

Nordic Newsletter 10 - 12 August 2017

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Submitted by admin on Sat, 2017-08-12 07:52

NORDIC SOUTH ASIA NETWORK

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Contents:

- [Research Community News](#)
- [Conferences and workshops in Scandinavia](#)
- [Conferences and workshops outside Scandinavia](#)
- [South Asia related Culture](#)

Research Community News

• Aarhus dissertation on the Urdu-speakers of Bangladesh

Isha Dubey from the School of Culture and Society, University of Aarhus - part of Contemporary India Study Centre Aarhus (CISCA) - will be defending her doctoral dissertation entitled "*The Urdu-speakers of Bangladesh and the Idea of 'Home': Migration, Displacement and Shifting Narratives of Belonging since the 1940s*" on Thursday 24 August 2017 at 13.00. The assessment committee consists of Associate professor Mikkel Rytter, Aarhus University; Professor Willem van Schendel, University of Amsterdam; and Associate professor Radika Chopra, University of Delhi. Venue: School of Culture and Society, Building 1461 room 516, Jens Chr. Skous Vej 5, Aarhus. The defence is open to the public and will be conducted in English. The thesis focuses on the identity problems of post-colonial South Asia, profoundly shaped by the partition of the subcontinent in 1947 and the Bangladeshi Liberation War of 1971 – both of which involved massive cross-border movements of people as well as large scale internal displacement. The Urdu-speaking 'Biharis' in Bangladesh migrated from the Muslim minority regions of India during and after partition to claim the 'promised' homeland of Pakistan. And yet they found themselves stateless after 1971 on account of accusations of being collaborators of the West-Pakistani army and remained devoid of any nationality till as late as 2008. Isha participated in the March 2017 Harvard Graduate Conference on International History with a paper based on her research. [Read an abstract.](#)



• Christabel Royan acting Nordic Centre in India Director



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- [Create new page](#)
- [See content and pages](#)
- [Create URL shortcut \(alias\)](#)
- [Broken link Report](#)
- [Import](#)
- [Imported From NIAS](#)
- [Sammanställ ett nyhetsbrev](#)
- [Skapa verksamhetsrapport](#)
- [Open newsletter template](#)

Since 1 May 2017, Christabel Royan, Programme Manager for the Nordic Centre in India (NCI) university consortium, has taken the position of Acting Director of NCI as the present Director, Dr. Samrat Schmiem Kumar, is on paternity leave. The Nordic Centre in India (NCI) was established in 2001 as a consortium of Nordic universities and research institutions. The objective is to facilitate cooperation in research and higher education between the Nordic countries and India. Through academic exchange NCI seeks to strengthen Indo-Nordic ties and understanding. In November 2004, NCI got final clearance from the Indian Government to operate in India.



From 1 January 2014, the NCI secretariat is based at the Umeå University in Sweden. NCI runs educational courses for Nordic students in India at different universities in India ([More information about the courses on NCI's website](#)), and has a flat with rooms available to rent in Delhi. The flat, located at Nizamuddin East, can be rented by students, researchers, and other personnel affiliated to the Nordic member universities. The consortium consists of 16 member universities in the Nordic countries (5 in Sweden, 2 in Norway, 3 in Denmark, 5 in Finland, 1 in Iceland, plus NIAS in Copenhagen). NCI aims at supporting collaboration on research and education between the Nordic countries and India. [More information on the Nordic Centre in India website](#).

• **IIT Kharagpur joins Hand With MIT To preserve Rabindranath Tagore's Santiniketan**

Architecture students from the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kharagpur and America's Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) will soon conduct a joint study on how to preserve the heritage of Rabindranath Tagore's abode in Santiniketan. The department of architecture and regional planning at IIT Kharagpur has tied-up with the School of Architecture and Planning at MIT for a course to study urbanisation in the current developing world. A group of 6-8 students, at graduate and undergraduate levels from each institute, will come to Santiniketan in October 2017 for their research work. Officials said during this period they will make a proposal regarding an integrated site management strategy for Visva Bharati university. They will also suggest guidelines to control the scattered and unsystematic development in the university campus and tailor it in sync with Tagore's ideology behind the inception of the place. Visva Bharati university authorities have been unsuccessfully trying for the past few years to get the tag of a World Heritage Site from UNESCO. [Read more](#).



• **Indian scientists and students marched in support of genuine science**

Thousands of Indian scientists, university students and science enthusiasts gathered in some 40 Indian cities to march in support of science on 9 August 2017 - lamenting their country's low levels of funding for research, and complaining about government promotion of 'unscientific ideas'. However, several scientists stayed away from the event, either because they had been directly asked not to attend, or because they feared repercussions from higher authorities if they did. The Indian demonstrations came 4 months after the global March for Science on 22 April, which saw people gather in at least 600 cities around the world in support of scientific research and evidence-based policymaking. On that day, only two Indian cities, Hyderabad and Coimbatore, took part. This time Bangalore, one of India's key science hubs, was among the first to set off; more than 1,000 people participated, according to the Breakthrough Science Society, the Kolkata based advocacy group that coordinated Wednesday's events across India. [Read more in an article in Nature](#).



• **Clemens Cavallin writes on the study of religion in India**



Associate Professor Clemens Cavallin from the Department of Literature, History of Ideas, and Religion at the University of Gothenburg has written an interesting article on the study of religion in India ("*Att studera religion i Indien*") in the Swedish language magazine Signum, issue 05/2017. He reflects upon the contrast between the vast amount of religion in the country and the lack of academic study of the same, and also discusses the right of European and American scholar to analyze Indian religious phenomena. The article is not available for free, but the Signum magazine can be ordered on the net, [go for it](#).

In the same Signum issue, Prof. Heinz Werner Wessler at the Dept. of Linguistics and Philology, Uppsala University, writes about a meeting he had with the Indian Jesuit pater Noel Sheth, an eminent interpreter of Hindu theology who visited Uppsala in October 2016.



• **More information about South Asia related research at Swedish and Nordic universities**

Seminars and Conferences in Scandinavia

• Water and Waste in focus at the World Water Week 2017



The 2017 World Water Week in Stockholm is held 27 August - 1 September 2017. World Water Week in



Stockholm is the annual focal point for the globe's water issues. It is organized by [Stockholm International Water Institute](#) (SIWI). The theme for the 27th World Water Week is *Water and Waste: Reduce and Reuse*. It is being held in the heart of Stockholm at the City Conference Centre. Experts, practitioners, decision-makers, business innovators and young professionals from a range of sectors and countries come to Stockholm to network, exchange ideas, foster new thinking and develop solutions to the most pressing water-related challenges of today. Every year around 200 delegates from South Asia participate (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka).

The programme of 2017 World Water Week consist of 238 sessions and will have more than 3,200 participants from 133 countries. Two sessions deal with the River Ganga, one seminar entitled "[ASIA Focus - Towards a healthy Ganges](#)" organised by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, the International Water Management Institute, World Wide Fund for Nature, and CGIAR Research Program on Water, Land and Ecosystems. It will be held on Wednesday 30 August. The second Ganga seminar is organised by Earthwatch, HSBC, WaterAid, and World Wide Fund for Nature, and is entitled "[The HSBC Water Programme: Transforming lives in the Ganga](#)". It is als held on Wednesday 30 August.

Another session focusing on Asia is again held on Wednesday 30 August, and is entitled "[Circular Economy Cities: Transforming China and India's Urban Wastewater](#)". It is organised by Global Water Partnership China, and the World Resources Institute.

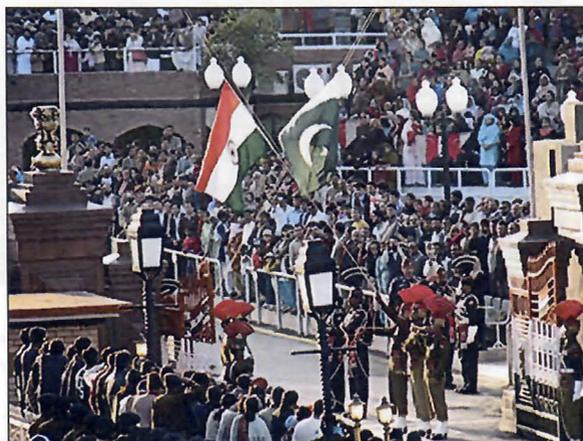
[Full information about the 2017 World Water Week.](#)

• Oslo seminar on VCD representations of Indo-Pak relations



On Monday 28 August 2017, 16.15-18.00, the Morgenstjerne seminars at the Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS) at University of Oslo, opens its 2017 fall series with a lecture by Dr. Ronie Parciack from the

Department of East Asian Studies at Tel Aviv University, Israel. He will speak about "*Borderline nationalism: Blurring Indo-Pak Lines through Indian Border Security Force VCDs*", addressing a somewhat surprising set of representations of Indo-Pak relations formulated on the Indian side. The representations appear in video compact discs (VCDs) designed to be played on personal computers. They are never broadcast online, on television or in cinema theatres. To what extent



do these VCDs suggest the existence of vernacular socio-religious ideologies that challenge the hegemonic narrative of Indo-Pak animosity? Drawing on visual ethnography, textual analysis and participant observation, this talk documents a liminal ideology that even appears to be present in the Border Security Force. Venue: P.A. Munchs hus at Blindern, Oslo. [More information.](#)

• Information about South Asia related lectures and seminars

See SASNET's page, <http://nordicsouthasianet.eu/lectures-in-scandinavia>

Conferences and workshops outside Scandinavia

• Vilnius conference on Nation, Gender and History in Asian film

Asian Arts Centre and The Centre of Oriental Studies at Vilnius University, Lithuania, organises an international conference entitled '*Nation, Gender and History: Asian Cinemas in Perspective*' on 7 - 9 September



2017. Scholars, film professionals and other interested are invited to participate. Deadline for abstracts was 30 April 2017.

The idea of a national culture has played a fundamental role in the definition, historiography and evaluation of Asian cultural practices for at least two centuries, and cinema is no exception. In today's world, however, ideas of the nation

appear as increasingly problematic. The same can be said of gender, the pertinence of which in individuals' understanding of themselves and their history has, over the last decades, been challenged from many fronts. And yet both ideas of nation and gender continue to mark discourses about identities and countries, including and perhaps especially in situations of conflict. 2017 marks the 70th anniversary of the independence and partition of India and Pakistan. The conference takes this opportunity to raise the question: can we still argue for the centrality of national cinemas? What role do notions of gender play in our appreciation of a nation's cinema? And how do the interconnections between gender and nation in cinema help us understand the present historical moment? [Full information.](#)

• **2017 South Asia Anthropology Group (SAAG) meeting in Edinburgh**



The Annual Meeting of the South Asia Anthropology Group (SAAG) holds its meeting at University of Edinburgh, Scotland, on 8 September 2017. The theme for the 2017 meeting is *"Identity, Politics, and Resistance"*. It is being convened by Hugo Gorringe, Senior Lecturer in Sociology, University of Edinburgh.

The issue of identity has been at the heart of several important political developments and social movements over the past few years in South Asia. In India, critics argue that the rise of the BJP, culminating in the election of Narendra Modi as Prime Minister in 2014, has legitimised a vehement brand of Hindu nationalism, in turn contributing to an atmosphere of intolerance and hatred and an escalation of discrimination and violence against Muslims, Christians, Dalits, and women. In Bangladesh, freedom of speech remains under serious threat as a severe backlash against secularism accounts for violent attacks against writers and bloggers at the hands of radical Islamist groups. In Pakistan, identity based politics are ever present in conflicts based on sectarian, religious and regional divides. Sri Lanka meanwhile continues to embark on a process of national and ethnic reconciliation following a long and bitter civil war between the majority Sinhalese and the Tamil minority in the northeast. Nepal, too, has embarked on a new process of political settlement following the peace accord in 2006, contentious politics of identity and federalism and constitutional reform amidst protests from different religious and ethnic minorities. In all instances, there are growing demands for, and promises of, economic growth and development that are coterminous with a shrinking of state provision. [Full information.](#)

• **London 2018 conference on Muslim Cultures in the Indian Ocean**



The Aga Khan University's Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations, based in

London, organises an international conference entitled *"Muslim Cultures in the Indian Ocean. Diversity and Pluralism, Past and Present"* on 12-14 September 2018. The Call for Papers is open until 30 September 2017. This conference aims to explore the diversity of Muslim cultures prevalent in the Indian Ocean region - including the Maldives - where, historically, Muslims have interacted for centuries with each other and with other peoples and cultures. Islam not only provided the scaffolding that facilitated cultural exchanges but was also the pivot for



transforming local societies. The conference seeks to bring together experts from different disciplines and backgrounds including archaeologists, historians, sociologists, anthropologists, geographers, and scholars of related disciplines to explore various facets of this diversity. This conference marks a reconnaissance of the Indian Ocean not as a periphery but as a centre for the study of Muslim cultures.

Indeed, over the past couple of decades, significant new research has been undertaken across East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and the Indian subcontinent leading to fresh insights on a number of facets of Indian Ocean cultures. Some of these studies were written about the Indian Ocean on the longue durée and other studies were focused on local and regional histories. Cultural encounters across the Indian Ocean down the centuries have given rise to cities, towns, ports and other constructions and artefacts which, while remaining distinctive in themselves, also exhibit layers of shared features. They manifest the craftsmanship and values of their creators, peoples whose diversity is almost proverbial. Similar endeavours are present in almost all aspects of human creativity through contact, including religious beliefs and practices, literature, architecture, trade, cuisine, textiles and fashion, etc. Cultural contacts, exchanges and networks were facilitated by the sea as a link between these diverse worlds. [Full information.](#)

• **Other conferences connected to South Asian studies all over the World**

See SASNET's page, <http://nordicsouthasianet.eu/conferences/conferences>

South Asia related culture in Scandinavia

• **India in focus at Stockholm Cultural Festival 15-20 August 2017**

On 14th and 15th August 2017, it is 70 years since the Partition of British India, and the independent nations of Pakistan and India appeared on the scene. In Stockholm, Sweden, the 2017 jubilee celebrations coincide with the Stockholm Cultural Festival to be held 15-20 August. The festival includes a large number of events related to Indian culture - concerts, dance performances, seminars, Bollywood film screening, street food stalls, yoga sessions, etc. Among the highlights should be mentioned a concert with Tabla maestro Zakir Hussain (*photo to the left*) on the 16th, a seminar on *"Diversity and tolerance - Experiences from India"* on the 17th, another seminar on *"In the scenes behind the Jaipur Literature Festival"* on the 16th, and a Bollywood musical *"Love Story"* (*photo above*) to be performed on the 15th and 16th. [See the full Stockholm Cultural Festival programme, and search for genre "India" to get specific info about the India related events.](#)

As an integral part of the festival, the Embassy of India organises a parade with dancing children through the streets of Stockholm, led by the Ambassador, on August 15th; and a Business day with an impressive full-day programme on the 17th of August looking at the future of India (this will also act as a curtain raiser for the Mega Make in India Event



that is to take place from the 11-13 October 2017), [more information](#).

• **Arundhati Roy and Bangladeshi literary representatives at 2017 Göteborg Book Fair**



Arundhati Roy and Shamsuzzaman Khan.



Whereas many well-known Swedish writers and publishers have decided not to participate in the 2017 Göteborg Bok Fair (Bok och Biblioteksmässan) due to the organisers having accepted an extremist right-wing newspaper having a stall at the fair ([more information](#)), South Asia will be represented by Indian writer Arundhati Roy, and four prominent Bangladeshi literary stalwarts, namely Shamsuzzaman Khan (Bangla Academy Director);

Muhammad Samad (National Poetry Council of Bangladesh President); Tarik Sujat (poet, publisher and graphic artist); and Anisur Rahman.

Seminars with them will be held on Thursday 28 September, one with Arundhati Roy entitled "Returning to Literary Fiction", about her recent book, "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness", a novel just like her 1997 novel "The God of Small Things". After that, she left literary fiction behind and made a name for herself as an activist and social commentator. In a number of books and articles, Arundhati Roy has fought for women's rights and against dam projects and environmental degradation, among other things. But now exactly twenty years later a new novel suddenly emerges. Why did she choose to return to literature? John Freeman, American author will be the moderator. The Bangladeshi literary quartet will take part in a seminar entitled "What is Happening in Contemporary Literature in Bangladesh?". It will be a kind of follow-up to events at the 2013 Book Fair with five Bangladeshi writers ([more information](#)). They will promote modern Bangladeshi literature, a hundred years after Rabindranath Tagore, the main architect of modern Bengali literature, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. The seminar - organised by Litteraturcentrum Uppsala, Bangla Academy, and the National Poetry Council of Bangladesh - will be held as a dialogue with Swedish writer Lars Häger.

[Go for the full programme of 2017 Göteborg Book Fair.](#)

• **Information about South Asia related culture in Sweden/ Scandinavia**

See SASNET's page, <http://nordicsouthasianet.eu/cultural-events>

Best regards

Lars Eklund

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Nordic South Asia Network (NSAN) newsletters are produced by Lars Eklund.

Till 31 December 2016 he worked as deputy director for the Swedish South Asian Studies Network (SASNET), based at Lund University.

After retiring from SASNET, Lars is working part-time as Executive Director, Communications, for the Centre for the Study of Indian Languages and Society (INLANSO) in Varanasi, India.

Besides, he runs the NSAN web site and produces monthly newsletters as a follow-up venture to the old SASNET Newsletter service that was closed down in April 2016.

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