



Story of COVID-19 by Kalyan Joshi

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY  
Moynihan Institute of Global Affairs

# SOUTH ASIA CENTER

NEWSLETTER SUMMER 2020

## NEW FACES

| **Mona Bhan** has joined the Maxwell School as the Ford-Maxwell Professor of South Asian Studies and Associate Professor of Anthropology. Professor Bhan teaches both undergraduate and graduate courses related to gender and conflict in South Asia as well as environmentalism.

Born in Kashmir, Bhan grew up wanting to understand why political conflicts happen and recognized how arbitrary borders can be. Initially desiring to be a war journalist, her career track took a shift and led her to specialize her research in border wars and counterinsurgency; militarism and humanitarianism; race, gender, and religion; environmentalism and climate change; water and infrastructure. Bhan is also engaged in public anthropology. She works closely with activists and human rights organizations on the ground in Kashmir to understand how various actors are situated differently in relation to the conflict.

Her current research entails looking at infrastructure as an instrument of occupation. Professor Bhan was a part of the South Asia Center's 2020 Spring Speaker Series in which she gave a lecture titled "Infrastructures of Occupation: Dams, Development, and the Politics of Integration in Kashmir."

| **Winn Wasson** joined Syracuse University Libraries in February 2020 as the new Social Science Librarian. He is the liaison librarian for the Maxwell School (except for the Geography Department) and several departments within the College of Arts and Sciences.

Winn holds a bachelor's degree in Government from Harvard University, a master's degree in International Relations from University of Chicago, and a master's degree in Library and Information Sciences from University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He studied Urdu and Hindi and had a substantial academic background in South Asia at Harvard. He also held a FLAS fellowship in Hindi at University of Illinois. His master's thesis at University of Chicago utilized data from the Census of India to explore the relationship between lopsided sex ratios at birth and female marriage-related migration. He previously served as Social Sciences Librarian at New College of Florida. Before becoming a librarian, he taught political science at community colleges in the Midwest for several years.

He is very excited to be part of the SU community and looks forward to working with affiliates of the South Asia Center and invites students, faculty, and staff at the Maxwell School to be in touch with questions regarding their research and teaching needs.



## SUMATHI RAMASWAMY EXPLORES GANDHI IN ART

| Romita Ray  
Associate Professor of Art History

Mohandas K. Gandhi has been described as “an artist of non-violence,” crafting a set of practices of the self and politics that earned him the mantle of *Mahātma*, “the great soul.” There is an enormous body of scholarship that has explored and critiqued Gandhi’s philosophy and praxis of *satyāgraha*, non-violent civil disobedience. Yet what does it mean to think of *satyāgraha* as an aesthetic regime, and its principal exponent as the paradigmatic artist of disobedience? In November 2019, acclaimed cultural historian Sumathi Ramaswamy, James B. Duke Distinguished Professor of History at Duke University and President of the American Institute of Indian Studies, visited Syracuse University to explore these very questions for her forthcoming book on Mahatma Gandhi. Spending a week in the Special Collections Research Center studying Margaret Bourke-White’s famous photographs of Gandhi for *Life Magazine* as well as her India journals, professor Ramaswamy gave a public lecture titled “Gandhi in the Gallery: The Art of Disobedience” to a standing-room only audience of students and faculty. She also conducted a research seminar in Special Collections for which she drew upon materials from the Bourke-White archive. Professor Ramaswamy’s lecture and seminar engaged students and faculty from across the arts, humanities, and social sciences; specifically, from Art History, History, Photography, Arts Journalism, Political Science, African American Studies, and Women’s and Gender Studies. She also visited the Light Work archives to study Brijesh Patel’s photo-book on Gandhi’s Salt March created while Patel was a 2013 artist-in-residence at Light Work.

Her visit to Syracuse University was co-sponsored by the department of Art and Music Histories, Syracuse University Humanities Center, Light Work, Bird Library, History, Photography (Newhouse), Magazine Journalism, Communication and Rhetorical Studies, The Lender Center for Social Justice, the Goldring Arts Journalism Program, the College of Arts and Sciences, the Democratizing Knowledge Project, the South Asia Center, and the Renée Crown University Honors Program. Professor Romita Ray, chair of the department of Art and Music Histories, organized professor Sumathi Ramaswamy’s visit in close collaboration with the South Asia Center.

Sumathi Ramaswamy, Romita Ray  
Radha Kumar, and Margaret (Maggie)  
Innes at Light Work.

© Shane Lavalette, Light Work



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## SAXENA SUPPORTS SOUTH ASIAN STUDIES AT OCC

For the past two years, the Cornell-Syracuse South Asia Consortium has been working with Professor Anisha Saxena, assistant professor of Social Sciences and Philosophy at Onondaga Community College (OCC), to develop South Asian studies in the curriculum and awareness of South Asian issues on campus. One of the ways that Professor Saxena decided to promote South Asia on campus was to work with students to create the South Asia Club. The South Asia Club, which has about 30 members so far, aims to support students' understanding of the region and to support cultural programming on campus.

Throughout the year, the South Asia Club participates in a number of events. At the beginning of each semester, the South Asia Club tables at welcome events for new students to give them information about the Club's activities. In October, the Club celebrated Diwali on campus, South Asian snacks were served, and students were able to try creating rangoli, patterns made from rice flour. The Club also participated in World Languages Fair, which was held in November.

"The South Asia Club at OCC has organized many South Asia -based events on campus and this has exposed students to many aspects of South Asian geography, history and culture. This would have not been possible without the continuous support of the Cornell-Syracuse South Asia Consortium," said Saxena.

Professor Saxena has worked with the South Asia Consortium to bring South Asia-related speakers to OCC which South Asia Club members attend. In September, Swati Dandekar came to OCC to screen her movie *True Blue*, which discussed the history of indigo production and use in India.

Professor Saxena also designed and taught course in history of South Asia in Spring 2020. She also contributed to the OCC Library's Women's History Month exhibit, *Rebels, Radicals and Revolutionary 1900-2020*, which included the stories of several South Asian women.

## COMMUNITY COLLEGE FACULTY PROJECTS BRING SOUTH ASIA TO THE CLASSROOM

The Community College Internationalization Fellowship (CCIF) supports community college faculty who wish to integrate international, intercultural, or global dimensions into community college curriculum in an effort to increase students' understanding of the world. Faculty from any discipline at two-year institutions can propose to design a new course, a new unit for an existing course, or a service-learning component to an existing course that engages students in some aspect of South Asian studies. The Cornell-Syracuse South Asia Consortium will be supporting two Fellows during the 2020-21 academic year—Alejandro Gonzalez-Suarez of Tompkins Cortland Community College and Stephen Pierson of Onondaga Community College.

Alejandro Gonzalez-Suarez is a civil engineer. He teaches Structural Design, Surveying, and Construction Materials for the Department of Construction and Environmental Technology at Tompkins Cortland Community College. In 2020, Alejandro was awarded a CAORC-AIIS Faculty Development Fellowship to travel to India: Exploring Urban Sustainability through India's Cities (see page 5). His fellowship project is titled, "Construction Technology in New York and New Delhi: A Comparative Understanding."

Stephen Pierson is a professor of English at Onondaga Community College where he teaches English and English as a Second Language (ESL) composition and sophomore-level literature courses. His research focuses on the relevance of Mikhail Bakhtin's philosophy of language to composition and literary studies, and his service to the college over the last sixteen years has involved leading or participating in internationalizing initiatives, such as the ESL Mentoring Service, the development of Global Awareness and Diversity courses, the International Education Committee, and the World Languages Committee. His fellowship project involves incorporating South and Southeast Asian literature in his English 104: Freshman Composition and Literature II course.



# WELCOMING A DECADE OF UNKNOWNNS: INDIA'S CARS AND CHAOS GAVE ME HOPE FOR THE 2020s

| Alejandro Gonzalez-Suarez  
Tompkins Cortland Community College

Twenty hours and counting on various forms of public transportation—two NYS trains, two planes, I've crossed an ocean, with a stop in a desert metropolis. Now in a taxi, on a much slower journey (several hours in New Delhi's traffic), I am tired. I am in a foreign land. Why then, a familiarity?

An old friendly tug of recognition beckons us at moments of having come back to ourselves after having been distanced for too long. These colors, these smells, this collage of India's urban sprawl is all new to me—cars beeping in syncopated rhythms, scattered people, animals, as many carts as cars. The off-tune chorus of vendors cuts through my recent memories of the United States, a country defined by order, by neat lawns and square blocks. Vacant roads, people tucked away neatly in houses and cars in garages, have, after several years of living on them, already etched themselves like maps through layers of me. But perhaps this mark is only surface deep, for it is chaos now that reaches my core, reminding me of the Managua of my youth; me, a wide-eyed student just arriving.

My tired eyes will record two lasting impressions of New Delhi: its chaos and its cars. Both observations will be important. I let go of questioning, for the time being, in favor of some expanding sense of connectedness, which I hadn't previously known could stretch across the world and join me in this strange new place.

The COARC-AIIS Faculty Development Seminar on urban sustainability had a common thread about access to water woven throughout visits to New Delhi, Jaipur, and Lucknow, just as it has been a theme during my life. In 1998, catastrophic flooding from a slow-motion storm we later came to know as Hurricane Mitch, blew northern Nicaragua's infrastructure away as if it were nothing but a fragile window, easily shattered. No bridge, large or small, was left standing. Landslides swallowed roads. Highways sunk into rivers. What started as a soft "chi-chi", the sound of rain pattering on clay-shingled rooftops, left Nicaragua and Honduras with a death toll between 11 and 18 thousand. The majority of the countries' crops were destroyed, and more than a million people left homeless. We cannot know when and how chaos will shape us. My father declared he didn't like that "chi-chi" sound, and was unsettled. Having already lived through the upheavals of both revolution and civil war, what he heard in that pitter-patter was the familiar sound of irreversible change on its way.

Representatives of the government water entity introduce us to enormous challenges. New Delhi supplies 920 million gallons per day (MGD) of drinking water to 20 million people. To put that in perspective, New York City's system offers 1 billion gallons per day for a population of 8.5 million. Water coverage in the greater Delhi area does not include services to informal settlements. Not being recognized by the authorities means a lack of basic services. It is a permanent struggle for the people residing in India's "not notified slums", to achieve the legality of the place where they live to be able to obtain coverage of basic services.

I notice I am talking too much when a new colleague, an urban sociologist whom I already view as an expert, asks me, "Why the obsession with water?" Though I can articulate an intellectual answer, what I wish I could share is what cannot be known intellectually.

There is the experience of a built environment, which gives structure to our lives, leveled in a matter of weeks. There is the experience of not knowing where the next water comes from. There is the shared experience of families rationing the last precious water saved in buckets; of crowds, entire neighborhoods, walking into the hills together carrying every crude recipient we could find to fill from some trickle, somewhere. I left home with those memories, and at the same time I've never left them. My students at Tompkins Cortland Community College can confirm I'm passionate about technology, the materials and fundamentals of construction, right down to formulas, right down to the math. But there are different ways of knowing that I don't know how to share with them. And this is what I am in search of in India.



India's own brand of trucks. It's common to see Tata brand used in any kind of vehicles including cargo, buses and heavy construction equipment.



"Not notified slums" in Lucknow: Occupants don't own land and don't get basic services



"Notified slums" in Lucknow

Never will I know anything intellectually the way urgency has insisted on my knowing water as a keystone to development. I've never been taught anything that has impacted me like necessity. Nothing I've done in my life has mattered more than joining others in sourcing clean water.

From the academic sector, we hear of plans to implement a mega-project to prevent pollution by building treatment plants for wastewater before it is discharged into the Yamuna river. In some cases, non-governmental organizations are developing and promoting appropriate technologies with communities. The Segal Foundation works in the design and construction of levees to allow the runoffs of rain recharge aquifers exhausted by over-exploitation. Their projects have allowed the NGO to validate their designs, expanding the implementation to other regions. In Jaipur we visit a city water treatment plant operated by a private corporation. Not uncommon, but what stands out for me is that this private corporation is Indian, not transnational.

Rich history and monuments now coexist with the socio-economic and environmental challenges generated by the stress of a growth so rapid that these metropolises have yet to meet demands. I see this; and, I see researchers, resources, autonomy, and self-sufficiency. My surprise in observing the make of the unfamiliar cars on my arrival day becomes admiration—India develops and produces its own brands of vehicles, of construction machinery, and industrial equipment. The effects of my own country's utter dependence on these types of imports have been staggering. Toyotas and Fords are what we had in the 80's. Then it was all out of commission during the embargo. Toyotas, Fords, and transnationals are what we've had since.

Can I know that being comfortable with chaos, and having their own trademarks of cars, will lead to successes in India? I cannot. Two weeks in a country is only enough to become acquainted with how much one doesn't know. I will leave with plans to return, to share with my students the reasons we can learn from India's self-sufficiency and aptness for innovation, as unsettling rates of urban migration launch us all into new urgencies. I am on my way to forming a belief that if comfort with chaos can awaken perceptions of reality and bust open mind-sets, it could also give us evolutionary change. It is not yet 2020.

I called in the New Year and kicked-off a decade with a group of intelligent, introspective, dedicated scholars, all still unaware of what we were on the brink of—a novel coronavirus disease that had already spread around the world, violence against black people and the "pandemic of racism" rooted in U.S. society which would soon lead to mass demonstrations and calls for addressing this systemically.

Systems we find ourselves steeped in, living our day-to-day, contribute significantly to how we respond. How will we know what we are capable of, if not for the upheaval of our lives as we've known them? Visible realities of systemic inadequacies around every turn in India's northern cities reminded me to see. They woke me up from a more unsettled knowing we endure when the struggles of 'away' neighborhoods and 'away' countries are tucked in neatly, swept to the edges of fast and functional lives. Responsiveness and agility have been known to appear on ships with burning decks. Perhaps we have a way of finding ourselves where we need to be.



16.5 MGD treatment capacity  
Waste water treatment plant in  
Jaipur.



Using India's own construction  
equipment for the remodeling of  
Lucknow international airport



# HUNGER AROUND THE WORLD: TEACHING FOOD SECURITY AT HOME AND ABROAD

| By Emera Bridger Wilson  
Associate Director, Syracuse University South Asia Center

The annual International Summer Studies Institute (ISSI) looked and felt a little different in 2020, since we met with K-12 teachers and scholars virtually due to COVID-19. But the pandemic made the event even more timely, given its focus on food insecurity around the world. Scholars reflected on changes in food security over time in South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, Africa, and the United States, as well as the impact of the novel coronavirus.

Food security is defined as “all people at all times having physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life.” Both Lin Fu, research fellow with Cornell’s Emerging Markets Program, and Mathew Abraham, Assistant Director of the Tata-Cornell Institute, stressed that stable access, affordability, and quality are the three main dimensions that need to be considered when looking at a country’s or community’s food security.

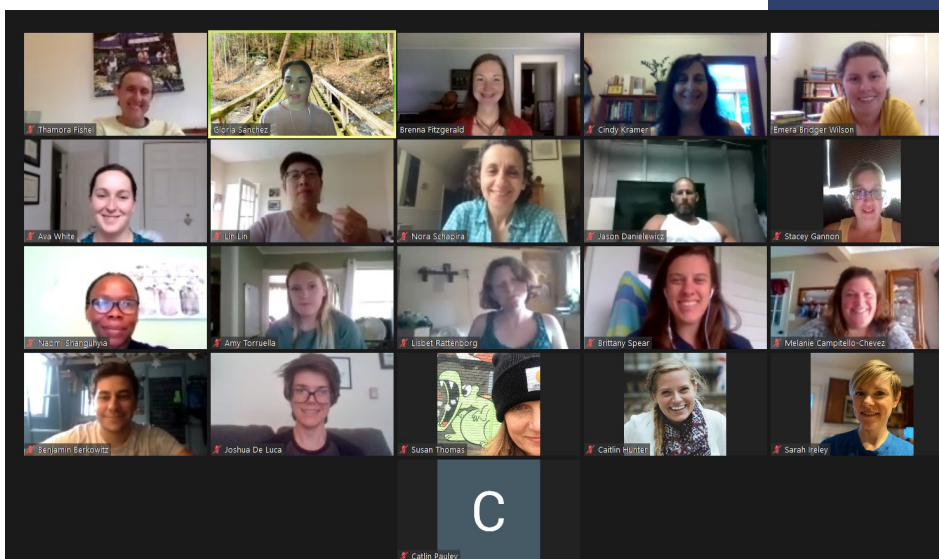
Abraham spoke about the ways in which a mismatch between agricultural policies and people’s nutritional needs has exacerbated malnutrition in India. While there has been an increase in agricultural production since the 1970s and an overall decrease in poverty, India still has a high rate of malnutrition. Indian government agricultural and nutritional policies have long focused on the production and distribution of cereal crops, particularly wheat and rice. While important to the Indian diet, these foods do not provide all of the micronutrients needed for a balanced diet. Abraham argued that a shift to social safety net programs, which would provide cash transfers rather than in-kind transfers, would provide low-income and vulnerable people the opportunity to diversify their diets, decreasing malnutrition due to a deficiency of micronutrients. Furthermore, empowerment programs for women and children and water and sanitation programs are also needed to decrease malnutrition in India.

While each speaker focused on the specificities of food security in their regions, some common themes, such as climate change, increasing globalization of food chains, and the use of technology to increase food production, emerged throughout the presentations. Timothy Gorman, assistant professor of sociology at Montclair State University and Cornell alum, discussed climate change as being one of the biggest threats to food security in Vietnam.

Brandon Kane, General Manager of GreenStar Co-op in Ithaca, discussed how GreenStar responded to COVID-19 disruptions in their increasingly global supply chains. While many of their products were not disrupted because they are sourced locally, this is not the case in many places. Parts of East Asia and Africa are heavily dependent on food imports, which were significantly disrupted by COVID-19 precautions and shutdowns. To bring this point home, Raylene Ludgate, youth program coordinator at the Cornell Botanic Gardens, discussed how teachers can discuss issues of food security, food waste, and climate change with their students in ways that would make these issues more concrete for them.

The primary goal of ISSI is to give educators resources so that they feel confident in incorporating international content into their curricula. Several of the teachers that participated this year have already shared draft lesson plans which indicate ways in which they can pass on the information that they learned to their students in New York state.

This year’s ISSI was supported by Cornell University’s Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies, South Asia Program, Southeast Asia Program, Institute for African Development, East Asia Program, Latin American Studies Program and Cornell Institute for European Studies; Syracuse University’s Moynihan Institute for Global Affairs and the South Asia Center; TST-BOCES, and the U.S. Department of Education Title VI Program.



## SOUTH ASIA—FAMILY, FOOD AND HEALTHCARE SYSTEMS: AN IMMERSION EXPERIENCE

| Sudha Raj  
Teaching Professor, Department of Public Health  
Food Studies and Nutrition

In Fall 2019, Professor Sudha Raj taught the course, *South Asia - Family, Food and Healthcare Systems*. The goals for the course were to stimulate interest in the Indian culture that is distinctly different from what the students are familiar with, build their cultural competence, and expand their critical and comparative thinking skills.

The course was designed to build students' cultural competence and more importantly start them on a journey of appreciating how to be receptive to other cultures unlike their own. As a full semester offering, this course provided both didactic content and a guided ten-day cultural immersion experience. Throughout the course, the students were engaged and enthusiastic about the course and curious to learn more about Indian culture that is distinctly different from what the students are familiar with. The online portion consisted of 7 modules with 20 recorded webinars and a significant number of readings along with a textbook. To make the cross-cultural experience meaningful for students, and to prepare them for the travelling component, additional activities related to the Indian immigrant experience were designed in the U.S. on five Sunday afternoons. These included a visit to a local Hindu temple in Syracuse, a visit to an Indian home to learn about the textiles and artifacts from India, and two classical music concerts. These experiential activities during the semester provided the students a glimpse of the socio-cultural context and lifestyle of the ethnic South Asian Indian population that lives in the U.S.

After the completion of the course, seven undergraduate and graduate students, the instructor and four faculty/preceptor guests participated in the ten-day cultural immersion experience in India. The group visited three major cities—New Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai. Development of the cultural immersion experience involved networking and collaborating with colleagues in Indian universities as well as a tour company in India to design visits to iconic cultural sites such as the Taj Mahal and create other experiential activities such as lectures on public health and nutrition, sustainability, and disability-related initiatives, food walks and cooking demonstrations, visits to a variety of health care institutions, and a visit to Asia's largest slum where a variety of products are created for domestic and international markets.

The immersion segment of the recently completed visit to India is best described below by a few quotes from the students' reflections which show the lasting impact that such a course and trip can have in molding their perspectives at all levels - personal, professional and philosophical. Students' reflections illustrate that the shared experiences were meaningful and inspirational. The trip closed the loop of learning by reading, experiencing what was read, and desire to learn more.

- For me, the last couple months have been really difficult in my decision to pursue medicine. I experienced significant challenges that made me question whether or not I am capable of being a physician. I was feeling very lost, but this visit really helped bring me back to where I was before my difficult experiences this year. This entire visit was so special to me because it reminded me of my passion for healthcare and medicine. These are the kind of healthcare providers I would want to have if I was sick, and the kind of provider I hope to be for others someday.
- While visiting Lady Irwin College, we saw so many women of color in higher education. Seeing these women working in the science field and to see their passion was very inspirational.
- When we sat in circles and listened to the families, I really got to know what their lives were like. Asking them, then, to make serious adjustments in how they fed their children seemed insensitive and unhelpful. Instead, I threw out some of my plan and just talked and listened to the parents.



## NOTES FROM THE FIELD | COVID-19 PANDEMIC: FEW NOTES FROM A GRAM SABHA IN JHARKHAND, INDIA

| Jay Sharma  
PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology

As a student of anthropology, I was taught to embrace uncertainties especially when it comes to doing fieldwork and let the ethnographic encounters and observations take precedence over the preconceived objectives laid out in research proposals. Amidst these uncertainties emerging from the fieldwork, nevertheless, there lies one certainty—the certainty of ethnographic encounters with people, places and events. However, the kind of restrictions that were imposed in response to COVID-19 pandemic instilled a sense of an obscure uncertainty that seemed to render doing ethnography impossible by causing a sheer restriction on human contact, interactions and movements. As a seasoned anthropologist would say, the field never ceases to surprise you.

Due to government regulations, I was in lockdown where I am conducting my fieldwork, in a village of some 75 families. The village is located in Western Singhbhum District that forms the southern part of the recently created Jharkhand State. After having anxiously waited for almost three months due to the lockdown, I felt much relieved upon getting an opportunity to attend a *gram sabha*. A *gram sabha* is a (institutionalized) formal meeting through which all the village-level decisions pertaining to political, economic and social issues are made in the presence of the residents and is headed by Munda, a traditional village chief. Attending this function still involved no close contact or interviews. The pandemic has, indeed, induced a profound sense of fear, anxiety and panic among the people especially in terms of conceiving what future holds for them. However, in a striking contrast to such an imagery that is flooding mainstream and social media, I found quite a placid attitude among the villagers towards the pandemic. Some friends nonchalantly pointed out, “we are going to die anyway, if not from this disease then from some other, and if not from some disease then surely from hunger.” There seemed to be a complete lack of general awareness and critical information about the disease which can be mostly attributed to local officials’ apathy towards rural areas along with nearly zero access to any media.

Finally, the day arrived when the *gram sabha* was to be held to discuss what has to be done in the wake of returning migrant workers to the village from various parts of the country. The discussion that ensued during the meeting largely revolved around what precautions should be taken along with all the arrangements to be made on the arrival of migrant workers in the village. The villagers unanimously decided to take the responsibility of keeping the migrant workers in quarantine for 15 days and also take care of their basic needs including food, even though the local sarpanch and MLA had not offered any kind of help. Some pointed out that it would be better to serve them cooked food in disposable plates (locally made by stitching tree leaves) rather than just offering dry ration. However, it was emphasized by many residents that a proper distance should be maintained while offering anything to them.



Happier Times: traditional dance on the eve of Mage Parv, the most popular festival among Ho community, celebrated during the month of March. Photo: Jay Sharma

The government has created different zones depending upon the severity of COVID transmission. Some of the residents pointed out that they should be mindful of this classification and keep the migrant workers in separate rooms depending upon the kind of zones they are coming from. This would be helpful, they argued, in checking further transmission among the workers who are being quarantined. There were two panchayat members who did not attend the meeting for some reason. It was pointed out by the residents and further reiterated by the Munda that all the elected members must take up their responsibilities and that they must attend the meetings and fulfill their respective duties. As the meeting neared its conclusion, it was strongly emphasized that everyone must follow the guidelines and precautions that has been laid out for the migrant workers in the meeting. There was a common concern that the village will be sealed by the local police in case a positive corona case is found and eventually all agricultural work would have to be suspended. This has created a sense of anxiety among the villagers as monsoon is just few weeks away and they have to prepare their lands for paddy cultivation.

Overall, the meeting ended on a positive note with a strong emphasis upon coming together in this fight against Covid-19 while consistently discussing, deliberating, actively participating, taking responsibility, and holding the village officials accountable for their jobs. I hope such spirit prevails during these uncertain and tragic times not just among the people in this remote village but all across the globe.

## PROMOTING KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE IN SUSTAINABILITY

| Sapna A. Narula

Professor & Dean, School of Management Studies, Nalanda University, Nalanda, India

| S.P. Raj

Professor, Whitman School of Management

Sustainability occupies a prominent role in South Asia especially in the regions where resources are scarce and the population is growing. One outcome in the context of sustainability in these regions is the evolving paradigm shift in consumption patterns, introduction of and adoption of sustainable technologies, products and services along with new sustainable business models for development. Green growth is now viewed as important to ensuring sustained long-term development in this region—in improving agriculture, health, employment, and industry.

Sustainable food supply chains are the need of the hour to meet the food and nutrition security needs of the growing population and generate new opportunities through export markets thereby increasing income for small and marginal farmers in South Asia. In this context, Syracuse University South Asia Center and the Whitman School of Management, along with other prominent institutions, partnered with TERI School of Advanced Studies to host an International Conference on Agribusiness in Developing and Emerging Economies on January 3-4, 2018 where around 350 participants from 13 countries gathered with representation from academia, industry, government and NGOs. The forum took shape as a unique platform for showcasing academic research, industry perspectives, and practitioners, and provided a networking opportunity for the stakeholders of food supply chains to deliberate upon emerging opportunities in agribusiness and trade.

Subsequently, following the success of the conference, an international Workshop on Strengthening Agribusiness Trade with global partners from industry and academia was organized on November 14-15, 2019. The South Asia Center partnered this time again with TERI School of Advanced Studies, New Delhi, India along with other partners such as National Agricultural Higher Education Project, Ministry of Agriculture, Tata-Cornell Institute for Agriculture, Western Sydney University, Deakin University, Australia and Tata Trusts. The workshop was inaugurated by Professor Ramesh Chand, member, Nitti Aayog and Dr. Ashok Dalwai, Chairman, National Rainfed Area Authority was the Guest of Honor. The workshop was organized in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and attended by farmers, scientists, academicians, NGOs and policymakers.

### Workshop Recommendations

The key themes along which the deliberations took place included: Increasing Farm Productivity through Resource Efficient Techniques and Practices; Fostering Academia-Industry-Government Partnerships for Excellence in Higher Agricultural Education; Community Institutions in Agri-value Chains; Doubling Farmers Income: Technologies, Business Models and Sustainable Livelihoods; Building Sustainable Agri-food Supply Chains; Climate Change, Food and Nutrition Security.

The output of the workshop was significant in terms of recommends related to SDG 9 (Industry Innovation & Infrastructure); SDG 4 (Quality Education); SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals); SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption & Production), and SDG 13 (Climate Action). Major recommendations emerging out of the deliberations were building climate smart and market efficient value chains, studying impact of climate change on markets; aligning production systems with market demands and building capacities of vulnerable groups. The group also recommended establishing a global multi-stakeholder platform to facilitate agricultural trade between India and the US and create a knowledge sharing platform to facilitate trade. Regarding higher education in agriculture, it was recommended to introduce interdisciplinary, solution-oriented curricula targeted at developing scientific farming techniques, social entrepreneurs and encouraging innovation. It was deliberated upon how foreign educational institutions could play an important role in revolutionizing higher educational curriculum in countries like India. In this context, the relevance of South Asia Center was established in encouraging knowledge exchange.

Moving forward, there is an opportunity to facilitate increased knowledge exchange between the US and India through the South Asia Center. There is considerable knowledge about current practices and challenges in improving sustainable development on both sides. India also has a rich ancient heritage to contribute to making this world sustainable. Several Indian sectors (e.g. oil & gas, mining, food & agribusiness, textile) and companies have recently emerged as frontrunners in the global sustainability landscape. Government efforts such as the Corporate Social Responsibility Act, sustainability reporting and many other policies favor landmark development on the SDG front and the same is evident in a growing number of research publications in the field. New agricultural reforms introduced after Covid-19 in May 2020 aim to support small

farmers, marginalized communities and also migrant labor. The South Asia Center can emerge as a leading platform for facilitating knowledge exchange between the two nations through scientific and cultural exchange of ideas and knowledge resources. Some of these prospective areas for collaborations could be sustainable rural development, women empowerment, sustainable food supply chains, nutrition security, capacity - building through education, and social justice. Hopefully, the initial collaborative steps that have already been taken will flourish into a more sustained partnership on a variety of initiatives - sustainability issues as well as knowledge exchange in other areas of arts, sciences, business, and engineering.

## MITHILA ART AT SU

| Susan S. Wadley  
Professor Emerita, Department of Anthropology

As many may know, the SU Art Museum (formerly SU Art) has the largest collection of Mithila art in the United States. This amazing collection is mostly due to a gift from the Professor H. Daniel Smith of the Department of Religion. Dan was an early collection of India's non-classical art traditions, whether 'god posters' or the folk paintings from Mithila, a region in northern Bihar famous for its traditional art forms done by women on the walls of their houses to celebrate various annual cycle rituals as well as life events such as marriage.

Professor Smith's donation of more than 70 paintings made in the 1970s has been carefully stored by the SU Art Museum and joins the Ruth Reeves Collection of Indian folk art, some 500 pieces bought by SU in the 1960s. In 2002, SU presented the Mithila pieces in a major exhibition, Under the Banyan Tree, organized by Professor Susan Wadley. A second exhibition was held with pieces from the Ethnic Arts Foundation (EAF), an NGO working with Mithila artists. Professor Wadley worked with EAF throughout the early 2000s to add to the SU collection as changes in style and topic were significant. While many artists continued to paint the gods and goddesses of their ancestors, others explored new topics of social change and especially social justice for women. The twenty pieces donated to SU by Professor Wadley in the last two decades focus on these changes.

Other changes occurred too: the traditional artists up through the 1960s were high caste women, as traditional painting was found only in the Brahmin (priestly) and Kayastha (accountant) castes. But nowadays male artists have emerged as painting became more lucrative.

In a second innovation, in the 1970s, with input from foreign scholars, Dusadh, tribal/low caste women (and eventually men) also took up painting. But none were represented in the SU collection. Sadly, change brought an end to the Ethnic Arts Foundation whose directors sought to find homes for the many pieces still owned by the Foundation. Professor Wadley along with omita Ray, associate professor of Art History, worked with EAF and Vanya Malloy, Director of the SU Art Museum, to obtain a donation of ten Dusadh pieces, which adds a key dimension to the SU collection, increasing its value for future study and research, as well as exhibitions.

Pollution killing the earth as the goddess crosses the Ganga filled with fish and animal life (Rani Jha 2019)



## AAROGYA SEVA: THE PANDEMIC RESPONSE JOURNEY

| Dr. Dayaprasad Kulkarni  
Director of Aarogya Seva

In late January, when India recorded the first confirmed case of COVID-19, no one knew how this novel disease would run its course. We watched with the rest of the world as statistics changed, transmission rates went up, and COVID-19 went from being labeled a Global Health Emergency to a pandemic over the course of two months. Although we know a lot more about the virus and the disease process today than we did a few months ago, we continue to have no concrete answers on the best way forward. One government's guess is as good as the other's and on a macro level, every policy decision being taken is in some ways an experiment or a reaction to challenges that crop up. It is fair because nobody has the answers right now. Everybody is learning. But is it enough? That is something only time will tell.

Current statistics show that we have over 6 lakh COVID-19 cases in totality, the third-highest in the world; and the numbers continue to rise exponentially in spite of having one of the strictest lockdowns globally. As grim as these numbers look, what is equally reassuring is India's low mortality and high recovery rate. With 18,655 deaths (as of July, 4, 2020) India's COVID-19 mortality rate at 3% is amongst the lowest in the world. We have more recovered cases than active cases with a recovery rate of 48%. To a large extent, however, this can be attributed to the sheer makeup of India's demography. Consisting largely of a young and therefore low-risk population for increased mortality from COVID-19, our demographic dividend has proved to be a saving grace in this pandemic.

However, that has not been enough. India has faced a slew of challenges in responding effectively to this crisis especially with respect to the provision of personal protective equipment for healthcare professionals and other essential service providers, allocation of resources towards managing COVID-19 cases, ramping up testing, economic and food security and maintaining law and order. Unsurprisingly, vulnerable communities consisting of migrant workers, daily wage earners, and people below the poverty line have been the worst affected at this time. Loss of wages has led to inability in procuring food and other essentials leading to an atmosphere of fear, anxiety, nutritional challenges, and sub-par sanitation and hygiene.



As healthcare infrastructure and resources get diverted to manage COVID-19, another problem emerges - lack of access to healthcare for non-COVID related health concerns. This could be devastating to the progress India has made in terms of combating communicable and non-communicable diseases, reducing child mortality through immunization and strengthening primary care in hard to reach areas. A strict lockdown that places restrictions on movement, incidences of police brutality for violators, and the very real fear of contracting COVID-19 by physically accessing a healthcare facility have further compounded this problem.

Additionally, as India reels under the effects of one global crisis, another one is slowly but surely rearing its ugly head - mental health. Psychological effects of quarantine have been well documented in the past and can range from anxiety, anger, and sleep disturbances to depression, suicidal tendencies, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Separate studies of quarantined patients of SARS, a previous coronavirus outbreak in 2003, found between 10% and 29% suffered PTSD. The COVID-19 pandemic poses unique stressors for the mental health of our society, intensified by the challenges of navigating the lockdown, fears surrounding infection, frustration, boredom, inadequate supplies, lack of information, financial loss, and stigma associated with contracting the disease. To respond to this, AarogyaSeva has instituted a Mental Health Helpline in March 2020 that strives to address the mental health needs of the community by providing a safe channel for community members to voice their concerns, ask questions and receive professional mental health assistance. Through a trained network of volunteer counselors and other mental health professionals, the helpline has provided psychological first aid and alleviated distress of over 500 callers since its inception. We were also successful in arranging for medical referrals and consults for callers who had symptoms or a history suggestive of a COVID-19 infection.

The insights from call patterns to the Mental Health Helpline and the rising challenge of meeting non-COVID related health concerns faced by the general public led us to further expand our helplines. We realized that Telehealth consulting platforms offer a viable solution to bridge the gap of access to health that exists while also avoiding unnecessary health center visits and ensuring patient safety. While several options in this space exist, most require payment which individuals from vulnerable populations are not able to afford given economic income cessation. The need for sophisticated technology, dependence on internet connectivity, and smartphone access further limit their utilization in these segments of society. Aarogya Seva's Tele-Health Helpline launched earlier this month is a free, pan-India telephone-based service to assist community members with non-COVID related health concerns. The aim of the telehealth helpline is to provide the public with an alternative method to

receive access to general healthcare and health advice, as well as guidance to navigate appropriate, existing channels of care for specific health needs and concerns.

Alongside the above, we also created and distributed a health-needs assessment of NGO's/Non-profits working in the medical space to better understand the health and hygiene focused resource needs of organizations during this time. Two of the needs that stood out were menstrual hygiene supplies and medicines. Since then, we have identified and distributed 200,000 packs of sanitary pads along with IEC materials to 15000 women living in vulnerable areas - urban slums, migrant worker colonies, sex worker communities, etc. Medicine distribution is being channeled to support the running of non-profit clinics in Karnataka as well as our rural clinics in Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur. Our clinics in Assam and Orissa have been additionally hit by the annual flooding cycle to add to the woes. These clinics have been instrumental in providing timely medical care in hard to reach areas and we hope this endeavor will continue to sustain and strengthen the general health of these communities.

Covid-19 is here to stay. And by the looks of the present situation, it is going to be around for a while. As the world copes with what is slowly becoming a "new normal", every day brings with it new challenges that spare no one. From individuals and families to organizations, governments, and nations, all of us are feeling the brunt of this pandemic in a multitude of ways. This is the time for reflection, solidarity, timely assessment and collaboration. Better outcomes can be achieved through collaborative efforts as has been evidenced by very successful NGO-government partnerships to further the Covid-19 response. This is the time for action. Every decision taken now will have a role to play in altering the course of this pandemic now and in the future.

## NOTES FROM THE FIELD | UNDERSTANDING THE MOTIVATIONS OF RETURNEES TO INDIA

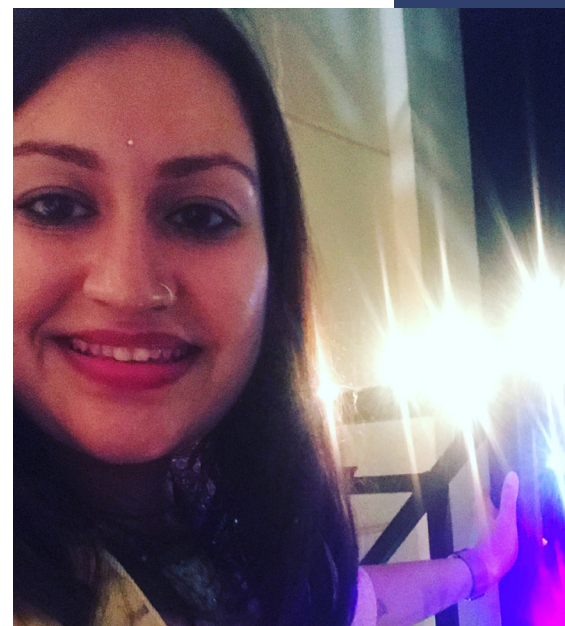
| Jenna Sikka  
Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Sociology

When I started college, like a majority of students, I knew I would be studying abroad. I wanted to go somewhere. In the recent decades, there has been a return to the home country of first-generation diasporic Indians who have earlier resided in the US or Canada. Because this seems to be a fairly rare phenomenon (the ratio of first-generation immigrants who come back to the ones who stay in their host country is rather low), there is little research which exists in this area, with almost no focus on Indian women returnees. My research aims at identifying how and in which ways this move affects women's lives, and how processes of adjustment and resettlement in India are shaped by gender.

I conducted this research in the form of multiple in-depth interviews in the small Indian city of Vadodara, which is also incidentally the city in which I spent many of my formative years. Interviews usually begin with a discussion of current events, the weather, or curious questions about my research and my own experiences outside of India. We then delve into the nitty-gritty of respondents' daily lives, a discussion dotted with several anecdotes and recollections of memories past.

Initial analysis identifies a distinct group of women returnees between the ages of 55 and 80, returning to India between the mid 1970s and 2000, who share a very specific outlook in their narrative: a deep sense of patriotism and nationalism which has been a key element in returning home. This also dictates how they readjust and resettle into life in India, and also how they negotiate their feelings about difficulties upon returning to the country in which they grew up. These women also share the values of deep patriotism, and they choose to dedicate lives to giving back to the country in the form of philanthropy and through social/developmental work.

I am now nearing the end of my fieldwork and have learned that interviews almost always have a very informal tone, with a lot of laughter and commiseration, and that chai (Indian milk tea) and deep-fried Indian snacks facilitate rapport-building more than I could ever imagine. Although it has been almost a year since I have spoken to some respondents, I regularly receive text invitations to events they think I might find interesting, as well as wishes for Diwali and other Indian festivals throughout the year. It goes without saying that the time I have spent collecting data has been markedly exciting, and I look forward to revisiting these conversations again as I enter the final phase of my dissertation.



## NOTES FROM THE FIELD | LIVING THROUGH NEPAL'S COVID-19 LOCKDOWN DURING FIELDWORK

| Ajaya N. Mali  
PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology

When news first broke of the eruption of a new coronavirus-based pandemic in central China, I was in my first month of fieldwork at Deopatan. Deopatan is a small ancient settlement in Nepal that the urban sprawl of the country's capital, Kathmandu, has today subsumed. The settlement is situated adjacent to Nepal's most important Hindu temple, Pashupatinath, on the banks of the River Bagmati on the outer side of the northeastern bend of Kathmandu's ring road.

For a few weeks, the government paid minimal attention to implementing travel restrictions, and even air links with a few Chinese cities reportedly continued. In early March, the government gradually implemented entry-point restrictions at Nepal's only international airport. Even then health experts were puzzled that, except for one infection that have been detected in the third week of January, no other infections had yet surfaced in the country despite insufficient travel restrictions.

I was painfully aware that if the pandemic did erupt in Kathmandu, the Pashupatinath temple would be a major hotspot for transmission because of the big crowds it regularly draws. I was especially worried for the temple officiants and senior staff because they are all senior citizens, belonging to an age group said to be most vulnerable to the virus. Whenever I went to meet the officials at the temple during their working hours, I saw devotees and visitors interact with them without practicing any type or degree of social distancing. The officials were also resigned to the fact that the government had not implemented strict distancing rules to protect them.

In the third week of March, the government sprang into action following continued criticism from health experts. On March 18, restrictions on gatherings in public and religious spaces were implemented and recreational spaces were shut down. Schools were shut down and nationwide exams postponed. People were requested to wear face masks and use hand sanitizers. Starting that day, rural-to-urban migrants began leaving Kathmandu in hordes and by March 24, when the government finally issued strict national lockdown measures, over a million had left the city for their homes in the provinces. Likewise, in the Pashupati area, the usual rush of daily visitors had now completely dried up.

Nepal's nationwide lockdown announcement came on March 23rd. The decision was reportedly taken following confirmation of the country's second infected case - a student who had returned from college in France. That evening, when I received the news, I was participating in the annual festival of Vatsaleswari. Vatsaleswari is one of the ten mother goddesses worshipped in the Pashupati area. Many other traditional settlements in Kathmandu valley had springtime processions and festivals that week. All these public processions got cancelled, and the Hindu and Buddhist deities concerned were placated with mandatory rituals. Nepal's covid-19 national lockdown came into effect the next day, March 24th. All residents in the country were to stay indoors unless they experienced an emergency.

The national lockdown lasted almost three months and was finally eased on June 15th. By then, nineteen COVID-19 patients had died out of more than 6000 infected. As I write this note immediately following the easing, I await the opening of the Pashupatinath temple premises, which will take place in about three weeks. I hope to recommence research in full swing in the coming month.



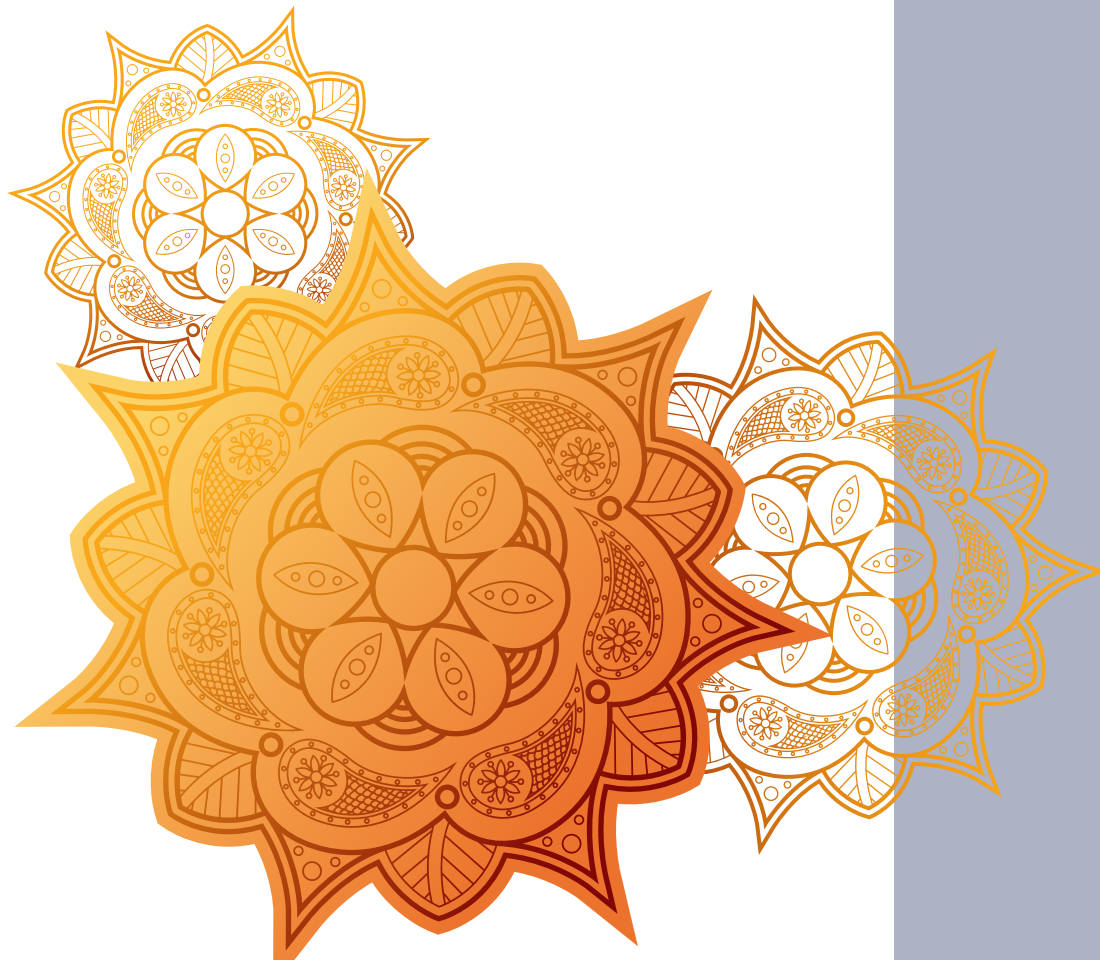
## FACULTY UPDATES

**Tej K. Bhatia**, Professor of Linguistics served as guest-editor for the Journal of the International Association for World Englishes. The edited volume, *World Englishes and Cross-Cultural Advertising*, features 16 articles, which examine theory, best practices, and new trends in global advertising. His three articles explored the characteristics and dynamics of language mixing, religion (Hinduism and Islam), and emotional targeting used by global advertisers to reach their super-diverse consumers.

Between Spring 2019 through Spring 2020, **Dimitar Guergiouv** published four peer-reviewed articles and a peer-reviewed book chapter. His student, Liu Dongshu, successfully defended and is starting a tenure-track position at City University of Hong Kong. Additionally, he was awarded the Daniel Patrick Moynihan award for Teaching and Research in April.

**Farhana Sultana** was awarded the 2019 Glenda Laws Award by the American Association of Geographers for “outstanding contributions to geographic research on social issues.” Her latest publications include her book *Water Politics: Governance, Justice and the Right to Water* (Routledge 2020), “Decolonizing Development Education and the Pursuit of Social Justice” in *Human Geography*, and “Embodied intersectionalities of urban citizenship: Water, infrastructure, and gender in the global South” in *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*.

**Joanne Waghorne**'s newest book, *Singapore, Spirituality, and the Space of the State: Soul of the Little Red Dot*, was released in March 2020 as part of the Bloomsbury Studies in Religion, Space and Place Series.



## GRADUATE STUDENT UPDATES

**Taapsi Ramchandani** (Anthropology) defended her dissertation, “Put a crapaud in a suit and people will vote for the PNM: A critical examination of patronage, loyalty, and the structuring force of party partisanship in Trinidad.”

**Sreyoshi Dey** (Mass Communications, Newhouse) defended her dissertation, “Queering Virtual Groups: Exploring Facebook Groups as a Space for Identity Construction and Social Justice among the LGBTQ Community in India”

## FLAS FELLOWS, 2019-2020

**Samantha Chaudhry-Muffuletto** is a cultural anthropology PhD candidate. Her research interests include the real-life effects of popular and political media representation, structural violence, human rights, and disability studies. Her primary geographical interests include India, Pakistan, and the United States.

**Iti Maloney’s** academic focus is on sustainable development in South Asia. She is interested in the relationship between climate change and food and water security. She wants to understand how local, state, and national governments are addressing these problems with the involvement of international organizations.

**Robb Woodruff** an International Relations and Economics Master’s student at Maxwell. While at Syracuse University, Robb plans to study economic development in South Asia. After graduation, he would like to work abroad in the financial sector in new and emerging economies.



## BHARATI SUMMER RESEARCH GRANT

The friends and family of Professor Agehananda Bharati established a memorial grant in his honor in the early 1990s. Each year, awards are made to doctoral students in the Maxwell School for research leading to their dissertation on South Asia. This year’s recipients were:

**Alexandra Berger**, Religion

**Zainab Khalid**, Anthropology

**Jay Sharma**, Anthropology



Moynihan Institute of Global Affairs

## South Asia Center

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The South Asia Center Newsletter is the official outreach bulletin for the South Asia Center, Moynihan Institution of Global Affairs, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University.

## SOUTH ASIA CENTER

Funded by a Title VI National Resource Center Grant by the Department of Education, the South Asia Center at Syracuse University serves as a liaison between Syracuse University faculty with research interests in South Asia, educators, and the wider public in the Central New York area. Our resources and faculty interests cover the South Asia region, broadly defined as Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, and the Maldives. Our audience includes educators in area schools and colleges, the general community, individuals interested in the region, and the Syracuse University community. South Asia Outreach presents workshops, seminars, lectures, film screenings, cultural programs, and other public events. In addition, the Center loans a wide variety of educational materials to educators at no cost. These resources include books, maps, DVDs, comic books, and cultural materials. We also offer teachers curriculum units and advice on curriculum development. A list of media items may be found on our web page at:

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