

# Washington South Asia Report

South Asia Center, Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies

## Message from the Director

*K. Sivaramakrishnan*

With this first issue of the new, expanded, newsletter I would like to welcome back all the members of the South Asian Studies community at the University of Washington and the greater Seattle area. I would also like to take the opportunity to extend a special welcome to several new faculty, notably, Dr. Craig Jeffrey in Geography, Dr. Purnima Dhanvan in History, and Dr. Sanjeev Khagram in Public Affairs. The support of the College of Arts and Sciences and the growing participation of various professional schools have ensured a steady growth in the faculty and courses offered in South Asian Studies. This is cause for celebration but also an occasion to remember our growing responsibilities in a world where South Asia is newly significant. My faculty colleagues have been called upon to help the community understand everything from the performance of the Indian economy to the relief efforts following the tragic Tsunami in south India and Sri Lanka and the devastating earthquake in Kashmir. They have tirelessly responded to these requests.

One of the ways in which we seek to fulfill the mission of mainstreaming South Asian Studies into the university curriculum, and support public education about the region in the northwestern USA, is by promoting more travel and relations between the place where we live, in a corner of this country, and the region called South Asia that we study or hail from. New undergraduate study abroad programs are being launched, notably one that will take students for studies in environment and development in the western Himalaya starting in 2006.

With community support we were able to bring the inaugural Indian Distinguished Visitor, Gurcharan Das, to campus for two months this fall term. Collaborating with the Simpson Center for the Humanities we have also brought the eminent historians of modern India, Prof. Tanika Sarkar and Prof. Sumit Sarkar, for two months in this fall term as well. These fine public figures and scholars have enriched not only the life of the students and faculty but also the greater community with their public lectures, participation in conferences, and attendance in community events of all sizes. We would like to do this on a regular basis and look to all friends of South Asian Studies, both from the regional South Asian community and other groups, for support to make these events and exchanges possible regularly.

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## IAWW SCHOLARSHIPS

The South Asia Center awarded two India Association of Western Washington scholarships for academic year 2005-2006. This scholarship is supported through an endowed fund provided by the members of IAWW. We thank them for their continuing support.

See the announcement for this year's IAWW Scholarship competition on page 3.  
The awardees for this year are:

**Devin Joshi** is a 3<sup>rd</sup> year graduate student in the Department of Political Science. He holds an MA in Asian Politics from the University of Hawaii and a BA in Chinese History from Stanford University. He is working on a project comparing Human Development in India and China. This project intends to examine how politics has impacted poverty and inequality in India and China from the 1970's to the present. He plans to analyze three factors in this regard: knowledge/education; health; and wealth/income, which will help clarify how these factors have contributed to national human development trajectories and patterns of regional variation in human development across India and China. This will be the first time that these two global symbols of centralized single-party authoritarianism (China) and decentralized multi-party democracy (India) will be thoroughly evaluated and compared regarding their progress in human development rather than economic growth.

Mr. Joshi plans to spend September-March doing dissertation research in India next year, during which time he plans to interview government officials and NGO practitioners in Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Maharashtra.

**Anshuman Pandey** is a second year student in the International Studies Program in the Jackson School of International Studies. Like many South Asian Americans, he is an immigrant to the US who has pursued academic study of South Asia at the University of Washington, earning BA degrees in History and Asian Languages and Literature. Unlike many other South Asian immigrants, Mr. Pandey emigrated from Norway. As he put it in his application for the IAWW Scholarship:

"...growing up in Norway...left me disconnected from [India's] larger experience, like an outsider looking in. This disjunction persisted long after I moved to the US, until I began to study Indian history during high school as an exercise in personal discovery. This exploration of my Indian heritage evolved into a passion for the study of South Asia that continually inspires my academic and professional ambitions."

He is interested in understanding ethnic identities which persist and are constructed through laws that promote linguistic and religious affiliations in India. He also works with immigrant communities in the Puget Sound region and plans to pursue a career in public affairs or law.

In 2005-2006, he plans to develop specific research topics in South Asian ethnic conflict and nationalism in order to conclude his graduate work in International Studies.

# Money Available for 2006-2007

INDIA ASSOCIATION OF WESTERN WASHINGTON SCHOLARSHIP

## For the Study of South Asia

for 2006-2007 academic year

The South Asia Center is pleased to announce the fifth annual competition for the awarding of the India Association of Western Washington Scholarships.

This competition is open to all University of Washington students who are South Asia majors or who have demonstrated an interest in South Asia as defined below.

Two awards are proposed, each in the amount of \$1000, for support of the awardee's studies during the 2006-2007 academic year.

### **ELIGIBILITY:**

**Undergraduate students** who are South Asia majors or who have demonstrated a serious academic interest in South Asia by virtue of successfully completing at least 20 credits of South Asia-related courses (of which no more than 15 credits may be for language study).

**Graduate students** who are South Asia majors or who are pursuing graduate level degrees with significant South Asia focus under the direction of a South Asia program faculty member are eligible to apply for the graduate award.

### **REQUIREMENTS FOR APPLICATION:**

Any eligible applicant in either category may apply by submitting a letter of application, a statement of purpose indicating the significance of the study of South Asia for the applicant, a plan of study for the 2006-2007 academic year, transcripts (reproductions acceptable) for all post-secondary institutions attended, and two letters of recommendation, at least one of which should be from a faculty member familiar with the applicant's South Asia related coursework directly to the South Asia Center.

Applications and letters of recommendation should be sent to:

South Asia Center  
Attn: IAWW Scholarship Awards  
Thomson Hall 303, Box 353650  
University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195-3650

The deadline for receipt of applications and letters is January 20, 2006.

## Gurcharan Das, First India Distinguished Visitor

Interviewed by Shiwani Shrivastava

On October 26, 2005, Gurcharan Das the first India Distinguished Visitor gave a talk entitled, "On the Difficulty of Being Good," which examined the concept of dharma in the *Mahabharata* and how the moral issues of this epic are very relevant to India today. Shiwani Shrivastava interviewed him after this discussion.

Das is an author and public intellectual. He is the author of the international bestseller, *India Unbound*, which has been published in many countries and languages and filmed by the BBC. He writes a regular column on Sundays for the *Times of India* and *Dainik Bhaskar* and occasional guest columns for the *Wall Street Journal*, *Financial Times*, and *Time Magazine*. He was also the CEO of Procter & Gamble in India.

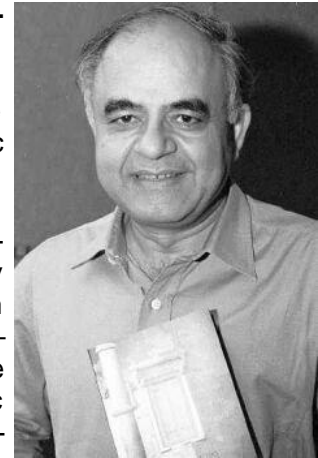
**Q: In your lecture, On the Difficulty Being Good, you mentioned that not being an academic gives you an interesting scholarly perspective. Since you don't consider yourself an academic, what made you decide on being the first India Distinguished Visitor at the University of Washington?**

**A:** Well, you don't plan your life. I studied philosophy at Harvard and I was going to go do a PhD at Oxford. But I suddenly got cold feet and said, "Do I really want to be a professional philosopher?" And so I went back home to India, but my family couldn't understand this business of taking a year off. Just to get away from that pressure, I got a job at a company selling Vicks VaporRub, of all things. And I'm like the man who came to dinner – I just stayed on in the business world. In the meantime, I wrote 3 plays in my 20s, I wrote a novel in my 30s, and so on. Now, frankly, what attracts me here is that I'm writing another book. And the library, Suzzallo, is incredible. If you're working on a book, you need to take time to just read. I've been here six weeks so far and I've been reading a book a day.

**Q: When you speak in front of an audience, especially in an academic setting, do you think that you bring a unique perspective be-**

**cause of your background?**

**A:** I think that because I'm not in the academic world I can be freer. Academics have to be very cautious – everything they say, they must footnote. But I'm liberated from that – I'm like a bridge (between the academic world and a wider audience). And you know, I have a pulpit – I have these columns I



Gurcharan Das

write in the *Times of India* and *Dainik Bhaskar*, and occasionally the *Wall Street Journal*, *Time Magazine*, and *Newsweek*. Right now I'm writing a piece for *Newsweek*.

**Q: What's it about?**

**A:** The subject is the failure of our schoolteachers in India. But I'm giving [India] a positive spin because I think in some ways Indian achievement is even greater than China's. China's success is induced by the state and ours is despite the state, because our governance is failing us. If the government doesn't deliver a good school education, we depend on private education – we open schools in slums. So it's really a people's entrepreneurial miracle, much more than even China.

**Q: In *India Unbound*, you mention that India was a democracy before it was a capital state. That being the case, where do you think India is headed? Do you think it will be like America in 50-100 years?**

**A:** Even before that I would say. Well, America in what sense? Certainly economically, if we keep growing at the rate we are in India, which is a 6% growth rate, and I think it will become 7% as we

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## Gurcharan Das Interview (*continued*)

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move forward. This growth will take us to US incomes by 2066 – current US income, that is, around \$37,000 a year. As far as culture, if you're talking about the world turning 'McWorld,' which I don't think it is, then India would be the last country. This is partly because of democracy, partly the hold of tradition.

**Q: One aspect of Indian culture that you talk about a great deal is the idea of *dharma* as it functions on both personal and political levels. What exactly do you mean by *dharma*?**

**A:** The word *dharma* of course has many meanings; it's a very complex word. Let's not get stuck in that. Eventually, the way I see *dharma* is the way that Yuddhistira develops as a character [in the *Mahabharata*]. He has an extreme sense of sorrow, especially in Book 12, which is called *Shanti Parva*, the Book of Peace. But it's about war, and that remorse that he feels, which he has to reconcile himself. Finally, in the very last scene, when Yuddhistira reaches heaven with his dog, the god Indra says, "You can come in, but dogs aren't allowed in heaven." And he says, "Well, I'm sorry but this poor dog... everybody is dead on the earth. Who will take care of this dog? If you can't let him in along with me, then I'm sorry I'm not coming." Just that one incident shows what *dharma* is ultimately about – it is just concern for another being.

**Q: Speaking of the *Mahabharata* and your book *The Elephant Paradigm*, I know you've discussed India as being without ideology. What do you mean by this? If a country like India has texts like the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* as guides, doesn't it have an ideology that's inextricably linked with religion?**

**A:** I think we [India] are a secular country. Because we have Muslims and Sikhs and Christians in India, even though they're minorities, we as a state have to have a [secular] wall. So, in one way, it's good that we as a nation don't have an ideology right now. I'm very aware of Isaiah Ber-

lin's idea that ideology has done so much damage to our lives in the 20<sup>th</sup> century – so much harm to humanity. About religion, the reality is that 99% of Indians are religious. Now, you can be an atheist and be a Hindu. I'm an agnostic and a Hindu, and that's a luxury that Hinduism provides. So, there's a hell of a lot of room for [different] beliefs within Hinduism. For me, that's why *dharma*, a kind of secular sense of right and wrong, is the right sort of ideology to focus on. You can believe in God, you don't have to believe in God. There are 33,000 gods to choose from, you can choose whichever one you want. But as a state, we really must have the wall. The problematic thing with the *Mahabharata*, though, is do you allow it to be taught in school? Right now, it's not allowed.

**Q: How do you feel about that?**

**A:** I don't like that because it cuts us off from our tradition. I think you need that continuity in human life to fully realize your potential. A person who is cut off is a person who is deracinated – and that's very sad. I can't stand the dilemma though. I wonder how it would be if the *Mahabharata* was just an epic and the gods of the *Mahabharata* were seen as the Greek gods in the *Iliad*. Nobody worships Zeus and those Greek Olympic gods in Greece, so there's no problem teaching the *Iliad* in Greece. But the *Mahabharata* has Krishna, who may be a devious kind of god, but it's very clear and he shows his full face in the Gita. He is God.

**Q: The Gita says, "Sri Bhagavan Uvaca" or "God is speaking." How can you really work around that?**

**A:** Right. Well, the intelligent thing to do is to do it like in England, where they teach the King James Bible in school, unlike here [America] where you can't teach the Bible at all. So, in school, they teach it as a text – it's a textual interrogation and criticism, but it has nothing to do with belief. But I think that requires a degree of maturity and we

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Gurcharan Das Interview (*continued*)

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need to reduce the borders of hostility for that to happen.

**Q: So politically speaking, is there a solution for this? In the past, you've said that secularism as Nehru proposed it failed. Do you think that India could have another go at it and how?**

**A:** Well, I think the only way to be is secular. The problem with our secularism was that the articulate secularists were mostly Marxists and they had contempt for religion. You can't have contempt for your own fellow human beings who are believers. I mean, Nehru had contempt. And so, you really have to be very careful. See, in our case, secularism is not the separation of church and state, because we don't have a church as such. What we have are many religions, and the important thing is that we must have tolerance and appreciation of all religions. So, this question of teaching the *Mahabharata* in school is something I take up.

**Q: Have you ever thought about going into politics itself to amend some of things you've talked about like teacher absenteeism in India or the secular teaching of the *Mahabharata* in schools?**

**A:** Well, I get a lot of letters about that, particularly when I write columns. People say, "Why the hell are you just talking?" And I feel very guilty, to be very honest. I feel that I should do something. And yet, if you're going to be successful in politics, you really have to be hungry for power. You won't succeed if you're not. It's like going into business – you have to be hungry for it. You want to be wealthy – that's the goal. The bottom line is to make money. And the bottom line of politics is power – you must get into power. In a way, I've enjoyed that. Being a CEO, you enjoy a lot of power. It's a pity in a way that I'm not hungry. But my real desire is to write, and so, I'd be going against my real de-

sire. I feel I've found a voice in my columns, in *India Unbound*, and I want to keep nurturing my voice.

**Q: If you were to get involved in politics, is there a party in India right now with which you would associate yourself?**

**A:** No. I'm genetically programmed not to go into the BJP. And the Congress, I just dislike that party so much. The whole rotten political system is a creation of the Congress with corruption and everything. And Congress is very statist. It doesn't really respect the individual, it doesn't respect volunteerism, it doesn't respect civil society. And then, I'm not sure I like the idea of dynasty either. I just think that when we became a republic in '47, we gave up monarchy.

**Q: So what's the next step then?**

**A:** I would like to revive the Swatantra Party. Swatantra means freedom. I would revive the party that was started in the late 1950s and 60s. In fact, Amartya Sen has been after me for 20 years saying, "Why don't you go start a secular party of the right?" meaning, a party that believes in classical liberalism, markets, and governance.

**Q: And that's not something that you see yourself doing?**

**A:** Well, I can see myself supporting it very actively, but I don't want to lead it. First of all, it should be somebody in his 40s. I've been trying to persuade younger people to come in and start it. It's one of those things that could happen if a few individuals come together. But it hasn't happened so far.

**Q: Well, going back to the concept of power, and how one has to be hungry for it, you mentioned in your lecture that most people in positions of power in the business world at**

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Gurcharan Das Interview (*continued*)

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**one point ask themselves, “What’s the point of all this?” As somebody who isn’t hungry for power now, did you ask yourself that question?**

**A:** Yeah, all the time.

**Q: And do you still ask yourself that even now as a writer?**

**A:** Well, in a philosophical sense, yeah, I do. Certainly, I think just being human is to ask that question all the time. And a lot of sensitive people in business raise that question. Too few sort of take the plunge or get out of it.

**Q: So tell me more about your current project.**

**A:** Well, what I read last night was an excerpt from my upcoming book. I don’t know what the title will be, but I’m thinking about calling it “The Difficulty of Being Good” and the subtitle might be “Lessons from the *Mahabharata* for Contemporary Governance.” Each chapter takes a character’s conflict in the *Mahabharata* and explores the moral ideas behind it. I quote very extensively from the text. It presents a very nice education in moral ideas – in moral thinking. And they’re universal. That’s why in some ways, I don’t want people thinking this is about something obscure. It’s really an exploration of Hindu ethics done with a modern mind with a lot of references to Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hume, Western thinkers. It certainly has a universal quality. But the text is the point of departure. It’s the beauty of the text that takes you from chapter to chapter, story to story, and character to character.

**Q: Well, I know you got a lot of reading done for this book during your stay in Seattle. But how were your experiences as both a visitor and a lecturer here?**

**A:** I was very taken up by the beauty of the campus and the beauty of the city. I think it’s one of the most beautiful campuses in the world. And being here has been wonderfully productive. I’ve had time to think and the chance to interact. I gave a talk at Microsoft and I’m doing another talk tonight – a gathering of senior executives. I’ve done many of these talks and to some extent, this is a duty. If people understand India, they are more likely to invest in it. In a sense, my book *India Unbound* has been used by the corporate world as a way to sell India. I’m not in politics, but at least this is my little contribution.

**Q: At the lecture, there was a comment about how Indians tend to see the glass as half empty for their country. Do you see the glass as half full?**

**A:** If you read *India Unbound*, you know that I’m an optimist. I think Indians are too self-critical, but I think it’s good to be critical to a point. But one should not forget the glass that’s half full. After all, it’s a great story what India’s achieving. It’s achieving tremendous economic strides in the midst of terrible governance. As I see it, the story of *India Unbound* is this mental revolution took place among the young. The young are very proud of their country. Even here, people have become very proud. For many years people were apologetic, and that’s gone. Now, India’s a competitor and you respect your competitor.

**Q: Thank you for your time today and at UW.**

**A:** It’s been a pleasure.

## Islam, Asia, Modernity Conference Review

The South Asia Center, along with multiple sponsors including the Simpson Center for the Humanities and the other Asia Centers of the Jackson School of International Studies presented "Islam, Asia, Modernity", a 3 day conference addressing issues of religion, politics, culture and art relating to Islam and Asia, May 5-8, 2005. This three day conference attempted to address issues of politics, religions, gender and society in its scope across a broad geographic area. It extended beyond the three days of the conference to also include: a Teachers as Scholars event; a series sponsored with the World Affairs Council of 4 teacher training events leading up to the conference; and a pedagogy workshop for graduate students the day after the conference. All of these events meant that "Islam, Asia, Modernity" allowed both UW and non-UW faculty and students, area K-12 teachers, and the general public to avail themselves of the expertise brought to this subject by both participating UW faculty and the many visitors who attended and participated.

South Asia was well represented in the panels, with David Lelyveld of William Patterson University presenting *"Sir Sayyid's Enigma of Arrival: Empire and the Realm of the Secular"* on the Islam, Asia, Modernity panel, Huma Haq of Qaid-i-azam University (Islamabad) presenting *"Majlis: A Discourse Analysis of a Shiite Ritual in Pakistan"* on the Gender, Sexuality, and the Body in Asian Muslim Societies panel, Imtiaz Ahmed of Dhaka University presenting *"Public Education and the Reproduction of Religious Intolerance: The Case of Bangladesh"* on the Education and Islamic Legal Subjects in Asia panel, and Partha Chatterjee of the Centre for Studies in the Social Sciences (Kolkatta) presenting on the Asian Islam and the Politics of Knowledge panel. In addition, South Asia faculty members Cabeiri Robinson and Chandan Reddy served as discussants on Asian Islam and the Politics of Knowledge and Gender, Sexuality, and the Body in Asian Muslim Societies, respectively.

The gathering of scholars working on Asian Islam from all over the world to the University of Washington was the strongest feature of this conference. The University community and the wider Seattle community was introduced to the importance of Islam in Asia and the great diversity of approaches to both the practice of Islam as well as the study of it. This conference created a community of scholars that should be nurtured over the coming years.

*By Keith Snodgrass, Associate Director, South Asia Center*

## Faculty Profile: Anand Yang

**Noted historian and Director of the Jackson School Anand A. Yang talks about his motivations to study peasant history as a graduate student, his enthusiasm about the growing field of World History, plans for his tenure as President of the Association for Asian Studies in 2006, and his proposals for the Jackson School. He spoke with Juned Shaikh.**

### **How and when did you decide that studying history would be your career?**

I was a chemical engineering and pre-med student as an undergraduate at Swarthmore College. But this was the era of the Vietnam War and I got more interested in Asian History to find out more about the war.

### **So you started studying Vietnam?**

I started out studying Chinese history actually and stayed with it well through graduate school. But then at the time of writing my dissertation, I focused on India instead of China.

### **How did that happen and why did you work on Bihar?**

My mentor (Walter Hauser) had done a lot of work on Bihar. He was well known for writing this sensational dissertation on the peasant movements in Bihar. That was my initial interest as well, - peasant movements.

### **So you extended his work?**

Yes, I extended his work, but not really. Hauser was more interested in peasant movements and peasant mobilization. Since he had already done that work, I became more interested in studying why there were not more movements and mobilizations. With that question in mind, I looked at systems of *Zamindari* (landlord) control in Bihar.

### **So how did the *Zamindars* control the peasant, was it physical coercion?**

It was sort of everything from ornamentalism to direct physical control to the use of economic power over the peasants. The *Zamindars* used all the institutional networks made available to them by the colonial state. They fashioned themselves as the local allies of the colonial state and that was the key to their success. And even though the colonial state rapped them on the knuckles occasionally for being too extortionists, they were so much more adept at playing the system and prospered and blossomed under the colonial state.

### **Did you have to pick up the local dialects and understand the caste system?**

Yes I did. I don't know how well I picked up the dialects of Bihar though, but I was able to communicate easily. Knowing a bit of the local language did help me get access to a lot of material. These were not only records from the elites, but also records at the local district records room where lots of ordinary people were using them for their litigations. They were involved in the judicial process because of litigations to determine the ownership of the land. Because I could establish a rapport, they would let me look at their records, though they had no idea what I was going to do with their dusty *bastas*. I was delighted to find this living body of source materials that still had a lot of value to many people. The year I spent in Bihar also helped in picking up the language and also in understanding the social structure. I spent some time in Patna, Chaapra, and then Saran district. I stayed with the local *zamindar* in a village of Saran district and this helped a lot in understanding the control he exerted over the people.

### **Did this control continue till the 1970s Bihar (when you were doing your fieldwork)?**

It continued until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The abolition of *zamindari* did not eclipse the powers of the *zamindar* completely. But as democracy took root in the countryside, the numbers became very important and prevailed over the clout of the *zamindars*.

### **Have these changes, like the deepening of democracy in India, influenced the questions some of the historians are asking?**

The people who studied the disempowered were not many. One of the great boons to South Asian History was the rise of Subaltern Studies. The interest that ensued in the wake of this school of historiography, where people began to look at all kinds of actors who hitherto had not much of a voice or presence in most historical accounts, was phenomenal. So we have gone from the focus on the state to a focus on all the people that constituted the body politic that the state tried to control.

### **You are fan of world history, how does world history impact historians working on South or South East Asia?**

It is still very much in the beginning stages. We are beginning to re-conceptualize the way we do national histo-

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## Yang Profile (continued)

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ries because the nation states are so implicated and imbricated in large world systems. One cannot do a history in isolation of societies cordoned off from other societies. World history encourages you to make more effective comparisons, but it also helps in understanding the connections that exist across different parts of the world.

### **And historians are beginning to do that?**

They are beginning to, but there is still a long way to go because history is such a conservative discipline and historians are still wedded to operating along national and regional group. There is a lot at stake when you have to give up the way you are used to doing something in a particular way. There are also practical issues like learning new languages, exploring new archives, getting out of your comfort zone. But it is one of the most exciting trends. Just as local histories benefited from interacting with national histories, national histories will benefit a lot by getting into a dialogue with comparative and world histories. Historians can benefit a lot from enlarging their vision.

### **Are there any blind spots that historians are not looking at?**

There are blind spots in the sense that historians still find it very difficult to research subaltern histories. They are still grappling with different ways of responding to the question: "Can the subaltern speak?" and this is an ongoing struggle for most historians including myself.

### **When you take over as president of the AAS next year, will you encourage your colleagues to look at questions raised by world history and subaltern studies?**

As the AAS President, you don't have the influence to change the discipline. You have some influence over Area Studies Programs, but then that's just about it. I want the Area Studies to enter into conversations with other disciplines in the social sciences and that would be one of my main emphases.

### **What other programs would you pursue as AAS president?**

I want to internationalize AAS so that it's not just a North American ethnocentric Center. I would like to bring more scholars from different Asian countries, which have a very lively tradition of scholarship, to the Association. But besides bringing scholars from different regions, I am

also trying to bring in students from minority and under-represented sections of the population into Asian Area Studies. For this purpose, outreach programs are very important. The Title VI centers, like the South and Southeast Asia Centers have outreach programs anyway. The South Asia Center's outreach program for instance, has built up ties with the South Asian community in Seattle and this has been good. They also reach out to schools in various school districts of the City and this would encourage students from diverse backgrounds to study South Asia.

### **Do you have a similar vision for Jackson school?**

At the Jackson School, we are already taking steps to internationalize our Master's program and increase minority representation in the program. We are developing partnerships with minority serving colleges and Universities.

Post 9/11 many students are interested in International Studies and that boom still persists. There are a lot of people interested in getting an IAAF.

### **How do international students at Jackson School deal with the demands of the American Academy?**

It depends a lot on the country the students come from. In the US schools, there is more emphasis on analysis, involvement and participation in a class room and this may be unusual for students coming from Asia. But students catch up, they are bright, young and ambitious and it doesn't take very long for them to figure what it takes to succeed in an American school.

### **After a hectic day's work, how do you unwind?**

I like going out and eating in restaurants, playing racquet ball and squash, and cycling. And I also like to spend time with my family

### **Any favorite foods or restaurants?**

When it comes to food I am a truly global citizen, so no, I don't have any preference apart from the fact that it should be good.

### **I have also heard that you are a fan of 70s rock music?**

I am a fan of 70s rock music, also 50s and 60s rock. But my nine-year old is learning classical music and I am slowly learning to appreciate it. Unfortunately, I am a slow learner when it comes to classical music.

## The State after Economic Liberalization in India: A Conference Report By K. Sivaramakrishnan

In early June 2005, sunny Palo Alto was the venue for a fairly unique conference on the study of the state in India. I had the pleasure of organizing this conference in collaboration with Prof. Akhil Gupta of Stanford University. In this project we wished to take the many implications of changes in the Indian state, and its relationship with citizens and subjects, into account through a systematic and interdisciplinary examination of the Indian state in the aftermath of economic liberalization.

In the mid-1990s the Government of India authorized a sharp reduction in the annual recruitment to the All-India and Central Civil Services. This decision, among many taken in the 1991-96 period by the Congress led Narasimha Rao government, was particularly symbolic of the dismantling of not only “big government” but of a model of government where strong leadership was provided by the central government in India’s federal system. It was under the Congress, in the early 1950s, that the momentous decision was taken to expand the central and All-India services, as a way to retain and strengthen the “steel frame” that contained a nation in the making.

Two days of vigorous discussion and debate addressed several themes. We started with careful delineation of economic liberalization as a process, went on to identify key features of the developmental state, and considered how abiding issues like individual or group rights and poverty or opportunity or law get redefined in the liberalized economic environment.

We proposed that reform and reshaping of the Indian state in the last fifteen years, as symbolized by the well-advertised cutting of staff in higher government bureaucracies, has implications for the study of many topics like federalism, decentralization, citizenship, cultural nationalism, and globalization that are of great interest to social scientists. We felt that much of this can be accomplished by a careful examination of the transformations in governmental institutions and the study of ideas about the state in official and popular culture. Additionally, we proposed that the changing links between the national state and forms of regional and local government was a fertile area of investigation. Besides this, the new connections and disjunctions between the national state and international governmental forms that have taken shape under the aegis of trade liberalization, environmental regulation, human rights and counter-terrorist activism by transnational coalitions which have emerged from both civil society and inter-governmental initiatives also need to be explored.

The conference brought together political scientists, economists, historians, sociologists, and anthropologists, to consider the changes underway in the Indian state at various levels and how they might be studied and understood. Many of them came from as far away as Delhi University, the University of Edinburgh and the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, McGill University, besides several universities from different parts of the USA. Most of these scholars were renowned experts in the study of the Indian state, but some had recently become interested in this topic.

The success of the conference lay, firstly, in the sustained dialogue that emerged across disciplines. Macro-economic analyses were juxtaposed against fine-grained ethnographic studies, and interesting arguments developed between political philosophers and economic historians. The second measure of success was the desire of all participants to create a network that would continue this discussion in subsequent meetings. So, we decided, we would assemble again in a couple of years, this time in India, and work towards a series of collaborative projects and publications. And when that happens, I will report again.

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## My Summer in India: Monsoons and the Media Boom

Coming home after a reasonably long hiatus (two years in this case) in a land out west separated by continents and oceans can be a bewildering experience, for all parties concerned. While I fitted into the hustle, bustle and chaos that is Bombay, as if I had never left, my family and friends were suddenly very concerned about the germs in the water that I was drinking and in the food that I was eating. They were embarrassed by the dirt on the roads, the crowds in the trains and buses and the intense heat and humidity. Even as my family had constructed an image of a “Westerner” that had come to replace me in their minds during my absence, the task of reconciling the image to the person in flesh and blood proved to be a task that caused some discomfort. I did not sport an accent, did not wear makeup or style my hair, did not display too many branded clothes; I had a digital camera but no camcorder; I had a Dell laptop but its monitor was slightly damaged and I still didn’t own a car!

The two months that I resided in India (largely in the cities of Bombay and Pune) were therefore largely spent acquainting family and friends with campus life in the United States and the vagaries of being a student of the humanities. Since I am a student of communication, I spent the rest of the time gawking at the spectacle that is the contemporary Indian media. Newspapers were being launched like new fashions, with all the glitz and ads that accompanies any large corporate launch. My journalist friends in the meantime complained that they were forced to edit the work of young reporters who did not know what a news story meant but were nevertheless all keen to change the world through their journalism. Despite their griping though, my friends who like me had earned the minimum wage while working 12-14 hour shifts not too many years ago, were happy because they were new homeowners, new car-owners and the new owners of an upper-middle class lifestyle that involved a great deal of consumption. So, while tea at a roadside *tapari* and a *dosa* at the closest Udupi joint were necessities earlier, now, our visits to favorite haunts were framed by nostalgia.

The theme that bound my various experiences in India together was the rain. As Bombay and various other parts of Maharashtra reeled under the wave upon of wave of lashing water, my upper middle class relatives attempted to curse the state infrastructure but remained awed instead by what they saw as “nature’s wrath.” My lower middle class relatives struggled to salvage all they could as the water threatened their homes, and my friends were stranded in different parts of the city as the media circus rolled out its tent.

The trip home was bewildering truly because it was both exhilarating and exhausting. I can’t wait to go back again and experience that heady assault on my senses just one more time.

*Madhavi Murty is a first-year Ph.D. student in the Communications Department.*

### Visiting Scholars Invited to Apply

The South Asia Center of the University of Washington invites applications from faculty in colleges, community colleges, and universities in the Pacific Northwest region for our *Visiting Scholar* program. This program is funded from our US Department of Education National Resource Center grant. The purpose of the program is to enable a scholar to spend two to four weeks at the University of Washington in Seattle using our substantial library and center resources for research, presenting a colloquium paper and interacting with our faculty and students, in order to improve instruction on South Asia throughout the region. The visitor is invited to come to the University of Washington during winter or spring quarters, Jan. 2- June 9, 2006.

A stipend of \$3000 is offered. Visiting scholars will be expected to meet their living expenses, including travel and lodging, from this stipend.

Applications will be received until December 16, 2005.

We particularly encourage applications from women and minorities. Send a letter of application in which you explain what project you would like to pursue, accompanied by a curriculum vitae and any other supporting materials you wish to include to: Professor K. Sivaramakrishnan, Director, South Asia Center, Box 353650, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195-3650.

## Periyar Tiger Reserve: An Experiment in Conservation Strategy By Tapoja Chaudhuri

The Periyar Tiger Reserve, popularly called PTR, in Thekkady, Kerala has recently been in focus among Indian conservationists for its 'innovative' strategies in wild life conservation. I was drawn towards PTR for its popular 'Tiger Trail' trekking tour with involvement of the 'poachers-cum-conservationists' as tour guides. Though the Tiger Trail was the most glamorous, and perhaps one of the most successful projects of the PTR, it was only one of the many experiments being carried out by the forest department and the surrounding community in the Thekkady/Kumily area. The Trail itself is part of a set of various community based eco tourism projects which were launched as a part of the World Bank and GEF funded India Eco Development Project (IEDP). Of the seven sites where this IEDP was launched, PTR is the only success story.

One of my first questions was, then, what made the PTR a success story? Even before I had reached the 'field' I was told about the honest and dedicated forest officials at PTR during the inception of IEDP. What I discovered after having reached the PTR was that it was not only the initial boost, but also the ongoing enthusiasm which has led to the formation of the Periyar Foundation to carry on even when the IEDP had officially ended. In the same week that I was there, there was a meeting on sustainable agriculture in PTR at the Mahatma Gandhi University, a Fishing folks' Committee meeting and a four day training camp for field level staffs. Furthermore, apart from the ecotourism eco development committees (EDCs), there were various other EDCs covering a wide range of activities from volunteer work, grazing, village management etc. One of the most impressive EDCs was perhaps that of the Vasant Senas, a group of women who were voluntarily patrolling the forest.

And yet, a close look at the PTR does reveal its loop holes and complexities. PTR is not a simple story of the relationship between the 'Government'/Authority and the Community. In PTR one comes across the conflict between the Forest Department, the KTDC (Kerala Tourism Development Corporation) and the Travancore Devaswom Board (in charge of the Sabrimala pilgrimage which brings in millions of pilgrims in the buffer zone of the forest). Moreover, the process of identifying some groups of people as legitimate beneficiaries of the IEDP and others as encroachers creates tension among the settlers in the Kumily/Thekkady region. Structurally the Periyar Foundation, with its 'authority of the government and flexibility of an NGO' potentially undermines the functioning of gram panchayats, thereby perhaps weakening a key grass level democratic institution. The biggest question, perhaps, is how long could this endeavor, dependent on motivated leadership, last? And how replicable can this model be? PTR, definitely becomes an interesting project in process, rather than a stagnant 'model', longer field research.



*Hiking the Tiger Trail in Periyar Tiger Reserve*  
<http://www.periyartigerreserve.org>

## Film Review: *Banaras Muharram and the Coals of Karbala*

Reviewed by Collett Cox

*Banaras Muharram and the Coals of Karbala*, produced, written and narrated by Marc J. Katz and supported by a grant from the South Asia Center at the University of Wisconsin at Madison is a beautifully photographed documentary bringing to life, visually and aurally, Muharram as observed today in Banaras. The major portion of the film was shot in 2003. The main theme is Banaras as a multicultural place of religious harmony and “ritual performance crossover,” a feature exemplified by Muharram in which Shi‘ah and Sunni Muslims and Hindus participate in a spirit of brotherhood and unity.

The film opens with a brief history of the event around which Shi‘i religious life revolves, namely the murder of the Prophet’s grandson Husayn along with followers and members of his family by the soldiers of the Umayyad caliph Yazid on the tenth day of the month of Muharram at Karbala in 680 A.D. It introduces some of the symbolic representations of the Karbala martyrs used in Muharram rituals, such as a rider-less horse signifying Husayn. It also stresses that the message of Muharram is one of peace as expressed in the vow participants take never to lift their hands against one another again. As one interviewee explains, “We remember the sacrifice of Husayn and his legacy of peace when we do *matam* (ritual rhythmic beating of breasts).”

The film includes shots with cogent explanatory narration of major rituals during the ten days of Muharram. Among the rituals depicted are *matam*, self-flagellation with whips, and the possession ritual in which a Sunni male is possessed by the spirit of Qasim, son of Husayn’s murdered brother Hasan, who is said to have been wed to Husayn’s daughter, Fatima, on the Karbala battlefield. The *dulha* (bridegroom), as the possessed man is called, leads a procession around the city, passing over hot coals in each locality. Another highlight of Muharram captured in the film is the culminating ritual, the final procession of *ta‘ziyas* (model tombs of Husayn) to bury them in graveyards representing Karbala. The film provides clear definitions of the technical terminology of Muharram, familiarizing viewers with the terms without overwhelming them. It pays attention not only to the sights of Muharram but also to its music and rhythms; in addition to *matam*, it includes the singing of *nauhahs* (dirges). There is also a clip from a *shenai* concert given by Bismillah Khan on the occasion of Muharram.

A flaw of the film is that it does not give enough voice to people of Banaras. Although it includes a few brief interviews, often the interviewee is cut off quickly by the narrator, even when the interview is conducted in English. The film contains no interviews with people on the street to obtain their points of view. Such interviews would give a more nuanced picture of Muharram as an observance that has many messages and means different things to different people of different religious communities. Another shortcoming is that it gives too rosy a picture of communal relations. Although Muharram fosters a feeling of unity, it also causes conflict; there are documented cases of sectarian confrontations in Banaras during Muharram. Frank Korom in *Hosay Trinidad: Muharram Performances in the Indo-Caribbean Diaspora* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003, p. 75) notes that some Shi‘ah he interviewed in Banaras objected to the possession rituals “as a mockery of the event,” and occasionally, as a result, “tempers flared.” On the whole, however, this is an informative film that will be a valuable tool to use in a variety of courses on Islamic traditions, South Asia, comparative religion and social anthropology.

*This film is now available on loan to educators from the South Asia Center. Contact us for details.*

## Book Review: The Hungry Tide

Reviewed by Juned Shaikh

### A Tale From the Margins

*The Hungry Tide*, by Amitav Ghosh, Harper and Collins, 2004, 403 pages

The Sundarbans, the world's largest mangrove swamp, crept into the English media from the relative obscurity of geography textbooks on very few occasions last year. Amitav Ghosh, the New-York based writer was associated with two such instances. His essay [1] in *Outlook* warned about a potential ecological disaster if Sahara India, a powerful Indian corporate group, was allowed to build resorts for 'eco-tourism' there. The Sundarbans returned to the news again with *The Hungry Tide*, the geographical setting for Ghosh's latest novel.

Ghosh has built his reputation on writing with flair about regions and characters at the margins of middle class existence. Some of his earlier novels like *The Antique Land* and *The Glass Place* were based in rural Egypt and colonial Myanmar and western India respectively. He delves into the margins yet again with *The Hungry Tide* and brings the Sundarbans alive for his mostly urban audience. With trademark facility he weaves seemingly disparate strands, like the precarious ecological balance of the region, the beauty and treachery of the landscape, the social and political lives of its inhabitants, the high-handedness of the State, the prejudices of city folk and their social power, into a richly textured fabric.

The most fascinating and memorable characters of *The Hungry Tide* are Kusum Mandol and Fokir Mandol, even though they are not the main protagonists. Kusum barely manages to avoid the clutches of a pimp as a teenager and escapes to a mining town in Bihar. She marries a hawker there, but he dies in a freak mishap. Before long, she joins a band of Bangladeshi refugees eager to return to the Sundarbans from their camps in central India. Kusum, along with her five-year old son Fokir, join the refugees in their long march to the Sundarbans. The refugees manage to reach their destination and build their home in Morichjhapi, against the diktat of the State. This brings them in conflict with the State and their solidarity is imperiously crushed by the authorities. The political aware-

ness and 'agency' of the villagers eventually comes to naught against the 'structure' of the State. Hundreds are killed in this rout and Kusum is one of the victims. But her son Fokir survives the carnage and grows up to be a stoic but expert boatman.

The main protagonists of the novel are Kanai Dutta and Piyali Ghosh. The Delhi-based Kanai knows six languages and runs a successful translation firm. Piyali is a Seattle-bred marine scientist of Indian origin. They both meet in the Sundarbans where Kanai is visiting his aunt, a well-respected social worker, while Piyali is there on a research trip. Piyali hires Fokir not just to navigate her through the treacherous waters of the region but also for his enormous knowledge of its flora and fauna. She also grows extremely fond of Fokir. Kanai joins them ostensibly as a translator, but in fact he is attracted to Piyali. The love triangle that the author creates is the most hackneyed part of the novel. Even the dramatic end is trite and predictable.

But if one ignores the little scraps of banality, the brilliance of Ghosh's craft shines through. He expertly portrays the struggle of the people of Morichjhapi. For them, their politics is a means of survival, but for Marxists like Kanai's uncle, it is the fruition of the elusive 'Revolution'. Similarly, Ghosh masterfully exposes the social power of urban intellectuals by showing their pathological tendency to see the marginalized only through the lenses of their class/high caste position. Thus, for Piya, Fokir is a grassroots ecologist, while for Kanai and his aunt he is an indolent waster. Similarly, for Kanai's aunt, Kusum and the people's movement of Morichjhapi are trouble, but for his uncle she is a muse and the movement is his Revolution. But Kusum and Fokir avoid all these straight jackets and this is the greatest strength of *The Hungry Tide*.

[1] A crocodile in the swamplands, *Outlook*, October 18, 2004

*Juned Shaikh is a first-year Ph.D. student in the History Department at UW.*

## Director's Message (continued)

*(Continued from page 1)*

The University of Washington continues to offer solid support and we shall, thereby, continue to hire new faculty in South Asian politics, cinema, and art history in years to come. With the increased support of the university we have also renewed our request for federal support of the South Asia Center with proposals for expanded teaching in languages, humanities, social sciences, and more ambitious outreach programs. The timely and much needed growth of the South Asian Studies program

should be sustained and we look forward to working ever more closely with various parts of the regional community in doing this work. I invite all to get involved; important and interesting times lie ahead.

K. Sivaramakrishnan  
Professor of Anthropology & International Studies

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