

Centre for South Asian Studies

Annual Singhvi Lecture

30th May 2023, 16.15 – 17.30

Violet Laidlaw Room, Chrystal Macmillan Building

Decolonising Water: Knowing and re-enchanting waters from national to local scale

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There is something fundamentally dysfunctional about how we have known and imagined water under modernity. Colonial knowledge systems have been deeply intertwined with the project of modernity. Term like, cubic meters, average flows, parts per million of pollutants, hydraulic gradient among others, form the foundational vocabulary for knowing and interacting with water, waterways, rivers and springs across spatial scales. A decolonial imaginary and practice would incorporate the different ways of knowing and living with water, in addition to, and not necessarily instead of the colonial (scientific?) tropes that have imprisoned hydro-social imaginaries. Water has been thought of as a resource or a hazard within colonial water imaginaries. A decolonised praxis would emphasise the *experience* of water as variegated lens through which to know and live with water. Drawing upon the examples of 2022 floods in Pakistan, and the case of mountain springs in the post-conflict Swat valley of northern Pakistan, I make the case for a decolonial praxis of water, that may usher in a more gender and class inclusive *experience* to water from national to local scales. Water as an instrument of producing a national scale of water management is the real villain of the decolonising agenda in water. Re-enchantment of local waterscapes and re-democratization of hydro-social praxis is our best hope in negotiating a climate change present.

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Daanish Mustafa is a professor in critical Geography at King's College, London. His research has been in water, environmental hazards, development and critical geographies of violence and terror. He has worked on irrigation, flood management, urban water supply and sanitation, cultural politics of urban horticulture and Indigenous waterscapes within the sub-discipline of water resources geography. Daanish's publications have been based upon research in South and West Asia, Central American and the United States. His research has been funded by US National Science Foundation, Department for International Development (DFID), IDRC, The Belmont Forum and the British Academy among others.

