

CENTER FOR SOUTH ASIAN STUDIES

University of  
Michigan  
Fall 2023  
Newsletter

# Letter from the Director



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**Cover photo:** Peter Adams/Alamy

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### Dear Friends and Colleagues,

I am delighted to welcome everyone—students, community members, staff, and faculty to the new academic year. This fall kicks off an exciting new year of programming at the Center, with a range of talks, film screenings, and fellowship opportunities suited to the wide variety of interests held by our community on campus and beyond.

Before previewing some of these events, however, let me mark an important staff transition. Clemente Beghi, our program specialist, left the Center for a position in the global MBA program at Michigan's Ross School of Business. Clemente had been with the International Institute for seven years, starting in the Nam Center for Korean Studies and moving over to our center five years ago. We thank him for his years of service and wish him well in his new position. Ann Takata, Peggy Rudberg, and especially Do-Hee Morsman deserve special thanks for stepping in to keep the Center running smoothly after Clemente's departure. I would also like to recognize the wonderful contributions of Sonia Mishra in communicating the richness of the Center's events and the work of its faculty, the U-M community and beyond. Finally, I extend my thanks to Christi Merrill (Asian Languages and Cultures) and Savithry Namboodiripad (Linguistics) for their service last year on the Center executive committee, and Syed Ekhteyar Ali (Asian Languages and Cultures), Inderjit Kaur (Music, Theatre, & Dance), and Joyojeet Pal (Information) for their continuing service on this committee.

Financially, last year was a difficult year for the Center. The Center has a number of small endowments. However, the main funding for the Center comes from a National Resource Center grant from the US Department of Education. Budget cuts reduced the number of centers funded by this program. The University of Michigan and the University of Wisconsin, both leading institutions in the study of South Asia that have received these grants for decades, were not funded. I am happy to report that the Center has been awarded the grant for the next three years. However, the sudden and unexpected withdrawal of these funds has underscored the need to build the Center's endowment to ensure our mission. Please consider a donation to the Center endowment; donation information is on the form attached to page 9.

We are excited to announce the establishment of a new annual South Asian Film Series, which will be directed by its founding curator, Veerendra Prasad of the Department of Film, Television, and Media. The series, a partnership with the Michigan Theater, will include an array of South Asian movies, from documentaries to mainstream regional films, and will bring actors and filmmakers to discuss their work. The opening event will be a screening of *Shoebox* and a discussion with filmmaker Faraz Ali (see article on page 6).

This year's Kavita Datla Memorial Lecture on South Asian History will be given by Prof. Syed Akbar Hyder from the Department of Asian Studies at the University of

Texas, Austin. Our second endowed lecture, the Thomas Trautmann Honorary Lecture of Pre-Modern India will be given by Jessie Ball duPont Professor of Religion and Adjunct Professor of Law Timothy Lubin from Washington and Lee University in the winter semester. In the spring, the Center will hold our annual U-M Pakistan conference. All these events will bring scholars based in South Asia and throughout the world.

In the pages that follow, you'll find more information on the Center's activities over the past year as well as those we have planned for the coming year. You'll also read about research on and engagement with South Asia from across U-M.

I look forward to seeing you at upcoming events, all of which are free and open to the public.

Sincerely,

**Matthew Hull**

*Director, Center for South Asian Studies*

*Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology*

# CSAS Kavita Datla Memorial Lecture



## **Kavita Datla received her bachelor's degree**

in history from the University of Michigan in 1997. She then pursued her master's degree at Jawaharlal Nehru

University in Delhi and completed her doctorate at the University of California, Berkeley. Unfortunately, Datla passed away in July 2017 after a hard-fought battle with a rare form of cancer. She was an associate professor at Mount Holyoke College at the time of her death and was promoted to full professor posthumously.

In her honor, the University of Michigan Center for South Asian Studies (CSAS) hosts an annual lecture series to honor Kavita's work and her passion for research in India, enabled by a generous donation from the Datla family and friends.

On October 7, 2022, Kavita's friend, Associate Professor Bhavani Raman from the history department at the University of Toronto, was the featured speaker for the well-attended (which included members of the Datla family) annual CSAS Kavita Datla Memorial lecture.

**“This overlooked legal archive of colonial annexation history reveals regimes of counter-insurgent policing to be embedded in wartime measures and tied to the sequestration of bodies and land.”**

The lecture was on Raman's paper on the earliest freestanding statutory provision in the world for administration detention crafted by the British East India Company. Bengal Regulation III, 1818, empowered an executive to seize and hold individuals indefinitely without trial, and it acquired a long afterlife in the British Empire beyond India.

“This is my preliminary attempt to explore the conceptual connection between extraordinary law and resource sequestration,” said Raman.

Curiously, very little is known about this regulation. Why and how was it promulgated, and why did it take the form it did, given that in the company's colonies, the executive was unrestricted by legislative checks and the jurisdiction of habeas corpus was limited? Raman's paper looks into how and why the early documents on this regulation disappeared in plain sight in the colonial archives, journeying to the upland edges of the Northern Circars. It shows how recalling the events that led to Bengal III, 1818, challenges our understanding of administration detention as a constitutional guarantee of personal liberty. It also draws out the significance of this history for theories of emergency and the normalization of wartime law.

Raman's research and teaching focus on colonialism's histories, especially concerning questions of law, administration, and Tamil worlds. Other than a monograph on paperwork and writing in Tamil South India Document Raj: Writing and Scribes in Early Colonial South India (University of Chicago Press, 2012 and Permanent Black, 2015), she has published on recordkeeping and property, ethics and elementary education, migration and return in the Bay of Bengal, and the history of Tamil Studies as an interdisciplinary formation. She is currently working on two projects: one, on early colonial security laws in South Asia, and the second, on the history of hydrological infrastructure in Chennai, India, using historical maps.



**Bhavani Raman delivers the 2022 Kavita Datla Memorial Lecture**

“I examined the taxonomy of detention developed by the British East India Company at the turn of the nineteenth century,” adds Raman. “This overlooked legal archive of colonial annexation history reveals regimes of counter-insurgent policing to be embedded in wartime measures and tied to the sequestration of bodies and land. This genealogy of the security state invites a reconsideration of theories of sovereign exception by foregrounding the relationship between law and frontier-making.”

# CSAS Hosts Annual Thomas R. Trautmann Honorary Lecture with Daud Ali



**In April 2023, the Center for South Asian Studies** at the University of Michigan hosted Daud Ali from the University of Pennsylvania for their Thomas R. Trautmann Honorary Lecture on *Bhoja Among the Gonds: Place, Memory and the Afterlives of Kingship in Medieval India*.

The lecture, part of an ongoing annual series, honors Thomas Roger Trautmann, an American historian, cultural anthropologist,

and U-M professor emeritus of history and anthropology. He is a leading expert on the Arthashastra, the ancient Hindu text on statecraft, economic policy, and military strategy. Trautmann has mentored many students during his tenure at U-M, and his studies focus on ancient India, the history of anthropology, and other related subjects.

“If I attempted to provide an adequate account of Tom Trautmann’s scholarship and his impact on the study of South Asia, we would have no time left, so I’m going to force myself to be brief,” said David Brick, U-M assistant professor of Sanskrit, in his introductory remarks of the honorary lecture.

“Over a long and illustrious career spanning seven decades at the University of Michigan, Tom has produced a staggering number of works and covered seemingly every period of Indian history.”



The main lecture with Daud Ali considered the social memory of the eleventh-century medieval king Bhoja, widely known as a learned author, patron, and adventurer across communities in South Asia. Bhoja, unlike other kings, is not primarily associated with a 'heroic' tradition of memory in early modern India. Ali’s talk explored Bhoja’s life and actions as remembered by communities of nomads, Adivasis (collective term for the tribes of the

Indian subcontinent), and others with seemingly little or no connection to the highly textualized memories preserved among societies.

“Studying Bhoja has been such a daunting project for me,” says Ali. “There isn’t a week that goes by where I don’t learn something new. It’s become more of an exercise in limiting the information I present.”



**U-M Professor David Brick, Daud Ali, and Thomas Trautmann**

“Though Bhoja’s stories are in many Indian languages, this discussion focused on Sanskrit,” added Ali. “In these works, Bhoja is considered both a great patron of the arts and a latter-day heroic king marked by boldness and generosity.”

Ali’s talk focused on Bhoja’s legacy among travelers and forest-dwellers to suggest several important conclusions about collective memory, kingship, and history that existing scholarship has not addressed.

*Daud Ali is an associate in the Department of South Asian Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. He received his BA at the College of William in Mary in religious studies and English literature. He earned his MA in history of religions and a PhD in history at the University of Chicago. Ali’s research has focused on mentalities and everyday practices in pre-Sultanate South Asia. He has published works on monastic discipline, mercantile networks, historical writing, and inscriptions, but his most enduring work has been on the culture of aristocratic society in early medieval India.*

# CSAS Awards First-Ever South Asian Languages Video Awards



During this year's University of Michigan's Asian Languages and Cultures (ALC) graduation ceremony in April 2023, the Center for South Asian Studies (CSAS) awarded the first-ever set of South Asian Languages Video Awards to highlight students' work in South Asian languages and help promote the language programs beyond campus.

"It's a great pleasure for me to present these awards," says Matt Hull, director of CSAS. "It's so important to recognize the outstanding work of students and faculty in the language program."

ALC's South Asian Language Program offers Bengali, Hindi, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Urdu courses. Their goal is to help develop language skills and cultural and regional awareness. Students in the South Asian language classes are asked to work in groups of 3 or 4 and produce a short video to showcase what they learned during the semester for their final project. The video project is worth 10 percent of their total grade.

"This project allows students to practice, develop, and master their language skills," says Director of the South Asian Language Program Syed Ekhteyar Ali. "It is also useful as they learn from

their peers and understand the challenges and importance of collaboration.

We feel this is a wonderful way to showcase their learning outcomes. They choose specific themes and create the story to show their mastery over the vocabulary and control of various structures and grammar usage in contexts," adds Ali. "These videos are, in a way, documentations of their performances, and we also use them to reflect upon our teaching methods and styles."

The twelve best videos (one from each class) are selected and reviewed by a panel of judges outside the language department for the CSAS South Asian Language Video Awards. This year's judges included Swapnil Rai from the U-M Department of Film, Television, and Media, Joyojeet Pal from the School of Information, and Stephen Rush from the School of Music, Theatre, and Dance. In addition to the recognition, the students received a cash prize from CSAS of \$300 for the winning video and \$200 for an honorable mention.

The 2023 SAL Video Award for Best Movie went to second-year Urdu's *Murder Mystery* by Zahra Basha, Iman Kadwani, Aleezah Manzoor, and

Minahil Raheel. In this video, the students are invited to a mysterious party. Once they arrive, the lights go out, and they find the body of a girl they recognize from Urdu class. They all decide to work together and investigate what could have happened to her.

Honorable Mentions were given to second-year Hindi's *Adesh's Birthday Party* by Rishi Baronia, Vinamra Swaroop, Adesh Urval, and Ashwin Vivekanandan, and Advanced Urdu's *Meeting with the Soul of a Poet* by Maria Khan, Zoha Khan, and Maryam Malik.

In *Adesh's Birthday Party*, Adesh invites everyone to his party, where a very unexpected event occurs.

In *Meeting the Soul of a Poet*, the students are working on a paper on famous Pakistani poet Parveen Shakir but hit a roadblock. To help, they summon her spirit and learn some important lessons during the interview.

All the award-winning videos can be found on the CSAS YouTube channel: [www.youtube.com/@umcsas](http://www.youtube.com/@umcsas).



### The Center for South Asian Studies

(CSAS) at the University of Michigan will launch the South Asian Film Series in October 2023. The first film to be screened will be *Shoebbox*, made in 2021 and written by Faraz Ali and Noopur Sinha.

"We are really excited about establishing this film series under the creative direction of our founding curator, Veerendra Prasad of Michigan's Film, Television, and Media department," says Matthew Hull, director of the Center for South Asian Studies. "We will be inviting filmmakers and covering popular and art house films, old and new, as well as collections of video shorts shown with English subtitles. Film is a wonderful way to understand the region, and our goal is for these film events to engage the entire South Asia community, including undergraduates and residents of Southeast Michigan beyond the campus."

A screenwriter, director, and lecturer at U-M, Veerendra Prasad, will serve as curator for the series. Prasad has an MFA in screenwriting from the American Film Institute. In addition to his work as a filmmaker, instructor, and consultant, Prasad has served as a programmer for the Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles, specializing in films from South India and the Indian Diaspora.

"I want to pick films that present a thorough picture of what is happening in India," says Prasad.

"With thriving industries in multiple languages, South Asia has a rich, diverse filmmaking tradi-

# CSAS Launches New Film Series with *Shoebbox*

tion. By featuring monthly events throughout the fall and winter, this film series will introduce film lovers to this vibrant cinema by showcasing contemporary works from across South Asia and the diaspora and bringing these filmmakers to Ann Arbor to discuss their work.

"The South Asian Film Series will co-host screenings, including retrospectives, throughout the year, as part of its mission to cultivate new audiences for a cinema that has long been ignored in the West."

The series' first film, *Shoebbox*, will be screened on October 18 at the Michigan Theater in Ann Arbor, and the movie's director and co-writer, Faraz Ali, will be on hand to discuss the film. *Shoebbox* has traveled to various film festivals worldwide and has won awards and nominations at many, including the New York India Film Festival and the Mumbai Film Festival.

"*Shoebbox* is an exploration of the evolving urban landscape in India, particularly through the lens of Allahabad's transformation," says Ali as he describes the film. "It encapsulates the struggle to preserve identity, memory, and heritage in the face of rapid development and change. As a filmmaker, I've experienced the profound impact of such transitions firsthand, having grown up in a small Indian town that eventually gave way to urbanization.



"The human story around a single-screen theatre, intertwined with the city's renaming and the backdrop of the Kumbh Mela, reflects a universal narrative of how communities grapple with progress

while honoring their history. As a director, I believe that this film holds a mirror to the challenges many regions across South Asia face as they navigate the intricate balance between preserving cultural heritage and embracing modernity.

"By showcasing *Shoebbox* to the audience at the Center for South Asian Studies, I hope to spark meaningful conversations about the multifaceted dimensions of development, identity, and the

value of preserving cultural roots. I'm excited to contribute to the dialogue and offer a glimpse into the emotional journey that my protagonist undertakes, searching for belonging amidst the changes in her hometown," adds Ali.



CSAS will also partner with the historical Michigan Theater to showcase the film series.

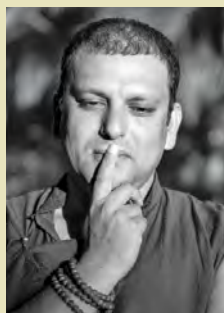
"We are an independent art house cinema, and a lot of what we do are narrative features and documentaries from all over the world," says Alicia Pani, the theater's interim chief operations officer and director of development. "One of the ways we can do this is by partnering with different departments at the University of Michigan. I used to work at the International Institute at Michigan, so I knew this would be a perfect fit."

"I saw *Shoebbox* at a film festival last year, and it immediately struck me," concludes Curator Prasad. "I think it will be a perfect way to kick off the festival and our partnership with the theater."

# Running Toward Mystery

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**On October 14, 2022, the Venerable Tenzin Priyadarshi** visited the Center for South Asian Studies (CSAS) at the University of Michigan to discuss his book *Running Toward Mystery*.



Described on Amazon as a “bracing and beautiful story of a singular life compelled to contemplation, sharing lessons about the power of mentorship and an open mind,” the book takes us through Venerable Tenzin’s life journey. It describes many vital lessons and people he met along the way.

Born in India to a prominent Hindu Brahmin family, he was only six years old when he began having visions of a mysterious mountain peak and men with shaved heads wearing robes the color of sunset.

“It was as vivid as if I were watching a scene from life,” Priyadarshi describes. “And at the age of ten, I ran away from boarding school to find this place—taking a train to the end of the line and then riding a bus to follow this inexplicable vision.”

The book is a profound account of his lifelong journey as a seeker. At its heart, it is a story of looking for enlightenment, the importance of mentors in that search, and the many remarkable teachers he met along the way, including the Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and Mother Teresa.

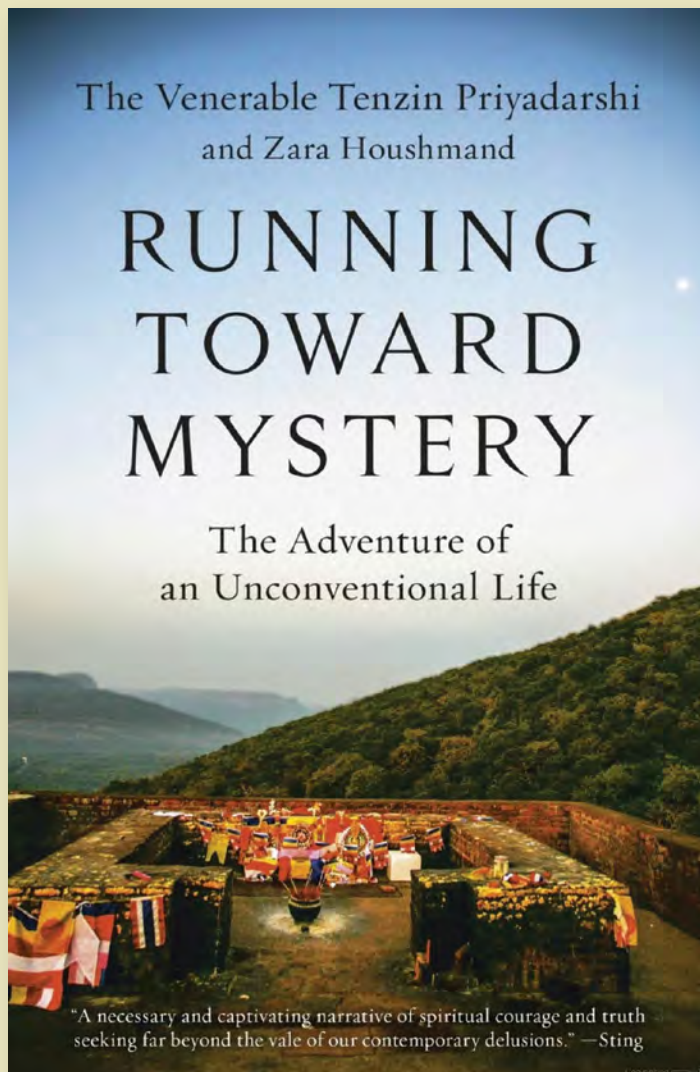
“Teachers come and go on their schedule,” Priyadarshi adds. “I clearly wasn’t in charge of the timetable, and it wasn’t my place to specify how a teacher should teach.”

The musician Sting describes *Running Towards Mystery* as “a necessary and captivating narrative of spiritual courage and truth-seeking far beyond the veil of our contemporary delusions.”

The Venerable Tenzin’s unusual background also encompasses graduate education at Harvard University with degrees ranging from philosophy to physics to international relations. He is also a Tribeca Disruptive Fellow and a 2018 Fellow at Stanford University Center for Advanced Study in Behavioral Sciences.

Priyadarshi is President and CEO of The Dalai Lama Center for Ethics and Transformative Values at MIT. The center is dedicated to inquiry, dialogue, and education on life’s ethical and humane dimensions. It is a collaborative and nonpartisan think-tank, and its programs emphasize responsibility and examine meaningfulness and moral purpose between individuals, organizations, and societies. Six Nobel Peace Laureates serve as the center’s founding members, and its programs run in several countries and are expanding.

In addition, Venerable Tenzin serves on the boards of several academic, humanitarian, and religious organizations. He is the recipient of many recognitions and awards, including Harvard’s Distinguished Alumni Honors, for his visionary contributions to humanity.



**The book is a profound account of his lifelong journey as a seeker. At its heart, it is a story of looking for enlightenment, the importance of mentors in that search, and the many remarkable teachers he met along the way, including the Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and Mother Teresa.**

# CSAS Hosts 12th Annual Pakistan Conference

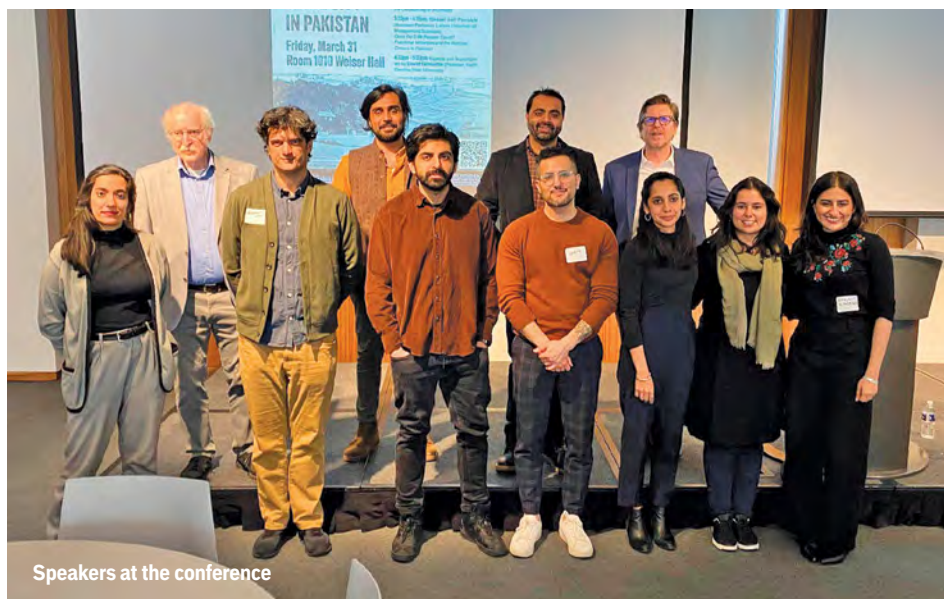
On March 31, 2023, the Center for South Asian Studies (CSAS) at the University of Michigan (U-M) hosted its 12th annual Pakistan conference, featuring a series of engaging speakers and talks. This year's theme was "The Country and the City in Pakistan." The full-day conference aimed to explore the productive tension and constitutive relationship between the countryside and the city in Pakistan's past and present.

Matthew Hull, director of CSAS and associate professor of anthropology at the U-M, opened the conference and welcomed the illustrious host of speakers, including Atiyab Sultan, career civil servant with the Pakistan administrative service, Yale University Postdoctoral Associate Shozab Raza, American University Professorial Lecturer Mubashir Rizvi, Cornell Assistant Professor Natasha Raheja, and Ghazal Asif Farrukhi, assistant professor with Lahore University of Management Sciences. The keynote and round table discussion was led by North Carolina State University's Distinguished Professor of History David Gilmartin, author of *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan*, and U-M alum.



"This conference aims to foster an alternative intellectual and political discourse on Pakistan beyond typical political science questions," says Matthew Hull. "It's also an effort to articulate scholarship on Pakistan with an understanding of the broader region and the world."

Bringing together scholars researching Pakistan's diverse rural and urban contexts spanning its different regions, this conference investigated the interrelationship between the urban and the



rural by centering marginalized and minoritized people's struggles for rights and unpacking the structures of feeling and moral economies. The speakers discussed the role played by kinship, domesticity, religion, institutional and technological change, and everyday practices of governance that mediate people's experiences and mobility across the rural-urban continuum.

One of the speakers, Shozab Raza from Yale, presented this example and discussed the 'Worker-Peasant Rule' from rural Pakistan. Drawing on 20 months of research, he explored how peasant revolutionaries in Pakistan's South Punjab region creatively theorized to accelerate a revolutionary movement to remake the country. Raza's work recasts peasants as worldly theoretical actors, destabilizing various distinctions – like rural/urban, theory/practice, and universal/particular – that have conventionally framed the study of decolonization in the global South.

"Peasant revolutions alert us to how emancipatory politics can be found in the most unlikely places," says Raza.

The conference also featured short film screenings of *A Gregarious Species* and *Kitne Passports* by Natasha Raheja, assistant professor of anthropology from Cornell.

Her current research generates insights across writing and film to advance political theory on majority-minority relations and majoritarianism.

"In the context of cross-border migration and immigration policy in South Asia, I ask, how do majorities come to imagine themselves as minorities?" says Raheja. "Conversely, how do minorities imagine justice as part of majorities? How do majority-minority politics exceed the parameters of states in ways that are not nation-bound?"

This conference was co-sponsored by the Department of History, The Eisenberg Institute for Historical Studies, the Center for South Asian Studies, Asian Languages and Cultures, the Institute for the Humanities, Women's and Gender Studies, the Institute for Research on Women and Gender (IRWG), Global Islamic Studies Center, College of LSA, Weiser Center for Emerging Democracies, Middle East Studies, Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning, American Culture, Arab and Muslim American Studies, Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies, History of Art, Rackham Graduate School, and the American Institute of Pakistan Studies.



# The Third Annual Conference: Social Media and Society in India

The third annual social media and society conference at the University of Michigan was held in April of 2023. The hybrid conference featured various speakers, including actors, activists, educators, lawyers, journalists, physicians, and entertainers, to discuss how social media impacts life in India.

Some of those speakers included Indian Supreme Court attorney Karuna Nundy, one of Time Magazine's 100 most influential people of 2022, journalist and anchor Saurabh Dwivedi, activist Bezwada Wilson, comedian Rohan Joshi, and film star Richa Chadha.



"The goal of the conference was to bring together a group of practitioners and scholars to discuss how social media is changing contemporary society in India," said U-M Associate Professor of Information Joyojeet Pal. "We are bringing in not just people who study the effects of social media and society, but also people who are actively involved in creating those effects, such as online influencers."

In 2021, it was estimated that there were about 448 million social network users in India, a significant increase from 351 million in 2019.

"India is numerically the largest social media market, in terms of the installed base of Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp users," Pal said. "Their internet literacy is different, creating a huge market for misinformation. Because of the low cost of mobile connectivity, you have many people who can't afford access to television, but they're on YouTube and WhatsApp."

The wide variety of speakers represented varying points of view and covered topics such as health care, media, food, travel, misinformation, and activism in India.

"The reason I chose to come to his conference, given that it draws people beyond the traditional conference, is the diversity of participants," said conference speaker Apar Gupta, executive director of the Internet Freedom Foundation. "This diversity adds value to understanding the online media ecology in India. The people who are being invited carry a large level of responsibility because they're influencing social attitudes rapidly."

"At Michigan, we keep the largest archive of Indian social media in the world," added Pal. "We archive the messaging of about 50,000 politicians and influencers, which is also partly why many influencers want to come here because they want to know more about what we are doing."

Some of the more notable panels and workshops were on topics like internationalization, new resistance, and health and well-being.



In the new resistances panel, influencers discussed increasingly using varied, creative, and sometimes humorous means to combat polarization, the dominance of historically overrepresented voices, and misinformation on Indian social media.

Sushant Divigikar, an Indian model, actor, singer, columnist, and drag queen, shared their thoughts on how social media is a double-edged sword.

"It allows me to be fully authentic, unlike most other platforms in India," said Divigikar. "The downside is, of course, dealing with how some people consume your content."



During the fireside chat, Richa Chadha, a well-known Indian actress, producer, and political activist, sat down with Michigan State Professor and good friend Kuhu Tanvir.

"Social media has shown us a lot about people in the industry," said Chadha in response to an audience question. "I've had to say no to roles because I really know who the directors and producers are now because of their social media."

The action-packed two-day seminar was well-attended and received. Based on its success, Pal is already looking forward to next year's conference.

"The hope is that the University of Michigan continues to be the premier place for studying social media and society in the region," Pal added.

# Q&A with CSAS' Summer in South Asia's Anonymous Donor



**Beginning in 2006, thanks to a generous gift from an anonymous donor,** the Center for South Asian Studies (CSAS) Summer in South Asia Fellowship (SiSA) has provided over 100 students with funding to volunteer and conduct a project in India over the summer months. The program is designed to be student-centered.

CSAS was able to sit down with our anonymous donor and learn about their thoughts behind the program.

**CSAS: What inspired you to fund this fellowship? And why India?**



**Donor:** My family has had a relationship with the University of Michigan for more than 100 years. I received an excellent education at the university, which enabled me to have a successful career as a petroleum geologist. Consequently, after I retired, I wanted to do something which would positively impact current and future students.

Before I retired, I made several business trips to India. Before my initial visit, my previous international travel had solely consisted of going to exotic Windsor, Ontario, in Canada. That experience did not adequately prepare me for the overwhelming crush of people, the cacophony of sounds, and the distinctive odor when I first walked out the door of the Arrival Hall at New Delhi's International Airport. My first reaction was similar to Judy Garland's when Dorothy arrived in the Land of Oz and exclaimed: "Toto, we're not in Kansas anymore!"

I found India to be a land of immense contrasts:

- ▶ Enormous wealth vs. abject poverty.
- ▶ Incredible natural beauty vs. urban blight.
- ▶ Ancient cultures vs. Bollywood.
- ▶ Traditional villages vs. cosmopolitan cities.
- ▶ The latest IT vs. bullock carts.
- ▶ The world's largest democracy vs. corruption, political gridlock, and communal strife.

I found India fascinating, disturbing, enjoyable, frustrating, and, above all, mind-expanding. India captivated me. Therefore when I learned about

the novel concept, which became the Summer in South Asia (SiSA) Program, it immediately resonated with me.

**CSAS: Why allow students to pick their projects?**

**Donor:** Who would be better qualified than the students to make those decisions? They know where their passions and specific interests lie and understand what independent research projects will best contribute to their education and future career aspirations.

This approach has been highly effective. It has resulted in an eclectic assortment of projects from all parts of the university's campus. The fellows have worked in the megacities of India, the smallest rural villages, the Himalayan foothills, and southern India. This is a list of the broad categories of projects:

- ▶ Public Health
- ▶ Environmental
- ▶ Business
- ▶ Education
- ▶ Entertainment
- ▶ Religion
- ▶ Poverty/Economics/Development





**CSAS:** Is there one thing that you hope all students gain from this experience?

**Donor:** I wanted the fellows to be exposed firsthand to the rich tapestry of India's cultures, religions, history, politics, and social structures – the “real” India, not the “sanitized” India which tourists experience. I wanted the SiSA Program to be unique and challenging, forcing the students out of their comfort zones. It should be completely different from the typical, much more structured study abroad programs. I wanted the students to have authentic, person-to-person interactions with the urban and rural people of India, which, in some small way, would improve understanding and relationships between the citizens of India and the United States.

**CSAS:** You have heard from past Fellows after their trips. Were you pleased with how the experience was for them and what they gained out of it?

**Donor:** “Pleased” does not adequately capture the sense of gratification that I feel when I read the acknowledgment letters from the 103 fellows who have participated. I love hearing about the positive impact that their experiences in India have had on them. Some of my favorite quotes from them:

- ▶ “Never before have I endured such a challenge. It is hard to imagine a more fulfilling trip, and I am hard-pressed to conjure a more effective way of threading common bonds between people from different corners of the globe.”
- ▶ “I learned more in the seven weeks in India than throughout my three years in Ann Arbor.”
- ▶ “Traveling solo throughout India has been the most eye-opening and empowering experience of my life. I gained a sense of confidence in myself that I never had before. A truly transformative experience that defined my junior year in college and shaped my future career goals.
- ▶ “When asked to describe my summer this year, I always struggle to find the right words – unforgettable, amazing, unique, impactful, eye-opening, bittersweet, inspiring. It was undoubtedly the most difficult experience but also the most rewarding.”

“I wanted the students to have authentic, person-to-person interactions with the urban and rural people of India, which, in some small way, would improve understanding and relationships between the citizens of India and the United States.”

▶ “I am from a tiny agricultural town in western Michigan where few people travel outside the state. The entire community looked forward to the emails I sent my parents to hear about my stories and see the pictures I had taken.”

▶ “My career path has changed, and my worldview has been thrust open. My life has been changed.”

**CSAS:** You have chosen to remain anonymous. Why?

My focus has always been on providing students with the exceptional educational experience of a lifetime which they could not get in any other way. I am not interested in gaining personal notoriety.



# 2023 CSAS SiSA Fellows



## **"I completed an internship at Dasra**

doing research on educational inequities for the Bottom of the Pyramid in Bombay. I was surrounded with the best work environment and the most caring boss. Friends were easy to make as I luckily landed in a hostel with other girls between the ages of 19-24 doing internships from across the world. Post Mumbai, I went to Jaipur, then Delhi, then Agra. Mumbai is a beautiful city and I would love to visit again. I have so much gratitude and appreciation for this fellowship and being provided this once in a life time opportunity." —*Mariya Jahan*



**"My 6-week internship in Mysore** with the Organization for the Development of People was a powerful look into the goals, methods, and challenges of a community development based group that truly puts community members at the forefront of decision making. While my focus was on the organization's environment programs (which include organic agriculture, compost, alternative energy sources, watershed development), primarily directed at small farmers in the Mysore area, I was exposed to, and incredibly impressed by, the vast range of issues ODP addresses - most of which encourage lower class and marginalized women to gain economic and political agency of their own. Being able to visit

farms and attend community meetings and trainings, interacting (and becoming friends) with the countless number of people in the ODP-sphere was the true highlight of my internship. After the six weeks, I spent another jam packed (10 separate destinations!) month in India exploring new cities, visiting relatives, and thoroughly enjoying my travels!"—*Simron Bose (pictured center in pink/purple saree with ODP staff)*



## **"I know this is a trip that I will remember**

for the rest of my life. I have stories from this experience that I will be able to tell my grandchildren's children, if I am lucky to live that long. So many incredible memories were made during my time in India. I would highly recommend this experience to any other students who may be interested in visiting a beautiful country rich in culture and charm." —*Matthew Robinson*



## **"When I first applied to the fellowship,**

I was 19 and it was 2019. I was just well into my sophomore year at umich and was beginning to pay attention to the topics that really peaked my interest. I was taking a food globalization class and eating vegan, so food systems and the social injustices associated were on my mind. But then covid hit the

following March and my India dreams were crushed. I had to find other ways to get the experience. I got an internship at a local farm in Ann Arbor called Tantre. The following fall I got a job at the Umich Campus Farm and ended up becoming a manager. I took various classes about native plants and food systems to fulfill my degree. Through all of this I learned more and more about Dr. Shiva and her farm and what a visionary she was for all of the things I was passionate about. I got more and more excited about India and knew that I had to figure out a way to use my fellowship and visit Navdanya. Fast forward to this past school year, I got my graduation date pushed back and I got the green light from the fellowship that I could go to India and live my dream!! I thought it was such a coincidence and maybe even fate that a younger Lauren stumbled across Navdanya and that nowadays big Lauren would have chosen to do the same internship." —*Lauren Kuzee*



**"For as long as I can remember,** I have held a deep passion for women's health as a facet of public health that could use a lot more love from doctors, researchers, and our greater communities alike. I wanted my time in India to be centralized on this, hoping to gain global perspectives to deepen my own understanding of the field and assist other women in learning about their own bodies. I worked with Action Research and Training for Health (ARTH), an organization that mirrored my drive for researching and improving upon women's health issues through a public health lens. This fantastic organization explores where clinical practice meets social factors that impact accessibility and quality of women's health care in the tribal village areas of southern Rajasthan." —*Mackenzie Woock*

# Malaysian Cultural Night



In January, CSAS helped sponsor the Michigan Malaysian Student Association's (MiMSA) Malaysian Cultural Night (MCN) 2023 at the Lydia Mendelssohn Theatre, Michigan League. This event featured "Rojak", a play centered around an interracial couple overcoming parental disapproval of their marriage through sharing and understanding of each other's cultures.



Participants began gathering in the Michigan League as early as 5:30pm. They were greeted by an exhibition of various posters detailing the ethnic groups in Malaysia and how Malaysian culture would be represented in the play.

The play began at 6:30pm and lasted for an hour. Throughout the play, many different dances were presented including a modern dance, the Chinese ribbon dance, and a traditional Indian dance. This highlights the true intercultural nature of Malaysia where the unity shown through dances juxtaposes with the conflicts presented in the story of the play. This was the goal of creative director, Chairie Faris, who identifies as mixed Malaysian-Indian.

"Because Malaysia is such a multi-racial country...when you cross (paths), inevitably there's going to be conflict...(The play) is about families trying to reconcile...A lot of what's happening in the play is inspired by stories from my grandparents," Chairie said when asked about his thoughts behind the play.

"Through Malaysian Cultural Night, I'm letting myself be a bit more vulnerable and showing people, like, this is who I am, and people appreciate that."

Many others shared Chairie's thoughts of showing people the true nature of Malaysian culture. This includes Mas Razak, director of MCN.



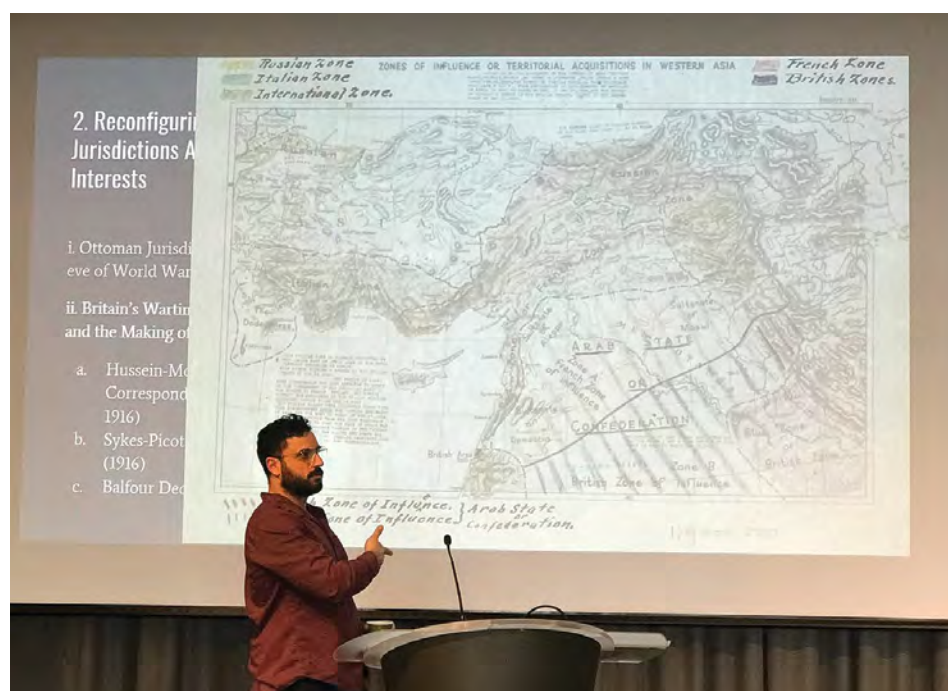
"Thank you for coming and learning about our culture tonight," said Mas at the end of the play. "I hope that next time you hear about Malaysia, or you think about Malaysia, you think about the warmth of its people and the colors that you see up on stage here tonight."

After the play concluded, participants were ushered to North Quad to pick up a box of Malaysian food which was free of charge. The MCN dinner featured a variation of Nasi Lemak, which contained fragrant rice, sambal, egg, cucumbers, and a choice of butter chicken or chickpeas. This marked the end of the event where participants mingled around and slowly dispersed.



# 2023 World History and Literature Initiative (WHaLI)-Border Walls: Navigating Exclusion in a Divided World

by Jennifer Lund, II & CMENAS Outreach Coordinator



Through the lens of area studies, 17 teachers spent the day building regional knowledge from area studies experts who presented four regional case studies on border walls and related issues.

the historical and political context of border walls led by Michelle Bellino. While the event was targeted for middle school and high school teachers of world history, social studies, and English language arts in SE Michigan, this year's attendees also included teachers from Northern Michigan, Illinois, and Puerto Rico due to a partnership between U-M's Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies and the University of Puerto Rico.

**The 2023 World History and Literature Initiative (WHaLI)** titled "Border Walls: Navigating Exclusion in a Divided World" was held in-person on June 13, 2023, at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. The goal for WHaLI is to build teachers' content knowledge, enhance their pedagogical practices, and acquire new resources and instructional materials that encourage students to think on a global scale. The educational design of WHaLI is co-led by Michelle Bellino, associate professor of Educational Studies, and Darin Stockdill, instructional and program design coordinator of the Center for Educational Design and Evaluation Research (CEDER), both within the School of Education. Darin and Michelle bring their joint expertise in history and citizenship education, teacher development, learning theory, and comparative analysis into WHaLI resources and experiences. Amy Perkins, a historian and world history teacher from Lakeshore High School, was the teacher liaison, supporting the development of materials and communication.

Through the lens of area studies, 17 teachers spent the day building regional knowledge from area studies experts who presented four regional case studies on border walls and related issues. The teachers also participated in small groups to discuss strategies to approach the topic in their classrooms and ways to use the resources provided by the WHaLI design team. This year's WHaLI also included a pre-workshop module on canvas with an asynchronous component that focused on

**The goal for WHaLI is to build teachers' content knowledge, enhance their pedagogical practices, and acquire new resources and instructional materials that encourage students to think on a global scale.**

All participating educators reported high satisfaction with the symposium's modules and educational resources. Unanimously, they found the content very useful for understanding border walls, and said they would return to the workshop materials in the future. "One of the best PD I have ever attended. I wish more people knew about it and it was longer," reported one teacher. Another wrote, "I found almost everything about this workshop to be relevant to what I teach. It will enrich my course so much."

WHaLI 2023 was sponsored by U-M's International Institute, Marsal Family School of Education, and the Center for Education Design, Evaluation, and Research (CEDER). The Center for Armenian Studies and five Title VI National Resource Centers were represented, including the Center for Latin America and the Caribbean Studies, the East Asia National Resource Center, the Center for South Asian Studies, the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, and the Center for Middle Eastern and North African Studies. It was funded in part by Title VI NRC grants from the U.S. Department of Education.

# Faculty News



**Ruma Bannerjee**, Vincent Massey Collegiate Professor of Biological Chemistry at U-M Medical School was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences this year. She

was involved as the basic science cluster lead and with faculty development in the \$79 million investment in diversifying STEM, which includes the ~\$16 million FIRST grant from NIH that was awarded in June. Banerjee also was named a member of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences in 2023.



On August 18th, 2023, India's Independence Day celebration, **Pinderjeet Gill**, U-M professor of Hindi and Punjabi, was honored by the India League of America, Michigan. She was

recognized for her academic achievements and professional excellence. The award was bestowed during a ceremony attended by more than 300 people. Dr. Gill views this award as a tribute to all those who teach and preserve Indian languages and cultures.



**Shekha Kotak**, U-M doctoral student in Asian Languages and Cultures, is doing an internship with the Ashoka Translation Center at the Ashoka University.



U-M doctoral candidate in anthropology **Irene Promodh's** review of Andrea's Wright's *'Between Dreams and Ghosts: Indian Migration and Middle Eastern Oil'* (SUP, 2021) is now out in the *Journal of Asian Studies*.



**Pinderjeet Gill (second from left) was honored by the India League of America, Michigan.**



**Matthew Schissler**, U-M doctoral candidate in anthropology, will be working to finish his dissertation, which explores the formation of a distinctively Buddhist anti-Muslim move-

ment in Myanmar. This work will be supported by a writing fellowship from the Robert H.N. Ho Family Foundation Program in Buddhist Studies (administered by ACLS) and an Emerging Scholar Award from the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation. During this time Matt will also be a visiting fellow in the Department of Political and Social Change at the Australian National University.

U-M Professor Emeritus of History and Anthropology **Thomas Trautmann** was invited to give a distinguished lecture at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City in December 2022.

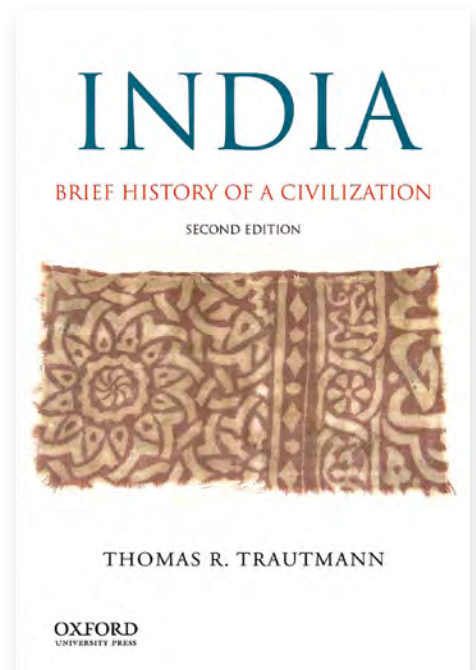


In addition an article of his, "Forest people in the Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra," was published by Brill in Leiden in *Science and Society in*

*the Sanskrit World*, a Festschrift for Christopher Minkowski of Balliol College, Oxford. Another Trautmann article, "War Elephants, Forest People," will appear in a conference volume.

A Tamil translation of his book, *Elephants and Kings: An Environmental History*, was published this year (2023), as *Yānaikaḷum Aracarkaḷum*, by Kaalachuvadu at Nagarkoil.

Translations of his textbook, *India: Brief History Of A Civilization*, has been made in Italian, Greek, and two for different forms of the Chinese script, Complex Characters (at Taiwan) and Simple Characters (at Beijing) – the latter offering a potential readership of a billion people.





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This newsletter is funded in part by a Title VI NRC grant from the U.S. Department of Education.