

## Abstracts

*Many Lives of Gold in India: Economic Circuits, Commodity, and Communities*

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India, one of the largest importers of gold in the world, has the reputation of being an insatiable market for the yellow metal. Gold enjoys a double life as a sacramental object as well as the most fungible financial investment option. Its ubiquity in banks, temples and wedding ceremonies offers interesting material to think through sociological theories of consumption, wealth, accumulation, and kinship. Both gold jewelry manufacturing and gold trade were and remained community-based activities, despite the current weakening of caste-based occupations. I will track and trace the changes in the gold jewelry sector in the post-independence period which was precipitated by a series of new laws to control gold consumption.

The command economy led to what is known as ‘license raj’ and resulted in a complete overhaul of goldsmithing as a caste-based activity and buried it in the informal sector, deep into the heart of an ever-growing shadow economy. Trust, village networks and being self-organized have been the hallmark of the jewelry manufacturing sector since then. Finally, we address the question: what does gold consumption mean in India (and elsewhere) where the forces of modernization have failed to dent the sacramental, sartorial as well as financial supremacy of the ‘barbarous relic’ and the precious commodity inhabits different economic circuits in its many *avatar*.

*Analysis of Pashto Recordings of WWI Prisoners of War*

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Many Pashtun soldiers deserted the British army during the First World War from various theatres of war in Europe. Some of them joined the Turco-German Mission to Afghanistan and started recruiting deserters in the border area. Few of them were made prisoners of war in Germany. There are some Pashto recordings of Pashtun prisoners of war, in the collection of the recordings of the First World War (WWI). I explore and contextualise the literary, linguistic and cultural aspects of these Pashto recordings.

*Transformation of Water Bodies in Peri-Urban Chennai*

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My PhD project deals with the transformation of water bodies in peri-urban Chennai, South India and uses a mix of geographical and planning approaches. As South India is characterised by weather extremes, shifting between short and strong monsoonal rainfall and long dry periods, a cultural landscape evolved to store water throughout the year, which enabled agricultural irrigation. The centrepiece of this landscape are semi-natural lakes or reservoirs, called *eri* in Tamil, which catch rainwater, are interconnected and belong to rivering basins. Due to Chennai's rapid growth, eris in the peri-urban zone are also affected: While larger eris are converted to serve the city's drinking water needs, small eris disappear to make way for urban land uses. In my research area, I conducted interviews with local experts to find out about the emanating effects of these eri transformations, leading to the central question whether an eri, a rural landscape feature in character and use, can become an urban eri after all.