



WATSON INSTITUTE
INTERNATIONAL & PUBLIC AFFAIRS

BROWN UNIVERSITY

CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY
South Asia

Annual Report 2020-2021



About the Center

Mission

The Center for Contemporary South Asia (CCSA) promotes research, teaching and public engagement on key issues of modern South Asia in an interdisciplinary framework and in a historically and culturally grounded manner.

About

CCSA is based at the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs at Brown University. The Center supports faculty, graduate and undergraduate research and teaching on the region and is home to the South Asian Studies concentration.

CCSA functions within the larger framework of the Watson Institute, which is seeking to define a new approach to regional studies for the 21st century. Anchored in the social sciences, this new approach is problem driven, comparative and multidisciplinary. Our multidisciplinary will include sustained interaction of social scientists with the humanities on the one hand and disciplines such as medicine and public health on the other.

Research & Programs

At this time, the Center's programmatic and research themes focus on inequalities, development, urbanization, democracy, public health and pluralism & diversities.

Cover Image: Chennai, photo by Ieva Zumbyte, Sociology PhD candidate

Message from the Director



2020-21 was a year like no other, perhaps since 1919-1920. A horrible pandemic upended our lives. Though the Covid-induced transformation had already begun in March 2020, the expectation frankly was that sometime during the year, normalcy would return. It did not.

This posed a challenge, which we met, like so many other institutions, by going entirely online for our programming. Of course, the great redeeming feature of online seminars and events was that our audience grew manifold, including those who joined us on Zoom from South Asia and Europe. But we missed in-person meetings and events. Our students were also unable to do field work in South Asia, instead reaching their sites and sources virtually.

To seek an understanding of the biggest challenge of our times, we had several sessions on Covid-19. The series of conversations benefited immensely from the arrival of Ashish Jha at Brown, as the new dean of our School of Public Health. Given his rising interest in South Asia, he was quickly appointed as a faculty fellow of the Center, and he participated in several events sponsored by the Center. Our joint inquiry will continue. We will start the new academic year (2021-22) with a day-long workshop on "Covid-19 in South Asia", a combined undertaking of the Center and the School of Public Health on September 10.

A seminar with Rahul Gandhi, a leader of the opposition in India, was another big event of the year. For two hours, Rahul Gandhi answered our questions, first from the faculty and then from our students, ranging from politics and economics to matters more philosophical.

The big personnel-related news of the coming year is the arrival of Arvind Subramanian, India's former chief economic advisor, as a joint fellow of the Center and Watson Institute. He will be with us for three years, teaching as well as participating in our seminars.

The other highlights of the coming year include two events under the imprimatur of the OP Jindal Distinguished Lectures. In November, Salman Rushdie, the novelist, will have a conversation with Shahzad Bashir (Religion and History, Brown), Gauri Viswanathan (English Literature, Columbia) and me. Later that month, Mira Nair, the eminent film maker, will give a lecture and also show one of her films, followed by a discussion of her artistic craft.

Several other important events are planned; they are listed on our website (watson.brown.edu/southasia). Our activities will combine online and in-person formats in the fall. We hope to return fully to our normal, in-person, programming in the spring.

This report summarized what we were able to do in a heavily constrained environment last year. We hope to see you at many of our activities this coming year.

Ashutosh Varshney

Director, Center for Contemporary South Asia
Sol Goldman Professor of International
Studies and the Social Sciences
Professor of Political Science

OP Jindal Distinguished Lecture Series

To promote a serious discussion of politics, economics, social and cultural change in modern India, Sajjan and Sangita Jindal have endowed, in perpetuity, the OP Jindal Distinguished Lectures by major scholars and public figures.

Uday Mehta Spring 2021

Uday Singh Mehta is a renowned political theorist whose work encompasses a wide spectrum of philosophical traditions and issues, including the relationship between freedom and imagination, liberalism’s complex link with colonialism and empire, and, more recently, war, peace, and nonviolence. He is the author of two books, *The Anxiety of Freedom: Imagination and Individuality in the Political Thought of John Locke* (1992) and *Liberalism and Empire: Nineteenth Century British Liberal Thought* (2000), which won the J. David Greenstone Book Award from the American Political Science Association in 2002 for the best book in history and theory. In 2002, he was one of ten recipients of the “Carnegie Scholars” prize awarded to “scholars of exceptional creativity.” He is currently completing a book on M. K. Gandhi’s critique of political rationality.

Mehta received his undergraduate education at Swarthmore College, where he studied mathematics and philosophy, and holds a Ph.D. in political philosophy from Princeton University.

He has held teaching positions at a number of universities, including Princeton, Cornell, MIT, University of Chicago, Amherst College, University of Pennsylvania and Hull.

APRIL 14

Critiquing Empire and the Challenge of Representation: Gandhi and the Nationalists

Commentator:

Faisal Devji, University of Oxford

APRIL 16

Gandhi’s Critique of Political Rationality

Commentators:

Juliet Hooker, Brown University
Karuna Mantena, Columbia University



OP JINDAL
DISTINGUISHED
LECTURES

WITH
**UDAY
MEHTA**
Graduate Center, CUNY

Critiquing Empire and the
Challenge of Representation:
Gandhi and the Nationalists

Commentators:
Faisal Devji University of Oxford

APR 14 • 2021
12PM - 2PM

Gandhi's Critique of
Political Rationality

Commentators:
Karuna Mantena Columbia University
Juliet Hooker Brown University

APR 16 • 2021
12PM - 2PM



Uday Singh Mehta



Karuna Mantena



Faisal Devji



Juliet Hooker

COVID-19 Series

CCSA continued to follow the unfolding COVID-19 Crisis through a series of seminars tackling questions around the effects of and response to the virus in South Asia by experts and journalists in the field.

Fall 2020

SEPTEMBER 18
Barkha Dutt, Journalist
Yamini Aiyar, Centre for Policy Research
India's Response to COVID-19

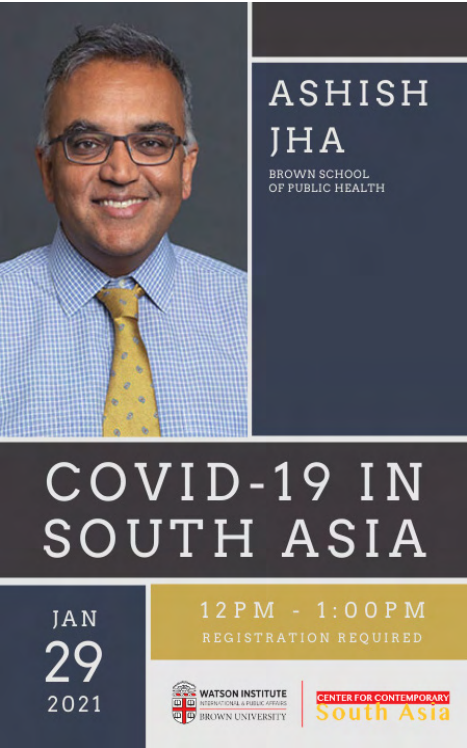
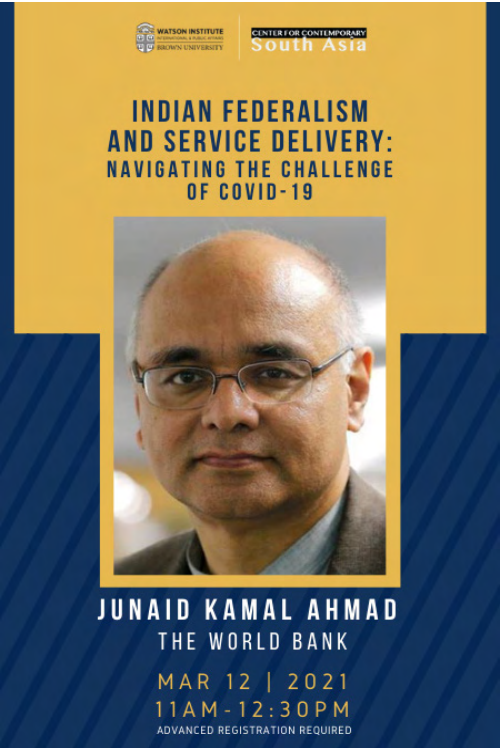


Spring 2020

JANUARY 29
Ashish Jha, Brown University
COVID-19 in South Asia

MARCH 12
Junaid Kamal Ahmad, World Bank
Indian Federalism and Service Delivery: Navigating the Challenge of Covid-19

APRIL 26
Ashish Jha, Brown University
Barkha Dutt, Journalist
Ashutosh Varshney, Brown University
The COVID-19 Crisis in India: A Time to Act



South Asia Seminar

This series of public lectures facilitates a convergence of figures from across the lines of academia, civil society, literature, public policy, and journalism to contribute to the discourse on contemporary South Asia.

FALL 2020

SEPTEMBER 11

Sukhadeo Thorat, Jawaharlal Nehru University
Caste, Market Discrimination and Consequences on Income and Poverty

OCTOBER 2

Nosheen Ali, New York University
Delusional States: Empire, Literature and Affective Histories of Kashmir

OCTOBER 9

Sharmin Hossain & Bheempalli David Raju
Caste in Bangladesh and Bangladeshi Diaspora

OCTOBER 30

Feroz Khan, former Brigadier in the Pakistan Army
Regional Security and Strategic Stability in Southern Asia

NOVEMBER 6

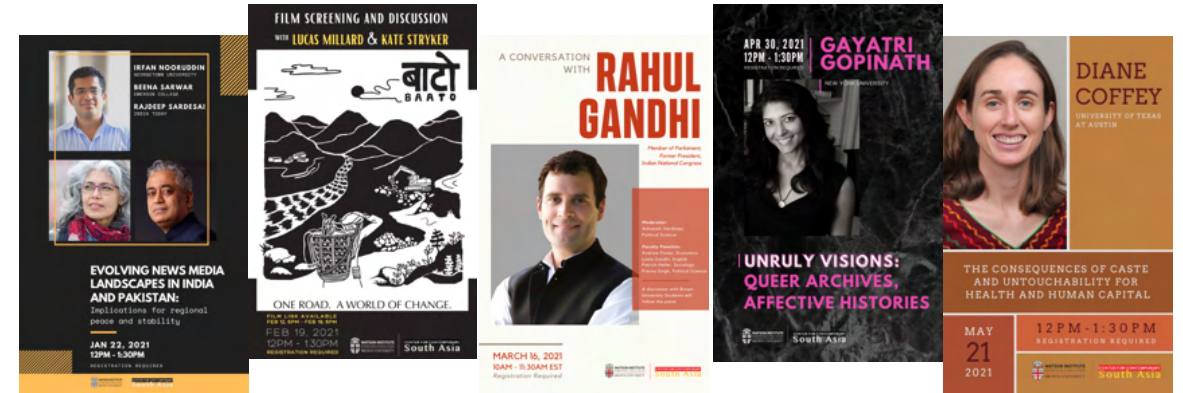
Sameer Lalwani, Stimson Center
Second Coming? Testing the Nuclear Revolution in Pakistan's Strategic Debates

NOVEMBER 12

Naeem Mohaiemen, Columbia University
Film Screening: *Two Meetings and a Funeral*

NOVEMBER 13

Eszter Szakács, University of Amsterdam
Naeem Mohaiemen, Columbia University
Solidarity Must Be Defended



SPRING 2021

JANUARY 22

Irfan Nooruddin, Georgetown University
Beena Sarwar, Emerson College
Rajdeep Sardesai, India Today
Evolving news media landscapes in India and Pakistan: Implications for regional peace and stability

FEBRUARY 12

Aarushi Kalra, Brown University
Aditi Priya, LEAD
Vineeta, Centre for Development Economics
The Pedagogy of Economics and Caste in India

FEBRUARY 19

Lucas Millard & Kate Stryker, Filmmakers
Film Screening of *Baato*

MARCH 5

Audrey Truschke, Rutgers University
Hindutva History and Other Modern Problems with the Indian Past

MARCH 16

Rahul Gandhi, Member India's Parliament
A Conversation with Rahul Gandhi

MARCH 19

Ghulam Hussain, Institute of Policy Studies, Islamabad
Anthropology of Activism: Engaging with the Narrative of Forced Conversion in Pakistan

APRIL 30

Gayatri Gopinath, New York University
Unruly Visions: Queer Archives, Affective Histories

MAY 21

Diane Coffey, University of Texas, Austin
The Consequences of Caste and Untouchability for Health and Human Capital

Brown-Harvard-MIT Joint Seminar on South Asian Politics

The Brown-Harvard-MIT Joint Seminar on South Asian Politics approaches some of the big questions of politics, political economy and security, on which the South Asian region offers engaging perspectives. The series is co-sponsored by CCSA, the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs and Lakshmi Mittal South Asia Institute at Harvard University, and the MIT Center for International Studies.

SEPTEMBER 28

Shivshankar Menon, Brookings International
Tanvi Madan, Brookings Institution
M. Taylor Fravel, MIT
Vipin Narang, MIT
The Border Crisis and the Future of India-China Relations

OCTOBER 23

Mashail Malik, Stanford University
Discrimination and Defiant Pride: How the Demand for Dignity Creates Slack for Poor Governance

NOVEMBER 20

Rikhil Bhavnani, University of Wisconsin, Madison
Gandhi's Gift: Successful Mass Nonviolence and India's Decolonization

DECEMBER 4

Gautam Nair, Harvard University
Business, Voters, and Distributive Politics in Developing Democracies

FEBRUARY 5

Aditya Dasgupta, University of California, Merced
Weapons of the Weak: The Violent Consequences of Biased Technological Change

FEBRUARY 26

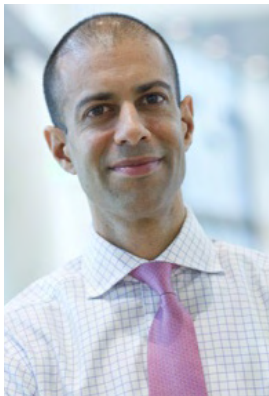
Nirvikar Jassal, Stanford University
Policing and Gendered Cases in India

MARCH 26

Susan Ostermann, University of Notre Dame
Capacity Beyond Coercion: Regulatory Pragmatism and Compliance Along the India-Nepal Border

APRIL 9

Tanushree Goyal, Harvard University
Representation from Below: How Women Mobilize inside Parties



ORGANIZING COMMITTEE:

CHAIR

Ashutosh Varshney
Sol Goldman Professor of International Studies and the Social Sciences, Brown University

CO - DIRECTORS

Emmerich Davies
Assistant Professor of Education, Harvard University

Patrick Heller
Professor of Sociology and International Studies, Brown University



Prerna Singh
Mahatma Gandhi Assistant Professor of Political Science and International Studies, Brown University

Vipin Narang
Associate Professor of Political Science, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Book Adda

Adda means a site for collective deliberation in South Asia. This series features panel discussions of important new books written by our colleagues, or those significantly involved with us as intellectual interlocutors.

OCTOBER 16

*India's Founding Moment:
The Constitution of a Most
Surprising Democracy*

Author:
Madhav Khosla, Ashoka University

Commentators:
Sunil Amrith, Yale University
Corey Brettschneider, Brown University
Louise Tillin, King's College London



Madhav Khosla

Center for Contemporary South Asia

BOOK ADDA

Madhav Khosla
ASHOKA UNIVERSITY
COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL

Commentators:

Sunil Amrith
YALE UNIVERSITY

Louise Tillin
KING'S COLLEGE LONDON

Corey Brettschneider
BROWN UNIVERSITY

Oct 16, 2020 | 11AM
Advanced Registration Required

NATION INSTITUTE
FOR CONTEMPORARY SOUTH ASIA
South Asia

Adda means a site for collective deliberation in South Asia

Center for Contemporary South Asia

BOOK ADDA

Madhav Khosla

India's Founding Moment

The Constitution of a Most Surprising Democracy

Adda means a site for collective deliberation in South Asia

DECEMBER 3

*The Dravidian Model: Interpreting the
Political Economy of Tamil Nadu*

Authors:
Kalaiyarasan A, Madras Institute of
Development Studies
M. Vijayabaskar, Madras Institute of
Development Studies

Commentators:
Rina Agarwala, Johns Hopkins University
Partha Chatterjee, Columbia University
Barbara Harris-White, University of Oxford



Kalaiyarasan A

Center for Contemporary South Asia

BOOK ADDA

KALAIYARASAN A.
Fulbright-Nehru Fellow

M. VIJAYABASKAR
Madras Institute of
Development Studies

COMMENTATORS:

RINA AGARWALA
Johns Hopkins University

PARTHA CHATTERJEE
Columbia University

BARBARA HARRIS-WHITE
University of Oxford

DEC 3, 2020
10AM-11:30PM
ADVANCED REGISTRATION REQUIRED

NATION INSTITUTE
FOR CONTEMPORARY SOUTH ASIA
South Asia

ADDA MEANS A SITE FOR COLLECTIVE DELIBERATION IN SOUTH ASIA

Center for Contemporary South Asia

BOOK ADDA

THE
DRAVIDIAN
MODEL:
INTERPRETING
THE POLITICAL
ECONOMY OF
TAMIL NADU



M. Vijayabaskar

Book Adda Continued

FEBRUARY 11

*The Nine Lives of Pakistan:
Dispatches from a Precarious State*

Author:

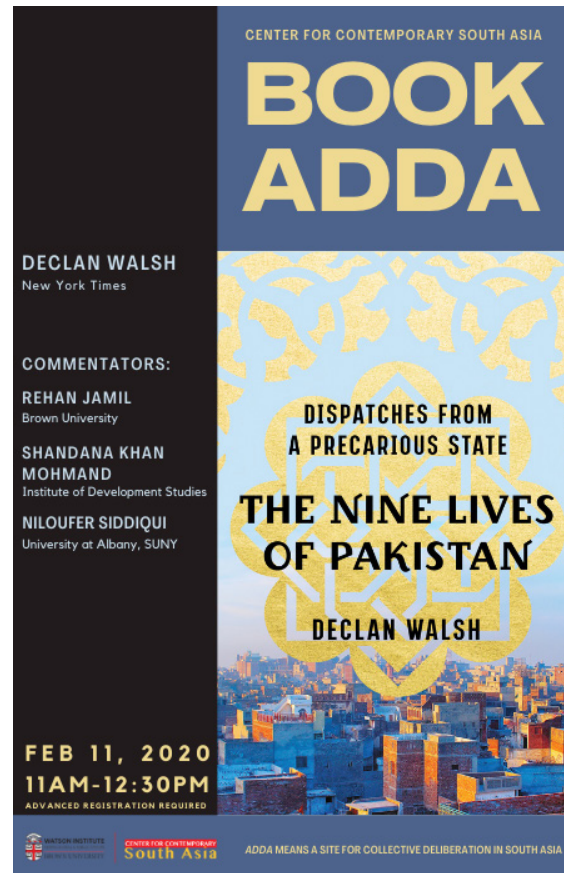
Declan Walsh, New York Times

Commentators:

Niloufer Siddiqui, University at Albany, SUNY
Rehan Jamil, Brown University
Shandana Khan Mohmand, Institute of
Development Studies



Declan Walsh



APRIL 2

*Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance
and British Dissent*

Author:

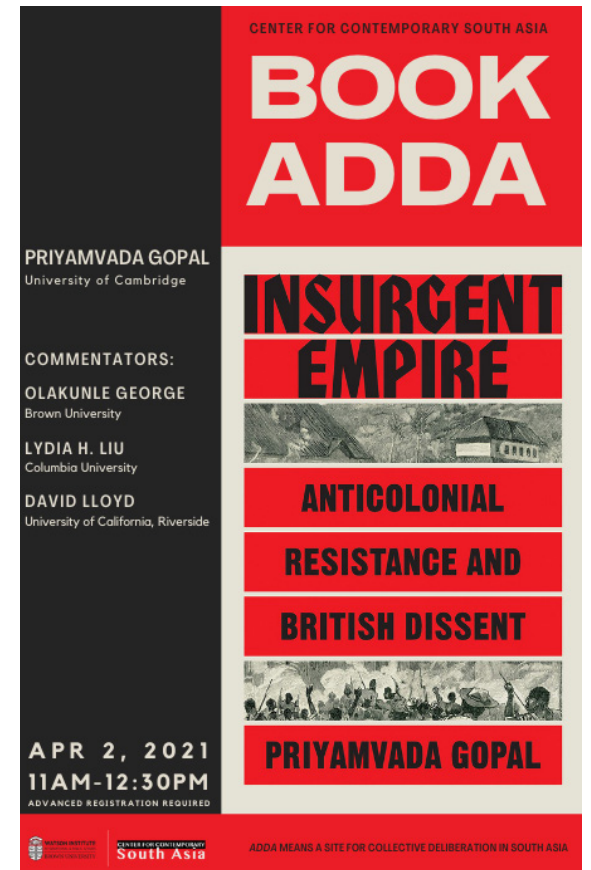
Priyamvada Gopal

Commentators:

Olakunle George, Brown University
Lydia H. Liu, Columbia University
David Lloyd, University of California, Riverside



Priyamvada Gopal



Additional Programs & Films

The Center continues to host film screenings and co-sponsor events with many departments across campus.

FALL 2020 & SPRING 2021

SEPTEMBER 22

Ashwini Deshpande, Ashoka University
Which Indian Children are Short and Why?
The Indian Enigma, Social Identity, and Childhood Malnutrition

SEPTEMBER 25

Art History, Postcolonialism, and the Global Turn
— Session I

OCTOBER 2

Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, Brown University
Art History, Postcolonialism, and the Global Turn — Film Screening and Conversation with Director

OCTOBER 9

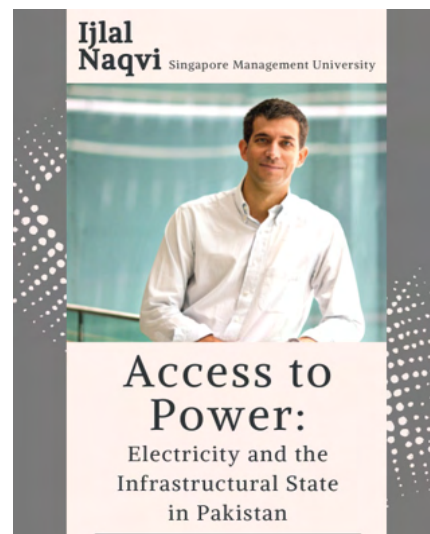
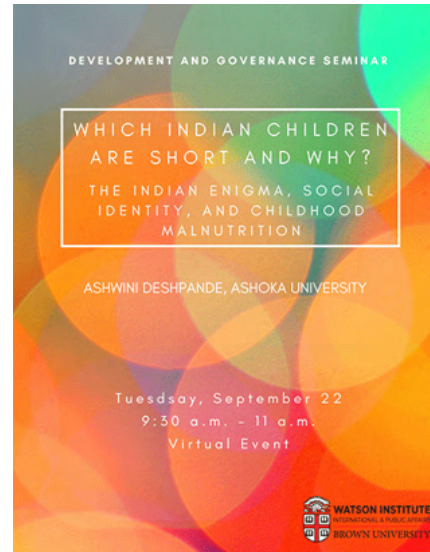
Art History, Postcolonialism, and the Global Turn
— Session II

OCTOBER 23

Art History, Postcolonialism, and the Global Turn
— Session III

FEBRUARY 3

Ijlal Naqvi, Singapore Management University
Access to Power: Electricity and the Infrastructural State in Pakistan



Graduate Student Programing

Graduate students from across the disciplines working on South Asia are a vital part of the CCSA community. Students present their own work, receive fellowships to support their research and invite speakers to be part of the South Asia Seminar Series. In 2020-2021, four groups of students brought speakers on themes ranging from international security to the humanities.

PRESENTATIONS BY GRADUATE STUDENTS

NOVEMBER 17

Rehan Rafay Jamil, Political Science
Social Policy and Changing Citizenship
Boundaries in Pakistan

EVENTS ORGANIZED BY GRADUATE STUDENTS

SEPTEMBER 11

Sukhadeo Thorat, Jawaharlal Nehru University
Caste, Market Discrimination and Consequences on Income and Poverty

OCTOBER 9

Sharmin Hossain & Bheempalli David Raju
Caste in Bangladesh and Bangladeshi Diaspora

OCTOBER 30

Feroz Khan, former Brigadier in the Pakistan Army
Regional Security and Strategic Stability in Southern Asia

NOVEMBER 6

Sameer Lalwani, Stimson Center
Second Coming? Testing the Nuclear Revolution in Pakistan's Strategic Debates

NOVEMBER 12

Naeem Mohaiemen, Columbia University
Film Screening: *Two Meetings and a Funeral*

NOVEMBER 13

Eszter Szakács, University of Amsterdam
Naeem Mohaiemen, Columbia University
Solidarity Must Be Defended

FEBRUARY 12

Aarushi Kalra, Brown University
Aditi Priya, LEAD
Vineeta, Centre for Development Economics
The Pedagogy of Economics and Caste in India

MARCH 19

Ghulam Hussain, Institute of Policy Studies, Islamabad
Anthropology of Activism: Engaging with the Narrative of Forced Conversion in Pakistan

APRIL 30

Gayatri Gopinath, New York University
Unruly Visions: Queer Archives, Affective Histories

MAY 21

Diane Coffey, University of Texas, Austin
The Consequences of Caste and Untouchability for Health and Human Capital

South Asian Studies & South Asia in the World

South Asian Studies is an interdisciplinary concentration in which students work across the humanities and social sciences, geographical locations and historical periods.

Through their coursework, SAST concentrators work across the humanities and social sciences, geographical locations and historical periods. The concentration emphasizes both the diversity of South Asia as a region, as well as the long-term historical connections among people and places in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, India and Sri Lanka.

COURSES SPONSORED BY CCSA

Aarushi Kalra, Economics
SAST 0730: Economic and Human Development in South Asia

Shishav Parajuli, Political Science
SAST 0725: Political Ecology in South Asia

Suvaidd Yaseen, History
SAST 0700: Introduction to Modern South Asia



THESIS PRIZE RECIPIENT

Anchita Dasgupta '21
Beit Sourik and Kunan Poshpora: Reimagining Agency in Legal Resistance Movements

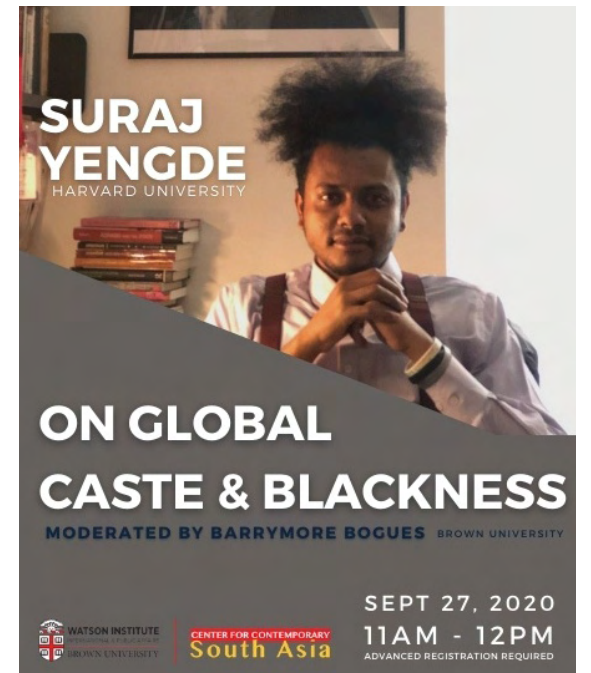
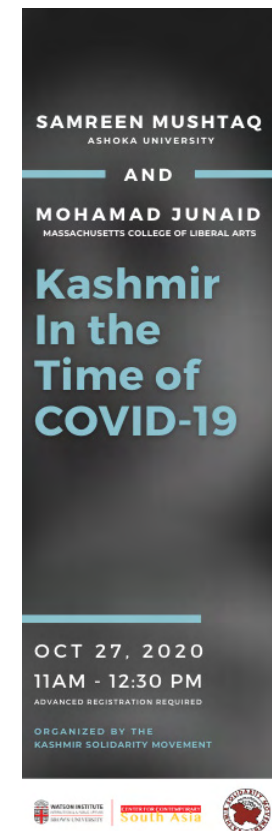


PAPER PRIZE

Srinaath Kidambi Perangur '23
Bhakti and Bhāva: A Brief History and Ethnography

Departmental Undergraduate Group (DUG) & Programing

CCSA's DUG leaders inspire undergraduate driven programming that focuses on creating informal learning environments where students can learn about the research and experiences of professors and postdocs, critically analyze popular culture by examining films and share their own research with the Brown community.



SEPTEMBER 22
Student-Led South Asian Groups Town Hall

SEPTEMBER 25
Suraj Yengde, Harvard University
On Global Caste and Blackness

OCTOBER 27
Mohamad Junaid, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts
Samreen Mushtaq, Ashoka University
Kashmir In the Time of COVID-19

CCSA Summer Fellows

Projects selected represent a variety of research topics related to social, political, cultural and economic change in South Asia.

Travel Restrictions due to COVID-19 continued to present challenges to CCSA's fellows. In 2020-2021, the Center awarded funds for research projects to six graduate students and one faculty member. Recipients will be able to utilize their funds anytime during the academic year. We were not able to fund undergraduate travel this year.

FACULTY FELLOW 2021



Vazira Zamindar, History
On Walking With Gandhi and Bacha Khan: A 'Historio-Graphic' Collaboration

GRADUATE FELLOWS 2021



Tara Dhaliwal, Religious Studies
Lives on the Periphery: Social Roles of Women in Pre-Colonial Punjab



Ravi Krishnaswami, Musicology & Ethnomusicology
Body, Home, World: Original Music



Ruchi Mahadeshwar, Economics
The Impacts of Socioeconomic Mixing in Mumbai's Annual Public Housing Program



Katyayni Seth, Anthropology
Caring for Children with Seizures in Uttar Pradesh



Esha Sraboni, Sociology
Making Meaning of Gendered Violence and the Law: Women and the Quest for Justice in Bangladesh



Pamudu Tennakoon, History of Art & Architecture
Tamil Language Training

Visiting Faculty



Finnian Moore-Gerety

In the fall of 2018, Finnian Moore-Gerety joined CCSA as a visiting assistant professor for a three year term. Professor Moore-Gerety works on texts, rituals, and the senses in South Asian religions, with a focus on Hindu traditions of India. He is especially interested in Sanskrit mantras: how they are performed, textualized, and passed on; how they are embodied and sensed; how they are reflected upon and interpreted; how they are transformed in the digital age; and how they influence identity, community, and heritage within religious traditions. He will teach classes in South Asian Studies, Contemplative Studies and Religious Studies.

Courses

SAST 0037: Sensing the Sacred: Sensory Culture in South Asian Religions

SAST 0140: Food, Religion and Politics in South Asia

SAST 0525: The History and Practice of Yoga in India and Beyond

SAST 0526: This Whole World is OM: Mantras in Indian Religions

Research Partnerships



JANAAGRAHA PARTNERSHIP WITH ASHUTOSH VARSHNEY & PATRICK HELLER

For their ongoing project on Citizenship and Urban Governance in India, Professors Patrick Heller and Ashutosh Varshney received a second grant of \$200,000 from the Ford Foundation. In India, the project is based at Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship & Democracy, Bangalore. An earlier grant from the Ford Foundation had allowed them to do research in several Indian cities, including Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Vadodara and Kochi. With this newer grant, the research will be extended to Northern and Eastern cities as well. Work had already begun in Lucknow and Bhopal, when COVID-19 caused an interruption. Once possible to resume work the following cities will be covered: Delhi, Kolkata, Bhubaneswar, Ajmer, and Jalandhar. Professor Siddharth Swaminathan (Azim Premji University), an annual visitor to CCSA and Watson Institute, is the third academician associated with the project.

The project has two aims: (i) construction of various measures of effective citizenship across caste, religion, class and gender; and (ii) examination of the determinants of public service delivery in urban India.



AIIMS PARTNERSHIP WITH BHRIGUPATI SINGH

Since 2015-16, Bhrigupati Singh has partnered with the psychiatry department at AIIMS to explore how the idea of “quality of life” is understood. Since summer 2020, Singh and his partners have been preparing a second round of surveys in urban poor neighborhoods in Delhi based on the World Health Organization’s Quality of Life instrument, [WHO-QOL BREF], a 26-item questionnaire created in 1991 with the aim of creating “an international cross-culturally comparable quality of life assessment instrument.” The second round of surveys will include questions regarding the impacts of COVID-19 in these communities.

Steering Committee



- 1 Ashutosh Varshney**
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Professor of Political Science
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- 3 Leela Gandhi**
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- 4 Patrick Heller**
Lyn Crost Professor of Social Sciences
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- 5 Prerna Singh**
Mahatma Gandhi Assistant Professor of
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- Stephanie Abbott-Pandey**
Center Manager
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- Grace Cardogno**
Administrative Coordinator
grace_cardogno@brown.edu



CCSA Celebrates Five Years as a Center

In 2016, the Brown-India Initiative was transformed into the Center for Contemporary South Asia. Since that time the center has:

- Supported research and projects by 15 undergraduate, 32 graduate, 8 faculty and postdoctoral fellows in the amount of nearly \$300,000.
- Faculty and graduate students have published or been quoted in news media more than 175 times.
- Hosted or co-hosted 260 events to expand knowledge about South Asia.

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CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY
South Asia