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INDIA UPDATE 2016

IDEAS FROM INDIA

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

Presented by

The South Asia
Research Institute
ANU College of
Asia & the Pacific

SARI ANNUAL PUBLIC LECTURE

Wednesday 9 November

5:30 – 7:00pm, Refreshments from 5pm

Hedley Bull Centre, Lecture Theatre 1

Mother India (Bharat Mata) and her unruly daughters

Nivedita Menon, Jawaharlal Nehru University



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CONFERENCE PROGRAM

Day 1, Thursday 10 November

9am	Welcome Nachiketa Jha, First Secretary, High Commission of India
9.30am	Governance, Conflict and Political Economy Chair: Allan Gyngell, Crawford School, ANU <i>India: the tyranny of comparisons</i> Michael Wesley, ANU <i>How do transnational conflicts in Southwest Asia impact the Indian state's attitude and behaviour towards its minority Muslim citizenry?</i> Nishank Motwani, ANU <i>Sanitation and society: garbage, sewage and caste in India</i> Robin Jeffrey, National University of Singapore
11.00am	Break
11.30am	Contested Pasts, Challenging Futures Chair: Hyaeweol Choi, School of Culture, History and Language, ANU <i>The history that wasn't: interrogating modern labels for an ancient Sanskrit text</i> Shonaleeka Kaul, Jawaharlal Nehru University <i>Populism in India</i> Paul Kenny, ANU <i>The terms of engagement: history, academic and public</i> Meera Ashar, ANU
1.00pm	Lunch

2.00pm	<p>Gender, Development, Environment (part 1)</p> <p>Chair: Philip Taylor, School of Culture, History and Language, ANU</p> <p><i>Governing India with biometrics: The age of service and the future of life</i></p> <p>Lawrence Cohen, University of California Berkeley</p> <p><i>New developments: some big ideas from Delhi's slums</i></p> <p>Annie McCarthy, ANU</p> <p><i>The go-between: interstitial generations and social development in the Indian Himalayas</i></p> <p>Jane Dyson, University of Melbourne</p>
3.30pm	Break
4.00pm	<p>Visual Culture and Ideas from India</p> <p><i>DiverCity: contesting erasures</i></p> <p>Anjali Monteiro and K. P. Jayasankar, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai</p>
5.00pm	Close of sessions, day one
7.00pm	Dinner for Conference Presenters and Chairs, venue TBA

Day 2, Friday 11 November

9.15am **Gender, Development, Environment (part 2)**

Chair: Chris Gregory, CASS, ANU

Gender, development and environment in the context of post-disaster reconstruction: Indian experience and its relevance to developing countries

Thiru Venkatachalam

Santhals and education in Mayurbhanj

Zazie Bowen, ANU

Contesting hydroscales in India's Himalayan river basins

Doug Hill, University of Otago

10.45am Break

11.15am **Language, Literature and Media**

Chair: McComas Taylor, School of Culture, History and Language, ANU

City as news: mediated desire and bhasha media in 'global' Bangalore

Sahana Udupa, Central European University

Global excursions in Hindi

Ian Woolford, La Trobe University

Hindi today: at the crossroads of culture, commercialism, traditions and modernity

Peter Friedlander, ANU

Before and beyond the divide: language, exile, power and partition

Rita Kothari, Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar

1.15pm Lunch

2.15pm: **Plenary Discussion**

Moderator: Assa Doron

3.30pm End of conference

The terms of engagement: history, academic and public

Meera Ashar, ANU

History frequently finds itself a contentious subject of public debate. Deliberations on the past and present, central to the academic discipline of history, are susceptible to politicization. In the present times, history has been serviced by political groups in India to justify and legitimate their own agenda. Historians have either lent their support to or condemned the employment of 'history' to further social and political causes. However, in their conversation with the publics, the terms and categories of deliberation are assumed to be mutually intelligible across the academic and public spheres. This paper seeks to question this assumption. It further asks—in light of the vulnerable and yet critical position of the discipline of history—how academic historians might engage and disengage from the public debates on history in India.

Meera Ashar is a Lecturer at the School of Culture, History and Language at the Australian National University. She is also the Deputy Director of the South Asia Research Institute (SARI) and the Secretary of the South Asian Studies Association of Australia (SASAA). Meera's research interests lie at the intersection of history, political theory and literary studies. Her work addresses questions about identity, self-representation, colonialism and postcolonialism. She is currently completing a manuscript on the controversial nineteenth-century novel, *Saraswatichandra*, and has recently started work on a set of oral folk narratives that were compiled and published as 'children's stories' in the late colonial period. Meera is also working on a collaborative project on broader questions of colonial education that will start with an examination of debates on education in India and Hong Kong and later hopes to include other postcolonial nations. Meera reads and writes in several South Asian languages and in a couple of European ones.

Santhals and education in Mayurbhanj

Zazie Bowen, ANU

India's recent radical education reforms envisage modernization percolating into the hitherto neglected remote rural areas, bringing schools to marginalized communities. Based on fieldwork in a Santhal and Ho dominated rural block in Mayurbhanj District, Odisha, this paper shows that state schools are transformed at the village level. The gaps which persist in resourcing local schools—especially manifest in ongoing government teacher absenteeism—become a consolidating pivot for local communities to fill the gaps. Thus schools are an important site of a range of local social, cultural and political projects expressed in interacting and competing historical and future educational claims, including the generational claims of students.

Zazie Bowen is curious about children's peer play. She approaches play anthropologically as a distinctive cultural expression and as a social performance which reveals ways that young people interact with their local worlds. In rural north Odisha she has explored marginalised rural children's peer play and schooling experiences.

Governing India with biometrics: the age of service and the future of life

Lawrence Cohen, University of California Berkeley

A decade ago the government of India began putting into place a massive program to assign every resident of the country a biometric ID number, linked to a person's digital fingerprint and eye scans. Branded Aadhaar, Hindi for foundation, the program depended on what its engineers termed a concept redefining the distribution of welfare, the granting of micro-credit, and other government and private "service" enabling life today in terms of database management. Databases to remain uncorrupted must continually be "de-duplicated": the challenge for the country's newest technocracy became nothing less than *how to de-duplicate India*. As the project emerged, particular features of its concept began to take on unexpected lives: this talk will focus on a question that came to matter tremendously and attempt to think about why: whether the new "Aadhaar" was an ID card or an ID number, why this came unexpectedly to matter, and what it might teach us about government in the future.

Lawrence Cohen is a cultural anthropologist whose primary field is the critical study of medicine, health, and the body. His book *No Aging in India* is about Alzheimer's disease, the body and the voice in time, and the cultural politics of senility. His two current projects are India Tonite, which examines homoerotic identification and representation in the context of political and market logics in urban north India, and The Other Kidney about the nature of immunosuppression and its accompanying global traffic in organs for transplant. He teaches both in Anthropology and in the Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies at the University of California, Berkeley.

The go-between: intersitial generations and social development in the Indian Himalayas

Jane Dyson, University of Melbourne

Jane Dyson teaches in the School of Geography, University of Melbourne. She has worked for fourteen years in the high Himalayas in India examining gender, work, and social transformation from the perspective of social geography, cultural anthropology and development studies. Jane's doctoral research explored children's everyday work and is presented in her book, *Working Childhoods* (Cambridge University Press, 2014). She continues to work with the same cohort of young people, examining youth politics and social change. Jane recently moved to Australia from the University of Oxford, UK.

Hindi today: at the crossroads of culture, commercialism, traditions and modernity

Peter Friedlander, ANU

The question of what role Hindi should play in contemporary India is highly contested. Some see it as a vehicle for the preservation and continuation of orthodox Indian cultural values. Others value Hindi for the markets it opens up for advertising and commercial marketing of goods and services into wide sectors of India today. Whilst yet others find in Hindi a vehicle through which they can promote heterodox ideas related to the liberation struggles of oppressed minorities and communities in India. Yet in the end all of the different proponents for Hindi also have to engage with the ways in which Hindi is part of the living political process of Indian grassroots politics. I shall draw on contemporary Indian media, national and international conferences and educational debates in the Diaspora to show that even in an era of Anglophone elites Hindi today is still the language that many of the key players speak on the stage of the Indian public sphere.

Dr Peter Friedlander: Senior Lecturer in Hindi-Urdu, College of Asia and the Pacific

Peter learned Hindi whilst living and studying in India from 1977 to 1982. He completed a doctorate at SOAS (London University) in 1991 where he wrote a PhD on the life and works of the medieval Hindi poet-saint Ravidas. He has taught Hindi, Buddhist Studies and Indian history at La Trobe University, the National University of Singapore and the Australian National University. His publications include articles, book chapters and books on issues ranging from Hindi language teaching pedagogy to translations of medieval Hindi works and studies of the role of religion in contemporary Indian society and politics.

Contesting hydroscaapes in India's Himalayan river basins

Doug Hill, University of Otago

This paper considers the discursive construction and material contestation of India's Himalayan river basins at a variety of scales to illustrate how debates on environment and development are being transformed. While transboundary water resources have long been subject to inter-state and intra-state disputes, it is arguable that the contestation over these resources has intensified in the recent period because of the convergence of two distinct but related discourses concerned with development in the Himalayas. On the one hand, discourses of neo-liberalism argue that infrastructure-led economic integration is the most effective and efficient way to link previously

marginalised populations to the fastest growing parts of the Indian economy. On the other hand, hawkish geopolitical discourses securitise Himalayan development by asserting that India's national interest necessitates a firm hand in the country's borderlands to ward off competing claims from India's neighbours. As such, the proposed acceleration of large-scale hydropower as a driver of water and energy security has occurred alongside a closing of dissent, frequently under the guise of national security. In so doing, these neo-liberalised discourses of security tend to elide the realities of how such development actually occurs by omitting critiques of corruption, environmental destruction and forced displacement. Further, the singular focus on water as a resource to be harnessed for national security and economic progress marginalises alternative epistemologies and ontologies that focus greater attention on localised economies and more-than-human natures.

In considering these challenges and what they might portend for the possible futures of environment and development in India, this paper showcases a range of countervailing ideas and movements from within India that seek to open up space for alternative understandings of Himalayan development. As the paper demonstrates, while there is a range of hopeful, multi-scalar movements and alternative imaginaries asserting a different vision of what might constitute just and sustainable development, these are currently operating in tightly constrained spaces that limit their capacity to contest the closures of the current conjuncture.

Dr Doug Hill teaches Development Studies at the Department of Geography, University of Otago, New Zealand. During the period of his employment at Otago, he has also held visiting appointments at institutions in the UK, the Netherlands and Germany. Amongst other projects, for the past decade he has been researching issues associated with South Asia's transboundary water resources. He is also associated with the Water Diplomacy Consortium, which is a group of researchers and practitioners led by a Netherlands-based think tank called The Hague Institute of Global Justice. This group is currently facilitating multi-track stakeholder dialogues concerned with transboundary water resource management in the Brahmaputra basin.

Sanitation and society: garbage, sewage and caste in India

Robin Jeffrey, National University of Singapore

In any attempt to create a *Swachh Bharat* (or write a book about sanitation in India), one must confront the beliefs and practices associated with caste. This presentation compares the stigma attached to the people who remove waste in India and elsewhere, today and in the past; describes the extent to which cleaning India depends on Dalit workers; and suggests what conditions will be necessary to bring about change.

Robin Jeffrey is Visiting Research Professor at the Institute of South Asia Studies and Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore. His research interests cover India and South Asia, particularly the regions of Punjab and Kerala and the politics of media, development and pluralism. His most recent book, with his colleague Assa Doron, is *The Great Indian Phone Book* (London: C. Hurst/New York: Harvard University Press, 2013). This book is published in India by Hachette under the title of *Cell Phone Nation*. A third edition of *India's Newspaper Revolution* was published in 2010. He is currently completing a book on waste in India with Assa Doron.

The history that wasn't: interrogating modern labels for an ancient Sanskrit text

Shonaleeka Kaul, Jawaharlal Nehru University

My paper scrutinizes the modern reinvention of an iconic Sanskrit text, Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*, a sprawling, versified account of the kings of Kashmir composed in the 12th century CE. Though traditional Sanskrit poetry (*mahakavya*), replete with the aesthetic form, conventions and concerns of its literary genre, its translation and exegesis at the hands of European Orientalists in the 19th century followed by Indian historians in the 20th century resulted in a suppression of the *Rajatarangini*'s poetic and figurative qualities and its interpretive rebirth as a work of objectivist history – the first and only work of history, in fact, we are told, to have been produced in all of ancient India. This labeling has had lasting but flawed results. My paper traces the transformation the *Rajatarangini* underwent

and the intellectual and political conditions in which this occurred. It centrally critiques the many epistemic contradictions this introduced in the modern understanding of the ancient text. In the process it engages with the discipline of history in non-western societies as a colonial project of coevality – whether in its denial or affirmation – predicated on positivist valorizations and concomitant devaluation of traditional modes and devices of history writing such as myth, rhetoric and didacticism.

Shonaleeka Kaul is a cultural historian of early South Asia specializing in working with Sanskrit texts, with a primary interest in literary representations of space. She is Associate Professor at the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University where she teaches ancient Indian history to post graduates and supervises MPhil and PhD research. She is the editor of an international anthology on questions of cultural consumption in antiquity: *Cultural History of Early South Asia: A Reader* (New Delhi, 2014) and is the author of *Imagining the Urban: Sanskrit and the City in Early India* (Delhi, 2010; New York, 2011). She is currently working on a monograph on landscape and identity in early Kashmir.

Populism in India

Paul Kenny, ANU

This paper assesses the use of populism as a political strategy at the national level in India. Populist movements as distinctively *personalist* and *illiberal*. They are personalist in the sense that leaders have a high level of control over party affairs and establish direct ties with voters through mass media. They are also illiberal in that they oppose pluralistic practices and institutions. Both the Congress Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party have embraced populist strategies.

Paul Kenny is research fellow of political and social change at the Australian National University. Paul obtained his PhD in political science at Yale University and has taught at ANU since 2013. He was previously assistant professor of political science at Trinity College Dublin. His current research examines the causes and consequences of populism, xenophobia, and ethnocentrism. His first book, *Populism and Patronage: Why Populists Win Elections in India, Asia, and Beyond* is forthcoming with Oxford University Press.

Before and beyond the divide: language, exile, power and partition

Rita Kothari, Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar

In very valuable scholarship Francesca Orsini (*Before the Divide: Hindi and Urdu Literary Culture*, New Delhi : Orient Blackswan, 2011) looks at how the perceived and performed separateness of 'Urdu' and 'Hindi' falsify the pre-colonial multilingual cultures of North India. This paper subscribes to that argument and shifts the landscape as well as the questions slightly to different languages and times. It begins with the moment of Partition, only to help us interrogate the fallacy in thinking of languages as territories. At the same time, forms of nationalism and displacement around the historical marker of Partition do form one of the contexts contributing to linguistic ruptures. Languages can become divisive through exclusion of not only what people say, but how they say things. For instance, the English language results in a far more divisive politics of class than any language in South Asia. At the same time, it is also the most common site of consensus and desire. The borders of language mobilize syntax and vocabulary to align with particularities of caste, community, religion and nation. Apart from complicating "language" in the context of territorial division, I also wish to provide experiences of languages, who like people, undergo exile and minoritization, divestment of purpose and legitimacy, and polarization of history. Some, like entrepreneurs during wars, gather importance. Partition, or rather the specific forms of nationalisms in India and Pakistan, had both effects.

Rita Kothari is currently with the Humanities and Social Sciences Department at the Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar, where she teaches courses on History of India Through Cinema, Indian Literature, Culture Studies and Translation. She is the author of *Translating India: The Cultural Politics of English* (St Jerome Publishing, 2003; rev. ed. New Delhi, 2006), *The Burden of Refuge: Sindh, Gujarat, Partition* (New Delhi, 2009) and *Memories and Movements: Borders and Communities*

in *Banni, Kutch* (New Delhi, 2013). She edited with Judy Wakabayashi *Decentering Translation Studies: India and Beyond* (John Benjamins, 2009) and with Rupert Snell, *Chutnefying English: The Phenomenon of Hinglish* (New Delhi, 2011). She translates works of poetry and fiction from Gujarati.

New developments: some big ideas from Delhi's slums

Annie McCarthy, ANU

Figuratively and literally marginalised children have long been the 'poster child' of development programs and initiatives globally. In India, divided further into categories such as stunted child, slum child, child bride, child labourer, child beggar, street child, these children are increasingly the targets of development programs which aim to restore them to a state of proper childhood through the removal of the qualifier, slum, stunted, bride, beggar, et cetera. Yet in the increasingly NGO saturated urban centres of India, new kinds of NGOs are emerging that approach development in new and different ways. Whether it is through sport, music, dance or acting these organisations, which I have termed extra-curricular NGOs reconceptualise the meanings and temporalities associated with development by creating performative contexts in which children can exceed the limitations associated with the development categories in which they find themselves. Yet, these organisations who provide only discursive development assistance, and thus distribute development messages rather than any material or economic assistance largely fail to address the very categories of slum, bride, stunted, etc. that have initiated their engagement with these children in the first place. In this paper I will foreground the views of the child participants in these programs, drawn from my own fieldwork with slum children in Delhi, to explore what these programs mean both for children and for development.

Annie McCarthy is a recently completed PhD student in Anthropology at the ANU. Her doctoral research explored the way slum children in Delhi navigate development spaces. Foregrounding children's creative activities in these spaces, she explores the way children engaged, opportunistically drew upon, disrupted and reshaped a range of development narratives, from anti-child marriage to handwashing promotion campaigns. More broadly she is interested in the way marginalised children negotiate and challenge institutions that seek to preserve, foster or establish 'childhood': from missionary efforts to 'save' girls sold into temple prostitution in early 20th century south India, to slum children playfully engaging development programs that offer them the chance to 'star' in films or sport-teams.

Mother India (Bharat Mata) and her unruly daughters

Nivedita Menon, Jawaharlal Nehru University

Bharat Mata ki beti is a contradiction in terms, for the Motherland produces only sons - Hindu savarna sons - to protect their mother's ever fragile honour. Who are the daughters, especially the unruly daughters? In this lecture I will explore potential and actual resistances to the Hindu nationalist project (Hindutva), that arise from within the folds of the heterogeneous practices that have come to be called Hinduism

Nivedita Menon, Professor at Centre for Comparative Politics and Political Theory, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, is the author of *Seeing like a Feminist* (2012). Apart from research papers in Indian and international journals, her previous books are *Recovering Subversion: Feminist Politics Beyond the Law* (2004); and a book co-written with Aditya Nigam *Power and Contestation: India after 1989* (2007). She also has two edited volumes *Gender and Politics in India* (1999) and *Sexualities* (2007); and a book co-edited with Aditya Nigam and Sanjay Palshikar *Critical Studies in Politics. Exploring Sites, Selves, Power* (2013). She is a regular commentator on contemporary issues on the collective blog **kafila.online** (of which she is one of the founders), and active in democratic politics in India. She also has translated fiction and non-fiction from Hindi and Malayalam into English, and from Malayalam into Hindi, and received the AK Ramanujan Award for translation instituted by Katha.

DiverCity: contesting erasures

Anjali Monteiro and K. P. Jayasankar, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai

The construction of the Bombay/Mumbai as a world-class city rests on a series of erasures and expulsions. This politics of forgetting, from the rewriting of events like the 1992 violence to the reconfiguring of spaces such as the mill areas of Girangaon, requires the deployment of history and geography in the service of a homogenized, sanitised imagination of the city. This imagination of the city also pathologises the spaces of informal housing and work, ignoring the histories of the communities that inhabit these spaces and their contribution to the city. The DiverCity Web Archive attempts to counter this forgetting. It seeks to generate and draw on a range of resources—print, audio, visual and documentary—to remember, explore, and evoke alternative experiences and narratives of the city. The archive presently has three sub-archives: Remembering 1992 (<http://mumbairiots.tiss.edu>), Mill Mumbai (<http://millmumbai.tiss.edu>) and Castemopolitan Mumbai (<http://castemumbai.tiss.edu>). Focusing primarily on the 1992 Memory sub-archive, this paper will reflect on the possibilities of such web-based archives, created through collaborative creative and research work. We will discuss the process of creating this web-based archive with young citizen students, attempting to exploring the significance of such oral history initiatives, in a context where forgetting has meant the denial of justice. These erasures are related to dominant flows of power that seek to rewrite the past in keeping with the expediciencies of the present. The paper will be illustrated with material from the film series *Remembering 1992* and the website.

Anjali Monteiro and K.P. Jayasankar are Professors at the School of Media and Cultural Studies (www.smcs.tiss.edu), Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. Their documentary films, which have been screened across the world, have won 32 national and international awards. Their most recent award is the Basil Wright Prize for So Heddan So Hodda at the 13th RAI International Festival of Ethnographic Film 2013. Their most recent publication is *A Fly in the Curry: Independent Documentary Film in India*, Sage 2016.

How do transnational conflicts in Southwest Asia impact the Indian state's attitude and behaviour towards its minority Muslim citizenry?

Nishank Motwani, ANU

Although there is a well-known body of literature investigating the tensions between Hindu nationalism, democracy and secularism, as well as the relationship between domestic identity politics and foreign policy, my research examines the spillover effects of protracted transnational conflicts on India's domestic political landscape. I study how regional conflicts affect the promotion of democratic principles and governance in India towards religious minorities, specifically Indian Muslims. I argue that it is critical to understand these linkages because they risk sharpening communal divides to the detriment of India's security and stability. Three areas deserve particular attention even though the spillover effects of regional conflicts are complex and intertwine with enduring internal problems: (1) elite perceptions and institutional practices, (2) the state's real or perceived security concerns, and (3) the mechanisms, whether direct or indirect, used to marginalise this community. By examining the influence of regional conflicts on India's constitutional and moral responsibilities, scholars and policymakers will be better able to propose strategies to address the issue and take remedial action.

Dr Nishank Motwani is a Visiting Fellow in the Asia-Pacific College of Diplomacy at The Australian National University, and a Consulting Researcher for armed conflict at the International Institute for Strategic Studies. He holds a PhD from the University of New South Wales, and Masters degrees in Diplomatic Studies and Strategic Affairs from The Australian National University. He completed a Bachelor of Science in Economics from Northeastern University, Boston. His research examines transnational conflicts, international and regional cooperation, nuclear strategy, and the spillover effects of external conflicts into domestic politics. He is currently completing a manuscript that analyses the regional dynamics of the conflict in Afghanistan and how they affect the ongoing conflict.

City as news: mediated desire and bhasha media in 'global' Bangalore

Sahana Udupa, Central European University

Based on multiyear ethnographic fieldwork in Bangalore, the famed 'IT capital of India', this talk demonstrates how the changes in the news industry in the years of economic reforms led to an emphatic urbanization of the news discourse. This shift could be best conceptualized as 'mediated desire' – a conflated discourse around consumption, civic activism, cultural mobility, physical fitness, fashion and beauty. Bangalore's news cultures reveal the striking appeal of 'mediated desire' as the cultural sensibility of 'New India', which nonetheless confronts multiple cultural logics entrenching the news field – what I grasp as the ethos and practice of the 'bhasha' media. What is 'bhasha', and how does it relate with 'mediated desire'? To explore this question is one way to unravel media transformation as a constitutive strand of global urbanization in the last two decades.

Sahana Udupa researches digital media politics, news cultures, urbanization and religion, with ethnographic fieldwork in India and among the Indian diaspora in Europe. She is Associate Professor of Journalism and Media Studies at the Central European University, Budapest, and Senior Research Partner at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Germany. She is the author of *Making News in Global India: Media, Publics, Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). Her work is published in *American Ethnologist*, *New Media and Society*, *Media, Culture and Society*, *Critique of Anthropology*, *Communication, Culture and Critique* and other journals. 'Media as Politics in South Asia.' A co-edited volume with S.McDowell, is forthcoming with Routledge (London). She is the recipient of the European Research Council Starting Grant award (2016).

Gender, development and environment in the context of post-disaster reconstruction: Indian experience and its relevance to developing countries

Thiru Venkatachalam

Post-disaster reconstruction is a challenging process. Disasters often provide windows of opportunity for building back better. The "Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030" identifies "Building Back Better" as one of the four priority areas of action. Building back better implies ushering in sustainable development incorporating gender equity, long-term risk reduction, and preventing future disasters. The opportunities for betterment reconstruction have been used with considerable success in several post-disaster reconstruction programs to address persistent social challenges, going beyond economic and infrastructure development. This paper will discuss some issues related to gender, development and environment from the Indian experience in post-disaster reconstruction programs. The lessons from India could be relevant to developing countries in general and South-Asia in particular.

Dr V.Thiruppugazh is a senior officer of the Indian Administrative Service of the rank of Joint-Secretary to Government of India. After joining the Civil Service in 1991, he served in various district assignments before he was posted as Joint Chief Executive Officer of the Gujarat State Disaster Management Authority (GSDMA). In addition to his contribution in Gujarat earthquake reconstruction as Joint CEO, Additional CEO and CEO of GSDMA, he also served as the Commissioner of Information, Commissioner and Secretary Rural Development Department, Director General of Mahatma Gandhi Labor Institute, Director General of Gujarat Institute of Disaster Management in Government of Gujarat, and Advisor, National Disaster Management Authority, India. He received his PhD from the Australian National University. Currently he is serving as Senior Advisor, National Reconstruction Authority, Nepal.

India: the tyranny of comparisons

Michael Wesley, ANU

All countries are unique, and India no less than any other. And yet India's history and sense of itself has been shaped by a long history of comparisons. During the colonial era, India was placed in comparison with an ascendant Europe, and took part in the invidious process of comparison among

colonized societies. Such comparisons also brought inspiration to its anti-colonial struggle; and India itself became a source of inspiration to others. In shaping an independent India, Nehru relied heavily on comparisons and analogies even as he tried to forge something unique. More recently, it has been geoeconomic comparisons that have shaped India's trajectory. The inevitable comparison has been China; and an evolving list of similarities and differences between the two Asian giants has begun to determine how most countries engage with India – and how India chooses to engage with them. This paper will trace the history of comparisons on India's sense of self and statecraft and ask the question, will India ever be able to escape the tyranny of comparisons?

Michael Wesley is Professor of International Affairs and Dean of the College of Asia and the Pacific at the Australian National University. He has published on Australian foreign policy, Asia's international relations and strategic affairs, and the Politics of state-building interventions. His book, *There Goes the Neighbourhood: Australia and the Rise of Asia* (2011), was awarded the John Button Prize for the best writing on Australian politics and public policy. Previously, Professor Wesley was the Director of the Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs at ANU from 2014 to 2016, the Executive Director of the Lowy Institute for International Policy from 2009 to 2012.

Global excursions in Hindi

Ian Woolford, La Trobe University

On September 26th, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj addressed the United Nations General Assembly. She discussed the recent terror attacks in Kashmir and responded to comments made by Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who spoke in the same venue five days earlier. Sharif spoke in English; Swaraj, in Hindi. This led to discussions about language: from pride at hearing Swaraj's thoughts expressed in Hindi, to questions over the place of Hindi in India and the world. Historian Ramachandra Guha, on Twitter, suggested that Swaraj made a "strategic mistake" by speaking in Hindi, because she was favoring the "Aaj Tak" crowd over the international listeners that should have been her primary audience. With an eye to troubling overlaps of English privilege and Hindi chauvinism, this paper surveys recent intellectual activity in Hindi, with the hope of encouraging a discussion of the global place of Hindi and other Indian languages. The examples include Shubham Shree's imagined poetic world, in which Pakistan and India fight not over Kashmir, but over their shared literary history; a satirical Indian love song, written by comedians, which received a sung response from a Pakistani army officer; and the recent writers' protests that began when Hindi author Uday Prakash returned his Sahitya Akademi Award after fellow award recipient M.M. Kalburgi was killed on his doorstep.

Ian Woolford is lecturer in Hindi language and literature at La Trobe University, in Melbourne. He has previously taught at Cornell University, Syracuse University, and the University of Texas at Austin, where he received his Ph.D. He is currently writing about the life and literature of Hindi author Phanishwarnath Renu, including analysis of the 21st-century song traditions of his village in northeast Bihar.



The South Asia Research Institute is based in the College of Asia and the Pacific at the Australian National University. Our aim is to support research on South Asia and promote links and collaborative projects focussing on the countries of South Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka). SARI is committed to advancing an interdisciplinary approach across the social sciences, and in particular, in the fields of history, culture and society of the region.

The aim of SARI is to bring together on a common platform people with expertise in South Asia across diverse disciplinary background at the ANU. These include anthropology, linguistics, cultural studies, human geography, comparative literature, economics, political science, international relations, development studies, history, Sanskrit and Hindi.

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