SHS Kolkata

Society for the History of Science Kolkata

No.1 November, 2024

Newsletter

Editorial Board

About the Society

The objective of the society is to promote research and teaching in the history of science in the context of India through the ages. Here the term science includes also technology, environment and medicine. The term history includes history in all possible dimensions, i.e., multiple histories. Thus, the said society focuses on histories of science, technology, environment and medicine (HISTEM). In achieving this, the society intends to strengthen the linkages between other institutions and organizations interested in the history of science leading to greater appreciation of the role of the history of science in society.

Editorial

It is a proud privilege and honour for me to be the Editor-in-Chief of the Newsletter of the 'Society for the History of Science Kolkata' (SHSK) at its very inception. The Newsletter that you are reading today is a channel to keep all the members of the SHSK and others interested in the history of science abreast of the news and information related to history of science. This will also serve as a "window" through which an external viewer can have a glimpse of what is happening in the field of history of science worldwide. We are committed to keeping our members informed from time to time about what the SHSK is doing, and more importantly what the SHSK is planning to do in the future. We plan to report on interesting events like seminars, meetings etc. happening worldwide on history of science as well as apprise our members of upcoming events, personal achievements, books published by members etc.

"A knowledge of the historical and philosophical background of science gives that kind of independence from the prejudices of his generation from which most scientists are suffering. This independence created by philosophical insight is—in my opinion— the mark of distinction between a mere artisan or specialist and a real seeker of truth."

Albert Einstein,

Letter to Robert Thornton, 1944

continued

History in our schools is taught mostly as a series of wars, defeats and triumphs, conquers of emperors, and the empire. It is less often taught as history of science, the series of advancements in science with its turns and twists, successes and failures, the story of overcoming dead ends to finally culminate in a discovery. Studying the history of science this way will appeal to the students and get them interested in science. An article on the importance of studying the history of science, technology, engineering, and medicine (HISTEM) is presented in this issue authored by none other than our President Deepak Kumar, a noted historian. Back to back, there is a detailed article by Arun Bandyopadhyay, Vice President of SHSK emphasising why a society for the history of science is needed.

Maintaining a diary or preserving records and documents has never been a strong practice in India. The writing of diaries started in India only during the British rule. The first evidence of writing a diary regularly and religiously was found in the medical profession in the ninth century in a place not far from India (Turkey). In a book titled *Ethics of the Physician* written by Ishaq ibn al-Ruhawi (854-931), we find evidence of peer review of case diaries of symptoms of diseases, applied medicines, patient progress, etc. to understand the quality of treatment given to patients. Rewards were awarded to competent doctors while the doctors providing improper treatment were penalised. Our lack of competence in preserving records and documents was once again realized during my intimate involvement in establishing a Science and Technology Archive in Kolkata. A brief report on the progress of this Archive has been presented in this issue of the Newsletter.

The success of this Newsletter will depend on the members of the Society; you are our correspondents, reporters, and columnists and we will depend on you to report any activities related to history of science for publishing in the newsletter. Feel free to report your personal achievements or your friends', books published etc. The editorial board will judiciously act on them and publish them for the benefit of all.

The current plan is to publish the Newsletter twice a year. We are hopeful of seeing the Newsletter grow as the Society expands its frontier in the near future.

Why HISTEM?

Deepak Kumar, President, SHSK

The term scientist may have a recent origin but the term scientia has been in vogue for centuries. It actually means knowledge (like our term Veda!). So it cannot be used in a limited sense. But to attain a scientific status, any kind of knowledge must undergo some kind of verification or distillation devised by or agreed upon by its practitioners. It is this distillation that converts a particular kind of Gyan (knowledge) into Vigyan (science). Science includes almost all aspects of our existence be it in the realm of ideas, understanding, activities, interrelationships, etc. Taken together, man and nature form the basis for the history of science, technology, environment and medicine (HISTEM) or STEM in history. Many have played 'historiograpaher royal' to science, transforming an individual genius into an icon. In this sense history of science helped an ex post facto legitimation and pandered to the scientists' amour proper. However, in recent years there has been an almost universal realization to view HISTEM within the wider spheres of thought, culture and society. Scientific ideas, theories and techniques do not diffuse evenly across a flat isotropic plane. In different settings, works of scientific scholarship are differently received on account of cultural, political, ecological and other considerations. Men of sciences are no longer the sole 'creators and consumers' of this new discipline. It now has a wider appeal. And in this sense history of science belongs to the mainstream of social and cultural debates in history. But there remains a note of caution. A scholar with expertise in social history or economic history would need to take into account the nuances of a scientific idea or a technological development while dealing with history of science or history of technology. He must develop an ability to distinguish technology from science, both socially and intellectually, and, above all, a sensitivity to the various modes of interaction between the two. Another issue that calls for attention is the concept of 'mainstream' history. What constitutes the 'mainstream'? Does it really exist? What is the status of the 'tributaries'? When do they become 'main stream'? Agreed, that a study of material culture is mainstream history. But what this study would be without history of tools and techniques? Again, what history of ideas would be without a study of scientific ideas? Some scholars, perhaps due to a misplaced academic ego, think that what they do is mainstream history. So, in the context of modern Indian History, the scholars writing on national movement, partition, etc., tend to treat their themes as 'mainstream' research. Changes, however, did occur from political accounts to social explanations, peasant studies, then 'subaltern', post-modern, and now probably history of science, technology, environment and medicine (HISTEM). Some scholars, working in hitherto unexplored areas, are sometimes themselves keen on 'mainstreaming' their themes. I consider this a meaningless exercise. There is no mainstream, instead there are numerous streams that collectively produce the ocean that history is. This approach not only admits both macro and micro studies as equally relevant but also allows other disciplines a significant role in the production of historical knowledge.

continued

The most significant feature of HISTEM lies in its necessarily interdisciplinary nature. It borrows and benefits from different disciplines. Philosophy, parts of physical and biological science, and social sciences like sociology, anthropology, political economy, etc. provide valuable insights. But any dependence on or overuse of anyone may interfere with the simplicity of a historical narrative and may even make a fine historical construction jargon-ridden. Conceptual analyses need not always result in epithets, labels or jargons. Concepts and empirical study should and do often mesh together and HISTEM provides ample opportunities for this interplay. This agenda must necessarily be not only interdisciplinary but also be comparative in both content and analysis. Another important feature seems to be its utterly secular nature. For example, diseases or epidemics do not differentiate between the rich and the poor the Brahmins and the Shudras, or the Hindus and Muslims. During the covid 19 epidemic of 2020-2021, the whole world suffered. Should not we study and teach the history of epidemics, or more specifically history of germs? Similarly, water knows no boundaries. So history of water, waterways, canals and dams is no less significant.

During the last five decades, works on the social construction of technology have virtually revolutionized our understanding of the technology-history relationship. It is generally agreed that technology- whether as tool or a form of knowledge- is not value-free; it always manifests socio-political qualities and drives the economy. In industrialized high-energy societies, it may become 'messy' and 'complex', but in colonial conditions it naturally acquired the contours of the colonial power, both commercial and administrative. Did it mean geographical relocation of technologies or could it encourage its cultural acculturation as well? Technologies are significant not only as 'tools' but also as forms of knowledge (sometimes referred to loosely as 'technical education' in colonial records). How was this knowledge generated, used, and transferred, and to whom? Aware of the darker side of Western industrialism, many in India wished to gain its benefits without losing India's indigenous culture. How to have the best of both worlds? The dilemma continues even at the turn of the new millennia.

Multi-sited, interdisciplinary studies would definitely be more illuminating. Social constructions, historical anthropology and cultural insights can bring forth new dimensions of HISTEM and enrich our understanding as nothing else has done so far. Help from scientists should be equally welcome. How can historians tap the scientific literature without becoming scientists themselves? They can by consulting their colleagues in sciences. The study of human welfare (be it in terms of technology or health) requires a joint effort on the part of scientists and historians; neither side has an advantage in method or truth over the other. In fact both stand to gain. Another significant aspect is that STM has always been much more plural than most people appreciate; there have always been lots of different ways of knowing and of making. But this pluralism has to be both critical and contextual. HISTEM recognizes this and testifies the complementary co-existence of the natural and social sciences. Apart from its research significance, it can be a useful teaching-aid. It deserves a place in our curricula, no doubt. Sooner the better.

What is this New Society of History of Science standing for?

Arun Bandopadhyay, Vice-President, SHSK

Study of the History of Science in India is not in the same place in the last 75 years. There were remarkable departures in the 1950s, 1980s and 2020s. But there had always been a need for a registered society to coordinate, diffuse and proliferate on the emerging issues and stakes on the subject. This Society for the History of Science Kolkata (SHSK) was established in 2023 after three years of failed attempts to set it up elsewhere in India including New Delhi. But once established in Kolkata in its true spirit and coverage, the SHSK caters to the issues pertaining to the whole of India and beyond.

To begin with, the venture initiated by the Society is the product of combined efforts of individuals, institutes and academies in the past and present. Scholars know that the early studies of the history of science in India were done in the Asiatic Society Calcutta, that the idea of the establishment of Science Congress was also mooted and initiated there. However, the straight fact reminds us that even by the early 2020s there was no registered society actively engaged for the history of science anywhere in India. When the SHSK stepped in and held its first Conference in Kolkata in December 2023, it was no wonder that the Asiatic Society Kolkata, National Council of Science Museum and the Indian National Science Academy (INSA) were the active collaborators. Over and above all, individual scholars with special interest in the history of various branches of science and the related fields became involved in the venture, along with a considerable number of professional and non-professionals engaged with the interest and broader vision of the history of science. In our understanding, history of science stands for the wide-ranging studies, connected with the history of multiple dimensions of the development and impact of the changes and transformation of science, technology, environment and medicine, HISTEM in short. This involves many theoretical and practical issues as well. The search of theories in the history of science was age-old. We can go back to the early nineteenth century, if not earlier, with explicit views of August Comte (1796-1857), the father of positivist philosophy, with special reference to two of its prominent aspects, namely, its 'greatest importance' and an assertion that 'one does not know a science completely as long as one does not know its history'. Later Alexander Koyre (1892-1964) took it up to an anthropological height where the evolution of this thought was connected with the intellectual and spiritual milieu of scientific works as well as mental habits, preference and aversions of their authors.

It is thus clear that many analysts sought and touched on theories for the study of history of science in the nineteenth and twentieth century and beyond – philosophers, scientists, historians and sociologists. In the process, the very idea of the History of Science also changed. The moot question that has now emerged is: What is the place of science or its extended but highly linked term STEM in History? STEM in History is HISTEM. A related question: If history of science is part of the broader social science, what is the exact relation between them? A connected other question: Who will do and write it, historians or scientists? Finally, how is HISTEM connected with broader questions of both history and science in analytical terms?

continued

The first two questions (place of science in history and their broader respective relations) are also connected with justification of history of science. Helge Kragh has identified in his Introduction to the History of Science at least six grounds of justifications for the study of science, but finally is fully satisfied with none. The first three justifications center on the study's beneficial effect on science itself, providing a critical self-examination of it, helping us at the same time know the genesis of scientific theories as well. It is also argued that history of science may be used to analyze the interplay between science and technology in the broadest terms. But there are objections as these co-relations are not direct, they are at best sporadic, and the interplay of science and technology not always contributing to people's welfare.

The study of history of science and its links with the philosophy and sociology of science may be advanced as another justification. It is also argued that all studies relating to science are to be approached in an interdisciplinary way. However, the relationship is complex, and at present far from settled. In this context, Philosopher Jitendranath Mohanti's complex arguments in his book titled The Self and its Other about close relationship between objectivity and subjectivity in scientific studies may be critically appreciated, in connection with the extant views of Hussrel and Hebermas on the subject. History of Science may play a significant didactic role in demonstrating the true nature of scientific knowledge, which itself is a 'softer' way to make science attractive to larger audience. However, here the argument is stretched too far, as science can also be used to support dogmas and scientific authorities.

Finally, it is stated that history of science largely reflects the humanist placement of science. In this context, the attempts to break the theories of 'two cultures' as prevalent in the 1930s and 1940s, and again in the 1950s and 1960s especially with efforts of C. P. Snow among others may be important pointers. It was a drive to open up a 'beleaguered culture', much in favour of these reflections.

However, an objection is raised that these reflections cannot silence the critics of contemporary science, and answer the question why greater part of science today is no longer regarded as an expression of humanist endeavour. Thus, as Helge Kragh argues, history of science does not require any justification, at least single justification. It is just another study of a branch of history. Metaphorically, it resembles the proverbial fable of four blind men and an elephant, which was part of a Jain philosophical inquiry. Here the truth of the full shape and form of the object is not available to none of the 'blind' men. It is also to be noted that the journey from the history of science to HISTEM in recent years is also a search for finding answers to questions which are both global and Indian in nature. The UNESCO drive after the World War II through the leadership of Joseph Needham and Julian Huxley at the global level was one part of it. At the other part, the letters of exchange amongst Nehru-Needham-Rahman-Chattopadhyay reflect on the possible ways and methods of the study of history of science, later HISTEM, in India, mostly in the 1950s,1960s and 1970s. The establishment of National Institute of Science, Technology and Development Studies (NISTADS) is an important achievement of this period. Its aftermath is most distinctly visible in the study of history of science in India during 1980-2020.

HISTEM cannot be studied in India without the context of some broader theories that have evolved through the evaluation of the writings of some of its practitioners. Five broader aspects are detected: East-West contact, diffusion theories, colonial impact, nationalist and post-colonial response, and globalization. East-West encounter is a long-drawn-out story, with pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial phases. The subject requires a more detailed, critical attention, which is not possible here. However, Dhruv Raina's formulation, 'how the successes of the Orient were represented in the discourses produced by the Occident', may be an important starting point of discussion. The hegemonic conception of the history of science as developed in the West and its various challenges coming from the East naturally come to scholarly purview.

continued

One of the latest formulations about this encounter, namely, 'history of science of the non-West would not be subordinate texts to the mainstream discourse of the history of Western science' need further critical appreciation.

Diffusion theory is indirectly connected with the theory of the 'civilizing mission' located in the West. It had chequered response – with all its potentialities, hesitation, partial fulfilment of promises and innate obstacles – in the East. In the final analysis, diffusion of Western science in India was inadequate, and missed out multifarious nature of exchange between modern science and the so-called traditional knowledge forms.

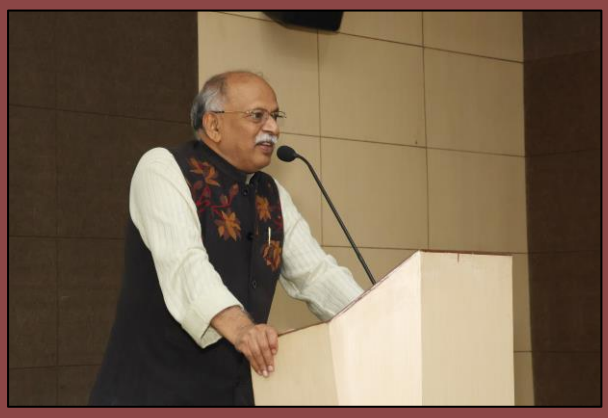
The colonial impact came with the close relationship of scientific and technological projects under colonial domination. Its impact on the indigenous scientific knowledge and institutions is also to be studied. Deepak Kumar's concept of 'colonial science' and its critical appreciation in the last thirty years – from vehement opposition through modified acceptance to creative application – is the one indicative of the historiographical changes that occurred during the period. Its recent expansion through 'waves across the South' over the Seas with regard to epidemics where both colonial experience and indigenous response were important. In this connection, one can consult Sujit Shivasunadaram's Waves Across the South, 2020 and Poonam Bala and Russel Vijloen's edited book Epidemic Encounters, 2023. Chronologically, nationalist and post-colonial response covers a long period, at least 150 years. Its connection with the construction of a national identity through the study of science and technology is now well-known. Here a tradition was also invented through careful selection from the past, hence came the idea of invention of tradition. It has both positive and negative impact. The idea of technology transfer from the West underwent several transformations in India during 75 years after Independence. The last phase of globalization, strongly visible in India since the 1990s, is a distinct phase where village view of the world gradually emerged. t is notable that ever since the 1970s, science appeared I as a notion which is both universal and culture-bound at the same time. Here Jitendranath Mohanti's philosophical theory of unity and diversion may be applicable, but he makes a clear distinction between multi-cultural and global cultural dimensions. Thus subjectivism and inter-culturalism take a significant form in his explanation of unity and difference from metaphysical standpoints. The search of theories for the study of HISTEM continues not only though the evaluation of the extant research works but also by a kind of speculation over and above them. Naturally, there is more to explore about the potentialities of HISTEM, an ever-expanding field with its innate inter-connectivity and many problems associated with its development and understanding. A young editor of a book called HISTEM in India (2022) has identified four such aspects, namely, science and society, technology and culture, environmental issues, and medical encounters. If properly expanded, each of these areas gives us scope for further speculation. For example, we may note the connection between technology and culture with regard to the recently introduced CHATGPT or the impact of Artificial Intelligence over our educational endeavours or the increasing use of all types of technology in our medical studies and treatment. Another instance is the duality of science and environment in some of its theoretical and practical applications. The emergence of the idea of the rise of Anthropocene in scientific discussion, and the significance of planetary, and not merely global, aspects of change vis-à-vis the uncontrolled scientific developments demand further discussion including speculative one.

In view of the study of these four components of HISTEM and their interconnections, it seems that the very idea of 'science' and 'history' is changing sometime beyond recognition, and there is scope for much discussion and speculation about their future forms and works. 'Science' is apparently concerned with both present and future, and 'history' is about the past. However, HISTEM can be comprehended from its full theoretical considerations only when it is simultaneously connected with the past, present and future in one way or another.

THE FIRST ANNUAL SEMINAR OF THE SOCIETY FOR THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE KOLKATA (SHSK)

A photo from our first seminar album.

The First Annual Seminar of the Society for the History of Science Kolkata (SHSK) took place on December 4th and 5th, 2023 at Science City and the Asiatic Society in Kolkata, marked a pivotal moment for the rapidly prospering field of History of Science, Technology, Medicine, and Environment (HISTEM) in India. Generously funded by the Indian National Science Academy (INSA), New Delhi, and organized in collaboration with the National Council of Science Museums (NCSM) and the Asiatic Society, Kolkata, the seminar aimed to promote research and discussion in the emerging field of history of science, technology, environment, and medicine (HISTEM) and the event drew over 200 research scholars and senior faculty members from prominent institutions across India. The theme, "Science, Technology, Medicine, and Environment: An Appraisal of Colonial and Post-Colonial Experiences of India," provided a rich framework for exploring the complex historical trajectories of these fields.



A photo from our first seminar album.

Key Highlights

The first annual seminar of the Society for the History of Science Kolkata was a resounding success, bringing together a diverse group of scholars and experts to discuss the multifaceted history of science, technology, medicine, and the environment in India. The event provided a platform for exchanging ideas, promoted collaboration among institutions, and highlighted the importance of historical research in understanding contemporary issues.

Inaugural and Keynote Sessions:

The seminar was inaugurated by esteemed academicians, setting a tone of intellectual rigour and scholarly exchange. The keynote address by Professor Projit Bihari Mukharji emphasized the importance of an object-oriented history of science, sparking thoughtful discussions.

Special Lectures:

Renowned scholars such as Professor K. Ramasubramanian, Professor Amartya Kumar Dutta, and Professor Arnab Rai Choudhuri delivered insightful lectures on various aspects of the history and historiography of science in India. These lectures underscored the rich legacy of scientific inquiry and the need to revisit historical narratives.

Technical Sessions:

The seminar featured eight technical sessions where 17 research papers were presented. Topics ranged from colonial urban hydrology and the advent of calculus in India to the history of medical education and the role of nursing homes in Kolkata. These sessions highlighted the depth and breadth of historical research being conducted in the field of HISTEM.

Networking and Collaboration:

The seminar facilitated networking opportunities for scholars, fostering collaborations expected to lead to future research projects and publications. The discussions during and between sessions were dynamic, reflecting participants' enthusiasm for exploring historical perspectives on science and technology.

Special Lectures

Continued...

Five special lectures delivered by eminent scholars provided deep insights into various aspects of the history of science in India:

- ✓ Professor K. Ramasubramanian (IIT Bombay) discussed the advent of calculus in India, highlighting the rich mathematical traditions and their historiographical interpretations.
- ✓ Professor Amartya Kumar Dutta (ISI Kolkata) explored responses to ancient Indian mathematics during colonial and post-colonial periods, shedding light on the intersections of culture and scientific knowledge.
- ✓ Professor Arnab Rai Choudhuri (IISc Bangalore) examined the contributions of Indian physicists M. N. Saha, S. N. Bose, and C. V. Raman, emphasizing their pioneering work in understanding the interaction of matter and radiation.
- ✓ Professor Syamal Chakrabarti (University of Calcutta) addressed the broader theme of "History of Science OR Science in History," challenging conventional narratives and advocating for a more integrated approach.
- ✓ Professor Nupur Dasgupta (Jadavpur University) focused on the changing perspectives of medical plants in 19th and early 20th century Bengal, illustrating the dynamic interplay between indigenous knowledge and colonial scientific practices.

A photo from our first seminar album.

Technical Sessions

The seminar featured eight technical sessions, each chaired by distinguished academics, where 17 research papers were presented. These sessions covered a wide array of topics, reflecting the diversity and depth of historical research in HISTEM.

- *Colonial and Post-Colonial Scientific Discourses*
- *Urban and Environmental Histories*
- *Medical Histories and Public Health*
- *Scientific Communities and Technological Change*

A photo from our first seminar album.

Networking and Collaboration

The seminar provided ample opportunities for networking and collaboration among participants. Informal discussions during breaks, as well as more structured interactions during the sessions, facilitated the exchange of ideas and the formation of potential research partnerships. The presence of scholars from various institutions, including Rabindra Bharati University, Jadavpur University, Bose Institute, and the Indian Statistical Institute, among others, contributed to the vibrant academic environment.

A photo from our first seminar album.

Key Outcomes and Future Directions

Building on the success of the inaugural seminar, SHSK announced that its next seminar would take place at Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, on November 11-13, 2024. The theme, "Science Education through the Ages," aligns with India's New Education Policy (2020) and aims to explore the historical evolution of science education in India.

The Society expresses its gratitude to the Indian National Science Academy (INSA), the National Council of Science Museums (NCSM), and the Asiatic Society for their generous support and encouragement. The successful organization of the seminar would not have been possible without the dedication and hard work of the SHSK team, the esteemed speakers, and all the participants.

The Science & Technology Archive at BITM, Kolkata

Science and technology have been crucial driving forces in human history, constantly evolving and reshaping our lives. Yet, the stories behind these breakthroughs, the struggles and triumphs of pioneers, and the socio-cultural context surrounding them often remain hidden within archival materials, personal notes, and unpublished manuscripts. It has long been felt in India to establish a comprehensive science and technology historical manuscript collection to preserve these invaluable records and make them accessible to researchers, educators, and the public, offering them an inspiring glimpse into our rich scientific heritage.

Recognising the vital role of collecting and preserving these documents in national development, the National Council of Science Museums (NCSM-an autonomous institution under Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India) society, the highest-level decision-making body of NCSM, recommended establishing a Science & Technology archive at Birla Industrial & Technological Museum (BITM). BITM stands as India's pioneering Science & Technology Museum, marking a significant milestone in the nation's scientific heritage.

The Core Committee

Prof. Suprakash C Roy - Chairman

Prof. Deepak Kumar - Mentor

Prof. Smriti Kumar Sarkar – Mentor

Prof. Amartya Kumar Dutta -Member

Prof. Arnab Rai Choudhuri – Member

Prof. Chandrima Saha – Member

Prof. Chittaranjan Sinha- Member

Prof. Sahara Ahmed – Member

Dr. Suvobrata Sarkar - Member

Prof. Syamal Chakrabarty - Member

Sri. S. Chaudhuri, Director BITM, - Member - Convenor

Since its inauguration on May 2nd, 1959, BITM has been the cornerstone of India's science centre movement. Over the decades, BITM has steadfastly pursued its core mission of fostering scientific temper and hands-on learning. Its growth catalysed the formation of the National Council of Science Museums (NCSM) in 1978, which has evolved into the world's largest network of science centres, creating a robust infrastructure for science communication and informal science learning across India.

The initiative to establish an archive at the premises of the BITM is basically to address a crucial gap in preserving India's scientific heritage. While India's historical contributions to global scientific knowledge are well-known, there's a pressing need to chronicle our scientific and technological achievements during colonial and post-independence periods. The archive aims to collect and preserve the intellectual legacy of Indian scientists, engineers, technology pioneers, and medical researchers who shaped modern India.

continued

The archive will provide an authentic window into our scientific past, serving as both a research resource and a testament to India's journey for the development of Science and Technology. The collection will encompass a broad range of materials, including: Manuscripts, letters, diaries, photographs and notebooks of scientists, medics, engineers, and inventors. It would also serve as a repository of early scientific publications, pamphlets, and newspaper clippings.

It would also implement best practices for archival storage and digitization to ensure the long-term preservation of the collection. It would facilitate scholarly research by providing access to the collection through a user-friendly online platform and dedicated research space. It would also try to develop educational programs and resources based on the collection to engage students, the public, and policymakers with the history of science and technology.

To realize this vision, NCSM constituted an expert committee comprising eminent professors, academicians, science historians, and medical researchers. In the first meeting of the committee held on May 13,2024, the committee has initiated a strategic approach, beginning with establishing a digital archive focusing on 27 distinguished scientists and researchers from Kolkata. On the guidance of the steering committee, the S&T digital Archive is formulating a strategic acquisition plan through targeted outreach to individuals, families, collectors, and institutions known to possess relevant materials. It is implementing standardized practices for archival processing, ensuring proper description, cataloguing, and organization of the collected materials.

The project has now expanded to include more scientists nationwide like Birbal Sahni, Homi J Bhabha, Dilip Mahalanbis, Vikram Sarabhai, M.V.Visvesvaraya etc to shape out as the National Science & Technology Archive in digital format, who laid the foundation of modern Indian science, technology, and medical research. The Archive is hoped to be launched soon.

To realize this vision, NCSM constituted an expert committee comprising eminent professors, academicians, science historians, and medical researchers. In the first meeting of the committee held on May 13,2024, the committee has initiated a strategic approach, beginning with establishing a digital archive focusing on 27 distinguished scientists and researchers from Kolkata. On the guidance of the steering committee, the S&T digital Archive is formulating a strategic acquisition plan through targeted outreach to individuals, families, collectors, and institutions known to possess relevant materials. It is implementing standardized practices for archival processing, ensuring proper description, cataloguing, and organization of the collected materials.

continued

The project has now expanded to include more scientists nationwide like Birbal Sahni, Homi J Bhabha, Dilip Mahalanbis, Vikram Sarabhai, M.V.Visvesvaraya etc to shape out as the National Science & Technology Archive in digital format, who laid the foundation of modern Indian science, technology, and medical research. The Archive is hoped to be launched soon.

The First Meeting of the Core Committee for setting up the Science & Technology Archive held on 13 May 2024 at BITM, Kolkata.

PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH A CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR STUDY OF HISTORY OF SCIENCE

From Left: Dr. Satyabrata Chakravarty, General Secretary, The Asiatic Society, Prof. Asok Nath Basu, Former VC, Jadavpur University, Prof. Swapan Kumar Pramanick, President of The Asiatic Society and Prof. Sujit Kumar Das, Treasurer, The Asiatic Society.

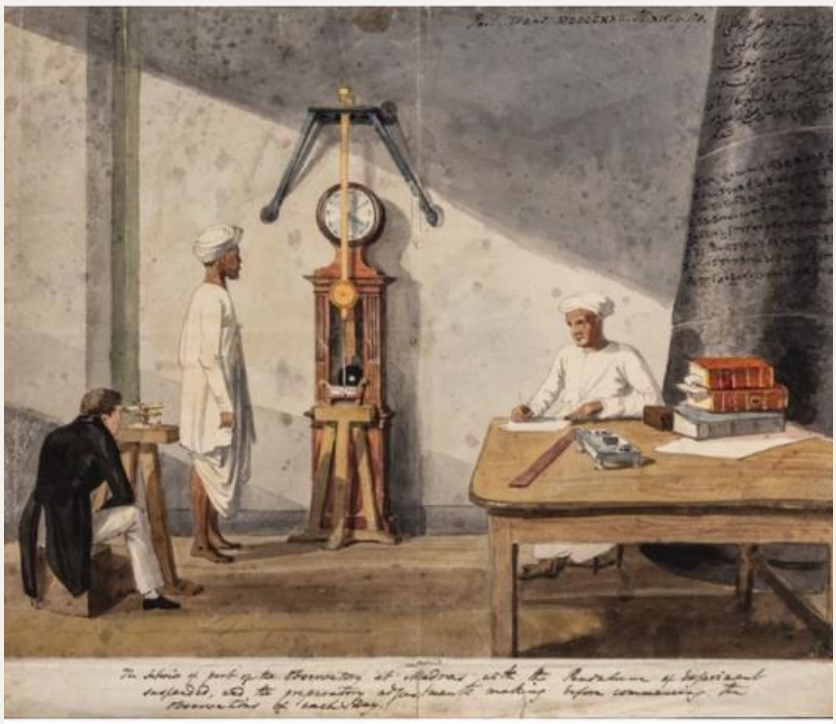
A preliminary meeting was organised at the Asiatic Society's Ballygunge premises (the residential building of the late Professor Shyamadas Chatterjee, an eminent Physicist) on 29th June 2024 to discuss the future programmes and activities to be organised at the premises. Incidentally, 29th June was the birthday of Prof. Chatterjee. The residential building of Prof. Chatterjee at 91 Ballygunge Place was gifted recently to The Asiatic Society, Kolkata by S. D. Chatterjee Research Foundation through a Gift Deed. The building was proposed to be a Centre of Excellence for the Study of History of Science. Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick, President of The Asiatic Society, presided over the meeting. Professor Asok Nath Basu, former Vice-Chancellor of Jadavpur University was present as a Guest of Honour. Prof. S.C. Roy was present as a special invitee.

Report

India's Valuable Science History Archives Under Threat!!

The preservation of India's rich and varied science archives faces challenges stemming from a deficiency of skilled professionals, limited permanent job opportunities, and inadequate academic programs. These concerns have been underscored by science historians and archivists. The looming risk of losing a significant portion of India's scientific heritage underscores the urgency for standardized preservation practices, sustainable funding, and enhanced accessibility. The significance of data archives in fostering collaborative scientific research, ideology, and methodology cannot be overstated. To this end, plans are underway to digitize and provide access to 18th and 19th-century weather records from India, leveraging AI transcription and crowdsourcing techniques.

Furthermore, fostering collaboration among science archives and comprehending the interconnected research narratives is crucial, as emphasized by Indira Chowdhury, a leading figure in establishing various archives, including those at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research in Mumbai. She stresses the importance of exploring the social dimension of scientific history.



A painting by an unknown artist showing the interior of the Madras Observatory. Credit: John Goldingham/The Royal Society Archives, London

India lacks accessible, diverse archives and experts in history, sociology, and philosophy of science, hindering scientific discourse. Shortage of archivists and conservation specialists hinders preservation of institutional records, personal papers, and data archives.

https://www.nature.com/articles/d44151-024-00110-x

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Forum for the History of Health, Medicine, and Life Sciences, along with Cambridge University Press, invites submissions for the Graduate Student Essay Award.

The FHHMLS assessment panel will choose the finest original, unpublished essay on the history of health, medicine, and life sciences.

This award aims to encourage research in the history of science, medicine, and technology.

The recipient will be able to select 5 books of their choice from Cambridge University Press. Submissions must not exceed 10,000 words, including footnotes and references.

Entrants should include a one-page cover letter explaining how their research contributes to new dialogues in the histories of medicine, science, and technology.

Please submit cover letters and essays as separate files. The essay file should contain only the title, with all author details removed.

For any questions, reach out to: andrewhogan@creighton.edu.

The deadline for submissions is August 1, 2024.

Send entries via email to fhhmls.hss@gmail.com.

Archives at NCBS: Research Fellowship and Scholar-in-Residence Program

The Archives at National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS) is delighted to announce a call for a new Research Fellowship and Scholar-in-Residence Program, toward developing scholarship based on the historical collections at the Archives at NCBS. This Program is generously supported by TNQ Technologies.

About the Research Fellowship and Scholar-in-Residence Program:

The Archives at NCBS is delighted to announce a call for research fellows and scholars-in-residence to engage with its collections over a period of 3-6 months. Research fellows and scholars-in-residence will identify collection(s) that they wish to work on, and outline their area of research or inquiry. They will be expected to be resident in Bangalore and will have access to all campus facilities that is typically provided to research scholars, including library and archival facilities. During their stay, they would be expected to engage with the campus and archives, and also the public through informal talks, and at least one presentation at the end of their residency, culminating in research that is geared toward publication (like a research paper), science-history-art installation, or other modes. They are free to choose the mode of their presentation.

Research Fellowships will be awarded to young scholars who can illustrate a keen area of inquiry, a demonstrated interest in the archival collections at the Archives at NCBS, and a plan for how the use of these collections would further understanding of the history and culture of science. Fellows are expected to work closely with the archivists and other researchers at the Archives at NCBS.

Scholars-in-residence are senior scholars who will typically bring with them a substantial body of work that deepens our collective understanding of the history and culture of science. They would also be known for working across disciplinary boundaries, including engagement with the public. They would bring with them a proposal and vision for how the use of these collections along with other archives would further understanding of the history and culture of science.

Research Fellowship and Scholar-in-Residence Program Application Form

https://bit.ly/archives-scholars

Academics from around the world credit H-Net for providing them with the opportunity to publish their first book review or article as a grad student or early career scholar. As H-Net's Associate Director of Research and Publications, it's rewarding to hear these stories and to know that our publications are open access and completely free for both readers and authors. However, these publications are free only because H-Net covers the costs associated with open access publishing. We employ two part-time professional copy editors for our publications and several student workers to complete layouts for the Journal of Festive Studies and the Proceedings of the H-Net Teaching Conference. This summer, our paid student intern is working diligently to code all our existing articles to ensure our publications from H-Net Journals meet accessibility standards for all our users.

We are also in the preliminary phases of rebuilding our reviews management system for H-Net Reviews, which is estimated to cost us $75,000. The rebuild is necessary to guarantee H-Net Reviews is easier for all to use: our reviewers, review editors, copy editors, and staffers who manage our book orders and inventory. The new Reviews Management System will be integrated into the H-Net Commons, allow for images and multimedia in reviews, and provide an overall smoother editorial process. If you choose to financially support H-Net during our annual recurring donor drive, even with a few dollars a month, you will be part of a community that provides early career scholars with a place for their first publication—an academic review or article that is completely free to access globally.

Consortium for History of Science, Technology and Medicine

Fellowship Opportunities

Emanuel Fellowships for Independent Scholars (Application deadline, December 15)

Emanuel Fellows will be awarded a stipend between $10,000 to $30,000 to be used for research in archives, oral history, or other research methods, travel for research, or time to write up research findings for an article, book, or other scholarly contributions in various formats or media. The stipend can also be used as income and salary support to provide time to conduct scholarship. Applicants must have received a Ph.D. or equivalent degree at least two years before the time of application, and may NOT be in a tenured or tenure track faculty position at a university or college nor enrolled as a student in any program of higher education. Scholars are eligible if they are independent or alternative academic scholars, meaning they have positions that do not have research expectations or offer institutional support for research in their area of expertise. They can be adjunct faculty, lecturers (if there is no research expectation), or unaffiliated with an educational institution. Applicants must be permanent residents or citizens of the United States. The Emanuel Fellowship may not be held concurrently with any position that would violate eligibility for applying as described above.

NEH Fellowships (Application deadline on December 15)

The Consortium's NEH Fellows receive a monthly stipend of $5,000 ($45,000 for nine months and $20,000 for four months). Fellows are expected to spend their fellowship months at the Consortium facilities in Philadelphia, participate in our events and conduct research at two or more Consortium member institutions. The Consortium's NEH Fellowships are available to scholars who are U.S. citizens or permanent residents. Applicants must have a Ph.D., or have completed by the application deadline all requirements for a Ph.D. except for the actual conferral of the degree. Additional funding is available for research travel to the collections of Consortium member institutions.

Research Fellowships (Application deadline on April 15 and December 15)

Research Fellowships are for scholars who would like to conduct research in the collections of two or more Consortium member institutions. Research Fellows will be awarded a stipend of $1,000 plus $750 for use of each collection, $425 if the collection is less than 100 miles from another collection for which a stipend has already been awarded. Fellows typically receive between $2,500 and $5,000 depending on number and locations of collections used.

info@chstm.org https://chstm.org/fellowships

Announcement

The Science and Technology in Asia seminar series discusses critical historical and contemporary issues in science, technology, medicine, and the environment in East, South, and Southeast Asia.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY IN ASIA

HARVARD UNIVERSITY | FALL 2024 ONLINE SEMINAR SERIES

SEPTEMBER 10
ALYSSA PAREDES
Living Downstream of Yourself on the Mindanao River

SEPTEMBER 24
ANNAPURNA MAMIDIPURDI
Three Stories and a Proposition: Innovation Theories from Handloom Weaving in India

OCTOBER 8
KARINE CHEMLA
Historiography and History of Mathematical Symbolism: A View from Chinese Sources

OCTOBER 15
AMIT PRASAD
Contestations over Stem Cell Ethics and the US-China Tech War: What Should We Do with Their Orientalist and Colonial Framing?

OCTOBER 29
DAFNA ZUR
How to Talk to Martians: Socialist vs. Capitalist Science in Korean SF

NOVEMBER 12
FEI HUANG
Bathing through Time and Landscape: A Longue Durée History of Hot Springs in China (1000–1945)

NOVEMBER 26
SULFIKAR AMIR
Living in a Hot City: Urban Heat Mitigation in Informal Settlements in Megacity Jakarta

DECEMBER 3
TOGO TSUKAHARA
Environmental History in Transnational Networks: Climate History Described by Rangaku, Dutch Navy, and Japan's Colonial Meteorology

HARVARD UNIVERSITY ASIA CENTER

This seminar series is sponsored by the Harvard University Asia Center and convened by Victor Seow, Department of the History of Science, Harvard University. We meet over Zoom, **10:30–11:45 ET**, on the **Tuesdays** scheduled above. For more information and registration, please visit: https://scholar.harvard.edu/seow/STinAsia

Announcement

An 8 week course for the working scientists on History of Modern Biology

Announcement

Program for the Archiving of Science and Technology (PAST), Call for Project Proposals, 2025-26

The Archives at NCBS invites applications to enable digital access to rare, endangered collections of archival value, and related to the history of science and technology in contemporary India (approximately between 1850 to 1995). The program is dedicated to documenting under-represented and marginalised histories in science-technology-engineering-mathematics/medicine (STEM) in India.

Budget: Rs 6,00,000 (six lakhs) to Rs 10,00,000 (ten lakhs)

Project time-line (up to 12 months between): 1 February, 2025 - 15 February, 2026

Applications open: 1 October, 2024

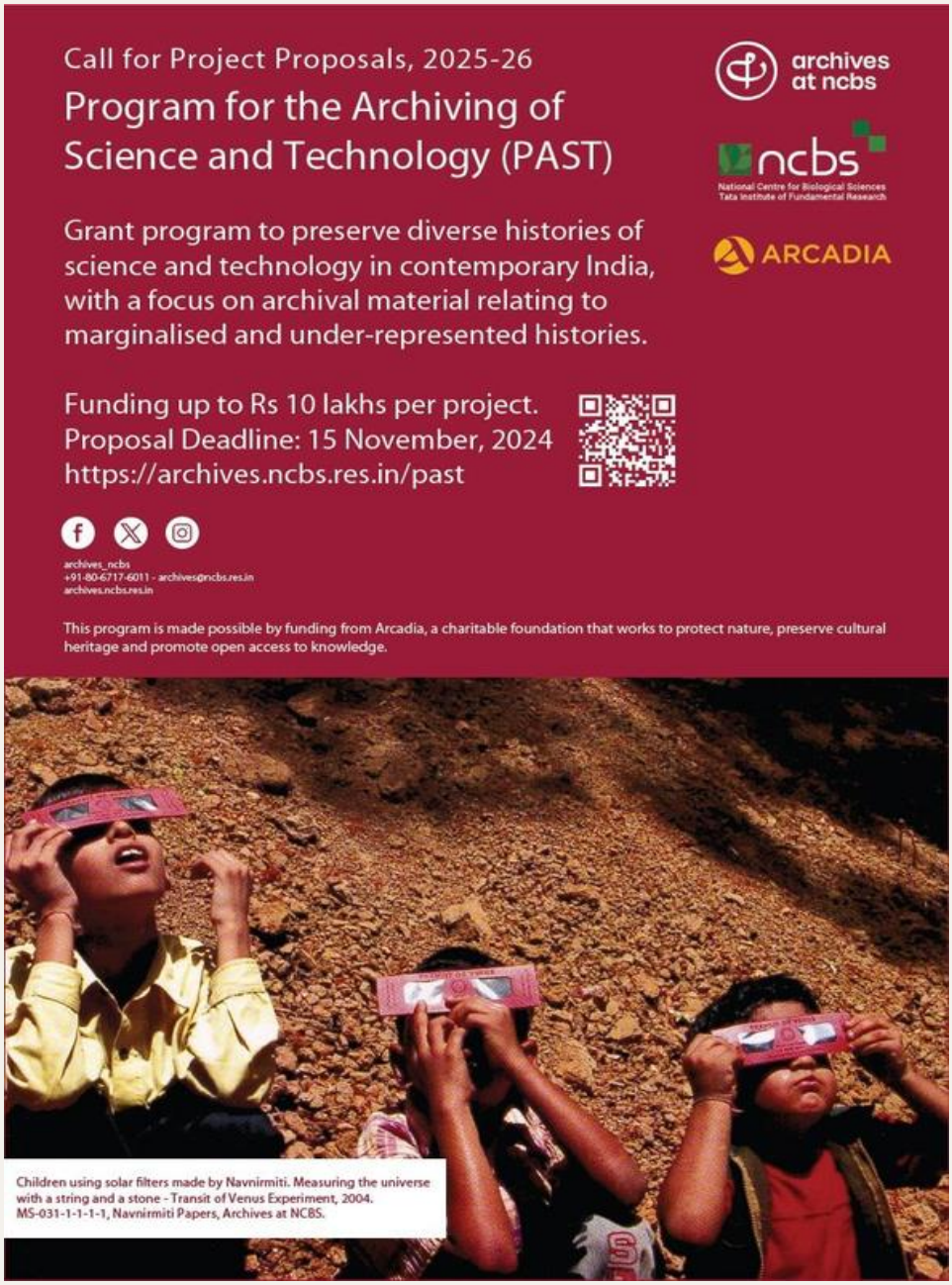
Application deadline: 15 November, 2024

Announcement of final grantees: 15 January, 2025

Online Information Sessions: 4:00 PM IST on 15 October, 2024; 29 October, 2024 and 11 November, 2024

contact archives@ncbs.res.in

Submission form https://bit.ly/archives-ncbs-past-grant-form



International Conference on

"Science Education in India through the Ages"

Organized by

Society for the History of Science Kolkata

and

Department of History, FSS, Banaras Hindu University

Indian Institute of Technology, Banaras Hindu University

Institute of Science, Banaras Hindu University

Varanasi

With generous financial assistance from Sponsored Research & Industrial Consultancy Cell (SRICC), BHU, Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR), Anusandhan National Research Foundation – Science & Engineering Research Board (SERB), Council for Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR), New Delhi

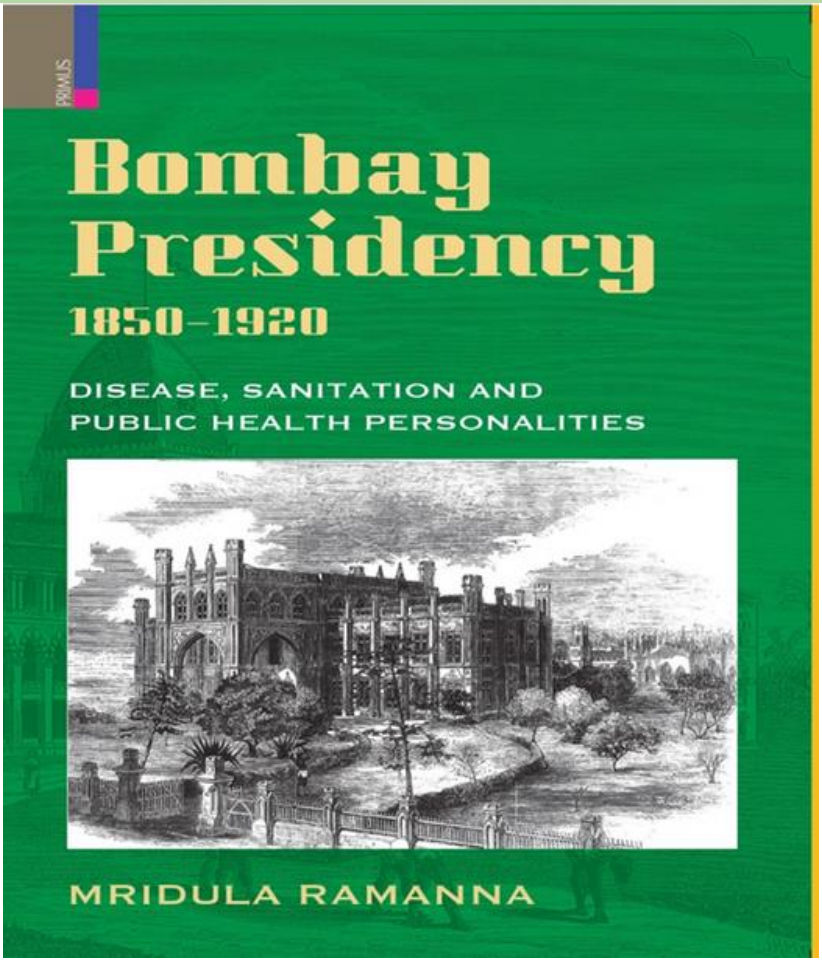
11 - 13 November, 2024
10:00 am - 06:00 pm

Mahamana Auditorium,
Institute of Science, BHU, Varanasi

BOMBAY PRESIDENCY, 1850-1920: DISEASE, SANITATION AND PUBLIC HEALTH PERSONALITIES

MRIDULA RAMANA

NEW DELHI: PRIMUS BOOKS, 2024.



About the book

Bombay Presidency, 1850–1920: Disease, Sanitation and Public Health Personalities examines the defining shifts in health and medicine, in Bombay Presidency, over seven decades. This work focuses on the major health and sanitation problems of the nineteenth century: the health of the European poor, battling alcoholism and venereal diseases; the views of Indian men and women doctors, about diseases, curatives and birthing practices; and Florence Nightingale's interest in the Presidency, particularly her advocacy of village sanitation. Besides, the contributions of doctors B.K. Bhatwadekar and N.H. Choksy, to public health, through an analysis of their writings, are also explored in this monograph. The themes of the early twentieth century which emerge in this work are the review of sanitary improvements in Urbs Prima in Indis, regulations imposed on pilgrims passing through Bombay and at pilgrim sites, and the state of sanitation and disease control in the villages and towns. The book also revisits an important episode, the experience of Bombay in coping with the Influenza Pandemic of 1918, based on contemporary newspaper reports, and reports of voluntary agencies, which provided relief.

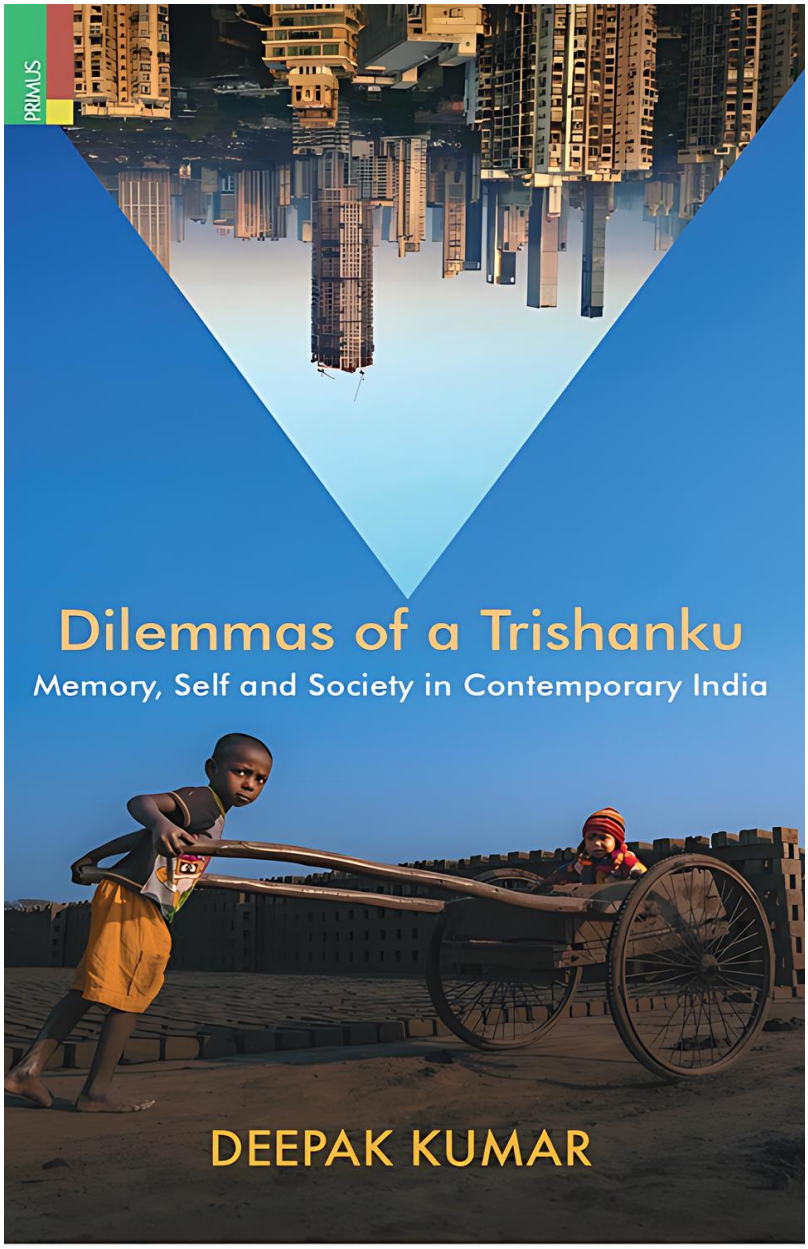
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mridula Ramanna is the former Head, Department of History, South Indian Education Society College, Mumbai. She has been the recipient of the Rockfeller Residency, Rockefeller Archive Centre, New York and has received grants from the Wellcome Trust, London for her research. Some of her publications include Parsis and Public Health in Colonial Bombay: Mid-19th Century to 1930 (2022); Facets of Public Health in Early Twentieth Century Bombay (2020); Health Care in Bombay Presidency, 1896–1930 (2012); and Western Medicine and Public Health in Colonial Bombay, 1845–1895 (2002), apart from numerous articles on medicine in colonial India, particularly Bombay.

Dilemmas of a Trishanku: Memory, Self, and Society in Contemporary India

Deepak Kumar

New Delhi: Primus Books, 2024.



About the book

Dilemmas of a Trishanku presents a thought-provoking account of a society and a nation marked by its contradictions and seamlessly combines everyday social and political experiences with academic insights. The Pauranic story of a pious king called Trishanku, who probably still hangs between the heaven and earth, is used as a metaphor to capture the different nuances of dilemmas which we all face in life as individuals and as citizens.

Based on both historical data and what sociologists call 'participant observation', this account dwells on the predicaments and struggles of post-independence India. It begins with a depiction of life in a moffusil town and moves on to examine closely the issues of caste, religion, governance, corruption, education, science, culture, and lot more.

Presented with rare verve and wit, and by using the lens of both historical and personal experiences, these 'rumblings' help unfurl layers of life in contemporary India.

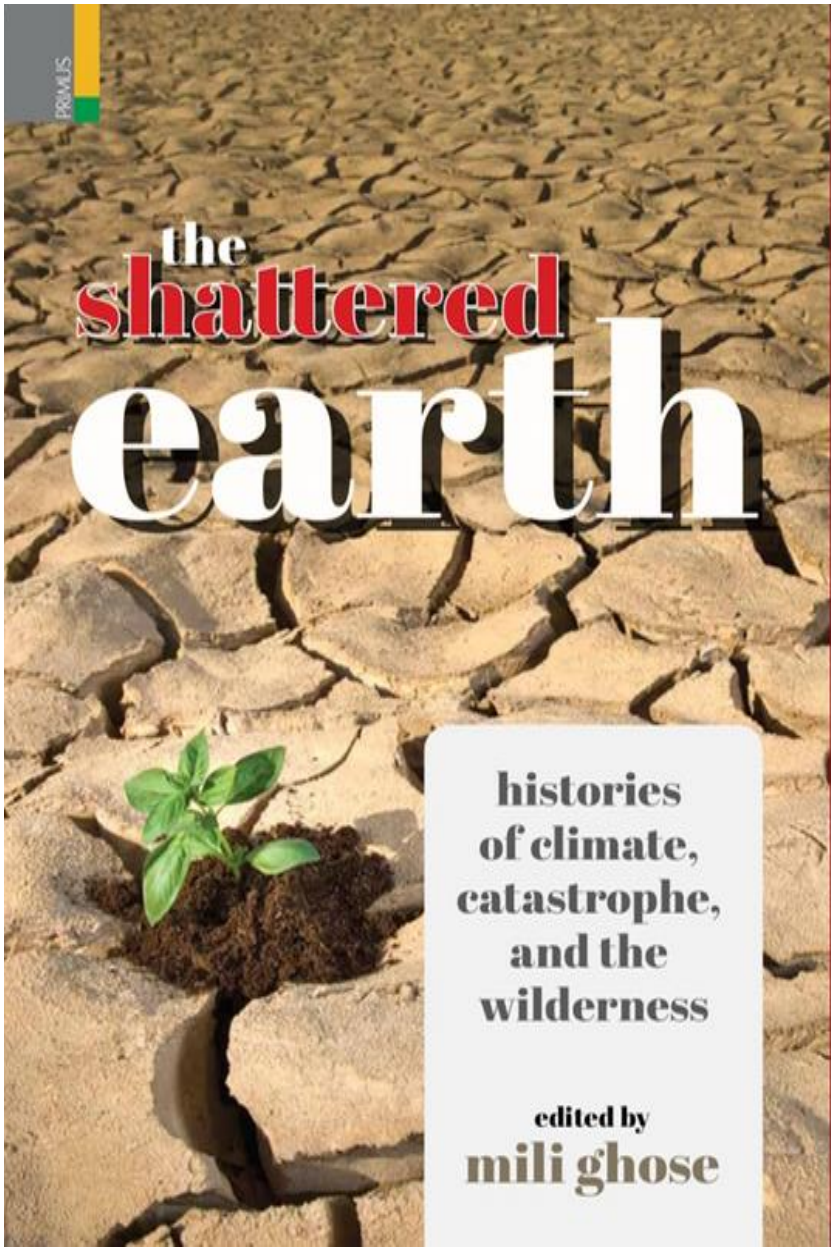
About the author: -

Deepak Kumar has worked and popularized research and teaching on the history of science in India for almost five decades. In 2017 he retired as Professor of History of Science and Education from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He is known for his book Science and the Raj (1995), and in addition he has published jointly-edited books relating to history of medicine, history of environment, history of technology and history of education. His latest books are 'Culture' of Science and the Making of Modern India (2023), and Science and Society in Modern India (2023). He is the founder-President of Society for the History of Science Kolkata, and he also holds an Honorary Professorship at the Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad

The Shattered Earth: Histories of Climate, Catastrophe and the Wilderness

Edited by Mili Ghose

New Delhi: Primus Books, 2024



About the book

Global climate change poses a genuine risk to the survival of the human species and raises questions regarding human existence on the planet. The Shattered Earth brings together the writings of scholars who investigate global and local questions related to critical environmental issues including global warming and anthropogenic climate change. If we look at the history of global climate change, we can discern the areas where humans have been responsible for disrupting the environment. Humans have already shattered the earth through their lust for power and profit, and have eliminated a number of species for the sake of industries, construction of roads, and for countless other commercial purposes which resulted in the loss of biodiversity. Examining diverse aspects in three sections, this volume deliberates on historical aspects, ecology, and the wild as well as catastrophes as markers of this climate change and its reverberations in planetary life.

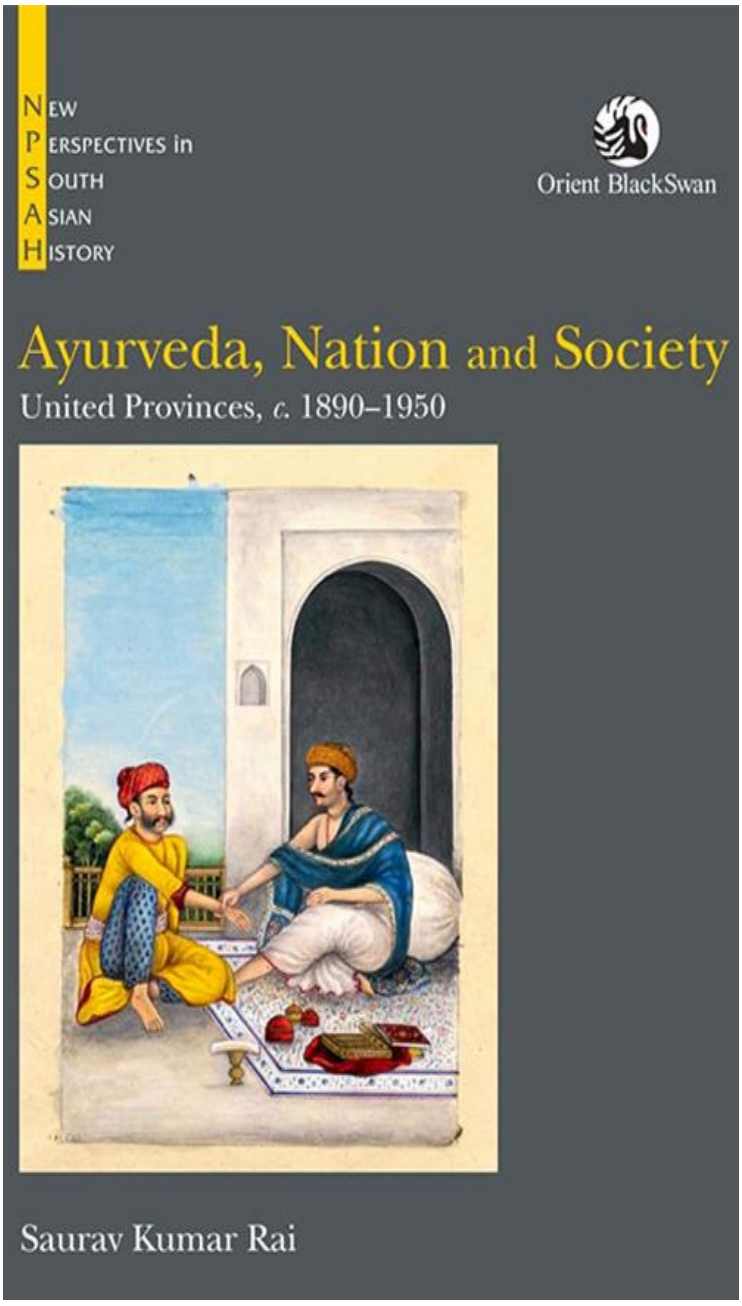
ABOUT THE EDITOR

Mili Ghose was a Fellow at Maulana Azad Institute of Asian Studies, Kolkata and a University Grants Commission Fellow at Jadavpur University. After obtaining her PhD from the History Department of Jadavpur University, she is currently engaged in teaching there as a guest faculty. Her areas of interest include the environmental history of modern South Asia and the history of climate, disasters and cyclones. She has been a resource person in the Summer School on environmental history at Tsing Hua University, Beijing and has written several research papers and book chapters. Dr Ghose has also visited Japan and Bangladesh in connection with her ongoing research on cyclones and society in the east coast of India.

Ayurveda, Nation and Society: United Provinces, c. 1890-1950

Saurav Rai

Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2024.



About the book

Ayurveda enjoys a growing global appeal, and is often touted as 'true' and 'time-tested' by contemporary political actors, governments, social groups, practitioners and NGOs in India. With 'indigenous' healing systems enjoying increasing state support today, an examination of the socio-political aspects of medicine, in particular Ayurveda, and its role in nation-building is critically important.

Ayurveda, Nation and Society, the latest in Orient BlackSwan's 'New Perspectives in South Asian History' series, captures the late nineteenth and early twentieth century growth of 'medical nationalism' through the Ayurvedic revivalist movement in the United Provinces, and observes the ensuing change and continuity in the attitude towards 'indigenous' medicine in independent India. The volume critiques the casteist, communal, class- and gender-biased social culture inherent in Ayurvedic discourse of the period under discussion, and notes how the constant blaming of the 'Other' for spreading diseases detrimental to the 'Hindu' male reveals that proponents of Ayurveda were actively involved in both the 'reconstruction of a tradition' and of the society and 'nation'.

The volume also examines the Ayurvedic print and drug market to study the commercialisation of the health discourse and healing practices, with the help of diverse sources such as hitherto untapped vernacular texts like Ayurvedic journals and pamphlets, literary interventions, along with field interviews of practising Ayurvedic healers and shopkeepers. The author also demonstrates how, despite co-opting several traits of Western medicine, Ayurvedic practitioners have often failed to imbibe one of its central tenets—the spirit of rigorous enquiry/experiment. This volume will interest scholars of the social history of health and medicine in colonial India and South Asia, as well readers curious about Ayurveda's evolution, leading to its present-day form.

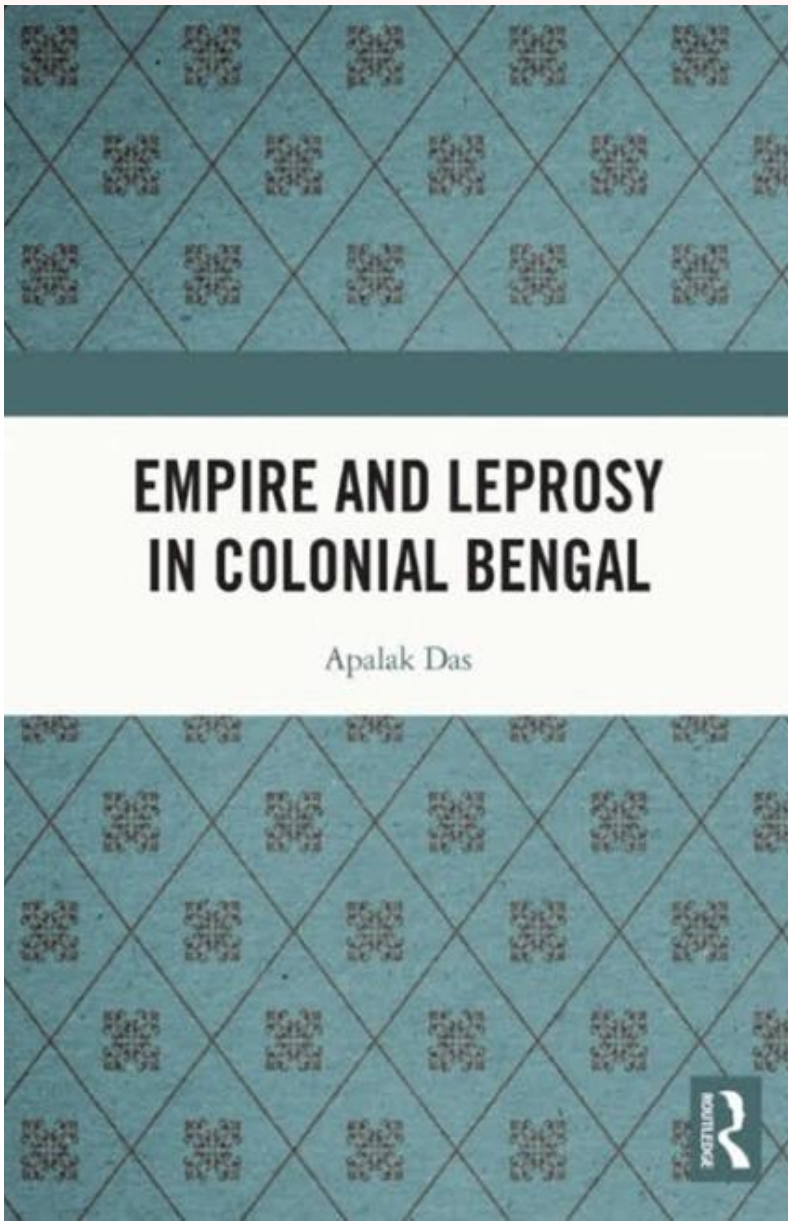
About the author

Saurav Kumar Rai is Research Officer, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti, New Delhi. His research interests are on Gandhian thoughts, gender and social histories of health and medicine.

Empire and Leprosy in Colonial Bengal

Apalak Das

London and New York: Routledge, 2024



About the book

Leprosy, widely mentioned in different religious texts and ancient scriptures, is the oldest scourge of humankind. Cases of leprosy continue to be found across the world as the most crucial health problem, especially in India and Brazil. There are a few maladies that eventually turn into social disquiets, and leprosy is undoubtedly one of them. This book traces the dynamics of the interface between colonial policy on leprosy and religion, science and society in Bengal from the mid-nineteenth to the first half of the twentieth centuries. It explores how the idea of 'degeneration' and the 'desolates' shaped the colonial legality of segregating 'lepers' in Indian society. The author also delves into the treatments of leprosy that were often transfigured from 'original' English texts, written by American or British medical professionals, into Bengali. Rich in archival resources, this book is an essential read for scholars and researchers of history, Indian history, public health, social history, medical humanities, medical history and colonial history.

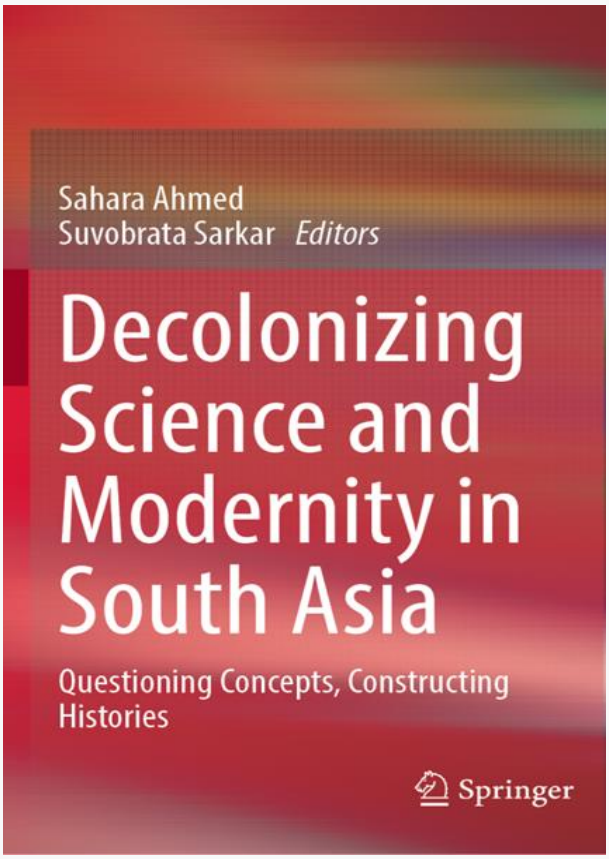
About the author

Apalak Das *is Assistant Professor in the Department of History, Rani Birla Girls' College under Calcutta University, India. He did his PhD from the Department of History, Jadavpur University on Leprosy in Bengal in 2022. His research looks broadly at the social history of medicine in colonial India. He was also a former Research Fellow of the History of Medicine Fellowship at the Asiatic Society, Kolkata, for a two-year term, 2017–2019.*

DECOLONIZING SCIENCE AND MODERNITY IN SOUTH ASIA: QUESTIONING CONCEPTS, CONSTRUCTING HISTORIES

Edited by Sahara Ahmed and Suvobrata Sarkar

Singapore: Springer, 2024



About the Editors

Sahara Ahmed is Professor at the Department of History, Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata, India. She obtained her Ph.D. from University of Calcutta. Her research interests include histories of ecology, environment, and sustainable development, health and medicine in colonial and post-colonial contexts. She is the author of Woods, Mines and Minds: Politics of Survival in Jalpaiguri and the Jungle Mahals, 1860–1970 (Primus, 2019). Her most recent publications—'Epidemics and the Indigenous Tribes: Sub-Himalayan Bengal and the Jungle Mahals', in Poonam Bala and Russel Viljoen (eds.), Epidemic Encounters, Communities in the Colonial World (Lexington Books, 2023), and 'Designing scientific mining: evolution and implementation, c. 1860s–1960s', in Suvobrata Sarkar (ed.), History of Science, Technology, Environment, and Medicine in India (Routledge, 2022). She is the secretary of the Society for the History of Science Kolkata.

About the book

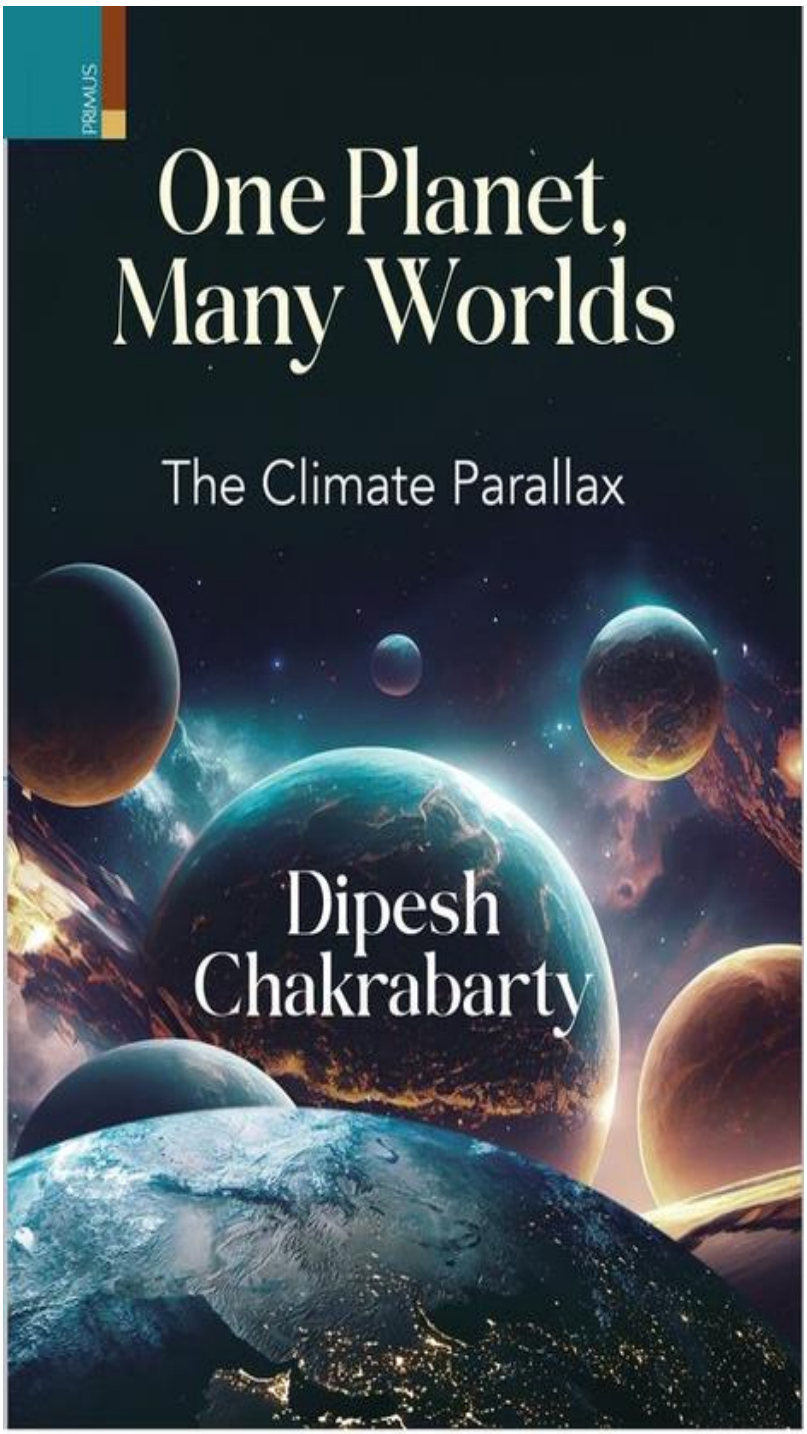
This book offers a unique perspective on the colonial roots of modern science, technology, and medicine (STM) in South Asia. The book questions the deconstruction of imperial visions and definitions of science and modernity in South Asia. It presents an in-depth analysis of the contested relationship between science, modernity, and colonialism. It explores how new research can contribute to the diversification of perspectives in the history and sociology of modern South Asian studies. The chapters in the book delve into various aspects of STM in South Asia. It covers diverse topics, including the social, cultural, and pedagogic context of early modern Bengal, the popularization of science in colonial Punjab, the Hindi science periodical Vigyan, and the emergence of the Indian science community. The book also examines the intersection of indigenous medical practices, ayurveda, Unani, and medical revivalism and highlights peripheral creativity in science. The contributors engage with the existing historiography to raise new questions concerning the global circulations of scientific knowledge from the perspective of South Asia and the regional appropriation of the same. It connects the history of science and modernity with South Asia's socio-economic and cultural background. It offers valuable insights into the decolonization of STM. It greatly interests scholars and students of modern South Asian history, sociology, social anthropology, and Science, Technology and Society Studies (STS).

Suvobrata Sarkar teaches history at Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata. He obtained his Ph.D. from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. His research explores the history of technology in the context of the 19th and 20th century South Asia. Sarkar is the author of Let there be Light: Engineering, Entrepreneurship and Electricity in Colonial Bengal, 1880–1945 (Cambridge University Press, 2020), in addition to several articles and book chapters. He has also edited the History of Science, Technology, Environment, and Medicine in India (Routledge, 2022). He received the Maurice Daumas Prize 2019 from the International Committee for the History of Technology (ICOHTEC).

One Planet, Many Worlds: The Climate Parallax

Dipesh Chakrabarty

New Delhi: Primus Books, 2024



ABOUT THE BOOK

Climate change represents a deep conundrum for humans. It is difficult for humans to give up the unequal and yet accelerating pursuit of a good life based on an insatiable appetite for energy sourced mainly from fossil fuel. But the same pursuit, scientists insist, damages the geobiological system that supports the existence of interrelated forms of life, including ours, on this planet. The planet, seen thus, is one. The global sway of financial and extractive capital connects humans technologically, but they remain divided along multiple axes of inequality. Their worlds are many and their politics still global rather than planetary. In the narrative presented here, Chakrabarty continues to explore the temporal and intellectual fault lines that mark the collapse of the global and the planetary in human history.

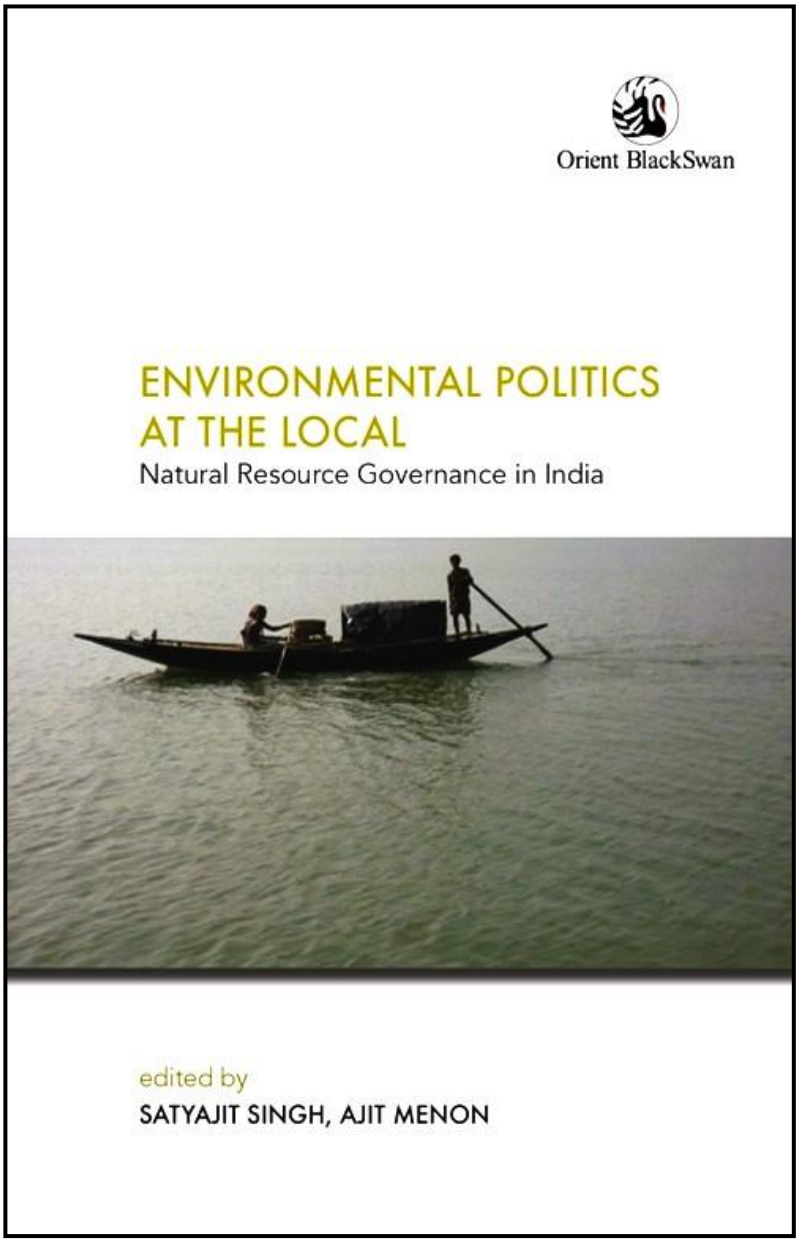
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dipesh Chakrabarty is the Lawrence A. Kimpton Distinguished Service Professor of History, South Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago. He is the author of The Calling of History: Sir Jadunath Sarkar and His Empire of Truth. Chakrabarty is the recipient of the 2014 Toynbee Prize, which is given to a distinguished practitioner of global history and the Tagore Memorial Prize by the Government of West Bengal in 2019. He has recently been elected a Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy.

Environmental Politics at the Local Natural Resource Governance in India

Edited by Satyajit Singh and Ajit Menon

Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2024



About the book

The practice of decentralisation and devolution of power to the 'local' have become central to public policy discourse. Existing scholarship argues that decentralisation will not only allow local communities to better articulate their needs, but also ensure a move towards sustainable, accountable and equitable governance, since local bodies are closer to the people they represent.

While agreeing with this broad consensus, Environmental Politics at the Local takes a critical look at the politics of the local that is central to the wider political economy of decentralisation. Despite its promise to democratise control over natural resources, decentralisation faces socio-political and institutional challenges in situations of unequal property and power relations. This is especially true given the entrenched hierarchies of caste, class, gender and community. These social divisions, and the contestations they lead to, problematise the spatial extent of decentralisation as well as the idea of the local. The case studies included in the book cut across rural and urban settings. They combine macro critiques of decentralisation with micro explorations of local politics and institutions. The contexts discussed range from issues of land rights in Meghalaya, to the concerns of Koli fishers in Mumbai, and the repercussions of joint forest management in the Sunderbans. Through their nuanced perspectives, the writers ask: To what extent have governments really enabled decision-making at the local level? What kind of gaps emerge between policy vision and implementation? Who represents the 'local' when different groups have competing interests?

This book is an essential read for anyone interested in public policy, development studies and environmental and socio-economic justice.

About the Authors

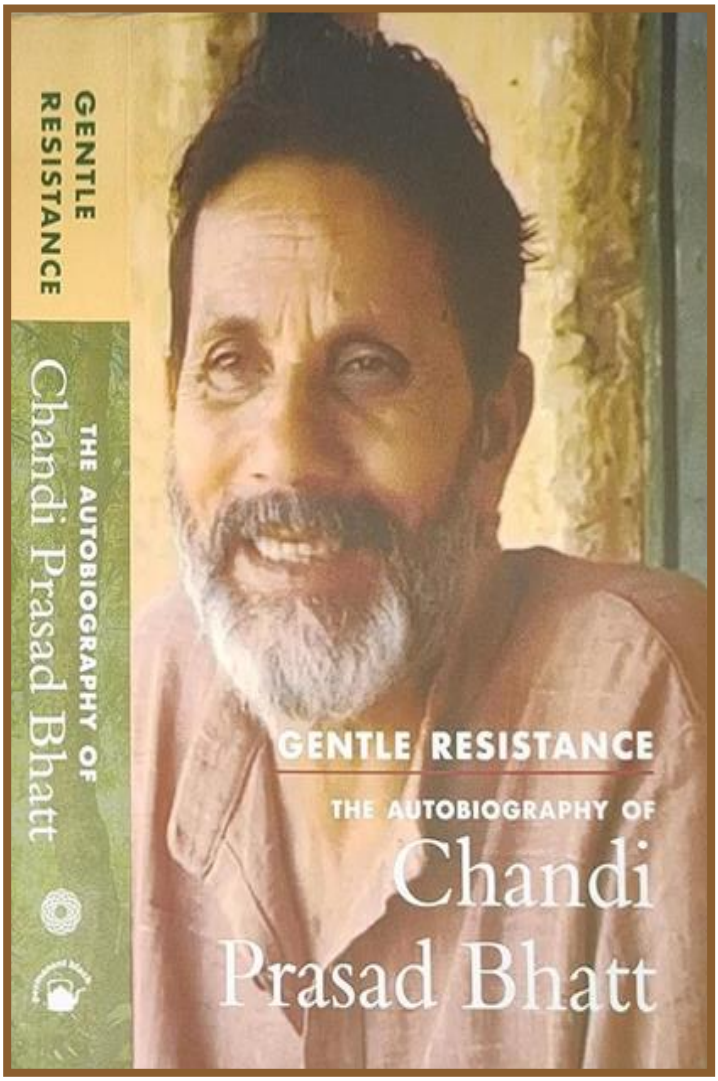
Satyajit Singh is Professor, University of California Santa Barbara, USA

Ajit Menon is Professor, Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai, India

Gentle Resistance: The Autobiography of Chandi Prasad Bhatt

Chandi Prasad Bhatt (translator Samir Banerjee)

Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2024



About the Book

This autobiography shows us a man whose strength, resilience, largeness of heart, and unshakeable belief in social equality encompass a pan-Indian and international message much larger than Chipko: had Mahatma Gandhi been reborn in the Garhwal Himalaya, he could not have taken better shape than Chandi Prasad Bhatt.

Born into a poor Brahman family of temple priests, Chandi Prasad began life as a peasant who herded cows, tilled fields, and attended village schools. Though he learned Sanskrit to follow the family profession, he soon switched to becoming a ticketing clerk in a private bus company. From the start, however, he felt his calling lay elsewhere, and hearing the Sarvodaya messages of Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan he renounced the security of a salaried career in favour of full-time social work.

Gentle Resistance narrates a monumentally admirable life. It outlines the core sympathies of a man who fought to make women the equals of men, and who rejected caste to embrace Dalits as no different from himself. Beyond that, it shows us an unfamiliar aspect of India – peasant life in forested mountains where demanding weather conditions, a fragile ecology, and lack of opportunity blend into an eco-system being changed only now by consumerism and modernity.

About the Author and the Translator

Chandi Prasad Bhatt *is the Gandhian activist best known for the pioneering groundwork which led to the start of Indian environmentalism. In the early 1970s it was he who first urged Himalayan peasants to "hug the trees" as a form of non-violent protest against the logging of age-old forests, resulting in the internationally renowned Chipko Movement.*

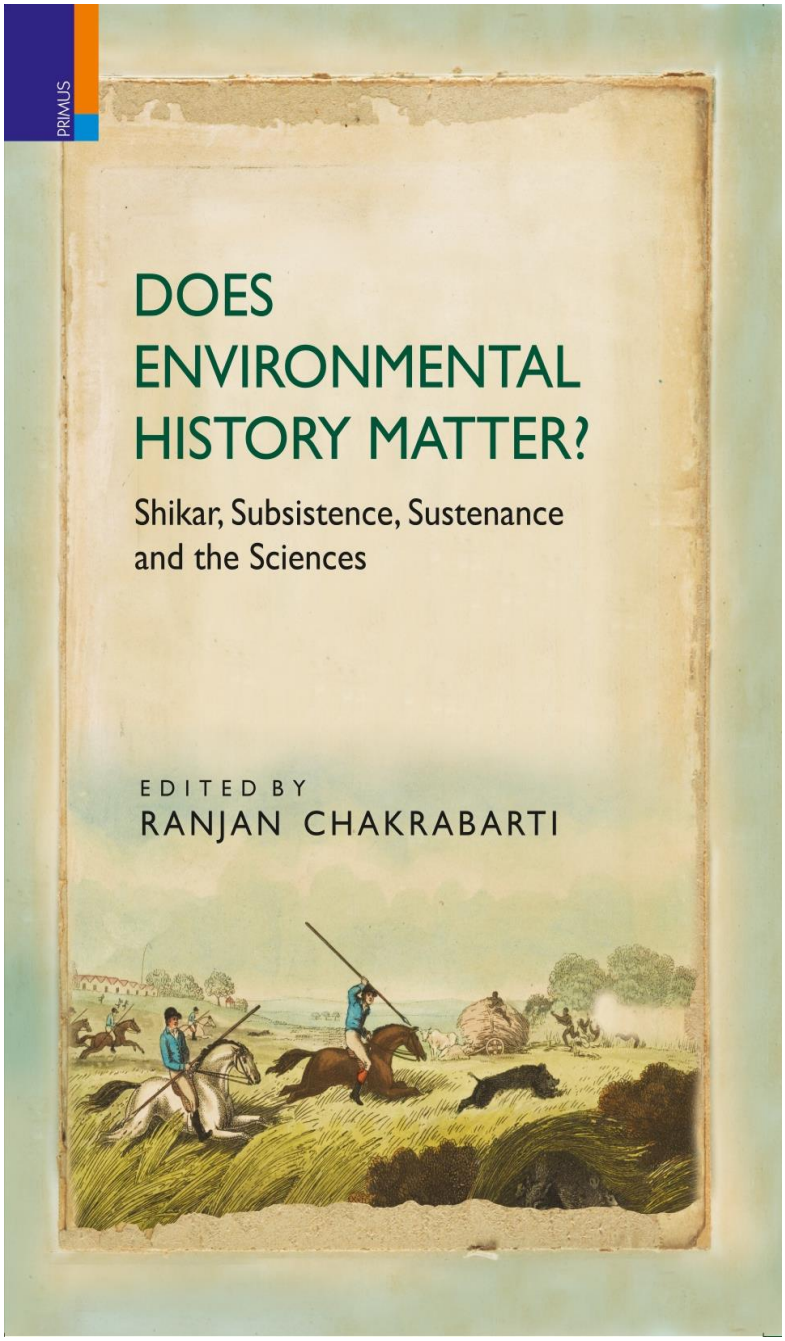
Samir Banerjee*, the translator, has been involved with the non-formal and non-governmental sector in India as an activist and academic. His scholarly interests include the environment, organic farming, adult education, and Gandhian thought. His latest book is Tracing Gandhi: Satyarthi to Satyagrahi.*

Does Environmental History Matter? Shikar, Subsistence, Sustenance and the Sciences

edited by Ranjan Chakrabarti

New Delhi: Primus Books, 2024

About the Book



Does Environmental History Matter? explores the territory of climate history and environmentalism through its methodology and historiography, focusing on its origins and usefulness in the contemporary world as well as its multidisciplinary character. The chapters brought together in this volume examine numerous issues in the context of the ongoing global climate crisis and analyse how such disasters are caused by the complex relationship between humans and the environment. Through their writings, the contributors thus call for a greater understanding of the connections between natural disasters and human-led activities such hunting, land use, deforestation, soil erosion, and overconsumption of resources. The volume grasps historical problems in terms of ecological, biological and cultural terms, drifting away from conventional methodologies of history while also questioning the gaps in history writing relating to the climate and the environment.

About The Editor

Ranjan Chakrabarti was previously Vice-Chancellor of Vidyasagar University and Netaji Subhas Open University. He is currently Hony. Visiting Professor at Jadavpur University and Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Royal Global University, Guwahati.

Disclaimer

Utmost care has been taken to present authenticated documents and news in the Newsletter. The Editorial Board including the Editor-in-Chief nor the SHSK is liable for any damage or any malware somehow transmitted while using the website or any confusion in using the contents of the newsletter. Any comments or feedback may be sent to the Secretary, SHSK at :

Professor Sahara Ahmed

Email: sahara.ahmed@rbu.ac.in

Mobile no. 9830374908