



# SOUTH ASIAN NEWS

Center for South Asian Studies at the University of Hawaii, Manoa  
www.hawaii.edu/csas

Spring 2008

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### *Letter From the Director / S. Shankar*

First, welcome to M. S. S. Pandian, in residence here at UHM for the Spring 2008 semester through the Rama Watumull Distinguished Visiting Scholar Program of the Center for South Asian Studies. Pandian's scholarship has contributed in a variety of ways to South Asian Studies, with particular attention to Tamil Nadu. Film, political economy, and history are just three of the fields to which he has made significant contributions. He has written on topics ranging from the Tamil film star and politician MGR to agrarian change in the Tamil region. His most recent books are *Brahmin & Non-Brahmin*, an important study of caste and anti-caste movements in Tamil India, and *Muslims, Dalits and Fabrications of History*, a volume in the Subaltern Studies Series. During his time with us, Pandian is teaching a course through Political Science, pursuing his own research,

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### *The Dragon's Gift: The Sacred Arts of Bhutan Symposium and Exhibition at the Honolulu Academy of the Arts*

By Amanda Gomes



Photos provided by the Honolulu Academy of the Arts

Bodies whirled around a courtyard to the rhythmic pounding of a drum and the clanging of brass cymbals as an attentive throng watched. A single call lingered in the following silence before a new series of movement and music began.

These dances marked the midway point of a day-long, CSAS-sponsored symposium held to mark the opening of the newest exhibition at the Honolulu Academy of the Arts. The Bhutanese dance, *Cham*, is traditionally performed by monks to bless onlookers and to impart Buddhist teaching. Its performance is customary at religious festivals in Bhutan.

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### *Unruly Immigrants wins AAAS Book Award*

CSAS Executive Committee member Monisha Das Gupta's *Unruly Immigrants: Rights, Activism, and Transnational South Asian Politics in the United States* (Duke University Press, 2006), won the 2008 Association of Asian American Studies (AAAS) Social Sciences Book Award. *Unruly Immigrants* examines feminist, queer, and labor organizing in post-1965 South Asian communities in the United States to mark the development of social justice politics that forwards immigrant rights. The award committee writes, "Das Gupta's book is a testament of engaged ethnography that offers not just a fresh perspective on the ingenuity of immigrant advocacy organizations but also hope and inspiration for the broader ongoing struggle for social justice." The award will be given at the AAAS annual meeting to be held in Chicago (April 16 - 20, 2008).



## Letter From Director

(continued from page 1)

and sharing his expertise with students and faculty. We are fortunate to have him here.

Between April 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> 2008, CSAS will hold its annual symposium under the exciting rubric “The Body in South Asian Contexts.” The objective is to explore the topic indicated by the title in a sustained way from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. While the symposium itself is yet to be, the response to the topic has already been gratifying. The program of panels and lectures this year is longer than usual in order to accommodate as many as possible of the excellent proposals that were submitted. On April 12<sup>th</sup>, as part of an ongoing project of the Center on “Caste in the Contemporary World,” we are organizing a day of presentations and workshops. Involving Pandian and other invited participants, this too promises to be exciting and intellectually rich fare. In addition, a dance lecture-demonstration and a tour of a historic exhibition of sacred art from Bhutan at the Honolulu Academy of the Arts will be part of the program. CSAS is proud to have supported a symposium on this Bhutanese art at the Academy on Feb. 24<sup>th</sup> 2008.

This year, CSAS sponsored or co-sponsored the visits of Consul-General of India B. S. Prakash, Arfa Sayeda Zehra of the Government of Pakistan’s National Commission on the Status of Women, Prof. Sukrita Paul Kumar, Prof. Asha Sen, Prof. Radhika Mongia, and Prof. Mrinalini Sinha. The visits of the last two were enabled by the Rama Watamull Collaborative Lecture Series.

Over the last year, CSAS has forged fresh ties with the South Asian community in Honolulu as well as continued to nurture established ones. We have helped host South Asian cultural events at the University as well as collaborated on events off campus. The South Asian community in Honolulu is small but energetic and interested in many of the things that we in the academic community do. CSAS considers its links with the Honolulu South Asian community vital and is determined to continue to build them.

Another collaboration that has borne fruit is that between CSAS and the journal *Cultural Dynamics*. “Margins and Migrations in South Asian Diasporas,” an issue of the journal inspired by the 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Symposium (April 2006) of our Center, is now in print. Congratulations are especially due to the editors of the issue—Monisha Das Gupta, Charu Gupta, and Katerina Martina Teaiwa.

These and other developments relating to CSAS over the last year are described in greater detail in this newsletter. And as always, our website carries updated news about us.

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## CSAS Turns Its Attention to ‘Caste’

By Amy Donahue

With support from the School of Pacific and Asian Studies, the UHM Center for South Asian Studies has started this year to focus sustained attention on the concept of ‘caste’. The CSAS will hold a mini-Symposium titled *Caste in the Contemporary World* on Saturday, April 12. Preliminary efforts are also underway to present introductory caste-related instructional and research materials on the CSAS website.

Caste is frequently construed as a defining characteristic of South Asian cultures and societies. There has also been much interesting caste-related research in recent years. The purpose of both the mini-Symposium and the internet project is to introduce ‘caste’ as a critical concept and to introduce members of the broader UH and academic community to recent scholarly work on the topic.

At first, the internet aspect of the project will present original essays, selections of relevant permissioned and public domain materials, and bibliographies of select textual and online scholarly, literary, and religious or philosophical materials. The bibliographies will be selected with the input of UHM faculty and specialists in the field, including M.S.S. Pandian.

For additional details of the *Caste in the Contemporary World* mini-Symposium, please visit p. 5 of this newsletter. Further information might also be found on the CSAS website: [www.hawaii.edu/csas](http://www.hawaii.edu/csas).

## THE J. WATUMULL SCHOLARSHIP FOR THE STUDY OF INDIA

The J. Watumull Scholarship for the Study of India aims to promote understanding of India through scholarship support of University of Hawai'i students who present a focused and well-developed proposal to study for a minimum of two months in India. The scholarship is generously supported by the J. Watumull Fund.

The scholarship supports University of Hawai'i students in areas of study such as the visual and performing arts, history, philosophy, religion, and politics, as well as any other field including the professional schools and community college programs. These students are expected to be enrolled in courses at a recognized Indian institution or to be conducting some pre-approved independent study overseen by a faculty member at UH in cooperation with a scholar in India. Students may also choose to participate in an approved study abroad program sponsored by another U.S. institution.

Complete information about the J. Watumull Scholarship for the Study of India is available on the CSAS website: [www.hawaii.edu/csas](http://www.hawaii.edu/csas). Applications are typically due in the early Spring of the award's calendar year.

### *Congratulations to the 2008 J. Watumull Scholarship Recipients!*

The Center for South Asian Studies received a large number of applications in 2008 for the J. Watumull Scholarship for the Study of India. The 2008 recipients are:



**Geoffrey Ashton** (PhD student, Philosophy). The J. Watumull Scholarship for the Study of India will allow Geoff to study the aesthetic theory of Abhinavagupta and classical Sanskrit poetics at the Jñāna Pravāha Centre for Cultural Studies. He writes that he hopes that his dissertation research will “provide some insight into not only the aesthetic theory of Abhinavagupta, but also the role that aesthetics can play in effecting a re-orientation to cognitive and moral life.” Geoff studies with Professors Arindam Chakrabarti, Eliot Deutsch, and Ramanath Sharma at UH-Mānoa.



**Crystal Chen** (MA student, Asian Studies). Crystal has an academic focus on contemporary China and an emerging interest in Indian film. With the help of a J. Watumull Scholarship for the Study of India, she will spend four weeks gaining familiarity in Mumbai with the Bollywood film industry through the India Study Abroad center's Film and Media studies Program. Afterward, she will spend an additional eight weeks in Himachal Pradesh. There, she will prepare a documentary film exploring “Bollywood's effect on the sense of identity and values of Tibetan refugees in Dharamsala.” Crystal studies with Professors Kate A. Lingley, Anne Misawa, and Cynthia Ning at UH-Mānoa.



**Rohan Kalyan** (PhD student, Political Science). Rohan's dissertation research focuses on India's urban spatial politics. The J. Watumull Scholarship for the Study of India will allow him to spend four months in Gurgaon, a rapidly expanding city near Delhi. There, through an affiliation with the urban media studies project SARAI, Rohan will produce “a visual ethnography of a city that is increasingly separating from its local surroundings and becoming ‘global’.” He studies with Professors Jon Goldberg-Hiller, Sankaran Krishna, and Michael J. Shapiro at UH-Mānoa.

The Center for South Asian Studies at the University of Hawai`i  
**25th Annual Spring Symposium**



**“The Body in South Asian Contexts”**

**April 9 - April 11, 2008**

**Center for Korean Studies Auditorium**

Special Event:

⌘ **Sohini Ray**, a scholar-artist and Creative Director of the Institute of Manipuri Dance based in Pasadena, CA, will speak about and demonstrate Manipuri dance. An evening reception in the Center for Korean Studies will accompany Dr. Ray’s exhibition.

Invited Lecturers:

✦ **Lawrence Cohen**, a cultural anthropologist and critical theorist of medicine, health, and the body who is based in the departments of Anthropology and South and Southeast Asian Studies at the University of California, Berkeley.

⌘ **Ketu Katrak**, a scholar of postcolonial literature and theory, Third World women writers, and feminist theory who is based in the departments of Asian American Studies and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Irvine.

✦ **Satadru Sen**, a historian of colonial and postcolonial institutions of body and identity regulation in India who is based in the Department of History at Queen’s College, City University of New York.

Panel Discussions:

✦ *Representing the Body*

⌘ *Transforming the Body*

✦ *Figuring the Body in Culture and History*

✦ *Bodies in Tamil Modernity*

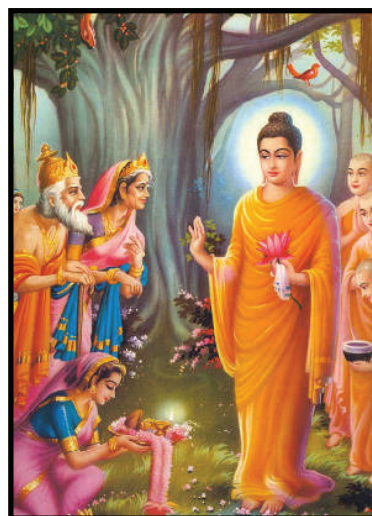
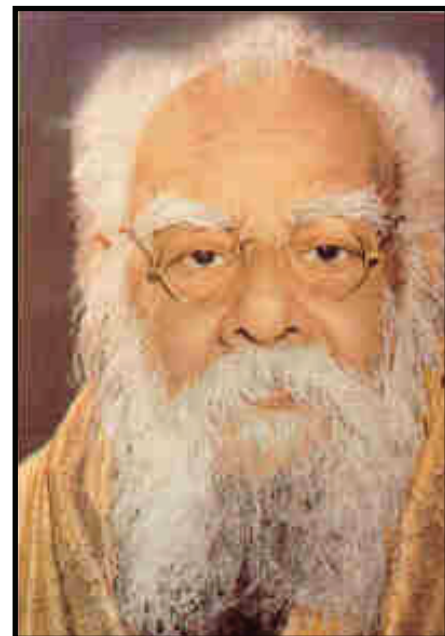
⌘ *Law and the Body*

✦ *Bodies in Space*

A Guided Tour of the Honolulu Academy of Art

## The Center for South Asian Studies at the University of Hawai'i

### *Caste in the Contemporary World*



**A Day of Workshops**  
 Saturday, April 12, 2008  
 Center for Korean Studies

#### Featuring Invited Presentations by:

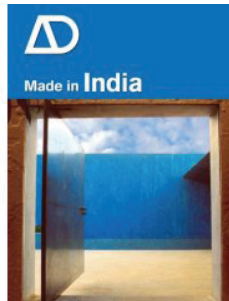
- ✦ **M.S.S. Pandian**, 2008 Rama Watumull Distinguished Visiting Scholar. A member of the Subaltern Studies editorial collective, Dr. Pandian published *Brahmin / Non-Brahmin: Genealogies of the Tamil Political Present* with Permanent Black in Spring 2007.
- ✦ **Anupama Rao**, Assistant Professor of South Asian History at Barnard College. Dr. Rao researches intersections of gender, caste, and nationalism in South Asian histories, law, and cultures. Her new book, *The Caste Question: Struggles for Civil Rights and Recognition by Untouchables in India, 1927-1991* is forthcoming from the University of California Press.
- ✦ **Ramnarayan Rawat**, Postdoctoral Teaching Fellow at the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Rawat is currently working on a book manuscript titled, *Untouchable Boundaries of Colonialism and Nationalism: Rethinking Histories of Untouchability in India*. He researches intersections of caste and race in South Asia and elsewhere, including the United States and Brazil. He works now in the fields of postcolonial studies, subaltern studies, and South Asia history.

The mini-Symposium is open to all who would like to participate. Visit [www.hawaii.edu/csas](http://www.hawaii.edu/csas) for details.

## Faculty and Student News

### Kazi K. Ashraf (School of Architecture)

Kazi Ashraf guest edited two journals, including a special issue of *Architectural Design* titled “Made in India,” and an issue of *Jamini International Art Journal* titled “The New Architecture.” He also published two essays: “Taking Place: Landscape in the Architecture of Louis Kahn,” in *Journal of Architecture Education*, and “The Buddha’s House,” in *RES: Journal of Aesthetics and Anthropology*. He delivered lectures at Catholic University of America (Washington, D.C., USA), Temple University (Philadelphia, PA, USA), Tokyo Tech (Tokyo, Japan), and the East-West Center (Honolulu, HI, USA).

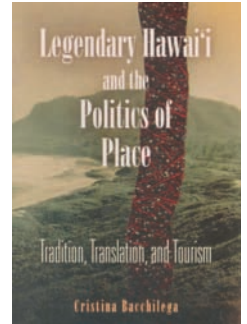


### Ned Bertz (Department of History)

Ned Bertz’s article “Educating the Nation: Race and Nationalism in Tanzanian Schools” was released in fall 2007 as a chapter of a book called *Making Nations, Creating Strangers: States and Citizenship in Africa* (Brill). It analyzes the role of the Indian diaspora in creating racial categories in colonial Tanganyika and racialized nationalist discourses in post-colonial Tanzania. Ned also contributed a book review to the September 2007 issue of the *Journal of World History* on Harvard Professor Sugata Bose’s recent book, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire*. At the UH, Ned assisted in planning the visit of CSAS’ spring 2007 Rama Watumull Collaborative Lecture Series speaker Jael Silliman. He continues to teach both halves of a survey course on South Asian history annually (HIST 301 and 302), each of which sponsored a “Bollywood” film series. He recently wrote a new course proposal for HIST 401 (History of the Indian Ocean World) to be offered in spring 2008 for the first time. Ned is also very happy to have secured funds for travel to India and East Africa this coming summer to conduct continuing research on his book project, “Race, Urban Space, and Nationalism in the Transnational Indian Ocean World.”

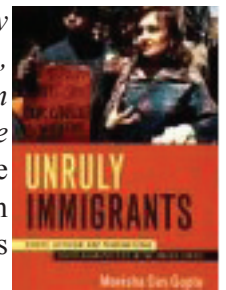
### Cristina Bacchilega (Department of English)

Cristina Bacchilega’s book *Legendary Hawai’i and the Politics of Place: Tradition, Translation, and Tourism* was awarded the 2007 Chicago Folklore Prize. In 2008 she has published three entries in the *Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales* (“Translation,” “Nalo Hopkinson,” and “The Land Has Eyes”) as well as a short piece in the electronic journal *Cultural Analysis*. She is presenting a paper at the Popular Culture Association meeting in March and has been invited to give a talk in Paris (Nanterre University) in June. With Noenoe Silva and Vilsoni Hereniko she is organizing “Folktales and Fairy Tales: Translation, Colonialism, and Cinema” (September 2008), an event co-sponsored by CSAS and featuring among its speakers Sadhana Naithani (JNU).



### Monisha Das Gupta (Departments of Ethnic Studies and Women’s Studies)

Monisha Das Gupta’s *Unruly Immigrants: Rights, Activism, and Transnational South Asian Politics in the United States* (Duke University Press, 2006) won the Association of Asian American Studies (AAAS) Social Sciences Book Award.



A short article entitled “Housework, Feminism and Labor Activism: Lessons from Domestic Workers in New York” is forthcoming in *Signs: A Journal of Women in Culture and Society* volume 33, number 3. The article is part of the journal’s Comparative Symposium: Women’s Labor Activism and is based on Monisha’s fieldwork with two South Asian organizations, Sakhi, Workers Awaaz, and Andolan. It examines the class politics of feminist organizing to explore the grounds on which cross-class coalitions can be built.

A book chapter, “Rights in a Transnational Era,” which lays out the new research questions Monisha will be developing for her next research project involving

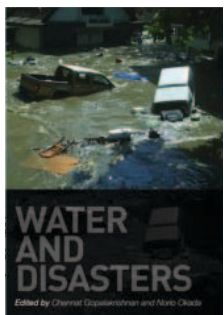
the dramatic mobilization of immigrants in 2006, is forthcoming in a volume of essays, *Immigrant Rights in the Shadows of United States Citizenship*, edited by Rachel I. Buff (New York University Press).

Monisha is currently working with anthropologist Piya Chatterjee, University of California, Riverside, and historian Richard Rath, University of Hawai'i, on a special issue of the *Journal of Historical Sociology* called "Imperial Plantations: Past and Present." The issue aims at tracing the logics of plantation systems in order to understand how these imperial formations have morphed in contemporary times. We are considering an exciting array of articles that cover a variety of commodities including tea, sugar cane, sisal, cotton, and wine grown in plantations in India, Fiji, Hawai'i, Indonesia, Brazil, several parts of the Caribbean, Tanzania, Cameroon, and South Africa.

#### **Chennat Gopalakrishnan**

##### **(Natural Resources and Environmental Management)**

Chennat Gopalakrishnan served on the Scientific Advisory Committee of the International Conference on integrated Disaster Risk Management. He also presented two papers - "Toward an Implementation Science: Key Concepts and Future Directions" and "Global Warming: Implications for Water Policy" - at the conference held in Stresa, Italy in August 2007. Gopalakrishnan gave a key note address at the international conference on Vitae Systems held in Kyoto, Japan, December 1-2, 2007. Gopalakrishnan also published a book titled *Water and Disasters* (Routledge) this year. His paper "Designing New Institutions for Implementing Integrated Disasters Risk Management: Key Elements and Future Directions" appeared in *Disasters* December 2007.



#### **Rohan Kalyan**

##### **(Department of Political Science Graduate Student)**

Rohan Kalyan will be attending the International Studies Association conference in San Francisco this coming March 2008, where he will present two papers. The first is on postcolonialism and economic subjectivity, where he will focus on India's new middle class in the post-economic reform period. The second paper will be presented in a panel on

postmodern Marxism, in which he will look at new configurations of class and spatial politics in urban India. Both of these papers are a part of Rohan's dissertation project, which looks at the politics of urban space and middle class identity in India in the era of economic liberalization.

#### **Muthusami Kumaran**

##### **(Public Administration & Public Policy)**

Muthusami Kumaran's research paper titled "Role of the Non Governmental Organizations (NGO) Sector in the Public Policy Making Process: Past Successes, Current Issues and Future Prospects," was published in *The Indian Journal of Public Affairs and Policy Research* (Vol.IX, January – December 2007, # 1-4, The Academy of Public Affairs, Chennai).

In mid 2007, the team of Kumaran, David Bangert (Shidler College of Business) and Susan Chandler (Public Policy Center) received a Center for International Business Education and Research (CIBER) grant to conduct a research project in India titled "Role of the Indian Non Governmental Organizations (NGO) Sector in Creating Business Opportunities for American Environmental Services Firms." The project was conducted in collaboration with the Society for Development Alternatives, the second largest environmental NGO in India.

In June-July Kumaran spent three weeks in India for the field research of this project. Data and findings from this project are likely to help the research team apply for a larger grant. Kumaran's research article titled "Governance in Indian Non Governmental Organizations (NGO) Sector: Trends, Problems and Prospects" has been accepted for publication in the commemorative volume *Public Affairs and Governance: Challenges and Strategies* by the Anna Centre for Public Affairs, University of Madras (Spring 2008).

#### **Matt Lopresti**

##### **(Department of Philosophy Graduate Student)**

Matthew Lopresti is in his first full-time year as a Visiting Instructor of Philosophy at Hawaii Pacific University, where he was recently given an award for distinguished teaching. He published two articles in 2007: "Santana Dharma as a Whiteheadian Religious Pluralism" in the journal *Process Studies* in Spring-Summer 2007 (36.1: 121-130), and "The

Challenge of Religious Diversity in ‘This Week in God’” in *The Daily Show and Philosophy* (The Blackwell Philosophy and Pop Culture Series, 2007). So far in 2008, he has published a book review of *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, by Kalyan Sen Gupta in *Philosophy East and West* (58.1: 147-152). He is also organizing a panel of distinguished scholars to participate in a panel on Whiteheadian Religious Pluralism and South Asian Philosophy at the 7th International Whitehead Conference in Bangalore, India in January 2009.

### Roy Perrett

#### (Department of Philosophy)

Roy Perrett published “Samkhya-Yoga Ethics” in P. Bilimoria, J. Prabhu and R. Sharma (eds.), *Indian Ethics: Classical Traditions and Contemporary Challenges* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp.149-160. He also presented “Indian and Western Conceptions of the Self” at the 2007 American Philosophical Association Eastern Division Meeting in Baltimore, MD, USA.

### S. Shankar

#### (Department of English)

In 2007, S. Shankar was promoted to Full Professor. During the summer, he traveled to India on a grant from UH-EH and URC to research his next fiction project. His last novel *No End to the Journey* (Steerforth 2005) is now being translated into Spanish for publication by Belacqua (Spain). He was interviewed for the forthcoming anthology *Other Tongues: Reconsidering the Language Debates in India* (Rodopi, ed. Nalini Iyer and Bonnie Zare), which includes his essay “The Tamil Krishna Devotional ‘Alaipayuthey’ and World Literature.” Three other essays “Postcolonialism and the Problem of Translation,” “Teaching the African Novel in a ‘Twentieth Century Novel in English’ Course,” and “Necessity and Desire: Water and Coca Cola in India” have been accepted for publication in various forthcoming anthologies.

### Ramanath Sharma

#### (Department of Hawaiian and Indo-Pacific Languages and Literature)

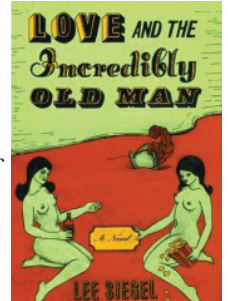
Ramanath Sharma gave a special address to the World Vedic Conference which was held in Ujjain from Jan 13-17 of last year at the invitation of Maharshi Sandipani Institute of Vedic Studies, under a grant

from the Government of India’s Ministry of Human Resources. He gave keynote addresses last year at the World Brahmana Federation in New Jersey and the inaugural session of the 11th All India WAVE Conference in Vrindaban. He has two major chapters for the planned 36 volume *History of Science, Philosophy, and Culture in Indian Civilization* (New Delhi: Center for Studies in Civilizations).

### Lee Siegel

#### (Department of Religion)

Lee Siegel has two new books coming out this spring: *Love and the Incredibly Old Man* (The University of Chicago Press), and *The Gitagovinda: Love Songs of Radha and Krishna* (The Clay Sanskrit Library with New York University Press).



### Sonja Sironen

#### (Department of Theatre and Dance Graduate Student)

Sonja Sironen presented a paper at the joint SDHS (Society for Dance History Scholars) and CORD (Congress in Research in Dance) conference in Paris in June, 2007. She is teaching a CSAS-sponsored Bharatanatyam class at UH in Spring 2008.

### CSAS Co-Hosts Consul General of India



The CSAS co-hosted a luncheon presentation by Ambassador B.S. Prakash, Consul General of India, in September, 2007. The East-West Center, Friends of the East-West Center, and the Pacific and Asian Affairs Council co-sponsored the event. Above, the Ambassador (right) mingles with audience members after his talk. Photograph provided by Shayne Hasegawa, of the Office of External Affairs, East-West Center.

## Welcome!



**M.S.S Pandian**  
2008 Rama Watumull Distinguished  
Visting Scholar

### *Spotlight On*

Interview with Professor M.S.S. Pandian

#### **What are your first impressions of South Asian Studies at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa?**

**M.S.S. Pandian:** The number of South Asianists in the University of Hawaii is indeed small. But, South Asian studies have a vibrant presence in the campus. It seems to me that there are two significant reasons for this paradox. First, almost every department of social sciences and humanities, ranging from literature to architecture to political science, has South Asianists. They surely bring in varying perspectives on South Asia. Second, post-colonial and subaltern studies, wherein the contribution of the South Asianists is substantial, diverse and rich, seem to inform quite a bit of teaching and writing at UH. The library resources at UH on South Asia, including the collection of films from the region, are of a special interest to me. The collection is no doubt substantial. However it needs further consolidation. The collection of periodicals in South Asian languages is not kept upto date and there are major gaps in the collection. It is evident that the library has also narrowed its focus to a few South Asian languages instead of many. It is pertinent to address this problem if UH is to ever become a major center for South Asian studies.

#### **How did you select the class that you are teaching this semester, and what are your first impressions?**

I am offering a graduate seminar on colonialism in South Asia. The choice of the theme was informed by the fact that colonialism, whichever way one defines it, is a common legacy of South Asia and Hawaii. Apart from teaching, I am using my stay at the UH to complete a book-length manuscript which uses films as a prism to understand changing contours of post-independence Tamil politics in south India. Several faculty members at UH use films in teaching and my discussions with them have been rather rewarding.

#### *Promising Beginning for HAA Bollywood Film Festival*

by Zora

The **Honolulu Academy of Art** opened its week-long festival of Bollywood film with an evening reception on January 26<sup>th</sup>. Shiraz Jivani, of NAZ8 cinema, a multicultural entertainment megaplex theater in Fremont, California, was an honored guest. He introduced the film that opened the festival: *Mughal-e-azam*, a lavish 1960 historical drama.

Gina Caruso, the Academy staffer who orchestrated the event, had picked films charting the evolution of Indian popular taste from 1960 to the present. Over the course of the week, *Mughal-e-azam* was followed by:

- 1977's *Amar Akbar Anthony*
- 1982's *Satte Pe Satta*
- 1995's *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*
- 1998's *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*
- 2003's *Kal Ho Naa Ho*
- 2003's *Munnabhai MBBS*
- 2006's *Omkara*
- 2007's *Saawariya*

All these films, save *Saawariya*, are available on DVD. However, it was a treat to see them on the big screen, in a clean and comfortable theater.

Ms. Caruso hosted informal discussion groups after the evening showings, during which she was peppered with questions like, "Why didn't you show *Sholay*?" Only time for nine films, alas. But, she promised, there will be another festival next year, with more Bollywood favorites to delight fans and novices alike.

*Zora is a freelance writer and Bollywood cinephile who lives in Honolulu. <http://www.klofstrom.com/>*

## *The Dragon's Gift: The Sacred Arts of Bhutan*



Several hundred years of Bhutanese history and Buddhist ritual flowed through the performance and enveloped the crowd. The dances added auditory and kinesthetic elements to an already stunning visual display of the Vajrayana Buddhist culture of Bhutan.

The symposium began with eminent cultural experts from Bhutan and scholars of Buddhism speaking on the continuing importance of Buddhism in modern Bhutanese society and on the history and visual expression of

the Buddhist dharma as it has been interpreted in Bhutanese culture. The museum's auditorium was filled to capacity with members of the local and global community interested in learning more about the groundbreaking exhibition. The afternoon talks featured the personal accounts of the curators and conservators.

Bhutan is one of the few Asian nations that was not colonized by European states. As a result, it has retained cultural conceptions that more "global" contexts tend to marginalize, particularly with respect to the environment and identity. The Dragon's Gift attempts to create an experience in which visitors learn lessons about equality and the sustainability of life, compassion for all beings, and the preservation of cultural diversity in an era of rapid homogenization. It could be said that the museum is trying to impart to its visitors some of the same feeling of contentment in flux that the Bhutanese government tries to impart upon its nation, for example, through its hybridic concept of Gross National Happiness.



The exhibition hosts paintings, sculptures, textiles, and ritual objects related to the Vajrayana Buddhist culture of Bhutan. With only a few exceptions these items remain in ritual use in active monasteries and temples.



Attempting to sketch out a rudimentary but coherent art history of Bhutan, *The Dragon's Gift* looks at Bhutan's cosmology and world-view, and introduces historic teachers, Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and protective deities. It ends with a dramatic installation of work by Herbert Migdoll, one of the foremost dance photographers of our time, depicting contemporary Buddhist dancers in Bhutan. The exhibition is currently on view through May 23rd. Bhutanese monks carry out Buddhist rituals in part of the gallery at 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. on weekdays for the duration of the exhibition. There are also videos of *Cham* performances playing throughout the exhibit for visitors who were not able to attend the symposium.



*Guru Drago Machen, thangka, 19th century, Phajoding Gonpa, Thimphu*

This symposium is organized in conjunction with the first comprehensive exhibition of Buddhist art from Bhutan,

**THE DRAGON'S GIFT:  
THE SACRED ARTS OF BHUTAN**  
*February 23-May 23, 2008*

which showcases more than 100 sacred works of art including sculptures, paintings, embroideries and appliqués, and ritual objects of Vajrayana Buddhism coming directly from the kingdom of Bhutan. The symposium will offer a behind-the-scenes glimpse into this groundbreaking exhibition.

This event is free to Academy members and students with student identification. There will be a fee of \$25 at the door for non-members.

*THE DRAGON'S GIFT: THE SACRED ARTS OF BHUTAN SYMPOSIUM* is supported in part by the Center for South Asian Studies and the School of Pacific and Asian Studies at the University of Hawai'i, Mānoa.



**HONOLULU ACADEMY OF ARTS**

# THE DRAGON'S GIFT

## The Sacred Arts of Bhutan

*A Symposium  
on the Buddhism and  
Buddhist Art of Bhutan*

**Sunday, February 24, 2008**

Doris Duke Theatre  
Honolulu Academy of Arts  
900 S. Beretania Street  
Honolulu, Hawai'i

**Keynote Address:**

- **FRANÇOISE POMMARET**  
(Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris)

**Speakers Include:**

- **His Eminence TSUGLA LOPON**  
(Dratshang - Official Monastic Body, Bhutan)
- **KHENPO PHUNTSHO TASHI**  
(National Museum of Bhutan)
- **STEPHEN LITTLE**  
(Honolulu Academy of Arts)
- **TERESE BARTHOLOMEW**  
(Asian Art Museum of San Francisco)
- **JOHN JOHNSTON**  
(Honolulu Academy of Arts)
- **EPHRAIM JOSE**  
(Honolulu Academy of Arts)
- **GERARD HOUGHTON**  
(Core of Culture, Chicago)

**For More Information:**

Visit [www.honoluluacademy.org](http://www.honoluluacademy.org)  
Or contact Takako Miyazawa  
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## Sonja Sironen: A Scholar-Artist with a Particular Twist

by Judy Van Zile



The hyphenated term “scholar-artist” is often used to describe individuals who are both practicing artists as well as practicing scholars. In the case of graduate student Sonja Sironen, this descriptor signifies an individual who is not simply two different personas, but whose scholarship and performing artistry are intertwined.

Sonja, who hails from Germany, began her study of South India’s dance form known as *bharatanatyam* when she traveled to Sri Lanka in 1992 to learn *ayurvedic* medicine. But from the outset a certain element of scholarship entered her dance studies; the nature of *bharatanatyam* is such that one must understand traditional Hindu mythology and religion in order to successfully execute performance subtleties. So Sonja began to learn about the vast pantheon of Hindu deities and their incarnations.

For ten years Sonja continued her studies in both Sri Lanka and India, and began to perform in Sri Lanka and Germany. During that time she also participated in *Shiva’s Daughters*, an educational film about *bharatanatyam* produced in her home country.

Her conventional study of scholarship, however, began when she came to Hawai’i. Although wanting to pursue a master’s degree in dance ethnology, she learned that her undergraduate degree from Germany did not qualify her to enter a UH graduate program. So Sonja persevered, completing her UH undergraduate degree in the spring of 2005, and moving on to graduate studies in the fall of that year.

While a student at UH Sonja availed herself of numerous opportunities, beginning to build an impressive resume even before she may one-day enter a doctoral program. Drawing on well-developed research completed in courses she took, she presented papers locally at one of the annual SHAPS student conferences, nationally at an annual conference of the Congress on Research in Dance (one of dance’s major professional organizations), and internationally at important dance conferences in England and France.

While pursuing her studies, Sonja began to teach *bharatanatyam* classes for Indian children in the community. The children’s parents thought so highly of her work, however, that they decided there was no reason to go shopping or simply watch while their children were learning, and some eventually joined the classes.

Sonja has frequently presented sessions on dance in India for UH courses, and during spring 2008, with generous support from CSAS, is teaching a regular credit course at UH in *bharatanatyam* performance.

Sonja’s work as a scholar-artist has been rewarded numerous times during her UH tenure. In 2005 she received funding from the University’s Hung Wo and Elizabeth Lau Ching Foundation to facilitate participation in a graduate student dance symposium in Norway. In 2006 she was distinguished with the dance program’s Halla Huhm Award for her contributions in the area of Asian dance to UH and the community. And members of the UH dance faculty invited her to perform in the spring 2008 mainstage dance concert.



While completing her coursework Sonja became interested in *devadasis*, the young women dedicated to temples who are said to have performed a kind of dance that was the precursor to what is now known as *bharatanatyam*. She was curious about the transformations in the position they held in society and attitudes towards them. This led her to the *arangetram*, a rite of passage marking a transitional point in the ritual and dance careers of *devadasis*. She then became intrigued with trying to understand why young women today study the rigorous *bharatanatyam* style and go through a kind of ritual identified as an *arangetram*, but then often terminate their involvement with dance. In spring 2007, with partial support from the Colleges of Arts and Sciences, Sonja returned to India to continue her practical studies as well as to collect data on these issues for her MA thesis.

As she reviewed her field notes upon her return to Hawai'i, and began to write her thesis, the particular twist on the "scholar-artist" emerged at a very conscious level for Sonja. In one draft she wrote:



*Flipping through the notebooks I brought back from my fieldwork in Chennai, I find . . . a beautiful reminder of how closely the two components, research and dance, academic and artistic perspective, are interwoven in [what I do]. Many questions I deal with in my academic work grow out of my personal dialogue with the art-form and my own experiences as a dancer, while my academic education provides me with a conceptual framework for my work. . . .*

*My original [thesis] question was based on the assumption that Indian women have gone through physical experiences similar to mine. However, even though I practice the same dance form, my personal experience of the body and physicality in dance did not correspond to the experiences and ideas of the Indian dancers I interviewed. . . .*

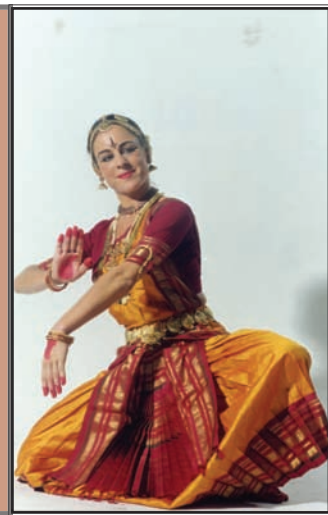
*As much as I am just another dancer in the class [in India], I am a researcher, foreigner, married woman, etc., and I cannot blindly assume similarities in perception and interpretation. My *bharatanatyam* practice does not solely allow me to empathize, but my understanding of the art-form can equally well serve to highlight differences in perception and assessment.*

As you read this, Sonja will have added a major UH dance performance to her growing resume, helped a group of UH students better understand, at a bodily level, the intricacies of *bharatanatyam*, and will be nearing completion of her MA thesis. As she chooses her next undertakings, her unified scholar-artist persona will continue to contribute to the understanding of an important part of the culture of India.

**The Center for South Asian Studies and the UH-Mānoa Theatre and Dance Department cosponsor a Spring 2008 1 credit course taught by Sonja Sironen titled,**

**“Bharatanatyam: Classical Indian Dance”**

**The class meets Mondays and Wednesdays from 1:30 to 2:20pm in MB 116.**



## *Honolulu South Asian Community Offers Neem Plant to Honolulu Mayor and Hawai'i O'hana*

by Saleem Ahmed

Mayor Mufi Hanneman thanked Milun, Association for Promoting South Asian Culture, and Honolulu's South Asian community for presenting the city with a five-foot potted neem plant, which he planted behind the Neal Blaisdell Center's box office on January 19, 2008. Accepting the donation, the mayor mentioned that neem is a valuable addition to Hawaii's flora. Having eaten bitter neem leaves himself, the mayor is familiar with some of neem's properties.

Helping the mayor plant the tree were the following representatives from South Asian countries: Bangladesh: Jan Rumi; India: Papi Sengupta, Nepal: D.P.S Bhawuk; Pakistan: Anwar Quadri; and Sri Lanka: Kusuma Cooray. Milun's board members (see below) also helped. Approximately 50 other enthusiasts pitched in to shovel dirt into the tree hole. A marker, to be erected by the tree, will be a constant reminder to passersby of neem's South Asian origin. A second neem plant will be planted at the Waikiki Shell.

Milun presented the neem plant to Hawaii's o'hana as a gesture of appreciation from Hawaii's small South Asian community for the aloha with it has been amalgamated into Hawaii's melting pot. Desiring to choose something representing all South Asian countries but being inexpensive, easy to maintain, and having a positive impact on the environment, it did not take them long to choose the neem tree, which has already been well acclimatized in Hawaii over the past quarter century.

According to Hindu mythology, when angels were transporting divine nectar to the heavens, a drop fell on the neem tree, thus bestowing upon it many pharmacological virtues. Even today, South Asians chew bitter neem leaves for controlling assorted health problems such as diabetes, gout, malaria, chicken pox, small pox, flu and cold sores. They brush their teeth with neem twigs for dental care; eat neem root paste for rheumatism and digestive problems and apply neem seed oil paste for dermatological purposes. Thus, the tree is often referred to as "village dispensary" in the region (which includes Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka). Interestingly, the same neem parts are also used for controlling more than 250 species of insects, mites, nematodes, termites, fungi, bacteria, and viruses attacking our horticultural, floricultural, and field crops in the field and in storage. South Asians also burn neem leaves to repel mosquitoes and throw neem leaves into standing water to kill mosquito larvae.



But how can something which kills pests be also safe for humans? There are two parts to the answer: (1) In most cases, pest control is not by "killing" action but by properties such as repellency; and (2) neem does not "kill" pests outright but brings about biochemical changes in pests which prove lethal in the long run. The same biochemical changes do not take place among mammals.

The 90-minute program began at 10:30 a.m. with a devotional dance, followed by a short slide presentation summarizing neem's various properties and uses. Mayor Mufi Hanneman accepted the plant on behalf of Hawaii's ohana and planted it near the NBC Box Office. The program ended with light South Asian snacks, accompanied by a small exhibit of neem products and literature, and an informal Q&A session. The UH-Mānoa CSAS joined Milun in co-sponsoring the program.



photos by Mandhoj Rai

## Center for South Asian Studies 2007/2008 Colloquium Series

**10th September: Ambassador B.S. Prakash**, Consul General of India

*The Changing Profile of India and the Impact on US-India Relations*

Co-sponsored with the East-West Center, Friends of the East-West Center, and the Pacific and Asian Affairs Council.

**14th September: Dr. Arfa Sayeda Zehra**, Chair of the Government of Pakistan's National Commission on the Status of Women

*Laws, Customs and Reality – The Case of Pakistani Women*

Co-sponsored with the Department of Women's Studies, the Matsunaga Institute for Peace, and the Program on Conflict Resolution.

**27th September: Dr. Sukla Basu**, Department of English and Other Modern European Languages, Visva-Bharati University

*Translating the Other – August Wilson's Fences as Bera, a performance text for a Bengali bourgeois audience*

Co-sponsored with the Department of English.

**22nd October: Dr. Sukrita Paul Kumar**, Zakir Husain College, University of Delhi

*Partition and After*

Co-sponsored with the Department of English and Mānoa: A Pacific Journal.

**15th November: Dr. Asha Sen**, Department of English, University of Wisconsin at Eau Claire

*Feminist Ethnographies of Desire and Resistance in Lalithambika Antherjanam's 'The Goddess of Revenge' and Ismat Chughtai's 'Lihaaf'*

Co-sponsored with the Department of English.

**7th February: Dr. Harriet Natsuyama**, Osher Lifelong Learning Institute.

*Bhutan - Images and Impressions*

**11th February: Dr. Radhika Mongia**, Sociology and Women's Studies, York University.

*Local Particularities, Global Regularities - International Regime of Migration Control*

Sponsored by the Rama Watumull Collaborative Lecture Series. Co-sponsored by the Department of Ethnic Studies and the Department of Sociology.

**24th February: The Dragon's Gift - The Sacred Arts of Bhutan Symposium**, Honolulu Academy of Art

The Honolulu Academy of Arts, in association with the School of Pacific and Asian Studies and the Center for South Asian Studies.

**14th March: Dr. Mrinalini Sinha**, Department of History, Penn State University.

*Civis Britannicus - The Strange Death of an Imperial Ideal*

Sponsored by the Rama Watumull Collaborative Lecture Series. Co-sponsored by the Department of Political Science and the Department of Women's Studies.

**9th - 11th April: The CSAS 25th Annual Spring Symposium**

*The Body in South Asian Contexts*

Made possible by the generous support of the G.J. and Ellen Watumull Fund. Co-sponsored by the Department of English.

**12th April: CSAS Mini-Symposium on Caste**

*Caste in the Contemporary World*

Co-sponsored by the School of Pacific and Asian Studies.



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## About Our Organization...

Strategically located, and with a multicultural heritage, the state of Hawai'i has always been uniquely international in outlook. The people, traditions, and cultural milieu of this island state in the Pacific provide a strong and continuing bond with Asia.

Beginning with the establishment of the Oriental Institute in 1935 and a still ongoing series of East-West Philosophers' Conferences in 1939. This emphasis continued with the establishment of the journal "Philosophy East and West" in 1951 and the Asian Studies Program.

The Center for South Asian Studies was created in 1985. Since then the objective of the Center has been to coordinate and integrate, by juxtaposing humanistic with scientific scholarship, and historical and contemporary data. The Center thus serves to illuminate specific questions of regional interest, and complements and bridges the disciplinary departments directly related to it.

The Center guides and assists study of both past and present societies and cultures of South Asia and promotes faculty interaction across departmental lines to foster comparative and interdisciplinary research on the region. South Asia includes contemporary Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India (including the Andaman and Nicobar Islands), Lakshadweep, the Maldiv Islands, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Tibet.

## 25th Annual Spring Symposium **The Body in South Asian Contexts** April 9-12, 2008 in Honolulu, Hawai'i

Invited Lectures by: A mini-Symposium on **Caste in the Contemporary World**, featuring workshops led by M.S.S. Pandian, Lawrence Cohen, Ketu Katrak, Anupama Rao, and Ramnarayan Rawat.  
Sohini Ray A demonstration of Manupuri Dance by Sohini Ray  
Satadru Sen A guided tour of The Dragon's Gift: The Sacred Arts of Bhutan



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