



Oral History
Association
of India



FLAME
UNIVERSITY



6th Annual Conference

Crisis, Community and Oral History

screening - talks - presentations -
Q&As - panel discussions

March 6 & 7, 2021

schedule and registration : <https://ohai.info>

10:00 am - 10.15 am
**Conference Introduction, and
Introduction to OHAI**
Nandini Oza, President, OHAI

Opening Remarks
Maya Dodd
Assistant Dean and Associate Professor,
FLAME University, Pune.

10:15 am – 11:15 am
**Oral History's Bad Timing –
Crisis in Bhopal, Disability and RTI Movements**
Rama Lakshmi
Facilitator/Moderator: Nandini Oza

Session Facilitators / Moderators

Session I : Avehi Menon
Session II : Abhineety Goel
Session III : Sanghamitra Chatterjee
Session IV : Rahi Soren

Public Talk I : Fleur D'Souza

Session V : Debarati
Chakraborty
Session VI : Poonam Gandhi
Session VII : Sudebi Thakurata
Session VIII : Vrunda Pathare
Session IX : Nidhi Kalra

Public Talk II : Maya Dodd

MARCH 6

11:15am – 12:00pm

Session I:

FILMS AND CRISES

12:15pm – 1:00pm

Session II:

CITIZEN AND THE STATE

2pm – 3:15pm

Session III:

GENDER

3:15-4:15pm

Session IV:

COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE AND CRISIS,
Part I

4:30PM – 5:30pm

PUBLIC TALK I:

Rob Perks, former lead curator of
oral histories, British Library

In conversation with Indira Chowdhury

MARCH 7

10am – 11:15am

Session V:
DISPLACEMENTS

11:30am – 12:30pm

Session VI:
COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE AND CRISIS,
Part 2

1:45pm – 3:00pm

Session VII:
COVID-19 & ORAL HISTORIES

3:15pm – 4:15pm

Session VIII:
TOWARD ORAL HISTORIES

4:30pm – 5:15pm

Session IX:
CHANGES AND PEDAGOGY

5:30pm – 6:30pm

PUBLIC TALK 2:
Jason Kelly,
COVID-19 Oral History Project
IUPUI Arts and Humanities Institute, Indiana University



Oral History
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Conference Introduction and Introduction to OHAI

Nandini Oza

It is an honor for me to introduce the 6th Annual Conference of the Oral History Association of India (OHAI) on the theme - Crises, Community and Oral History. The annual conference of OHAI, for the first time is online due to the unprecedented crises the world is facing due to the pandemic that has gripped us all during the past year and more. While experts define HIV,

Cholera outbreaks in the past, Swine flu as pandemics, I think the COVID-19 pandemic has affected us all rather severely and it is fresh in human memory.

Along with the pandemic, many countries across the globe are experiencing natural disasters be it floods, forest fires, tsunamis, earthquakes, droughts and so on. The pandemic and the natural disasters are a warning to all of us that the world is staring at an environment crisis not faced before. Along with this, we are also witnessing human-made or human induced crises of several different kinds affecting large populations across the world. Incidents of wars, militarization, occupations, conflicts based on ethnicity, race, color, religion, caste, class, gender, development induced and forcible displacement, etc. are on a rise across the globe.



We are witnessing increasing intolerance in the civil society and even curtailment of democratic spaces by States in many countries across the world. India that has not performed very well in its democracy index ranking, has slid further in its democracy ranking as per the Economist Intelligence Unit. Even after India become independent and increasingly over the past few years, we have witnessed several resistance movements, the most recent and ongoing being the farmer's movement. The farmer's movement is also a reflection of the crises we as a country face in an important sector like agriculture.

The pandemic, exodus of workers from cities, loss of jobs, etc. means that not all is well with our economy, infrastructure and service/public sectors. It is in such a situation when the World is facing the pandemic on one hand and several other crises, including environmental, that OHAI felt that it is the need of the hour that the 2021 annual conference focus on – Crises, Community and Oral History. And while we miss the physical venue and interactions during the conferences OHAI has organized in the past, we are very pleased that this has been compensated by an overwhelming response by participants from across the country and from other countries as well. We are also very happy to have Flame University, Pune as our co-host for this conference, for the University's liberal values in imparting education, its internationalism and its commitment to oral history as a discipline in their teaching and practice.

Over the next two days there will be excellent presentations on the theme by accomplished practitioners of oral history, scholars, academics, students from prestigious institutions and universities like Jadavpur University, Panjab University, Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar and Indore, Centre for Public History- Shrishti, Bengaluru, Tata Institute of Social Science, Mumbai, National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru, University of Otago, New Zealand, Newcastle University, UK, Rajasthan University, Flame University, Ashoka University, Universidad San Francisco de Quito, Ecuador, Al Akhawayn University, Morocco, to name a few.



We have also three very renowned and distinguished guest speakers who have done pioneering work in oral history in general and outstanding work in particular on crises, community and oral history. This conference will be enriched by the presentation by Rama Lakshmi, journalist, musicologist, oral historian and editor of Varta, OHAI's newsletter. Then we have the founding member of OHAI and former President of OHAI, Dr. Indra Chowdhury in conversation with Dr. Robert Perks, the author of several books including the Oral History reader and co-author of *Ukraine's Forbidden History*; Dr Perks has also been the lead curator of Oral History at the British Library, UK. And then we will have Professor Jason Kelly, Director, Arts and Humanities Institute, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, talking to us about the Covid-19 Oral History Project.

I also take this opportunity to briefly introduce the Oral History Association of India (OHAI), which was founded in 2013 with a membership that is committed to the value of oral history. OHAI provides a means of networking, sharing and communication among those working with recording, interpreting and archiving oral history. OHAI was established with the aim to promote and disseminate oral history through its annual conferences, public lectures, newsletters and workshops. Members of OHAI believe in the intrinsic value of life stories to enable us to understand the past as well as the present. Dedicated to ethical practices in oral history, OHAI is the only association of its kind in India. I also take this opportunity to invite those committed and interested in the discipline of oral history to become our annual or life members.

To end, I welcome all the participants to the conference and I am sure the presentations, discussions and talks will leave us all enriched in our understanding of Crises, Community and Oral History.

Nandini Oza
6-March-2021

Day 1
Session I : Films and Crisis

Screening : Tabdeeli (24 min.)

Followed by a discussion with the filmmakers :
Anmol Saini, Anna Binu, Rishika Revo, Sankarsan Behera,
Vyshakh Balachandran
Tata Institute of Social Sciences

Tabdeeli, which means transformation, showcases the journey of two women community leaders working towards eradicating the social evil of domestic violence against women and girls. Working with CORO (Committee for Resource Organisation), Kausar Parveen and Sadiqa Shaikh have been engaged with the predominantly Muslim community residing in Kamla Raman Nagar of Baiganwadi area in Mumbai. Through their tireless approach of rescue, counselling and rehabilitation for survivors and their families; they have not just helped women within the community but also themselves. The film shows the journey of Kausar Parveen and Sadiqa Shaikh, their stories of why they step out of their homes every day to smash patriarchal norms, and bring forth gender equality amongst the youth. With this microcosm as our focus area, we reflect on the larger issue of violence against women, the struggle towards bringing change individually and collectively.

In the recent Global Gender Equality Index released in 2019, India ranked 95th out of 129 countries. On one hand, the #MeToo movement brought forth the horrors of violence against women on social media. But the same conversations failed to seep into the familial space to address domestic violence in marriages. Through this film, we make an attempt to explore how the reins of patriarchy still continue to oppress women in an urban city like Mumbai.

Understanding the scars of erasure of people from the National Register of Citizens in Assam through Oral History.

Debasreeta Deb, PhD Scholar,
Department of Politics, University of Otago, New Zealand

The contemporary exercise of documenting 'genuine citizens' in Assam through the National Register of Citizens (NRC) to cleanse the state of 'illegal immigrants', has excluded more than 1.9 million people and has pushed millions into a vicious circle of anxiety as well as fear of disenfranchisement. While the demand for the NRC is conditioned by Assam's contentious history as well as its checkered past marked by conflicts over migration, identity, ethnicity as well as resource sharing, this statist exercise guided by the documented dominant paradigm of homogenizing experiences of victimhood and a collective history of deprivation weaved by the Assamese populace, which in turn has shaped the documented history of the region has overlooked and overshadowed the untold and unrecognized memories and sufferings of the peripheral population in Assam especially the Bengalis, an ethnolinguistic minority of the state, stigmatized as 'Bangladeshis' and 'foreigners', who have been at the crossroads of this exercise and whose lives have been torn apart again and again by social exclusions as well as political, linguistic and ethnic conflicts since the post-colonial era.

Against this backdrop, leaning on fieldwork experience collected through narratives of people left out of the NRC list in the town of Silchar in Assam largely inhabited by a Bengali speaking populace, this paper seeks to uncover the variegated accounts of strife, trauma, devastating trails of loss and sufferings experienced by the 'people on the edge' under the NRC; the 'other lives' who are carrying with them the burden of a fractured past, living under the gloomy shadow of exclusion thus helping us introspect the multiple dimensions of the crisis of citizenship induced by the Indian State upon its citizens 'entangled' in varied socio-cultural frames without acknowledging the depth of their trauma and how they are coping with the scars of erasure.

Keywords: Assam, Citizenship, Crisis, Erasure, Struggles.

Day 1
Session II : Citizen and the State

Finding Voices of Denotified Tribes

Megha Poonia, PhD Scholar
National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore

Denotified Tribes (DNTs) are communities which came under the Criminal Tribal Act (CTA), 1871 during the British period in India. Post-Independence, the DNTs came under Habitual Offenders Act (HOA), 1952. The communities under DNTs have suffered since pre-Independence and HOA, while replacing the CTA took in most of the provisions of CTA. The conditions of the communities also have not changed much since Independence. They face social stigma with the label of being hereditary criminals. There is lack of documents of them, reservation category list at times includes them in multiple lists, adding to the struggle of these communities in taking advantage of reservation. Other times, they are not found in any lists including Denotified lists. With all the confusion, the communities under DNTs do not find themselves in political, social, economic or education space making them almost 'invisible' or 'hidden' communities. All the above makes for a gap in information and experiences of and on these communities. Through oral history, oral interviews this gap can be narrowed. My work will use various sources to bring out these communities experiences and voices which are absent otherwise.

Buddhist Nuns of Spiti: (Re-) Claiming Spiritual Space

- Neekee Chaturvedi,
Associate Professor, University of Rajasthan,
Co-Director, ICSSR Project on Continuity and Change in Spiti.
- Kesang Thakur, Research Assistant,
ICSSR Project on Continuity and Change in Spiti
- Aniket Alam,
Associate Professor, IIT-Hyderabad, India;
Director, ICSSR Project on Continuity and Change in Spiti.
- Aman Kant Panta, Research Assistant,
ICSSR Project on Continuity and Change in Spiti

In the past few decades, there has been a widespread focus by the Buddhist religious establishment on the Chomos, or nuns, in the Spiti region of Himachal Pradesh. This provides new insights on the ways in which religion is being reimagined and reorganised within Tibetan Buddhism in general, but also in this remote region of India, in particular. As much of this change has not yet been documented by research, it is a perfect subject to study through oral histories and narratives of the main participants.

Buddhist establishment in Spiti has historically been led by Lamas. Women, not eligible for higher ordination by tradition, remained homebound even after becoming nuns, were rarely educated in the religious texts, and could not travel to Tibet for spiritual training. Now with the opening of new nunneries, Chomos are receiving an (almost) equal education. This is drawing more women towards religious ordination.

This change is caused both by larger social and economic changes, and is itself leading to changes in the form and content of religious life in the region. We have been researching religious life in Spiti for more than two years and have collected a range of oral narratives of nuns, religious leaders, and laity. Based on these interviews we argue that the rise of the nuns in Spiti is not just a major change in religious organisation, but in the very manner in which religion is experienced by the people.

Day 1
Session III : Gender

Narrativising #MeToo Beyond the Media Storm
Reflecting on sexual harassment in the news and the newsrooms

Nithila Kanagasabai, PhD Scholar,
Advanced Centre for Women's Studies,
Tata Institute of Social Sciences

In October 2018, almost a year after the news of Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein's sexual crimes broke, Indian journalism was forced to publicly confront what industry insiders had known, and experienced, for decades. Numerous women journalists – mostly urban, and belonging to English-language media – recounted on social media their experiences of harassment and predatory behaviour in interactions with their colleagues. While reams of newsprint, hours of broadcast, and many, many pages online debated questions of legality, anonymity and privilege; and news coverage focused on drawing links with the larger global #MeToo movement, attention was seldom focused on the long history of journalists complaining about gendered workplace harassment or the structural specificities of the current mo(ve)ment. Drawing on oral histories of women journalists from almost a decade ago, and secondary research about sexism in the newsroom over the past three decades, this paper situates #MeToo in the context of the larger women's movements in India, as a small, but important step forward in creating a collective consciousness that could possibly fuel the slow, painstaking work that goes into building a more equitable society.

**“You can’t just stick them in an archive”: taking care with the Panos
Women and Conflict testimonies**

Siobhan Warrington,
Newcastle University Oral History Unit and Collective

The Women and Conflict project was the Panos Oral Testimony Programme’s first global project which ran from 1993 to 1995 with women’s groups in the following countries: Liberia, Somaliland, Tigray, Uganda, India, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Croatia and Bosnia, and Lebanon. The resulting oral testimonies, over 200 in total, revealed the varied views and diverse lived experiences of women as fighters, participants, victims caught between warring factions, organisers for peace and rehabilitation, carers and mothers, relatives and partners of the dead and disappeared. Across the collection a number of broad themes emerged including: changes in women’s status and roles; sexual violence and exploitation; life as a refugee; and coping with the aftermath of war. At the time edited versions of these testimonies were shared via the publication *Arms to fight, arms to protect: women speak out about conflict* and a radio docu-drama.

In 2013 when Panos London, closed I became custodian of the Women and Conflict project archive, including paper and electronic file versions of transcripts of the full testimonies. In 2018 I started organising and cataloguing the material with a view to transferring it to the Special Collections Archive at SOAS, University of London. I naively assumed this would be a straightforward, if somewhat tedious, task. In this paper I will share the surprises and challenges encountered in revisiting this set of testimonies, and the emerging requirement of taking great care with the testimonies. The process of revisiting the full transcripts with a view to depositing them in a public archive has involved a series of ethical considerations alongside a wealth of formatting issues. It has felt far from straightforward, however part of this meandering journey has been the joy of establishing contact with a good number of the original interviewers and interviewees. In doing so, I feel like I am honouring the collaborative ethos of the original project and benefiting from the insights of some remarkable women around the world.

Day 1

Session IV : Community Knowledge and Crisis (Part 1)

Reimagining Santal Heritage through Oral History

Panel proposed by Rahi Soren

The proposed panel will try to explore the nuances of the existential crisis that the Santal community has been facing vis-à-vis the politics of representation across colonial as well as post-colonial times. This overriding thesis will be analysed through different narratives of oral history, ranging across radical moments of political turbulence such as the Santal Hul (rebellion) of 1855 to social issues of pertinence such as involvement of the community in higher education – all revisited and reintegrated through the embodied memory of oral history studies.

Panelists will base their research across the length and breadth of several survey samplings such as descendants of legendary Hul leaders Sidhu and Kanu, or contemporary Santali academicians working in Bengal, even archivists and musicians reliving the past through their reminiscences of songs, legends, family stories and other forms of oral traditions, among others.

Individual Presentations in the Panel :

Reimagining Santal Heritage and Orality in Academic and Social Inclusion

Daniel Rycroft,

Senior Lecturer, University of East Anglia

Education, Inside and Out: Life Narrative and the History of the Santali Language Movement

Nishaant Choksi, Assistant Professor, IIT-Gandhinagar

'Debon tingun Adivasi bir hor' – Remembering the Santal Hul through Song Narratives

Rahi Soren, Assistant Professor, Jadavpur University

Principal Investigator, RUSA 2.0 Project on Resource Mapping the Early Recordings of Traditional Santali Songs

Day 2
Session V : Displacements

Revisiting the 1947 Partition and Displacement: Subjective and “Intangible” Experiences of Hindu Migrants of Bahawalpur

Shaifali Arora
ASEM-DUO Fellow (Lancaster University, UK)

The reverberations of 1947 Partition were far more drawn-out and profound in quotidian lives than have been noted in standard historical accounts. Scholarly and emerging archival works in Oral History of 1947 Partition have brought due attention with an urgency to embodied narratives that are people’s experiences as the witnesses and survivors are approaching final years of their lives. The argument in this paper is two dimensional. Firstly, the paper argues that in addition to bringing attention to details of trauma of physical violence and loss (that are being importantly documented from ordinary perspectives), there is a need to expand attention in Oral History scholarship on Partition to other subjective experiences and imperceptible contexts such as those concerning language and ethnic shift in displacement that exemplify far-reaching consequences of the epochal event. The paper presents a case of Hindu migrants of Bahawalpur currently residing in Rajasthan that went through an ethnic and an inter-generational language shift, a displacement experience that continues to affect formation of community’s collective identity. Through an engagement with their oral testimonies, the chapter demonstrates how community’s atypical experiences of Partition displacement offer a different perspective in revisiting and interpreting history and thus challenging some of predominant notions of the historical event. In the second section, the paper discusses how survivors remember Partition and what forms their memories take in interviews that are conducted in the current contexts. This method allows us to revisit predominant accounts of violence, religion, honour and communities’ relationship during Partition.

Keywords: Displacement, Ethnic Identity, Language Shift, Subjectivity, Memory and Imperceptible Experiences

Day 2
Session V : Displacement

Crossing Over – Women’s Oral Histories of Settlement in the Andaman Islands

Raka Banerjee
PhD Research Scholar, Advanced Centre for Women’s Studies,
Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai

After the colonial administrators left in 1947, the Indian nation-state rehabilitated the lower-caste agriculturalist Bengali refugee families of India’s eastern partition (1947) in the Andaman Islands to develop it as an agricultural colony capable of sustaining its military outpost. The prerequisites for rehabilitation in the Island were guided by colonial policies, including, assumptions of the male refugee’s ability to perform hard labour and the existence of a heteronormative family unit under the guardianship of the male head. This agenda of transforming the refugees into ‘productive citizens’ was explicitly a male prerogative. Women were not primary recipients of rehabilitation and were eligible for settlement by virtue of being related to the male head of the household. Their experience of displacement(s) and resettlement is absent in statist documentation, and the peripheral position of the Islands in academic discourse pushes these ‘marginal’ narratives further into the shadows. Drawing from oral histories of the first-generation settler women, the proposed paper brings out a gendered narrative of settler women’s contribution to the process of rehabilitation. By focusing on the settler women’s adaptation to the island ecology, articulation of rights and claim-making, and the changes in the gender dimensions of the island society, the paper narrates a gendered history of post-Partition settlement in the islands.

Day 2
Session V : Displacement

The 1971 War of Bangladesh in the Diaspora: Some Reflections on Documentation, Ethics and Politics

Paramita Purakayastha, MPhil Scholar
Jadavpur University, Kolkata

The Liberation War has been among the most documented events in the history of South Asia, owing largely to the plethora of oral narratives that exist. And yet, most of those records are of Bangladeshi citizens. Select survivors of the conflict in Bangladesh have received state assistance in their documentation- 'Literature has been to Bangladesh what history has been to India in the project of nation-making' (Samaddar). And while there has been considerable scholarship on the politics that drive such selection in itself, the voices in the diaspora have largely fallen out of public discourse, barring a few instances (Jalais, Zakaria).

In my paper, I would like to resort to my own research and look at the necessity of bringing these absent voices into the fold. Because of the Indira-Mujib Accord (1972) and the amendments to the Citizenship Act (1986, 2003, 2019), these are people who are among the most vulnerable in India particularly, and offer some refreshing alternatives and nuances to the dominant accounts of being rescued by the state that are being promulgated in certain quarters at the moment. In the process, some of the issues I will be looking at are the ways in which trauma of the survivors of this crisis can be or is being addressed, the fault lines characterizing documentation (and publication) vis a vis the dominant contemporary politics, and to an extent, how notions of continuity inform the dialectic between the two.

Day 2

Session VI : Community Knowledge and Crisis (Part 2)

Panel:

The Ownership of Public History in India: The TOPHI Project

Maya Dodd, FLAME University; Aparna Vaidik, Ashoka University
Ranjani Prasad and Faisal Rehman, Keystone Foundation

The purpose of The Ownership of Public History in India (TOPHI) is to combine recent interdisciplinary research on the pedagogies of public history with the work undertaken by community historians, teachers and social workers to develop pathways for more inclusive educational projects going forward. Coming out of colonialism and the bloody history of the Partition, Indian historians came to see themselves as the custodians of India's past. The belief was that the past was an entity that needed to be saved and preserved, and therefore, was safe only in the hands of a specialist trained to handle it. Seven decades after India's independence the question facing historians is: how do we enter into debate with individuals and groups in Indian society who have their own view of the past? This project seeks to respond to this question by focussing on public history.

Traditionally public history has been practised by professionals and presented to the public. In some ways the public has been left out of public history. This project brings the public(s) back in. It aims to create a co-ownership between the universities and the local communities over historical knowledge and its teaching. TOPHI evinces public/community participation in the act of writing history where they are not just the target and recipient of the historical knowledge but participants in the work of analysis. This is an attempt to expand the consciousness of a public citizen to create a critical public sphere. Think of it like this: the history of lions are always told by hunters but if the lions were to tell their own history it would be different. Eklavya's story is told by Rishi Ved Vyas but the story would be different if Eklavya were to tell it.

Day 2
Session VII : Covid19 and Oral Histories

COVID-19 and Mutual Aid - temporary phenomenon or chance for a better society?

Alison Atkinson-Phillips,
Newcastle University Oral History Collective,
Silvie Fisch,
Northern Cultural Projects and
Newcastle University Oral History Collective

In March 2020, as the UK entered its first 'lockdown' in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, communities across the country responded by forming hundreds of ad-hoc groups to offer mutual aid to those struggling to access food and medicine and in need of social support. While many of these groups seem to have sprung up overnight, the traditions of mutuality, solidarity and self-care that they draw from have a long and global history. Indeed, similar phenomena have been documented worldwide.

The Covid-19 Mutual Aid Oral History Project uses oral history methodologies to understand the motivations, experiences and expectations of people who responded to the Covid-19 crisis by joining mutual aid networks. In this presentation, we will share some of the key findings from our interviews with responders across the UK, whose involvement has ranged from street-level neighbourhood care to national collaborations. Understanding the traditions and personal formative experiences responders are drawing from, as well as the ways groups have evolved during the past 12 months, we argue that mutual aid is not simply a temporary response to a short-term crisis, but offer transformative opportunities for a better social future.

Day 2
Session VII : Covid-19 and Oral Histories

Confronting the Nightmare: Covid and Women Carers in Pakistan

Furrukh Khan
Associate Professor of Postcolonial Studies
Lahore University of Management Sciences

Covid19 pandemic continues vice-like grip of the world, with scant chance of loosening the havoc that it continues to unleash. It is the most widespread and deadly pandemic we have witnessed in our lifetime. Family, which is the core unit of any society, has been put under tremendous economic and social pressure and has had to undergo dramatic changes to make it through these uncertain times. In so many cases, the financial uncertainty has been accompanied by medical bills as well as severe mental health strain if anyone in the family has tested positive for Covid. Women, as in most households of Pakistan, run the day to day affairs of the home, and so, have had to bear additional psychological pressure, more than their male counterparts.

This paper's primary objective is to document those households where women have had to become carers for those affected by Covid because either they did not have other male members or the male members were at another location. My aim is to interview 13-15 women who have had to bear this responsibility. There are various studies which have documented Covid pandemic's additional adverse effects on women all over the world. My principal target would be to interview women to collect stories of how they have had to adapt and deal with this sudden and critical responsibility.

The methodology applied in this qualitative research would be to first identify women one would be reaching out to. I am working on a survey and plan to use it to gather information about various facets of the challenges they faced as well as the aftermath/s of what they have been through. The follow-up would be a detailed zoom interview to flesh out of the individual narratives of women carers during the pandemic.

Day 2
Session VII : Covid-19 and Oral Histories

**Painting the Pandemic: Crisis and Memory in the works of
Patachitrakars**

Indira Chowdhury
Founder-Director, Centre for Public History
Srishti-Manipal Institute of Art, Design and Technology,

The Covid-19 pandemic has created an obvious sense of crisis globally. The loss of lives, loss of jobs accompanied by a sense of uncertainty and overwhelming fear has haunted communities all over the world. One of the earliest responses to the pandemic and its crisis has been by patachitrakars or scroll painters from the village of Naya in Purba Medinipur West Bengal. This paper looks at the songs composed by the scroll painters and my interviews about their compositions and paintings as a response to the crisis. Oral history enables us to examine this response to crisis in the larger context of earlier disaster scrolls painted and sung by the same group of scroll painters about the Tsunami and the attacks on the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001. Their narrativization of the current crisis is overlaid with reconstructed memories of earlier disaster that they have either experienced or imagined. These scrolls accompanied by songs which now have no audiences, reveal the processes of renegotiation by which the past and the present become entangled. My paper will attempt to present an understanding of crisis and creativity and the complex relationship between memory and experience.

Day 2
Session VIII : Towards Oral Histories

Indian Community Cookbooks: Archiving Food Histories

Khushi Gupta, Muskaan Pal, Ananya Pujary, Flame University

Most museum collections are silent on the question of food, as culinary histories often constitute living traditions. Consequently, the history of food has been under-represented in most archival collections. This is a strange omission when clearly food cultures are thriving in a digital age, and yet there is a lack of historical capture and serious academic consideration. In India currently, there is no single repository, digital or otherwise, that captures food memory community culinary history in an accessible domain. Existing arts projects such as “Edible Archives” acknowledge the need for a formal documentation of food to go forward.

- Necessarily, the Indian Community Cookbook project developed as a digital archive combining digitised multilingual, regionally specific community cookbooks and oral histories of community food memories. This way both the textual and oral traditions can be archived for food histories to be re-narrated. The archive operates as an acknowledgement and exploration into the role communities play in creating and keeping India’s food memories alive. The project (<https://communitycookbooks.wixsite.com/website>) makes use of timelines to map the evolution of culinary cookbook histories on a community/regional basis and corroborates collected handwritten, printed and oral recipes. Furthermore, it would be useful in understanding the intersection of socio-cultural, economic and political circumstances underlying the production of the cookbooks and recipes. The project aims to eventually be a digitally inclusive archive of community food memories that would otherwise have been lost and forgotten.

Keywords: India, Community cookbooks, Digital archive, Oral history, Food memories

Day 2

Session VIII : Towards Oral Histories

**Of unearthing voices and writing histories:
Exploring the oeuvre of Kalyani Dutta**

Krishnendu Pal, Junior Research Fellow, Jadhavpur University

Crisis often attains a state of permanence in the lives of individuals belonging to different marginalized communities. This state of permanence of crisis is enabled by the socio-religious structures that these individuals reside in. In the South Asian context, women, irrespective of caste/class moorings, have resided in a state of ongoing crisis perpetuated by patriarchal socio-religious structures. These structures assign stipulated behavioural roles to women, abet gendered segregation, allow limited mobility, arrest attempts at self-emancipation and inflict multiple methods of violation on them. Early and mid-twentieth century Bengal saw the restructuring of socio-religious 'traditions' following the emergence of the 'new patriarchy' in the nineteenth century (Chatterjee 1990). But the experiences of women who lived through these restructurings were overshadowed by men who were writing the history of this period.

Kalyani Dutta, a college professor, undertook the task of documenting these experiences by interacting with multiple women from in and outside her family and writing about them in her unique style. These women were mostly widows residing in ashrams, elderly aunts and grandmothers, and wives of influential men. Dutta thus embarked on a project that involved the knowing and writing of history that was wholly reliant on stories transmitted orally to her by women, who were seldom given any articulable space within the official discourses of history that were majorly controlled by men. This paper will try to read the oeuvre of Kalyani Dutta, with special reference to her works *Thor Bori Khara (The Humdrum)* [1982] and *Pinjore Boshiya (Sitting in a cage)* [1996], to understand how orally transmitted stories by women aid the writing of alternative histories. It will also try to understand how these histories foreground women's perspectives and their assessment of popular historical junctures, that they arrive at through their experiences.

(Keywords: Kalyani Dutta, oral history, stories, widows, women, domestic, Bengal, twentieth century, writing history)

Day 2

Session VIII : Towards Oral Histories

Understanding the orality associated to the Temple of Jawalamukhi; a Shaktipeetha (Kangra District, Himachal Pradesh)

Asmita Vaid, Panjab University

Religion is intimately bound with people's identity; their cultural practices along with their beliefs and notions. Communities interact in a cultural space where they identify themselves to the legends and myths, to the oral traditions of that arena and their own regional identity. The temple of Jawalamukhi addresses narratives that are contributing in formulating an identity of not only the temple in its own space but also of the communities that interact in that cultural space. Various legends and myths correlated to the temple have been located, where the importance of oral traditions and oral history pave their way in acknowledging the attributes of the temple. A temple which has no idol, emanates fire from the fissures in the hillside and attributes to various legends associated to it comprehends communities not only of the arena but from far off places of the world. The temple has its own followed oral history, profoundly dictated by the people who settled there and the ones who visited there interacting and associating themselves.

Day 2
Session VIII : Towards Oral Histories

The Role of Oral Narratives in History: A Case Study of Tanks in Southern India

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Tanks form an important source of irrigation for farmers in the rocky parts of peninsular India due to the absence of perennial rivers and the presence of impervious bedrock. Since most existing tanks were constructed in the pre-colonial era, they are seen not only as an example of the scientific superiority of traditional Indian knowledge but also as an alternative to colonial forms of irrigation and water management. Revival of this lost tradition is an important guiding force behind water policy promoting tank irrigation in India. This impetus is not backed by scholarly analysis but by imagined history and discourse about pre-modern India. Postcolonial scholars approach this problem with the frame of understanding whether tanks were more sophisticated than modern irrigation technology, and in doing so, miss out on the social-environmental issues associated with tanks. The use of temple manuscripts and inscriptions as historical sources only worsens this since these sources represent the voice of the elites. In this presentation, I seek to bring out more complicated narratives about the construction and maintenance of tanks that arise from studying oral narratives of and about the Voddas (a caste associated with tank-building), Neerghantis, (a caste associated with tank maintenance), and women. I also study folktales about tanks associated with crises such as droughts and floods. By juxtaposing these against the narratives of landlords, village chieftains, temple priests and upper caste farmers, one can understand the gaps in written and inscribed history that can be filled through oral narratives.

Day 2
Session IX : Changes and Pedagogy

Participatory Oral history as an exercise to reflect on cross-generation resilience

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Oral history can be a powerful methodology for Participatory Action Research in projects that seek to build on community capacities (Madsen, McNicol, y O'Mullan 2015). Social and family memory is a source of learning and resilience in a community (Hamilton y Shopes 2009). In this presentation, we explore how a participatory oral history exercise that involved cross-generation interactions can trigger resilience in a city such as Quito, Ecuador, that has been periodically challenged by economic, social and political crisis, as well as urban disasters produced by natural hazards and poor urban planning. We discuss how this participatory methodology, oral history and collective reflections that involve creative and artistic means should be explored in education and digital humanities engagement tools to build capacities for avoiding or managing future crisis in a community (Boyd 2014). This is part of the work of the GCRF-UKRI Tomorrow's Cities: Urban Risk Transitions Hub.

Day 2
Session IX : Changes and Pedagogy

The Crisis of Colonialism: Memories and Legacies of European Imperialism in Student Oral History Projects

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I am an historian of colonialism specialising in South Asia and I teach world history in Morocco, a country that regained its independence from French and Spanish rule in 1956. As a final project in my course, students conduct an oral history interview with an elder family member to ascertain the memories and legacies of colonialism in their family. The purpose is for students to learn about a personal connection they have to the past, and how the colonial experience in Morocco affected the lives and trajectories of people who lived through it. In Morocco, colonialism is not a large part of the national narrative and is often thought of as benign, especially when contrasted with the experience of neighbouring Algeria and its decolonization struggle.

My paper examines the pedagogical utility of incorporating such exercises that teach students about how to approach historical inquiry, and how historical knowledge is created. Furthermore, the successes and pitfalls experienced with designing such classroom exercises, how to incorporate such projects into various courses, will also be presented along with an examination of student responses. As a concluding element, my own positionality as an instructor from the Global North who has to respond to papers and oral histories that defend and even praise colonialism is explored and questioned.