



Left: Fellows gathered together in the IIAS conference room for an "Inspirational Session." (Photo courtesy of Chiara Livio)

## Northern Italians in the Low Lands: Experiences as Gonda Fellows

Chiara Livio and Martina Palladino

During the academic year of 2022-2023, we, Martina Palladino and Chiara Livio, were beneficiaries of the Gonda Fellowship at the International Institute for Asian Studies. The fellowship, granted by the J. Gonda Foundation, is dedicated to supporting the scholarly study of Sanskrit, other Indian languages and literature, and Indian cultural history. As post-doctorate-level scholars, we were selected to spend six months at IIAS to conduct our research projects.

Upon our arrival at the IIAS, Martina was engaged in a study on the *Śākadvipya Brāhmaṇas* in India. Her research was focused on the religious, cultural, and linguistic aspects of this under-studied Brahmanical group, which claims Iranian origins. Chiara was involved in an examination of *Mankha's Śrīkaṇṭhacarita* and its commentary by Jonarāja, which underlines the gaps in existing scholarship of the poem's manuscript tradition.

A shared bond emerged immediately from our common Italian roots. Interestingly enough, we were both born in the North of Italy, Emilia-Romagna and Lombardy, and we had the same academic interests in Italy. However, we never crossed paths despite the intricate web of Italian academia. The first time we met at the IIAS, over a cup of coffee in early January, it was not surprising to find out that we had friends in common, and that we both had been to Leiden before, the cradle of Sanskrit studies in the Netherlands.

As our time at IIAS progressed, we soon realized that the fellowship offered more than just a platform for academic research, as it soon became an experience that blurred the lines between the professional and the personal. On the one hand, our work at IIAS and Leiden University was characterized

by a blend of independent research, group discussions, and collaborative reading groups on Sanskrit texts. On the other hand, shared meals and coffee breaks in the IIAS kitchen gave us time for discussions and interactions with our then colleagues Jean-Thomas, Lisa, Mina, Aditya, Mariko, Aryo, and Soheb. With their backgrounds in political science and anthropology, they brought fresh perspectives that enriched our own philological studies. With their friendly and creative personalities, they made our stay at the institute very enjoyable and memorable.

A special note of gratitude is owed to Laura, our fellowship coordinator. Her role extended beyond administrative duties. She invested time and effort into understanding us not just as researchers but as individuals, fostering a sense of personal connection within the academic setting by attending our lectures and showing interest in our academic enterprises.

Reflecting on our time at IIAS, we recognize how significantly it underscored the importance of collaboration and shared learning in academia, which is often overshadowed by competition and individualism. Martina is now off to the University of Ghent, where she continues her academic career as a postdoctoral fellow, whereas Chiara is working at Utrecht University Library as an advisor for the publishing support department. We both took with us the synergistic atmosphere that IIAS inspired us to embrace, and the sweet memory of our time in Leiden.

## Exchange and Urban Studies at IIAS

Rohit Negi

I spent three wonderful months at IIAS from March to June 2014, as part of the exchanges under the Urban Knowledge Network Asia (UKNA) program. These were extremely productive months, getting to meet several scholars in residence, and deepening my relationships with those I already knew, all while exploring the Netherlands. While there were a couple of other UKNA scholars at IIAS with whom I shared substantial interests, the diversity of areas that fellows pursue meant that conversations were just as fascinating as they were enlightening. I remember learning about the music of Northeast Asia, Christianity in Sri Lanka, and the Chinese diaspora in South Africa from some of these excellent fellows.

As a short-term Leiden resident, I came to appreciate its past, urban form, architecture, and, of course, its museums. Speaking of the latter, one of the IIAS colleagues generously loaned me their Dutch Museum Pass, and I could use it to visit museums not only in Leiden but also Amsterdam and Utrecht. Since the Netherlands is a (relatively) small country that is well-connected by its train system, Leiden is a convenient launchpad to explore its different regions. One of my favorite memories of the summer was convincing a Japanese IIAS fellow to accompany me to a field hockey game that India was to play



Above: Fellows and colleagues gather for a drink beside the canals of Leiden. (Photo courtesy of Masaya Shishikura)

against Belgium, in a village on the other end of the country. The poor fellow did not quite know what field hockey was, let alone having ever watched a game, but was a good sport to come anyway. We ended up journeying by multiple trains, exploring the beautiful village, witnessing a close game, and chatting with the Indian team players and coaches.

On the academic front, I spent my time at IIAS working on a literature review for an area (urban ecology of Delhi) that I was just

about dipping my toes into. The review has been extremely valuable; contributing not only to research work, but also feeding into teaching. My Urban Environment course at Ambedkar has since then had a much stronger ecological component, much to the appreciation of students. I also had the opportunity to present the work towards the end of the visit at the Delft University of Technology.

Over the years, many of the relationships forged during that time have only been

strengthened. I have come to participate in and contribute to IIAS initiatives such as Asian Studies in Africa, ICAS, and Humanities across Borders, and I look forward to continuing these collaborations in the coming years. Congratulations to IIAS on its 30th anniversary and all the best for what is to come.

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