UC SANTA BARBARA

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A Research Lifeline

The story of the British Empire in the Indian subcontinent is often told in terms of commodities like tea, spices and textiles. Utathya Chattopadhyaya, a UC Santa Barbara assistant professor of history, will write a new chapter in a forthcoming monograph, “Bengal Ganja: Cannabis and Empire in British India.”

The timing on his project is exquisite. Chattopadhyaya has been named a fellow of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) for 2021. The fellowship, which comes with a $60,000 stipend, will support his research for a year.

“I am quite humbled and grateful for the award, especially given the kinds of financial pressures resulting from the pandemic,” he said. “The research connects different archives of taxation, land revenue, cosmological ideas, law and medicine that together show how cannabis was implicated in diverse historical developments between 1770 and 1930 in South Asia.”

Erika Rappaport, professor and chair of the Department of History, called the award a well-deserved acknowledgment of the value of Chattopadhyaya’s research.

“We are so thrilled that Professor Chattopadhyaya’s scholarship is being recognized by such a prestigious organization as the ACLS and that he will have a year’s leave to complete his field-shaping work,” Rappaport said. “Placing Eastern Bengal, cannabis and cooperative forms of knowledge production and ownership at the center of the global history, Chattopadhyaya’s book takes us on a journey from colonial India to South Africa, the Caribbean and beyond. It brilliantly weaves

together an intoxicating history of the body, labor, leisure, colonialism and capitalism."

Mary Hancock, the acting dean of humanities and fine arts and a professor of anthropology and of history whose research focuses on South Asia, called Chattopadhyaya's work "original and deeply engaging, a tour de force in both its breadth and the originality of its argument."

"It moves confidently between compelling macro-scale analyses of imperial political economy and law," she said, "and the everyday human-environment relations that structure work, religious practice and consumption. With this work, Professor Chattopadhyaya will be able to offer a ground-breaking account of the diverse imperial and transcultural processes that have converged in the history of cannabis cultivation, use, and exchange."

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.