

**SOUTH ASIAN LITERARY ASSOCIATION  
2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

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**Collective Currents in South Asian Collaborations  
March 27-28, 2026  
(Executive Committee Meeting on Mar. 26, 2026)  
Hilton Charlotte University Place  
8629 J M Keynes Dr.  
Charlotte, North Carolina 28262**

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**Conference Co-Chairs:** Aniruddha Mukhopadhyay, Texas A&M University-Kingsville  
Jana Fedtke, NYU Shanghai

**THURSDAY, MARCH 26, 2026**

**7:30-9:00 PM: SALA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING**

**DAY 1: FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 2026**

**8:00 AM-4:00 PM: REGISTRATION**

**12:45-1:15 PM: SALA WELCOME ADDRESS**

- Maryse Jayasuriya, SALA President
- Statement from Conference Co-chairs

**SESSION 1: 1:30-2:45 PM**

**1A: Collaborations from Around the World**

Room:

Chair: Madhurima Chakraborty, Columbia College Chicago

- Manling Xu, Peking University, "The Changing Logic of Collaboration: Ritual Logistics to Collective Memory in Nepal's Dashain Festival"

**Abstract:** This paper examines the transformation of the cooperative models that sustain Dashain, Nepal's largest festival. Traditionally, the festival's operation has relied on the Guthi system: a hereditary, patriarchal network sustained by land endowments. In the contemporary era, however, this traditional network is struggling to fulfill its ritual obligations due to economic disempowerment and youth outmigration. Consequently, new actors are emerging as "ritual specialists," most notably youth associations, to fill the void. The core argument of this study is that the traditional cooperative model, based on an ascriptive, hereditary "sociality," is being challenged and supplemented by a new model rooted in modern values and based on voluntary "association" derived from self-

identification. This transformation is analyzed through two key arenas of negotiation. The first is the power dynamics between the traditional Guthi and the emergent youth associations, focusing on how the former cedes authority while the latter establishes its own legitimacy and reframes collective memory. The second arena is a new form of transnational cooperation driven by female migration. This analysis investigates how the shift in women's roles, from local laborers in ritual practice to diasporic contributors of capital via remittances reconfigures the festival's economic model and, in turn, impacts its core symbolic meaning. Ultimately, this paper contends that the transformation in ritual logistics is, at its core, a struggle for narrative control over collective memory. By reconfiguring the narratives of collective cooperation, the very terms of community membership, its qualifications, rights, and obligations, are redefined, thereby achieving a renewal of cultural identity at a practical level. The choice of how to act together is the choice of who to be together.

- Madhurima Chakraborty, Columbia College Chicago, "Indians Vs. Asians: Performances of Rivalry and Acts of Collaboration by Hasan Minhaj and Ronny Chieng"  
**Abstract:** In the Fall of 2025, comedians Hasan Minhaj and Ronny Chieng toured 19 cities with their stand-up set called "Ronny Hates Hasan / Hasan Hates Ronny." The conceit of the show was that these two comedians were going to address each other about the other's shortcomings on stage; in doing so, they concretized for the audience in a live and synchronous format the dramatic rivalry that the two have been performing in various public venues, most often around which of them best occupies and owns the category of Asian American. This performance allowed Minhaj and Chieng to engage in an ostensibly competitive but ultimately collaborative project of delineating East Asian (American) and South Asian (American) identity. Given that the melodramatic conceit of Asian rivalry between Chieng and Minhaj hinged, for the most part, on alternated casting and parrying of stereotypes, this two-pronged assertion of difference between two Asian American comedians embodied for the audience the tensions inherent in such a broad demographic. In my essay, I argue that this show provides audiences a theoretical and critical analysis of how South Asian transculturation within contact zones happens not just between dominant and marginalized cultures but also between South Asian and other minoritized communities. It forces a reimagining, among other things, of South Asian American cultural identity by measuring the social, political, and cultural capital of South Asian immigrants not with white America, but in juxtaposition to other forms of Asian Americanness. Minhaj and Chieng leverage the possibilities inherent in comedy "the opportunities provided by exaggerated and ironic competition for an identity that they have received rather than built" to engage in a model of collaborative reconstruction of authentic immigrant lives.
- Jeffrey Cass, Arkansas Tech University, "An Unwillingness to Collaborate: Trump's Neo-Orientalism and Its Origins in Raspail's *The Camp of the Saints*"  
**Abstract:** In 1998, Jean Raspail, redoubtable opponent of immigration to France, staged an invasion of an uninhabited island, Les Minquiers, in the English Channel from a fictitious Patagonia. Mocking British colonialism, notably of the Falklands and of their dubious war there, Raspail repeatedly imagined in his work the problematic nature of immigration from a far more populated East, which he apocalyptically imagined overrunning the West, notably in France, and essentially obliterates the West as a distinct . But it is in "The Camp

of the Saints" where he unmistakably represents his racial fears in his rendering of potential South Asian immigration and the millions of potential "Indians" whom he envisions taking over and diluting the West's racial purity and its long history of cultural and political achievements. The plot in the novel consists of a large armada of boats, which contain millions of Indians who collectively plan to reach the "promised lands" of the West, first landing in France and from there, the rest of the West. In one particularly shocking moment, a professor of French Literature, who recognizes that the Indians' arrival means the probable end of his time in his family's ancestral estates, shoots a student who believes that the bourgeois tyranny of the professor should and will come to an end. Most importantly, in the novel the Indians refuse to even meet or take assistance from "liberal" organization that are trying to stave off death and starvation among the "Last Armadans," whose mass of people unthinkingly throw dead bodies off the boats and engage in large orgies, which Raspail clearly intends as a means to inflame his reading public. While critically dismissed in 1973, the novel has become a staple of Far Right thinking, particularly in the United States, and through policy proponents like Stephen Miller and Stephen Bannon, an integral piece of "the Great Replacement Theory" that has driven Trump's Neo-Orientalism, which, while primarily Islamophobic, has bled, in typical Orientalist fashion, to representations of other countries and cultures that are "Other" to the whiteness he craves in American culture. This essay explores, therefore, the ways in which Raspail's novel undergirds the philosophy that now drives anti-immigration policy in the United States, France, and other countries whose Far Right parties engage in nativist, Orientalist thinking.

### **1B: Solidarities of Resistance**

Room:

Chair: John Hawley, Santa Clara University

- Srikanth Mallavarapu, Roanoke College, "On Ideology, Literature, and the possibility of Solidarity in Gautam Bhatia's *The Wall*"  
**Abstract:** Legal scholar Gautam Bhatia examines how ideology and language make certain constraints seem natural in the world that he creates in his first speculative fiction novel, *The Wall*. The city of Sumer is enclosed by a very high wall and nobody in the city knows what exists outside. Except for water, there is scarcity of other resources. The novel introduces us to a group of characters who want to make their way outside this constraining wall. In interviews, Bhatia has spoken of the influence of Ursula Le Guin on his work and the role that art can play in imagining a world outside of capitalism. In an interview with Udit Bhatia and Bruno Leipold, Bhatia refers to Jean-Claude Juncker (President of the European Commission) suggesting that while countries could vote about smaller issues, there was no option for any member of the EU to vote against neoliberalism. This inspired a character in the novel who points out that while the inhabitants of Sumer might be able to have a say in small decisions, there is no option for voting against the wall. In this paper, I examine how Bhatia draws upon his interest in exploring how ideology and power operates in the legal context as he creates this fictional world, paying particular attention to language and the concept of "smara," which Bhatia describes as "the yearning for a world without the wall...To be able to see a world in which there is a horizon." What does it mean to resist? What is the role played by imagination and language? This paper

examines what this novel has to offer us in terms of reconceptualizing solidarity and collaboration in a world shaped by the rhetoric of austerity and neoliberalism.

- Pennie Ticen, Virginia Military Institute, “Navigating Moments of Violent Religious and National Eruption: The Anonymous Witness-Narrator in Gitanjali Shree’s *Our City That Year*”

**Abstract:** The success of the collaboration between novelist Gitanjali Shree and translator Daisy Rockwell on their translation of “Tomb of Sand” from Hindi to English led to the pair winning the 2022 International Booker Prize. The novel’s success brought welcome attention to the role of translation in the contemporary production of fiction, as well as marking “the American debut of an extraordinary writer” as trumpeted by Harper Collins. In 2024, translation scholar Dongwon Lee asserted that “Tomb of Sand’s” success “exemplifies the transformative power of translation,” as well as praising Shree’s ability to create “a rhythmic symphony that resonates with readers, captivating their senses” (Lee 23, 12). The success of Shree’s and Rockwell’s translation/collaboration facilitated the 2024 publication of “Our City That Year.” Loosely based on the communal and mob violence which led to the 1992 demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, the novel, with an anonymous narrator who asserts “I was incapable of gathering all the bits and pieces to create the true picture....I just had to copy”, (3) has had a more muted reception. In her introduction to “Our City,” Shree notes “the witness-narrator...[was] recording, even if not understanding” (v). In my presentation, I will analyze how the position of witness/reporter, while reflecting a theory of translation studies which highlights the role of reportage within translation (Lange, Monticelli, and Rundle, 2024), also widens the divide faced by readers caught between the aesthetic pleasure of “a rhythmic symphony” and the harsh, bewildering work of “picking up fragments...to search for fitting links.” I propose an engagement with post-colonial theories delineated by Clifford (1997) and Ashcroft (2024) which can offer readers routes for engaging with literature focused on cultural history at moments of violent religious and national eruption.

- Subrata Chandra Mozumder, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, “Transnational Feminist Solidarity and Resistance in the Poetry of Tarfia Faizullah and Fatimah Asghar”

**Abstract:** Tarfia Faizullah, born in Brooklyn, New York and raised in West Texas, is a prolific American poet. She authors two poetry collections, *Seam* (2014) and *Registers of Illuminated Villages* (2018). Her poetry addresses a wide range of subjects, including gender, identity, cultural conflict, memory, trauma, pain, loss, and displacement in diasporic and transnational contexts. In her poetry, Faizullah deals with diverse personal, political, social, cultural, national, transnational, and diasporic subjects, prompting the readers to explore her identities she continuously creates and recreates by negotiating with culture, memory, trauma, love, loss, and gender. Like Tarfia Faizullah, Pakistani-Kashmiri born American poet, educator, screenwriter, performer, and co-director of Emmy-nominated web series, *Brown Girls*, Fatimah Asghar navigates memory, trauma, gender, and identity in her poetry. However, whereas Faizullah’s memory and trauma related to the War of Independence in Bangladesh, Asghar’s ones emerge from the Partition of 1947 mostly. The poems in her debut collection, *If They Come for Us*, lead us toward a plethora of themes, ranging from the partition of British India to personal and collective memory, intergenerational trauma, gender identity, and the position of women within

South Asian diasporic contexts. Informed by Kimberley Crenshaw's concept of "Intersectionality" and Chandra Talpade Mohanty's idea of "Feminism without Borders," in this paper, I tend to argue that the representation of the themes of memory, trauma, identity, and gender in the *Registers of Illuminated Villages* by Faizullah and *If They Come for Us* by Asghar is a means of exposing transnational feminist solidarity and resistance.

- John Hawley, Santa Clara University, "Literature, Empathy, and Class Warfare: Aravind Adiga's *Last Man in Tower* and *Amnesty*"  
**Abstract:** Booker-Prize winning author Aravind Adiga (*White Tiger*, 2008) continues his analysis of social antagonisms in *Last Man in Tower* (2011), about an individual in Mumbai resisting the purchase of his home by a development company, and *Amnesty* (2020), about a Sri Lankan immigrant in Sydney denied refugee status and therefore living in the shadows. Arguably, the collaboration in the former is negative, a coercive force against the protagonist led by the other occupants who envision easy wealth. In *Amnesty*, collaboration is the unspoken thematic undercurrent that is resisted by the protagonist's society. The former deals with the individual versus society; materialism and moral ambiguity; class and community; and survival and identity. *Amnesty* deals with immigration and belonging; racism and xenophobia; moral dilemma and responsibility; and isolation and fragmented community. Both deal with the necessity for social collaboration, and both the possibility and limits of collaboration. Efforts built on inclusive solidarity, ethical action, and grassroots participation offer real pathways to address Adiga's themes of isolation, injustice and moral decay, moving his fiction dilemmas into implied practical transformations (like those attempted in major government-led initiatives (Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana—National Urban Livelihoods Mission; Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana; Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation; and slum improvement projects), and community-led and grassroots efforts (community development funds; skill development and livelihood programs; women's empowerment programs, and social enterprises such as Pollinators), as well as public-private partnerships and innovations (smart city initiatives; corporate social responsibility projects). Adiga's lesson is not that collaboration is utopian, but that its absence has real, damaging consequences for the vulnerable and marginalized, as well as for the souls of the upper classes.

## **2:45-3:00 PM: BEVERAGE BREAK**

## **SESSION 2: 3:00-4:15 PM**

### **2A SALA-CEA Professionalization Panel: Graduate Students and Early Career Professionals**

Room:

Chair: Moumin Quazi, Tarleton State University

Aniruddha Mukhopadhyay, Texas A&M University-Kingsville

Panelists: Maryse Jayasuriya, Saint Louis University

Cynthia Leenerts, East Stroudsburg University

Stacia Neeley Campbell, Texas Wesleyan University

Laura Petersen, Our Lady of the Lake University

In this professionalization session geared for graduate students and early career-professionals, each speaker will address a specific aspect of our professional careers. Following the mini-talks, the session will enjoy a robust 30-45 minutes for Q&A. After an introduction by Aniruddha Mukhopadhyay, will address the importance of working professionally and collegially with faculty, staff, and students to build a long career and foster the long-term health of one's department. Next, Maryse Jayasuriya will discuss strategies and best practices to keep in mind when submitting research to peer-reviewed academic journals such as *South Asian Review*. Then, Cynthia Leenerts will address leadership, with its roots in service, in professional organizations as a process of growth. Up next, Stacia Neeley Campbell will share strategies for increasing faculty morale through collaborative grant writing, strategic planning with like-spirited colleagues who become friends, and supplemental funding. She will also address grant leadership as a way to offer additional funding, engagement in service, and professional skills to students. Examples will be provided from four different types of grants. Then, Laura Petersen reframes service not as a duty, but as the strategic "third leg" of the faculty stool, demonstrating practical strategies for integrating university and community engagement to create powerful alignment, enhance scholarship, and ultimately build a successful, holistic professional profile. Wrapping things up before the Q&A, Moumin Quazi will focus on the importance of building a support system, enlisting a mentor, and listening to advice. As the old saying goes, "You only get one chance to make a first impression," but no one tells you that the "first impression" lasts several years.

## **2B: Cinematic Collaborations**

Room:

Chair: Nidhi Shrivastava, Sacred Heart University

- Ankita Rathour, Georgia Tech, and Jason Christian, Kennesaw State University, "Radical Education and Revolutionary Praxis through Cinema"

**Abstract:** We discuss the anti-imperialist collaborative potential of cinema through a case study of the radical film collective called Resistance Cinema in Atlanta, US. In June 2024, we formed Resistance Cinema—hosting free monthly screenings of radical films as a para-academic resistance practice to educate people outside of the academy about anti-imperialist struggles around the world. After each screening, attendees circle up and discuss the film of the night and how its themes or lessons apply to our current moment, with particular emphasis on praxis and how to strengthen activism locally. The collective derives inspiration from Third Cinema scholarship, and, in part, from the Senegalese film director Ousmane Sembène, who, used his films to not only critique Western colonialism, but to turn a critical gaze on the Senegalese post-colonial ruling class. Those latter films were banned, and so, Sembène drove around the countryside and set up free screenings in back rooms and houses for the largely illiterate peasants and workers— calling these screenings "night school." Such a revolutionary praxis has also existed in India and elsewhere. The goal was to teach radical ideas, foster conversation, build community and solidarity, and use these encounters as a springboard for further action. While the situation in the US is different from Sembène's Senegal, Resistance Cinema considers this approach to activism universal. To date, the collective has shown narrative scripted films *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) and *Salt of the Earth* (1954), three films about Palestine, a film about Patrice Lumumba, films from South Asia, films about the Black liberation struggles in the 1960s and 1970s, to name a few. The Cop City event served as both a teach-in and

strategizing session for how to advance the movement's objectives. This presentation speaks from experience and outlines the successes and challenges of Resistance Cinema, as both a radical education project and revolutionary praxis. While the project is not unique, we argue that it serves as a model for others to replicate in our current era.

- Md Hasan Ashik Rahman, Binghamton University, SUNY, "Transnational Film Adaptations as Collaborations: The Case of Ritwik's *A River Called Titas*"  
**Abstract:** Transnational films are often able to look at the local issues from a broader geopolitical perspective. Such renderings may challenge the local nationalist ethos and ask for a rethinking of its dominant statist imagination. When such films are also adaptations of any local texts, we get an 'anchor' to study the adapted films' areas of emphasis. Ritwik Kumar Ghatak's *Titas Ekti Nodir Naam (A River Called Titash)* (1973), a close adaptation of Adwaita Mallabarman's novel with the same title, can be a case in point, with its appeal of being an epic narrative of Bengali traditional life. Ghatak's adaptation, taking place within 2 years of the emergence of the Bangladesh state, remains unmarked by its contemporary events—a rare case considering Ritwik's oeuvre. It avoids any reference to its contemporary time, and the idea of any modern state remains quite absent in the film. Thus, by attempting to represent an "eternal Bengal" and by highlighting the consistent struggle of the marginal people, Ghatak seems to be critical of the effectiveness of different top-down political changes in postcolonial South Asia. Such transnational adaptations provide a criticism of the post-colonial state formations and instigate reconsideration of the border between independence and neo-colonialism. Instead of imagining nationalism based on cultural affinities, they seem to advocate a transnational solidarity based on economic emancipation.
- Swati Gilotra, University of Georgia, "Reborn and reformed race, filling the void: Overcoming the Self through dialogue and collaboration with the Other in Mira Nair's *Mississippi Masala*"  
**Abstract:** South Asian cultures and identities rely on vulnerability, self-doubt, identity crises, hybridity, and intersectionality, especially when living in multiethnic American communities. The boundaries of race become less clear when interactions and collaborations with other racial groups create opportunities for self-discovery, leading to the development of a new identity. Considering the potential for collaboration among different racial groups in America, this paper analyzes the 1991 film *Mississippi Masala*, directed by Mira Nair, where South Asian identity is redefined and reshaped through dialogue and collaboration with Black identity. This movie illustrates how new solidarities within America create new identities that allow individuals to understand themselves through dialogue, interaction, and collaboration with others. Instead of viewing race as fixed categories, *Mississippi Masala* challenges the rigidity of these concepts and embraces the idea that other identities are part of the self. Therefore, identity is constantly recreated, often overlapping with other racial categories, resulting in a continuous flux of change, confusion, and both appropriation and (mis)appropriation. The film raises questions about what society and individuals do when geography or location no longer defines belonging solely. The identity formed in such contexts becomes precarious, where interaction with others becomes the primary means of truly understanding the self. The paper will demonstrate how the interaction between South Asian diasporic identities and Black

identities in America highlights the fragility of racial boundaries, where each learns from the other, identities become interchangeable, and commonalities emerge across categories to reveal shared histories and identities. The reborn or reformed identity of the new age interracial couple ultimately becomes a hybrid, intersectional traveling pair whose "home" is not limited to one place but instead consists of infinite possibilities. This film, therefore, creates space for collaborative dialogue with others as a response to the rigid confines of race and identity.

- Zahin Zaima, Saint Louis University, "Desi Man in Mira Nair's *The Namesake* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*"

**Abstract:** Hollywood's long and troubled relationship with race has shaped the representational possibilities available to South Asian characters for more than a century. Early cinematic portrayals which routinely casted South Asian men as impoverished tricksters, mystical sages, or treacherous colonial subjects were central to Hollywood's racial imaginary. Comedic brownface performances such as the loyal servant Gunga Din in *Gunga Din* (1939), the mysterious snake charmer Hadji Singh in *Jonny Quest* (1964), and Hrundi Bakshi in *The Party* (1968) entrenched such "weird Desi man" stereotype, rendering cultural difference as comedic relief and cementing South Asian men as perpetual outsiders. These representational patterns persisted well into the 21st century through characters like Apu (*The Simpsons*) and Raj (*The Big Bang Theory*), whose exaggerated awkwardness reaffirmed Orientalist distinctions between the American norm and the exotic Other. I argue that the increasing presence of South Asians within U.S. media has generated counter-narratives that challenge these reductive constructions. Through close readings of Mira Nair's *The Namesake* (2007) and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2012), I demonstrate how her films foreground multidimensional South Asian male protagonists who navigate migration, cultural hybridity, class mobility, and post-9/11 racialization. Characters such as Gogol Ganguli and Changez Khan dismantle dominant tropes of the socially inept immigrant or the hyper visible Muslim threat, offering instead textured representations of Brown masculinity. At the same time, I also interrogate the limitations of these interventions. Nair's protagonists, who are often urban, affluent, and very much Westernized, displace but do not fully unsettle hierarchies that marginalize lower-class, rural, and non-Westernized Desi men. By situating these films within broader debates on Orientalism, Islamophobia, and hegemonic masculinity, I explore how although Nair intervenes in Hollywood's entrenched Othering of Brown men, her films still center Westernized, affluent Desi masculinities, leaving rural and non-Westernized men largely outside the representational repair she initiates.

**4:30-5:30 PM: SALA GENERAL BUSINESS MEETING**

**5:45-6:45 PM: CEA OPEN BUSINESS MEETING**

**DAY 2: SATURDAY, MARCH 28, 2026**

**8:00 AM-4:00 PM: REGISTRATION**

**SESSION 3: 9:00-10:15 AM**

### 3A: Collaborations against the Caste System

Room:

Chair: Ruma Sinha, Mercer County Community College

- Ruma Sinha, Mercer County Community College, “Caste Across Borders: The Politics of Analogy and Collaboration”  
**Abstract:** This paper examines Suraj Yengde’s *Caste: A Global Story* (2025) in the context of the collaborative and intersectional approaches to understanding caste as a global phenomenon, both in the US-Indian context and throughout various iterations of caste based collaborative movements. It will situate Yengde’s work within the larger historical, cultural, and social interactions between Dalit and other marginalized communities to illuminate the impact of structural oppression by drawing connections across geographies. More specifically, it will examine his work in relation to Isabel Wilkerson’s *Caste: The Origin of Our Discontents* (2020), which emphasizes the pervasiveness of what she calls “caste” across history and cultures, drawing parallels between the experiences of caste violence faced by Dalits in India, African Americans in the US, and Jews in Nazi Germany. Although Wilkerson’s book draws from the concept of the Indian caste system to explain the structural manifestation of hierarchies in the US and Nazi Germany, the emphasis on the shared characteristics leads to a loss of historical and local specificity, homogenizing them problematically. In contrast to the flattening of differences in Wilkerson, this paper argues that Yengde’s *Caste: A Global Story* resists such homogenization by foregrounding solidarity based on the specificity of diverse experiences and contexts. It explores how the manifestations of Dalits organizing worldwide in locations such as the United Kingdom, North America, the Middle East, and South Africa, among others, attest to the limits of Dalit-Black solidarity and break away from hegemonic impositions to argue for a “Cosmopolitan Dalit Universalism” which can provide a way forward for global Dalit solidarities.
- Ali Ahsan, University of Georgia, “Stories Within Stories: Caste, Faith, and the Form of Resistance in *Kusumabale*”  
**Abstract:** Devanura Mahadeva’s *Kusumabale* (1988) is a landmark in Kannada literature, notable for its colloquial idiom, innovative narrative technique, and non-linear structure. Yet, these very features make it difficult for readers accustomed to the standardized ‘mainstream’ written Kannada. The first English translation, by Susan Daniel (2015), appeared nearly three decades after its original publication, following multiple failed attempts by other translators. In her translator’s note, Daniel recalls how, lacking knowledge of the Nanjangud dialect of Kannada, she sought a reading session and instead encountered a collective performance—singer H. Janardhan’s renditions, actor Pramila Bengre from the stage adaptation, Shivaswamy who had memorized the entire novel, and Mahadeva himself. This collaborative act exemplifies the communal effort required to translate a text so deeply embedded in local sensibility and Dalit experience. Critical readings of *Kusumabale* have variously emphasized its innovative form (Balasubramanya, 1989), the centrality of motherhood (Ramamoorthy, 1991), and its symbolic engagement with collective experience (Ramakrishnan, 2021). Nagaraj (2012) argues that the novel’s form itself resists realism and that its language—poetic, rhythmic, and self-referential—often becomes an end in itself. In this paper, I examine both the overt and subtle

representations of caste in *Kusumabale*, including those embedded in its mythical and mystical dimensions. I explore how Mahadeva's layered storytelling, recursive structure, and the presence of faith among Dalit communities intersect with questions of language, identity, and resistance. Further, by juxtaposing the novel's satirical elements with Mahadeva's later nonfiction essays in *Edege Bidde Akshara*, I trace his evolution from an experimental novelist to a public intellectual articulating a distinct Dalit ethical and aesthetic vision. Through this reading, I argue that *Kusumabale* not only redefines the form of the Kannada novel but also reimagines the very politics of representation in Dalit writing.

- Soma Mandal, Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, "Dalit Experience of Indian History and Democracy"

**Abstract:**

"...evil –to the point of wickedness, which we shall have to speak of further – has for us come to be incarnated in all that threatens or destroys the freedoms most frequently described by the epithet 'democratic.'

- Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom* (1988)

Do I want to be born — Do I want to be born at all in this land?

- L.S. Rokade (*Dangle*, 1992, p. 1)

In this paper, it is argued that the Dalit experience of Indian history and democracy has not been one of rule by democratic rotation, but rather misrule by caste conditions. This conditional constitution of democracy by caste offers negative freedom to Dalits while assigning the positive outcomes of 'historical progress' and democracy to the majority. One might argue that the language of indignity and humiliation, the perpetual and relentless injustice that fetters the untouchable identity to its highest summit of asymmetrical and prejudiced existence, exposes the modern and contemporary historical tradition of the Indian nation and nationalism not only as recalcitrant and retrogressive but also anti-human and anti-ethical. The selective assignment of democratic rights to dominant castes while withholding human rights to Dalits thus offers a negative conception of Indian democracy and history for Dalits. It is argued that democracy is, at its root, simply the freedom to exist freely, which, in the case of Dalit, is the condition of being unfree and unequal. The notion of history and democracy then becomes inconsistent and idealistic in the Dalit case, while being consistent, realistic, and commonplace for privileged caste/class citizens, who subsequently transform Indian democracy into a corrupt system, whereby the civil liberties of Dalits are not only violated but also withdrawn from the democratic space of both the public and private spheres. The paper proposes that Dalits' experience of alienation can only be approached from a position of irreconcilable history, a trajectory where inclusion is not at its limit but at its most perverse and poisonous form. Further, the paper examines some conceptualizations of emancipations, equaliberty, and fraternity as Dalit responses to the exclusionary character of Indian democracy.

- Jomal Jose, National Institute of Science Education and Research (NISER), Bhubaneswar. "The Pan-Indian Dalit Rap: Forging Collaborative Counterpublic Spheres in New Media"  
**Abstract:** The Dalit experience of public space mediated by the caste system has been one of stratified social control and contestation towards such constraints. This caste-based geographical relegation built on ritualistic notions of purity and pollution replicated in

epistemic and cultural spaces ensured the erasure of Dalit narratives from dominant domains. Leveraging tools afforded by internet penetration, Dalits nurtured cultural capital and forged subaltern counterpublic spheres to document discrimination, expose systemic exclusion and challenge the aesthetically puritanic and elitist public sphere dominated by oppressor castes in India. The Dalit New Media public sphere is an amalgamation of counterpublics defined by gendered, linguistic, regional, religious, historical, occupational or electoral determinants vying for visibility. Buoyed by the enduring incremental democratisation of the cyberspace, primarily social media platforms and streaming services, a sub-genre of conscious rap pioneered by Dalit artists from across the diverse sub-castes, religions, regions and languages of India, Dalit rap, has emerged post-midpoint of the previous decade mapping contested public spaces and invisibilised terrains. Rappers such as Arivu, Sumeet Samos, Vipin Tatad, Ginni Mahi, Isaivaani and Vedan have fashioned solidarities with fellow Dalit artists and activists from different mediums and genres such as film, music, dance, literature, journalism and academia through collaboration in music production, cultural festivals and activism. Most of these rappers are multi-genre and multi-platform artists who via social media, live performances and public talks foster a participatory culture that then shape their artistic expressions. They can be deemed organic intellectuals who circumvent corporate media censure to prioritise creative collaboration and discursive spaces for civic engagement rather than consumerism. The collaborative counterpublic sphere of Dalit rap is a cultural incubator and a site to articulate grievances, question hegemony and engage in grassroots mobilisation.

### **3B: Justice as a Collaborative Process in the Sri Lankan Diasporas**

Room:

Chair: Dinidu Karunanayake, Elon University, North Carolina

Justice looms large in postcolonial Sri Lanka and its diasporas. Ethnonationalist politics resulted in a twenty-six-year civil war (1983-2009), leading to genocidal violence, mass migrations, and internal displacement, while class unrest resulted in two violent insurgencies in 1971 and 1987 that were brutally suppressed by the state. Even after these brutal events have come to official closure, their ghostly fallout continues to haunt the lived experiences of survivors, witnesses, and their descendants at home and in the diasporas. Whereas official interventions have serially failed to address the lingering issues of accountability, justice, and reconciliation, diasporic Sri Lankan literary and cultural work has carved out collaborative spaces for engaging with these topics. Going beyond the dominant topic of war and violence, writers also look into new terrains such as disability. Situated against this backdrop, this panel brings together four papers that examine justice-centric collaborative potential in the Sri Lankan diasporas.

- Maryse Jayasuriya, Saint Louis University, “Webs of Care and Collaboration: Disability Justice in the Writings of Leah Lakshmi Piepza-Samarasinha”  
Extending this theoretical premise, Maryse Jayasuriya’s paper “Webs of Care and Collaboration: Disability Justice in the Writings of Leah Lakshmi Piepza-Samarasinha” examines the possibilities for intersectional collaborations framed by diasporic identities, disability, and sexuality. In their 2015 memoir, *Dirty River: A Queer Femme of Color Dreaming Her Way Home*, Leah Lakshmi Piepza-Samarasinha, a Canadian-American writer of Burgher/Tamil Sri Lankan and Irish/Roma ancestry who identifies as a “disabled queer

woman of colour and abuse survivor,” describes their experiences dealing with fibromyalgia and Chronic Fatigue Immune Deficiency Syndrome. In Piepzna-Samarasinha’s subsequent 2018 book *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*, they advocate for disability justice, a movement that “centers sick and disabled people of color, queer and trans disabled folks of color, and everyone who is marginalized in mainstream disability organizing.” Piepzna-Samarasinha reframes support networks (a term with a cold, computerized connotation) as webs of care (suggesting something tactile, sticky, and organic), as Amanda Lautermilch has pointed out, and offers a set of strategies for dealing with the challenges faced by people navigating the intersections of disability, queerness, gender, class, race, and immigrant status.

- Sandamini Ranwalage, Skidmore College, NY, “Time of Disappearance: Staging a Post-War Sri Lankan Narrative of Inquiry”  
The second panelist, Sandamini Ranwalage, in her paper, “Time of Disappearance: Staging a Post-War Sri Lankan Narrative of Inquiry,” examines the work of the Sri Lankan Australian playwright S. Shakthidharan’s *Counting and Cracking* (2019) and *The Jungle and the Sea* (2023, co-written with Eamon Flack), and argues that these works embody “time of disappearance” through the experience of searching individuals. She argues against hegemonic reading practices that are quick to define post-war cultural production as “reconciliatory,” and thereby render reconciliation, or on its far end, disinterment, as the only viable relations to a war-torn past, rife with many enforced disappearances. *Counting and Cracking* and *The Jungle and the Sea* are, above all, stories about Tamil women who occupy hybrid identities, whose recounting of history is a negotiation with conditions of disappearance, not only that of their loved ones, but of themselves in the *longue durée* of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict. Contrary to perfunctory notions of the play, S. Shakthidharan’s work squarely refuses the very grammar of “reconciliation,” centering instead on recounting as an inquiry to make legible (and move beyond) the conditions of forced disappearance. Through the staging of searchers, these works refuse state-erasure of disappearances, foreground indomitable activisms, offer a view of authoritarianism across time, and in doing so redefine the very category of the “post-war” narrative.
- Dinidu Karunanayake, Elon University, North Carolina, “Shyam Selvadurai’s Buddhist Postmemories of Sri Lankan America”  
Continuing on this thread, the final panelist, Dinidu Karunanayake, in his paper “Shyam Selvadurai’s Buddhist Postmemories of Sri Lankan America” investigates Buddhist postmemories of Sri Lankan America through a reading of Shyam Selvadurai’s novel *The Hungry Ghosts* (2013). He argues that Selvadurai builds an epistemic alliance between Eastern and Western modes of memory politics. The novel presents a queer Tamil-Sinhala protagonist’s coming-of-age narrative from 1978 to 1994 against a pivotal period of Sri Lanka’s rebirth as a security state. Vulnerable communities persecuted by state violence see America as an idea and a site of refuge. Selvadurai’s novel brings to the fore the encounter between America and postcolonial Sri Lanka through the Buddhist metaphor of the hungry ghost. Drawing upon Marianne Hirsch’s work, the panelist reads the evocation of the hungry ghost as a heterotopic and multivalent iteration of postmemory. Examining the trauma stemming from an encounter between old colonial values and postcolonial

ideals alongside Buddhist parables, he argues that *The Hungry Ghosts* gives an Eastern spin on Hirsch's Holocaust/West-centric theory.

- Discussant: Nalini Iyer, Seattle University  
Finally, the panel's discussant, Nalini Iyer, will deliberate on the papers, focusing on the significance of these texts for South Asian literary studies and postcolonial studies.

By foregrounding collaborative potential proposed by diasporic Sri Lankan writers and artists, this panel contributes to the 2026 SALA conference theme "Collective Currents in South Asian Collaborations."

### 3C: Eco-critical Collaborations

Room:

Chair: Pallavi Rastogi, Louisiana State University

- Jahidul Alam, Jackson State University, "Solar Dreams and Salomon's House: Eco-Utopian Dialogues between Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultana's Dream*"  
**Abstract:** Utopian narratives often imagine not only social but also ecological renewal, staging alternative relationships between human communities and the more-than-human world. This paper places Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultana's Dream* (1905) in dialogue with Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627) to examine how speculative collaboration can reconfigure the bonds among science, gender, and environment. Although separated by centuries and colonial geographies, both texts envision islands where scientific inquiry shapes collective life; yet they diverge sharply in their ecological ethics. In *New Atlantis*, Bacon designs an experimental state where natural philosophy is marshalled to master and catalogue nature. The island's famed Salomon's House embodies an extractive ethos: knowledge is gathered, tested, and utilized to secure human dominion. *Sultana's Dream*, by contrast, imagines a women-ruled "Ladyland" that harnesses solar energy, air-cooling technologies, and sustainable agriculture to create abundance without exploitation. Here, science functions as communal stewardship rather than proprietary conquest, aligning technological advancement with environmental balance. Reading them together highlights two competing early visions of "green" modernity. Bacon offers an imperial model of ecological management while Rokeya rewrites the utopian genre to propose reciprocal care between humans and their surroundings. Their juxtaposition underscores how South Asian feminist speculation critiques the colonial logic of resource extraction and anticipates contemporary ecofeminist thought. By foregrounding the ecological stakes of collaboration, between people, knowledge systems, and the natural world, this paper argues that both texts reveal a transhistorical conversation about sustainability and justice. Such a pairing invites us to rethink global genealogy of environmental literature and recognize South Asian women's writing as a vital precursor to today's planetary ecological imaginaries.
- Pallavi Rastogi, Louisiana State University, "From Truth to Trope: Ecological Memory and Refugee Consciousness in Enjeela Ahmadi-Miller's *The Broken Circle*"  
**Abstract:** This paper argues that Enjeela Ahmadi-Miller's memoir, *The Broken Circle* (2019), articulates a refugee consciousness shaped by an ecological response to the new

geopolitical spaces where she is transplanted. While pre-Soviet Afghanistan is rendered as a space of natural abundance and elemental harmony, India and Pakistan—transit zones in the family’s flight to safety—are perceived through a blurry ecological lens. Ahmadi-Miller’s narrative unfolds across the perennially verdant flora and fauna of an eternally romanticized Kabul landscape. The memoir then moves on to describe the harrowing journey across the passes of the Hindu Kush mountains, followed by a short but traumatic trip to Dhaka, brief relief in Kathmandu, and finally, liberation in India. Through this movement, *The Broken Circle* highlights the contrast between Kabul’s natural beauty and the sensory overload of South Asian cities. Yet, environmental awareness serves as an emotional anchor against territorial estrangement in its promise of an international life. This push-and-pull of South Asian ecological spaces does not merely reflect changes in geography. It reveals how Afghan refugee consciousness collaborates with the land to mourn forced displacement and establish a contingent form of freedom. Thus, I analyze how landscapes serve as mnemonic, emotional, and ideological terrain across the memoir, with particular focus on the contrast between Afghanistan and South Asia. “From Truth to Trope” theorizes refugee consciousness in this memoir as an ecological awareness of national dislocation, but also projects the possibility of growth from the necessary and unexpected collaborations that forced exile invokes. In its movement across national and international borders, *The Broken Circle* considers how collaboration through land and ecology can stabilize a constantly shifting sense of self.

- Waseem Anwar, Kinnaird College for Women, “Ecofriendly Collaborations in Ghosh’s *The Nutmeg’s Curse* and Tahir’s *Where Cicadas Sing*”  
**Abstract:** Both Amitav Ghosh’s *The Nutmeg’s Curse* (2021) and Athar Tahir’s *Where Cicadas Sing* (2025) promote ecofriendly environment, the former by listening to nutmeg-parables and the latter by hearing cicada-songs. Indian-born Ghosh highlights the necessity of true belonging to the earth against human eco-fascistic mentalities. He challenges the primeval practices of planetary engineering and terraforming (49) that have brought war, crisis, and “‘omnicide’ [to] ‘species’ [... and to the] ‘Gaia’ itself” (75-85). By listening to the “hidden” sides of tiny nutmeg-planets “that sustain humanity” (98), the novel portrays nature as a significant collaborative force that can take care of climate-collapse issues. Pakistani writer Athar Tahir’s *Cicadas* also foregrounds the significance of ecofriendly environment through an overwhelming presence of cicadas: “The plane hums endlessly like cicadas. Softer and more distant” (359). A poet of the South Asian seasons for decades, his *Cicadas* promotes congenial regional as well as continental border-crossing to unlock mirthful learning for a pre-teen child-narrator. The novel helps explore and equate human multilingual, multireligious, multicultural, and transcultural interactions: “Rattan, rotten, written” (12), “Maulvi Sahib [beside] Gora Sahib” (165), “Hindu gods [alike] Moses, Jesus, Job and Joseph” (33-37), and the “Holy Prophet [and his] Mi’raj” (92). Natural to human, the bustling of trees, the echoing of nutmeg-parables, the consistent singing of cicadas, and various human sociocultural and discursive engagements expressed in *Nutmeg’s Curse* and *Cicadas* recount a collaborative interaction of diverse populations. Even from a postcolonial perspective, the works embed a common pluralistic critique to enhance and celebrate awareness about green environment, increasing the possibilities for a futuristic collaborative thinking beyond prevalent forms of ecological imperialism. They suggest border-crossing as a means of cooperation; respecting difference and embracing it.

## 10:15-10:30 AM: BEVERAGE BREAK

### SESSION 4: 10:30-11:45 AM

#### 4A: Diasporic Collaborations

Room:

Chair: Cynthia Leenerts, East Stroudsburg University

- Tharini Viswanath, University of South Carolina, “Superheroes, South Asian Histories, and Diasporic Identities: Adapting Ms. Marvel to a Global Audience”  
**Abstract:** The new Ms. Marvel comics created by Sana Amanat and written by Willow G. Wilson features sixteen-year-old Kamala Khan. Kamala’s extraordinary powers play an important role in shaping her complex identity as the brown, Muslim, Pakistani American female superhero, Ms. Marvel. The comics were adapted into a television mini-series in 2022 by Disney+. While the adaptation retains Kamala’s complex Pakistani-American identity, it makes several changes to the overarching plot of the comics, thereby affecting viewers’ perception of the narrative. Mehgann Meeusen has argued that “binaries are consistently polarized” in film adaptations of children’s and young adult literature (18), and the “key power dynamics and textual messages change when concepts like adult and child or good and evil are positioned in starker contrast with one another” (5). This holds true for the Ms. Marvel mini-series as well which, unlike the Ms. Marvel comics, attempts to bridge the tenuous relationship between India and Pakistan through its representation of Kamala’s South Asian culture, identity, history, and heritage. Drawing on tenets from adaptation studies, theories of transnationalism, and young adult literature scholarship, I examine three main elements incorporated by the Ms. Marvel television adaptation – Bollywood music and dance, characters’ personal and communal histories with specific regard to British colonization and the India-Pakistan partition, and Islamic mythology – which I suggest significantly change the televised narrative’s ideology. By calling attention to Kamala diasporic identity, the televised mini-series allows Kamala Khan-as-Ms. Marvel to own and even revel in her South Asian identity. I conclude that in doing so, the television series acknowledges the thorny relationship between the neighboring nation states of Pakistan and India caused by British colonization and the pain of partition and attempts to unite South Asian viewers.
- Tehmina Pirzada, Bradley University, “Listening Across Borders: Storytelling, Plagiarism, and Dream Dissolve as Diasporic Collaboration”  
**Abstract:** This paper examines uncredited musical borrowing between India and Pakistan as a form of diasporic collaboration and affective storytelling rather than cultural infringement. Through what I term dream dissolve, I describe how longing, nostalgia, and recognition circulate across divided homelands through digital soundscapes. My focus is on Instagram accounts such as @asksachin and @chappafactory, which have become informal digital archives where listeners and creators engage in playful yet emotionally charged dialogues about ownership, influence, and shared memory. These accounts use remixing, commentary, and parody to unsettle rigid ideas of national belonging and instead foreground listening as a collaborative act. Rather than reading plagiarism as theft, I

approach it as emotional recognition. When a Bollywood song borrows from a Pakistani melody, it becomes a site of cultural intimacy, an inadvertent collaboration that exceeds the control of national borders. Drawing on Angeli Gera Roy's concept of the border as suture and Michael Herzfeld's notion of cultural intimacy, I argue that these digital exchanges create shared publics of listeners who recognize one another through sound and affect rather than nationality. This project also emerges from a personal collaboration with Amrita Ghosh, a Bengali Indian American scholar and singer. Our friendship, sustained through digital collectives such as Binders Full of Women of Color, demonstrates how cross-border feminist kinship can shape both theory and feeling. In the spirit of SALA 2026's theme of collaboration, this paper positions digital remix culture as a new form of South Asian storytelling that values participation and shared listening over ownership. The communities surrounding @asksachin and @chappafactory exemplify how online creative labor, humor, and nostalgia become tools for reimagining connection across political and cultural divides.

- Ishan Mukhopadhyay, Brandeis University, "Listening in Slow Time: Translation, Diaspora, and Relational Ethics in Rajiv Mohabir's *Antiman*"  
**Abstract:** Rajiv Mohabir's *Antiman* transforms the act of translation into a practice of temporal and ethical resistance. Rather than treating translation as the transfer of meaning across languages, Mohabir conceives it as an ongoing process of care, listening, and embodied relation. This paper argues that *Antiman* stages what Tejaswini Niranjana describes as a "mobilized translation," wherein the act of rendering language—especially the Bhojpuri songs and stories of Mohabir's grandmother, Aji—becomes a decolonial intervention against both colonial temporality and diasporic erasure. Drawing upon Rita Kothari's framework of translation as ethnographic attention, Susan Stanford Friedman's spatial poetics, and Oneka LaBennett's critique of globalized representations of Guyanese femininity, this essay explores how *Antiman* resists the speed, transparency, and commodification that characterize imperial and capitalist modernity. Through his use of the tape recorder, memory, and multilingual layering, Mohabir enacts a form of slow time translation. This recursive temporal rhythm privileges repetition, resonance, and relation over linear progression. Aji's voice, replayed and refracted through static, becomes a living archive that unsettles the separation between memory and materiality, voice and landscape. The Florida backwaters and Varanasi's ghats emerge as spaces where translation extends beyond the linguistic to the ecological and sacral, making multispecies life integral to diasporic memory. Ultimately, *Antiman* asks how translation might become a mode of belonging within displacement—an art of listening rather than mastery. The slowness that structures the memoir becomes its ethics: a refusal of assimilationist temporality and an embrace of relational endurance. By foregrounding Bhojpuri's sonic residue, Aji's bodily labor, and the ecological density of diaspora, Mohabir reconstructs translation as a form of survival—one that moves not toward closure but toward continuity across generations, languages, and cosmologies.

#### **4B: Collaborations of Resistance**

Room:

Chair: Meghan Gorman-DaRif, San Jose State University

- Meghan Gorman-DaRif, San Jose State University, “Ethnographic Realism and the Maoist Struggle”

**Abstract:** The last decade has seen the continued debate over the political merits and capacities of realism, particularly in a postcolonial literary context. The work of Mark Fisher (2009) and Amitav Ghosh (2016), for example, claims, respectively, that the takeover of capitalism, and the emergence of climate crisis, have dwindled the political possibilities of realism as a genre. On the other hand, recent special issues of *MLQ* (2012) and *Novel: Forum on Fiction* (2016), as well as the recent work of Ulka Anjaria, Eli Park Sorensen, and Gabriele Lazzari, all posit instead a “realist turn” or drive in postcolonial literature. Engaging with this new scholarship on the realist turn and the formal features of contemporary postcolonial realist fiction, my paper works to elaborate the specific nature and capacity of the contemporary novel in comparison to other textual forms. My paper, “Ethnographic Realism and the Maoist struggle” engages in a comparative analysis of nonfiction texts and novels that focus on or feature the Maoist conflict in India. Through this comparative analysis I develop an argument about the unique capacities of fiction and the formal features of what I am calling “Resistant Realisms” that help to map both current material realities and the hope for alternative futures. I begin with a close reading of Sujatha Gidla’s 2017 *Ants Among Elephants*, analyzing how her ethnographic realism can be read alongside Arundhati Roy’s 2012 nonfiction text *Walking with the Comrades*, to comparatively demonstrate the capacity of realist literature’s formal innovations. Read alongside Neel Mukherjee’s 2017 *A State of Freedom* and Arundhati Roy’s 2017 *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, I analyze how the differences in nonfiction and novelistic form highlight fiction’s capacity not only to effectively represent current crises, but to offer hope and futurity in ways inaccessible to nonfiction.
- Wafa Asher Syeda, The University of Chicago, “Blood as Revolutionary Viscera: Anticolonial Erotics, Amrita Pritam and Sahir Ludhianvi in Lotus”

**Abstract:** In the first Afro-Asian Writers conference held in Tashkent, a resolution was passed to establish the Permanent Bureau of Afro-Asian Writers, which published the trilingual periodical Afro-Asian Writings (al-Adab al-Afriqi al-Asyawi) in 1968, later renamed Lotus in its sixth issue. The content page of each issue read like the syllabus of a modern-day course on postcolonial/world literature, including writers like Ghassan Kanafani, Alex La Guma, Mulk Raj Anand, Gabriel Okara, Mahmoud Darwish, Mouloud Feraoun, Adonis, Ngugi wa Thiong’o among others, proposing a promise (albeit unfulfilled) of global south comparatisms. Lotus represents what was, and more importantly, what could have been possible in this moment of global artistic and cultural exchange. I approach Lotus as a site of a missing vision of queer embodiment that was birthed in the underbellies of Afro-Asian third worldisms, to ask what revolutionary viscera can offer to us as a political and literary aesthetic, through the work of Punjabi and Hindi poet Amrita Pritam and her ever-evasion lover, Urdu poet, Sahir Ludhianvi. I center both, South Asia and a queer literary imaginary, in this transnational network of poets, writers and militants. I read Amrita Pritam’s poem *She Walked Through the Streets* as a double-text in relation to Sahir Ludhianvi’s *Martyr*, in the trilingual journal of Afro-Asian writings, Lotus. This paper approaches Lotus as a site of a missing vision of queer embodiment that was birthed in the underbellies of Afro-Asian third worldisms, attempting to excavate a decolonial erotics. I argue that translation erases the body, decontextualises the historical-

political relevance of South Asia to the transnational moment, eliding the viscera of revolutionary struggle and metaphorizing radical praxis instead. The two poems disrupt this notion of the symbolic collective body by instead offering embodied forms of solidarity that are too raw, uncontainable and queer to be taken up officially by the Lotus editorial board, or the world of forums and conferences. However, it is this very body that opens up queer forms of solidarity based in the erotic, the sensuous and the visceral, in the writing that appear in this journal. Closer reading these two poems proves that a case for anticolonial erotics must situate the body in its corporeality and reckon with its fleshiness, its porousness, and its opaqueness. As Ludhianvi writes, too, blood is still blood – it is not a representation, it is not a euphemism, it is not a prediction for a future to come. It is the liquid leaking out of the material body, it forms the viscera of the revolutionary subject.

- Asmita Saha and Ridita Mizan, Illinois State University, “States of Ungroundedness: Envisioning a Counter-Intuitive Alliance on the Question of Land”  
**Abstract:** This paper emerges from the need to problematize the systemic complacency of taking for granted the idea of land as something fixed. As transnational postcolonial researchers in the USA, our understanding of land (both as an epistemological framework as well as an organization of space that one inhabits) has been less about being rooted and more about navigating ungroundedness. We intend to unpack the issue by exploring the notion of “ungroundedness”, a condition of the postcolonial nation-building project that questions the codification of land and its governance under colonial and imperial terms, and how that has become implicated within the current emerging narratives of progress and claims to belonging. To explain these problematics, we look at the exploration of the subaltern perspective in Spivak’s translation of Maheshweta Devi’s *Imaginary Maps* and the diasporic perspective from Rushdie’s *Imaginary Homelands*. We argue that these two texts position two seemingly dichotomous theoretical orientations using imaginaries as methods of comprehending the role of land in the construction of the citizen self. Predicated upon this framework, we argue that the affordances of being rooted in an independent postcolonial nation-state reveals its constraints of relating to the land, and yet the diasporic imaginaries of the homeland demonstrates its affordances of comprehending how unstable the neocolonial conceptualization of the land is. Illustrating this, we discuss how Devi and Rushdie’s texts help complicate the fossilized and solidified understanding of land, allowing us to locate new ways of investigating the colonial-postcolonial entanglements and envisioning strategic alliances based on it. We are bringing South Asian Postcolonial Studies in conversation with Indigenous Studies and Black Studies, to illuminate the ways in which they can contribute towards expanding the scope of understanding the “land” and imagine ways of addressing the ongoing global neocolonial hegemony which demand shared efforts across academic initiatives.
- Nidhi Shrivastava, Sacred Heart University, “‘India’s Daughters’ and #MeToo: Investigating Women’s Stories in the 1947 Partition Archive”  
**Abstract:** Since 2017, the #MeToo movement has spread globally, especially in the U.S., following Harvey Weinstein’s conviction. However, India still grapples with gender-based violence. The 2012 Nirbhaya gang rape was a turning point, sparking protests and global attention. While media coverage of rape cases from the 1970s exists, stories of gendered violence during the Partition era have largely been absent from mainstream narratives. My

presentation draws on my ongoing research with the 1947 Partition Archive and builds on my doctoral dissertation, which analyzed how portrayals of these women have changed in Indian cinema and television. I will also discuss my current work with the 1947 Partition Archive, aiming to uncover firsthand accounts from women who endured gender-based violence during the Partition. This presentation addresses recent research in the USC Shoah Foundation Visual Archive by a Holocaust scholar focusing on women's testimonies of gendered violence. While scholars, cultural critics, and historians have examined the Partition, discussions about sexual violence remain limited and often avoided due to feelings of shame. Therefore, this timely project aims to uncover the cultural complexities and subtle nuances surrounding the silences about women who endured the violent upheavals of the Partition. Since 2023, I have obtained a URCG grant from my university to expand this project further and have visited the archive in Berkeley, California. Since then, I have collaborated multiple times with Dr. Guneeta Singh Bhalla, including inviting her to speak at my university's #MeToo event series. This collaboration helped Sacred Heart University become one of the first institutions to subscribe to the 1947 Partition Archive as a resource for teaching and research.

#### 4C: Literary Collaborations

Room:

Chair: Jana Fedtke, NYU Shanghai

- Jana Fedtke, NYU Shanghai, "A New Empire of AI? GenAI Usage among Contemporary South Asian Authors"  
**Abstract:** "This machine can produce a five-thousand-word story ... in thirty seconds. How can the writers compete with that?" What might sound like a scenario involving ChatGPT, Gemini, DeepSeek, or some other Generative AI tool in the 21st century is actually an excerpt from Roald Dahl's 1953 short story, "The Great Automatic Grammatizator." Moving into our contemporary times where this fictional scenario has become a reality, my paper analyzes how South Asian authors have (not) used GenAI tools over the past few years since ChatGPT was made publicly available in late 2022. I am particularly interested in how writers from South Asia and its diasporas approach AI-assisted writing and how their texts negotiate the new role of AI tools. Trained on vast amounts of text, these AI models can generate narratives, invent characters, suggest plot twists, or mimic the style of famous authors. As global Large Language Models (LLMs) are, however, predominantly trained on Western, Anglophone corpora, their application in South Asian contexts often enforces a generic, culturally reductive style. This cultural bias leads to AI colonialism or "tech colonialism" (Qadri et al., 2023; Agarwal, Naaman, & Vashistha, 2025). Drawing on theories of the posthuman as well as Karen Hao (2025) and Rachel Adams's (2025) work on the new empire of AI, I argue that South Asian authors establish a critical dialogue with GenAI models to decolonize the textual output. This hybrid mode of writing in a collaborative environment has also sparked larger debates about creativity and artistic intent. In this context, my project explores how the deployment of GenAI tools asks us to rethink questions of authorship, the production of knowledge, post/human agency, as well as processes of co-creation and collaboration between humans and sociotechnical systems.

- Hans-Georg Erney, Georgia Southern University, “Salman and Hanif Get Hurt: An Unusual Collaboration”

**Abstract:** The works of Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi have been intertwined at least since the latter explored the fallout of the Satanic Verses controversy in his second novel *The Black Album*. However, their literary relationship received a late boost in 2022, when both men experienced devastating physical injuries which they proceeded to describe in their memoirs *Knife* (2024) and *Shattered* (2024). The striking echoes in the friends’ lives and works invite closer examination, starting with a parallel analysis of their respective memoirs as books containing multiple textual portals between their authors’ worlds, cross-references that stop short of literal collaboration but go well beyond the occasional acknowledgment or blurb. This paper therefore accepts the invitation and proposes this comparative reading as a step toward defining the Late Style of two writers who likely served as literary gateway drugs to many people in our association. Here are two avid Substackers of South Asian origin whose works are intensely occupied with migration, who have described varying degrees of financial pressure in the context of their injuries, whose recoveries have been supported by recent lovers, and who make cameo appearances in each other’s memoirs. More than friends and colleagues, Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi are collaborators who jointly work to test the boundaries between east and west, between sickness and health, between public and private, and between fiction and autobiography. Considered past their prime by many critics who inevitably measure the authors’ Late Style by their early successes, Rushdie and Kureishi’s literary treatments of their extraliterary travails offer a welcome opportunity to reappraise their distinguished achievements.
- Nalini Iyer, Seattle University, “Mother-Daughter Collaboration: Anita Desai and Kiran Desai”

**Abstract:** Kiran Desai’s just published novel, *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny* (2025), has been short-listed for the Booker Prize. As is well-known, Kiran Desai is the daughter of Anita Desai, the equally famous Indian writer. In reading Kiran Desai’s recent novel, one sees the connections between the work of mother and daughter especially in the psychological realism that is the hallmark of both women’s depiction of women characters. There are echoes in Kiran Desai’s novel of Anita Desai’s *Fire on the Mountain*, where a woman living in solitude is suddenly made to contend with a small child, her great granddaughter. In the scenes depicting a conflicted family fighting over an ancestral house in Delhi, there are echoes of Anita Desai’s *Clear Light of Day*. Mayank Austen Soofi, the Delhi photographer, has identified that the home where Anita Desai lived when writing *Clear Light of Day* is in the same neighborhood that Kiran Desai sets her Delhi scenes. Kiran borrows heavily from her family story—the German-Bengali-Gujarati heritage, the separated parents—for the plot line of her latest narrative. Most significantly, Kiran Desai’s novel has segments set in Mexico just as Anita Desai did in her 2024 novella, *Rosarita*. In her recent JLF Seattle talk (September 20, 2025), Kiran Desai acknowledged that she works closely with her mother, that both of them had lived in Mexico while writing their respective works, and that her mother was her first reader and editor as she was working through this recent novel. My paper will examine the relationship between two writers, mother and daughter, through their most recent works *Rosarita* and *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny* to argue that both women center the artist in their works as a means of engaging

a cross-textual conversation/collaboration about writing fiction, the experience of women writers/artists, and the place of Indian writing in a global context.

- Rachayita Bhattacharyya, Indian Institute of Technology, Jodhpur, “Mera Joota Hai Japani, Ye Patloon Englishitani: A Case Study of English Haiku in India”

**Abstract:** The first instances of haiku in India and the notion of ‘world literature’ developed in tandem through the ideas and initiative of the polymath and the major exponent of Bengal Renaissance, Rabindranath Tagore. In North America, the first footprints of English haiku were also noted around this period (first and second decades of the twentieth century). There have been various levels of interaction with the Japanese form over the past century in many Indian languages, including English, as noted by P.K. Padhy in “History and Development of Haiku Poetry in India” (2023). The book *Late Blooming Cherries* (2024) marks the publication of the very first anthology of English Language Haiku (hereafter ELH) in India by a major publisher such as Harper Collins. Haiku groups such as CafeHaiku, HaikuJam, and Triveni Haikai have been more or less active since the 2010s. These communities have been observed to engage in many Indian language haiku as well as English. The rise of English haiku in India could also be observed in this period, owing to the various publishing and collaborating options available on the internet. However, sustained academic interest has been largely missing on the emergent genre of ELH in India from both the global south and north. This paper thus attempts to theorise the emergent genre of ELH in India. It does so by employing a mix of theoretical and methodological approaches, such as world literature, postcolonial literature, comparative historiography, and close textual analysis of select poems from the above-mentioned anthology. ELH in India is an amalgamation of the Japanese, Euro-American and Indian poetic traditions. This paper seeks to address the following questions: 1) Is it possible to theorise a distinctive genre of ELH in India? 2) Could ELH in India be classified as just postcolonial literature, or is the term world literature pertinent owing to haiku’s origin in Japan? 3) How do the publishing mediums contribute to its emergence as a genre?

**12:00-1:30 PM: LUNCH ON YOUR OWN  
OR  
CEA ALL-CONFERENCE LUNCHEON**

**SESSION 5: 1:30-2:45 PM**

**5A: Collaborations in Time: A Roadmap to South Asian Pasts, Presents, and Futures**

Room: Glenwaters

Chair: Waseem Anwar, Kinnaird College for Women

- Umme Al-wazedi, Augustana College, “Women and Entrepreneurship: Light and Darkness in Displaced Life”  
**Abstract:** Dr. Umme Al Wazedi’s paper turns to the much-explored site of partitioned Bengal with an aim to explore women’s entrepreneurial choices in her comparative study of Indubala, a character in Kallol Lahiri’s *Indubalar Bhatar Hotel* and Ruku in Hasan Azizul Hoque’s short story “The Daughter and the Oleander.” The women’s navigation of

displacement and the shifting roles of women in post-Partition South Asia allows us to envision comparative study of literatures from a cross-border lens.

- Waseem Anwar, Kinnaird College for Women, “Envisioning Collaboration, Imagining Solidarity: Kinnaird ICPWE and Its South Asian Profile”  
**Abstract:** Whatever else the term collaboration may connote, it stands for a method of equitable sharing. From a transcultural perspective, even literary collaborations refer to collective “isomeric” engagements; a compound that celebrates more similarities than differences and distinctions (*Transcultural Humanities in South Asia*, 2022: 1). South Asian literary and cultural heritage offers many such isomeric spaces for tracing common belongings, be they Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, or other. This paper highlights such collaborative efforts made by one of its kind Centre in Pakistan, the International Centre for Pakistani [Creative] Writing in English at Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore, aka the KC-ICPWE. Ever since its inception in 2014, the Centre could archive anglophonic works of local as well as diaspora Pakistanis who made a choice to express in English and, thus, added to the regional and global canonical contexts. The collections map a literary ambiance across and around the world universities to redefine “Pakistaniat” beyond its assumed primal notion: “the land of the pure.” Working closely with the families and institutions of writers like Ahmed Ali, Taufiq Rafat, Sara Suleri, Zulfikar Ghose, Bapsi Sidhwa, Mohsin Hamid, Kamila Shamsie, and more, the Center has conserved a common Pakistani-South Asian legacy. Very lately the Centre initiated a cross-institutional and cross-country project that engages the history of Pakistani anglophone drama in the light of 1947 and 1971 Partitions, where scholar-writers from Bangladesh [former East Pakistan] are also seminaly involved. Such initiatives enhance South Asian translingual, translational, and transnational traditions. Given its vibrant plans, and per our institutional support to envision teaching courses like “South Asian Literature/s,” “Transcultural Studies,” “Transnational Theatre,” the ICPWE outreaches SALA (South Asian Literary Association) for imagining a long-lasting subcontinental collaborative solidarity.
- Sonia Sharmin, Augusta University, “Contrasting Collaboration: Partition Trauma in Rahad Abir’s *Bengal Hound* and in Bollywood’s *Refugee*”  
**Abstract:** Rahad Abir’s *Bengal Hound* and J.P. Dutta’s *Refugee* both explore how political borders fracture personal lives, yet they do so through opposite artistic lenses, one rooted in psychological realism and the other in cinematic spectacle. The movie, *Refugee*, functions as a medium that dramatizes the experience of displacement, using sweeping visuals, romance, and patriotic sentiment to depict a refugee’s journey across the India–Pakistan–Bangladesh border. The film’s melodramatic tone simplifies complex identities into digestible binaries—us and them, love and duty, nation and exile, reflecting Bollywood’s tendency to collaborate with nationalist ideology. In contrast, *Bengal Hound* rejects grand cinematic gestures in favor of intimate interiority. Here, the protagonist’s urban disorientation in Dhaka is filtered through hallucination, memory, and the sensory instability of trauma. Using Cathy Caruth’s trauma theory, this paper examines how the main characters in both the movie and the book go through traumatic experiences because of the partition and the war. While *Refugee* offers a coherent cinematic arc with closure, *Bengal Hound* resists such resolution, showing how the refugee condition lingers even in supposed “home” spaces. Abir’s story evokes the feeling of exile more than its geopolitical

mechanics. Although the coalescing traumas create anxiety among readers and viewers, the movie blurs the idea of national identity by depicting a baby born in no man's land; the book, on the other hand, demonstrates the bitterness of trauma experienced by many Bengalis after the 1971 partition. In reading and watching these two works together, one can see how cinema and fiction collaborate with, reflect, or resist reality, one by aestheticizing displacement, the other by unsettling it. Together, they reveal how narratives, whether literary or cinematic, can either smooth over or expose the raw, unresolved textures of border violence.

- Feryal Bandy, University of Cambridge, "Regional Voices, Global Frames: Feminist Poetics and Translation in Contemporary Kashmiri Literature"

**Abstract:** Women poets in Kashmiri regional languages admit to being influenced by thinkers from the world over. Nighat Sahiba's poetry is animated by the works of Simone de Beauvoir and Sylvia Plath. Naseem Shafai is influenced by Fehmida Riaz and Quratulain Hyder. These eminent tri-lingual poets navigate feminine subjectivity in one of the world's worst, contemporary territorial conflicts, and they respond to various pressures — abject militarisation, ecological catastrophe surrounding them, as well as reflects on the finer details of Kashmiri nationalism and local patriarchies. Their work is informed by thinkers in three languages (Kashmiri, Urdu and English), but their important writing is geographically constrained as it is only read by an audience of eight million native speakers of the language most of whom reside in the Kashmir valley. The ideological contributions that they could make to the global conversations are left unheard. In this paper, on one hand, I want to investigate what are the networks of care and ideas of citizenship that emerge in their work, and how they negotiate being political subjects under the extraordinary circumstances they find themselves in. On the other hand, I want also to investigate the triple figures of poets, academics and translators who make the proliferation of the local ideas and epistemic systems of knowledge into a global literary sphere possible. Alongside investigating what they add to the knowledge system by living in such a place, I also want to investigate — what does it mean for the output of knowledge to be encased in the structures of translation and academic writing — and — what productive and unproductive tensions do the interactions of local and global feminist traditions bring forward?

## 5B: Historical Contexts

Room: Burnham

Chair: Billie T. Guarino, St. Anselm College

- Billie T. Guarino, St. Anselm College, "'I Want to be Killed by An Indian Bullet': Reimagining Collaborations and Everyday Resistance in Militarized India"

**Abstract:** The term 'collaboration' is often associated with an assumption that it creates and reinforces democratic partnerships. However, South Asian collaborative projects reproduce an epistemic hierarchy that frames minorities and historically marginalized people, especially from the northeastern region, as backward and exotic and therefore, should be colonized/integrated, stabilized, examined/studied rather than creators of political thought. Collaborations, in such a scenario, become distorted and asymmetrical, reinforcing the marginalization they seek to address. Therefore, collaborations must be

reconceptualized to examine collaborative frameworks in the region, which often emerge within conditions structured by extractive policies, militarization, and marginalization. In Manipur, where gun violence that stems from political turmoil, internecine conflict, militarization, and insurgency has been the existential reality of the people, rather than consensual alliances, collaborations have acquired transformative proportions and developed into a technique of Everyday Resistance. Through a close study of Thangjam Ibopishak and Memchoubi's poetry, this paper situates resistance that James Scott terms, "pursuing precisely those forms of resistance that avoid any open confrontation with the structures of authority being resisted" and "in the interest of safety and success, has historically preferred to disguise its resistance." [1] "I Want to Be Killed by an Indian Bullet" exposes the reality of militarized life in Manipur and positions resistance not as confrontation but as a tacit understanding that is shared by readers who survive authoritarianism. However, majoritarian South Asian literary and political discourse would reduce Ibopishak's works to "protest poetry" and rarely treat them as political theory critiquing citizenship, sovereignty, and state violence. I argue that reimagining collaboration, therefore, demands recognition of the Northeast as a theoretical location, not merely a political problem.

[1] Scott, James C. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990, pp 86

- Brian Yothers, Saint Louis University, "Networks of Collaborative Witnessing in Sri Lankan Anglophone Literature and Nineteenth-Century US Abolitionism"  
**Abstract:** Sri Lankan Anglophone literature has enjoyed a period of heightened visibility in recent years, as Shehan Karunatilaka has won the Booker Prize for *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida*, V. V. Ganeshanathan has won the Shields Prize and the Women's Prize for Fiction for *Brotherless Night*, and Anuk Arudpragasam was shortlisted for a Booker Prize for *A Passage North*. These impressive individual accomplishments, all of which involve witnessing to the destruction and violence that occurred during Sri Lanka's internal conflicts, are all connected to an important act of collective witnessing: the meticulous documentation by a group of courageous academics of the human rights violations during the war between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) as well as the intervention of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF). The University Teachers for Human Rights, Jaffna (UTHRJ), produced multiple volumes documenting and calling to account the human rights abuses committed by both state and non-state actors in Sri Lanka, and the literary work that has emerged from the conflict has explicitly been shaped by this collective and collaborative act of bearing witness. As a scholar of nineteenth-century American literature who has been fascinated by congruences between the literature of witness in response to slavery and segregation in the United States and the literature of witness that has emerged from contemporary Sri Lanka, I trace how the collective work of bearing witness to the violence of slavery in the 1840s and 1850s in the United States finds analogues in the collective work carried out since the 1980s in Sri Lanka by the UTHRJ. In both instances, the careful, collaborative act of documenting violence has found a voice in explicitly literary texts, and the ability of the individual literary imagination to advocate for change has been rooted in work that goes beyond what any individual could accomplish.

- Sudarshan Gautam, Indian Institute of Technology BHU Varanasi, “The Pāṇinian Treatment of Nitya Samāsa (obligatory compounds): The Inapplicability of Internal Expansion (Svapada-Vigraha)”

**Abstract:** This paper examines nitya samāsa (obligatory compounds) in the Pāṇinian grammatical tradition as an exemplary case of intellectual collaboration within South Asian knowledge systems. While Sanskrit grammar is often approached as a self-contained analytical system, this study argues that nitya samāsa emerges from and continues to preserve a long-standing interplay between linguistic theory, interpretive practices, and culturally embedded usage. The paper first outlines the principal characteristics (lakṣaṇas) attributed to nitya samāsa in the Pāṇinian tradition, such as obligatoriness, semantic inseparability, and resistance to syntactic reversal, and identifies the various causes traditionally recognized for obligatory compounding, including lexical convention, semantic compulsion (arthāparihāryatā), and usage-driven fixity. By clarifying how these factors jointly determine obligatoriness, the paper shows why nitya samāsas resist internal syntactic expansion, paraphrasing using constituent words (svapada-vigraha) and instead require external paraphrastic expansion (asvapada-vigraha), or in some cases admit no paraphrase at all (avigraha). Using expressions such as yathāśakti, tadartham, unmattagaṅgam, prācāryaḥ etc. the study demonstrates that the meaning of a nitya samāsa arises holistically from the compound as a unified semantic entity rather than from its individual lexical components. This intrinsic holism reveals a collaborative relationship between grammatical rules, semantic expectations, and cultural usage: neither grammar alone nor context alone produces the meaning. Instead, meaning is co-generated through the historical interaction of rule systems, interpretive traditions, and lived linguistic practice. In this sense, nitya samāsa exemplifies a distinctive mode of intellectual collaboration embedded in Sanskrit grammatical thought.

- Badusha Peer Masthan, Texas Tech University, “Caste, Gender, and Resistance in the Aesthetics of Dalit Muslim Feminism through Shajahana’s ‘Laddaaffni’ and ‘Silsila’”
- Abstract:** This paper examines the aesthetics of Dalit Muslim women’s writing through two works by Shajahana: Laddaaffni (2005) and Silsila (2016). While much scholarship has explored Dalit women’s narratives and their unique intersectional struggles, there is a notable gap in analyzing the experiences of Dalit Muslim women, whose voices remain underrepresented in Dalit feminist discourse. By analyzing the literary devices of metaphor and simile, I argue that these works not only depict the layered oppression of Dalit Muslim women but also transform their narratives into forms of resistance and activism. In Laddaaffni, the use of metaphors such as the speaker being “sacrificed like a dumb being” illustrates the poets’s enforced silence and submission within oppressive social and cultural rituals. Similes like the image of the Shajahana’s voice “turning somersaults all over the place like a wisp of cotton” convey her fragile, powerless state, tossed about by the powerful forces of class, caste, and linguistic superiority. The vivid depiction of the “terrified cotton saree” and “shy teardrops” underscores the embodied nature of the Dalit Muslim women’s oppression, where even her clothing and tears become symbols of her vulnerability. Through these aesthetic choices, the narratives not only highlight the intersectional challenges faced by Dalit Muslim women but also turn these experiences into sites of resistance, challenging the hegemonic structures that silence them. This paper

demonstrates how these aesthetics contribute to shaping a distinct feminist activism within Dalit Muslim women's writings.

### 5C: South Asian Feelings

Room: Walden

Chair: Shwetha Chandrashekhar, University of South Dakota  
Saumya Lal, Louisiana State University

This panel examines the grammar of South Asian feelings in literary and cinematic productions of the subcontinent. As the works of scholars such as Sara Ahmed, Sneja Gunew, Deepika Bahri, Ulka Anjaria, and Neetu Khanna have shown, attending to how we express and understand emotions is crucial for not only decolonizing Eurocentric taxonomies and philosophies of experience but also uncovering the multiple ways emotions both reinforce and disrupt hegemonic power structures in the global South. Accordingly, this panel aims to think through the problematics of emotional legibility and illegibility, with an emphasis on the challenges of articulating minoritarian feelings amid the ongoing socio-political conflicts and contestations in postcolonial South Asia.

- Kalyan Nadiminti, Northwestern University, "Blind Opacity: Ved Mehta, Cold War Institutionalality, and Disability Refusal"  
In "Blind Opacity: Ved Mehta, Cold War Institutionalality, and Disability Refusal," **Kalyan Nadiminti** puts Erving Goffman's sociology in dialogue with Indian American memoirist Ved Mehta, to query how these two very different ethnographers describe the microinteractions of disability through stark prose often dredged of feeling. Even as Goffman has become central to critical disability studies, his method has been singled out by scholars like Heather Love for its disinterest in interiorized life, pitiless portraits drawn with "ice water in his veins." Mehta's first memoir *Face to Face* (1957) offers a surprisingly similar account of blindness that scoops out interiority for description, presenting an account of a blind international student in the US that absorbs both the curiosity and animosity aimed at his disabled, racialized, and exoticized selfhood. Nadiminti shows how Mehta refuses the alienating affects of disability by substituting it with studied indifference and, occasionally, suppressed rage. From refusing to use a sighted cane to developing a theory of "facial vision," Mehta's memoir de-exceptionalizes disability by refusing blindness as an innately stigmatizing or disabling condition. Instead, he steers his readers to an understanding of blindness as a coherent, self-sufficient world that only remains opaque to the sighted for their inability to perceive disability.
- Shwetha Chandrashekhar, University of South Dakota, "What Comes After Tolerance?"  
In "What Comes After Tolerance?" **Shwetha Chandrashekhar** draws attention to the workings of Hindu majoritarian affects, a combination of aesthetic registers and emotive epistememes, in two Hindi films that released in the year 2013. Abhishek Kapoor's *Kai Po Che!* and Aanand L. Rai's *Raanjhanaa*, she argues, are postsecular Hindi films that can be interpreted as the successors of what Priya Kumar refers to as "the Muslim minoritarian film," a genre that became popular in the wake of the 1992 demolition of the Babri masjid and include films such as *Zakhm* (1998) and *Fiza* (2000). *Kai Po Che!* and *Raanjhanaa* revolve around the emotional lives of their young Hindu male protagonists, Ishaan and Kundan respectively, that get shaped by the sociopolitical structures of a globalized India

that accommodate the tenets of both liberal secularism and majoritarian nationalism. Chandrashekar pays attention to the overbearing nature of Ishaan's obsessional attachment to Ali, a poor Muslim boy in whom he sees the potential to become the next big cricketer, and Kundan's fervent but one-sided love for Zoya, a Muslim girl, in contrast to the emotional passivity, messiness, and inertness of Ali and Zoya respectively, thereby offering a new understanding of minoritarian opacity and repression in a postsecular Hindu majoritarian India.

- Saumya Lal, Louisiana State University, "Middle-Class Empathy and the Specter of a People's War in *The Lives of Others*"  
In "Middle-Class Empathy and the Specter of a People's War in *The Lives of Others*," **Saumya Lal** explores how Neel Mukherjee's 2014 novel comments on the politics of empathy in the Naxalite insurgency in 1960s India. The "annihilation line," or the obliteration of "class enemies," advocated by the Maoist leader Charu Mazumdar unsurprisingly repulsed large sections of Indian society, but Naxalite sympathizers defended its indispensability in the face of pervasive structural violence. *The Lives of Others* refracts the polarized sentiments that the Naxalite movement incited by zooming in on its paradoxical relationship with the Bengali middle class in the 1960s, which supplied a substantial number of its revolutionaries even though it constituted the "class enemy." This paradox was not lost on Mazumdar, who urged the movement's middle-class recruits to align their sympathies away from their own communities and toward the oppressed. Yet, such a redistribution of empathic affinities raises multiple ontological and ethical challenges. Probing these challenges, Lal argues that Mukherjee's novel encourages critical ambivalence in readers' empathy with Supratik, the Naxalite insurgent, and his bourgeois family members by interposing us between the divergent registers of empathy they engage, which in turn inform their participation in various forms of structural and revolutionary violence.
- Mehak Faisal Khan, University of Notre Dame, "Ajeeb Feelings"  
In "Ajeeb Feelings," **Mehak Faisal Khan** examines how ajeeb (strange, uncanny, wondrous, queer) feelings become palpable in contemporary culture from South Asia. Interest in the wondrous can be traced back to tilism in pre-modern Dastan-i Amir Hamza, yet the present implications of ajeeb artifacts are far more morally and aesthetically ambiguous. Khan's paper explores the kinds of affects that social media users from the global South use and the shades of ajeeb emotions their artistic endeavors produce. A key source is the corpus of texts that filmmaker and archivist Saad Khan has collected and published under the umbrella of Khajistan Press, which covers art from the Indus to the Maghreb. And although this DIY identity-making is different from that found in mainstream television and film productions, occasionally affective strangeness finds its way into arthouse filmic exploration, as in the Indian short film collection *Ajeeb Dastaans* (2021). By way of Khan's archive, this paper explores the aesthetics of strangeness in modern South Asian visual cultures, with particular interest in the kinds of unnameable emotions an ajeeb archive might gather and propagate. Doing so uncovers new ways of thinking about cultural and political connections across the varying forms of aesthetic discourse across the global majority.

As this overview suggests, the panel benefits from the juxtaposition of diverse foci and methods of analysis. In addition to constellating different historical contexts and theoretical frameworks, the papers bring together various mediums-cinema, visual art, memoir, and novel-to illuminate the range of aesthetic strategies South Asian writers and artists utilize for commenting on the politics of emotions and envisioning new modalities of feeling.

## SESSION 6: 3:00-4:15 PM

### 6A: Pedagogical Collaborations

Room: Glenwaters

Chair: Nalini Iyer, Seattle University

- Mommina Tarar, Western Washington University, “Nature and the Divine: Designing Eco-Spiritual Curricula through Hindu Thought and Rabindranath Tagore”  
**Abstract:** This paper examines how Rabindranath Tagore’s nature writing can serve as a foundation for teaching ecocritical literature through a Hindu ecological lens, which will highlight the collective spiritual currents that shape South Asian literature. While South Asia’s ecocritical pedagogy often focuses on human-nature impacts, it tends to overlook the spiritual source of these understandings of our natural world. Tagore’s writing is deeply embedded with Hindu traditions of animism, interconnectedness, and the sacredness of the earth. This alone will offer students of ecocriticism an entry point into spiritual ecology that is both culturally and ethically grounded. Additionally, these studies of nature will ask students to examine the biology, ecology, and environmental inhabitants of the region through the introduction of a spiritual force. Focusing on Tagore’s depictions of trees, rain, rivers, and rural landscapes, the paper will demonstrate how his work envisions nature as a living presence accompanied by a divine force. This animistic approach, which will explore the Indus, Chenab, and Sutlej rivers, the Peepal and Mango trees, along with the land fields in Punjab, will open up a wider discussion of holistic approaches to the understanding of the region’s ecological crisis. Moreover, the naturalistic spirit of the region’s literary landscape will foster a deeper connection to students’ writing/reading practice. Through close reading/writing practices, students will examine how Tagore merges ecological perception with spirituality, inviting them to see the natural world as a sacred participant in human life. By integrating Hindu ecological thought into the teaching of Tagore, the curriculum I propose encourages a reading practice that is grounded in South Asian ecologies within spiritual and cultural contexts. The paper argues that this approach will deepen students’ understanding of both environmental concerns and literary imagination, offering a more nuanced method for teaching ecocriticism in South Asian literature classrooms.
- Mayuri Deka, The University of the Bahamas, “Pedagogy and empathy: Re-imagining Collaborative praxis within the Literature classroom”  
**Abstract:** The diversity of the South Asian region has historically ensued in dynamic societies where diverse socio-cultural, ethnic, economic and political contexts come in constant contact. While this has contributed to the immense richness of the societal fabric, there are also many occasions of confrontation and chaos. This is very apparent in the current climate of the region where religious intolerance, political extremism and growing

economic inequality are being exacerbated with man-made and environmental disasters. This constant awareness of the Other is resulting in people reacting with panic and resorting to prejudice and bias in an attempt re-establish their sense of Self. As Nils-Torge Telle Telle and Hans-Rüdiger Pfister point out in “Positive Empathy and Prosocial Behavior: A Neglected Link” that empathy facilitates everyday interpersonal interactions and is usually connected to prosocial behavior and collaborative praxis. Usually, this desire to empathize with the Other is based on an openness to finding similarities underlined by sense of secure Self. The promotion of empathy-focused exercises within the South Asian literature classroom which enables students to see similarities with cultures and people they see as distant and alien while securing their self-identity would enhance their prosocial thinking and collaborative action. South Asian literature would provide students unfamiliar with the socio-cultural and economic ethos to enter a distant world and engage with the characters in the text. With empathy-focused pedagogical strategies, the instructor could encourage students to expand their circles of similarities. Thus, by expanding the students’ core identity-contents to include diverse information and people through their engagement with South Asian texts, empathy-focused pedagogical strategies would reduce the prejudices and biases of the Self and result in prosocial change.

- Umme Al-wazedi, Augustana College, “The American Dream and the Public Humanities”  
**Abstract:** The paper will answer the question listed in your CFP: “How might pedagogical collaborations between universities and the public—reimagine the role of South Asian literatures and cultures today” when it comes to investigating the American Dream. Given the recent controversial conversation about who is an American, it is essential to center our pedagogy on how we might prepare students “to engage in civic life—by centering the human elements of race, class, gender, and nationality...” (Risam, Yothers, Hernandez-Laroche 110). It is equally important to present eye-opening stories for the general public who may not have given much thought to the extent to which race, class, gender, and (foreign) nationality influence whether one achieves or does not achieve the American Dream. To some Americans, the American Dream of “other” nationalities seems to be centered around the usurpation of resources and advantages that are otherwise supposed to be for “them.” Keeping these observations in mind, this paper will focus on a multi-model project built on Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s short story “Clothes,” the history of South Asian migration to America, and on photographs of South Asian Americans, with a special focus on Bangladeshi immigrants, to present the complexity of the American Dream and the need for its presentation to the public.
- Austin Grant Bennett, Montana State University, Billings, “AI vs. Tagore: Can generative AI write like a human? A Comparative Analysis”  
**Abstract:** (1) The question is simple: To what extent can generative AI write like a human? AI’s experience is limited to language, whereas human experience is multifaceted and cannot be reduced to any one experience. Rabindranath Tagore is a writer exemplar who embraced a fully embodied approach to life and writing. AI is an exemplar of utility—something that Tagore did not strictly oppose but recognized its limitations. So, to answer the question, I implemented a simple study where I pitted utility vs. phenomenology: AI vs. Tagore. (2) I provided Copilot/ChatGPT-5 with a text file of Tagore’s well-anthologized short story “The Postmaster” and asked it to write a synopsis of the story. I then prompted

Copilot/ChatGPT-5 to generate a short story based on the synopsis. To focus on the phenomenological aspects of each story, I applied a “place-based” method to tease out the various experiential layers within each story. (3) The result: Tagore uses human experience to add atmosphere, beauty, and create similitude (complete with irrational expressions) by including the reader as an active participant; AI limits human experience to sustaining and explaining the plot with an explicitly stated logic. In other words, it behaves like an algorithm. Though this is a simple study with many limitations, it raises a fundamental issue that even Tagore might have raised. In *Stray Birds*, he writes, “A mind all logic is like a knife all blade / It makes the hand bleed that uses it.” (4) The goal of this session is to help demystify generative AI by demonstrating its creative limits while providing a model for participants to explore or utilize as an assignment in the classroom.

## 6B: Folk Collaborations

Room: Walden

Chair: Hans-Georg Erney, Georgia Southern University

- Bhawana Pillai, Texas Tech University, “Fighting for the Forest Way of Life in Ita Mehrotra’s *Uprooted: A Graphic Account of the Struggle for Forest Rights*”  
**Abstract:** The Van Gujjars of the Uttarakhand region of India are a small semi nomadic community that have lived in its mountainous forests for centuries. Predominantly Muslims, the Gujjars sustain themselves by rearing buffaloes in the forest and selling its milk in the neighboring inhabitations of the region. The tribal community practices transhumance as a life mode and lives in synchronization with the forest’s seasonal cycles. This means that in the summer, the Gujjars migrate with their livestock upwards into the highlands and during winters they live in the forest plains. This alternation in their settlement helps the Gujjars to replenish the forests and respect its dignity as a life force. However, since 1985 the establishment of national parks and tiger reserves in the region by the state government and forests authorities- who promote tourism and deforestation under the guise of developmentalism- has only threatened the Van Gujjars’ existence and amplified the colonization of forests that was originally introduced by the British. With the authorities attacking Gujjars and their settlements for trespassing into forests that have been converted into wildlife resorts and reserves, many members of the tribe have been forced to displace and to assimilate with the dominant mode of ‘civilizational’ existence. In the face of this crisis many young members of the Van Gujjar community have taken to resisting their erasure through organized collectives such as the Van Gujjar Tribal Yuva Sangathan that fights legal battles and educates tribal members about their forest rights and the ways of forest life. The Delhi based graphic artist Ita Mehrotra’s in her work *Uprooted* (2025) gives us a much needed graphic account of the Van Gujjar’s way of life and the ongoing land conflicts that threaten their erasure. In my presentation on the book, I will explore the graphic account’s vivid portrayal of the Van Gujjars as resilient and tenacious protagonists who collaborate with young activists to save the forests from depletion. I will also study how Mehrotra’s graphic work, with its auto-ethno-graphic deploying of the methodology of collaborative storytelling and life history narration by the observed Van Gujjar subjects and the participant observer/ graphic writer- makes for a collaborative life

text that provides a platform for multitudes of voices, visuals and stories about a community faced with the threat of obsolescence.

- Sangamithra Nataraj, Michigan State University, “Bridging the Artistic and the Academic: *The Mobile Girls Koottam*”  
**Abstract:** *Mobile Girls Koottam: Working Women Speak* is an oral history project that transcribes the stories of six women working at a Nokia factory in Sreeperambudur in Tamil Nadu, India. This project was a doctoral thesis written by Madhumita Dutta, first captured in the form of a podcast, later translated into a book. This research was undertaken in collaboration with artist and activist Samyukta P.C. Later, P.C. directed a play under the same name, drawn rooted in the stories of the women who shared their life experiences. These stories undergo transformation from the oral to the written to the audiovisual, with the play reimagining the afterlives of these women in the event that the factory is shut down. This paper examines the act of collaboration undertaken by the creation of the play, but also the play itself as a cultural and political act. Kattaikkuttu, or Tamil street theater, is a dying folk art. *Mobile Girls Kootam* was performed at the Kalai ThiruVizhaa (cultural fest) in Kancheepuram in 2024. The play in itself constitutes an act of collaboration, and in addition, in its performance, it includes the audience, “connecting through shared narratives” (The Hindu), thus deliberately incorporating fourth-wall breaking moments. This play not only assists in the revival of the Kattaikkuttu art form but also contributes to the modernization of the form, which previously concentrated on narratives based in myth and traditional storytelling. This paper will study the ways in which the play *Mobile Girls Koottam* has revolutionised the form by including a modern story based on the lives of real women and their real experiences. Therefore, it ultimately analyzes how a folk form in danger of disappearing can effectively resist societal pressures and thrive in new forms.
- Shreya Sharma, University of Hawai'i at Manoa, “Reading Against the Beef Taboo: Folk Collaboration and Craft-Story Interactions in Bachch Dua Rituals”  
**Abstract:** Forces of Brahminical nationalism push for certain consumption practices and culinary discourses in India— through hegemonic cultural crafting as well as coercive governmentality. The Indian version of (pure) vegetarianism is a historically and politically loaded category often invoked to fight debates around religion, caste and nationalism. At the heart of Hindutva food taboos stands the cow, the silent object of reverence and an involuntary participant in food wars. The paper looks into the dough modelling crafts and the ritual story associated with the folk tradition of Bachch Dua observed by Dogra women in the North Indian regions of Jammu and Himachal Pradesh. Dogras are an ethno-linguistic Hindu community. The dominant Hindutva readings of the ritual story (that involves an incident of cooking with cow meat) view it as a mistake-rectification plot but several points of rupture can be identified within the story which tend to offer alternative contradictory and “ludic” readings. In this paper, I explore the ways in which the Bachch Dua dough models act in ways similar to what Eugenia Zuroski calls “funny things” and encourage a disruption of the rigid vegetarian(ist) regime. The collaboration of models and the ritual story offers a strategic disorganizing of the rituals of violence while “retooling them from techniques of disavowing violence to a means of grappling with violence in its most diffuse

and ever-present forms” (Zuroski 8). While considering the ludic potential of the models, I also take into account the embodied materialities of both the ‘original creator’ (the woman who cooks cow meat in the ritual story and later models the calf for it to be granted animacy) and the participants of the ritual. The models act as sites of collision/collaboration of materialities and encourage an undisciplining of womanhood from authoritative modes of observing caste, nationalism, religion and gender while recognizing the violence of the disciplining processes.

**4:30-6:00 PM: CONFERENCE KEYNOTE & AWARDS CEREMONY**

Room: Lakeshore 4

**Keynote Speaker: Aarthi Vadde, Duke University**

“The Writer’s Hand-at-a-Distance: Literary Craft after Large Language Models”

**7:00-9:00 PM: SALA CONFERENCE DINNER**

**Zafran Kabab Palace**

**230 E W.T. Harris Blvd, Charlotte, NC**

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