

Steps across Southasia

Over the past year and a half, when we haven't been wrangling with state bureaucracies that have created a mass of hurdles to working cross-border, our attention has been directed mostly to the projects described below – the Forbidden Love initiative, Connecting the Archives of Southasia, and Music on the Move. Following is a flavour of each of these.

The [Forbidden Love](#) initiative has seen our researcher, Daljit Ami in Chandigarh, Punjab, exploring contemporary interpretations and evocations of love legends, of which Heer Ranjha forms a backdrop. He has been focussing on the Sohni-Mahiwal legend. He has written for us about Arpana Caur's paintings which take their inspiration from Sohni's independence. Through [Daljit's interpretation](#) of Caur's work, Sohni and Sita are linked by their courage. [This](#) piece from the September 2011 issue of *Himal* also takes from Arpana Caur's paintings. Daljit has also looked at how the giddha of Punjab provides an ideal space for performers to use the Sohni-Mahiwal story to call attention to their personal struggles. In the course of the dance, women give voice to their individual desires and aspirations – sentiments that are otherwise, Daljit points out, rarely encouraged or expressed in public.

In Pakistan, Sohail Abid is our researcher for the same initiative, focussing on the Mirza-SahibaN story. Over the years, Sohail has been putting together [audio and video recordings](#) of folk and Sufi music of Punjab, and now has a formidable collection of these genres. Like Daljit, Sohail has been looking at different interpretations and renditions of the story. Our Islamabad-based Sohail, astride his modern steed, motorcycled down to Danabad in Punjab, to soak in the atmosphere of the legend of Mirza-SahibaN. [Join him](#) on his journey to the theatre of their lives, love and death.

The next step of the initiative will use the recordings and analyses gathered by Daljit and Sohail, as well as material we develop cooperatively, to reach out to the public. We're excited about this next move – using these legends as a point of departure for college and university students in East and West Punjab to talk about culture – both historical and contemporary -- love, and the construction of what is considered taboo. This dialogue, while extremely sensitive given the volatile topic of

Upcoming

Hri has a few new projects in the works – some ready for unveiling, others very much in the early planning/development stages. (We'll be getting in touch with you for ideas, critique, and the like.) If you know of anyone potentially interested in funding or cooperating on a conference about drone warfare, do send them our way! We hope to hold such a gathering in April/May of this year. Participants will be predominantly from the region, but there will also be a few others from beyond Southasia.



Blog highlights

(<http://blog.hrisouthasian.org>)

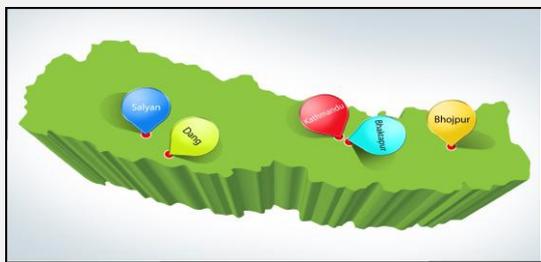
[“Pure or \(Im\)pure?”](#) - Sarita
Manu

[“Music Still on the Move”](#) –
Kabita Parajuli

[“The Ballads of Jugni”](#) – Surabhi
Pudasaini

“honour crimes”, is much-needed in this belt where tradition and taboo are invoked to control the lives of youth, especially women. A few other individuals will be joining us in formulating and conducting these discussions, fully interactive workshops to be ‘delivered’, most likely, as part of literature classes, over 1-3 sessions. Our goal is to reach six educational institutions each in India and in Pakistan by the end of 2012.

Thanks to the Sephis Institute for Social History, 2011 was the year of the [Music on the Move](#) project, an initiative led by ethnomusicologist and doctoral candidate Lochan Rijal of Kathmandu University, in conjunction with former Hri Programme Manager Surabhi Pudasaini. Together with a sound and research crew Surabhi and Lochan travelled to four districts in Nepal outside of Kathmandu: Dang, Salyan, Jhapa and Bhojpur. They surveyed families about their lives and musical traditions. The recordings from these five areas provide a starting point to analyze differences in Gandharva music – often considered a singular genre – across Nepal and over time. Surabhi is currently undertaking this analysis of content and music. [To listen to some of this music, click [here](#)] We are also in the process of producing a CD of a selection of the recordings, and will subsequently transcribe and translate the music.



In mid-September 2011, Hri was a collaborating partner in the [Kathmandu Literary Festival](#), Nepal’s first international literary festival. The event featured 63 speakers and writers over three days of panels, and culminated with a performance by five young Gandharva musicians based in Kathmandu.

Connecting the Archives of Southasia has also been a focal project in the fall of 2011. Following initial contacts with key partners in Kathmandu, Kolkata, Delhi and Chennai by Hri Chair Kanak Mani Dixit and Hri Director, Laxmi Murthy, Sarita Manu of Mumbai has come on board for this venture, and has been instrumental in the work to have taken place. Hri now has a comprehensive – and publicly accessible and searchable – database of public and privately held

Introductions: The Advisory Panel

Hari Sharma is adjunct professor at the Nepa School of Social Sciences and Humanities, Kathmandu. He is currently [Director of Alliance for Social Dialogue](#), Social Science Baha. A political scientist, Hari Sharma is the co-author of *Political Leadership in Nepal* (2001) and *Local Leadership in Nepal*.

Kumari Jayawardena is a [leading feminist scholar](#) based in Colombo. Having received a Ph.D. from the London School of Economics, she taught political science in Colombo until her retirement in 1985. She is the author of several books, including the critically acclaimed *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (1986).

Mitu Varma is the Country Director for India and the Director of Programmes for [Panos South Asia](#), based in New Delhi. Mitu has post-graduate degrees in law and literature and has spent her entire career in the media, from the Press Trust of India, Inter Press Service and *Himal Southasian*.

Ramachandra Guha is an author and columnist based in Bangalore, currently serving as the Phillippe Roman Chair in History and International Affairs at the London School of Economics (2011-12). [Guha’s](#) books include a pioneering environmental history, *The Unquiet Woods* (1989); *Savaging the Civilized* (1999), *India after Gandhi* (2007) and *Makers of Modern India* (2010).

Sadanand Menon is a writer, arts editor, photographer and curator based in Chennai. He is currently Adjunct Faculty at the Asian College of Journalism, Chennai. He is member, Apex Advisory Committee, the National Museum, Delhi and member, Executive Council, Lalit Kala Akademi, Delhi. A long-time collaborator with the path-breaking dancer and choreographer [Chandralekha](#), he is deeply involved with issues connected with the creation of a contemporary Indian dance. He is currently working on an archive of Chandralekha’s work.

Salima Hashmi is a renowned artist based in Lahore, is currently Dean of School of Visual Arts at the Beaconhouse National University. She also runs her own art gallery featuring works of young artists. She has also been active in the anti-nuke campaign and human rights movement since the early 80s when she was one of the founding members Women’s Action Forum. She is the author of *Unveiling the Visible: Lives and Works of Women Artists of Pakistan* (2001). She has illustrated *Song for this Day: Aaj Kay Naam*, a [collection of poems](#) by her father, the legendary poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz.

collections of books, manuscripts, AV material, government records, and international publication in Southasia's various countries. We will soon be adding to the database with collections in Burma. As we gain a new staff member in Pakistan and reach out to collection holders there, we will also be contacting others in Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Bhutan, and Afghanistan. The contents of these archival collections hold the potential to reshape how we write about and understand Southasian history. We seek to alleviate the challenge of connecting those curious about history and culture to the primary materials that can develop scholarship and understanding of the region and its people. Our evolving database of collections may be found at http://hrisouthasian.org/index.php?option=com_collection. We are about to live, so do test it out, and provide us with your feedback and suggestions.

While not explicitly a Hri venture, a Southasian road journey undertaken by our chair, Kanak Dixit exemplified some of the key ideas behind the work of both Hri and *Himal Southasian*. "The Great Nepal-India-Pakistan Spinal Beetle Rally" covered 1100 miles, and emphasized the need for better over-land connectivity in the region – as well as the opportunities offered by such linkages. You can read more on both the [Hri](#) and [Himal](#) pages about the trip itself.

And now a little about the Hri team. None of you need introduction to Hri Chair Kanak Mani Dixit and Hri Director, Laxmi Murthy. Succeeding Surabhi Pudasaini (whom some of you know), Kabita Parajuli is the current programme coordinator, and is based in Kathmandu. As mentioned earlier, Daljit Ami and Sohail Abid are in Chandigarh and Islamabad respectively. Daljit's background is in journalism; Sohail's in computer science. Sarita Manu is an architect with a Masters degree in Asia-Pacific studies. She is currently actively involved with *Designin* Schools in Mumbai, where she is based. Also in Kathmandu are other members of the administrative team – accountants Manoz Bidari and Atmaram Thapa, and office manager Preeti Thapa-Magar.

Please do keep us abreast of your work, and look out for this newsletter every quarter. In the meantime, you can always visit our site for news and writing: www.hrisouthasian.org.

Looking forward to hearing back from you,

Laxmi Murthy and Kabita Parajuli

Sanjib Baruah who lives part of the year in Guwahati, is [Professor of Political Studies at Bard College](#), New York and Honorary Professor at the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi. He is the author of several books including *India Against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality* (1999), *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India* (2007) and has edited *Beyond Counter-insurgency: Breaking the impasse in Northeast India* (2009).

Trustees in India

In 2011, the Hri Institute was also registered in India, thus strengthening our base for work in India. Hri Director Laxmi Murthy is founding trustee, and following are the other trustees:

[Prof Rameswari Varma](#) is an actor, educationist and specialist in women's studies. In 1989, she founded and headed the Department of Women's studies in the University of Mysore. She is widely acclaimed for her role in Kannada theatre and cinema.

[Dr Indira Chowdhury](#) is a Scholar-in-Residence at the Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology in Bangalore, where she started the Center for Public History. She has a Ph.D. in History from the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. She also founded ARCH, an archival consultancy that promotes the value of legacy.

[Lawrence Liang](#) is a lawyer and legal researcher who co-founded the Alternative Law Forum in Bangalore. His key areas of interest are law, technology and culture, the politics of copyright, Intellectual Property and the Knowledge/Culture Commons.

[Maitri Gopalakrishna](#) is a counsellor and drama therapist based in Bangalore. She has worked in inpatient and outpatient psychiatric/counselling facilities as well as in schools and NGOs using theatre as a tool for change and healing. She also has a background in music.