

# *South Asia Newsletter*

Centre of South Asian Studies, SOAS  
<http://www.soas.ac.uk/csas>

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No 58

September 2004

Greetings, first of all, to all those who have been involved and interested in the Centre for South Asia over the years, as well as to those who are new to SOAS and the centre. As the new chair of the center, I am only too aware of how challenging it will be to step in the shoes of Dr Rachel Dwyer, who chaired the Centre so ably during her tenure, brought a number of pivotal figures in South Asian Studies from around the world to speak at SOAS, and initiated important research projects. I solicit the help and advice of all colleagues and well-wishers of the center to maintain the buzz of activity during my tenure.

Responding to comments from students about their desire to 'connect' more with the center, I have put together a seminar series that includes readings by South Asian novelists, some recent academic work concerning the condition of South Asians in Britain, and new work on South Asia. My effort will be to cover all regions of South Asia in the series, as well as draw in the large numbers of SOAS people with interests in the region. On this too, I welcome your suggestions.

At the time of going to press, we have received the very sad news of the passing away of Dr Julia Leslie. It is a huge loss not only to the Centre and the School, but to South Asian studies and the study of religions in general. On behalf of the Centre, I extend our condolences to her family, friends and colleagues.

Best wishes, and I hope to see a continued level of interest in the Centre's activities.

**Subir Sinha**  
**Chair, Centre of South Asian Studies**

**Dr Julia Leslie, Reader in Hindu Studies  
School of Oriental and African Studies  
University of London**

Julia Leslie joined SOAS in 1990, having previously taught at Goldsmiths, Oxford, Bristol, Harvard, and the Open University. She was a Sanskritist who specialised on *dharmashastra*, her Oxford doctorate being published in 1989 as *The perfect wife: the orthodox Hindu woman according to the Stridharmapaddhati of Tryambakayajvan*. Soon after Julia's appointment as Lecturer in Hindu Studies (in the then Department of Indology), the interests of specialists in Religion from various locations within the School were brought together within a newly-formed Department of Religious Studies, and Julia was instrumental in the successful launching of that Department and its ambitious range of academic programmes.

Gender issues latent in Julia's own doctoral work were further developed in her subsequent research, which yielded many publications and latterly earned a major AHRB grant for a project on "Epic constructions: gender and myth in the *Mahabharata*". Her interest and energy helped form a nucleus for many new scholarly initiatives on gender, attracting many PhD students to SOAS and leading directly to the establishing of a Gender and Religion Research Centre in the School. Alongside an ambitious programme of teaching and research and a meticulously maintained pastoral role, Julia somehow found time for organising such extracurricular activities as a very popular "Come and meet..." series of informal encounters with visiting academics and writers. She also carried a substantial administrative load, and was Pro-Director for Undergraduate Studies in 1997-98.

This bland listing of specific tasks and achievements falls far short of mapping the true topography of Julia's life at SOAS. She was a brilliant and inspiring teacher whose gifts lay not only in the gratifying task of guiding the best students through their various degrees, but also in her patient and sympathetic nurturing of those to whom academic success came less easily. She was also the perfect colleague, always ready to discuss any subject with a unique combination of insight, practicality, wisdom and humour (she laughed a great deal: how she laughed!). In an institution too easily prone to division, Julia sustained a precious connectivity between our several approaches to teaching and research; and indeed in all her dealings with the world she kept sight of the connectedness of things, bringing discipline to her day-to-day life and work, and investing compassion, liveliness and humanity in her chosen disciplines. How does one assess the contribution of such a person to an institution such as ours? The task would perhaps have been better performed by one of the many research students for whom she provided so very much more than the statutory measures of scholarly and pastoral support; for at heart Julia was a teacher, a truly gifted and creative teacher who loved nothing more than to share her understanding of her subject with others, and to inspire them with her love for it.

Julia died in the early hours of Friday 24th September after a brave and dignified battle with cancer. Many people now working or studying at SOAS may be unaware of what they owe her in terms of the programmes and subjects now taught here; but those who knew her will be quick to acknowledge that debt, and to share in the grief of losing a highly respected and much loved colleague.

CENTRE OF SOUTH ASIAN STUDIES  
SEMINARS

WEDNESDAYS, 5PM, ROOM G52

- |             |  |
|-------------|--|
| 6 October   | Dr Ananya Jahanara Kabeer (University of Leeds)<br>Language, Identity, Political Conflict: The Case of Kashmiris   |
| 13 October  | Award-winning novelist and film-maker Ruchir Joshi will read from recent writing. Ruchir is based in Delhi, and is the author of the acclaimed novel, <i>The Last Jet Engine Laugh</i>   |
| 20 October  | Award-winning novelist Ardeshir Vakil will read from recent writing. Vakil is the author of <i>Beachboy</i> and <i>One Day</i> . He teaches at Hornssey Girls' Middle School.  |
| 27 October  | Acclaimed and award winning writer Dr Syed Manzurul Islam, will read from his latest novel, <i>Burrow</i> , set in the Bangladeshi community of east London. Manzu teaches English Literature at the University of Gloucestershire |
|             | Reading week: no session   |
| 10 November | Dr Alpa Shah (Goldsmith's College)<br>Democracy and Imaginations of the State in Jharkhand, India  |
| 17 November | Dr Tahir Abbas (University of Birmingham)<br>British South Asian Muslims after 9-11: Islamophobia, Multiculturalism and the State  |
| 24 November | Dr Phiroze Vasunia (University of North Carolina and Oxford University)<br>Classics and the Indian Civil Services  |
| 1 December  | Dr Emma Mawdsley (Birkbeck College)<br>Hindutva and Indian Environmentalism  |
| 8 December  | Dr Tariq Jazeel<br>Literary Landscapes: Geography, truth and productions of the national in Michael Ondaatje's <i>Anil's Ghost</i>   |

**PROFESSOR B R (TOM) TOMLINSON**  
Professor of Economic History in the University of London  
and Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities

will deliver an inaugural lecture entitled

***Rational explanations and irrational acts: the partition of India revisited***

Chair: Professor Andrew Porter  
Rhodes Professor of Imperial History,  
King's College London

5.30pm Monday 11 October 2004  
Lecture Theatre, Brunei Gallery, SOAS

The Director and Principal, Professor Colin Bundy will preside.

All welcome

**Dr Sachidananda Mohanty**  
University of Hyderabad

will give a talk

*Lost Tradition: Early Women's Writing in Orissa 1898-1950*

**CANCELLED**

Tuesday 11 January 2005, 5pm  
Room 116  
All welcome

The Department of the Study of Religions, SOAS, presents a talk by

## **Deepak Sarma**

Thursday 14 October, 1-3pm  
Room B202 (2nd floor, Brunei Gallery)

Deepak Sarma is an Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Case Western Reserve University, USA, as well as a Research Professor of the Purnaprajna Samshodhana Mandiram, Bangalore, India. He was born into the Madhva tradition and is a practising Madhva. His publications include *An Introduction to Madhva Vedanta* (Ashgate 2003) and *Epistemologies and the Limitations of Philosophical Inquiry: Doctrine in Madhva Vedanta* (RoutledgeCurzon 2004) (about which he will speak today), as well as articles on the Madhva tradition in the *Journal of Indian Philosophy* and the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*.

### **How secret is a secret society? Madhva Vedanta, the *mleccha* scholar, and current methodological challenges**

The Madhva School of Vedanta is founded on such a strict insider epistemology that outsiders are not permitted to access basic doctrines. Are the Madhva defences impenetrable or are there ways that outsiders can become virtuosos in Madhva doctrine and speak for/about the tradition? What are the implications of such defences for the study of esoteric religions? This talk, and the book on which it is based, are part of an ongoing controversy in religious studies pertaining to issues of voice and authority and the growing concerns of some in the Hindu community.

**‘Narratives of ‘Home’ in South Asian Literature’  
Report on two-day conference held at SOAS on 24-25 June 2004,  
sponsored by the British Academy**

On 24 and 25 June a conference on ‘Narratives of ‘home’ in South Asian literature’ was held at the Vernon Square campus of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). The Organising Committee included: Malashri Lal, Department of English, and Director, Women’s studies, University of Delhi, Sukrita Paul Kumar, Zakir Hussein College, University of Delhi, and the host-organiser, Lucy Rosenstein, SOAS, University of London. The objective of the conference was to map some of the narratives of ‘home’ in South Asian literature from the advance of modernity on the subcontinent till the present day. It aimed to read more than the domestic into representations of the home, to explore not only the geographical, but also the psychological and material connotations of ‘home’. Its goal was to problematise ‘home’ and its experience in different contexts and in different ways, to investigate if and how ‘home’ changes its significations when articulated from different locations, in different languages and by different subjects, paying particular attention to ideological determinants like gender and class.

Twenty academic papers were presented and discussed during the conference. The participants came from the USA, Canada, Japan, India and UK.

Rosemary Marangoly George, author of the groundbreaking *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-century Fiction* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), gave the key-note address ‘Fortuitous Slippage: From Malgudi to Madhupur’ in which she argued, on the basis of her reading of Narayan and Ganesan, that ‘all discourse on home is fictional and diasporic’. In the second morning session ‘Questioning borders’, Debali Mookerjee and Stephen Morton explored questions of home and homelessness in the context of women’s experience of Partition, as reflected in Bengali, Urdu and English writing, whereas Vibha Chauhan’s paper investigated the social geography of ‘home’ with examples from English, Hindi, Marathi and Bengali novels. The first afternoon session ‘Home as a social text’ included three papers: Sneja Gunew’s ‘Mouthwork’: Food and language as corporeal home for the unhoused diasporic body in South Asian women’s writing’, P.S.Chauhan’s ‘Home and constructions of fiction’ and Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph’s ‘Home in the context of liminality and hybridity in the Amar Singh diary’. In the following session Malashri Lal and Sonita Sarker talked about international themes in the work of women thinkers and writers. A special session, in which Pavan Varma, Susham Bedi, Sukrita Paul Kumar and Vijay Lakshmi, prominent writers from India, read from their work exploring ‘home’ was housed by the Nehru Centre. It was followed by a reception.

The second day started with a session, exploring the relationship between literature and media: John Thieme talked about cinema, nostalgia and ‘home’ in Rushdie’s fiction; Amna Malik focused on Alia Seyd’s film ‘Fatima’s Letter’ and Laura Kenreuther on FM radio in Kathmandu. The second and third sessions of the day included varied papers which dealt with problematics of longing and belonging in the fiction of Bengali writers (Sanjukta Dasgupta), the trope of travelling as a way of configuring home in diaspora writing (Sangeeta Ray), topoi in Hindi women poets’ narratives of ‘home’ (Lucy Rosenstein), ‘South Asian-ness’, ‘home’ and diaspora (Mridula Nath Chakraborty), and home and modernity in Surendra Verma’s Hindi play *Draupadi* (Pamela Lothspeich). The last session ‘Identity and nation’ looked at constructions of ‘home’, identity and nation in the writings of Michael Ondaatje and Shyam Selvadurai (Yoko Fujimoto and Sharanya Jayawickrama) and Krsnamurti (Akhila Ramnarayan).

Five papers will be included in the June issue of the *JCL*; a suitably revised version of most contributions will be published in an edited volume in due course.

**Lucy Rosenstein  
Lecturer in Hindi**

## SOUTH ASIAN HISTORY SEMINAR

**Tuesdays, 2.00pm, The Deakin Room, Founder's Building, St Antony's College, Oxford**

- 12 October      Dr Joya Chatterji (LSE)  
Graveyards and ghettos: Muslims in West Bengal 1947-67
- 19 October      Dr Soumyen Mukherjee (University of Sydney)  
Images and realities: Nineteenth-century Calcutta in Bengali literature, 1818-1910
- 26 October      Professor T Mizushima (Tokyo University)  
From Mirasi to Patta: Changes of social grammar in South India between 1770s and 1870s
- 2 November     Dara Price (Balliol)  
The illusion of omnipotence: Revenue administration and the "Punjab Tradition" in the nineteenth century
- 9 November     Yasmin Khan (St Antony's)  
Out of control? Understanding partition violence
- 16 November    Hayden Bellenoit (St Antony's)  
Missionary education, knowledge and North Indian society, c. 1880-1915
- 23 November    Professor Christopher Fuller and Haripriya Narasimhan (LSE)  
Globalisation, information technology and the middle class in Chennai (Madras)
- 30 November    Professor Peter Robb (SOAS)  
Children, emotion and identity: Views from the Blechyndens, Calcutta diaries (1790-1822)

All welcome

Convenor: Dr D.A. Washbrook, Asian Studies Centre, St Antony's College, University of Oxford  
Enquiries:    e-mail: [asian@sant.ox.ac.uk](mailto:asian@sant.ox.ac.uk)                      telephone 01865 274559

### **Indian Art Circle Autumn 2004 Lecture Programme**

The IAC is a non-profit organisation under the auspices of the SOAS Art and Archaeology Department and supported by the Society for South Asian Studies, dedicated to the promotion of scholarship in Indian art. The series of monthly lectures are followed by drinks and an invitation to join the speaker for an Indian meal. For any questions about IAC please contact <[Jasleen.Kandhari@bl.uk](mailto:Jasleen.Kandhari@bl.uk)>, Assistant Secretary, Indian Art Circle.

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## ***SOUTH ASIA RESEARCH***

*South Asia Research* is a bi-annual interdisciplinary area journal for the South Asia region, now published by Sage Publications in London and edited by Werner Menski. From Vol. 25 (2005) onwards, it will appear thrice a year. The topics covered include modern and pre-modern history, politics, economics, anthropology, literary and visual culture, language and literature. Its primary aim is to give rapid access to current research work and to provide opportunities for publication to research students as well as to established scholars. In addition to reports of research in progress and book reviews, review articles are welcome. *South Asia Research* also publishes 'thought pieces' and interpretive essays that address issues and problems arising from new research.

### **South Asia Research 24.1 was published in May 2004**

#### **Special Issue: Food in South Asia**

Rachel Dwyer

EDITORIAL: THE CULTURAL MEANING OF FOOD IN SOUTH ASIA

Ashis Nandy

THE CHANGING POPULAR CULTURE OF INDIAN FOOD:  
PRELIMINARY NOTES

Virinder S. Kalra

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE SAMOSA

Bhaskar Mukhopadhyay

BETWEEN ELITE HYSTERIA AND SUBALTERN CARNIVALESQUE:  
THE POLITICS OF STREET-FOOD IN THE CITY OF CALCUTTA

Barbara Harriss-White

NUTRITION AND ITS POLITICS IN TAMIL NADU

*South Asia Research* (ISSN 0262-7080) is published twice a year in May and November by SAGE Publications (London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi). Details are available from SAGE Publications, (new UK address from December 2003): Oliver's Yard, 55 City Road, London EC1Y 1SP, UK; Sage Publications Inc, 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks, CA 91320, USA, or Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd., Post Box 4215, New Delhi 110048, India.

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website: <http://www.sagepub.co.uk/home.aspx>



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**South Asia Research 24.2**  
**will be published in November 2004 and will contain the following articles:**

Raminder Kaur

At the Ragged Edges of Time: The Legend of Tilak and the Normalization  
of Historical Narratives

Akram A. Khan and Farhad Shirani Bidabadi

LIVESTOCK REVOLUTION IN INDIA: ITS IMPACT AND POLICY  
RESPONSE

Fabrizio Ferrari

SHRI DHARMESHVARA OF VARANASI AND THE CULT OF  
DHARMA THAKUR OF BENGAL: SOME ANALOGIES AND  
DISCREPANCIES

Nile Green

EMERGING APPROACHES TO THE SUFI TRADITIONS OF SOUTH  
ASIA: BETWEEN TEXTS, TERRITORIES AND THE TRANSCENDENT

Mayurika Chakravorty

‘SKELETONS OF HISTORY’: FACT AND FICTION IN RAKHALDAS  
BANDYOPADHYAY’S SASANKA

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SAR is expanding and, as of 2005, the Journal will be published three times a year. SAR 25.1 will be a Special Issue on Hindi (Guest Editor Rupert Snell), 25.2 a general issue, and 25.3 could be another Special Issue, either on ‘Food and Emotion’ or on ‘Gujarat Studies’.

The SAR Book Review Editor is Dr Lalita Du Perron at SOAS ([ld5@soas.ac.uk](mailto:ld5@soas.ac.uk)). She and the Editorial Assistant, Biswajit Chanda ([bc5@soas.ac.uk](mailto:bc5@soas.ac.uk)), are keen to attract more reviewers for the Journal. There are presently more than 100 recently published books available for review. Interested scholars and research students will be sent a full list of such books by Biswajit on request.

**Werner Menski**  
**Editor**



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Executive Officer

Barbara Lazoi ([bl1@soas.ac.uk](mailto:bl1@soas.ac.uk))

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