

# IGNITE

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Research and  
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INTERVIEW

## Interview with Prof. Saloni Kapur

**SALONI KAPUR**

Assistant Professor of Social Sciences

Prof. Saloni Kapur is an expert in South Asia studies and is the author of "Pakistan after Trump: Great Power Responsibility in a Multi-Polar World", (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021). She is also the co-editor of *Securitisation in the Non-West* (Routledge, 2019). At FLAME University, she teaches international relations theory and politics of South and West Asia.



IGNITE interviewed Prof. Kapur to obtain her views of the emerging situation in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region and its impact on the security situation in the area.

**Q. Why did the United States leave Afghanistan?**

The ostensible aim of the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan was to defeat the perpetrators of the 11 September 2001 attacks, i.e. Al-Qaeda, which was based in Afghanistan. The United States saw the Taliban as allied with Al-Qaeda and providing sanctuary to the group. However, the war in Afghanistan proved very costly to the United States, both monetarily and in terms of lives lost. The US spent upwards of \$2 trillion on the war in twenty years, while 2,448 American soldiers and 3,846 American private contractors were killed (in addition to of course

the 100,000+ Afghans. Domestic opposition to the war built up as the United States reeled from the financial crisis of 2008, and it became increasingly clear that the war against the Taliban would not be won, with the Taliban seizing territory and expanding the area under its control from 2006 onwards. Following the killing of Osama bin Laden in Pakistan in May 2011, former US President Barack Obama announced June 2011 that he would start withdrawing troops from Afghanistan.

**Q. How did the Taliban manage to gain control of the country so rapidly?**

The Taliban had already been in control of parts of Afghanistan's territory for years before the United States finally withdrew all of its troops in 2021. This was in fact not a rapid but a very gradual process with a predictable outcome. The Taliban first seized territory after the US invasion as early as 2006, and the United States started the withdrawal process back in July 2011. Gradually, as the United States continued to withdraw its troops, the Taliban expanded the areas under their control and stepped up attacks on US-led coalition forces, wanting to assert their power since they knew that foreign troops would eventually leave whereas Afghanistan was their home. In May 2020, RFERL reported that only 30% of Afghan territory was in the government's control, while another 20% was in Taliban control, with the remaining

territory being contested, meaning that the two sides were at war to gain control. Although the Taliban themselves have expressed surprise at how easily the Afghan forces surrendered after the United States' final withdrawal in August 2021, there was little doubt that they would prove preponderant following the departure of foreign troops, especially as intra-Afghan peace talks failed to make headway.

#### Q. What does the Taliban takeover mean for India?

India has invested more than \$3 billion in development aid in Afghanistan since 2001 and has allied itself with the governments of former Presidents Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani. The ties were so close that Pakistan repeatedly accused Indian and Afghan intelligence agencies of collaborating to support the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan in carrying out attacks within Pakistan. India has also started investing millions to develop the Chabahar port in Iran. It wanted to build a railway line from Chabahar to Zahedan near the Afghan border to access the Afghan market, but the project was stalled due to US sanctions on Iran. The takeover puts all of this investment over the past two decades at risk since the Taliban are old allies of India's regional rival, Pakistan. This underlines the need for India to reframe its discourse on the Taliban and seek to build a constructive relationship with the new Afghan government, which the Taliban have promised will be an inclusive administration with representatives of Afghanistan's diverse ethnic groups. The Taliban are also in talks with former President Hamid Karzai and former CEO Abdullah Abdullah to form a unity government.

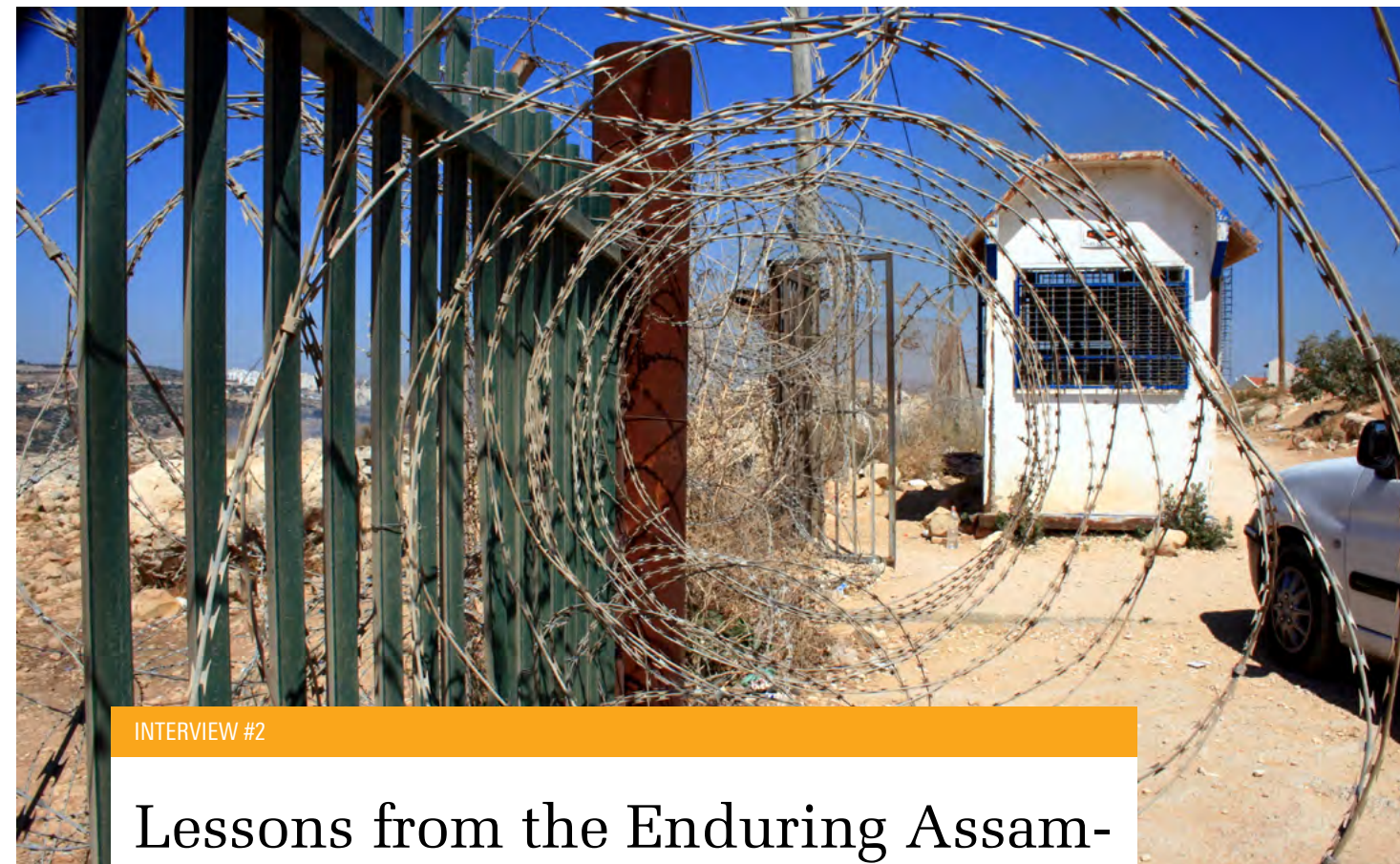
#### Q. Is Pakistan at risk of a Taliban takeover?

Pakistan's most significant insurgent group, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), is widely alleged to have received funding from Indian intelligence agencies with help from the former Afghan government of Ashraf Ghani. The TTP had shifted base to Afghanistan due to the Pakistani army's operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and Pakistan routinely accused the Ghani administration of providing sanctuary to the TTP. The TTP nominally owes allegiance to the emir of the Afghan Taliban, but the two groups have been on opposite sides in an India-Pakistan-Afghanistan proxy war over the past two decades. However, the TTP renewed its allegiance to the Afghan Taliban after their August 2021 coup, although Pakistan's interior minister

announced on 23 August 2021 that the Afghan Taliban had assured Pakistan that they would not allow the TTP to operate from Afghanistan. There was a media report on 29 August 2021 of firing from Afghanistan across the border into Pakistan, which killed two Pakistani soldiers, after the Taliban's takeover on 15 August 2021. The TTP has also released a video showing the Afghan Taliban releasing a senior TTP leader from a prison in Afghanistan. Thus, it remains to be seen how the relationship between the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban evolves in the coming months. However, it remains highly unlikely that the Pakistani or Afghan Taliban will take over Pakistan, whose military has carried out highly successful counter-terrorism operations across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

#### Q. Is Afghanistan going to become a safe haven for terrorist groups?

It is important to draw a clear distinction between the various groups operating in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region. This region developed a militant eco-system during the 1980s, when the US and Saudi Arabia contributed \$7.2 billion for Islamist fighters to be trained in north-western Pakistan and sent to Afghanistan to fight Soviet forces. The Taliban, al-Qaeda, and the Haqqani Network all emerged as a consequence of this Afghan jihad of the 1980s. Daesh (or ISIS) is also an offshoot of al-Qaeda and was earlier known as al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Nevertheless, the Afghan Taliban have always been an Afghanistan-focused organisation. They offered hospitality to Osama bin Laden in the years before 2001 but he was seen as a liability. Daesh is a rival whom the Taliban have been fighting for the past several years. The Haqqani Network is the group most closely allied with the Afghan Taliban. From an Indian perspective, the most significant risk is not that the Taliban will give sanctuary to Daesh or al-Qaeda, but that it will offer sanctuary to Kashmiri militants, which is what happened during their rule in the 1990s. This underscores the need for India to address human rights in Kashmir and to pursue a diplomatic resolution of the dispute with Pakistan, as this would tackle the root causes of the Kashmir conflict



INTERVIEW #2

## Lessons from the Enduring Assam-Mizoram Border Dispute

ADITYA BHAN  
Assistant Professor of Economics

This interview was conducted on a YouTube channel, Discuss Times, and uploaded on 2 August, 2021. Prof Aditya Bhan has translated this interview to English for IGNITE.



The border conflict between the Indian states of Assam and Mizoram is not a recent one, but rather a 146-year-old dispute. In 1972, the Union Territory of Mizoram was carved out of the Lushai Hills district of Assam. Mizoram subsequently went on to become the 23rd State of the Union of India in 1987, the genesis of which was enabled by the adoption of the 53rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1986. In 1875, the British had granted some areas to the erstwhile Lushai Hills while delineating the border between Assam's Cachar district and Lushai Hills. Most of these territories were, however, removed from Mizoram during the redrawing of state boundaries in 1933. Whereas Mizoram supports the 1875 demarcation, Assam favours that conducted in 1933.

Provided below are translated excerpts from an interview of Dr. Aditya Bhan, conducted in the aftermath of clashes in the tenuous border region of Assam and Mizoram, leading to the death of at least six Assam Police personnel on 26 July, 2021 (See endnote).

#### Q. Why has this 146-year-old conflict not been resolved yet? How can this dispute be settled?

A. This is indeed a very old conflict, dating back to the late 19th century. The demarcation of the border conducted by the British Indian Government in 1875 is said to have involved extensive consultations with various stakeholders, on the basis of which the delineation was finally achieved. The popular view in Mizoram cites this as the basis for its support for the 1875 boundary demarcation. The claim is that Mizo tribes are historic inhabitants of the area and there should be no dispute about this fact. However, in 1933 a lot of this area was retaken from the Mizos, causing popular discontentment and resentment toward the British India Government amongst them.

It is also common to have tribes from both sides utilizing forest resources for their livelihood, in such border regions. However,

when it comes to the issue of boundary demarcation, the issue tends to get politicized. This often leads to a hardening of stance by both sides, sometimes resulting in violence of the nature which sadly occurred on 26 July, 2021.

However, this dispute could have been solved long back but for one reason or another, it has continued to fester for almost a century and a half, and as a grievous consequence we have had to witness the recent tragic occurrence.

**Q. What is the difference between the boundary demarcations conducted in 1875 and 1933, which has led Mizoram to support and oppose the former and latter respectively?**

A. The area under dispute consists of approximately 509 square miles of inner-line forest reserve notified in 1875. This may not constitute a very significant land parcel for a large state. But for a geographically small state like Mizoram, such a resource-rich expanse of territory commands major significance. This heavily forested territory, adjoining south Assam's Cachar district, was allotted to the Mizos in 1875, and thereafter largely retaken from them in 1933. It is for this reason that they support and oppose the former and latter demarcations, respectively.

**Q. Given that Assam is geographically larger than Mizoram, do you think it adopts a big brotherly attitude toward Mizoram?**

A. This is a difficult question. Assam is, indeed, not only geographically larger than Mizoram, but also possesses more natural resources than Mizoram. It has greater forested areas as well. It also has a larger tribal population. It is also ahead of Mizoram based on some important developmental indicators. However, it is difficult to decisively claim whether Assam's attitude toward Mizoram is indeed unjust or not. Incidents on the ground are often impacted by political considerations, mostly at the local level, and it might be incorrect to claim that all political and administrative functionaries in these states are hostile toward their neighbouring state. Local tensions in the border regions are not necessarily fomented from those holding senior positions in the political hierarchies of the two states.

**Q. In interstate conflicts, we normally see heightened tensions between a section of locals on each side of the divide. In this case, however, we saw the police forces of neighbouring states facing off. Does this illustrate an abject administrative**

**failure?**

A. That can be said. On the one hand lies the role of the state governments, which cannot wish away their neighbouring state, and hence must focus on resolving the issue. Both states are part of the Union of India, and it is therefore the responsibility of the administrative machineries in both states to ensure that there is a continuous and persistent effort to resolve the differences between the two states by addressing the concerns of the locals on each side through constructive dialogue. Violence between the police forces is most unfortunate, and will certainly not lead to a solution, or benefit either state. On the other hand, the central government must facilitate a resolution of the conflict by playing the role of a mediator. Just as the center has achieved a significant reduction in violence in the Indian State of Nagaland via negotiations and understandings with outfits like the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isaac – Muivah) or NSCN (IM), it should deal with the Assam-Mizoram border issue in similar fashion.

**Q. Can a survey of the border region lead to a resolution to the conflict?**

A. Although a survey is certainly desirable, it cannot be claimed with certainty that this alone will enable a resolution. However, it would constitute an important step.

**Q. Solutions to such disputes are either achieved politically or legally. Do you think a political solution is possible in the present situation?**

A. It is hard to say for sure, but I would see it as a positive if the dispute can be settled by both sides via negotiation, without going to court. Even the central government should support such an effort and ensure a conducive environment for interstate negotiations, as well as security on the ground.

**Q. By declaring that they will not approach the legal system to resolve the dispute, have the states undermined the judiciary?**

A. I do not think so. My view is that both states want to try and resolve this dispute amicable through negotiations. If this is not achieved, however, then I am sure they will approach the judiciary.

*Note: This interview was conducted on a Hindi language YouTube channel, Discuss Times, and uploaded on 2 August, 2021.*



RESEARCH & TEACHING INNOVATIONS

## Research and Teaching Innovation with Films

PANKAJ JAIN  
Professor of Philosophy

In the summer of 2020, at the peak of the COVID-19 first wave in the US, Fareed Zakaria interviewed prominent academic leader, Michael Crow, the President of Arizona State University. As I watched the interview on Zakaria's show GPS on CNN, his optimism at the peak of a catastrophic scenario struck me. Crow boldly proclaimed that online learning could undoubtedly capture



a lot of in-person experience. He said it is the only way to deliver education to everyone in an efficient and effective method. He acknowledged that the real onus to embrace this new medium of education is not the hardware but the human software: faculty members must quickly adapt to meet changing needs. Around the same time, a Dutch management professor published his article in Forbes on seven opportunities that the pandemic has shown the world. The pandemic has given us more time for self-reflection, more urgency for speed and innovation, and alternative ways to connect with friends and colleagues in a cleaner environment with less pollution. It has also made us more modest as we accept

the inevitable truth all around us. The lockdown period sometimes made us pause and contemplate who we are as people, nations, and societies. It focused on our leaders transforming rapidly as the status quo was no longer an option.

As I tried applying some of these pieces of advice in my career, I encouraged some of my friends and colleagues to reconnect with our cinematic heritage. As is still the case across India, many of us have remained unaware of some of our films, even the films that caught the attention of international film critics and film scholars. Since the pandemic made us all home-bound, we started watching the classics by Bimal Roy, Satyajit Ray, V. Shantaram, Guru Dutt, and Ritwik Ghatak. As some of us started writing informal reviews of some of these films, our creative synergies soon developed these blogs into thoroughly researched academic articles accepted by tier-1 journals. The lockdown period proved a blessing in disguise for us; we continue our endeavors to unearth our cinematic goldmine that has largely escaped the attention of scholars.

These films can serve as a vital connection to our various research and teaching topics in diverse disciplines such as philosophy,

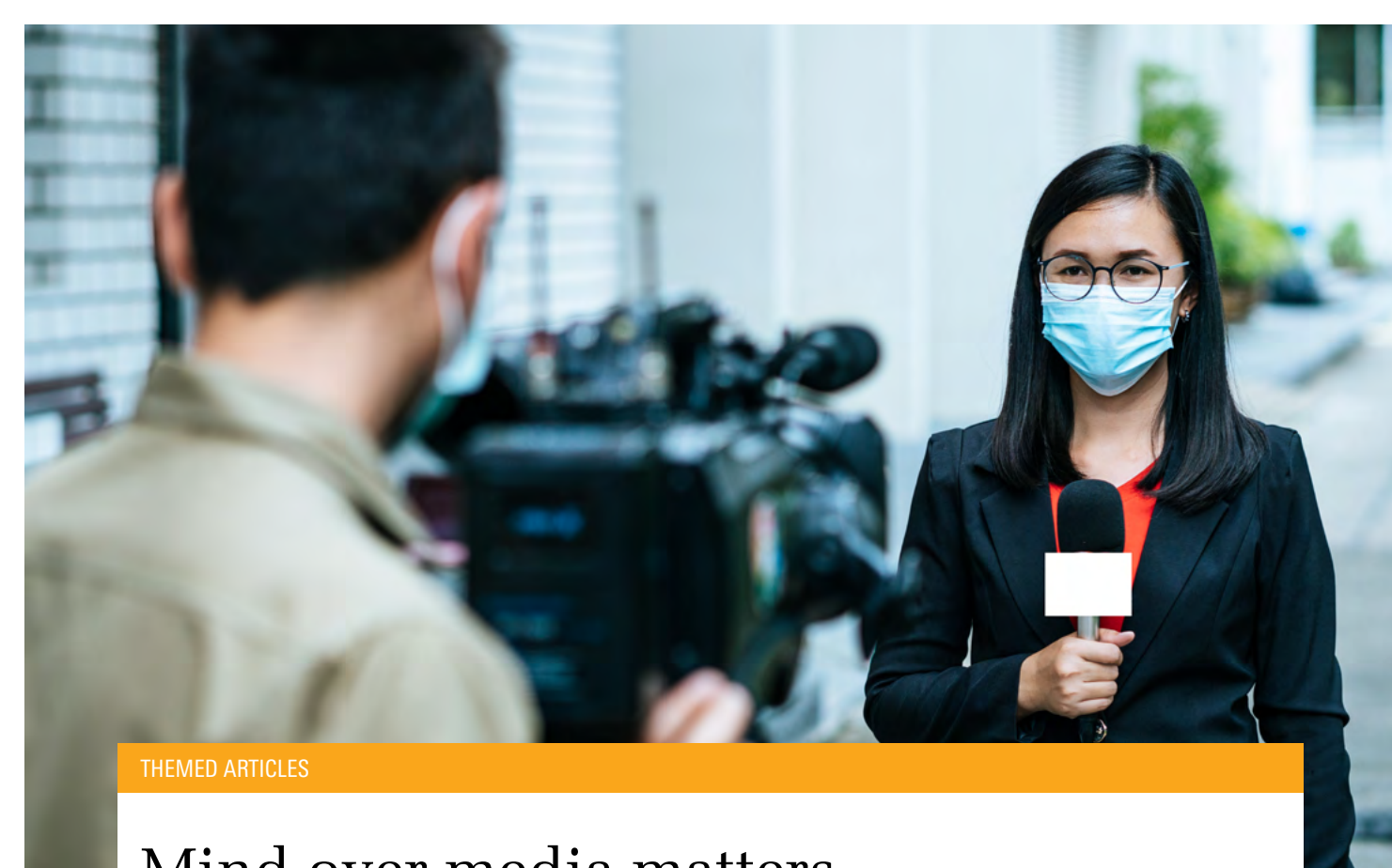
religion, psychology, anthropology, history, political science, and sociology. For instance, for courses on Indian literature, films such as Kalyug (1981) and Hum Paanch (1980) based on the Mahabharata can intrigue students. For courses related to colonialism or the British Raj, films such as Lagaan (2001) and Mirch Masala (1987) can be helpful. For courses on Mughal history, Jodhaa Akbar (2007) and Mughal-E-Azam (2004/1960) are recommended. For courses on Indian Christianity, Khamoshi (1996) and Baton Baton Mein (1979), for Indian Parsees, Being Cyrus (2005), and Pestonjee (1987) work well. For courses on Hindu, Buddhist, or Jain philosophy, films such as Trishagni (1998), Meera (1979), and Guide (1965) can help. Mirza Ghalib (1954) and Shatranj Ke Khiladi (1977) can work well for Islamic-themed courses. Films such as Khuda Kay Liye (Pakistan, 2005), Khamosh Pani (2003), and Matir Moina (Bangladesh, 2002) are highly recommended for similar insights into our neighboring countries. For courses on gender studies, films such as Sujata (1959), Bandini (1963), Anuradha (1960), and Anupama (1966) are indispensable.

While the pandemic has limited our fieldwork out in the community, visual fieldwork remains a viable alternative for deep insights into our communities. Most of our films are now available online on popular websites and on National Film Development Corporation's [www.CinemasOfIndia.com](http://www.CinemasOfIndia.com) (FLAME library has just purchased a subscription). Although Indian films have remained our most prevalent national entertainment medium, they remain understudied and underutilized by academics in India and abroad for their underlying themes in plots and music. While hundreds of films interpret and challenge several Indian cultural myths and norms, film songs similarly utilize classical ragas in addition to incorporating Western music in their cosmopolitan appeal across India and now across the world. We at FLAME are conspicuously located in Pune, the Gangotri, the Mecca, and the Jerusalem of filmmaking in India, with the Film and Television Institute of India in our backyard. A renewed cinematic interest can hopefully invite several creative geniuses to our campus, further enriching our students.





## Themed Articles



THEMED ARTICLES

## Mind over media matters

**LALITHA SUHASINI**  
Academic Specialist

The pandemic has taken a toll on the mental health of Indian journalists reporting from the frontline. Here's a look at what has transpired and what can be done.

The Indian newsroom has always been a kind of war zone. Long hours, harsh deadlines, lack of resources, and the stress of missing a story are hallmarks of the industry. Over time, journalists get accustomed to the daily buzz of covering news. But the pandemic has been unprecedented in so many ways that it has nearly broken even the most hardened journalists. Specifically, the mental health of journalists covering the pandemic has taken a severe beating as, collectively, they reported on the loss of thousands of lives every day with the background of the Indian healthcare and economy systems collapsing around them.



The fear of contracting the virus and infecting their own families has been acute for journalists as well, a fact that has not been given due attention. Often, journalists have been pressured to step out without basic safety measures such as PPE kits when they visit

hospitals to cover the crisis. This is often because of sheer apathy from their employers combined with a lack of necessary resources or adequate time as they fight to meet deadlines. Moreover, at the start of the pandemic, many journalists faced rising hostility in their own neighborhoods as they stepped out of their homes to do their jobs. Neighbors feared that journalists would lead to the spread of the virus by violating the rules of the lockdown. As a result, some journalists were even asked to vacate their homes, as accused of being super spreaders.

Looming salary cuts and downsizing across departments in media organisations, owing to the pandemic, has also added to the mental health crisis among journalists. According to a survey of 1,400 English-speaking journalists conducted in 125 countries by the International Center For Journalists (ICFJ), a Washington DC-based non-profit, 70 percent of journalists and news managers were hit hard by the psychological and emotional impact of covering the pandemic. Twenty-six percent of respondents said that they have clinically significant anxiety, with symptoms such as insomnia, fatigue, poor concentration, and consistent worry.

In April of this year, Faye D'Souza, one of India's leading young journalists, posted the following on her Instagram account: "Sometimes, just reading through all the news and processing

so much negative information is enough to break your heart. It actually genuinely feels like heartbreak." In May, D'Souza reached out to her followers on Twitter asking for mental health assistance for Indian journalists in the field. Her timeline was flooded with numbers of helplines and mental health support groups. Added to this, many journalists faced backlash even when they did manage to report under nearly impossible conditions. Women journalists, in particular, have been soft targets for trolls. Online violence on women journalists during the pandemic has even been termed as a "shadow pandemic." In a global survey conducted by UNESCO and ICFJ in 2020, 73 percent of women journalists said that they had experienced online abuse because of their profession. This form of gendered violence has resulted in increased stress levels and psychological trauma for women journalists.

The reason that this is so important is that we rely on journalists to tell the truth. Their work is even more important in a pandemic situation when information can save lives so immediately. In addition, with misinformation, rumor, and outright lies circulating so rapidly through communication culture, reporters have the additional role of setting the record straight, countering forces that sow chaos through falsehoods. The more journalists face abuse, discrimination, or lack of protection, the less resources society has to determine what reality actually is. In an environment like that, gossip becomes fact and propaganda becomes entrenched. And, most tragically, people die unnecessary deaths.

There is a dire need to set up a support system for journalists, which should include a mental health network of counselors that they can reach out to on a regular basis. As journalists continue to cope with the enormity of the COVID-19 pandemic and report on the mismanagement of the crisis, they also need medical and safety aid as well as placement on vaccination priority lists. Reporters need to be categorised as frontline workers along with health workers and law enforcement officers. A trust fund to support the families of deceased journalists is another initiative that merits consideration by state and central governments.

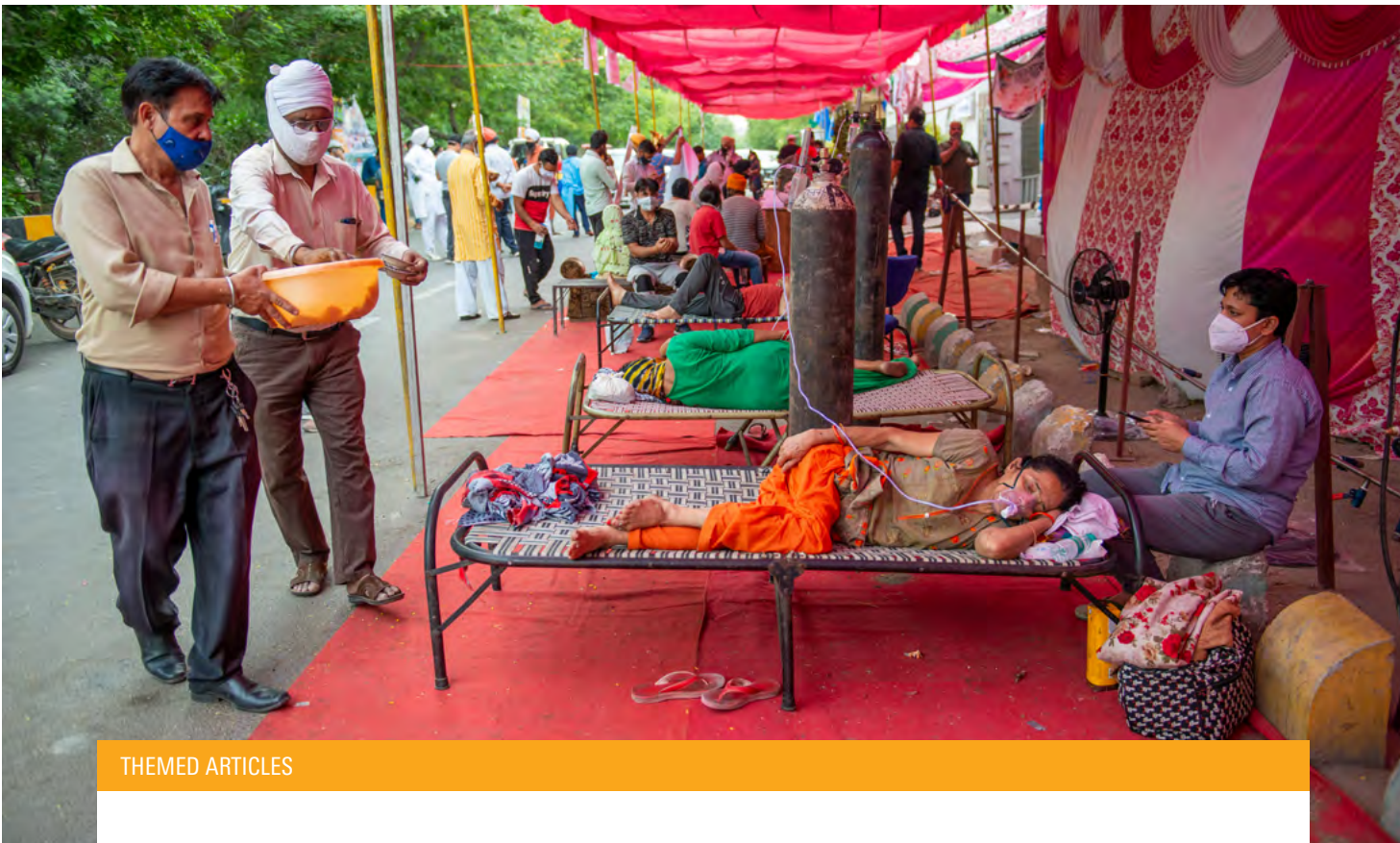
A special support cell to address the needs of journalists (with a noted emphasis on women journalists) is long overdue. While there are a few support groups such as the Network of Women

in Media in India (NWMI), more dedicated organisations that can provide emergency legal and medical aid would definitely benefit the cause of women journalists. This is crucial because attacks on women (both online and physical) tend to be sudden and unexpected, needing immediate attention. A dedicated emergency helpline would be a critical form of support at times like these.

What can media organisations do in this effort? Since more and more frontline journalists are reporting cases of burnout, media networks can ensure they employ in-house counselors to provide mental health support. Team managers have to make sure that their team members take their designated days off. If letting go of journalists is the only option, then helping those laid off to find work opportunities in related fields should be made a part of the HR team's function (at least at large-scale media organisations). Journalists have shared their experience of having been laid off without even a personal note from their team leaders after having worked with an organisation for decades. While personal gestures soften the blow, what would be truly beneficial is sustained support from the company to help them find their feet again during the pandemic.

Whether it's massive policy changes, government assistance, or just more public awareness, understanding that those who inform us about our world play an invaluable role in keeping it afloat is paramount. We tend to focus so much on whether we agree or disagree with journalism that we forget the person behind the words, the person who willingly takes lethal risks for the sake of providing us information. Their efforts and sacrifice exemplify the kind of courage that it will take for us to bring this crisis to an end and to begin the rebuilding process. Appreciating them starts with their protection.





THEMED ARTICLES

## Image Focus: The importance of pandemic photojournalism

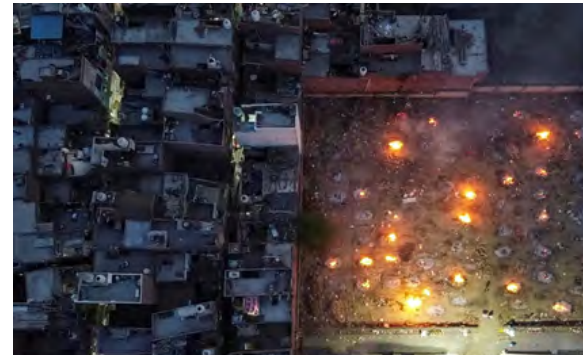
RUCHI SHAHAGADKAR  
UG3 STUDENT

More than ever before, social media has been a source of refuge, providing a platform for newsmakers to disseminate the latest on the slowly ending pandemic. Instagram in particular has allowed photojournalists to break stories using powerful images over the past year. One such image was from Kashmir-based photographer, Yawar Nazir. The photograph is an arresting portrait of the migrant crisis in India during the first wave of the virus. After the first lockdown in India, seas of migrant labourers were significantly displaced and their already precarious means of sustenance shattered. These labourers were forced out of their jobs, leaving many of them homeless and unemployed. Nazir's image below, showing lines for emergency transportation in New Delhi, captures the massive level of need rippling through an endless frame of people.



Migrant labourers waiting to board buses on the outskirts of New Delhi. Image: Yawar Nazir

During the second wave, heart-breaking images told the developing story of the pandemic and the damage it left in its wake. Crematoriums burned through the day and into the night, waiting for the fires to stop though they never did. Photos like those of Reuters photographer Danish Siddiqui's hard-hitting image of the mass cremation of those who had succumbed to COVID-19 in New Delhi, as well as images of burning pyres and unclaimed bodies, flooded social media. These images presented a true picture of the distressing state of the Indian healthcare system, a system which had collapsed under the strain of too many patients and insufficient resources including O2 cylinders, hospital beds, and medicines. Siddiqui's photo below, with its solemn neighborhood and bright burning pyre contrast, highlights one of India's darkest hours during 2020.



Mass cremation of COVID bodies in New Delhi. Image: Danish Siddiqui, Reuters

Notable images didn't just tell of India's struggling health conditions but also of the plight of millions who survived their deceased loved ones. Healthcare workers, bereaved families, police forces, volunteers, NGOs, sanitation workers, took the spotlight in haunting frames. Pushed to their limits, first-responders faced unprecedented pressures. Reports and news articles showcased the abominable conditions in which these people were working. Frontline workers continued to face physical assault by frustrated citizens while on duty. Working amidst amassing waste and unbreathable air, these workers were running the added risk of getting infected and yet were often provided with little to no protective gear or sufficient monetary relief. In this photograph taken by independent photographer, Anindito Mukherjee, a priest who isn't wearing a PPE kit or a medical mask is surrounded by burning bodies of COVID victims. Nothing explains how little respect and dignity our country gives to the people who bury our loved ones better than this one photograph.



A priest walks away from burning funeral pyres in New Delhi. Image: Anindito Mukherjee

There is something about an emotionally-charged photograph that connects followers through shared experiences and empathy for each other. Images of despondent people, abandoned children, and grieving parents sometimes spoke louder than most articles or statistical reports managed during the pandemic. Dozens of such photographs by journalists made rounds on social media. There was a fear and helplessness in the eyes of those who experienced an avalanche of loss. A photograph by independent Kashmiri journalist Bhat Burhan of a young boy holding onto the stretcher on which his older brother was carried instigates empathy for both COVID victims and survivors alike.



A young boy holds on to the stretcher on which his deceased older brother's body rests. Image: Bhat Burhan

Pandemic photography also had practical ramifications that saved lives. When those in need of medical supplies and hospital beds reached out to friends and followers on social media platforms, an ad hoc community was created. The unavailability of basic resources, lack of adequate medical supplies, and a surge of misinformation drove people to fend for themselves. Photos became a way to not only witness the tragedies that took place but to begin to fashion solutions. This is the critical yet unseen aspect of a powerful photograph: what does it lead to next? Do we have the collective will to channel the intensity of an image into action in the real world? Or do photos simply contribute to a seemingly infinite mountain of pessimism and voyeuristic despair? This is the challenge that a photo asks of all of us, never before as urgently as in the social media-driven times we live in.



THEMED ARTICLES

## The Status Quo Continues

SASI KIRAN

Assistant Professor of Communication

Journalistic snapshots of rural India tell us a lot about the state of the country as it slowly starts to reopen:

Shiv Devi, a Khabar Lahariya journalist, reported this past May from Bhavanipur village, district Banda, Uttar Pradesh, that 'at least one person in every household is extremely unwell'. She goes on to note that many people in the village do not have even a minimal awareness of Covid 19.



Tamanna Naseer, a freelance journalist on behalf of PARI, reported from Karnataka's Bidar district on the plight of young, educated, first generation Dalit and Adivasi engineers, managers, teachers, and lawyers who were forced to work under MGNREGA to make ends meet after they lost their jobs. The pandemic took them back to the precarity that they tried so hard to escape.

Jyoti Yadav, a journalist from The Print, reported on the Covid 19 crisis in rural Bihar from villages like Laukahi, Madhubani District highlighting several issues like abysmal medical infrastructure

and resource shortages faced by doctors posted in rural Bihar that rural state. In her report, a doctor observes that rural patients (because of lack of awareness) wait to seek medical care until they are critical, increasing the chance of a fatal outcome.

Interestingly, all of the reports mentioned above come from alternative digital media outlets. In fact, some of the most insightful and in-depth coverage of the Covid 19 crisis in rural India over the last 18 months has come from journalism sources outside of the mainstream.

The abysmal coverage of the Covid 19 pandemic in rural India is just a symptom of several deep-rooted issues of representation and misplaced priorities that define the neoliberal Indian media industry. While rural India has always been a deliberate media dark zone, one might have expected the pandemic to change that since, this time around, ignoring rural struggles would be at the peril of the urban population. This virus does not discriminate based on news coverage. But even a catastrophe like this pandemic could not change the coverage dynamics of the mainstream Indian news media.

The news cycle followed the second wave of the pandemic closely, with its epicentre, fatality-wise, being the metro urban centre.

Though numbers also grew in rural areas, readers stopped seeing virtually any mainstream stories from there. Ideally the news cycle should have followed the pandemic's spread as a whole. But the mainstream media never assigned a space for the rural in their journalistic imagination, which is typical of recent trends. A newspaper like The Hindu, traditionally has a section titled 'Regional' under which one expects to read some news from rural areas. But, increasingly, the news in such sections is inexplicably predominantly urban. If we look at a mainstream news website like NDTV, there is no even symbolic separate space allocated for rural life, creating space instead for sections like 'Offbeat' where they cover 'alien sightings' and such oddities. One wonders, if it is too much to ask for equitable coverage of rural India, where 66% of the nation's population resides.

In a speech delivered at the India Culture Lab in 2018, P. Sainath, a veteran journalist who covered rural India extensively and founded PARI (People's Archive of Rural India) lamented that on an eight-year average rural reporting accounts for just 0.76% of total news coverage. Yes, the mainstream media covered the occasional story on issues like farmer suicides, which importantly highlights the precarity of lives and livelihoods in rural India, but it was an exception to the rule. There are myriad other issues like the procurement of produce, the minimum support price (MSP), caste atrocities, lack of adequate health and educational infrastructure and state capacity which are rarely if ever addressed.

While most of us would be aware of recent oxygen shortages faced in cities like Delhi, Bangalore, and Lucknow, we would never know with the same depth and intensity about these same shortages and their devastating effects in rural India where people do not have access to blue ticks on twitter to post SOS messages. Except for some stories covered by alternative media, there was no proportionate coverage in scale or scope by the mainstream media on the oxygen crisis that gripped the Indian countryside.

While there is always the partly justifiable economic argument, that news media in this country is on the verge of collapse and they cannot afford to employ journalists in rural areas, one cannot

help but notice the alternative media with extremely limited resources covering the pandemic in rural areas commendably. Most mainstream media coverage of rural India depends heavily on stringers who are journalists working on a part-time basis often in precarious conditions, who are paid per story, sometimes as low as Rs 250-500 per piece. Rural reporters like Harishchandra Dhaware, lost their lives to Covid or faced extreme financial distress to pay hospital bills. PARI reported that his annual income was close to 1 Lakh rupees, and it included 40 percent commission on the advertisements he brought to the newspaper. So, the excuse of huge cost of reporting rural news also does not stand on solid ground. That brings us to the question of intent. Why is it that those who shape our news believe that rural life deserves less attention?

A majority of this country's most vulnerable population lives in rural India. In the coming months there will be countless critical issues related to the pandemic that demand coverage from rural India. To start with, there is the problem of vaccine hesitancy that needs to be addressed immediately—and media has a part to play in it. Then, last mile delivery of vaccines must be ensured. There are also the pressing issues of loss of livelihoods and distress sales and dumping of farm produce. The pandemic could be a perfect time to re-evaluate Indian mainstream media's priorities and to come up with innovative solutions to the problems of rural reportage—both resource-wise and revenue-wise. After all, the feeling that rural life and urban life are so disconnected is nothing but an illusion. From food to water to pollution, and, sadly, to diseases and viruses, rural and urban Indian are intimately connected. Ignoring the struggles in one area directly impacts the other through ripple-effects that we can scarcely predict.

**DIP**  
**Discover India Program**



# Essence of Khasi Matriliney: Our Lockdown Getaway

KRITI TIBREWALA & SANJULA WANIGASEKERA  
UG3 STUDENT

The Discover India Program is an exhilarating experience every student at FLAME eagerly looks forward to. But this year was different; we had the opportunity to discover a part of India from the comfort of our homes.

We were a multidisciplinary group of eight people, majorly pursuing economics or psychology. From choosing a topic to submitting the final project, the whole experience has been a revelation. With the collaboration of so many minds, agreements and disagreements were inevitable. The group environment was balanced; we knew our priorities and agendas but also knew how to keep the atmosphere light-hearted. This made the group dynamic a stimulating and free flowing one. After endless researching, debating, and shortlisting, we narrowed down our list of topics. Then with Prof. Poonam Gandhi, our faculty mentor, we finalised our topic: Matrilineal Khasis of Meghalaya: Change and Continuity. Thereafter, the real desk-based research journey began.

Each of us began by doing our own research to get a broad overview of Khasi society. After listing down credible sources, we started doing annotated bibliographies. Reading about the Khasi culture, traditions, and transitions was not only intriguing but rather eye-opening. We had a vague idea of what a matriliney society is and assumed that women hold absolute power in such societies. However, this was not the case. Through the initial literature review we learnt that economic and political power in the state of Meghalaya rests not with the women but instead with the men. Further research and group discussions caused the idea and notion of matriliney to evolve for all of us. We learnt that the common characteristics of a matriliney include tracing lineage through the mother, inheritance of property by the youngest daughter, and a matrilocal residence system. However, we wanted to delve deeper and understand what practices and traditions make Khasi society different. One fundamental aspect was the clan system which provides a group identity to its members. The KhasiKhasis are an exogamous group and marriage between members of the same clan, those descending from a common

ancestress, is strictly prohibited and considered to be a severe transgression. Our study sought to examine the nature of the matrilineal structures among the KhasiKhasis with emphasis on gender roles and dynamics in the contexts of inheritance, family, and opportunities within the economic and political spheres.

Once we were familiar with the literature and our secondary sources were established, we undertook the search for primary sources. In a world before the pandemic, we would have had the opportunity to conduct in-person interviews. Through on-field immersion, we would have been able to gather information not only through our interviews but also through constant observation of the participants and the surroundings. Being able to visit Meghalaya would've broadened our horizons and allowed us to explore spheres of their community that are indiscernible due to the online nature. Nevertheless, our reality was the pandemic. With the new normal, we resorted to the only option available to us during these times: online interviews. To come up with questions was a challenging task. With the myriad aspects of any society, addressing all of them is overwhelming. Without direction, we started jotting down all the questions that came to mind. After consulting and discussing with our mentor, we finalised our questions, and categorised them into themes; this provided us with a sense of clarity.

The process of taking these online interviews via telephone and zoom calls was one of the most exciting and rewarding experiences of DIP. Some participants were very insightful when it came to specific traditions, reasons for following them, their continuity and discontinuity. Their thoughts, words, and ideas were a beautiful reflection of the age-old Khasi tradition, its conflict and transition in the present world. After assimilating their viewpoints we were able to explore our assumptions, confirm, and break existing stereotypes and prejudice.

Despite forces of change, the Khasi tribal culture has withstood the test of time and is still followed and respected today. However, the community has not remained immune to the changes around. Colonisation and modernisation have played a significant role in shaping Khasi ideologies and practices over time. Given that the Khasi indigenous community and their faith is a minority, it explains why there is reluctance towards interfaith marriages. As each community tries to retain their distinctive identity, the Khasi tribal community too, is striving to preserve its culture and traditions in modern-day Meghalaya. While there may appear to be a segregation of roles, the KhasiKhasis are satisfied with the current system and are trying to find a balance and harmony between the genders. Though the community has undergone change over the past several decades as a result of modernisation and globalisation, the KhasiKhasis still uphold their core values and traditions: ensuring the community's continuity.

The next step was to transcribe the interviews and extract the pertinent information. Using our faculty mentor's suggestion, we colour coded each interview according to our subthemes. Then the process of analysing and interpreting the data began. We had accumulated extensive data which now needed to be converted into a report. The writing process began. To begin with one blank page and a clueless expression and end with a polished seventy-eight-page report and a smile was a different sense of

accomplishment. Endless nights of discussions, arguments, and laughter. The continuous process of typing, editing, deleting and retyping. It was tiring but materialised to a fruitful result. Exploring a completely new society was like discovering a unique panorama and perspective. One of the things that stayed with us was the immense pride the KhasiKhasis carried with their identity.

The Khasi left a lasting impression on us. We would like to share a few noteworthy quotes from our interviews which reverberate their Khasi pride.

*"It will thrive and succeed in spite of the many changes because it is in our blood."*

*"If we don't have traditions, we don't have an identity."*

**Kriti Tibrewala** is a final year student pursuing an Economics Major and Finance Minor. She loves travelling, meeting new people, and exploring different cuisines.

**Sanjula Wanigasekera** is a final year Economics major and Public Policy minor with an interest in developmental studies. She has a keen interest in languages, music, and dance.

DIP group members: Deepthi Adimulam, Mahika Gandhi, Sarayu Polkampally, Mariam Vayaliparambil, Kriti Tibrewala, Sanjula Wanigasekera, Manav Visaria, Aryan Deoskar



Source: 'Indianbijou | Tribe Fashion, Traditional Outfits, Traditional Attire'

A close-up photograph of a woman with long dark hair, wearing a white lab coat, looking through the eyepiece of a microscope. The microscope is a light-colored compound microscope with a black eyepiece. The woman's face is in profile, and she has a focused expression. The background is a blurred laboratory setting with shelves containing various items. The text 'RESEARCHER FOCUS' is overlaid in the top right corner in a bold, black, sans-serif font. There are orange decorative bars on the left and right sides of the page.

## RESEARCHER FOCUS



FACULTY RESEARCH

# Corporate Entrepreneurship and Younger Workforce

AMARPREET SINGH GHURA

Assistant Professor of Entrepreneurship

## My research agenda

I come with the mindset of an entrepreneur; and on a broad level I research the area of entrepreneurship and strategy. For over five years now my research focuses on understanding the corporate entrepreneurship environment specifically in a country like India. Wolcott and Lippitz (2007) has explained corporate entrepreneurship as a process through which different teams inside an existing organization not only conceive the ideas of new business, but also encourage, start, and manage the new business which is different from the existing business of the parent organization, but leverages the resources of the parent organization.



The background of my research has focused on the dimension of the younger workforce in the field of corporate entrepreneurship. The corporate entrepreneurship

literature shows that the past work on this subject has given little attention to look at the perspective of individual employees (younger work force) towards corporate entrepreneurship. The younger workforce includes millennials, born in or after 1980-1990's (Wiedmer, 2015) and Generation Z, born in the mid-1990s through the late 2010s (Turner, 2015). My research work has studied the antecedents of corporate entrepreneurship and characteristics of the younger work force and identified factors which are common to both in order to conceptually propose corporate entrepreneurship as a career choice for the younger workforce.

One major aspect of my research is to study corporate entrepreneurship phenomena with the lens of individuals in the Indian context. The Indian context comes with multiple facets and complexities which makes my work more interesting. For instance the younger workforce in India has the characteristics to become entrepreneurs; they are coupled with low engagement levels and lesser job opportunities, this complexity has fascinated me to remain focused on this topic. The triangulation mentioned

above is a new perspective to study the area of corporate entrepreneurship. Moreover, the transition between the generation cohorts and how it is taking shape is what makes my work interesting.

## Relevance of my research

Every country gets the opportunity to benefit from its younger demographic dividend. India's young workforce today is massive, numbers-wise. A younger workforce comes with very different work characteristics when compared with the older generation cohorts such as Baby Boomers (born from 1946 to 1964); Generation X (born from 1965 to 1977). For instance, the younger work force largely doesn't prioritize competition and rather is willing for collaboration at workplace. They dislike micromanagement and prefer a culture where they get autonomy and are allowed to innovate and undertake some kind of calculated risk in order to experiment new things. My research for sure will be useful for the corporate world and policy makers to understand more about these and other work characteristics of the younger workforce. For instance, younger workers are different types of professionals and are not like 40-hour per week cubicle workers. They prefer to be freelance contractors with great flexibility, who solve problems with particular expertise. Understanding these insights will create value for the organization one at an operational level by not only solving the ongoing employee retention challenge but will also help them to create mechanisms to offer meaningful jobs to the younger work force. On a strategic level, creating mechanisms to curate and transfer innovative ideas of a younger workforce will allow the organization to unlock the value through incremental innovation, new business venture ideas and so on. One of my teaching cases was published in Aug 2021 which highlights how India First Life Insurance as an organisation could achieve their next level of growth through implementing corporate entrepreneurship.

## Future direction of my research

My research for last four years on the area of corporate entrepreneurship and the younger work force has resulted in an outcome of conceptually proposing in my research paper (published in IIM C working paper series) one important proposition: corporate entrepreneurship as a career choice for the younger workforce. This proposition is new to the literature of corporate entrepreneurship and has not been studied so far. The further scope of research warrants an empirical investigation for the propositions made in conceptual papers. For this, contacts have been established with leading organisations in India who are practicing corporate entrepreneurship.

My short-term interest is to study the organisations in India which practice corporate entrepreneurship and add to the body of literature. I have already studied entrepreneurship programs of over five organisations and I am in the process of publishing more teaching cases on firms who have benefited through implementing these kinds of initiatives.

One practical aspect and my long-term interest related to the future direction of my research interest in the area of corporate entrepreneurship includes starting a center for corporate entrepreneurship which shall offer guidance to organisations in India to start corporate entrepreneurship programs. This can be done by offering management development workshops for the organisations. These experiences of offering support to organisations will allow access to the practices of Indian organisations and will help to add to the body of literature by way of research papers and teaching case studies. With the assistance of FLAME, I look forward to making this plan a reality.

A photograph showing two people in business attire shaking hands over a desk. The desk has a laptop on the left and some folders on the right. The background is a plain wall. The text 'FACULTY BIOS' is overlaid on the right side of the image.

# FACULTY BIOS



**ABHISHEK SAHAI**

Phd, IIT, Gandhinagar, Cognitive Science,2020



**PANKAJ JAIN**

Phd, Religious Studies, University of Iowa,2008



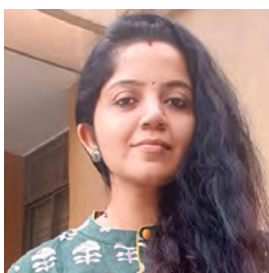
**MOULIKA MANDAL**

PhD in Psychology, IIT Bombay, 2020



**SUNIL RAJPAL**

Phd Economics, 2019, Central Gujarat University



**NEHA YADAV**

PhD, Marketing, NITIE, Mumbai, 2021



**YAMINI KRISHNA**

PhD in Film Studies & Visual Culture from The English and Foreign Language University (EFLU), Hyderabad, 2020



**PRATEEK SHAH**

IIMA,PhD., Innovation and Management in Education,2020



**JUHI HUDA**

PhD, EVS, University of Colorado, Boulder,2019



**PRAKHAR MANAS**

MA, University of Bristol, Philosophy and History of Science,2012



**RAMNATH NARAYANSWAMY**

PhD in Economics & Sociology, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales,Paris, France, 1985





**MOITRAYEE DAS**

Ph.D, Management and Labour Studies TISS, Mumbai, 2020



**VISHAL KHANDELWAL**

MMS, Finance, Mumbai University



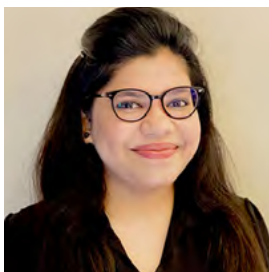
**YUGANK GOYAL**

Ph.D.Law and Economics (2016): University of Hamburg, Erasmus University, Rotterdam, University of Bologna, Erasmus Mundus Fellow for the European Doctorate in Law and Economics



**SANJAY BAKSHI**

MSc Economics, LSE, UK



**GARIMA RAJAN**

Pursuing PhD,IITD, Jul2021, Psychology; PhD, Cognitive Science, Mississippi State University, 2016; MA, Psychology, Delhi University, 2014



**SANDIP ROY**

MBA Marketing IISWBM, Kolkata, 2000



**SHREEKANT DEODHAR**

PhD, IISc, Bangalore, 2017; MSc, Biodiversity, Abasaheb Garware College, Pune University,2008



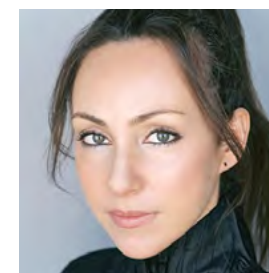
**JOANNA MANKAD**

MBA, 1999, University of Leeds



**YASHOBANTA PARIDA**

PhD, Economics, JNU, New Delhi, 2020



**HEATHER SOTTONG**

PhD in Italian, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), Dec 2016



**BHUSHAN PRAVEEN JANGAM**

Ph.D. in Economics, IIT, Hyderabad, 2021(awarded)



**MAYANK MATHUR**

Phd: Executive Fellowship IIM Lucknow; 5 yrs Integrated Masters in Technology, IIT, Mumbai



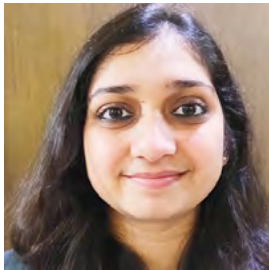
**POONAM PANDEY**

PhD Science Policy, JNU, New Delhi, 2016



**GANGARAJU SALADI**

PG Diploma in Communications Management, MICA, 2008



**ANUJA SETHIYA**

Doctorate Degree, 2020, Finance from IIT, Madras



**ARPAN GANGULY**

PhD, Economics, Colorado State University, 2020



**TANUJ NEGI**

Pursuing PhD candidate, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore; M.B.A. (HR) Degree from Amity University, 2010



**SINJINI MUKHERJEE**

PhD, Sociocultural Anthropology, Heidelberg University, Germany, 2018



**ARTATRANA RATHA**

Ph.D. In Economics from University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, USA



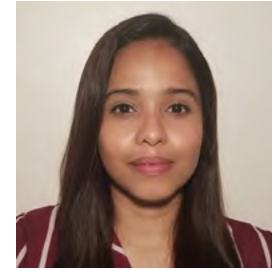
**RAJITHA VENUGOPAL**

PhD, Dept. of English, Jamia Milia Islamia, 2021



**MATHEW ABRAHAM**

PhD, Finance, University of Auckland, 2013; PhD Economics, University of Pune, 1997



**ANUBRATA DEKA**

Pursuing PhD Agricultural Economics, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Aug 2021



**LING-LING WU**

BA, 2006, Department of German, Wenzao Ursuline College of Languages in Kaohsiung, Taiwan



**SREEPARNA CHATTOPADHYAY**

PhD Cultural and Medical Anthropology, 2007



**SHYAM GOURI SURESH**

PhD, Economics, The University of Texas at Austin, 2008



**LOVE SARIN**

PhD Chemical Engineering, Brown University, 2010



**TEJPAL SINGH BATRA**

MBA, HR, 2017, SPPU



**HRISHIKESH CHANDANPURKAR**

Ph.D., University of California, Irvine, USA, 2016

## GET IN TOUCH

### FLAME Campus Address

Gat No. 1270, Lavale, Off. Pune Bangalore  
Highway, Pune - 412115, Maharashtra, India.

### Mailing Address

401, Phoenix Complex, Bund Garden Road,  
Opp. Residency Club, Pune - 411001, India.



1-800-209-4567



[www.flame.edu.in](http://www.flame.edu.in)



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