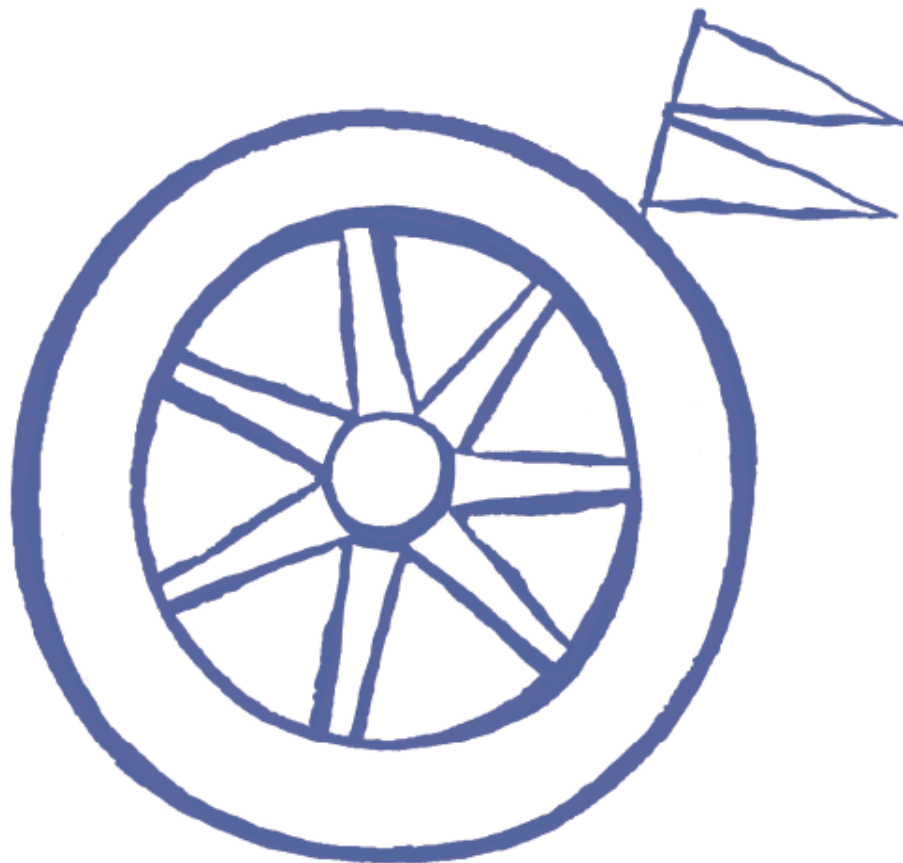


# **Nordic Conference on South Asian Studies for Young Scholars**

**REPORT**

prepared by Julia Velkova

September 2009



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## 1. Introduction

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The Nordic Conference on South Asian Studies for Young Scholars was held between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of August 2009 at the Falsterbo retreat centre in the Swedish province of Skåne. It was organised by the Swedish South Asian Studies Network (SASNET), Lund University, Sweden.

The primary objective of the conference was to gather M.A. students, doctoral candidates, post-doctoral researchers and other junior scholars from the Nordic countries (including Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden) who focus on South Asia in their research. Fifty persons had been accepted as participants in the conference. It was convened by Kristina Myrvold, Lund University, and Julia Velkova, a graduate of the University of Sofia, Bulgaria.

The aim behind the conference, which was similar to the conference that SASNET organised in Marstrand in 2002 (<http://www.sasnet.lu.se/phdsymp.html>), was to provide an opportunity for young scholars to present their future and ongoing research projects, establish contacts with colleagues in the Nordic countries, and discuss the challenges and opportunities for career planning and conducting research in South Asian Studies.

The focus of the conference was mainly on the students and the topics which were of major interest for them like career planning, funding and networking. In this sense the conference was quite different from the traditional academic conferences and it allowed for intensive interaction and communication between students from the Nordic Countries who were attending.

The participants in the conference came from various fields and backgrounds and had very different interests—from classical religious studies to global politics, health care, environmental studies and social sciences. This created an opportunity for interdisciplinary interactions and led to the identification of some major common problems which the students face in their research on South Asia.

## 2. General discussion topics and structure of the programme

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The structure of the conference was based on the one from the Marstrand conference of 2002. It was organised around the following three main topics:

- Input: Career Planning, Funding and Passion for South Asian Studies
- Outreach: Publication, Conference, Teaching and Other Activities
- Output: Networking and Future Research

In addition, there were several thematic and interdisciplinary groups where students could meet and discuss their research projects, as well as the topics they are interested in.

There were also sessions with “challengers” and “champions”. The role of “challengers” was played by students from different backgrounds who had to elaborate and present several issues of primary importance for them and with which they struggle in pursuing their studies. After that the “champions”, who were senior scholars, had to reply to the challenges and suggest how to approach the issues mentioned by the “challengers”. These sessions were followed by group discussions with all participants which revolved mostly around the challenges and issues suggested.

The conference’s keynote speaker was Dr. Vinayak Chaturvedi from University of California Irvine, USA, who gave a lecture on “Dialogues with M.K. Gandhi on History and Violence in India”.

The other speakers were Prof. Pamela Price, University of Oslo, who spoke on “Being a South Asianist in Norden: Being Glocal”; Teddy Primack, Academic Documents Associates, who conducted a workshop entitled “How to Displease an Editor”; and Dr. Mirja Juntunen, Uppsala University, who gave a speech on “A Nordic Perspective on Prospects and Challenges for Scholarly Interaction with South Asia”.

On August 18 a reception was held for all participants and concluded with a sitar performance by Shri Harvinder Singh (<http://www.harvindersingh.com/>).

The objective of the first day of the conference was to get participants acquainted with each other. The SASNET director, Anna Lindberg, opened the conference and presented the program structure together with a summary of the suggestions which were made for the

improvement SASNET's work at the Marstrand 2002 symposium. She also made a brief presentation of the development of SASNET and the current issues it is struggling with.

Her presentation was followed by the keynote speaker, Dr. Vinayak Chaturvedi. He spoke about the history of violence in India, a topic that he approached by analysing Gandhi's dialogues. He covered the relationship between Gandhi and the peasants, between Gandhi and the Indian revolutionaries, post-colonial politics, and the theoretical discussions on nationalism, and some of their implications for violence. The goal of his lecture was to provide a better understanding of the history of violence in colonial and post-colonial India.

Participants were then divided into thematic groups according to their interests and each person presented their current projects.

### **3. Session INPUT**

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On August 18 the session "Input: Career Planning, Funding and Passion for South Asian Studies" opened with a speech by Prof. Pamela Price, University of Oslo, entitled "Being a South Asianist in Norden: Being Glocal". She spoke of what it means to be a South Asianist nowadays, when the global affects the local, but the local in return affects perceptions of the global. Nordic researchers can lessen feelings of intellectual and geographical isolation by thinking of themselves as being part of a global and a local (Nordic) community of South Asianists, in which one reads and communicates across disciplinary boundaries. Price argued that Nordic scholars of South Asia share approaches that give them a certain amount of common ground in thinking about South Asia. She pointed out that a number of Nordic institutions are available to researchers for use as platforms for presenting their own research and for learning about the work and interests of others. In addition to SASNET and the Nordic Center in India, she cited the listserver NoFSA (currently based in Norway), national Asian studies networks like Asianetverkett, and the Nordic Association for South Asia, which will hold a South Asian studies conference in Helsinki in the spring of 2010. She encouraged South Asianists to consider forming local South Asia symposia of their own in which researchers meet regularly amid informal surroundings (such as members' homes) to discuss one another's work and read articles of common interest.

After Prof. Pamela Price spoke, the session continued with presentations by the challengers and responses from the champions related to career planning, funding, and keeping one's passion for South Asian Studies alive.

**In this session, the challengers were:**

- Peder Gedda, M.A., Gothenburg University, Sweden
- Johan Skog Jensen, B.A., University of Oslo, Norway
- Md. Ashiqur Rahman, M.A., Lund University, Sweden

**The champions were:**

- Prof. Bo Lindblad, Karolinska Institute, Sweden
- Dr. Anna Godhe, Gothenburg University, Sweden
- Dr. Jan Magnusson, Lund University, Sweden

**The challenges presented by the team of challengers were:**

Introduction:

1. What are the points of emphasis in Nordic South Asian studies? From just a quick survey of the conference itself, 20 participants in two groups study history, religion and culture. An interesting contrast is that politics, economics and international relations (IR) are so few that they were merged with the business and technology group - and still form only 10 people all together (vs. 12 in society, gender and development). So the problem seems to be that the emphasis in the Nordic countries is on history, anthropology/sociology, history of religions, indology, languages (Oslo: 1 modern, 2 dead languages for a continent of more than 300 living languages) and cultural and identity issues in general. However, the following topics are clearly underemphasised: international relations, geopolitics, economics, energy politics, environmental studies, business studies and many other contemporary issues that affect a dynamic region of the world (especially India). Copenhagen could be seen as an exception to that with their Asian Dynamics Initiative.
2. Academic passion and private-public sector careers are not necessarily congruent issues – at least not outside academia. What may be fascinating and exciting within the walls of academia, may not be quite what the societies we are part of are demanding from future South Asian experts. This can lead to a discussion of the

general role of universities in society but does not compensate for our neglect of the other aspects of South Asia.

#### Assertion:

We are stuck in a kind of orientalist paradigm and in a pattern of thought which limits our view of South Asia to cultural and development issues. In other terms, Nordic academia has not managed to keep pace with the current economic, political and environmental development in South Asia in general, and India in particular. We are stuck in the past. This in turn will limit our career opportunities in the long run. Students of political science in general and economists with limited knowledge of South Asia may well do better than Nordic South Asia students/scholars when it comes to South Asia-related employment in the private sector, think tanks, international GOs and NGOs as well as in the civil or foreign service.

#### Challenges:

1. Why are South Asian studies in the Northern countries so conservatively confined to purely academic-humanistic affairs, anthropology and local/village-level topics? We are neglecting major contemporary and future developments within economics, IR and geopolitics.
2. How do we make Nordic South Asian studies more relevant to the contemporary setting, and to new demands in the job market?
3. How do we establish solid and functional contacts with Indian universities and acquire the skills in languages which are important in India (for example, Punjabi) but underrepresented in Nordic Universities?
4. A Ph.D. candidate in Sweden and Scandinavia is fully funded and has access to a variety of scholarship funds. An M.A. student does not have anywhere near the same means at his/her disposal as does a Ph.D. student. This is not a healthy position, since the reality of research is that a Ph.D. project starts during the undergraduate period. How do we get funding for M.A. students? Are there any possibilities of creating an equivalent to the Monbukagakusho scholarship offered by the Japanese embassy?
5. How do we maintain the contacts that we have already made? What can be done to increase the circulation of students between various universities within the Nordic countries?

6. How do we secure long-term field visits and get help with establishing contacts?
7. How could networking and research on Bangladesh and Nepal be strengthened and escape from the common association that South Asia is mainly India (in terms of funding, support and focus)?

### **Responses from champions:**

Dr. Anna Godhe commented that the low number of students at the present conference who deal with international relations and topics other than the History, Religion and Culture is because most of these students would probably go to a more specialized conference instead of an interdisciplinary one. Regarding keeping contacts with universities, Dr. Godhe stated that in the field of natural sciences it is necessary to have strong research platforms and work together with other universities in order to get research funding. Regarding the focus on countries other than India, Dr. Godhe commented that the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) is currently pulling out all resources from India and China, but Bangladesh will keep getting funding, so that may be a positive sign and should strengthen networking with Bangladesh.

Dr. Magnusson commented on the question regarding the adequacy of courses available in Nordic Universities. He stated that from a university point of view, it is essential to have sufficient students to schedule a course and hire a teacher. This determines more narrowly which courses will be offered and subsidized. SASNET is currently trying to change this by communicating with the government, the universities and the students but it is not certain to what extent this will meet with success. On the other hand, the EU has a general policy for Higher Education and Sweden has reformed its system to comply with it. For those who organise courses, there are now new requirements and every course must include an assessment of employability after taking the course. The question then becomes: To what extent can one obtain employment in the field of South Asian studies?

Prof. Bo Lindblad responded to the question about obtaining funding and scholarships by commenting that if ambassadors have an interest in South Asia, they can exert considerable pressure: there are currently more than 2000 Pakistanis in Nordic countries, for example. A suggestion for a future action might be for SASNET to collaborate more closely with



ambassadors and push for funding of research programs. In Sweden, an option for funding undergraduate students is through the Linnaeus-Palme programme (<http://www.programkontoret.se/sv/Program-Stipendier/Program1/Linnaeus-Palme/>). Another source of funding might be the Karolinska Institute or SIDA.

With regard to obtaining support for longer field visits, one idea might be to network with more researchers around the world who work on similar topics and collaborate with them. Prof. Lindblad also stated that if money is the main student's motivation, it may not be promising for the research one does. Passion should lead the research. Regarding the job opportunities: those staying in academia should be interested in teaching and want to bring knowledge of South Asia to the Nordic countries. If not, museums, foreign offices and Nordic companies with businesses in India are other alternatives for career development.

After the presentation of the challengers and the answers by the champions were concluded, interdisciplinary discussions took place in five different groups. Afterward, there was a common discussion among all participants. The following points emerged from the discussions:

- South Asian students should be better informed about the resources and programs available to them.
- A lack of mobility of students in various Nordic countries may be the result of a lack of awareness.
- It is important to seek private funds and resources to conduct one's research.
- A network of Ph.D. students could be organised so that students can exchange experiences.
- Students could benefit from the Erasmus Mundus exchange programme with South Asia currently coordinated by Lund University and available to M.A. and undergraduate students.

#### **4. Session OUTREACH**

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This session was held on the afternoon of August 18 and opened with a workshop by Teddy Primack entitled "How to Displease an Editor". He urged writers to prepare manuscripts that

are uniform in appearance and formatted exactly as specified by the editor. He discussed ten things which everyone who wants to publish in an academic journal should adhere to closely, as follows:

1. Manuscripts should be double-spaced, including the references. The corresponding address on the cover and block quotations may be single spaced.
2. Margins should be 1 inch (25mm) on all four sides.
3. The font and type size used should be Times New Roman 12 pt. for everything.
4. Bold type should be avoided, italics used sparingly, and underlining never employed. The main section headings should be capital letters or bold, as specified by the journal's "Guidelines for Authors".
5. Justification must never be used. Instead, alignment should always be "flush left/ragged right".
6. All pages, including the first, should be numbered. The upper right corner is recommended but there is no definitive rule.
7. The maximum word count must be strictly observed and should be stated on the title page.
8. Before you submit any work, an educated native speaker of English should review it critically, focussing particularly on syntax, word usage, and punctuation.
9. Repetitions of words, phrases, and thoughts should be avoided, as should academic jargon.
10. The end of one sentence must be connected to the beginning of the next for a paper to flow logically. Paragraphs should be linked the same way to avoid poor transitions. One can check for this by reading papers aloud a few days after they have been completed.

The speaker concluded by stressing that each journal's "Guidelines for Authors", available on its website, be followed closely.

In the comment period afterward, Prof. Chaturvedi suggested that researchers read old issues of the journals in which they wish to publish. He encouraged those present to aim high and submit to the best journals, reminding them that it in his experience they are often looking for fresh contributions from young scholars.

The workshop was followed by presentations of the second group of challengers and champions on the topic of “Publication, Conference, Teaching and Other Activities”.

**In this session, the challengers were:**

- Anne-Line Sandåker, M.A., University of Oslo, Norway
- Mikko Juhani Viitamäki, M.A., University of Helsinki, Finland
- Suraj Shakya, M.S., Nepal Medical College

**The champions were:**

- Dr. Christer Norström, Stockholm University, Sweden
- Dr. Zarina Kabir, Karolinska Institute, Sweden
- Prof. Staffan Lindberg, Lund University, Sweden

**The challenges presented by the team of students were:**

1. How should one present one’s research in conferences and to journals? How does one find conferences specific enough to be really fruitful? How can one give a presentation that is good enough for an international conference, but still sufficiently tentative to raise questions that might be helpful for research?
2. How does one write an article that corresponds to the general line of a journal? How does one even approach a respected international journal as an M.A. or Ph.D. student who has no formal position in a university? How to can one ensure that an article will be considered for publication and not simply set aside because the author’s name is not yet known?
3. How can expertise in South Asian studies be marketed outside the academic world? Often the easiest thing to market is one’s competency in rare languages. But where can one apply one’s knowledge of the entire culture of the area?
4. There has been a change in the conception of what South Asian studies are. Traditional Sanskrit-oriented indology seems to be slowly giving way to a wider conception of South Asian studies. Students are often interested in more contemporary issues, but those who hold teaching positions represent the “old school” and are seldom able support the needs of students. This is reflected in a lack of interest in supervising a thesis. In addition, teaching and supervising seem to be viewed as necessary evils that take time from a professor or lecturer’s research time. As a result,

preparing a good thesis without proper guidance can be a major challenge.

5. How can one conduct research successfully in the restricted amount of time allotted and with the limited resources provided? Lack of a research budget and short scholarships of six to twelve months duration are inadequate for writing a dissertation. Research on South Asia is also often burdensome because in most cases it requires learning a new language – English is seldom enough.

**The responses of the champions were as follows:**

Dr. Peter B. Andersen commented that there is currently great pressure to publish in prestigious peer- reviewed journals. In Norway, for example, there even exists a classification of the popularity of journals. The typical way to prepare a publication is to read a paper at a conference and then to try to publish it.

Dr. Zarina Kabir commented that it is the responsibility of supervisors to make students being in the academic world, since students need coaching. The students should work on creating confidence in themselves and their work, even if they are giving a presentation before 300 people. To convince donors in Sweden to provide a grant is also very hard, but persistence is important. One should also be practical when it come to publishing: if a journal is not interested in your topic, find another one. Dr. Kabir concluded that there is no recipe about how to market yourself in academia, noting that there is also the issue of expertise, and how and where it is recognised. She noted that sometimes a student needs more support than just financial backing.

Prof. Staffan Lindberg remarked that at present the process of writing a Ph.D. thesis is focused not so much on the creativity of the student but on deadlines, schedules, etc. He stressed that one should not underestimate personal style in becoming a scholar. An example is to act as a volunteer in conferences—the best way, in his view, to get to know more about publications, etc. Students should also focus on research questions that may be relevant in several countries and use a more interdisciplinary approach.

After presenting the challenges and receiving the answers of the champions, thematic groups met, followed by a general group discussion session.

In the evening a dinner reception for all the participants took place. It concluded with performance on the sitar by Shri Harvinder Singh, who also answered questions about the sitar and demonstrated various ways to play it.

## **5. Session OUTPUT**

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The Output session focusing on “Networking and Future Research” was held on August 19, the last day of the conference. It began with a presentation by Dr. Mirja Juntunen, Uppsala University, entitled “A Nordic Perspective on Prospects and Challenges for Scholarly Interaction with South Asia”. She discussed recent policy statements launched in Norway that are aimed at initiating research cooperation between the Nordic countries and India/South Asia. The Nordic Council of Ministers, an intergovernmental cooperation organisation, has implemented long-term joint Nordic globalisation initiatives. They are primarily intended to a) develop the Nordic welfare model, b) increase competition by reinforcing cooperation in a number of areas, and c) promote the Nordic region as a pioneer in addressing globalisation. These policy statements identify India as one of a few important partners in this new arena.

She also spoke about the Nordic-Asian Research Funding Cooperation, whose primary goal is to establish a model for joint research funding activities by Nordic countries and their Asian counterparts. This cooperative research venture is coordinated by the Academy of Finland and has resulted in important projects and strategies regarding South Asia (particularly India). Juntunen also indicated that many of the grants offered by Nordic research bodies are commonly for institutional cooperation or for identifying partners for such cooperation in India. Currently, some of the priority areas are environment, energy, climate, and public health. Several of the initiatives also stress education as an area of focus. In closing, she declared that initiatives do exist, documents and strategies have been formulated, but what now remains is to implement them. She concluded with a brief presentation on the Nordic Center in India (<http://www.nci.uu.se/>).

The session continued with the last group of challengers and champions. The challengers were:

- Anna Rebecca Frilund, M.A., University of Turku
- Mette Gabler, B.A., Lund University

- Sanaya Singh, B.S., University of Gävle

The champions were:

- Prof. Devdatt Dubhashi, Chalmers University of Technology
- Prof. Pamela Price, University of Oslo
- Prof. Staffan Lindberg, Lund University

The challengers raised the following issues:

1. What are the best methods to create contacts and build networks and how can we convince people to be committed to keep in touch? A tighter network among researchers situated in South Asia and Nordic Countries would be a good way to get support and share information. Hence, do the champions have experience in how to create a smoothly-operating international network?
2. How does one get financed and find information about all the existing funding agencies in order to establish a research career? What are the key strategies for successful long-term research, and how important it is to please those who fund one's research?
3. How would the champions promote their themes if their research were to be in a less known or less current field? —in a country that is not a big player politically or economically like Nepal, for example, or about a theory that is not popular at the moment?
4. How should one deal with organisations that are helpful in the process of creating networks or establishing field contacts (informants), and yet follow one's own main researcher interest?
5. Research topics have several ways of being selected: they can be demand driven (but who decides what is most important to be studied?), interest driven (although one's personal interest does not necessarily represent the interest of informants or funders), and fund driven (however, the topic might not be the primary choice of the researcher). Hence, how does one go about choosing a research topic?
6. Should we do research that can be of practical use to our informants, and should the

research have constructive information that is also helpful to a broader population? What are the best ways to connect our academic interests and benefit people at the same time? Should research always be useful to people, or is its philosophical content justification enough for its existence?

The champions then took the floor. In commenting on the above challenges, Prof. Devdatt Dubhashi stated that it is always hard to estimate the usefulness of certain kinds of research at the outset: it might take years to become useful years, so it is hard to predict its future value. Research itself is a curiosity, a passion, and an act of risk-taking. One needs to recognize that industry and the academy work in different ways. Prof. Dubhashi addressed also the question of how to make someone's research attractive to broader circles of the public. He commented that the IT world currently works with numerous scholars from humanistic fields, and this could be an option for potential collaboration. Prof. Dubhashi also stated that in the last decade completely new forms of communications and media have appeared, and these could be used to make one's work accessible to a wider audience.

Many present commented on the issue of corruption among researchers, something apparently present to a certain degree in academia in general. Another issue Prof. Staffan Lindberg addressed was the tremendous pressure on the researcher to spread information. A way to include the subjects of one's research in the fruits of the project would be to provide them with the findings the researcher developed using their input.

Prof. Pamela Price spoke of research on less commercial topics and suggested that it is usually better to adapt one's research to the strategies and policies of international organisations like World Bank; otherwise it may be extremely difficult to find funding for the research.

There was also an intensive discussion about how to write a successful funding proposal. Prof. Staffan Lindberg's suggestion was to make sure that the first five lines of the proposal are catchy and attractive.

A final thematic group session followed, during which participants has their last opportunity to issues of interest among each other.

The conference closed with an address by SASNET Director Anna Lindberg in which she drew together all the threads from the various sessions over the three days in Falsterbo (see next section of this report). Finally, student Malin Gregersen, a Ph.D. candidate at Lund University, described the SASNET Student Forum (<http://www.sasnet.lu.se/studentforum/>) and encouraged students who attended the conference to use it.

## **6. Main conclusions and outcomes**

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At the end of the conference, the main issues which arose in the course of the discussions were summarized by SASNET Director Anna Lindberg, as follows:

- There is a common feeling among the students that a researcher should give back something to the community which he/she has worked with. Suggestions on the ways to do that were made during the group discussions, as well as during the session “Output”. Among them is that each researcher could feel themselves part of a larger whole and work with others interested in similar topics. Another way may be by taking photographs, writing personal stories, books for kids, etc., and keeping in mind that only personal interaction with people influences them.
- SASNET should expand its focus South Asian from India to the other countries in the region, such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and others. This could be done through more intensive interaction with the embassies of these countries and through the SASNET network of contacts.
- More conferences of this type should be organised in the future, with their main focus on students in order to allow them to interact and network among each other. Such events would be an excellent opportunity for the young researchers to present their projects and get feedback.

## **7. Summarized feedback from the participants**

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The conference organisers received a lot of feedback from the participants. The common impression was very positive and many stated that they received concrete suggestions and ideas on how to improve their research work in the future. They were pleased that they could



become acquainted with other students working in the same field and to learn about various possibilities for funding, exchange programmes, and future research. Some participants also mentioned that they enjoyed the more dynamic structure of the conference, with its variety of shorter and diverse sessions, rather than longer ones. The location of the conference – in a remote area outside the city – was also regarded very positively because it allowed for a closer interaction among the participants.

There were also a lot of suggestions on how the conference could be improved next time.

Below are some of them:

- Moderated discussions in smaller groups were very useful, but the interdisciplinary sessions would have benefited from having a knowledgeable chair person guide the discussion and answer questions. Without such guidance they were a bit chaotic.
- Such a conference should be held every year.
- Participants might best be divided into groups according to their degree level – Ph.D., Masters and Bachelors, since otherwise too much focus is put on Ph.D. students and their research work, while the M.A. students were somewhat in the background.
- There was too much talk about funding.
- For the next conference, participants could be placed in groups done according to their country of interest so that they could discuss practical issues revolving around on similar problems they might face in their research.
- It would be good to send out a brief bio of the attendees and their projects to participants before the start of the conference
- Invite someone with a Ph.D. in an area related to South Asia who works outside academia, since many of students will not continue their work in the academic environment.
- Structure the discussions on funding according to scholarships for a) minor field studies for M.A. students, b) internships on the B.A. and M.A. levels, c) Ph.D. funding, and d) post-doc opportunities.
- Since people came together with from such diverse fields of interest, it was sometimes difficult to discuss one's own research in depth.
- Schedule more time in small group discussions in which everyone could discuss their research projects.
- Enable students to upload their articles on the SASNET web page.

- Place more emphasis on careers, as well as opportunities outside the academic world.
- Too much focus was on Sweden, Norway and Denmark, and very little on Finland.
- Perhaps include participation of policy makers like an ambassador, vice-chancellor, or senior academic in future conferences.
- Provide more information about publishing – not only how to format one’s paper for a scientific journal, but also how to select journals in which one could publish one’s papers, how to find a topic relevant to the larger public, how to reach out through the media, etc.
- Make the themes of the plenary sessions more concrete.

## 8. Keynote speakers

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- *Vinayak Chaturvedi*, Associate Professor of History, Dept. of History, University of California, Irvine (USA). [vinayak@uci.edu](mailto:vinayak@uci.edu)
- *Pamela Gwynne Price*, Professor of History, Dept. of History, University of Oslo (Norway). [p.g.price@iakh.uio.no](mailto:p.g.price@iakh.uio.no)
- *Mirja Juntunen*, Teacher and researcher in Indology at Uppsala University (Sweden) and Director of the Nordic Centre in India, a consortium of leading universities in the Nordic countries. [Mirja.Juntunen@statsvet.uu.se](mailto:Mirja.Juntunen@statsvet.uu.se)
- *Teddy Primack*, Academic Documents Associates, Greenbelt, Maryland (USA), linguistic reviser of journal articles and dissertations. [tprimack@yahoo.com](mailto:tprimack@yahoo.com)

## 9. Thematic sessions chairpersons

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- Peter B. Andersen, University of Copenhagen, [peterba@hum.ku.dk](mailto:peterba@hum.ku.dk)
- Per Hilding, Stockholm University, [per.hilding@ekohist.su.se](mailto:per.hilding@ekohist.su.se)
- Knut A. Jacobsen, University of Bergen, [Knut.Jacobsen@ahkr.uib.no](mailto:Knut.Jacobsen@ahkr.uib.no)
- Catarina Kinnvall, Lund University, [Catarina.Kinnvall@svet.lu.se](mailto:Catarina.Kinnvall@svet.lu.se)
- Per Knutsson, University of Gothenburg, [per.knutsson@globalstudies.gu.se](mailto:per.knutsson@globalstudies.gu.se)

## 10. Plenary sessions “Champions”

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- Devdatt Dubhashi, Chalmers University of Technology, [dubhashi@chalmers.se](mailto:dubhashi@chalmers.se)
- Anna Godhe, University of Gothenburg, [anna.godhe@marecol.gu.se](mailto:anna.godhe@marecol.gu.se)
- Zarina Kabir, Karolinska Institute, [Zarina.Kabir@ki.se](mailto:Zarina.Kabir@ki.se)
- Staffan Lindberg, Lund University, [Staffan.Lindberg@soc.lu.se](mailto:Staffan.Lindberg@soc.lu.se)
- Bo Lindblad, Karolinska Institute, [Bo.Lindblad@ki.se](mailto:Bo.Lindblad@ki.se)
- Jan Magnusson, Lund University, [Jan.Magnusson@soch.lu.se](mailto:Jan.Magnusson@soch.lu.se)
- Christer Norström, Stockholm University, [christer.norstrom@socant.su.se](mailto:christer.norstrom@socant.su.se)
- Stig Toft Madsen, SASNET, [stm@ruc.dk](mailto:stm@ruc.dk) <http://www.sasnet.lu.se/lucram.html>

## 11. Plenary sessions “Challengers”

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- Peder Gedda, M.A., Gothenburg University
- Johan Skog Jensen, B.A., University of Oslo
- Md. Ashiqur Rahman, M.A., Lund University
- Anne-Line Sandåker, M.A., University of Oslo
- Mikko Juhani Viitamäki, M.A., University of Helsinki
- Suraj Shakya, M.S., Nepal Medical College
- Anna Rebecca Frilund, M.A., University of Turku
- Mette Gabler, B.A., Lund University
- Sanaya Singh, B.S., University of Gävle

## 12. Organising committee:

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1. Kristina Myrvold, Assistant Professor in History of Religion, Lund University, Sweden, [Kristina.Myrvold@teol.lu.se](mailto:Kristina.Myrvold@teol.lu.se)
2. Julia Velkova, M.A. in Eastern Philosophy and Culture, University of Sofia, Bulgaria, [jvelkova@gmail.com](mailto:jvelkova@gmail.com)
3. Anna Lindberg, Director, SASNET, [Anna.Lindberg@sasnet.lu.se](mailto:Anna.Lindberg@sasnet.lu.se)
4. Lars Eklund, Deputy Director, SASNET, Lars [Eklund@sasnet.lu.se](mailto:Eklund@sasnet.lu.se)

### 13. Useful links and organisations mentioned in the conference

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1. Linnaeus Palme program – <http://www.programkontoret.se/sv/Program-Stipendier/Program1/Linnaeus-Palme/>
2. International Institute of Asian Studies, Leiden, Netherlands. <http://www.iiss.org> – contains a newsletter on Asia containing with conferences, reports, news, etc. from Asia. Produced in association with the European Conference on Modern South Asian studies (ECMSAS).
3. Swedish Institute – <http://www.si.se>
4. [Indian Council for International Relations – http://www.iccrindia.org](http://www.iccrindia.org)
5. Swedish Academic Network on South Asia (SASNET) – [www.sasnet.lu.se](http://www.sasnet.lu.se)
6. Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Window (EMECW) lot on India, administered by Lund University, Sweden, from 2008. <http://www.erasmuswindow13.org/>
7. Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Window (EMECW) lot on India, administered by KTH, Sweden, from 2009. <http://www.uni-goettingen.de/de/118464.html>
8. Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Window (EMECW) lot on South Asia, administered by Aalborg University, Denmark, from 2009. [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/extcoop/call/2008/selection/aalborg\\_university.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/extcoop/call/2008/selection/aalborg_university.pdf)
9. Information about all India/South Asia related EMECW programmes: <http://www.sasnet.lu.se/emecw.html>
10. Erasmus Mundus general website – [http://ec.europa.eu/education/external-relation-programmes/doc72\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/external-relation-programmes/doc72_en.htm)
11. Nordic Centre in India – <http://www.nci.uu.se>
12. Institute for Oriental Languages, Stockholm University – <http://www.orient.su.se>
13. [Norwegian Forum for South Asia – http://www.nofsa.uio.no/engelsk.html](http://www.nofsa.uio.no/engelsk.html)
14. [Norwegian Institute for International Affairs – http://english.nupi.no/](http://english.nupi.no/)
15. [International Peace Research Institute, Oslo, Norway – http://www.prio.no/](http://www.prio.no/)

**APPENDIX:****Detailed feedback from some of the participants and info about their research projects**

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**MALIN SODERBERG**

University of Oslo  
Society, Development, and Gender

Feedback: I really enjoyed the conference. My tips for improvement is a little bit less focus on financing research since seemed to be the thing that was discussed mostly. I would like more emphasis on career, and also a little bit about any opportunities outside academic world.

Research project:

Working title: Caste Identity among Scheduled Caste students: Student politics, reservation and identity in Andhra Pradesh.

**JOHAN SKOG JENSEN**

University of Oslo  
Technology, Economics, and International Relations

Feedback: My general impression of the conference was good. The main benefit was meeting other students, although our backgrounds, academic focus and professional prospects were very diverse. South Asia as a geographical area remains the lowest common denominator. Nevertheless it was useful to see what other South Asianists chose to emphasize in their research. There are rather few of us in the Nordic countries, so staying in touch with each other can definitely enhance both the quality and the interest of work on South Asia. In that sense, I suppose the benefit of the conference was especially the networking and meeting of colleagues rather than the purely academic stuff (at least for my discipline, International Relations). I also suppose networking was the conscious objective at the outset.

Johan Skog Jensen is doing his MA in diplomatic history at the University of Oslo. He has his background in International Relations and South Asian studies.

The research project:

The MA-thesis will discuss some aspects of the contemporary history of India-China relations - two simultaneously rising economic and military powers, large developing countries and complex neighbours. More specifically, the thesis will analyse the nature of the Indo-Chinese rapprochement in the late 1980s in general, and Rajiv Gandhi's 1988 China diplomacy in particular. To what extent were Indian visions and policies vis-à-vis Beijing altered, and what were the main factors permitting change?

## **ASHIQUR RAHMAN**

University of Lund  
Nature, Health and Environment

Feedback: As a whole the conference was well organized and an excellent display of coordinated effort of some scholars. To my mind, the plenary session among the different sessions was most interesting and it would be better if we could avoid the extension of this session I mean plenary session with concluding discussion led by the champions. In addition, it will be great if SASNET can ensure participation of policy makers like ambassador, Vice-chancellor and senior most academics in such kind of future conferences.

The research project:

I am a Masters student of Development Studies at Lund University, Sweden. At the last stage of the program I am writing my dissertation on “Livelihood adaptation to salinity intrusion in Bangladesh: Perception and practices” based on a minor field work in a coastal region of Bangladesh under the supervision of Steven Sampson of Social Anthropology where I wanted to know the perception, knowledge, valuation and responses of local community to the salt water intrusion. I’d like to dig the issue deeper as part of my future study.

## **YI QU**

University of Gävle  
Technology, Economics, and International Relations  
(Second year in his bachelor study)

Feedback: I’m so happy that I attended this conference in Malmö this summer. It became one of my best experiences in my life. Although I’m the only bachelor student and the only Chinese, yet I made a lot of friends from different countries. Everyone is so friendly and so kind. I really appreciate you and the SASNET organised the conference. From the speech and group discussion, I learnt a lot and have much more interest in South Asia study! I’m quite interesting in the thematic presentation part and I heard other people’s research which really impress me. I know much more about the situation of India and the relationship between China and India and the MDGs of Bangladesh and so on. And I really appreciate the speeches given by the professions which are very useful for us. Maybe sometimes I felt a little confused, but I think it’s my own reasons. I need to study more.

I’m a second year student in Gävle University and my major is International Social work. As I’m still in my bachelor study, I don’t really sure what will I focus on in master degree. But during the conference, I want to focus on the relationship between China and South Asia and how has the relationship with India been changing, the reasons and so on. I will start to collect the information and try to find my answer.

The research project: Recently, I’m doing a research on child abuse and neglect.

**DAVID FLEISCHHACKER**

University of Uppsala  
Society, Development, and Gender

Feedback: Thank you for organizing a great conference, I had much fun and learned a lot through both my peers and the lectures! All in all, I would say it was a great success for me to take part. I left additional thoughts in the "feedback box" at the last session, so I won't repeat that here.

Research project:

I study at Uppsala University, my main subject being political science. Although my major interest areas are development questions and human rights, in my thesis I will be doing a comparison of the anti-terrorist laws enacted by/in the EU vs. India. Herein I will be focusing on the individual's rights to safety and freedom, and how these laws possibly restrict personal integrity and other freedoms.

**METTE GABLER**

University of Lund  
Society, Development, and Gender  
(Bachelor degree from university of Copenhagen in Indian studies)

Feedback: What a great couple of days. I really enjoyed it. I liked the spontaneous nature and the fact that all seemed confused. Lovely way of doing. Not stiff and all organized to the detail.

It would have been nice to know a little about what was expected in presentations, but I guess that would go against the above. I am currently planning my next step as I recently graduated from Lund University, Sweden from the MA program international Development and Management. My Bachelor degree I obtained from University of Copenhagen in Indian studies. During these years I also studies Hindi at Banaras Hindu University and spent a year at Humboldt Universität zu Berlin.

The research project:

The title is for the moment "the good life – buy one get one free". It engages in communications between outdoor advertising and public space and considers the possibility of social marketing and social change through consumerism. Where this will go is not certain yet.

**JOHANNA SOMMANSSON**

University of Stockholm  
Society, Development, and Gender  
Master of Anthropology (2009)

Bachelor of Indology  
India - Gender – Modernity (2006)

Feedback: I had a great time at the conference, and my overall impressions are all good. The conference schedule was well structured and interesting meetings took place. One thing that I would like for the future is a more thorough presentation of all participants – maybe send them out in advance. For the next conference I would like more student presentations of MA projects and PhD projects in the big room. If we don't have time for all, maybe you can select a few and ask them to present. I also think that we could upload our articles and theses on SASNET, is that possible? The Saturday dinner was great, I really appreciated the nice food and Harbinders music. I think that the schedule was a bit hectic during the conference.

The research project:

My master thesis work constitutes an in-depth study of young urban middle class girls in Delhi and, specifically, how they construct and negotiate gender in their daily lives. Currently, I am preparing a film project sprung from my Delhi research. I am also looking for projects relating to my field of interest to participate in, as I have completed my MA degree I wish to get more practical experience. I also write an anthropological blog at [www.anthromodernity.com](http://www.anthromodernity.com).

## **ADRIANA MILENA**

University of Lund  
Master of Society, Development, and Gender  
University of Bucharest  
Bachelor of Sociology  
Did Master's thesis in Delhi, India for waste management system in from a development and social studies perspective.

Feedback: Being part of the SASNET conference on South Asia for young scholars was very enjoyable and interesting. I benefited a lot from the advice and discussions on funding and outreach. As a result I now feel very motivated to publish my research project in a specialised journal and to try to disseminate the information gained through all possible channels on which I got very good tips. As for suggestions for improvement, I think the interdisciplinary sessions would have benefited from having a knowledgeable chair person to guide the discussion and answer questions.

The research project:

I have a bachelor's degree in Sociology from the University of Bucharest and this year I have completed my master's degree in International Development and Management from Lund University. As a master's candidate I did field studies for my master's thesis in Delhi, India. My research project focuses on the Waste Management System in Delhi from a development and social studies perspective. I argue that the waste problem is caused by human behaviour and solving the problem necessitates changing that behaviour. Therefore I strive to understand the knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of Delhi residents concerning waste and waste handling.



## **ANNELIES OLLIEUZ**

University of Oslo  
 PhD student  
 Technology, Economics, and International relations

Feedback: Thanks for a very successful conference. It was a good opportunity to discuss the practical issues related to research. I liked the many relatively short sessions, instead of fewer long sessions. In contrast to what was mentioned the last day, I did not think that the interdisciplinary sessions, without a 'leader', were confusing. I found them interesting and constructive, although rather short, because of the longer tea break.

I am especially grateful to have met other people working on Nepal, and am therefore thinking it might have been interesting to have one session with the groups divided based on the country (or part of the country in the case of India) where people are working. That would have enabled us to discuss practical issues related to our own country of research.

It was positive to have the conference out of town. Otherwise people easily go in to town in the evenings, which makes it more difficult to talk to people, as they are spread in different places.

Lastly, I include the two suggestions for a future conference which I mentioned yesterday:

- to send out a short presentation of the participants and their project to all the participants before the start of the conference
- to invite somebody with a PhD in something related to South Asia who works outside academia.

Research Project:

I am a social worker and social anthropologist with field work and development work experience from Bhutan, Nepal and Vietnam. About a year ago, I started as a PhD student at the University of Oslo. Based on long term field work in a village in the southeastern plains of Nepal, I am studying people's perceptions of moral authority, the crucial question being who is considered a good leader. By answering this question I hope to offer an insight in how people in Nepal understand and practice democracy.

## **ASIFUL BASAR**

University of Lund  
 Master in Asian Studies  
 Nature, Health and environment

Feedback: I think the conference was wonderful and I personally benefited a lot. The conference was held in a time when I am preparing to submit my master thesis. So, I had the opportunity to learn new things from the conference. The Plenary session was very useful, though discussion after plenary session was not quite useful sometime. It would be good if we get more thematic discussions in future. It would also be useful for young researchers if you can arrange more paper presentations from senior scholars.

Research project:

The main focus of my research work will be on the effect of climate change on the life of the coastal communities in Bangladesh. The research will find out how natural changes affect the livelihood of coastal communities in Bangladesh and how it forces them to migrate from a vulnerable place to a better place. It will also investigate the changing life patterns of these coastal communities and scrutinize government policies for these naturally vulnerable groups.

## **GEOFFREY GARDELLA**

University of Lund  
History, Religion, and Culture, group 2

Feedback: I found the conference a wonderful opportunity to really connect with others in the field. I enjoyed pretty much everything we did. The event that I found most helpful was the round-table where we presented our research to our small thematic group. I received very helpful feedback there, and was really inspired by hearing the work that others were doing. I would have liked to see more time with this.

If I would change anything... well, I suppose I got more out of the smaller group exercises than out of sitting in the large group. Perhaps dropping/shortening the third portion of the challenger-expert sessions to allow more time in the small group discussion.

Research project:

Geoffrey Gardella is a Master's degree student within the South Asia track at the Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies, Lund University. His area of focus is the intersection of food, culture and identity in India.

## **SOHAIB AHMED KHAN**

University of Kuopio Finland  
MBBS, MPH, PhD student  
School of Public Health  
History, religion, and Culture, group 1

Feedback: The theme and purpose of the conference was very important; to bring together the students and seniors and provide them a forum to communicate the problems and to discuss the situations and opportunities in South Asian studies. Arrangements were very neat, everything from the venue to the people involved and the program content was totally fine. Personally for me it was so good to get guidance from seniors in my Public Health field, and also to see what other students are interested in and what methods are they using in their studies and research projects. The problem of "funding" was the most raised issue, seniors guided us students about some sources, but then it would be even better if we could have a representative or two from any funding source or embassies. Overall I am very satisfied with what I gained from the conference, so thanks a lot to Anna Lindberg and all the organizers.

The research project:

I am a Pakistani, born and raised in a small village in province Punjab. Step by step I tried and moved from that small village to the next bigger city and from there to Lahore city in search of better education and future. I graduated from medical school and decided to pursue career in Public Health. The high education standards of Finnish universities attracted me and now it's the start of my 4th year of PhD studies here at the School of Public Health, University of Kuopio. I am studying the situation of Poliomyelitis in Pakistan in socio-cultural context. My rural roots made me interested in this particular topic, and I hope that I can be useful to my people back in my village – at least in the near future after my studies.

### **CAROLINA IVARSSON**

University of Gothenburg  
History, Religion, and Culture, group 1  
Fil Mag/MS, Doktorand/PhD student  
School of Global Studies, Social Anthropology

Feedback:

It was a great conference. I particularly valued the discussions about publications, editing and funding. The only suggestion is that we could have been handed summaries of each participant's projects and interests beforehand. The group discussions without moderator became a bit unfocused and the sessions overall a bit repetitive. Otherwise, very constructive. Thanks a lot!

The research project:

This dissertation project examines the ways in which people in a local Sri Lankan context strive to rebuild their community after the 2004 tsunami. It identifies particular challenges and phases of reconstruction as well as the strategies employed by the local population in order to restore a sense of security and coherence, and recover a viable everyday life. The approach is anthropological and holistic and adopts a human security lens to local realities. Exploring local responses to new insecurities in addition to old ones, the project also examines the relevance of the concept of 'Human Security' in relation to locally perceived dimensions of what security is and how it is attained.

### **PÄR FREDBORN**

University of Delhi  
Studied Persian  
Will get registered as a PhD through Erasmus Programme

Feedback: Suggestion for improvements; a short presentation of everyone's projects could have been handed out before we met. The organization, the accommodation and the food, was incredibly good. But most importantly, it was a very encouraging experience. Personally I got a few ideas about my project and how to go about it. I can't almost come up with any constructive suggestions. The interdisciplinary groups functioned well, as well as the thematic ones. I look forward to the next conference!

Research Project:

The aim is to work on Qawwali music, and to investigate how the Qawwali texts relate to Persian mystical poetry.

### **MIKKO VITTAMÄKI**

University of Helsinki  
History, Religion, and Culture, group 1

Feedback: All the discussion on funding, career, exchange programs etc. concerned only Sweden, Norway and Denmark. But, I am afraid, this reflects the state of South Asian studies in Finland and could work Asian inspiration for more activity. The interdisciplinary groups might have been as fruitful had there been a chairperson there too.

I think it was a good idea to choose Falsterbo as the venue; outside the city there were very few distractions and, I believe, the participants ended up spending more time together than might have been the case in the city. Overall it was very well organized.

Research Project;

I am a PhD candidate in Arabic and Islamic Studies (Univ. Helsinki) and Philology and History of Medieval and Mughal India (Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Paris). My research project analyses Sufi poetry in the context of qawwali music in South Asia focusing on the formation of poetic repertoire in different times and localities. Furthermore, I analyse the reasons behind the selection of poems and discuss the role of Sufis in the developments in the intellectual history of South Asian Islam. The research is based on both ethnographical material and textual sources in Arabic, Persian, Hindi and Urdu.

### **REBECCA FRILUND**

Research Assistant  
University of Turku  
Society, Development, and Gender

Feedback: If I should find something to criticize it would be probably that sometimes the “champions” did talk a bit too long so that I got the impression that the focus was missing.

Suggestion for improvements; it was very good to get info about academic publishing since many scholars struggle with these issues, it as also good to get to know about existing networks and funding possibilities. I also liked the fact that the conference center was located away from the city center; this way people were more socialized and concentrated more on the issues than going to a city and shopping.

### **SVARE LODYE ANDERS**

University of Tromso, Norway  
Technology, Economics, and International Relations

Master of Philosophy in Peace and Conflict Transformation (University of Tromsø) and Master of Science in Industrial Management (Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim).

Feedback: What did not work so well, in my opinion, were the non-moderated and undefined/unorganised interdisciplinary group sessions. While I fully support the idea of blending people and not sticking to the same groups throughout the event, my interdisciplinary group did not function very well. With limited time to take up and elaborate on the various issues already presented in plenary, we would have been more concentrated and the group more productive had there been a moderator or leader who had prepared precise questions for getting the discussion going. In my group, the focus and work intensity shifted constantly. Thus, I was left with the feeling that “this didn’t give me very much” after both those group sessions.

The distribution (or otherwise presentation, somehow) of each participant’s abstract before or during the conference. In my thematic group, the members’ abstracts were distributed by the moderator in the first meeting. However, this was not done in all groups, as I understood it, and what all the other people participating in the conference (members of the other thematic groups) are working on, one could only find out by talking to them one to one in the spare time (which is OK, but a bit random and makes it hard to get the full picture).

Satisfaction:

Thanks a lot for organising the conference at Falsterbo in such a good way and for accepting my participation after the deadline. The conference was a fruitful experience for me. I met very nice and interesting people and really enjoyed the days.

The Research project:

My (upcoming) PhD project examines the role of legitimation and representation in contemporary peacemaking. More precisely: What affects the legitimacy of actors in internal conflict and how do legitimation processes determine which actors will be represented at various levels when a peace initiative is underway? The empirical context for the study is Sri Lanka and/or Nepal.

**DUTT, KHALEDA GANI**

History, Religion, and Culture, group 2  
Stockholm University

Feedback: The conference was an excellent platform to air our concerns and share our aspirations to further research in South Asia. By meeting key people engaged in South Asian research it sure rekindled the spark to stick with it. A fervent hope is that the links forged continue to be strengthened through the student forum and we find the ways and the means to meet annually.

The Research Project:

Inaccessibility to primary education arises out of poverty accentuated by gender constraints manifest in societal constructs. Governments construe policies to combat social maladies by

engendering their policies. The research project studies the Indian and the State Government of Gujarat's programs and policies designed for ameliorating the problem. The government initiatives are juxtaposed with the ground realities observed at four elementary schools in Vadodara District, Gujarat.

## **ELEONOR MARCUSSEN**

University of Heidelberg  
 History, Religion, and Culture group 1  
 Ph.D. candidate  
 Junior Research Group 'Cultures of Disaster'

Feedback: The discussions on funding can maybe be structured under, for example, scholarships for a) minor field studies for master studies, b) internships (on BA and MA level), c) PhD-funding, d) post-doc opportunities (to plan ahead), e) ? etc. - to in the end bring out clear information to the participants where these can be found. It could also be interesting to have funding specified after disciplinary areas. I had a feeling the 'development' friendly scholarships easily dominated the discussions. It would be nice to hear more about opportunities for 'purely' philological studies, but maybe the absence of them is implicitly a part of the discussion on so-called 'useful/need-based' research. I would also suggest to provide abstracts of the participants research/university affiliation before the conference. It would be good to have to facilitate networking and exchange of information. I really enjoyed the conference and got a lot of good practical information and useful research ideas.

The research project:

My research focuses on natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes in early 19th century Gujarat. The research deals with how perceptions and explanatory models of natural disasters influence reactions and approaches to reconstruction work and administration of natural disasters.