



**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](http://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*



**INDIA'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19**  
WITH **BARKHA DUTT & YAMINI AIYAR**

**SEPT 18, 2020**  
**12PM - 1:30PM**  
Register for Webinar or Stream on Youtube  
[watson.brown.edu/southasia/events](https://watson.brown.edu/southasia/events)

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BROWN UNIVERSITY  
**CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY South Asia**

## 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*



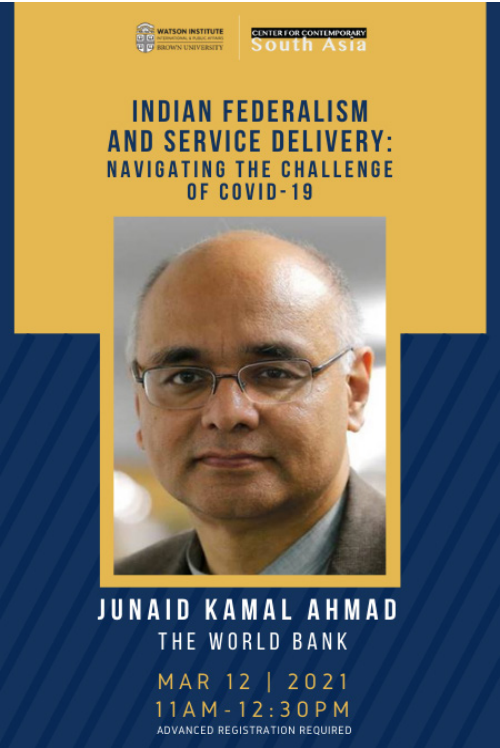
**The COVID-19 Crisis in India: A TIME TO ACT**

**Ashish K Jha**  
Brown School of Public Health

**Barkha Dutt**  
Emmy Nominated Reporter

**Monday, April 26, 2021**  
**11:00am ET | 8:30pm IST**  
Registration Required  
Open to All

**BROWN** School of Public Health  
**WATSON INSTITUTE** BROWN UNIVERSITY  
**CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY South Asia**

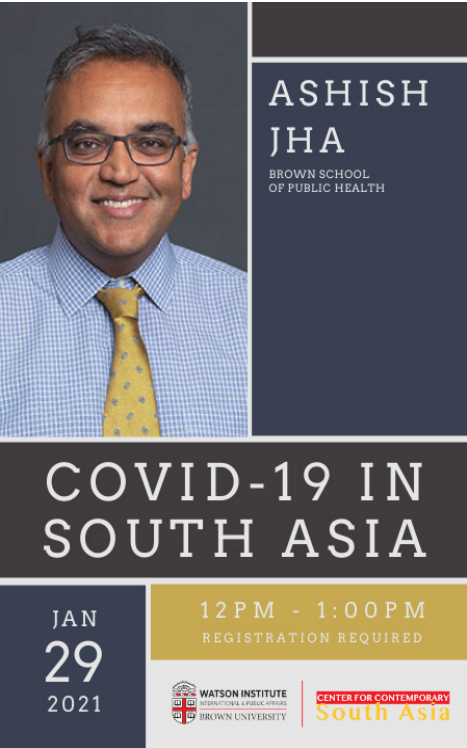


**INDIAN FEDERALISM AND SERVICE DELIVERY: NAVIGATING THE CHALLENGE OF COVID-19**

**JUNAID KAMAL AHMAD**  
THE WORLD BANK

**MAR 12 | 2021**  
**11AM - 12:30PM**  
ADVANCED REGISTRATION REQUIRED

**WATSON INSTITUTE** BROWN UNIVERSITY  
**CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY South Asia**



**ASHISH JHA**  
BROWN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

**COVID-19 IN SOUTH ASIA**

**JAN 29 2021**  
**12PM - 1:00PM**  
REGISTRATION REQUIRED

**WATSON INSTITUTE** BROWN UNIVERSITY  
**CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY South Asia**



# 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**

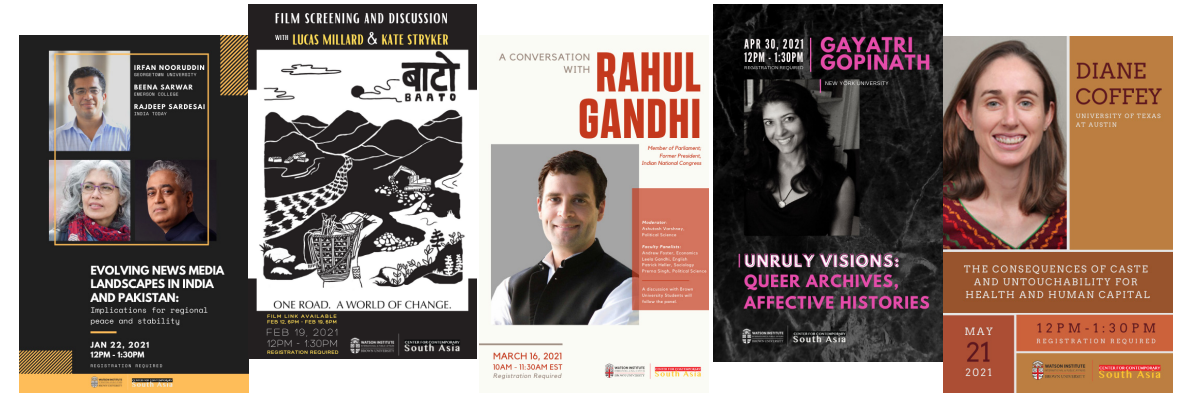
**Sameer Lalwani**, Stimson Center  
*Second Coming? Testing the Nuclear Revolution in Pakistan's Strategic Debates*

**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

**Madhav Khosla**  
ASHOKA UNIVERSITY  
COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL

**Commentators:**

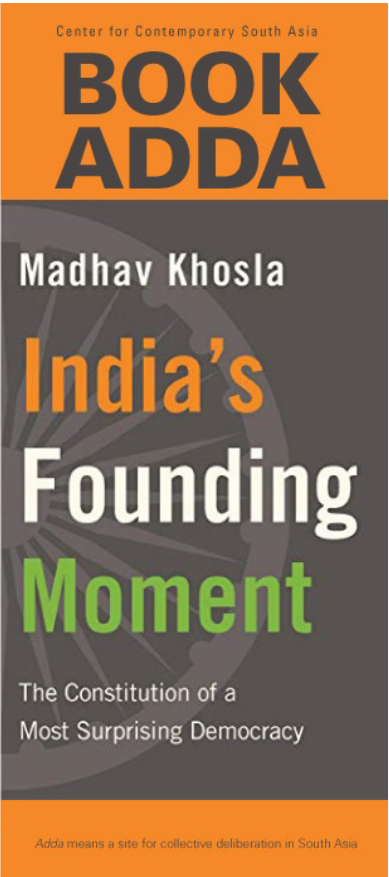
**Sunil Amrith**  
YALE UNIVERSITY

**Louise Tillin**  
KING'S COLLEGE LONDON

**Corey Brettschneider**  
BROWN UNIVERSITY

**Oct 16, 2020 | 11AM**  
Advanced Registration Required

 **South Asia**

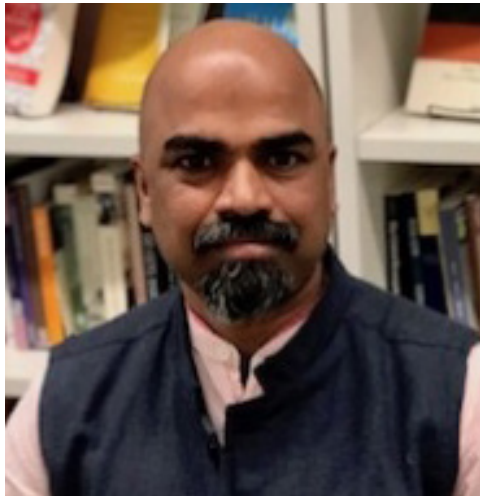


**DECEMBER 3**

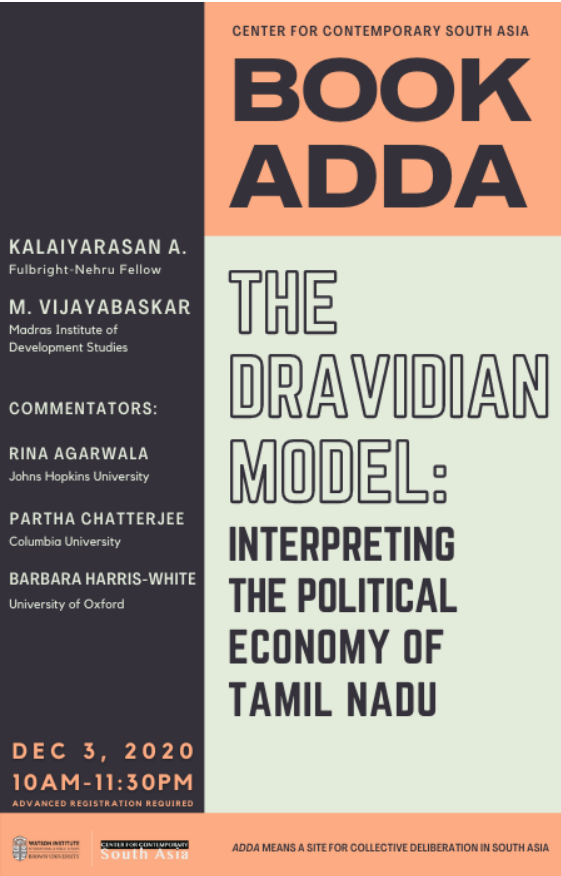
*The Dravidian Model: Interpreting the  
Political Economy of Tamil Nadu*

**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



M. Vijayabaskar

# Book Adda Continued

**FEBRUARY 11**

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

**Author:**

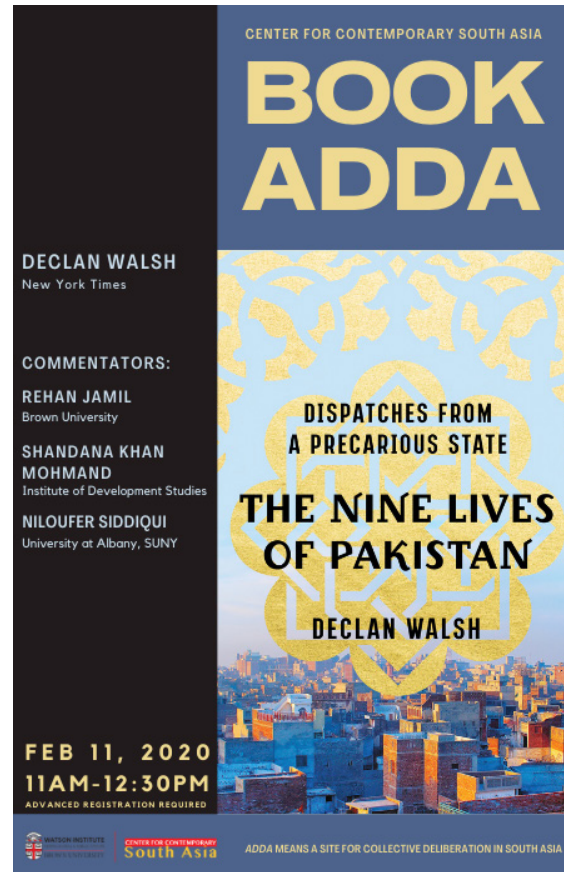
Declan Walsh, New York Times

**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:**

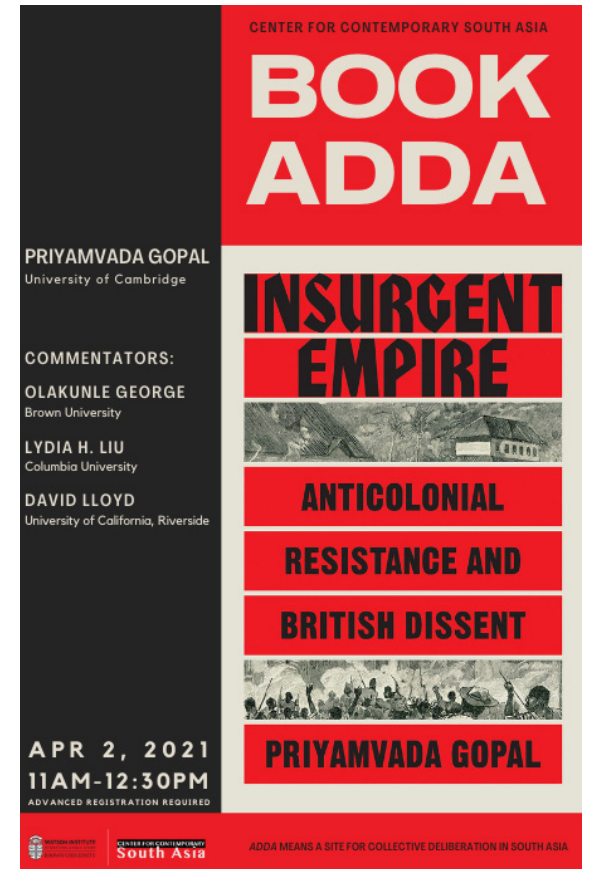
Priyamvada Gopal

**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

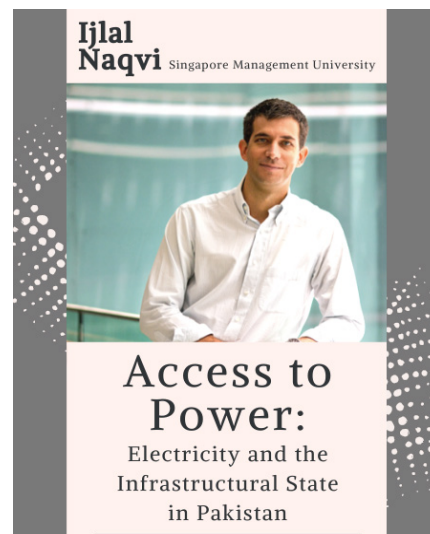
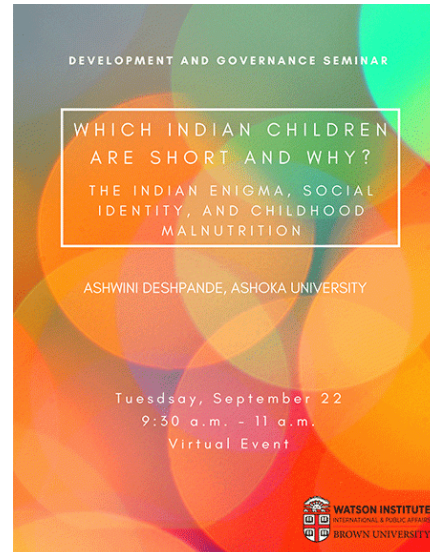
*Art History, Postcolonialism, and the Global Turn*  
— Session II

### 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*

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**Aditi Priya**, LEAD  
**Vineeta**, Centre for Development Economics  
*The Pedagogy of Economics and Caste in India*

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*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

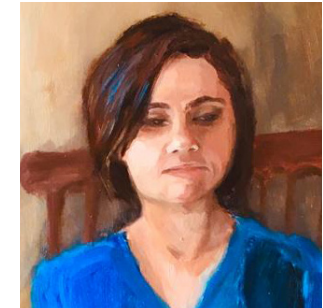


**Vazira Zamindar**, History  
*On Walking With Gandhi and Bacha Khan: A 'Historio-Graphic' Collaboration*

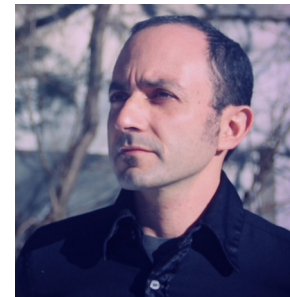
## GRADUATE FELLOWS 2021



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



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



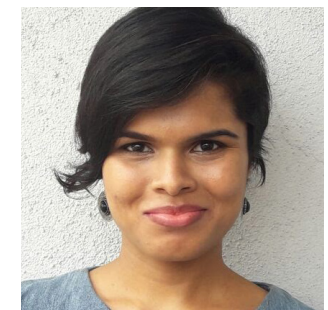
**Ravi Krishnaswami**, Musicology & Ethnomusicology  
*Body, Home, World: Original Music*



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



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



**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**  
Director, CCSA  
Sol Goldman Professor of International  
Studies and the Social Sciences  
Professor of Political Science  
*ashutosh\_varshney@brown.edu*
- 2 Andrew Foster**  
George S. and Nancy B. Parker Professor  
of Economics, Director of Social Science  
Research Institute  
*andrew\_foster@brown.edu*
- 3 Leela Gandhi**  
Associate Director, CCSA  
John Hawkes Professor of  
Humanities and English  
*leela\_gandhi@brown.edu*
- 4 Patrick Heller**  
Lyn Crost Professor of Social Sciences  
*patrick\_heller@brown.edu*
- 5 Prerna Singh**  
Mahatma Gandhi Assistant Professor of  
Political Science and International Studies  
*prerna\_singh@brown.edu*

# Staff



- Stephanie Abbott-Pandey**  
Center Manager  
*stephanie\_abbott@brown.edu*
- 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.



Center for Contemporary South Asia  
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[southasia@brown.edu](mailto:southasia@brown.edu)



CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY  
**South Asia**