

Nordic South Asia Network

Lars Eklund attended 45th Annual University of Wisconsin–Madison Conference

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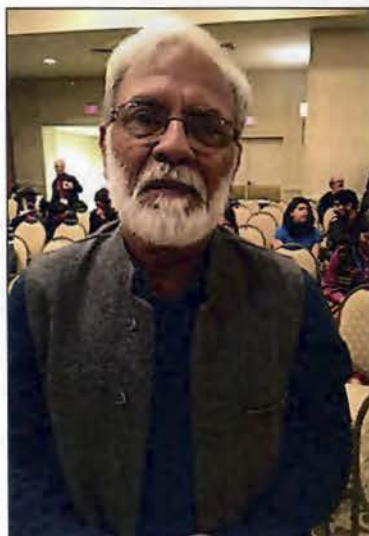


The 45th Annual Madison Conference on South Asia was held 20–23 October 2016. This year's theme was DECAF. The conference, sponsored by the Center for South Asia at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, this year attracted over 750 scholars and specialists on South Asia, coming from countries all over the world and much of the United States.



This year the Joseph W. Elder keynote lecture at the conference was given by Professor **Radhika Coomaraswamy** (*photo to the left*), former UN under secretary from Sri Lanka. Her presentation was entitled *"Perpetually on the Cusp of Crisis: Women, Peace, and Security in the South Asian Region"*.

On second day, an extraordinary good plenary seminar was given by Indian documentary film maker **Pankaj Butalia** (*photo to the right*). He provided a sharp intelligent analysis of the state sponsored violence in Kashmir and Manipur, and the ethnic strife in Assam. He showed clips from films he has made about these issues.



The Annual Conference on South Asia invites scholars, students, professionals, and anyone interested in research on the region to Madison, Wisconsin, for a four-day event featuring research panels and roundtables, lectures and addresses, and film screenings. The venue is The Madison Concourse Hotel, where many of the participants also are accommodated, which gives ample possibilities for socializing with researcher colleagues. [See the schedule for the 45th Annual Conference on South Asia.](#)



This year, SASNET deputy director **Lars Eklund** participated in the Madison conference, also representing the European Association for South Asian Studies, EASAS, an organisation for which he serves as the Treasurer. The Madison conference is about double the size of the corresponding European South Asian studies conferences (this year held in Warsaw, Poland in July), and this makes it even more difficult to choose which panels to attend. And another unwanted phenomenon becomes apparent when you in many cases visit more or less interesting panels with only few external people attending besides the paper presenters. It is of course totally impossible to give a complete and true picture of the outcome of a conference with 21 parallel sessions over three days, plus an initial day devoted to so-called pre-conferences.

Lars chose to attend a number of panel sessions of his interest, besides the plenary sessions, details below. He also attended a highly engaging lunch seminar of high relevance for academics within the field of South Asian studies. The seminar was entitled "*Cultures of Protest: HCU, JNU and Beyond*", and dealt with the worrying events during the past year in India, beginning with the suicide by Dalit student **Rohit Vemula** in Hyderabad; and the police action against students at Jawaharlal Nehru University during a solidarity meeting for Kashmir. Among the speakers were **Anja Loomba** from University of Pennsylvania, and **Ather Zia** from University of Northern Colorado – Greeley.

Alf Gunvald Nilsen, University of Bergen, and **Kenneth Bo Nielsen**, University of Oslo, were the only Scandinavian panelists at the conference, in a panel entitled "*Revisiting Dis/possession Politics: The Macroview of India*", chaired by **Anand Vaidya** – also based at Bergen, Norway. Kenneth's paper dealt with *Mining and the Iron Ore Bust in Goa: Forms of Extraction and Resistance*, whereas Alf Gunvald presented a paper on Dispossession and Democracy, discussing the future of India's land wars after The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013 (LARRA), which was among the last major laws passed by the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government of Prime Minister **Manmohan Singh**, which lasted from 2004- 2014.

Lars also attended a panel on *Decay in Colonial India*, where **Rajit Mazumder** from DePaul University in Chicago presented a paper on "*Preventing strategic decay?: military compulsions and the establishment of a veterinary department in Colonial India, 1790-1900*"; and in the same panel **Nabaparna Ghosh** from University of Virginia presented a paper on "*Paras of Calcutta: Resistance and self-government in the backdrop of decay and displacement (1911-1930)*".

Another



interesting panel entitled "*Between Brutal and Benign: Political Violence and Democratic Resilience in India*" was convened by Professor **Ron Herring**, Cornell University (with a SASNET connection, he participated in the important 2001 workshop when the guidelines for the build-up of the then new network were discussed). Presentations in Herring's panel included one by **Ajay Verghese**, University of California Riverside on "*The Mingling of the Two Oceans: A History of Hindu-Muslim Conflict in India*"; one by **Navine Murshid**, Colgate University on "*Elections as Instruments of Suppression: Bengali Muslims in Assam*"; and by **Rumela Sen**, Cornell University, on "*Democratic Deepening via Violent Rebellion: The Case of Leftwing Insurgency in India*", presenting data on the rehabilitation of former insurgents, and how differently this is carried out in north India (Jharkhand) and south India (Andhra Pradesh).

In yet another panel, on "*Care for the Body in South Asia. Conceptualizing Threats*", Lars listened to a presentation by **Jennifer Rothchild**, University of Wisconsin Madison on "*Women's Sexuality and Reproductive Health in Post-Disaster Nepal*"; and on final conference day, in the final hours when most conference participants already left Madison, a panel entitled "*Labor Militancy in South Asia and in Diaspora*" was held.

With two presentations that should have deserved a larger audience than the five people present (including the SASNET representative). **Loomarsh Roopnarine** (photo to the left) from Jackson State University but originally hailing from Guyana, presented a paper on "*Decay in Indian Indebted Labor System*", with a focus on the sugar plantations in Guyana and the Caribbean in the 19th century.

He was followed by **Yoshina Hurgobin**, Syracuse university, who presented a paper on the indentured casual workers and strikes in Mauritius, another destination for the Indian workers.



A number of cultural events were also part of the programme. One evening an amazing Kathakali dance show was performed by **Kalamandalam Manoj**, a highly talented Kathakali actor, trained at the prestigious public institution in Kerala for Kathakali - Kerala Kalamandalam in the 1980's. Manoj is noted for his roles of heroes and antiheroes like Ravana in Kathakali, and the Madison performance was exactly focusing on this theme.

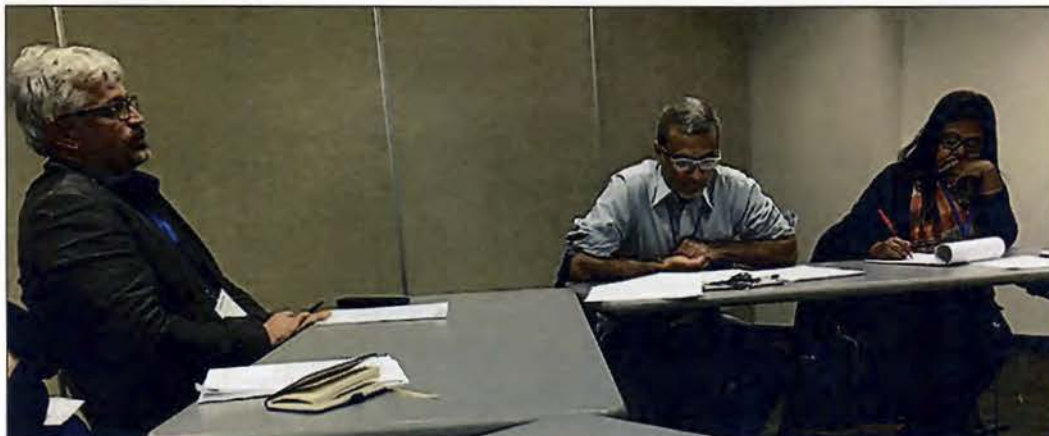


The cultural events also included film sessions, and one of the films being shown was *Mohenjo Daro*, an Indian epic adventure-romance film written and directed by **Ashutosh Gowariker**, featuring **Hrithik Roshan** and **Pooja Hegde** in the lead roles. It is a cinematic presentation referencing the ancient Indus Valley civilization and its city, Mohenjo-daro, a UNESCO World Heritage site. It was a costly brand new Bollywood production released worldwide in August 2016. Two and a half hours to enjoy while

relaxing in darkness.



Nice companions at the conference dinner:





Miraklet Indien och dess baksida

NYA INDIENBOKEN av EKLUND/LINDBERG

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Lars Eklund visited SALC at University of Chicago

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After attending the 45th South Asian Studies conference at Madison, Wisconsin, 21-23 October 2016, SASNET deputy director Lars Eklund did not return immediately to Sweden ([read his report from Madison](#)). Instead he travelled to the nearby metropolitan city of Chicago in order to visit the [University of Chicago](#) on invitation from Professor [Dipesh Chakrabarty](#) who recently visited Lund University as the keynote speaker for the SASNET conference on Modernity in South Asia ([more information](#)).

Unfortunately Prof. Chakrabarty was out of station at the time, but he had made arrangements for Lars to visit the prime institution of interest, namely the Center for South Asian Civilizations and Culture (SALC), located in the impressive and beautiful late 19th century building Foster Hall ([photo below](#)). The SALC Department offers graduate and undergraduate programs with a focus on the study of the textual traditions of South Asia and its languages as a basis for a fuller understanding of the civilizations of the Indian subcontinent and surrounding areas. [Full information about SALC](#). Gary Tubb, Anupama and Guru Ramakrishnan Professor, Chair of the SALC Department (and a renowned Sanskrit scholar), hosted a lunch meeting with Lars on Thursday 27 October, a meeting also attended by Associate Professor [Whitney Cox](#), another Sanskrit language scholar who is also a specialist on premodern Tamil language and literature, as well as the history of medieval South India. They discussed various forms of possible collaboration between SASNET/Lund University and University of Chicago. Lars had a mission to explore this issue from SASNET new acting Director, Dr. Andreas Johansson, who is actively searching for new partners in developing South Asian studies in Lund.

In a separate meeting, Lars met Associate Professor [Rochona Majumdar](#) and Assistant Professor [Thibaut d'Hubert](#) ([photo to the right](#)). Rochona is the Director of Graduate Studies in SALC, and Thibaut Director of its Undergraduate Studies. Besides, Rochona is involved in research on History of gender, marriage, and family in India; modern Indian



cultural and political history, modern Bengal, Indian cinema, and postcolonial history and theory; and Thibaut specializes on Bangla language and literature, history of translation, Indo-Persian culture, Sufism, and cultural interactions between South and Southeast Asia.

The discussions in this meeting focused on possible ways to offer students from Lund University and other Swedish universities a possibility to do language training at SALC, and participate in its conferences. SALC currently offers language training in nine South Asian languages, namely Hindi, Urdu, Bangla, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Tibetan, Pali and Sanskrit. A tenth language - Malayalam - is also regularly taught, but is not available at the moment. Training in South Asian languages - four years minimum for the language of concentration, two years minimum for the secondary language - is seen as an integral part of the department's program. However, SALC is willing to accept foreign students coming for shorter periods, for example one or two semesters (of the three semesters in a calendar year).

Another possible way to collaboration would be letting Swedish students participate in the eminent Annual South Asia Graduate Student Conferences (SAGSC), its thirteenth conference held in March 2016 with the theme "Dying in South Asia". [More information](#).

It also turned out that d'Hubert and Majumdar both have strong connections, d'Hubert with late Professor William Smith at Stockholm University, the one and only scholar that used to teach Bangla at university level in Sweden; and Majumdar knows Prof. Gunnel Cederlöf, previously at Uppsala University, now at Linnaeus University in Växjö, well.

It should be mentioned that SALC is the mother institution of several other researchers of fame, and most well-known among them is certainly [Wendy Doniger](#), Mircea Eliade Distinguished Service Professor of the History of Religions in the Divinity School at SALC. Doniger wrote the scholarly masterpiece on Indian religion, *The Hindus* (Penguin 2009) that unfortunately created an uproar in India.

University of Chicago also houses the famous Oriental Institute with a museum featuring exciting archaeological finds from the ancient Middle East - Babylonia, Assyria, Egypt, Persia, etc. A must to visit for every visitor to University of Chicago, so also for SASNET's Lars Eklund, completing the day with this museum.



Thibaut d'Hubert, Whitney Cox and Gary Tubb in front of the Oriental Institute Museum at University of Chicago.



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