



CENTER FOR SOUTH ASIAN STUDIES

University of
Michigan
Spring 2026
Newsletter

Letter from the Director



CONTENTS

- Letter from the Director 2
- 2025 CSAS SiSA Fellows 3
- Datla Memorial Lecture 4
- Trautmann Lecture 5
- Asia in the Headlines 6
- CSAS Hosts 14th Annual Pakistan Conference 7
- South Asian Language Pedagogy Conference 8
- 5th Annual Social Media and Society in India Conference 11
- CSAS Education in India Roundtable 11
- Masculinity in Punjab 12
- New CSAS Faculty Member Drishadwati Bargi 13
- Fall 2024 SiSA Symposium 14
- MIRS-CSAS Graduate Defends Master's Thesis 15
- New CSAS Academic Program Specialist Deepthi Bathala 15
- U-M Partnership with Madras Christian College 16
- Why Take Tamil? 17
- Faculty & Library News 18
- Teacher Outreach 19

Cover photo: The Shah Jahan Mosque in Thatta, Pakistan; Photo by Aleksandar Pavlovic

Editorial team: Sonia Mishra, Alexis Wu, Linda Hanes Miller, Deepthi Bathala

Design: Hammond Design

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

This year has been challenging for the Center. As many of you have heard by now, last fall the U.S. Department of Education terminated all federal funding for the Center. Funding was canceled for every area studies center at the University of Michigan and across the U.S. The Center has received federal funding for its programs since the passage of Title VI within the Higher Education Act of 1965. Over the past 60 years, these funds have profoundly shaped students, scholars, and the Michigan community. Foreign Language Area Studies fellowships supported undergraduate and graduate students studying South Asian Languages at Michigan and in India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Title VI seed funds also enabled us to launch Punjabi, Bengali and Tamil language classes, which are now thriving. These funds brought many hundreds of scholars, artists, and filmmakers to Michigan for our free, public talks, screenings, and conferences. Through Title VI support, the annual Pakistan Conference has flourished as a space of rigorous debate, fresh scholarship, and dynamic cross-regional dialogue. The funding that made these experiences and exchanges possible has now been withdrawn.

However, the Center will move forward and indeed flourish because it must. With a history dating back to the 1960s and a longstanding leadership role in the field, we carry both a legacy and a responsibility: to sustain vibrant scholarly and artistic ties between our Ann Arbor community and our many friends and colleagues throughout the U.S.

and South Asia. We are prioritizing language instruction, support for graduate events, and our lecture series and planning new initiatives to fund them.

In October, we welcomed Deepthi Bathala as our new administrator. Deepthi recently completed her Ph.D. in architectural history at the University of Michigan. Her dissertation, "Botanical Failures," traces the environmental and climate history of colonial South Asia, highlighting how both people and plant life resisted colonial scientific ambitions. Deepthi brings significant experience in public engagement, having worked with Michigan State University Outreach and Engagement and served as a fellow with U-M's Public Engagement and Research Impacts team. Originally from India, she earned her bachelor's degree in architecture from the University of Kerala and her master's degree in architectural history and theory from the University of Washington in Seattle. I would like to thank Madhumita Lahiri, our 2024-25 interim director, who led thoughtfully through a difficult and uncertain time. My thanks also go to Zainab Hakim, whose dedicated service as academic program specialist was central to the Center's daily work and sense of community. Finally, Sonia Mishra left the Center and I want to acknowledge and thank her for the energy and care she brought to our communications work.

I am pleased to announce that our Summer in South Asia (SiSA) undergraduate fellowship program continues to thrive. Last summer we sent 10 U-M students to India to work on a range of research and internship projects, including a fish

welfare initiative, neonatal immunization, children, and architectural monuments. This fall, we will celebrate the 20th Anniversary of this terrific program with a Symposium that will bring together former fellows and our 2026 fellows who will soon be leaving for India.

We are planning a dynamic slate of events next year. During the winter 2027 semester, Prof. Inderjeet Kaur will convene a conference, Sounds of Social (In)Justice in South Asian Musical Worlds, which will examine how musical practices in South Asia—through performance, listening, circulation, and pedagogy—articulate and contest questions of social justice. We gratefully acknowledge the support of Drs. Ranvir and Adarsh Trehan in making this conference possible. Alongside this event, we look forward to welcoming back our Lecture Series, with presentations spanning a diverse range of scholarly themes.

In the pages that follow, you'll find more information on the Center's activities over 2024-25. You'll read about research and engagement with South Asia from across U-M as well as across the region of South Asia with the Pakistan Conference, Education in India Roundtable, South Asian Language Pedagogy Conference and the partnership with Madras Christian College to highlight a few.

Sincerely,

Matthew Hull

*Director, Center for South Asian Studies
Associate Professor,
Department of Anthropology*

Meet the 2025 Summer in South Asia Fellows

Started in 2006 with a generous donation from an anonymous donor, the Summer in South Asia (SiSA) fellowship has provided more than 100 students with fully-funded opportunities to volunteer or conduct projects in India during the summer months.



Annika Burman interned with the Fish Welfare Initiative in Andhra Pradesh. During the summer, she worked with local farms to improve fish farming practices from animal welfare and sustainability perspectives.



Lyndsey Del Castillo is studying public policy at the Ford School with a concentration in grassroots organizing and social movements alongside a minor in community action and social

change. In the future, Del Castillo hopes to work for smaller nonprofits and NGOs as she believes in the power of community to bring about societal change. She is passionate about building community, deconstructing the individualistic mindset, and working with children. At her summer internship, she worked with Salt Lake City Prayasam as a youth mentor and taught artistic and English literacy skills. Del Castillo's priority going abroad was to learn from the community she was working with. Her goal was to learn and to bring her lessons back home to inform future social justice advocacy work.



Anika Gowda is studying neuroscience and creative writing. She is interested in public health research, and preventative care. Through this fellowship, she travelled to rural areas surrounding

Bangalore and volunteered with the National Health Mission Immunization Program, focusing on care of pregnant and neonatal/infant care. Immunization is a huge factor in reducing infant and maternal mortality rate, but it is an incredibly complicated process to get the vaccines to those who need them in a huge country like India, with a high rural population and limited hospital/clinic access.



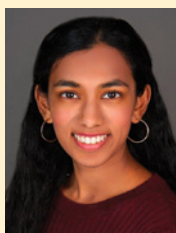
Varshini Kashyap is on the pre-medical track. Outside of academics, she serves as a director of the Columbus Clinic Host Group, a nonprofit that organizes an annual free clinic in Colum-

bus, OH, providing essential healthcare services to hundreds of uninsured patients. She is also actively involved with Project MESA—an initiative focused on improving gynecological care in low-resource areas—and conducts drug delivery research in the DYNAMED Lab. Last summer, she shadowed physicians through a clinical rotation at Kasturba Medical College in Manipal, India. Additionally, she worked on rural health clinic initiatives in partnership with a hospital in Udupi.



Anniya Maysun is studying biology, health, and society, and international studies (global environment and health). Last summer, she volunteered with the Swami Vivekananda Youth

Movement. This opportunity exposed her to an integrated model of institution and community based health services and clinical services in a resource limited setting. In the future, she aspires to work in global public health and specifically within epidemiology. At U-M, she is part of Health Promotion at the University of Michigan (HPUM), Fleece and Thank You, and Alpha Tau Pi, a biology fraternity. In my spare time, I enjoy hiking, painting, and trying out new workout classes!



Vishalakshi Meyyappan is studying data science in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts. At U-M, Meyyappan enjoys teaching younger children and is a part of GEECS'

Outreach Committee, teaching computer science to students in the local area. Meyyappan is also involved in UROP and WISE. Meyyappan loves to watch TV shows, play board games, and learn new Indian languages. Meyyappan interned in data science at a software company in Bengaluru, India.



Hitanshi Vaidya is studying architecture and art & design, aiming to learn more about Indian classical and modern architecture through her travel experience in India. She visited architectural

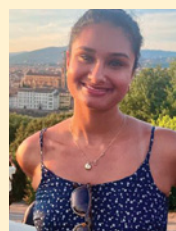
monuments and studied the transition into modern architecture with the many environmental and socio-economic factors involved.

Raised in the classical Indian arts of dance and music, Vaidya found a deep appreciation for the aesthetics and science behind her heritage, including architecture. Her research is heavily rooted in introducing more depth to the narrative of Indian-Americans in the creative field, as well as South-Asian culture. This fellowship acted as a catalyst for her to reconnect with her culture and elevate my inspirations in architecture.



Opal Vitharana is from Seattle, Washington! Just over two years ago, she wrote an article about empowering women in India who struggle with mental illness and are victims of harmful menstrual

taboos. Last summer, she worked with Maher, an organization in Pune, India that helps the same women she wrote about.



Disha Sankholkar studies public health sciences. Last summer, she volunteered with Jankalyan Blood Centre, an NGO that supplies blood to over 20 hospitals in Pune. She was especially

eager to support their mission to raise awareness about thalassemia, a common but preventable genetic disorder that causes low hemoglobin levels and affects many in India. Sankholkar enjoyed making a meaningful contribution while engaging with and exploring Pune's communities!

2024 CSAS Kavita Datla Memorial Lecture

By Sonia Mishra



The 2024 Datla lecture featured David Lelyveld, author of *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India*. Lelyveld's publications deal with Urdu's social and political history and its differentiation from Hindi. He has held faculty and administrative positions at the University of Minnesota, Columbia, and Cornell. He retired as a professor of history at William Paterson University.



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. At the time of her death, she was an associate professor at Mount Holyoke College 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.



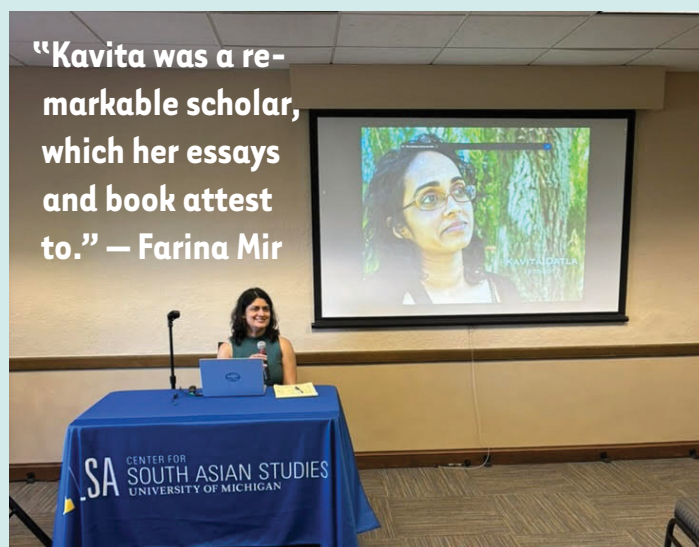
"Kavita was a remarkable scholar, which her essays and book attest to," said Farina Mir, U-M history professor and CSAS faculty associate. "What is more difficult to gauge, however, is that she was also a remarkable person and friend. One who relished conversation and laughter."

Lelyveld's lecture, entitled *Criss-Crossing Narratives Of Empire: Sir Syed At Versailles And The French Conquest Of Algeria*, shared art of the time and discussed how, in 1869, Sayyid Ahmad Khan ("Sir Syed") stopped briefly in Paris on his way to a life-transforming journey to Britain.

At Versailles, Sir Syed was shocked and upset when confronted by a large, almost panoramic painting, *La prise de smala d'Abd el-Kader*, for its brutal depiction of the humiliation of the Algerians. For the French, this was a triumphal celebration of a turning point in their conquest of Algeria a quarter century earlier. Sayyid Ahmad's encounter with the painting summons up a challenge for historical exposition, weaving together histories of nineteenth-century French and British imperialism with respect to North Africa and India and the lives of two prominent contemporary leaders, Amir Abd al-Qadir and Sayyid Ahmad Khan.

Professor Lelyveld also discussed his relationship with Kavita Datla.

"Fortunately, Kavita used to come frequently into New York, and we almost always had lunch and had these great conversations," said Lelyveld. "She was determined to get me into this full stream of what people are doing now, and the new generations, and the new methods of communication that people had."



CSAS Presents Annual Trautmann Lecture with Patrick Olivelle

By Sonia Mishra



Patrick Olivelle, from the University of Texas, visited the Center for South Asian Studies (CSAS) in January 2025 to help us further understand the Indian land ethic, based on Tom Trautmann's defini-

tion focused on the Indian war elephant and the establishment of elephant forests.

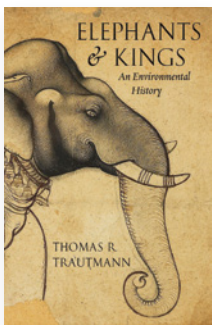
The annual CSAS lecture series honoring Thomas Trautmann, an American historian,



cultural anthropologist, and U-M Professor Emeritus of history and anthropology, took place in January 2025. Trautmann is a leading expert on the Arthashastra, the ancient

Hindu text on statecraft, economic policy, and military strategy. He 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.

Why are there no elephants in China? And, by way of contrast, why have there been and continue to be large numbers of elephants in the Indian subcontinent across its geography and throughout its recorded history? Why are these two largest



countries of Asia so different in their attitudes towards the elephant?

These questions are addressed in Thomas Trautmann's groundbreaking masterpiece *Elephants and Kings: An Environmental History*. In explain-

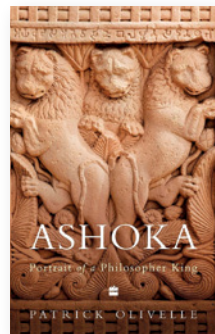
ing the divergent ecological histories of the two countries, Trautmann introduces the concept of 'land ethic.'

Olivelle aimed to help us further understand the Indian land ethic, based on Trautmann's definition focused on the Indian war elephant and the establishment of elephant forests.

"My topic today is not Ashoka, a topic close to my heart, but elephants, a topic close to Tom's heart," opened Olivelle.

"And, when I asked Tom if it was ok to cover, as not to step on any toes, he said, 'Elephants are always welcome in Ann Arbor.'"

Patrick Olivelle was the chair of religious studies at Indiana University, Bloomington, and Asian studies at the University of Texas, where he is currently



Professor Emeritus. He also was the past president of the American Oriental Society and was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He received the honorary doctorate of humane letters from the

University of Chicago in 2016 and the Guggenheim Fellowship in 1996. His recent book *Ashoka: Portrait of a Philosopher King* was included in *The New Yorker's* The Best Books of 2024.

Olivelle presented four further facets of the land ethic: economic, recreational, religious, and aesthetic.

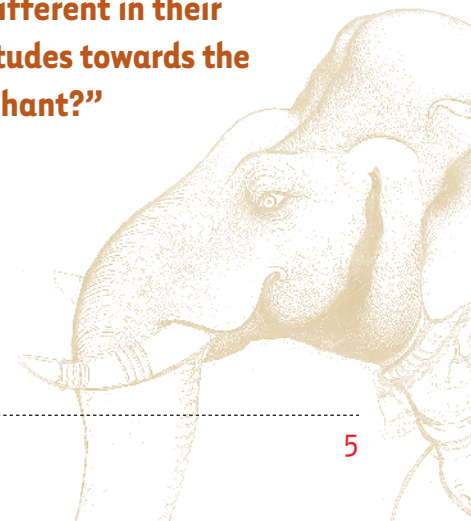
"Trautmann's deep history of the Indian war elephant and its impact on Indian ecology over the past three thousand years is a singular achievement, a veritable tour de force," added Olivelle.

"It opens up through the eyes of the elephant and the totality of the Indian ecological landscape. The book is a fitting culmination to a long and distinguished scholarly career, which, fortunately, is far from over. And in terms of the category land ethic, it opens up new and fruitful avenues of research into India's environment and environmental history."

The generosity of individuals and institutions—including that of Martha and Inderpal Bhatia—has made possible the endowment that supports the Trautmann lecture series. As one of two annual endowed lectures, the Trautmann lecture series has become a bedrock of CSAS events each year.



"Why are there no elephants in China? And, by way of contrast, why have there been and continue to be large numbers of elephants in the Indian subcontinent across its geography and throughout its recorded history? Why are these two largest countries of Asia so different in their attitudes towards the elephant?"



Asia in the Headlines: India, China and Trump 2.0

By Sonia Mishra

The Center for South Asian Studies, along with the Lieberthal-Rogel Center for Chinese Studies and the Nam Center for Korean Studies, sponsored the third edition of the Asia in Headlines seminar, titled “India, China, and Trump 2.0,” in January 2025.

This collaborative, well-attended event aimed to comprehensively analyze the evolving dynamics between the United States, India, and China in the context of President Trump’s second term. It featured two panel discussions and a roundtable session, each focusing on critical aspects of international relations, trade, security, and regional stability.

“We are so good at so many things, at putting things in context and giving you deep historical and sociological and political understanding. But, we are not that good at telling you what’s going on right now,” said Madhumita Lahiri, former CSAS interim director and U-M English professor, as she kicked off the event.

ASIA IN THE HEADLINES SYMPOSIUM
India, China, & Trump 2.0

A comprehensive analysis of U.S., India, and China relations during President Trump's second term. Discussions will delve into trade, security, regional stability, and strategic priorities in the Indo-Pacific.

SPEAKERS

- Seema Sirohi, Journalist and Columnist, Economic Times
- Michael Kugelman, Director, South Asia Institute, Wilson Center
- Yun Sun, Director, China Program, Stimson Center
- Mark Magnier, U.S. Deputy Bureau Chief, South China Morning Post

MODERATORS

- Ann Chih Lin, Associate Professor of Public Policy and Kenneth G. Lieberthal and Richard H. Rogel Professor of Chinese Studies
- Ji Yoon (Lynn) Hong, Associate Professor of Political Science and Korea Foundation Professor of Korean Studies
- Kunal Majumder, Miller Journalist and Knight-Wallace Journalism Fellow

PROGRAM

- 9:00 AM / Welcoming Remarks
- 9:15 AM / Panel 1: U.S.-India Relations
- 10:45 AM / Panel 2: U.S.-China Relations
- 1:00 PM / Roundtable Discussion: U.S. Strategy in the Indo-Pacific Amidst India-China Dynamics

FRIDAY, JANUARY 17, 2025
9:00 AM - 2:45 PM
WEISER HALL 1010
500 CHURCH ST., ANN ARBOR

Don't miss this engaging and thought-provoking symposium! Reserve your seat today!

LSA CENTER FOR CHINESE STUDIES | LSA CENTER FOR SOUTH ASIAN STUDIES | LSA CENTER FOR KOREAN STUDIES

“Asia in the Headlines allows us to think about exactly where the interface between academic work and public journalistic work can happen. And in thinking about that interface, what we’re doing here is a kind of public humanities project;



what can the university bring to a larger public conversation when we bring that public conversation into our own spaces.”

The first panel examined U.S.-India relations and featured Michael Kugelman, the South Asia Institute director at the Wilson Center, and Seema Sirohi, an Indian journalist and Economic Times columnist. It was moderated by Kunal Majumder, an Indian journalist and a Knight-Wallace fellow at U-M.

“The question before us is, what a second Trump administration might mean for India,” said Seema Sirohi in her opening.

“U.S.-India relations have improved steadily under five different U.S. presidents, Clinton, Bush, Obama, Trump, and Biden. Today, India and the U.S. work together in almost every domain, thanks to the value both Republicans and Democrats see in the partnership. In other words, India enjoys bipartisan support.”

Sirohi further discussed why and how she thinks India has successfully developed this relationship and why, based on his last term in office, she feels India is not anxious about a second Trump presidency. As she discussed possible scenarios that could change the relationship between the two countries, she also talked about what role she sees China possibly playing.

Michael Kugelman covered some of the minefields for India and the U.S. with Trump in power again, including Iran and tariffs.

“There’s a trade imbalance in India’s favor,” said Kugelman. “I think this makes India a top candidate for tariffs, and the latest I’ve heard from various sources is that India could face tariff increases of 10 percent during Trump’s initial days in office unless something changes.”

The second panel explored anticipated developments in U.S.-China relations during President Trump’s second term. This panel included Yun Sun, senior fellow and co-director of the East Asia Program and director of the China Program at the Stimson Center, and Mark Magnier, U.S. deputy bureau chief of the South China Morning Post. It was moderated by Ann Chih Lin, LRCCS director, Kenneth G. Lieberthal and Richard H. Rogel professor of Chinese studies, and associate professor at the Ford School of Public Policy.

The roundtable discussion, the day’s last event, featured all the speakers and addressed navigating U.S. strategy in the Indo-Pacific amid India-China dynamics. The lively talk featured various perspectives on how the two countries will handle the power struggle in the region and how the Trump administration could react to it.



The 14th Annual CSAS Pakistan Conference | Seeing Pakistan

On January 30-31, 2025, the Center for South Asian Studies hosted the 14th annual conference panel on Pakistan. The conference, “Seeing Pakistan,” focused on Pakistani culture as it interacts with the processes of seeing and being seen. How do countries, peoples, and cultures come to be seen in a global framework? How might the shared qualities of sight and vision unite experiences as disparate as the art museum, the social media site, and the movie theater?

The conference commenced with a screening of the 2023 film *Wakhri*, directed by Iram Parveen Bilal at the Michigan Theater. *Wakhri* dramatizes the extraordinary life and tragic death of Qandeel Baloch (1990-2016), who is often described as Pakistan’s first social media celebrity.

The second day began with a keynote address from the film’s director, Iram Parveen Bilal. A Pakistani writer, director, and producer based in Los Angeles, Bilal spoke about the process of making the film, what it means to be a Pakistani-American filmmaker today, and how her own use of the cinematic medium reflects upon Qandeel Baloch’s use of the visually oriented world of social media.

The conversation about seeing and being seen continued with a second keynote address by Saleema Waraich, associate professor of art history at Skidmore College. Waraich explored these issues through notions of invisibility and visibility, as elicited by the oppressive and unrelenting smog that blanketed Lahore for two weeks, briefly earning Lahore the title of the most polluted city in the world. One of the many hazardous conditions created by the smog was severely limited visibility. Waraich connected these precarious environmental

conditions to a long-standing enthusiasm for “development” that relies on an inability to critically engage with and resist discourses of “progress” and “growth” that pollute both people’s minds and the environment.

Waraich further queried how practices related to visibility that are associated with “development” manifested in recent restoration efforts involving Lahore’s Mughal heritage. Waraich interrogated the image of Lahore’s Mughal heritage for the tourist industry as promoted by the Walled City Authority of Lahore (WCAL) and the ways in which these sites were being used by local populations to represent themselves, in part through the selfie and TikTok cultures that drive many younger audiences to visit these sites. Asking what is being made visible (and consumable) through these forms of self-representation, what drives these systems of representation, and to what ends, this paper explores the relationship between (not) seeing and being seen and probes the spaces in between.

Bilal spoke about the process of making the film, what it means to be a Pakistani-American filmmaker today, and how her own use of the cinematic medium reflects upon Qandeel Baloch’s use of the visually oriented world of social media.

South Asian Language Programs Pedagogy Conference | Meeting Teaching Challenges with South Asian Pedagogy

By Alexis Wu



On February 14-15, 2025, the South Asian Language Pedagogy Conference brought together South Asian language instructors from Big Ten institutions to share their teaching challenges and experiences.

The two-day conference, held in partnership with the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures' South Asian Language Program and the Language Resource Center, invited South Asian Language instructors to explore the possibility of collaborations in teaching and material productions with the focus on designing a standard curriculum for South Asian languages that would help in meeting CourseShare demands and challenges across the Big Ten institutions and to share expertise with the South Asian community and public school instructors.

The engaging first keynote address, "Strategies for Facilitating Interaction and Collaboration in the Target Language," was delivered by Felecia Lucht, academic director of the Language Program Office at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Prof. Shaheen Parveen of Rutgers University–New Brunswick and Prof. Jameel Ahmad of the University of Washington discussed "Proficiency-based lessons aligned with ACTFL's World-Readiness Standards" and "Three-years-integrated Urdu Curriculum: Balancing All Four Skills" respectively. Julie Evershed, the director of U-M's Language Resource Center, presented on "Resources for Language Instruction: Tried and True, New and Bold" before taking all attendees on a tour of the Language Resource Center (LRC).

UC–Berkeley faculty lecturer and creator/host of Stanford-based Chai Time Radio Pranjali Sirasao delivered the conference's second keynote, "Shaping the Future of Language Teaching: Collaboration Between Academia, Industry, and Technology." Mithilesh Mishra, director and language coordinator of Hindi and Urdu at the University of Illinois Urbana–Champaign, then



spoke on "Using AI for Developing Metacognition in Language Teaching and Learning." This was followed by talks given by Rashmi Sharma of Indiana University Bloomington, as well as U-M Fulbright scholars Sneha Sharma and Spozmai Khan. A third keynote, delivered by Christi Merrill, professor of South Asian literature and postcolonial theory and chair for the Department of Comparative Literature at U-M, shared her innovative collaboration experience, entitled "Collaborations at the University of Michigan: Translation, Language Justice, and AI," concluded the events of Day 1.

The two-day conference invited South Asian Language instructors to explore the possibility of collaborations in teaching and material productions with the focus on designing a standard curriculum for South Asian languages that would help in meeting CourseShare demands and challenges across the Big Ten institutions and to share expertise with the South Asian community and public school instructors.

Day 2 of the conference opened with remarks by Somnath Ghosh, Consulate General of India, Chicago, informing attendees about resources available for teaching certificates, special scholarships, and grants from the Indian Government and particularly from the Central Institute of Hindi at Agra.



The conference participants and the community volunteer attendees from Wisconsin said that it “provided valuable insights and networking opportunities for us, focusing on challenges and strategies in community language programs.”

U-M's own Syed Ekhteyar Ali, director of the South Asian Language Program, outlined the South Asian Language Program's accomplishments and efforts. He mentioned that ALC's South Asian Language Program, in terms of the number of languages and student enrollments, is in fact the biggest in the Midwest, and among the top four in the nation. David Brick, associate professor of Sanskrit Literature, then spoke on “Approaches to Teaching Sanskrit at an American Institution,” highlighting the challenges and approaches in teaching Sanskrit grammar and vocabulary. Pinderjeet Kaur Gill, teaching professor of Hindi and Punjabi, and Faijul Hoque, lecturer of Bengali, gave a joint presentation entitled “Engaging Students Through Project-based Learning.” Urdu instructor Umar Anjum, in his presentation entitled “Creating Theme-specific Images Using AI in Urdu,” shared his findings on how AI created some translations and pictures when he and his students used ChatGPT. In her presentation “Addressing Linguistic and Pedagogical Barriers in Tamil-language Teaching,” Pathima Raviraj (Tamil language instructor) shared her teaching approach. Phill Cameron, LRC instructional learning senior, talked about gamification and the ways to create some interactive learning exercises using the H5P App in his presentation entitled “An Introduction to H5P and Presentational Games.”



The conference concluded with two large group discussion panels. “The Role of Community in Keeping the Language Alive,” saw the participation of three members of the Houston-based non-profit organization Indus Arts Council, a leading Urdu language provider and arts-and-culture organization of Pakistani descent in North America: Founder and President Shahid Iqbal, Language Program Director Talat Awais, and Language Teacher Samina Kasim. They were joined in this panel by a group of community volunteers engaged in Hindi-language pedagogy in Wisconsin: Vijay Sharma, Muktak Sharma, Geeta Sharma, Sarita Singh, Chandrashekhar Singh, and Garima Periwai.

Finally, U-M CourseShare Coordinator and Director of Academic Technologies Services Monika Dressler, in her presentation entitled “CourseShare Challenges—Perspective for Developing Collaborations,” helmed a discus-



sion panel that touched upon developing collaborations for material development and sharing, as well as the standardization of South Asian language curricula across BTAA institutions. The participants found her presentation very informative and useful and learned whom to reach out to for sharing their course offerings and exploring possible CourseShare opportunities.

The conference participants and the community volunteer attendees from Wisconsin said that it “provided valuable insights and networking opportunities for us, focusing on challenges and strategies in community language programs.” Praising the conference as “highly organized and informative,” they commended the diverse group of speakers who were included, in particular giving recognition to the presentation on, and tour of, the U-M LRC led by Julie Evershed, which not only impressed them with the number of languages being offered at U-M but also led to them being connected with Dianna Murphy, director of the Language Institute at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, who will potentially become a source of support in building the team's curriculum for community language programs in coming years.

More broadly, the volunteers said, “This conference highlighted and reinforced the value of community language classes and the role they play when students take Hindi in college. We also recognized the importance of certified teachers and the resources that may be available to help our volunteers obtain teaching certificates for their community work. It confirmed for our team what we had already experienced—that the textbooks that are used in India to teach Hindi are not appropriate to be used in our community Hindi classes. We also learned about heritage vs. non-heritage students.” The group affirmed that, given the opportunity, they would like to attend a future installment of the conference.



Social Media and Society in India Conference 2025

By Joyojeet Pal

The fifth edition of Social Media and Society in India 2025 conference convened on April 4–5, 2025, at the University of Michigan, exploring the multifaceted impacts of social media on Indian democracy, culture, and society. The symposium coincided with the Year of Democracy events at U-M and was co-sponsored by the Center for South Asia Studies, the School of Information, the Center for Ethics, Society, and Computing, Wallace House for Journalists, and the Department of Communication and Media. The event brought together scholars, journalists,

digital practitioners, and cultural figures in a hybrid format with sessions on democracy, propaganda, and the digital economy.

The event featured a range of speakers with important and high-profile work on social media, including award-winning actor and Women in Cinema Collective founder Padmapriya Janakiraman who discussed the intersections of digital activism and gender equity within media and film, Sambhaji Bhagat, a Dalit activist and composer, performed and spoke on “Music and Activism in Offline and Online Days,” emphasizing how online

behavior has changed grassroots activism in the last decade, fact-checker Pratik Sinha, co-founder of AltNews.in, spoke about the ecosystem of information verification in a polarized media environment in India, and innovator and climate activist Sonam Wangchuk used his experiences of organizing for climate justice in Ladakh to link environmental concerns to digital engagement strategies. The annual event featured panels and presentations from peer-reviewed student research papers on issues of social media and its impact on contemporary Indian society.

Education in India Roundtable: A Conversation with Ashok Lahiri and Sonam Wangchuk



As India undergoes rapid transformation, its education sector is evolving to meet new challenges and opportunities. From pioneering research to educational reforms, Indian universities have played a significant role on the global stage. On April 2, 2025, the Center for South Asian Studies Education in India Roundtable explored the role of universities in shaping democratic values, the evolving relationship between Indian universities and the state, and the ways in which government support can enhance higher education for the public good. The roundtable examined how U.S. research institutions can contribute to India’s educational landscape through partnerships, student and faculty exchanges, and shared initiatives. As the global education system adapts to a changing world, what is the future of international academic collaboration?

Featured speakers included Somnath Ghosh, Consul General of India in Chicago, Ashok Lahiri, distinguished economist, policy advisor and former chief economic adviser to the Government of India, and Sonam Wangchuk, renowned education reformer, engineer, and innovator, best known for his work in sustainable education and environmental conservation. In his remarks, the Consul General, Somnath Ghosh, outlined the drop in the number of students from India to the United States from 356,000 the previous year to less than 260,000 today. Ghosh mentioned he would like to encourage students in India to pursue a Ph.D. and study niche subjects, and at the same time, encourage universities like the University of Michigan to have campuses and centers in India as a part of the education policy.

CSAS Lecture Takes a Deeper Look at Masculinity in Punjab

By Sonia Mishra



Disillusioned by lofty promises for power and control, Gill's research shows how Punjabi men contend with patriarchy: by submitting to it, attempting to transgress it, migrating away from it, or coming undone by it.

tenderness that men express freely towards each other without the fear of homophobic ridicule."

Gill's research exposes an indictment of patriarchy as a system that not only oppresses women but also constricts men's choices regarding their intimate and sexual lives. Whereas outward transnational migration from Punjab is historically understood through frameworks of political persecution and economic desperation, Gill considers male migration as gendered phenomenon by exploring how it offers a strategy for evading patriarchal responsibilities. In addition, Gill also looks at how male migration reconfigures the lives of those who are left behind.

Gill received the Point Foundation Scholarship, Fulbright-Nehru Research Fellowship, American Institute of Indian Studies Performing Arts Fellowship, the Institute for Citizens & Scholars' Career Enhancement Fellowship, and the Whiting Foundation Public Engagement Fellowship. He also is the current president of the Society for Visual Anthropology.

"In Indian Punjab, a culture dominated almost entirely by men, learning to become a man is a process fraught with violence," says Harjant Gill, anthropology professor from Towson University and CSAS guest lecturer in October 2024.

Gill's research examines the intersections of masculinity, modernity, transnational migration, and popular culture in India. Gill is also an award-winning filmmaker and has made ethnographic films screened at international film festivals and on television channels worldwide, including BBC World News, Doordarshan (Indian National TV) and PBS.

Disillusioned by lofty promises for power and control, Gill's research shows how Punjabi men contend with patriarchy: by submitting to it, attempting to transgress it, migrating away from it, or coming undone by it.

Based on long-term ethnographic research in and around Punjab and its capital city Chandigarh, Gill offers a deeper insight into the worlds of middle-class Punjabi men and how they come of age.

"On one hand, masculinity is produced through pervasive patriarchal violence," adds Gill. "On the other hand, it's underlined with intimacy and

New CSAS Faculty Member Drishadwati Bargi Presents at the WHaLI 2025 Teacher Workshop

By Alexis Wu

On Wednesday, June 17, 2025, **Drishadwati Bargi**, newly incoming LSA collegiate fellow and assistant professor at U-M's Department of Asian Languages and Cultures, gave a presentation as part of a faculty-led panel at the World History and Literature Initiative (WHaLI) 2025 Teacher Workshop.



The workshop, held across two days (June 16 and 17), was the 16th annual workshop held under the WHaLI title. A unique collaboration between the U-M International Institute's Title VI National Resource Centers and the Marsal Family School of Education, WHaLI workshops have aimed to deepen teachers' understanding of world history, literature, and the ways in which their students learn new historical ideas since their inception in 2009. The workshop took place in the Prechter Lab in the School of Education Building, and teachers in history, social studies, and English and language arts (ELA) were invited to attend.

Titled "Gendered Exclusion and Caste: Examples from Dalit Literature," Bargi's presentation focused on one particular text—Yashica Dutt's *Coming Out as Dalit*—and offered two potential frameworks that could make a potential population of American high school students who are being taught about caste both read the text and be reflexive about what constitutes reading any literary text. The work chosen belongs to a list of books, personally curated by Bargi, that she hopes teachers might consult if they were to teach Dalit literature to high school students here: a combination of historical works as well memoirs and cinema in an accessible format.

The presentation's emphasis on framework comes from Bargi's training as a cultural theorist, wherein one is not just trained to understand the meaning of a text but also focus on how a text is produced, what its historical conditions were, what drove it to make the formal choices it did, and how it is read (or misread) in its local, regional, or international context.

Bargi's presentation was joined in the panel by presentations from Magdalyn Akiding, Lecturer IV of Swahili in U-M's Department of Afroamerican and African Studies, and Anna Brotman-Krass, Ph.D. student in U-M's Departments of Romance Languages and Literature and Spanish. The panel was moderated by Michelle Bellino, associate professor at the U-M School of Education.

Bargi had arrived at the University of Michigan merely a week before she participated in the WHaLI workshop, making her appearance in the panel her first public presentation in Ann Arbor. Delighted to hear, when learning of WHaLI, that American schools are interested in teaching Dalit literature, she accepted the invitation with great interest. Bargi would like to thank Jennifer Lund, outreach coordinator for the U-M International Institute, for inviting her, and Madhumita Lahiri, interim director of the Center for South Asian Studies, for recommending her participation.



Immediately prior to her appointment at U-M, Bargi was a 2024–25 postdoctoral fellow at the Fox Center for Humanistic Inquiry at Emory University. Her work lies at the intersection of postcolonial cultural studies and theories of authoritarianism in the wake of European fascism, with an emphasis on modern experiences

A unique collaboration between the U-M International Institute's Title VI National Resource Centers and the Marsal Family School of Education, WHaLI workshops have aimed to deepen teachers' understanding of world history, literature, and the ways in which their students learn new historical ideas.

of caste-based exclusion in the Global South. She earned her Ph.D. from the Department of Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature at the University of Minnesota and her M.Phil. in women's studies and M.A. in English literature from Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India.

As an incoming assistant professor of ALC and faculty member at CSAS, Bargi is looking forward to working in the esteemed company of scholars whose expertise in Dalit literature, mediation, visibility, and post-secular formations is in sync with her research and pedagogical interests. She is already collaborating with a U-M colleague in an edited volume and is very enthused by the warm reception she has so far seen from faculty, students, and staff. In the winter 2026 semester, she is teaching an undergraduate seminar titled, "South Asian Feminism: Contemporary Expressions," which marks her first teaching opportunity at U-M. She hopes to be able to contribute intellectually to the existing debate on gender justice in the U.S. from the vantage point of a Global South scholar. Bargi remarks that WHaLI has opened the doors for more public-facing, community-oriented work, and that she is looking forward to more such engagements with colleagues from other disciplines and regions during her time in Michigan.

Fall 2024 Summer in South Asia Symposium

By Sonia Mishra



Back, L-R: Venkatesh Alagappan, Thomas Bates, Schnadè Saintil, Yixin Zhang
Front: Aditya Patel, Jorja Wegryn-Jones, Emilio Uribe Botero, William Harrison

In the fall of 2024, the Summer in South Asia Symposium welcomed back eight students from their summers in South Asia to hear about their experiences. Seven of them went to India, and one to Sri Lanka.

Each fall, the Center for South Asian Studies (CSAS) Summer in South Asia (SiSA) fellowship program culminates in a public symposium where our fellows present their experiences in India. This opportunity to discuss their research findings or volunteer efforts provides them a venue to reflect upon their experiences and how they have impacted them personally and academically.

The fellows, Venkatesh Alagappan, Thomas Bates, Emilio Uribe Botero, William Harrison, Aditya Patel, Schnadè Saintil, Jorja Wegryn-Jones, and Yixin Zhang, did brief presentations for an audience including SiSA's generous donor.

Some highlights from their presentations were the students taking us through their internships, their research, their additional trips throughout

India, their newfound friendships, and, of course, their various food experiences.

"India is a place where absolute serenity is surrounded by chaos, and being there teaches one the balance between the two," said Venkatesh Alagappan.

In addition to working in public health for a non-profit that served poor communities in Kanjiparam, Alagappan traveled to other areas of India, and he started a food blog that ranked 275 restaurants.

"In terms of a personal experience," added Alagappan. "It was so much better than I imagined."

"I learned many lessons while there," said William Harrison, who focused his internship on the climate. "The world is much bigger than I imagined. I can handle a lot of challenges. Climate change will be devastating if left untreated, but many people are working on it. I can make a bunch of new friends. I improved my professional skills. And, lastly, I will definitely be back in India."

SiSA Fellows receive \$4,500 to learn through an unpaid internship or conduct independent research projects in India over the summer months. This amount is sufficient to cover all costs of traveling to India, living there, and traveling after the internship or research period. The minimum required time in India is four weeks, but students can stay up to four months. Undergraduate students from any academic discipline are eligible. No familiarity with an Indian language, prior research, or professional experience is required.

SiSA Fellows have focused on various topics related to their academic degrees and areas of personal interest. Past SiSA Fellows have built solar panels with community members in a rural area, worked on a Bollywood movie set, and served in a rural healthcare NGO. Participating in this fellowship provides students with transformative international experiences that leave a lasting personal, academic, and professional impact on their lives.

For more information, please visit the SiSA website or email SiSAFellowship@umich.edu.

MIRS-CSAS Graduate Defends Master's Thesis

By Alexis Wu

On May 15, 2025, Caitlyn Marentette, a Masters in International and Regional Studies (MIRS) student specializing in South Asian Studies, defended her master's thesis titled, "Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay and the Bengali Gothic Literary Aesthetic."

Caitlyn's thesis seeks to answer the question, "How would one read Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's two short stories about Taranath the Tantrik titled, 'Taranath Tantrik-er Golpo' (The Story of Taranath Tantrik) and, 'Madhusundari Debir Aabirbhab' (The Appearance of Madhusundari Devi), as Gothic fiction?"

The thesis analyzes Bandyopadhyay's two short stories concerning the youth of the Tantra practitioner Taranath through the lens of affect theory. Chapter one explores Gothic literature via affect theory. Marentette posits that the "Gothic" is not a genre label; instead, it must be understood as a literary aesthetic (social, emotional, environmental, etc.) that, in the case of Taranath Tantrik, adapts to the localized religious, linguistic, literary, and cultural nuances of 1940s Bengal. Chapter two explores the monstrous feminine, a common literary trope in the Gothic literary canon, in Taranath Tantrik's short stories and in contemporaneously written literature. In so doing, Marentette sets up comparisons between the women in the two Taranath Tantrik short stories and Lavinia Whateley from H. P. Lovecraft's *The Dunwich Horror*.

By centering affect theory as the theoretical support and determinant of Gothic literature, Marentette attempts to flip a narrative: where, for instance, common literary tropes (such as the monstrous feminine) are used to talk about *what is Gothic*, it is not necessarily the trope that marks a Gothic story as such. After



all, plenty of Gothic stories do not invoke the monstrous feminine, so to say that the monstrous feminine is a necessary structural support of Gothic literature would be false. Rather, Marentette suggests that these figures, when adjusted to specific linguistic, religious, and other cultural norms, produce a sort of emotional provocation that "feels" Gothic—that is to say, uneasy, questionably resolved at its end, and oftentimes accompanied by feelings of regret, remorse, and discomfort.

CSAS congratulates Marentette on her graduation and wishes her much success in her future endeavors.

Deepthi Bathala Joins CSAS as New Academic Program Specialist

"I've been in the audience for CSAS programs and resources as a graduate student over the years, so being on the other side of these engagements is extremely exciting, especially because I personally know the impact the center can have in supporting students," says Bathala.

Deepthi is a recent Ph.D. graduate in architectural history from the University of Michigan, and her dissertation, titled "Botanical Failures: Gardens and Climate Imaginaries in Colonial South Asia," focused on the environmental and climate history of the region. During her time at U-M, she was involved in various public engage-



ment projects, including K-12 programming, policy development, and sharing her South Asia-centered work with broader audiences in diverse contexts across the U.S., UK, and India. These experiences further deepened her commitment to public engagement. She was a doctoral fellow with the Public Engagement and Research Impacts team at U-M and has worked at Michigan State University Outreach and Engagement as a professional aide.

As the academic program specialist for the Center for South Asian Studies, Deepthi works with the director and the Asia centers manager to develop and implement programming that serves the U-M community and beyond. She also supports other faculty and center-led initiatives and coordinates CSAS scholarship and fellowship competitions.



The University of Michigan School of Social Work Strengthens Its Partnership with Madras Christian College in India

By Sonia Mishra

The University of Michigan (U-M) is following a national trend of improving U.S.-India relations through higher education by steadily increasing its partnerships with Indian universities, the number of Indian students and faculty on its campus, and the amount of U-M students traveling to India for educational opportunities.

"We have been partnering with Madras Christian College (MCC) since 2016," says Katie Lopez, director of the Office of Global Activities at the U-M School of Social Work. "We have found it so valuable that we've renewed the five-year partnership program twice.

"We have an exchange of faculty and students, research and teaching collaborations, and a program with students going back and forth. We offer a global course, an intensive introduction to how social work is done in India, key issues confronting vulnerable populations, and how the issues in India compare with those in the United States."

The partnership is proving valuable to students from both universities.

"We really enjoy working with the University of Michigan," says B. Prince Solomon Devadass, associate professor and fieldwork coordinator for the Department of Social Work at MCC. "Both schools are passionate about and share a social work value system, professionalism, and global engagement. That is our connection and why the partnership is so successful."

This past August, 11 Master of Social Work (MSW) students participated in an inaugural international faculty-led course, or Global Course Extension (GCE), in Chennai, India.

Students in the GCE completed two courses focused on the Grand Challenges for Social Work. More specifically, the courses focused on four grand challenges, including eliminating racism and caste, closing the health gap, creating social responses to environmental challenges, and building healthy relationships to end violence with a focus on women. The first one-credit introductory course took place in the U.S., and the second 2-credit experiential course took place in Chennai. Both courses were taught by Ashley Cureton (Bhavalkar), and they were locally grounded and explicitly comparative. The GCE experience provided students with an intensive introduction to how the social work profession is organized in India, key issues confronting vulnerable populations, and how the issues in India and the United States align and depart from each other.

Once in Chennai, the GCE cohort attended Tamil language courses and lectures given by local experts in the mornings and visited field sites in the afternoons to complement course content. The lectures and field visits allowed the cohort to learn about social work practices employed in the Indian context, particularly in local communities, agencies, and organizations with which the MCC Department of Social Work (Aided) works closely.

"Our days were long and extremely impactful," says Kelz Cousins, an online, part-time U-M MSW interpersonal track student.

"Many mornings, we did Tamil language lessons to learn some basic words and phrases to interact with local folk. Then, we would have lectures from amazing people doing wonderful work in India about themes in the Social Work Grand Chal-

lenges. Many of the lecturers were professors in India or worked at nonprofits.

"In the afternoon, we would travel into the community. Sometimes, traveling by bus with the group would take many hours. The school had wonderful partnerships with Irula communities. They partner with them to help them achieve their goals. This community is one of the greenest, sustainable places I've ever seen, and so much more."

Additionally, some of the impactful site visits included visiting Rehoboth, a home for mentally disabled women; traveling to the Irula Tribal Women's Welfare Society, which is a community-based organization that works to protect natural resources using the Irula tribal knowledge and empower Irula women; and touring an award-winning village known for water conservation projects.

"My favorite part of the course was the farewell dinner on our final night. It was also a meaningful moment to reflect on our shared experiences as a cohort and to celebrate the strong partnership between the two institutions," says Shreeja Vachhani, U-M MSW student, with a focus on interpersonal practice in integrated health, mental health, and substance abuse.

"I highly recommend this course and the global social work experience to other MSW students. While I may be a bit biased since India is my home country, this experience deepened my connection to the field of mental health and how I envision contributing to it there. This program is truly one of a kind, offering the opportunity to explore a different culture and region of the world while gaining valuable and meaningful learning experiences."

Why Take Tamil at the University of Michigan?

Testimonials from U-M's newly launched Tamil program

By Sonia Mishra

"Tamil is very important to us,"

said Syed Ekhteyar Ali, director of the South Asian Language Program at U-M and professor of both Hindi and Urdu.

"All of our South Asian languages that we teach here (Bengali, Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu) are spoken in at least two countries and Tamil is no different. However, Tamil is the only language spoken in South India and belongs to the Dravidian language family. We knew we needed it back in the curriculum to enrich and broaden our offerings by adding the precious South Indian and Sri Lankan language and cultural contents. Now we have Professor Raviraj on our team, and we are very happy to welcome her."

Presented here are the testimonials of several students reflecting on their reasons for taking U-M's newly relaunched Tamil classes with Professor Pathima Pasmila Raviraj:

"Tamil is an important language to learn, not only to learn about the culture but because Tamil is spoken in different states across India, as well as Sri Lanka. Tamil is important to me because it is part of my culture, and my mom's side speaks it."

Ami/Avik Patel, a beginner-level Tamil student at U-M.

"I am loving Tamil. My progress has been immense in just the first term—I can read anything, and I went from knowing a few words to now hundreds and hundreds. My professor is always so nice and supportive and truly a friendly face to see."

"I would very much recommend the class to others. It has a close-knit classroom environment, an excellent teacher, and, especially if they are Tamil or Indian, they can learn about their culture and/or language, too!"

"I have always been interested in learning Tamil because it is my family's language, but being born in America to Indian-born immigrants, I never had the chance to formally learn the language more than the conversation I picked up at home."

Sanjana Ramanathan, an intermediate-level Tamil student at U-M.

"This summer, I took an intensive beginner course and was lucky enough to continue Tamil at U-M when it returned to our course offerings this year! Learning Tamil is an important connection to my heritage and as a literature student, I'm also interested in learning to read the script and find more contemporary work in Tamil."

"I am really enjoying the Tamil classes here! It's very accessible, and Professor Raviraj is an excellent teacher. My favorite part is discussing the differences in regional dialects and scripts, especially the changes between Indian and Sri Lankan contexts. It shows the diversity of the language."

"I believe it is important to learn Tamil as it is one of the oldest languages that has multiple intricate yet interesting patterns."

Thankith Solomon Janakiraman, an advanced-level Tamil student at U-M.

"I like the class very much since it helped me expand my knowledge of my hometown while also learning the language simultaneously."

"It's important for me to learn Tamil because I want to be able to communicate with that side of my family better and be able to speak another language."

Nikhil Rangarajan, a beginner-level Tamil student at U-M.

"I would highly recommend this class. Not only is it informative, but it is a fun environment with an awesome teacher! I've already greatly improved my listening skills and learned better grammar. I'm strengthening my vocabulary and want to continue that process."

"I love the class. It's a great environment to ask questions and improve my speaking and listening skills. My favorite part is when we do light-hearted activities and speaking activities. It's interactive, and I feel it improves my speaking skills."



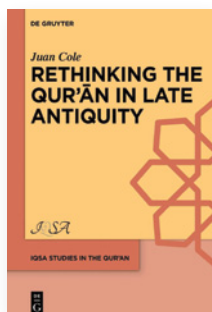
Faculty News



Juan Cole was awarded a Michigan Humanities fellowship for winter 2026 on “The Victorian Persianate: The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám and the Pre-Raphaelites.” The project has a substantial Indian dimension.

His major work *Rethinking the Qur'an in Late Antiquity* was published in February 2025 by DeGruyter in Berlin.

His essay “Rumi and Shakespeare” appeared in *Renovatio* in March 2025.



In 2024–2025, **Farina Mir** held a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities, to work on her book *Genres of Muslim Modernity: Being*



Muslim in Late-Colonial India, 1850–1947. The book interrogates a history of being Muslim in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century India that emerges from popular Urdu akhlaq literature, a genre of religious/literary texts on ethics. Related to the project, Mir published a forum in *Modern Asian Studies* on “Muslim Modernity in South Asia,” co-edited with Muhammad Qasim Zaman. The forum was based on a workshop held at CSAS in May 2022. She also contributed “Language Policy and Transformations in India’s Epistemological Terrain” to the Comparative Studies in Society and History Forum, “In and Out of Persian.”

While on leave, Mir was appointed an Arthur F. Thurnau Professor by the U-M provost, for outstanding contributions to undergraduate education. She was also awarded a John Dewey Award by the College of LSA for her long-term commitment to the education

of undergraduate students. Mir is pleased to return to the classroom in 2025–2026 to teach for the History Department and the LSA Honors Program.



Swapnil Rai’s book *Networked Bollywood: How Star Power Globalized Hindi Cinema* received an honorable mention in the category of best first monograph by the British Association of Film, Television and Screen Studies. The book was also cited in major newspapers in India, China and the United States.



Library News

By Jeffrey Martin

This fall semester there will be a meeting held for the South Asian language instructors that will reacquaint them with the ever-expanding collections of the University Library, including both print and electronic formats. The meeting will focus on the particular pedagogical needs of the faculty as well as how they might better inform their students concerning library materials.

The South Asia section of the library has received funding from the Library Fellows program to hire a student worker to help redesign the research guide for South Asian Studies. This guide, often referred to as a LibGuide, is a reference “cheat sheet” that gives researchers pointers to information concerning South Asia. This reconfiguration of the guide will help researchers to find links to all aspects of South Asian civilization. As progress is made, the guide will be updated and will be released in its revised form.



Teacher Outreach

This article was adapted, with permission, from “International Institute TVI Centers Partner with Western Michigan School Districts” by Jennifer Lund. Minor changes were made to the original content.

On March 12, 2025, the Center for South Asian Studies and three International Institute National Resource Centers (NRC) including the African Studies Center, the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, and the Center for Middle Eastern and North African Studies, partnered with the Muskegon and Kent intermediate school districts for a day of professional learning for 50 secondary social studies, world history, and geography teachers.

As part of the Muskegon and Kent school districts’ first annual West Michigan Social Studies Collaborative, the professional learning initiative titled “Seeds, Sustenance, and Spaces: Spicing up World History and Geography Through the Lens of Food and Foodways” allowed grade 5–12 social studies, world history and geography educators to enhance their teaching practices, share innovative strategies and build a network of passionate professionals committed to advancing social studies education.

Opening the program was veteran world history teacher, Amy Perkins, from Lakeshore High School in Stevensville, Michigan. She modeled lesson ideas to engage students in discussions of how diets reflect migration, conquest, and resilience through interactive activities like sensory-rich “buffet” stations representing global cuisine, a critical reading and discussion activity, and project ideas to explore the topic in more depth. She also shared related resources and funding opportunities for overseas professional development targeted for educators.

Four scholars from the International Institute area studies centers followed with in-person presentations that highlighted not only regional cuisine and indigenous agricultural methods but also the intersection of colonialism, migration, and historical events that have shaped foodways around the world from ancient history to the present. Caitlyn Marentette, a South Asian Studies Masters in International and Regional Studies student, fast-forwarded through history to the 20th-century to frame the causes of the 1943 Bengal famine and its effects on dietary habits for the survivors. Darin Stockdill, instructional and program design coordinator for the Center for Education Design, Evaluation and Research, closed the session by modeling lesson ideas for engaging students in global learning through food and drink. He also shared possible approaches for building curriculum based on the materials provided.



The professional learning initiative titled “Seeds, Sustenance, and Spaces: Spicing up World History and Geography Through the Lens of Food and Foodways” allowed grade 5–12 social studies, world history and geography educators to enhance their teaching practices, share innovative strategies and build a network of passionate professionals.



Thank you to our generous donors. Your support makes our work possible.

We recognize that our ability to reach an even higher standard of teaching, research, and programming depends on those of you who share our commitment to the study and dissemination of knowledge about this important region.

Donations to the Strategic Fund allow CSAS to pursue its mission to promote a broader and deeper understanding of South Asia and its histories, cultures, and peoples. It also enables students and faculty to produce cutting-edge, field-defining research.

Scan this QR code for information on how to donate to CSAS



The CSAS team

Matthew Hull, Director

Madhumita Lahiri, Interim Director (2024-2025)

Tina Griffith, Asia Centers Business Manager

Deepthi Bathala, Academic Program Specialist

Linda Hanes Miller, Communications Editor

Margaret Rudberg, Asia Centers Administrative Assistant

