

# THE YALE HERALD

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## India: The Next Step in Yale's Global Initiative

BY NEENA SATIJA

President Richard Levin, GRD '74, has had a busy week abroad—and no, he's not in China this time. Last weekend, he headed to India's capital of New Delhi, where he announced an international initiative of a far greater scale than anything that has ever been done in China, or any other part of the world, by any American university.



COURTESY GEORGE JOSEPH

President Richard Levin announced the Yale India Initiative in Delhi on November 17/

The approach is markedly different from that of Yale's expansion of its relationship with China, which anthropology professor Kalyanakrishnan "Shivi" Sivaramakrishnan, Ph.D. '96, described as much more historically grounded. He will direct the Yale India Initiative, as Levin called it in a speech in New Delhi on Mon., Nov.17. In the case of China, he said, "It is a matter of filling in certain gaps. But with India...pretty much everything needed to be done." The University has already committed \$75 million to the project.

"We have a dynamic and visionary president," Sivaramakrishnan continued in a phone interview from India, where he is traveling with President Levin. "He wants to make up for lost time."

And there is certainly much time to make up for. Several other American universities have had strong South Asian studies departments for decades, including the Universities of Chicago and California at Berkeley, and Ivies University of Pennsylvania and Columbia. "Even universities such as the University of Hawaii, which are not so well-endowed as Yale, had more impressive programs," said Charu Gupta, a visiting associate professor of South Asian Studies and history. She also finds Yale's library, while impressive, lacking in resources for her own research. "I feel severely handicapped in terms of sources," she said, noting that "Chicago has so, so much more."

Sivaramakrishnan, too, was "part of a much larger and much stronger community of scholars" at his previous post at the University of Washington in Seattle. But he was quick to add that UWash is one of many large public universities with a well-established focus on South Asia, benefiting from the Higher Education Act's Title VI, which provides federal funding for international programs in higher education institutions in the States. Other non-public universities have focused on East Asia (and are oftentimes what Gupta called "China-centric"). According to Tamil professor E. Annamalai, this can be traced back to the end of colonialism and the Second World War. At that time, "South Asia was thought to be under the sphere of influence of the United Kingdom, and East Asia under the U.S.A.," he said. "Yale followed that pattern."

Historical and governmental influence aside, economics professor T.N. Srinivasan called the prominence of South Asian Studies in other American universities "incidental," and the result of recommendations from specific faculty members. The impetus for Yale's India Initiative, on the other hand, was far more systemic. "This is not sort of a 'eureka' moment," or a realization of just a few individuals, said George Joseph, Assistant Secretary for International Affairs at Yale and another of Levin's partners in travel, in a phone interview. Rather, a conversation between students, parents, faculty, and alumni has been underway for a number of years.

The first phase of the initiative will actively recruit faculty specializing in South Asia in the college. The initial goal, said Sivaramakrishnan, is to recruit at least two professors who specialize in South Asia into the history, political

science and anthropology departments. From there, the focus would move to facilitating such a growth in other departments and the professional schools. For Gupta, herself a specialist in South Asian history, building up faculty strength in Indian history is key. "To date, not even a single Ph.D. student has been enrolled at Yale to do Indian history," she said, "That really surprised me. It makes me think, well, [Yale] is a great place, but it's not meant [for] courses on India."

Faculty build-up will take time. "Senior appointments don't happen overnight," Joseph acknowledged. "They'll come to Yale only when they feel ready to make the move because we have something better to offer them than what they currently have." In the meantime, though, Sivaramakrishnan said students interested in South Asia will not suffer from a lack of resources. The University hired three visiting professors and post-docs this year, committed to hiring more South Asian language instructors, and is offering many more courses related to South Asia compared to in previous years. In addition, Yale has quadrupled the number of fellowships available to undergraduates studying South Asia, and has established funding for graduate students to travel there for research as well.

The initiative's architects are confident that such efforts will generate the kind of activity and interest on campus that will attract the faculty Yale is looking for. Echoing Levin's speech, Sivaramakrishnan declared that within three to five years, Yale will be "not just a place where the study of India is emphasized, but a place where the study of India is eminent," an ambitious goal requiring the University "to move on multiple fronts simultaneously."

Those fronts include both student and faculty recruitment. In the eyes of Indian student Vidhur Seghal, ES '10, Yale already has a very prominent reputation in South Asia. However, said Seghal, "There's no stopping as to how much you should publicize your mission." Applied physics graduate student Prasanta Pal, ENG '09, however, said in an email that he had never heard of Yale before entering college. American universities in general, he said, had seemed out-of-reach financially, and their application procedures confusing.

Joseph expects the University's recruitment efforts to dispel many such "misconceptions" of Yale by publicizing Yale's financial aid policies and emphasizing its accessibility. "It's far more difficult to get into IIT than to get into Yale," he noted, "but 250,000 people sit for IIT exams each year—a multiple of several times in terms of what Yale's applications are, for far fewer seats." Pal himself attended the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in Kharagpur, which he had applied to after hearing about it from his schoolteachers.

Pal said that he chose Yale for graduate school because of his specific research interests, but that most students at IIT Kharagpur were interested in premier technology universities in the United States including M.I.T., Stanford, and Georgia Tech. Simply an increase in Indian professors in Yale's professional schools would "boost more confidence in Indian students," he said.

As for the general student body at Yale, Annamalai hopes that the initiative will facilitate a deeper interest in South Asia. Currently, "There is more a kind of 'superficial' interest in India," he said, pointing to Bollywood film culture and Indian pop music. But with a college president committing an initial budget that's larger than those of entire universities in India, Yalies should have a new formidable source of global intellectual capital.

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