cornell approval to

travel to Delhi, during the winter break. While going through the process, I often had second thoughts whether or not it was worth it. I had to obtain multiple approvals from several authorities at Cornell and assure them that I would be extremely careful during my travels. I had to answer questions pertaining to terrorist activity in my applications and, to be honest, the situation at that time felt nothing like that. I was able to be in Delhi for the month of January 2021. At the time, I definitely felt much safer in India, but things changed drastically when I left. Nonetheless, after going through a crazy application and departure process, I feel fortunate to have been able to conduct my research and write a well-acknowledged exit project.

## Manasicha Akepiyapornchai, Asian Studies

I originally planned to spend a semester at the University of Hamburg, Germany, last year. However, I did not manage to get a visa, due to the pandemic.

Fortunately, I received an invitation from the director of Maison de l'Asie, École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) Library, Paris, to conduct some research on a collection of monographs in Grantha Tamil script from July to August 2020. The library collected these monographs from different places, including Pondicherry, South India, and France. When I arrived, the collection was not properly cataloged, so I also had an opportunity to help with the cataloging process. All the monographs are in Tamil, Sanskrit, and/or Manipravāla (a mixture of Tamil and Sanskrit). Some belong to the South Indian Śrīvaiṣṇava religious community, which is the focus of my dissertation. In the process, I found some valuable information for my dissertation and a number of interesting materials for a thematic issue of the Journal of Indian Philosophy that I plan to co-edit, on "The Afterlife of Tamil with Sanskrit: Śrīvaiṣṇava Manipravalam in Modernity."

## Aparajita Majumdar, History

This picture, below, is of a small village located in Meghalaya, northeast India, close to the Bangladesh borders. It showcases a weekly market day that is coming to a close under the late afternoon sun. These markets, selling fish, rice, and snacks, procured from Sylhet, Bangladesh, operate as lifelines for the local Khasi and Jaintia communities, who find themselves marginalized within India's supply chains. The onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, put the border security regimes of these areas into high alert. For much of 2020, until now, markets such as these, have been closed and the border with Bangladesh is sealed, "like never before"—in the words of an interlocutor. In a sentence that brings to light the connected agro-economies of the Khasi Hills and Sylhet, she told me, "I have been craving fish for months...but even more than that we are worried about our pineapples". Embedded within these food cravings are questions of livelihood that point towards cross-border dependencies, which the state's intensifying surveillance exposed acutely during the pandemic. Many Khasi and Jaintia pineapple farmers from border villages in Meghalaya, who earlier found a ready market in Sylhet, have now had to let their harvest perish. In a region that suffers from acute marginality in terms

of access to medicines, vaccines, and hospitals, the disruptions of cross-border trade and economic losses have rendered human lives even more disposable. It is here, in these margins of the developing world, that the pandemic may perhaps last the longest.

## Geethika Dharmasinghe, Asian Studies

I remember March 18, 2020, the day Cornell asked us to leave the campus. I emptied my locker of books and put them into a bag. The bag was heavy but my heart was heavier and about to explode. Near the library slope, some students were playing violins under the dark sky. I wanted to cry for a reason that was not known. On my way home, I bought wine and all alone, I emptied the bottle, though I knew I would need it keep myself in the writing mood. Weaves of sorrow, fear, anger and despair started to engulf me.

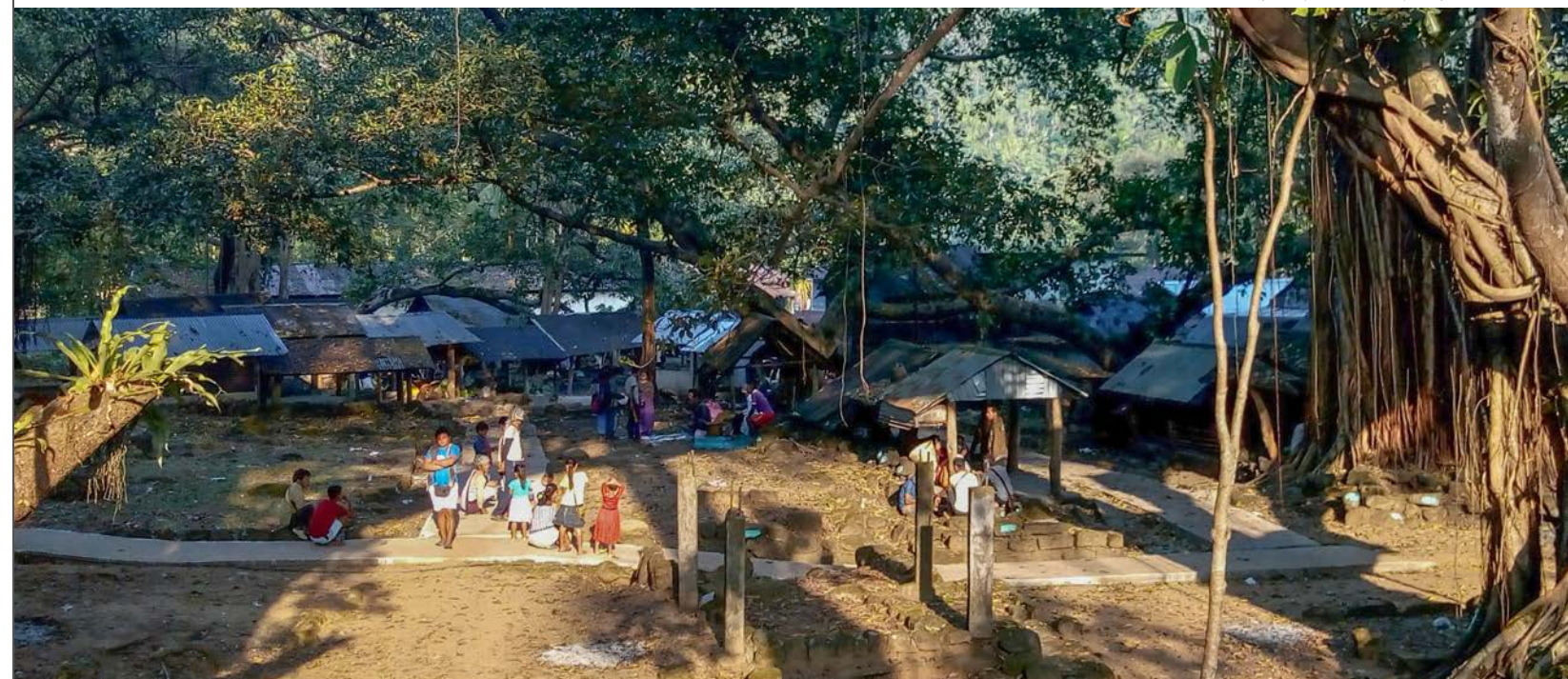
Two months later, around early May, it was my friend's birthday. I had a conversation with her for more than two hours to convince her to go for a one-mile walk to celebrate. When she agreed, I felt it was like convincing someone to go to war. It was that difficult. She is Southeast Asian and was scared that someone would mistake her for Chinese and attack her, as then-President Trump kept the China syndrome alive with the "Chinese flu"

rhetoric that was dominating the country. So we became afraid of "the other's gaze" and this forced us to re-organize our social lives.

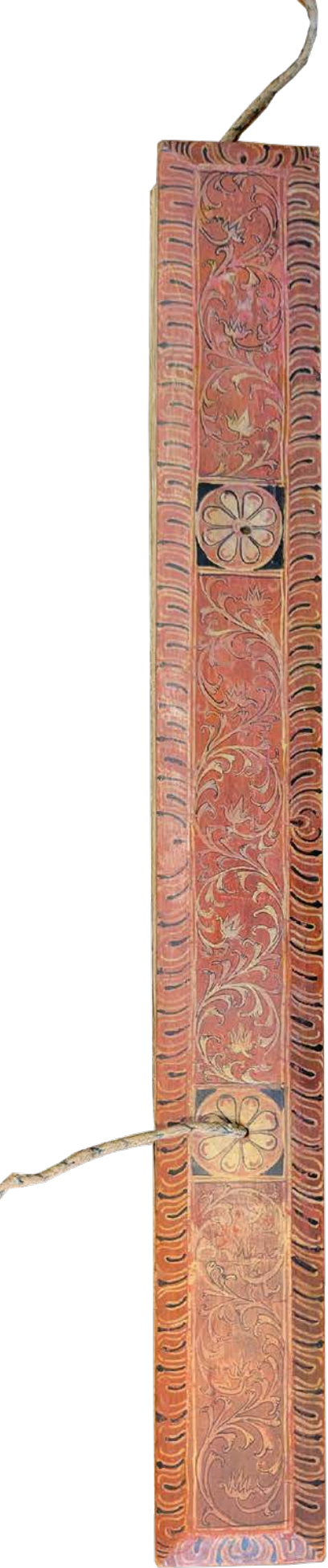
"Our lives, however fragile they were, need to be saved," became a mantra. Yet, the police thought otherwise and killed George Floyd. My friends called me irresponsible for attending protests where hundreds were gathering against systemic violence. I responded that there was no abstract life to be saved. Life was everything as the market continued flourishing on the suffering of the people, especially the poor and the working classes. The global south including my home, Sri Lanka, was in chaos. The police continued to exercise state-sanctioned violence. Authoritarian regimes were praised for being experts at protecting lives from a virus. The pandemic did not disturb the cruel normal we had already become accustomed to. It just propelled into visibility what had been so mundane, an unequal world fraught with hierarchies of class, gender, race and culture.

Now we are saying things are returning to normal here. A normal that would allow us to go on as if nothing happened. Did anything really happen?

Weekly village market, Meghalaya, India







# A “LINGUIST’S” ARCHIVE?:

## Cursory Reflections on Some Pali Manuscripts Collected by James W. Gair

Tyler A. Lehrer, PhD Candidate, History, UW–Madison  
Bruno Shirley, PhD Candidate, Asian Studies, Cornell University

“Bruno, Tyler, would you be interested,” asked Bronwen Bledsoe, South Asia Curator, “in looking at some of James Gair’s collected palm leaf manuscripts?”

And so, one sunny afternoon we found ourselves in the presence of eight objects collected during the remarkable career of James W. Gair (1927-2016), who taught at Cornell from 1962, when he earned his PhD in linguistics, until his retirement in 2000. As the Rare Manuscript Collections undertakes the lengthy work of cataloguing his papers, we jumped at this opportunity to spend time with a small selection of these remarkable materials.

Our brief examination and subsequent discussions lead us to three provisional conclusions. First, the texts themselves are especially relevant to the quotidian lives of lay Buddhists. Second, the texts demonstrate Gair’s broad range of academic interests, which far exceed linguistics, revealing his fascination with Buddhist practice and philosophy, as well as broader currents of South Asian literature and history. Third, this collection holds much value for scholars and practitioners working across a broad range of disciplines. Small, idiosyncratic collections by venerable scholars like Gair contain absolute gems of unacknowledged and underexamined materials.

The collection comprises eight objects, which we have labelled A through H, pictured at right. Seven are palm leaf manuscripts in Sinhala script. The notable exception is E, Gair’s honorary Sāhitya Cakravarti doctorate, which Kelaniya University awarded him in 1993, contained in an elaborate metal tube. Of the seven manuscripts, all but one (H) contain canonical Pali suttas (Buddhist scriptures) and their Sinhala commentaries.

Three unique suttas and their commentaries are represented: the Mahā-Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta (“the Great Teaching on the Establishment of Mindfulness”), a foundational text for the Vipassanā meditation method, in manuscripts A, C and G; the Sigālovāda-sutta (“the Teaching of the Advice to Sigāla”), often called the “layperson’s Vinaya,” full of practical advice about the ethics of human relationships and of ordinary, non-ordained life, in manuscripts B and F; and the Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta (“the Teaching on the Turning of the Wheel of Dharma”) in manuscript D.

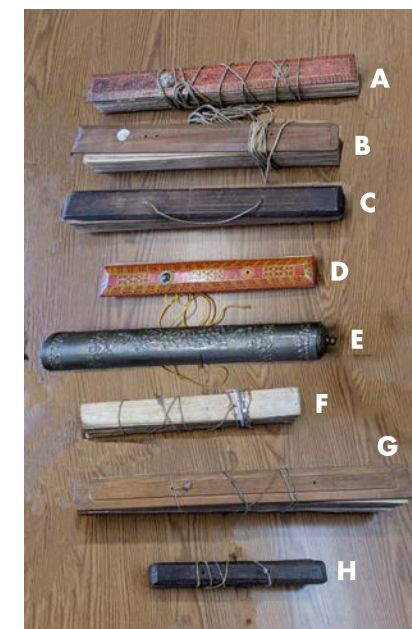
These manuscripts are fascinating objects, not only for their content, but also as part of a long continuum of textual practices, in which colonial intrusions are evident even in this very traditional manuscript form. For



Some of Jim Gair’s palm leaf manuscripts

example, the folia of manuscript B are initially numbered in Arabic numerals, before abruptly switching to the more traditional ka-kha-ga system. Manuscript F has an 1870 Victoria penny fastened into its cord. The brightly painted boards and synthetic cord of manuscript D suggest its 1984 origins even before seeing the partially-erased date in Arabic numerals. The creator of manuscript G signed their own name in Roman script, and marked the date not just in Buddhist (2454) and Christian (1930) eras, but also in the Śaka era (1852). The Indian Government did not adopt the Śaka calendar until after independence, and it is tantalizingly unclear why G’s creator chose to include it in this colophon.

Finally, manuscript H is almost certainly a yantra manual, a guide for ritual specialists in the creation of auspicious protective symbols, but since the folia are out of order, we were unable to confirm this. It contains many complex diagrams, some abstract and some superimposed on recognizable animal forms, accompanied by cryptic Sinhala prose and verses. Its presence amidst the other manuscripts, all of which represent well-beloved and uncontroversial Buddhist



texts, raises stimulating questions about Gair’s collecting practices.

Gair looms large as a pillar of linguistic pedagogy. His academic contributions and publications, many co-authored with his lifelong collaborators and students, span the breadth of not only Sinhala, Pali, and Tamil linguistics and grammar, but also linguistic change in Dhivehi, Sri Lankan Portuguese, and other South Asian languages. He cultivated a lifelong passion for understanding how Sri Lanka’s cultural and historical complexity can be more fully apprehended through its diverse and beguiling literature’s use of humor, wordplay, and wit, as well as aspects of Buddhist philosophy and ritual practice.

Gair was interested in the connections between the unexpected features of living language and the lives that make it so, leading him to collect these diverse texts

over the years. It will take significantly more time and effort to piece together the full story of Gair’s acquisition of these remarkable materials, now facilitated by their presence in the Kroch Asia Library’s manuscript collections.





Left Page: Husnain Afzal & family; This page: Mohamad Safras Mohamed Safwan, Mohsin Khan, Manoj Kaphle (L-R)

# An Unusual Humphrey Fellowship Year

by Francine Barchett, Humphrey Fellow Graduate Assistant

As the Cornell Humphrey Fellowship graduate assistant, I view each fellow as a Rockstar. Hand-picked by the Department of State, they are mid-career professionals who attend year-long leadership and skills training at one of thirteen US campuses, including Cornell. They are also my de facto mentors and teachers. As I show them the ropes of taking classes, Cornell networking, and personalizing their fellowships, they open my eyes to realities beyond my international development grad school classroom.

Unfortunately, this group of 14 fellows from 13 countries has had a trying and abridged year. However, I dare say they, along with our management team, Peter Gregory, Polly Holmberg, and myself, developed grit and community in ways that will last long after the pandemic.

None of us knew which curveballs we would face. The normally ten-month fellowship was condensed to a five-month spring semester. Five fellows relocated from UC-Davis to Cornell at the last minute. The Cornell COVID-19 Response Team did not have us in their system. Plus, we had to obtain rigorous university COVID-19 approvals for each in-person activity.

Yet we adapted through this process. On Zoom, we realized untapped possibilities to become hybrid professionals. For example, Mohamed Safras Mohamed Safwan of Sri Lanka learned to manage his workforce of 10,000 remotely by collaborating with Cornell's Workday director. Furthermore, our program solidified our national network as we joined other Humphrey campuses to host multi-campus seminars that met fellows' diverse needs.

We also grew communally. Since the fellows had traveled across the world to be at Cornell, I did my best, as the

Humphrey Fellows' "party planner," to organize safe, socially distanced activities. Imagine watching a 45-year-old experiencing snow for the first time...on a sled or skis! Or hiking with a group of confused adults as they follow their phones' clues to a tree, feeling around for a geocache. These activities helped meld the fellows into friends and colleagues when community-making was difficult elsewhere. Moreover, by being confined locally, we came to appreciate many of New York's wonders, like Niagara Falls, Cornell AgriTech in Geneva, and Letchworth State Park—the "Grand Canyon of the East."

Finally, we learned to discern what can be done on a computer versus what is irreplaceably in-person. Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge in Seneca Falls has an invasive species problem that shows no signs of abatement. As our keystone volunteer activity, we literally put our hands together and removed common buckthorn. Zoom and telecommunication, we also realized, is still a luxury for many. By visiting the Broome County farming community, fellows' gleaned insights to take home to their countries.

A lot of people ask why the Humphrey Fellowship even had a program this spring when Cornell and the US had all but shut down. While this was a federal government decision outside of our hands, I believe we made the most of what we had.

For our final teambuilding activity as things were opening up in May, we all went whitewater rafting. Afterward, I turned toward Safras and Mohsin Khan from Pakistan. "So, what do you think?" Mohsin snickered, then grinned. "I think this is the best day of the fellowship. For better or worse, this year makes us a family."

Humphrey Fellows are my mentors, but also teachers for life.

**Husnain Afzal**, *Executive Engineer (Civil), Water & Power Development Authority, Pakistan:*

I had the most amazing time at Cornell; starting with academics, the faculty is highly professional, cooperative, and outstanding. I loved walking around the campus's architecturally magnificent buildings, scenic waterfalls, botanical gardens, snow skiing, and especially the cultural exchange and long-lasting friendships made with other Humphrey fellows from 13 different countries.

Studying at Cornell broadened my vision and expanded my mind to think more creatively. In particular, I learnt about sustainable water resource management, water diplomacy and climate change.

I hope to apply the lessons learnt during the fellowship to contribute towards dispute resolution on water sharing among various sectors, to provide informed decision making for water and power infrastructure development, promote water re-use, quantify climate-change driven impacts on water resource availability, and build capacity among Pakistani water resource managers.

**Mohsin Khan**, *Agricultural extension and rural development practitioner, Pakistan:*

Being at Cornell was full of enjoyable moments and wonderful learnings but most mesmerizing were the beautiful landscape and the building structures.

Through this fellowship, I learned best community service and rural development models implemented across the US and New York State. I hope to replicate them in the Pakistani context by working with local community-based organizations in rural areas. This exchange of knowledge can provide a chance to design a locally suitable model to address local challenges.

**Mohamed Safras Mohamed Safwan**, *District Director, Department of Samurdhi Development, Ministry of Finance, Sri Lanka:*

I was really surprised about the role Cornell played as both a private and public land grant university and its contribution to the economy through its world-class education and advanced research facilities and innovations.

I was able to customize my Humphrey fellowship on the theme of "Promoting Agricultural Technology and Best Practices to Increase Productivity and Modernize the Agriculture sector through Diversification, Commercialization and Value Addition." What I learned from one of the leading agriculture schools in the world will help me to achieve Sri Lanka's policy priorities to alleviate poverty and make hunger zero in the country by 2030 through agriculture sector improvements.

**Manoj Kaphle**, *Senior Credit Officer, Agricultural Development Bank, Nepal:*

I found this program to be a milestone for my professional development. I think I achieved almost all of the goals that I had made for my fellowship at Cornell.

My words are less than enough to describe my friendship with partners, professors, and my Humphrey cohort as they supported me from the very beginning to the end of my fellowship. I enjoyed visiting several places in New York State, tasting different foods, and having new experiences, like playing snow games.

Along with two other Humphrey fellows from Nepal who were placed at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Syracuse University, we are starting a rural livelihood improvement project, based on agricultural production and infrastructure, in a rural village in Nepal with 100 small holder farmers. Strengthening farmer capacity, building essential infrastructure to enhance production and create market access, and finance and technical services will be the major outputs of this project.





Migrant worker with his family after the nation-wide lockdown in March 2020 (Photo: Ashish Sharma)

# OXFAM INDIA SUMMER INTERNSHIPS

## Social Protection of Informal Sector Workers in India

by Amisha Chowdhury

I grew up watching Bollywood movies that mostly show upper and middle-class lifestyles of India. Of course, some films occasionally feature a farmer, construction worker, or street vendor as the main character, but the usual portrayal of Indian society excludes the unpleasant underbelly of society. The realities of informal sector workers such as manual scavengers, sweepers, ragpickers, or domestic workers are oftentimes hidden from the foreign gaze.

As someone pursuing a career in international labor rights, I seek to deepen my understanding of groups in the labor force who are rarely represented in the media. My interest in the field prompted me to intern remotely with Oxfam India this summer, through the Einaudi Virtual Internship Program. Oxfam India is a non-profit organization dedicated to addressing the rights, entitlements, and dignity of informal sector workers in India. An informal worker is defined as a worker with no written contract, paid leave, health benefits, or social security. The informal or unorganized labor sector employs roughly 86% of the Indian workforce. Unlike the formal workforce, the state's lack of oversight over informal sector workers makes it a breeding ground for discrimination. Workers face a high risk of

human and labor rights violations, lower wages, unsafe and unregulated working conditions, and lack of social benefits, among many other disadvantages.

I worked with Oxfam India's research team to understand the social protection measures that are in place to support informal workers. My research primarily focused on the conditions of informal sector workers living in the slums of four major cities: Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, and Bangalore. While I conducted extensive research on the slums, I quickly realized that the existing research broadly focuses on the conceptual understanding of informal work in India, with limited data available on the demographics of these informal settlements. There is a clear need for more comprehensive fieldwork and survey research on the ground in targeted areas. My work this summer has encouraged me to continue exploring the issue through my own future academic endeavors and to contribute to underexplored and outdated research areas.

While my time with Oxfam India expanded my knowledge of labor rights, it was also met with a sense of nostalgia. Born and raised in Bangladesh, I am familiar with the sight of children working as domestic workers in the household or carrying bricks over their heads in construction sites. The reality of the informal sector workers might be hidden in global media, but those of us who have strong ties to South Asia are not strangers to the issue. The overwhelming number of informal workers living in poverty and facing harsh conditions has become a societal norm. Those in privileged positions oftentimes turn the

other way and are indifferent towards vulnerable groups who signify the severe class divide in society. Perhaps it is easier to ignore extreme levels of poverty instead of reimagining a different world that challenges existing power structures.

## Analyzing Sugarcane Value Chains in India

by Mihika Badjate

Over the summer, I had the opportunity to intern at Oxfam India, a non-governmental organization (NGO) which takes action to fight inequality, injustice and poverty across the world. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the devastating Delta surge in India this spring, the experience was completely virtual. My focus throughout the internship was on researching sugarcane supply chains in India. India is one of the world's largest producers and consumers of sugar, with the states of Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra being the biggest producers, generating 40% and 21% of domestic sugar, respectively.

One of the first projects I worked on involved research on child labor in the sugarcane industry, assisting Oxfam India in writing an informational report that could later be developed into a more comprehensive action plan. While bonded labor is illegal in India, many families with child laborers are held hostage by informal bondage systems, in which workers are forced to take large loans from farmers and must work until the loans are repaid in full. These loans often transcend generations, keeping workers' children in the bondage system and creating a cycle of exploitation. I conducted research to come up with a list of actions that organizations can take to help put an end to this exploitation and ensure basic rights and dignity for all.

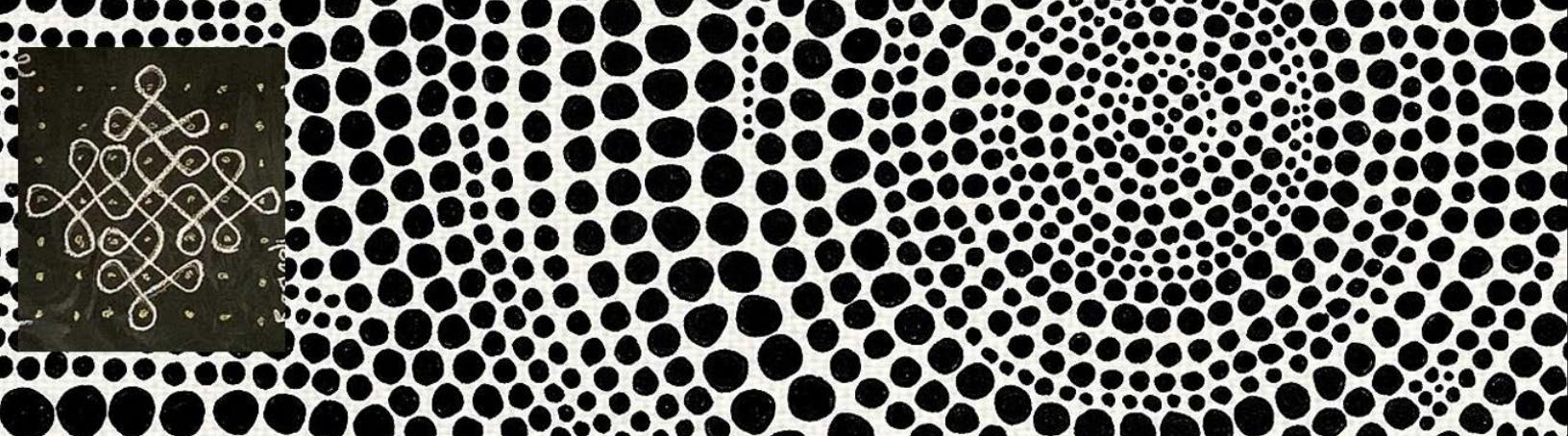
The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the

sugarcane industry in India, despite the government declaring the production of sugar to be an essential service. I researched these impacts and what they may mean for the industry in the long term. During the pandemic, the demand for sugar across the world has fallen dramatically, since several key industries, such as hotel, food and beverage companies, greatly reduced their operations. Sales have declined by as much as 50%, causing sugar mills to be unable to pay cane farmers. In light of the pandemic, some sugar mills started automating their processes, though most sugarcane farmers lack the funds to invest in machinery. In one mill in Maharashtra, one mechanical sugarcane harvester replaces as many as one hundred workers. While increased automation will undoubtedly lead to increased efficiency and productivity, it could also result in massive job losses.

During my time with Oxfam India, I had the opportunity to work with members of the Oxfam America team that collaborate on the Behind the Brands campaign, an initiative that brings together the ten largest food and beverage companies to tackle climate change and sustainability in their sourcing of various commodities. I assisted in research from a sugar perspective, examining where in India the biggest brands source their sugar from. I also attended a stakeholder meeting with representatives from Nestle, Coca-Cola, and other food and beverage companies with a strong presence in India, where I listened in on their discussions about encouraging better practices in sugarcane sourcing.

As an economics student, I grew so much through the opportunity to apply my classroom knowledge in a real-world context. It was also exciting to get a window into the behind-the-scenes of a major global NGO that runs so many amazing initiatives worldwide. My summer with Oxfam India was truly invaluable, and I hope to visit India once travel becomes safe and see the amazing work Oxfam is doing firsthand.





# STORIES OF SOLIDARITY

by Alekhya Mukkavilli, MRP student, City & Regional Planning

By the summer of 2020, COVID-19-induced lockdowns magnified the precarity of global healthcare, justice, and welfare systems. In India, a country-wide shutdown announced with just four hours' notice on March 24, 2020 enabled a migrant crisis, as people left cities on foot and later on public transportation, returning to rural areas and small towns. This summer, India is suffering with growing fear as experts warn of a coming third wave. Throughout the pandemic and throughout the world, everyone suffered in some way or the other, but those living on the margins suffered the most.

During this time, a group consisting of Rewa Phansalkar and myself, both City & Regional Planning graduate students; Anna Shats, an Information Sciences graduate student; and Neema Kudva, Associate Professor of City & Regional Planning, came together to process what was happening in India. Stuck in our Ithaca bubble, we wanted to contribute to documenting how people struggled to help each other and to survive, during a time when major institutional support systems failed. Moreover, we realized the need for an archive of what this process of solidarity creation felt like, which went beyond the moment that was reported in the news.

We received a small Cornell Engaged Opportunity Grant for our project, "Stories of Solidarity." Our aim was to reach out to people working with communities that COVID heavily impacted, and to collect stories of their mutual aid. We asked frontline workers and community members to send us self-recorded videos of themselves that captured, briefly, their experiences of COVID-19 lockdowns, and how their communities responded. Eventually, the plan was to put the videos on an interactive website, where one could look at a large world map, and zoom in to locations to watch videos of people's reflections.

While simple in theory, neither getting videos nor putting together the website proved straight-forward. We soon realized

that asking people to direct their own reflections was too broad of an ask in a moment of crisis. No one had fully processed what was happening, and so sending a three-minute video of self-reflection was a difficult undertaking.

Eventually, we realized that we need to reach out and ask for interviews, in which we asked people about their own and their loved ones' experiences. Conducting these interviews allowed us to reach out to organizers and community members, but mostly aid organizations. Setting up the website was difficult, due to a range of bureaucratic and technological hurdles, but Anna Shats was eventually able to create a website that will launch soon.

As we begin to process the project, we have realized that conducting interviews based on our networks limited the scope of the work, even as it allowed us to connect with people we know in ways that we had not previously imagined. We have not, despite our intentions, collected enough stories from community members themselves, mainly due to language barriers. Furthermore, we have realized that as the world moves in a non-linear path away from the pandemic, people still need more time to process their experiences. In the next phase of the project, we will need to address some of these barriers, and synthesize our interviews when we archive them on the website.

For me, this form of learning is a more localized form of "systems thinking." While the pandemic has highlighted the shortcomings of our food, government, and healthcare systems, it has also emphasized the importance of community systems rooted in the bonds that hold communities and people together and help them survive great hardships. The types of systems that these bonds can create, however fragile, and however temporary, might be our species' saving grace, during the pandemic, and for time to come.



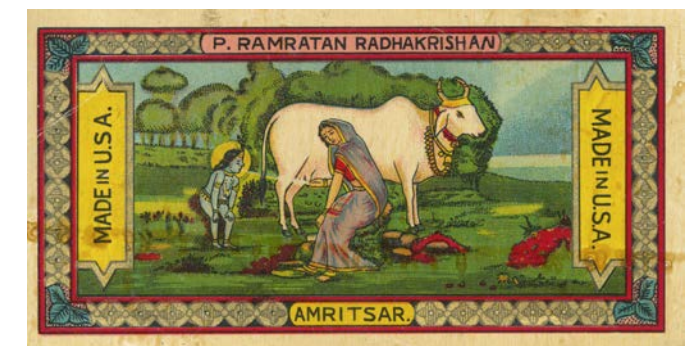
## COLONIAL-ERA LITHOGRAPHED LABELS AT LIBRARY

by Bronwen Bledsoe, South Asia Curator,  
Cornell University Library

Cornell University Library's South Asian Collection has been adding popular visual sources to its collection for several years, including these recently acquired lithographed textile labels, pictured here and on the front cover.

Textiles played a conspicuous role in the Indian struggle for independence. Shown here are a selection of bright lithographed labels for fabrics sold in India from about the 1890s to the 1950s. When Mahatma Gandhi called for a boycott of British goods in 1921, he was objecting to the colonial exploitation of taking raw cotton from the colony, shipping it to the industrial weaving mills of northern England, then reexporting the yard goods for sale in India, at a substantial profit. Within a few decades, Indians had established their own cotton mills in competition with the colonial trade.

The labels use imagery of assorted genres—Indian, European, Orientalized, and fanciful. British goods both announce themselves with British company names, and naturalize themselves with Indian scripts and imagery. Indians, on the other hand, sometimes appropriate colonial imagery, but also developed an iconography of independent India, personified as a goddess in these labels, and elsewhere in the lithographic repertoire.





# ARTS EVENTS & CONCERTS

## AMARTYA SEN SPEAKS OUT ON RISING THREATS TO DEMOCRACY

by Priya Pradhan, Global Cornell writing intern



“Home may have become a dangerous place for democracy to flourish now,” said Nobel prize-winning economist Amartya Sen, this year’s Bartels World Affairs Fellow. His May 5, 2021 lecture, “Attacks on Democracy,” hosted by the Mario Einaudi

Center for International Studies and the South Asia Program, examined the history and global patterns of democracy, from Sen’s home country of India to the United States. With an eye to how democracy has changed over the past few decades, Sen argued that today, threats to democracy are internal rather than external.

Defining democracy as “government by discussion,” Sen noted the disturbing rise in authoritarian tendencies in countries worldwide. “I fear I have to include my own country, India, in that unfortunate basket,” he said.

While India may have been the first country to accept democracy in the non-Western world, Sen said, the rise of right-wing parties has led to internal conflicts that threaten democratic resilience. From legal eligibility afforded selectively to Hindus, but not minority groups, including Muslims, to stifling anti-government criticisms through arrests and anti-nationalist labels, Sen cited numerous instances of democratic backsliding in his home country. Sen also touched on the past year’s unforeseen challenge, the pandemic, emphasizing the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on the poorest across the globe.

The event was moderated by Kaushik Basu, the Carl Marks Professor of International Studies, Professor of Economics, and core faculty member of the South Asia Program. Sen is the Thomas W. Lamont University Professor and Professor of Economics and Philosophy at Harvard University and a defining thinker across several academic fields. Following prepared remarks, he engaged in discussion and Q&A with faculty representing disciplines touched by his work and Cornell students.

Robert Hockett, Edward Cornell Professor of Law, pointed out how democratic backsliding in the United States has been facilitated through the abuse of the first amendment. Marco Battaglini, Edward H. Meyer Professor of Economics, asserted the role of social media as an exogenous shock to democracy and governance. Rachana Kamtekar, Professor of Philosophy, considered the rise of “outsider” candidates and voters in South Asia who may be less likely to see democracy’s intrinsic value.

Four students posed questions about postcolonial governments and memory, education, and the grassroots impacts of social media. In response, Sen described social media as a tool that has expanded the reach of our conversation, with the potential “to inform, to diffuse, to misinform, and to question.” Originally appeared in *Cornell Chronicle* (May 11, 2021)

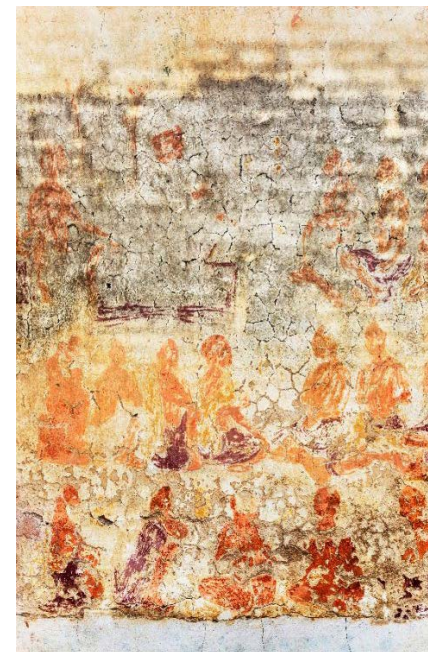


On daviapayana Video Still, Archival Pigment Print, Atul Bhalla, 2016

## Virtual Artist In Residence ATUL BHALLA

In Fall 2020, Indian artist Atul Bhalla was our Virtual Artist-in-Residence. SAP had been working with Anisha Saxena (History, Onondaga Community College) to bring him to Ithaca and Syracuse for several months, but the pandemic forced us to change plans, and make his residency virtual.

Over the course of six weeks in October and November, Atul Bhalla gave two virtual lectures hosted by SAP (“You always step into the same river” and “The Lowest depths: Partition through Objects of Fictitious Togetherness”), and one hosted by OCC (“Anhedonic Dehiscence”). He also visited history and art classes at Cornell and OCC. The series of talks covered some of his artworks while addressing his concerns with the physical, historical, spiritual, and political significance of



Fictions-II, Archival Pigment Print, Atul Bhalla, 2017

water to the urban environment and populations through artworks that incorporate sculpture, installation, video, photography, and performance.

Atul Bhalla’s recent solo shows include “Anhedonic Dehiscence” (Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi, 2018), “You always step into the same river” (SepiaEYE, New York, 2015) and “Ya Ki Kuch aur ...” (Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi, 2014). He was also the Mellon Artist Research Africa fellow at University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa in 2018, with the project “The Excavated distance of gold,” examining acid mine drainage at the gold mines. Recent group exhibitions have brought his work to FotoFest Biennale Houston in 2016 and 2018, The Pompidou Center, Paris, the IVAM Institute of Modern Art in Valencia, and the Devi Art Foundation in New Delhi.



# A CONVERSATION WITH RAHUL GANDHI



On March 3, 2021, Rahul Gandhi, Member of India's Parliament and former leader of the Indian National Congress, engaged in a frank and open conversation on democracy, development, and life in politics, India, and the world with Kaushik Basu, Professor of Economics and the Carl Marks Professor of International Studies at Cornell.

Rahul Gandhi has been a member of the Lok Sabha (India's lower house of Parliament) since 2004. He currently represents the constituency of Wayanad, Kerala. In 2007, he was named general secretary of the Indian National Congress in charge of the party's youth and student organizations. In January 2013, he assumed office as vice president of the Indian National Congress. He was the president of the Indian National Congress from December 2017 to July 2019. He is also the son, grandson and great-grandson of Prime Ministers of India (Rajiv Gandhi, Indira Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, respectively),

As part of the post-conversation Q&A, Rahul Gandhi answered questions from four students and one faculty member, allowing for further engagement with the Cornell community. Alekhya Mukkavilli, a Master's student in City Regional Planning, asked about strategies through which India can address green growth outside of investing in renewable energy, while her fellow MRP student, Harman Singh Dhodi, asked about the Smart Cities Mission in India. Atharv Garje, a Biology and History undergraduate, had a question about maintaining a judiciary independent of majoritarian interests. Rewa Phansalkar, a City and Regional Planning Master's student, asked Gandhi how the national budget would differ if it were created under his leadership. The session ended with a question from Durba Ghosh, Professor of History, about the state of higher education in India today, given recent attacks on numerous institutions.

While attendance at the Zoom event was limited to the Cornell community, the livestream received hundreds of views. In the ensuing days and weeks, though, the video was watched over a hundred thousand times via numerous social media postings, and the event also received extensive coverage in the Indian press.

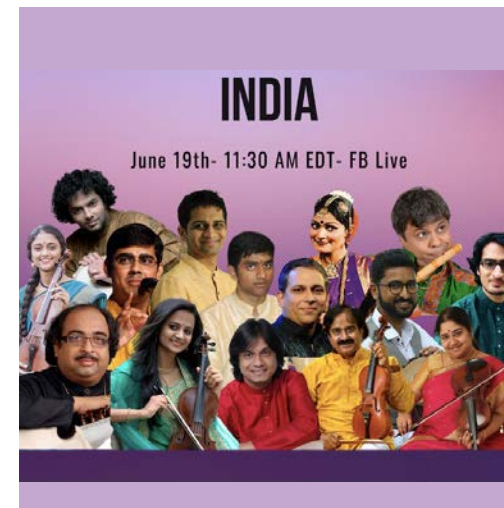


## MARG FOUNDATION COLLABORATIONS

In Fall 2020, SAP partnered with the Marg Foundation to co-sponsor several webinars. The Marg Foundation, founded in 1946, is a leading Indian publisher and research institute focused on art and architecture. This partnership was established to help SAP reach a wider audience in India, as well as share Marg's innovative scholarship with American audiences. SAP co-sponsored two Marg webinars. On October 14, "Art in the Age of Blockchain" featured Deeksha Nath and Beth Citron, both curators at Terrain.art, discussing the possibilities of presenting contemporary art through digital technologies. On November 18, Ela Bhatt (Founder, SEWA & Chancellor, Gujarat Vidyapith) and Kaushik Basu (Economics, Cornell University) explored the "Economy of Nurturance and Cultural Wellbeing," in India and throughout the globe.

## SPICMACAY EVENTS

This past academic year, SAP continued to support the Cornell chapter of the Society for the Promotion of Indian Classical Music and Culture Among Youth (SPICMACAY) in bringing Indian classical music and dance to the Cornell community, albeit virtually. As with SPICMACAY's on-campus events, all these concerts were free and open to the public. SAP and SPICMACAY hosted six different events this year, an increase allowed by the virtual format, including the Carnatic violinist L. Subramaniam, the Bharatanatyam dancer Geeta Chandran, Hindustani singer Anand Bhate, and fusion violinists Nandini Shankar & Raaginder Singh Momi. An all-star fundraiser for COVID relief in India ended the year in June 2021.



## SAP YouTube

Videos of over twenty 2020-2021 South Asia Program seminars and events, as well as several past events, including Tagore Lectures in Modern Indian Literature, are now available on the SAP YouTube playlist. Simply search for "South Asia Program" in YouTube.





# COLLABORATIONS WITH OXFAM INDIA

In 2022, SAP embarked on a partnership with Oxfam India, hosting a webinar and supporting two virtual internships. Ranjana Das, a Humphrey Fellow and SAP Visiting Scholar at Cornell in 2017-2018, who is now Lead Specialist-Private Sector Engagement at Oxfam India, initiated these interactions, and has been SAP’s lead contact with Oxfam India throughout the year.

For seventy years, Oxfam has been working in India to end discrimination and create a free and just society. Oxfam India is an independent, autonomous Indian NGO, and a member of the global confederation of 20 Oxfams across the world. Oxfam India has a long and well-recognized record of humanitarian relief in times of crisis.

On February 22, 2021, SAP co-hosted a webinar with Oxfam India, to examine their work and how it has been affected by the pandemic. Max Lawson, Head of Inequality Policy for Oxfam International, and Amitabh Behar, Chief Executive Officer of Oxfam India, presented, “Rising Inequality: Oxfam’s Journey to Fight Inequality to End Poverty and Injustice.” A second planned webinar in March 2021 on Oxfam’s human rights work among Assam tea plantation workers was unfortunately cancelled due to scheduling issues.

The partnership continued in summer 2021, with Oxfam India hosting two Cornell students for virtual internships, with funding support from the Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies (See p. 14–15). Mihika Badjate ’22, an Economics major, and Amisha Chowdhury ’23, a Government and Feminist, Gender & Sexuality Studies major, are both spending six weeks working with Ranjana Das and others at Oxfam India. Badjate is assisting on a project to develop a responsible sugar supply chain in Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra, while Chowdhury is supporting a project on the rights and entitlements of informal sector workers in four cities: Bangalore, Delhi, Pune and Mumbai.

Depending on what the future holds, SAP hopes to be able to send Cornell undergraduates to India for internships with Oxfam India in future years, building upon the foundation laid by these virtual interactions this past year.



ऑक्सफैम इंडिया  
**OXFAM**  
India

A movement  
to end  
discrimination

# CORNELL AND THE STUDY OF South Asian Buddhism(s)

by Bruno M. Shirley, PhD Candidate, Asian Studies



Buddha statues, Dambulla, Sri Lanka



Cornell has long been a center for the study of Buddhism. Working across multiple departments and disciplines, researching varied temporal periods, and, of course, affiliated with our three Asia area programs, Cornell’s faculty, graduate students and undergraduates are uniquely positioned to engage with the transregional and multimedia phenomenon that is Buddhism. It’s rare to work or study in an institution that can offer three distinct courses focused on Buddhism at the undergraduate level, alongside Buddhist-oriented language courses like Pali and Buddhist Chinese, all in a single semester. From philosophical debates in Sanskrit to contemporary cinema in Thai, the academic study of Buddhism at Cornell is thriving at all levels.

To celebrate this expansive and interdisciplinary range of expertise, several graduate students, including myself, formed the Society for Buddhist Studies in 2019 to promote Cornell as an institutional leader in the field. Our first program of events, in the long-distant in-person past of Spring 2020, consisted mostly of presentations from our own faculty and graduate members. But the pivot to virtual meetings allowed us to look dramatically wider for both speakers and attendees, presenting an ambitious seminar series featuring scholars, both leading and early-career, from across the globe. Over three hundred people attended our talks this past semester alone, from Ithaca

to Colombo, many of whom joined us for multiple events in the series. Scholars, practitioners, and interested bystanders all took part in building a global community interested in learning about cutting-edge Buddhology, centered in upstate New York.

While we aim to be diverse in our seminar offerings, the South Asia Program’s long-standing support for our events has given us a particular strength in the Buddhism(s) of this region. Of the sixteen talks we’ve hosted over the past academic year, over half have either focused on South Asian Buddhism in particular or have seriously engaged with texts and thinkers directly originating in South Asia. These talks have covered all places and periods: from Ghandhāra to Sri Lanka; from early textual production to modern revivals. Our talk on Dalit historiography and temporality of caste, given by SAP core faculty Lucinda Ramberg, had over one hundred audience members register from across the globe. Interest in what Cornell has to say about South Asian Buddhism in particular is clearly alive and well.

It has been an absolute joy to help set the wheel rolling on this Society, and to have SAP’s enthusiastic support from day one. Our new graduate student co-chairs, MK Long and Yuanyuan Duan, are beginning to lay plans for the coming academic year which will include virtual viewing opportunities, and which I will thoroughly look forward to watching from afar myself.



SAP SEMINARS AND  
EVENTS 2020-2021

**September 14:** “Land and Livelihoods in Kalimpong, West Bengal” Sarah Besky (International and Comparative Labor & Labor Relations, Law, and History, Cornell University)

**September 21:** “Nilgiris Field Learning Center during a Pandemic” Neema Kudva (City & Regional Planning, Cornell University), Andrew Willford (Anthropology, Cornell University), Steven Wolf (Natural Resources, Cornell University), Anita Varghese (Keystone Foundation, India) & K. R. Abhishek (Keystone Foundation, India)

**September 29:** “Language and Education in South Asia” Chaise LaDousa (Anthropology, Hamilton College) & Christina Davis (Anthropology, Western Illinois University)

**October 2:** “Reading a Buddha Biography as a Whole Person: Lessons from Medieval Sri Lanka” Charles Hallisey (Buddhist Literatures, Harvard University)

**October 5:** “Dynamics of Tamil Urban Ethnoterritories in Diaspora” Delon Madavan (South Asian Studies, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, France) & Sharika Thiranaganama (Anthropology, Stanford University)

**October 12:** “Connecting Art Histories: Across Africa and Asia” Diana Campbell Betancourt (Dhaka Art Summit, Bangladesh), Iftikhar Dadi (History of Art, Cornell University), Anissa Rahadiningtyas (History of Art, Cornell University), Muhammad Nafisur Rahman (Architecture, University of Cincinnati), Amie Soudien (Art History, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa), Akshaya Tankha (South Asian Studies, Yale University), John Tain (Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong) & Ming Tiampo (Art History, Carleton University, Canada)

**October 14:** “Art in the Age of Blockchain” Deeksha Nath (Curator, Terrain.art) & Beth Citron (Curator, Terrain.art)

**October 19:** “The Astronomical Observatories of Jai Singh” Barry Perlus (Art, Cornell University)

**October 22:** “You always step into the same river” Atul Bhalla (Virtual Artist-in-Residence, South Asia Program, Cornell University)

**October 24:** “Melody, Moods and Ragas” SPICMACAY-Cornell chapter

**October 26:** “Hindu Belonging and Minority Recognition in Pakistan” Ghazal Asif Farrukhi (Anthropology, Johns Hopkins University), Chander Kolhi (Progressive Human Foundation, Pakistan) & Kapil Dev (Human Rights Activist, Pakistan) Juergen Schaflechner (Social & Cultural Anthropology, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany) & Natasha Raheja (Anthropology, Cornell University)

**November 7:** “From Indian Classical to World Music” L. Subramaniam

**November 9:** “South of the Future: Marketing Care and Speculating Life in South Asia and the Americas” Anindita Banerjee (Comparative Literature, Cornell University) & Debra Castillo (Comparative Literature, Cornell University)

**November 12:** “The Lowest Depths: Partition through Objects of Fictitious Togetherness” Atul Bhalla (Virtual Artist-in-Residence, South Asia Program, Cornell University)

**November 16:** “Semi-Study Break: World Music of the Moment” Daniel Bass (South Asia Program, Cornell University) & Jonathan Miller (Homelands Productions)

**November 18:** “Economy of Nurturance and Cultural Wellbeing” Ela Bhatt (Founder, SEWA & Chancellor, Gujarat Vidyapith) and Kaushik Basu (Economics, Cornell University)

**December 5:** “Dance and Expressions: A Bharatanatyam Tale” Geeta Chandran

**February 15:** “Agricultural Transformation in an Evolving Nepal” Andrew McDonald (Soil & Crop Sciences, Cornell University)

**February 22:** “Rising Inequality: Oxfam’s Journey to Fight Inequality to End Poverty and Injustice” Amitabh Behar (Oxfam India) & Max Lawson (Oxfam International)

**March 1:** “Infrastructures of Occupation: Dams, Development, and the Politics of Integration in Kashmir” Mona Bhan (Anthropology, Syracuse University)

**March 2:** “A Conversation with Rahul Gandhi” Rahul Gandhi (Member of Parliament, India) & Kaushik Basu, (Economics, Cornell University)

**March 8:** “The Cunning of Capital: Dalit and Queer Aesthetics of Resistance” Nimanthi Perera-Rajasingham (English, Colgate University) & Ani Maitra (Film and Media Studies, Colgate University)

**March 10:** “From Upstate New York to Foggy Bottom: Lessons from a Career in the U.S. Foreign Service” Laura Stone (Deputy Assistant Secretary for South Asia, U. S. Department of State)

**March 15:** “Figures of Surplus: Waste, Informality, and Caste in Urban Pakistan” Waqas Butt (Anthropology, University of Toronto, Canada)

**March 16:** “‘We Were Always Buddhist’: Dalit Historiography and the Temporality of Caste” Lucinda Ramberg (Anthropology, Cornell University)

**March 19:** “Basement Bhangra Redux” Rekha Malhotra (DJ, Basement Bhangra)

**March 27:** “Guru Vandana: A Lecture Demonstration” Anand Bhatte

**March 30:** “Partisan Aesthetics: Modern Art and India’s Long Decolonization” Debashree Mukherjee (South Asian Studies, Columbia University), Dwaipayan Banerjee (Science, Technology, and Society, Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Iftikhar Dadi (History of Art, Cornell University) & Sanjukta Sunderason (History of Art, University of Amsterdam, Netherlands)

**March 31:** “Hyper Education: Why Good School, Good Grades, and Good Behavior Are Not Enough” Pawan Dhingra (American Studies, Amherst College)

**April 2:** “Hell as a Metaphor in Early Buddhism” Joseph Marino (Buddhist Studies, University of Washington)

**April 5:** “Musicophilia in Mumbai: Performing Subjects and the Metropolitan Unconscious” Tejaswini Niranjana (Cultural Studies, Lingnan University, Hong Kong)

**April 12:** “An Uncharted Modernity: The Architecture of Muzharul Islam” Nurur Rahman Khan (Architect, Tanya Karim N. R. Khan and Associates, Bangladesh)

**April 9-15:** *Kalira Atita (Yesterday’s Past)* film screening

**April 16:** “Post-screening Q&A with Director Nila Madhab Panda” Neema Kudva (City & Regional Planning, Cornell University) & Nila Madhab Panda (Director)

**April 17:** “Breaking Boundaries: A Bridge Between Indian Classical and Western Music” Nandini Shankar & Raaginder Singh Momi

**April 19:** “Resistance Through Poetry in Pakistan: Tradition and Personal Journey: Harris Khalique (Poet, Pakistan)

**April 23:** “Epic Work: Readings of the Mahavamsa” Kristin Scheible (Religion, Reed College)

**April 28:** “Farmers, Traders, Slaves, and Princes: Retrieving Lives of Eighteenth-Century Inhabitants in and around Colombo, Sri Lanka” Dries Lyna (History, Radboud University, Netherlands)

**May 3:** “Kamala Harris and the History of South Asian America” Nico Slate (History, Carnegie Mellon University)

**May 5:** “Attacks on Democracy” *Bartels World Affairs Lecture* Amartya Sen (Economics and Philosophy, Harvard University)

**May 10:** “The Puzzle of Rising Education, Later Marriage, and Dowry Persistence in India: A Demographic Analysis” Alaka Basu (Global Development, Cornell University)

Rhythms of  
the Land:

Indigenous Knowledge,  
Science, and Thriving  
Together in a  
Changing Climate



Maureen Gruben, *Stitching My Landscape*, 2017. Video of land-based performance work. (Image: Kyra Kordoski)

This fall, SAP is among the sponsors for a conference and art exhibition on global climate change. From October 11 to 13, 2021, “Rhythms of the Land: Indigenous Knowledge, Science, and Thriving Together in a Changing Climate” will bring together scholars, activists and artists from around the world both virtually and on the Cornell campus.

Indigenous and rural societies that have contributed least to anthropogenic climate change are facing its harshest consequences. Scholars in the humanities along with social and biophysical scientists must collaborate with these communities to build innovative systems that are needed for anticipatory capacity, that is, the ability to envision ‘just’, ‘equitable’, and ‘sustainable’ futures and develop a plan of action to deal with uncertainties.

As a capstone to a transdisciplinary project (2016-21) involving social and biophysical scientists, community leaders, and government and civil society organizations, this conference will demonstrate the ability of ecological calendars to build anticipatory capacity, develop climate change policy and adaptation strategies, and facilitate curriculum development based on research.

At the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, *Art and Environmental Struggle* brings together the work of twenty artists responding to the environmental degradation occurring in their countries and communities. This exhibition, running from August 26 to December 19, 2021, features artists from regions



Dilyara Kaipova, *Danger Signs*, 2017. Cotton and silk, handwoven *ikat*.

encompassed by established Cornell fieldwork in Central Asia, the Arctic, and North America, as well as from southern hemisphere regions experiencing some of the most acute consequences of resource extraction and climate variation.

Emphasizing the effects of colonialism and neocolonialism, the exhibition foregrounds works of art that explore the consequences of environmental damage on the food production, security, cultural independence, and general well-being of communities that have historically contributed the least to the current crisis. It explores specific, local impacts of geopolitical forces and extractive industries, as well as Indigenous concepts of the value and personhood of all living things.

The compelling ways that artists confront this crucial topic, simultaneously with the presentation of critical research at a major conference, represents a means for engaging contemporary thinking about this most universally human of issues.

Participants and sponsors in the exhibition and the conference include the American Indian & Indigenous Studies Program and faculty partners and thought leaders from the South Asia Program, the Department of Natural Resources, Cornell Botanical Gardens, Cornell University Library, the Atkinson Center for Sustainability, the Department of Global Development, the Department of Performing and Media Arts, and the Judith Reppy Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies.



# Afterschool Language and Culture Program

by Julio Rodriguez, Graduate Assistant, Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies & Ava White, New Initiatives Coordinator, Southeast Asia Program



Gaining exposure to a variety of cultures in today's increasingly globalized world is an important part of a K-12 student's educational experience. To facilitate this exchange, the Afterschool Language and Culture Program (ALCP), offered through the Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies and managed by the South Asia Program and Southeast Asia Program, bridges connections between Cornell student volunteers and local K-12 students to foster meaningful language and culture engagement. Over the years, student volunteers who speak foreign languages have worked with thousands of children in the local community to provide engaging experiences learning about other languages and cultures.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the ALCP re-envisioned the way it operates, since in-person programming at local schools was not possible as students transitioned to online and hybrid learning arrangements. Unfortunately, the ALCP was not able to bring language-learning opportunities into local schools in a virtual capacity. Teachers expressed concern with extra enrichment programming for K-12 students, as they were already struggling to adjust to virtual and hybrid settings, which was compounded by the challenge of "Zoom fatigue."

However, the ALCP is a program with two goals: to expose local K-12 students to foreign languages and our increasingly interconnected world, and to provide opportunities for Cornell students to volunteer their language skills and learn about culturally competent language education.

Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, the ALCP offered three virtual workshops in April 2021 for the 30 Cornell and Ithaca College students who expressed an interest in volunteering with the ALCP. These students had experience in a variety of languages including Vietnamese, Spanish, French, Italian, Mandarin, and others. These professional development

opportunities allowed students to learn about language pedagogy, and to develop skills they could leverage for future teaching or volunteering with the ALCP once pandemic restrictions ease.

To assist with the workshops, the ALCP recruited the expertise of education department faculty at Ithaca College. This opened a dialogue between Cornell's Einaudi Center and Ithaca College, which we hope to explore further in the future. On April 7, 2021, Jeff Perry, Senior Lecturer of Global Development at Cornell, provided the first workshop on "Developing Lessons from a Curriculum," which stressed the various methods and practices available to boost engagement in the classroom.

Ellie Fulmer, Associate Professor of Education at Ithaca College, presented a workshop on "Learning about Students, Multisensory Activities and Assessment Tools, and the Practice of Lesson Design" on April 14, 2021, with assistance from Ithaca College students Lillian Roman (Spanish Education) and Catriona Ferguson (Spanish and Education Studies). The workshop addressed how to consider students' individual backgrounds when planning lessons and how to gauge the success of a lesson.

In the final workshop on April 21, 2021, Shuzhan Li, Assistant Professor of Education at Ithaca College, discussed how to identify cultural strengths within diverse communities. Participants used critical race theory to analyze multimodal materials and collaboratively imagine ways to incorporate an asset-based approach in the Afterschool Language and Culture Program.

This fall, as vaccination rates increase and restrictions lift, we hope to return to local schools for in-person exchanges of culture and language, buoyed by the success of this spring's virtual workshop series. Volunteers with knowledge of foreign languages are encouraged to join the program. Please email outreach@einaudi.cornell.edu for updates on fall recruitment of volunteers!

## EXPLORING *the Impacts of Human* DISEASE *Throughout* HISTORY

by Emera Bridger Wilson,  
Associate Director, South Asia Center, Syracuse University

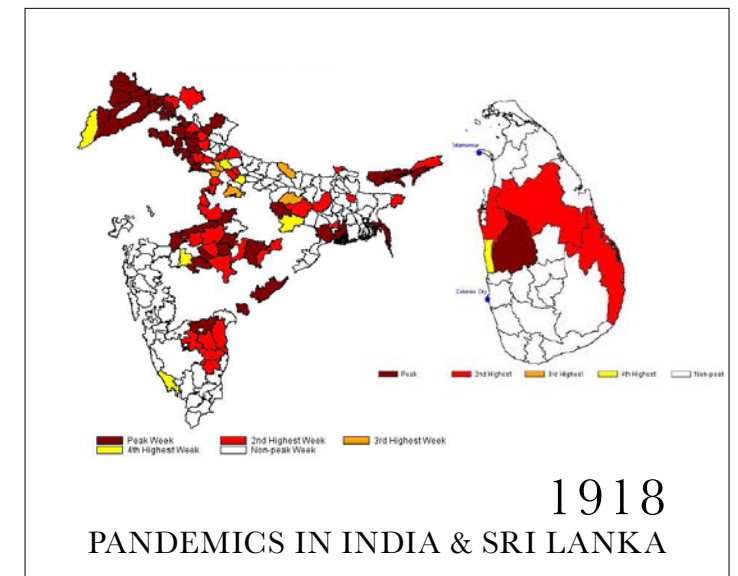
Since March 2020, we have been living through a historic global pandemic. As we begin to process our collective experiences with COVID-19, we might pause to reflect on how people around the world have lived through periods of disease throughout history, and how they understood their experiences. Before germ theory, how did cultures around the world conceptualize vectors of disease? What public health measures were employed in 10<sup>th</sup> Century China to slow down epidemics? How has malaria changed the course of history? These are some of the questions with which educators enrolled in this summer's International Studies Summer Institute (ISSI) grappled.

The 2021 ISSI, a professional development workshop for K-12 teachers hosted annually by the South Asia Program and other programs at the Einaudi Center for International Studies in collaboration with the Syracuse University South Asia Center, explored the history of human disease. The goal of the institute was to encourage teachers to develop a greater understanding of the different regions and cultures of the world, including South Asia, and to think critically about social, political, and environmental issues using disease and public health as a point of departure.

Building upon the experience of the 2020 ISSI, this year's workshop consisted of a mix of synchronous meetings, which allowed the participants to interact directly with faculty studying these issues, and asynchronous components.

On June 28, 2021, participants gathered virtually via Zoom to talk with three scholars about diseases over time. Suman Seth, Marie Underhill Noll Professor of the History of Science at Cornell, discussed "Medicine, Race and Sex in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century British Empire," focusing on the British colonists and enslaved peoples in the Caribbean.

Siddharth Chandra (Cornell PhD '97), professor of economics at Michigan State University, talked about the social and economic ramifications of the 1918 Influenza Epidemic in the US, India, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia. Chandra noted that the ports, like Bombay, Madras and Calcutta, and pilgrimage sites, like Puri, were early hot spots for the pandemic, which then travelled in a wave-like manner from east to west, highlighting



1918  
PANDEMICS IN INDIA & SRI LANKA

the connectivity between locations. In contrast, the virus spread differently in Sri Lanka, because of two demographically distinct regions with limited connections between them, the Tamil-majority North and the majority Sinhalese South. Chandra argued that understanding how demographic, social and cultural factors impact the spread of disease historically can help scientists and public health officials create better models for how to manage the spread of disease now and in the future.

Finally, Jarra Jagne, Senior Extension Associate at the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, outlined the basics of zoonotic diseases, the economic and public health impacts of these diseases, specifically avian influenza, and how we can mitigate the spread of these diseases in the future.

Following the synchronous session, participants completed six weeks of online activities featuring professors from Cornell and Syracuse sharing their expertise and perspectives on disease through taped lectures and readings. The topics of these asynchronous sessions ranged from the introduction of disease in colonial Peru, epidemics in early modern China, the Black Death in Art and Literature, and the most dangerous animal on earth, the mosquito. Each of these units, in addition to the presentations given on June 28, drew connections between the ways in which race, gender, social structure, and culture impact how people conceptualize and treat diseases.

In August, the participants reconvened for a synchronous Zoom session, during which the teachers discussed the lessons plans they developed around the history of disease. This session helped educators to connect the material they learned through the presentations with resources at Cornell and Syracuse to give them the confidence to teach about different world regions in the future.

This year's ISSI was supported by Cornell University's Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies, South Asia Program, Southeast Asia Program, Institute for African Development, East Asia Program, Latin American and Caribbean Studies Program, and Institute for European Studies; Syracuse University's Moynihan Institute for Global Affairs and the South Asia Center; TST-BOCES, and the US Department of Education Title VI Program.





Diana Baker, Jasna Bogdanovska, Lin Lin &amp; Laura Penman (L-R)

# Zooming among upstate New York Community Colleges

by Kathi Colen Peck, Post-Secondary Outreach Coordinator

In the quick step to embrace our new ‘virtual’ normal this past year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our outreach program met the challenge without a stutter. In fact, we had a full year of activity, albeit all virtual. We continued to build on our collaboration with our consortium partner, the South Asia Center at Syracuse University, and with Cornell’s Southeast Asia Program, Latin American & Caribbean Studies Program, and the Institute for African Development, new to our post-secondary outreach efforts. We delivered programming opportunities to four community colleges: Cayuga Community College (CCC), Monroe Community College (MCC), Onondaga Community College (OCC), Tompkins Cortland Community College (TC3); and an expanding set of schools of education including SUNY Cortland School of Education, SUNY Buffalo State School of Education, and Syracuse University School of Education.

As part of our *Voices in Global Education* Speakers series, we organized two engaging events for education faculty and teachers-in-training among our partners. In September 2020, Chaise LaDousa (Hamilton College) and Christina Davis (Western Illinois University) gave a lively, conversational presentation on “Language, Identity, and Education in South Asia,” and in March 2021, Pawan Dhingra (Amherst College) spoke about his newly published and highly praised book, *Hyper Education: Why Good Schools, Good Grades, and Good Behavior Are Not Enough*.

In collaboration with OCC, SAP hosted acclaimed Indian artist and Virtual Artist-in-Residence Atul Bhalla, who gave a thought-provoking presentation “Anhedonic Dehiscence,” to OCC students and others on the significance of water in New Delhi’s urban environment in October 2020. Cornell History PhD candidate Kelsey J. Utne made three presentations at community colleges: two on “Burial & Cremation Traditions in South & Southeast Asia” at MCC & OCC in March 2021, and another on “Commemorating WWI Casualties from British India around the World” at TC3 in April 2021. Each talk was tailored to its corresponding college or course audience and elicited fascinating reflections on the cultural expression of

death and dying, especially notable in the time of COVID. Humphrey Fellow Husnain Afzal from Pakistan also visited TC3 to talk about water systems with the students of community college internationalization fellow (CCIF) Alejandro Gonzalez Suarez’s Structural Design course in March 2021.

SAP continued to support 2020 CCIF fellows and welcomed a new cohort in May 2021. Alejandro Gonzalez Suarez completed his project on construction technology in India and the US, and utilized contacts made during his January 2020 CAORC-AIIS faculty development trip to India to augment his course curricula. OCC English Professor Stephen Pierson refocused his Freshman composition course entirely on modern literature from South and Southeast Asia.

For 2021, SAP accepted two new CCIF fellows, Jasna Bogdanovska and Laura Penman. Jasna Bogdanovska is a Professor of Visual Arts at MCC, where she teaches photography and photojournalism. Her project, “Reframing Culture Through Visual Storytelling,” will develop a catalog of women storytellers from South & Southeast Asia that amplifies a diverse representation of gender, race, social class, and ethnicity in the visual arts. Laura Penman, Professor of Biology at MCC, will consider issues of food security and sustainable agriculture among coastal communities in South & Southeast Asia to develop case studies to illustrate impacts of management strategies for her Intro to Sustainability course.

Additionally, SAP welcomed two new global education faculty fellows (GEFF) in 2021, Lin Lin, Associate Professor of Social Studies Education at SUNY Cortland, and Baker, Associate Professor of Education at Hobart and William Smith Colleges. Lin, who visited Sri Lanka with SAP Manager Daniel Bass in January 2018, will create a series of digital journeys through South Asia for her teachers-in-training using outstanding children’s literature associated with the South Asia Book Award. Baker will enhance curricula to include South & Southeast Asia perspectives in the narratives of disability for her students.



Andrew Willford and N. Selvi, from The Keystone Foundation, speak to an Alu Kurumba community member in 2014

## Andrew Wilford awarded Fulbright-Nehru Distinguished Chair Fellowship

Andrew Willford, Professor of Anthropology, was recently awarded the CIES Fulbright-Nehru Distinguished Chair Fellowship, with plans to travel to India in 2022.

His project will assess the efficacy of a community-based model of mental health care by triangulating ethnographic, participatory, and biomedical approaches in areas underserved by biomedical care. This collaborative project is in partnership with three Indian organizations: The Banyan, an NGO with a 28-year history of working with homeless and vulnerable populations across several states through institutional, community-based and alternative long-term care options; the National Institute for Mental Health and Neuro Sciences, a leading research hospital in Bangalore; and The Keystone

Foundation, an NGO in the Nilgiris that works with local indigenous communities on issues of conservation, governance, livelihoods, and health, and where our Cornell-Keystone Nilgiris Field Learning Center is located.

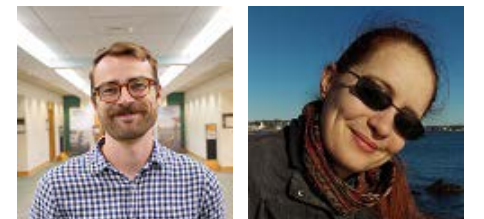
Willford will focus on communities in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala that face various forms of social precarity, exacerbated recently by the ongoing pandemic. Utilizing a community-based health model, a pilot project in 2015 incorporated faculty, students, and community members as primary data collectors at the grassroots level. After some encouraging results, Willford and his collaborative partners aim to expand research and its supporting pedagogy at all three institutions, allowing them to test the efficacy of care within local cultural contexts, scale up when appropriate, as well as facilitating referrals to tertiary medical centers when necessary. The community-based model of care has proven efficacious in improving a commitment to care and a sense of wellbeing, as well as serving to bridge the biomedical, traditional healing practices, and local cultural worlds.

## SAP Students awarded Doctoral Fellowships

Congratulations to the following SAP graduate students for receiving doctoral fellowships:

Kelsey J. Utne, History, received a Mellon/ACLS Dissertation Completion Fellowship for her project, “Corpse Politics: Disposal and Commemoration of the Indian Interwar Dead, 1919-1939.”

Bruno Shirley, Asian Studies, received a Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Dissertation Fellowship in Buddhist Studies for his project, “Constructing Buddhist Sovereignities: Text and Landscape in a Medieval Lankan Kingdom.”



Bruno Shirley &amp; Kelsey J. Utne (L-R)



# Selected SAP Faculty Publications 2020–2021

**Anindita Banerjee.** “Fiction.” in *Anthropocene Unseen: A Lexicon*, Cymene Howe & Anand Pandian, eds. Goleta: Punctum, 185-189, 2020.

**Anindita Banerjee** & Debra A. Castillo, eds. *South of the Future: Marketing Care and Speculating Life in South Asia and the Americas*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2020.

**Arnab Basu**, Tsengunjav Byambasuren, Nancy Chau & Neha Khanna. “Cooking Fuel Choice, Indoor Air Quality and Child Mortality in India.” *IZA Discussion Papers* 13295. Bonn: IZA - Institute of Labor Economics, 2020.

Subhayu Bandyopadhyay, **Arnab Basu**, Nancy Chau & Devashish Mitra. “Offshoring to a Developing Nation with a Dual Labor Market.” *IZA Discussion Papers* 13420. Bonn: IZA - Institute of Labor Economics, 2020.

**Kaushik Basu.** *Policymaker’s Journal From New Delhi to Washington D.C.* New Delhi: Simon & Schuster India, 2021.

**Kaushik Basu** & Robert Hockett, eds. *Law, Economics, and Conflict*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021.

**Kaushik Basu**, Eric Verhoogen, Sudipto Mundle, Maitreesh Ghatak & Kenneth Kletzer, eds. *Development, Distribution, and Markets*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021.

**Sarah Besky.** “Empire and Indigestion: Materializing Tannins in the Indian Tea Industry.” *Social Studies of Science*, 50 (3): 398-417, 2020.

**Sarah Besky.** “A Dress Code for the Revolution.” in *Majoritarian and Populist Politics in South Asia*, Radhika Govindrajan, Bhoomika Joshi & Mubbashir Rizvi, eds. *Society for Cultural Anthropology* Editors Forum/Hot Spots: March 16, 2021.

**Sarah Besky.** “The Plantation’s Outsides: The Work of Settlement in Kalimpong, India.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 63 (2): 433-463, 2021.

**Iftikhar Dadi.** “Abstraction in the Arab World.” in *Taking Shape: Abstraction from the Arab World, 1950s-1980s*, Suheyla Takesh & Lynn Gumpert, eds. Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2020.

**Iftikhar Dadi** & Elizabeth Dadi. “Jugaad.” *ARTMargins* 9 (3): 56–68, 2020.

Elaine Yu, **Julia Finkelstein**, Patsy Brannon, Wesley Bonam, David Russell, Marshall Glesby & **Saurabh Mehta.** “Nutritional Assessment among Adult Patients with Suspected or Confirmed Active Tuberculosis Disease in Rural India.” *PLOS ONE* 15 (5): e0233306, 2020.

Balaji Srinivasan, **Julia Finkelstein**, David Erickson & **Saurabh Mehta.** “Point-of-Care Quantification of Serum Alpha-Fetoprotein for Screening Birth Defects in Resource-Limited Settings: Proof-of-Concept Study.” *JMIR Biomedical Engineering* 6 (1): e23527, 2021.

**Martin Gilbert**, Nadezhda Sulikhan, Olga Uphyrkina, Mikhail Goncharuk, Linda Kerley, *et. al.* “Distemper, Extinction, and Vaccination of the Amur Tiger.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*. 117 (50): 31954-31962, 2020.

**Daniel Gold.** “Gurus in Contemporary Hindu Practice” in *The Oxford History of Hinduism: Hindu Practice*, Gavin Flood, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 449-470, 2020.

**Daniel Gold.** “Senses of Home in the Field.” *Fieldwork in Religion*, 15 (1-2): 40-52, 2020.

**Ravi Kanbur.** “Sustainable Development Goals and the Study of Economic Inequality. *Journal of Economic Inequality*. 19: 3–11, 2021.

Gargi Wable Grandner, Katherine Dickin, **Ravi Kanbur**, Purnima Menon, Kathleen Rasmussen, John Hoddinott. “Assessing Statistical Similarity in Dietary Intakes of Women of Reproductive Age in Bangladesh.” *Maternal & Child Nutrition* 17: :e13086, 2021.

**Karim-Aly Kassam.** “Anthropogenic Climate Change, Anxiety, and the Sacred: The Role of Ecological Calendars in the Pamir Mountains of Central Asia.” in *Understanding Climate Change Through Religious Lifeworlds*, David Halberman, ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021.

Isabell Haag, **Karim-Aly Kassam**, Thomas Senft, Harald Zandler & Cyrus Samimi. “Measurements Meet Human Observations: Integrating Distinctive Ways of Knowing in the Pamir Mountains of Tajikistan to Assess Local Climate Change.” *Climatic Change* 165 (5), 2021.

**Sarosh Kuruvilla.** *Private Regulation of Labor Standards in Global Supply Chains: Problems, Progress, and Prospects*. Cornell University Press, 2021.

Yigal Bronner & **Lawrence McCrea.** *First Words, Last Words: New Theories for Reading Old Texts in Sixteenth-Century India*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021.

**Andrew McDonald**, Balwinder-Singh, M. L. Jat, Peter Craufurd, Jonathan Hellin, *et. al.* “Indian Agriculture, Air Pollution, and Public Health in the Age of COVID.” *World Development* 135: 105064, 2020.

Jon Hellin, **Andrew McDonald**, M. L. Jat, Priya Shyamsundar & A. K. Singh “Mitigating Agriculture’s Contribution to Air Pollution in India.” *The Lancet Planetary Health* 5 (4): e186. 2021.

Anton Urfels, **Andrew McDonald**, Gerardo van Halsema, Paul Struik, Pankaj Kumar, Ram Malik, S. P. Poonia, Deepak Singh, Madhulika Singh & Timothy J Krupnik. “Social-ecological Analysis of Timely Rice Planting in Eastern India.” *Agronomy for Sustainable Development* 41 (2), 1-15, 2021.

**Saurabh Mehta**, Bryan Gannon, Camille Jones, Laura Hackl, Shoba Udipi, Varsha Thakker, Aparna Thorat, Wesley Bonam, Jere Haas & **Julia Finkelstein.** “Effect of Multiple Biofortified Food Crops-based Meals on Micronutrient Status and Immune

Function in the First 1000 Days of Life in India: Study Protocol for a Randomized Controlled Feeding Trial.” *protocols.io*. 2020.

James Berry, **Saurabh Mehta**, Priya Mukherjee, Hannah Ruebeck & Gauri Kartini Shastri. “Implementation and Effects of India’s national School-based Iron Supplementation Program.” *Journal of Development Economics* 44: 102428, 2020.

Matthew Abraham & **Prabhu Pingali.** “Climate Change and Food Security.” in *Population, Agriculture, and Biodiversity: Problems and Prospects*, J. Perry Gustafson, Peter Raven & Paul Ehrlich, eds. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 97-122, 2020.

Matthew Abraham & **Prabhu Pingali.** “Shortage of Pulses in India: Understanding how Markets Incentivize Supply Response.” *Journal of Agribusiness in Developing and Emerging Economies*. 11 (4): 411-434, 2021.

**Eswar Prasad.** *The Future of Money: How the Digital Revolution is Transforming Currencies and Finance*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2021.

**Eswar Prasad** & Vera Songwe. *Regional Integration in West Africa: Is There a Role for a Single Currency?* Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2021.

Ghazal Asif & **Natasha Raheja.** “Unwelcome Guests and Hostages: Minority Claims on the State” *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* Forum, 2020.

Syantani Chatterjee & **Natasha Raheja.** “India’s Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA): Citizenship and Belonging in India.” *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* Forum, 2020.

**Mary N. Woods.** “The City Has Memory: Images of Ruin and Reclamation in Bombay/ Mumbai.” *Candida: Journal for Architectural Knowledge*. 12: 23-36, 2020.

# Tata-Cornell Institute for Agriculture and Nutrition Scholars

*Tata-Cornell Scholars include a multidisciplinary group of Cornell graduate students who are actively engaged in applied and field-based research aligning with TCI’s key research priorities. Research topics relate to food and nutrition security, agriculture development and food system transformation in India. Learn more at: tci.cornell.edu.*

**Bindvi Arora**  
*PhD, Food Science and Technology*  
Bindvi Arora is interested in developing novel food products and improving upon existing popular foods that can cater to the nutritionally deficient populations by interventions in processing technologies and use of alternate ingredients.

**Shivranjani Baruah**  
*PhD, Plant Pathology and Plant-Microbe Biology*  
Shivranjani Baruah has research interests in exploring the intricacies of plant-pathogen interactions at the molecular level in order to inform decision making related to crop protection.

**Kiera Crowley**  
*PhD, Soil and Crop Sciences*  
Kiera Crowley is interested in innovation diffusion and the adoption of conservation agriculture technologies among farmers in India’s Indo-Gangetic Plain.

**Natasha Jha**  
*PhD, Applied Economics and Management*  
Natasha Jha studies the linkages between agriculture and nutrition and how these are likely to be impacted by climate shocks.

**Ekta Joshi**  
*PhD, Applied Economics and Management*  
Ekta Joshi examines how agriculture can be an effective instrument for economic development in developing countries.

**Kavya Krishnan**  
*PhD, Soil and Crop Sciences*  
Kavya Krishnan studies soil health, particularly its effects on food security.

**Sumedha Minocha**  
*PhD, Applied Economics and Management*  
Sumedha Minocha studies the complex ways in which food systems work in developing countries, particularly their impact on nutrition and health-related outcomes and the role of public policies in shaping these outcomes.

**Amrutha Jose Pampackal**  
*PhD, Development Sociology*  
Amrutha Jose Pampackal is interested in studying the sociology of access to food, particularly among marginalized communities in India.

**Chanchal Pramanik**  
*PhD, City and Regional Planning*  
Chanchal Pramanik has primary research interest in rural-urban dynamics and how they can benefit rural economies, with a focus on digital technologies.

**Shree Saha**  
*PhD, Applied Economics and Management*  
Shree Saha researches women’s empowerment, maternal and child nutrition, financial inclusion, and development.

**Vanisha Sharma**  
*PhD, Applied Economics and Management*  
Vanisha Sharma has research interest in analyzing the effects of the internet and digitization in rural economies. Her field-based research involves exploiting increasing internet access in rural communities to analyze its effects on agriculture technology adoption, as well as maternal health and nutrition.

**Anna David Thottappilly**  
*PhD, Applied Economics and Management*  
Anna David Thottappilly looks into issues related to development and social mobility. She is interested in policy-oriented research that could aide in bridging the inequality gap.

**Sonali Uppal**  
*MPA, Public Administration*  
Sonali Uppal is interested in the intersection of development economics and agricultural livelihood, as well as the mechanisms for improving agricultural returns and generating secure and sustainable livelihood opportunities for the existing workforce and potential entrants.





# Recently Graduated Students

**Ranjit Singh**  
PhD, Science and Technology  
Studies  
*Seeing Like an Infrastructure:  
Mapping Uneven State-Citizen  
Relations in Aadhaar-Enabled  
Digital India*

**Uchita Vaid**  
PhD, Design and Environmental  
Analysis  
*Is ‘Moving Up’ Really Moving  
Up?: Evaluation of an In-Situ  
Redevelopment Policy in India*

**Gargi Wable Grandner**  
PhD, Nutritional Sciences  
*New Methods to Improve Evidence on  
Old Problems: A Multidisciplinary  
Approach to Assess Women’s Dietary  
Deficits in Rural Bangladesh*

**Aman Banerji**  
MS, Development Sociology  
*The Persistence of Peenya: Examining  
Industrial Space in ‘Global’  
Bangalore*

**Sampreety Gurung**  
MA, Anthropology

**Akhil Kang**  
MA, Anthropology

**Kasim Saiyyad**  
MS, Applied Economics and  
Management

**Kittipong Vongagsorn**  
MA, Asian Studies  
*A Study of the Composition,  
Transmission, and Development of  
the Kāśyapaparivarta*

**Grady Owens**  
BA, Asian Studies

**Tanushri Shah**  
BA, Physics

**Asni Verma**  
BA, Industrial and Labor  
Relations

# Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Fellows 2021–2022

**Ian Bellows**  
Degree: MA, Asian Studies  
Language: Nepali  
Research Interests: Nepal and the Himalayas, the  
intersectionality of tourism and development, and the  
politics and economics of expedition mountaineering

**Dietrich Bouma**  
Degree: PhD, City and Regional Planning  
Language: Malayalam  
Research Interests: Environment and migration,  
displacement and dispossession, land governance and  
human rights, managed retreat, reconciling rural livelihoods  
and biodiversity conservation, and mountain peoples and  
ecosystems

**Daniel Loebell**  
Degree: MA, Asian Studies  
Language: Nepali  
Research Interests: China One-Belt-One-Road engagement  
in South Asia, comparative politics, transitional democracies,  
economic development, and legal dispute resolution  
mechanisms

**Parijat Jha**  
Degree: PhD, Anthropology  
Language: Urdu  
Research Interests: Agriculture, apple cultivation and  
climate change in the Western Himalayas, and the  
social, environmental, and political-economic conditions  
surrounding labor migration in South Asia

**Daniel Sabzghabaei**  
Degree: PhD, Music  
Language: Persian  
Research interests: Time and form in Persian *moosiqi sonati*,  
20th-century and contemporary music in Iran, theatricality  
and absence, and empathy and vulnerability in creation and  
performance

**Bhavna Sivasubramanian**  
Degree: MRP, City and Regional Planning  
Language: Hindi  
Research Interests: International development planning  
focusing in South Asia, community-based planning and  
informality, urban infrastructure planning, and the  
provision and management of basic services



Mario Einaudi  
Center for International Studies

# The South Asia Program welcomes your support

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# About Us

The South Asia Program (SAP) is an interdisciplinary hub for Cornell students, faculty, staff, community members, and academic visitors, located in the Mario Einuadi Center for International Studies. SAP coordinates teaching, research, and campus activities concerning the area comprising the nations of the Indian subcontinent: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The South Asia Program maintains distinctive strengths and dedicated expertise in several key areas, especially South Asian humanities; social, scientific, and applied research on South Asia; and the languages and cultures of Nepal and Sri Lanka.

With the Department of Asian Studies, SAP is committed to teaching a number of modern and classical South Asian languages, including Bengali, Hindi, Nepali, Pali, Punjabi, Sanskrit,

Sinhala, Tamil, Tibetan and Urdu. Additionally, Persian is taught in the Department of Near Eastern Studies. Our special resources include a library collection of over 500,000 printed monographs and nearly 10,000 serial titles in hard copy; 48 core faculty and 16 associate faculty in 30 departments, annually teaching over 100 Area Studies courses and 60 language courses at levels from beginning to advanced; and extensive outreach materials including films, web-based curricula, and hands-on teaching aids.

SAP sponsors a weekly seminar series with presentations by local, national, and international scholars, and organizes or co-sponsors numerous conferences and workshops every year. SAP collaborates with student organizations to bring South Asian cultural and performance events to campus on a regular basis, enriching

Cornell and the surrounding communities. SAP also has a significant outreach program which makes training on South Asia available to educators from K-12 schools, community colleges, and schools of education.

Since 1983, Cornell has collaborated with Syracuse University as a National Resource Center for South Asia, one of only eight nationally, sponsored by the US Department of Education. SAP facilitates summer intensive language opportunities for students from Cornell and other universities on the Cornell campus, at the South Asia Summer Language Institute at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and at the American Association for Indian Studies language programs in India. The South Asia Program also nurtures the Office of Global Learning’s study abroad opportunities in India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.



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## **SOUTH ASIA PROGRAM**

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