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Association for Asian Studies

Annual Conference

March 27–30, 2014

**Philadelphia Marriott Downtown
PHILADELPHIA, PA**

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Vernacular Poets, Cosmopolitan Pasts

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Area of Study:

South Asia

Schedule Information:

Scheduled Time: Fri Mar 28 2014, 10:45 to 12:45pm **Building/Room:** Philadelphia Marriott, Level 3 - Independence III - Headhouse Tower

Title Displayed in Event Calendar: [Vernacular Poets, Cosmopolitan Pasts](#)

Session Participants:

Session Organizer: [Indrani Chatterjee \(University of Texas at Austin\)](#)

Goddesses, Vernacular Poets, Vernacular Pasts

*[Ishita Banerjee-Dube \(El Colegio de México\)](#)

Reading Poetry for Geography: Cosmographs and Cosmopolitans in the Eighteenth Century

*[Indrani Chatterjee \(University of Texas at Austin\)](#)

Grisly Histories: Parental Cannibalism in the Mangal Kabyas

*[Projit Mukharji \(University of Pennsylvania\)](#)

Sentiments, Memories, and Social Bonds in Ballads from the Littoral Zone of Eastern Bengal

*[David Curley \(Western Washington University\)](#)

Discussant: [Lindsey Harlan \(Connecticut College\)](#)

Abstract

This panel explores the narrative poetry of early modern South Asia made famous most recently by Kumkum Chatterjee's analysis of mangalkavya. Before she died in 2012, Chatterjee had taken two distinct positions on these poetic narratives – one, that they were Mughal-period artifacts as well as historical records of the Mughalisation of Bengal and second, that the stories within were allegories of the encounter between Mughal and local ruling regimes.

Four historians explore divergent implications of Chatterjee's analyses of such poetic texts. Ishita Banerjee-Dube interrogates the applicability of the term 'vernacular' for a canon that combined Sanskrit, Persian and regional languages but spoke about particular geographies. Indrani Chatterjee focuses directly on the geographies of fortified shrines in an eighteenth-century poem to wonder about the fully developed cosmopolitan imaginary stretching between the Himalayan world (of modern Nepal) and the coastline (of modern Odisha) marked there. Projit Mukharji analyzes episodes of parental cannibalism in two poetic narratives which resist being read as historical description: only an allegorical reading, he suggests, can yield a modicum of history in these narratives. David Curley trains his gaze on a ballad collected in the nineteenth century. By using records of a conflict found in the English Company's official archives, he suggests that the ballad could be read as a record of the historical refashioning of social bonds and cleavages resulting from marriages between governing men and non-elite women in the 1760s.

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