



ROUNDTABLE

Governing Regional Commons in South Asia: Prospects for Cooperation and Inclusion

Jointly Organised By

Department of International Relations, South Asian University

Institute of South Asian Studies, South Asian University; and

Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore

17 October 2024 (Thursday) | 11.30am-1.30pm (IST) / 2.00pm-4.00pm (SGT)

LS 001, South Asian University (Hybrid Mode)

11.30am IST/
2.00pm SGT

Opening Session

Chair: **Dr Jayashree Vivekanandan**

Chairperson, Department of International Relations, SAU

Professor Sanjay Chaturvedi

Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, and

Director, Institute of South Asian Studies, SAU

Associate Professor Iqbal Singh Sevea

Director, Institute of South Asian Studies, NUS

11.45am IST/
2.15pm SGT

Panel Presentations

Chair: **Associate Professor Iqbal Singh Sevea**

Director, Institute of South Asian Studies, NUS

Panelists

Dr Amit Ranjan

Research Fellow, Institute of South Asian Studies, NUS

Dr Dhananjay Tripathi

Associate Professor

Department of International Relations, SAU

Dr Puspa Sharma

Visiting Senior Research Fellow

Institute of South Asian Studies, NUS

Dr Medha Bisht

Associate Professor

Department of International Relations, SAU

12.45pm IST/
3.15 pm SGT

Interactive Session

Chair: **Dr Jayashree Vivekanandan**

Chairperson, Department of International Relations, SAU

1.30pm IST/
4.00pm SGT

End of Session

About the Roundtable

This roundtable is jointly organised by the Department of International Relations, Faculty of Social Sciences, South Asian University, the Institute of South Asian Studies, South Asian University, and the Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore.

Transboundary resources, by their very nature, are fraught with conflict. Be they rivers or forests, they present the classic challenge of reconciling benefits with obligations. This is particularly acute in South Asia, where 'absolute' sovereignty claims over shared natural resources have informed foreign policy agendas. Political disputes between states have a deleterious impact on cross-border cooperative mechanisms related to water sharing, renewable energy and forest conservation.

Consequently, the states in South Asia have prioritised national security over regional resource governance. Hence, although there exist agreements at the bilateral level, and a memorandum of understanding at the multilateral level that signal the intent to cooperate, many of these arrangements have not translated into tangible and effective cooperation between the states.

Further, resource governance has tended to be technocratic and top-down. It has proven to be exclusionary at multiple levels, resulting in the marginalisation of local level actors from the decision-making process and the privileging of expert-driven knowledge over local traditional knowledge forms.

The roundtable will deliberate on the problem of collective action, which is moot to govern regional commons in South Asia. Towards this, it will explore prospects for a multilevel governance framework in the context of water and forest resource management. The event will also discuss how institutional responses can be calibrated to build trust and improve coordination among different stakeholders. The panellists will be invited to discuss and deliberate on the following questions regarding managing transboundary water and forest resources:

1. How can cooperation be made effective at the local level, given the geopolitical realities in South Asia?
2. Which types of interventions in the existing regulatory and governance structures at the national and regional levels are needed to make resource governance inclusive and participatory?
3. What are the strengths of South Asia's ecological and social setting that can be leveraged towards mitigating resource conflicts?

Roundtable Participants *(alphabetical order)*

Dr Medha Bisht is an Associate Professor at the Department of International Relations at South Asian University (SAU). She has a PhD from the Diplomatic Studies Division at Jawaharlal Nehru University. Her research interests include philosophy and theory of International Relations, water governance and diplomacy at international, transboundary and local scales, transnational networks in International Relations (with special focus on water, climate and energy sector), Asian diplomatic thought and qualitative methods. Her book, *Kautilya's Arthashastra: Philosophy of Strategy*, was published by Routledge (London and New York 2020).

Before joining SAU, Dr Bisht was an Associate Fellow at MP-IDSA, an independent think tank under the Ministry of Defence, and a Research Associate with the Institute for Social Studies Trust, a non-government organization with special consultative status with ECOSOC, United Nations. She has also taught at Kumaon University, Uttarakhand. She has been a consultant with UNIFEM, ICIMOD, UNDP, IUCN, OXFAM, DFID/Asia Foundation, University of Arizona, and FNF, Germany.

Dr Bisht also regularly delivers lectures at Sushma Swaraj Foreign Service Institute, Ministry of External Affairs on transboundary water issues and has participated in Track 2 and 1.5 dialogues on climate change. She is a member of regional and international working groups on transboundary rivers and climate change and has led and co-led international projects on water governance and diplomacy with Dhaka University, IUCN, Uppsala University, WWF (P), Lahore. She writes for national dailies like *Indian Express* and *Pioneer* and alternative social media like *The Wire* and *Live Encounters*.

Professor Sanjay Chaturvedi was Lala Lajpat Rai Chair Professor in Political Science at Panjab University, Chandigarh before joining South Asian University, New Delhi, as a Professor in International Relations in June 2018. He served as Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS) from September 2018 to September 2021. He is serving his second term as the Dean, FSS, with effect from 1 August 2022.

During the early 1990s, Professor Chaturvedi pursued post-doctoral research on 'Polar Regions in International Relations' at the University of Cambridge, England, with a Nehru Centenary British Commonwealth Fellowship. This was followed by the award of Leverhulme Research Grant at the University of Cambridge, where he was employed as a Research Associate to work on the research project, 'The Future of the Antarctic Treaty System and its Relevance for the Arctic', at Scott Polar Research Institute, from 1993 to 1995. A major output of his research stint at Cambridge, which also involved lecturing to M.Phil. in Polar Studies, was *The Polar Regions: A Political Geography* (Chichester: John Wiley, 1996), which remains widely cited. He was the Lead Author for Chapter 10: (Asia) of the Working Group II Contribution to the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report (2019-2021).

Currently, he is the President of the Indian Ocean Research Group, an *Observer* in the Indian Ocean Rim Association and Chief Editor of its flagship journal, *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* (Routledge). He serves/has served on editorial boards of several journals, including *Geopolitics* (Routledge); *Political Geography* (Elsevier), *Cooperation and Conflict* (Sage), *Journal of Borderland Studies* (Routledge), *Strategic Analysis* (Routledge), *The Polar Journal* (Routledge, as a Regional Editor) *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs* (Sage), *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal: A Quarterly of the Association of Indian Diplomats* (Prints Publication), *Journal of Global Faultlines* (Pluto) and *Journal of Land Ports and Border Economy* (Sage).

Dr Amit Ranjan is Research Fellow of the Institute of South Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore.

Dr Ranjan's latest publication is *The Aftermath of the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971: Enduring Impacts* (edited with Taj Hashmi and Mazhar Abbas, Routledge, 2025). He has edited *Linking Climate Change Adaptation, Disaster Risk Reduction, and Loss & Damage* (with Vositha Wijenayake, Linda Anne Stevenson, Akio Takemoto, Dennis Mombauer and Nafesa Ismail, Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), *Migration, Memories and "Unfinished" Partition* (TISS-Routledge series on Migration Studies, 2024) and *The Breakup of India and Palestine: The causes and legacies of partition* (edited with Victor Kattan, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2023). He is also author of *Federalism and Inter-State River Water Disputes in India* (Routledge, London and New Delhi, 2023), *Contested Waters: India's Transboundary River Water Disputes in South Asia* (Routledge, Oxon and New Delhi, 2021) and *India- Bangladesh Border Disputes: History and Post-LBA Dynamics* (Springer, Singapore, 2018). Dr Ranjan has also edited *Migration, Regional Autonomy, and Conflicts in Eastern South Asia* (with Diotima Chatteraj, Palgrave, Switzerland, 2023), *Environment, Climate Change and Migration in South Asia* (with Rajesh Kharat and Pallavi Deka, Routledge, London, 2023), *Urban Development and Environmental History in Modern South Asia* (with Ian Talbot, Routledge, Oxon, 2023), *India in South Asia Challenges and Management* (Springer, Singapore, 2019), *Partition of India: Postcolonial Legacies* (Routledge, London and New Delhi, 2019), and *Water Issues in Himalayan South Asia: Internal Challenges, Disputes and Transboundary Tensions* (Palgrave, Singapore, 2019).

Dr Ranjan's papers, review essays and book reviews have been widely published in journals, including *Asian Survey*, *Asian Affairs*, *Asian Ethnicity*, *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics*, *Australian Journal of Ocean and*

Maritime Studies, Economic & Political Weekly, India Review, Indian Journal of Public Administration, India Quarterly, Journal of Migration Affairs, Journal of the Indian Ocean Region, The Roundtable: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs, Social Change, Studies in Indian Politics, Society and Culture in South Asia, South Asia Research, Social Identities, Sikh Formations, Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs, Journal of Contemporary African Studies, Water History and World Water Policy, among others.

Associate Professor Iqbal Singh Sevea is Director of the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) at the National University of Singapore (NUS). He is an internationally recognised scholar of contemporary and modern South Asia whose core research focuses on South Asian politics, social and political thought, governance, and Islamic thought.

Associate Professor Sevea has held academic appointments in leading institutions globally and is the author of several publications. Before joining ISAS, he was an Associate Professor with the Department of History at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill where he was a faculty member from 2012 to 2021. Before this, he was an Assistant Professor and the Coordinator of the Contemporary Islam Programme at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

His publications include *The Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal: Islam and Nationalism in Late Colonial India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), *India and the Future of G20: Shaping Policies for a Better World* (New Delhi: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023) and *Islamic Political Thought in Modern South Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming, 2024). He has also published articles and chapters on ethnonationalism in South Asia, the Partition and its aftermath, culture and state ideology in Pakistan, modern Islamic thought, the spread of transnational Islamic movements across the Indian Ocean, conceptions of bodily piety in South Asia and Muslim education in South Asia.

Associate Professor Sevea holds a DPhil in History from the University of Oxford. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in history from NUS and a master's degree from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

Dr Puspa Sharma is visiting Senior Research Fellow of the Institute of South Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore (NUS).

Dr Sharma was an expert member of the teams that prepared the Nepal Trade Integration Strategy 2023 and Nepal's Trade Logistics Development Policy 2022 for the government of Nepal. From 2009 to 2021, he worked at the South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE), a think tank based in Kathmandu, in various capacities, latest as its Executive Director. He was also the Editor-in-Chief of SAWTEE's flagship publication Trade Insight. He is a member of the International Advisory Network of the Forum on Trade, Environment & the SDGs, an initiative of The Graduate Institute, Geneva, and a member of the Standing Group on Food Policy and Governance, European Consortium of Political Research.

Dr Sharma has published articles in esteemed peer-reviewed journals such as *Agriculture and Human Values* and *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice* and *Globalizations*. He has also authored, reviewed and edited books, book chapters, working papers, research reports, policy briefs, briefing papers and articles on trade, least developed countries graduation, landlocked developing countries' concerns, agriculture and food systems, regional integration, paperless trade and other development issues focusing Nepal and South Asia.

Dr Sharma holds a PhD in Public Policy from the Australian National University, which he earned as an Australia Awards scholar. He earned his MA degree in Global Finance, Trade and Economic Integration from the University of Denver, Colorado, as a Fulbright student. He also holds an MA degree in Economics from Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu.

Dr Dhananjay Tripathi is an Associate Professor (Senior Grade) and Former Chairperson, Department of International Relations, South Asian University, New Delhi, India. His research interest includes regional integration process (Europe and South Asia), South Asian politics, border studies and international political economy.

His recent publications are (ed) *Re-imagining Border Studies in South Asia* (2020 – Routledge Publication), Co-edited *South Asia: Boundaries Borders and Beyond* (2022 – Routledge Publication), *Afghanistan Post-2014: Power Configurations and Evolving Trajectories* (2016 – Routledge Publication) and authored book *Development Role of the European Union in South Asia* (2011 – Vij Publication).

He has also contributed to edited volumes and published in peer-reviewed journals, including *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, *Economic and Political Weekly*, *International Studies*, *Alternatives*, *Eurasia Border Review*, *Quarterly of International Sociology*, and *USI Journal*, among others. He is also the co-editor of a special issue of the *Journal of Borderlands Studies* on ‘South Asia: Boundaries, Borders and Beyond’.

Dr Tripathi is also the editorial board member of prestigious international journals – *Journal of Borderlands Studies* (Taylor and Francis), *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* (Sage Publication), *Estudios Fronterizos (REF)* (open access) and *BIG Review* (University of Victoria).

He is also co-applicant in the successful 21st Century Borders Partnership grant awarded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council, Canada. He also delivered lectures at prestigious institutions like National Defence College, National Centre for Good Governance, Foreign Service Institute), National Academy of Direct Taxes and others. His brief write-ups have been published in major national newspapers including – *The Hindu*, *Tribune*, *Daily Excelsior*, *Telangana Today*, *Kathmandu Post* *India Narratives*, *Prabhat Khabar*, *Dainik Jagaran* and *Dainik Bhaskar*

Dr Jayashree Vivekanandan is Chairperson and Associate Professor at the Department of International Relations, South Asian University, New Delhi. She holds a PhD in International Politics from the Centre for International Politics, Organization and Disarmament, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University. She was a Visiting Fellow at the Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Cambridge, United Kingdom, in 2017.

She is the author of *Interrogating International Relations: India’s Strategic Practice and the Return of History*, Routledge, New Delhi, and London, 2011. Her articles have appeared in *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, *India Review*, *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, *Postcolonial Studies* and *Studies in Indian Politics*, among others. She was the guest editor of the special issue on ‘Chronicling the Histories of India: The Politics of Remembrance and Commemoration’, *India Review*, 20 (5), 2021. Her most recent publications include ‘Not just ‘Somewhere South of Sovereignty and East of Equality’: Indian Strategizing in the Age of Transnational Solidarities’, *Studies in Indian Politics*, 12(1), 2024, and ‘“Where We Need Water, We Find Guns Instead”: Understanding the Securitization of Sovereignty Claims on the Brahmaputra’, *India Review*, 23 (2), 2024.

Roundtable Convenors

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