



Synergies: Persian, Urdu, and Hindi in MESALC .....1

Notes from the Chair: MESALC: A Local Global Village.....3

My Summer with UVA in Jordan.....4

Mahmoud Darwish: He is Quiet and So Am I .....4

My MESALC Experience .....5

MESALC’s Newest Faculty Member .6

New MESALC Courses .....7

New Faculty Publications.....8

Calendar of Events ..... 9

Our Ongoing Mehfil ..... 10

An Ethnographic Documentary by MESALC Faculty, Ashok Rajput ..... 12

Hassan, Mahvash & Farzad Milani Scholarship ..... 13

Middle East & Women’s Studies at UVA: A Stop on My Way Back Home ..... 14

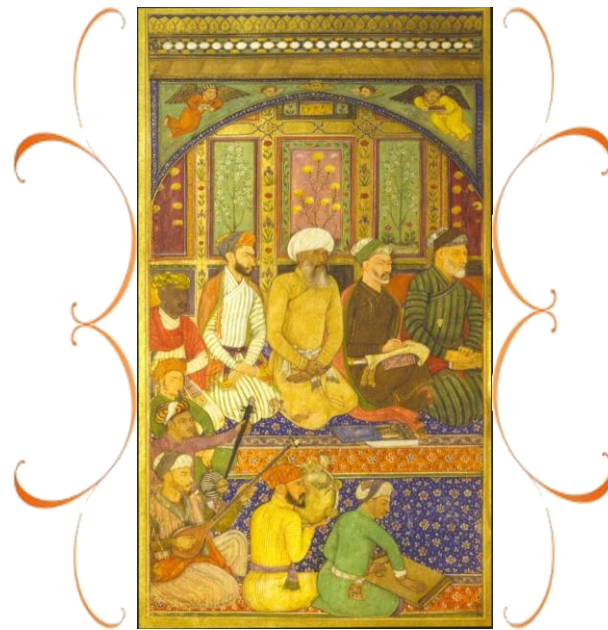
Multicultural Student Services in the Office of the Dean of Students ..... 15

Innovative Collaborations: Synaesthesia and Inter-institutional Collaborations ..... 16

On Leopards, Cheetahs, and Persian Literature: An Interview with David Laylin ..... 18

## Synergies:

### Persian, Urdu, and Hindi in MESALC



The Persian language came to India with the Turks, who established the Delhi Sultanate in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It became the language of the court. Under the Mughals, who ruled India beginning in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, literature in Persian flourished as more and more poets and scholars from Iran and Central Asia found their way to the Mughal court. Under Mughal rule, translations from classical languages, such as Sanskrit and Arabic, into Persian were undertaken on a massive scale. Elaborate histories of the Mughal administration, such as the *Ain-e Akbari* of Abul Fazl, were written in Persian. All these activities made Persian synonymous with the Mughal state.

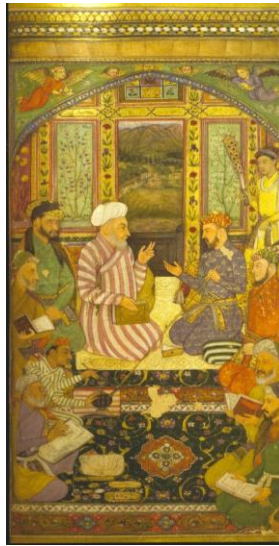
When Persian speakers interacted with the languages of northern India (subsumed under the umbrella term Hindi) over the next couple of centuries, a mixed language that we now know as Urdu emerged. Urdu, or its early literary version, Rekhtah, was built on the Hindi/Indic grammar base with a vocabulary speckled with Persian and Sanskrit derivatives.

## SYNERGIES

continued from page 1

Three different shades of Persian were also created: *Indo-Iranian Persian*, which is the Persian written by Iranian-born writers who lived the most part of their lives in India, *Indo-Persian*, which is the Persian written by second generation Iranians whose forefathers had settled in India, and *Indian Persian*, which is Persian written by Indians, who were either Muslims or Hindus. Thus Persian, in its different registers, became the most important literary language in India. A vast quantity of literature, both in poetry and prose, was produced. To facilitate the absorption of Persian by the Indian elite, many major, influential dictionaries of Persian were produced in India from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some great dictionary writers, such as Tek Chand Bahar (*Bahar-i Ajam*) and Sialkoti Mal Varasta, were Hindus.

By the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, immigration from Iran and central Asia began to wane. In the peripheral regions of the Mughal Empire, it was Rekhtah rather than Persian that represented the authority of the center. Muhammad Vali, a poet from western India, was the first to produce an entire Divan or collection of ghazals in Rekhtah. Vali's rekhtah poetry opened the flood gates to the writing of ghazals in the rekhtah mode. The synergies between the Persian and Sanskritic indigenous literatures had resulted in the creation of the Sabk-i Hindi, or the Persian



ghazal poetry in the “Indian style.” The themes of Sabk-i Hindi poets were complex and their metaphors very intricate and abstruse. The Urdu ghazal, too, leaned towards Sabk-i Hindi motifs. What is remarkable is that some of Urdu's greatest poets, such as Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib and Muhammad Iqbal, were highly regarded Persian poets too. The capability of writing in two languages with equal felicity is a remarkable accomplishment of the Indian literati.

The relationship between Persian and Urdu grew stronger as Urdu was split by the British colonizers beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to create the so-called standardized form of Urdu and Hindi. A Persianized vocabulary became the benchmark for Urdu. Paradoxically, as Indian Persian declined, Persianized Urdu took its place. But Urdu and Hindi cannot be unlinked because of their common root: grammar.

The relationship between Hindi and Urdu, though troubled in the decades leading up to the partition of India, is one of mutual enrichment.

We are proud to occasionally have students in our Department studying Persian, Urdu and Hindi simultaneously. I am currently offering an upper level seminar on Urdu poetry, (Urdu 7300), in which students can and do read the ghazals in the script of their choice: Nasta'liq for Urdu, Devanagari for Hindi and even Urdu in Roman for students who can understand the language but cannot read. Ghazal poetry is meditative with embedded layers of meaning couched in a language that is at once fastidious and sparkling. The emotions are presented in a manner that can make them individual and universal at the same time. Every student in the class has a “takhallus,” or poetic name, and learns to recite the ghazal in order to appreciate the aural impact of the language. The students are encouraged to have favorite she'rs, or verses, that they memorize. The following she'r of Ghalib is typical in its imagery and sensibility, and offers a distinctive shade of the experience of love, which appealed to the class.

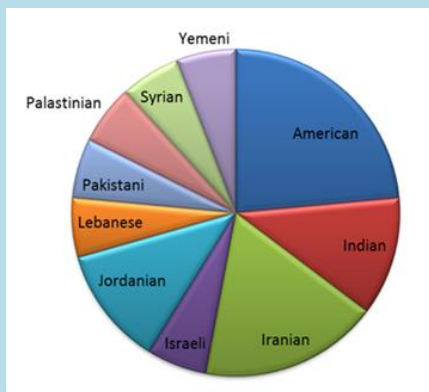
MEHR FAROOQI

*The heart must have burned  
when the body burned;*

*What are you searching  
digging in those ashes?*

## MESALC: A Local Global Village

In his *History of the University of Virginia*, Philip Bruce describes Thomas Jefferson's vision for his "academical village" as a truly international and cosmopolitan place: "His inquisitive eyes looked abroad unerringly for the best in the practical or intellectual life of every foreign land in order to employ it for the betterment of his own," writes Mr. Bruce. From the days of its founding, foreign languages (along with philosophy, arts, science, law, and medicine) were part of the University of Virginia's curriculum. Remarkably, of the original seven professors teaching on the first day of classes at UVa in 1825, five were foreign citizens and two were foreign-born. Mr. Jefferson would be delighted with the Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Languages and Cultures—an exemplary academical village at the institution he founded.



MESALC Faculty

In its core composition and mission, MESALC rises to the challenge of educating a new wave of students who represent a surge of interest—and enrollment—in the languages, literatures, and cultures of the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia, an area encompassing some 30% of the world population. MESALC is not united by a common geographic area of expertise, one language, or one intellectual commitment. Yet, it has a unique identity. It focuses on the deep historical ties between the many and varied literatures, languages, cultures, politics, and religions of the Middle East (Iraq, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, Yemen, and the United Arab Emirates), North Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, and Tunisia) and South Asia (Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka). We teach six languages—Arabic, Hebrew, Hindi, Persian, Sanskrit, and Urdu—and have an impressive array of expertise and specialization among our faculty members—Anthropology; Comparative Literature; Islamic Studies; Language Pedagogy; Literary Studies; Linguistics; History; Media Studies; Anthropology; Film Studies; Philology; and Gender Studies. We are also one of very few universities nationwide that takes a cross-regional approach, integrating studies of the Middle

East and South Asia.

The institutional experience of academic disciplines suggests that the crossing of such wide-ranging linguistic, intellectual, and regional boundaries is difficult, if not impossible. We take great pride in having accomplished interdisciplinarity cross-culturally. While maintaining our strong language programs and content courses, we are designing more trans-cultural, trans-national courses in tandem with the College's mandate for interdisciplinarity in a global context.

And yet, what most distinguishes the Department is its students. We consider our students our major asset. They speak out for global justice, question canonical knowledge, revise methods of inquiry, and challenge conventional academic structures and curricula. By refusing to remain uninvolved citizens of the global village, they contribute significantly to advance the priorities of the University and its founding father.



FARZANEH MILANI

# My Summer with UVA in Jordan

When I told my family my plan to study abroad in Jordan that summer, they were shocked. They couldn't believe "Play It Safe" Katharyn would choose to study Arabic 23 hours per week for two whole months... and without air-conditioning. I honestly could not believe it either. However, UVA in Jordan was essential to my college experience. Once a "Play It Safe" kind of person, I became something I had never thought I could be: bold.

Inside the classroom, my Arabic improved markedly. Once too shy to speak in Arabic, I found myself chatting with professors, language partners, and complete strangers. I still made mistakes, yet with each one, my confidence in my abilities grew. I left the United States unsure of myself, and returned a more confident student, now as chatty in Arabic as I am in English.

Outside of the classroom, I did things I never would have before. During the first week, I was overwhelmed by the newness of place. Yet by the second, I was ravenous. New foods, new experiences, new people- I could not get enough. This thirst for adventure culminated in a trip to Istanbul, a place I had only dreamt I would get to see one day. Of course, there were bouts of homesickness. But, by the end of the summer, I felt a sense of nostalgia for a place that felt so strange only two months earlier.

Since returning to the United States, I have found that when asked about one's study abroad experience, the automatic answer is "Great!" However, my study abroad experience was not just "Great." It was daring. It was vivacious. It was bold, and it forced me to be bold. Once "Play It Safe" Katharyn, I am now a more adventurous, open-minded, and courageous version of myself. I am bold.

KATHARYN GADIENT

# Mahmoud Darwish

## He is Quiet and So Am I

*He is quiet and so am I  
He sips tea with lemon,  
And I drink coffee,  
That is the difference between us.  
He wears, like me, a loose, striped shirt  
And I read, like him, the evening newspapers.  
He does not see me as I glance stealthily,  
And I do not see him when he glances stealthily.  
He is quiet and so am I.  
He asks the waiter something,  
I ask the waiter something ...  
A black cat passes between us,  
I touch its black fur  
He touches its black fur ...  
I do not say to him: the sky is clear today  
And more blue.  
He does not say to me: the sky is clear today.  
He is the observed and observer  
I am the observed and observer.  
I move my left leg  
He moves his right leg.  
I hum a tune,  
He hums a similar tune.  
I think: is he the mirror I view myself in?  
Then I look toward his eyes,  
But I no longer see him ...  
I leave the café in a hurry.  
I think: perhaps he is a killer, or perhaps  
He, just passing through, thought I was a killer  
He is afraid, and so am I!*

Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008), a Palestinian poet, is considered one of the most famous Arab poets in the 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The original Arabic version of this poem is selected from his anthology titled *La Ta<sup>c</sup>tadhir <sup>c</sup>amma fa<sup>c</sup>alt* (Do Not Apologize for What You Did), 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, published in Beirut in 2004.

Translated By: **MOHAMMED SAWAIE**

# My MESALC Experience

In 2006, when I entered the graduate program at UVa's Department of Anthropology with the hope of conducting ethnographic research in the Islamic Republic of Iran, it seemed a daunting task. I required Persian language, region-specific expertise, research visas, and faculty support, both in the U.S. and in Tehran. It helped that I aimed to study a topic that was superficially apolitical – Iranian national food culture, the family, and rural Shi'i Islam, and that I had the benefit of UVa's excellent Department of Anthropology, yet I still needed a starting place, a beginning.

I found that place in UVa's Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Languages and Cultures. Having dabbled in Arabic and Persian language as an undergraduate, I took my first real Persian class with Professor Zjaleh Hajibashi at MESALC and loved every minute of it. She used Farsi language text books and encouraged the students to speak Persian to each other in class. We wrote dialogues and poetry. We learned to speak. I can honestly say that Professor Hajibashi is the best language teacher I have ever had.

As my confidence in the language grew, I made special arrangements to take more advanced Persian classes at the graduate level in MESALC. These included "Introduction to Modern Persian Literature" as well as an "Independent Study" in Persian poetry, again with Professor Hajibashi. We read amazing short stories, wrote essays, and learned vocabulary, in Farsi. In addition, I took an invaluable class with Professor Farzaneh Milani entitled "Life Narratives and Iranian Women Writers." We read Simin Behbahani, Forough Farrokhzad, Shahnush Parsipur, and Shirin Neshat, among others. The diversity of Iranian language, culture, and film came alive. I am tremendously thankful to Professor Milani for also being my outside dissertation committee member. Finally, I had the great fortune of auditing several fascinating classes on



Rose Wellman

Persian prose and poetry with Professor Alireza Korangy, an amazing scholar and teacher.

I can't begin to explain the many ways in which all of these courses contributed to the completion of my successful dissertation, *Feeding Moral Relations: the Making of Kinship and Nation in Iran*. The task I had set out for myself was not an easy one. But beyond providing speaking and writing skills in Persian, the MESALC's classes provided me with the skills to do my research. Indeed, the ability to converse about Hafez or Ferdowsi, or even about Farrokhzad, became profoundly useful during fieldwork in Iran. Iran is, I found, a land of poetry experts. The verses of Hafez and Rumi abound, even in the rural town where I conducted fieldwork in the Fars Province.

Since returning from the field, I had the wonderful opportunity to contribute in my own way to MESALC. In the Spring of 2014, I taught a class, cross-listed in Anthropology, entitled "Muslims in the Middle East and South Asia," to a group of diverse and interested students. Today, having successfully graduated from UVa, I am the Postdoctoral researcher at the Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies at Princeton University. I wish to express my deepest thanks to MESALC and to its faculty and staff.

ROSE WELLMAN

# Shankar Nair

## MESALC'S NEWEST FACULTY MEMBER

---



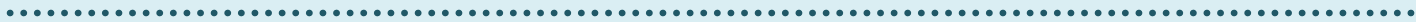
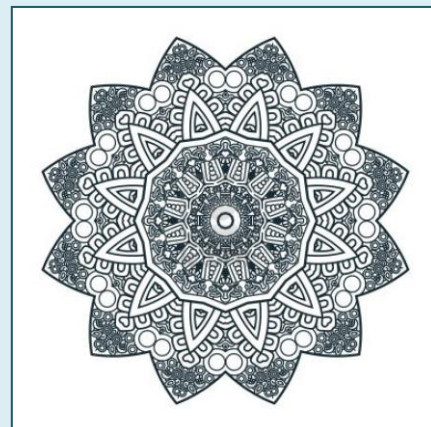
Shankar Nair

It is my great pleasure to be joining the faculty of Arts and Sciences here at the University of Virginia. I have an appointment in both the Department of Middle Eastern & South Asian Languages & Cultures and the Department of Religious Studies, where I teach courses in Islamic studies, the Qur'an, Sufism, Islamic philosophy, and Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit literatures, as well as South Asian religions more generally. My research explores Islamic intellectual history quite broadly, with a focus on Hindu-Muslim interactions in early modern South Asia. In brief, I am interested in how Hindu and Muslim philosophers, theologians, and mystics interacted with one another, and the ways in which they conceptualized and responded to the fact of religious diversity in the world around them.

After studying in Boston, MA for far too long (undergraduate and graduate, Harvard University), I spent a few semesters as an instructor at Brandeis University. I then had the very good fortune to teach at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign for a time. Life was good – but we missed the mountains! The opportunity to work now with the fine students of UVa really is a dream come true, and the shift from the Midwestern flatlands to the hills, forests, and rivers of Charlottesville has been a welcome one. Needless to say, I am an avid nature-lover and hiker, and hope to see you on the trails sometime!

A central theme in my work is the myriad connections and interrelations between the Middle East and South Asia, and so it is a delight for me to be able to call MESALC my departmental home. I look forward to exploring these fascinating connections together in the classroom. I am also always looking for the opportunity to explore new religious texts in Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit, so, if you're looking to study something, let me know!

SHANKAR NAIR



# NEW COURSES

..... 2014



**MEST 3559/5559**  
**Martyrdom in the Middle East: A Literary Evaluation**

*Instructor: Alireza Korangy*

This course engages students both in the foregrounding and mainstream ideas and ideals that have made martyrdom into the phenom we see in the Middle East today. It also introduces them to the otherwise neglected notions of martyrdom as can be found in the corpora of the many writers in the history of the Middle East. The course engages rigorously the role of the literary, both in terms of the religious and exegetical tradition, but also looks at the literary influences that could have—and in some case have in fact—preceded the religious notions of martyrdom in the Middle East and or built upon those religious fervors.

**PETR 3559**  
**Ghazal in Near East and South Asia**

*Instructor: Alireza Korangy*

This class treats the influences of the poetic genre of ghazal as a focal point of divergence in linguistic and thematic development of poetry in the Middle East, Near East and South Asia. The embryonic stages of ghazal, from the ninth to the twelfth century, will be examined from the point of view of theme, rhetoric, and prosody under the rubric of historicity and cross-linguistic correlation. The subject requires an in-depth analysis and interpretation of a multitude of Arab and Persian poets in order to examine the thematic borrowings prevalent in the early and eventually later stages of ghazal development. More than fifty poets will be examined. Ghazal is the most important poetic genre in the Persian-speaking world, but is also extremely prevalent in South Asia. The inter-regional influences of the ghazal are immense, both in terms of prominence and culturally nuanced themes and rhetoric, especially when considering Indo-Persian studies. The development of this genre, in terms of both rhetoric and meaning, will be examined. This lecture and all readings will be in English.

**PERS 3559/5559**  
**Jami's Haft Aurang**

*Instructor: Alireza Korangy*

This course addresses the poetry of ‘Abd al-Rahman Jami’s masterpiece in seven parts, “*the Seven Thrones, the Seven Spheres, the Seven Heavens.*” Considered one of the masterpieces of Persian literature, Jami’s work touches on the themes of many other Persian poetry greats. One of these poets, Nizami, and his work, *Yusuf and Zulaykha*, one of the seven works constituting the *Haft Aurang*, will be a special focus of this course, although others will be summarily touched upon.





# NEW PUBLICATIONS



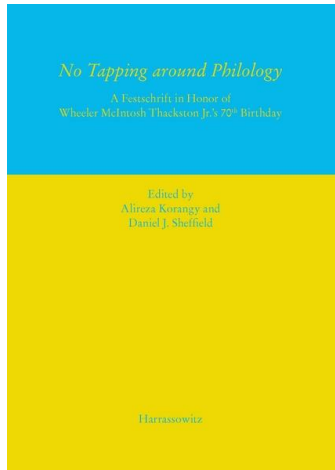
## ***No Tapping Around Philology***

Editor: **Alireza Korangy**

Publisher: **Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014**

This volume is a collection of twenty-three articles. It is dedicated to one of the most distinguished philologists and linguists in Near Eastern Studies and one of the most prolific teachers and translators of Near Eastern languages and literatures, Wheeler McIntosh Thackston, Jr. (Harvard University), on the occasion of his seventieth birthday.

The essays, written by Thackston's students, colleagues, and friends each interact with his intellectual legacy individually and are divided into four sections: Persian Literature; Linguistics, Philology, and Religious Studies; Middle Eastern, Central Asian, and South Asian History; and History of Art and Architecture. Reflecting Thackston's scholarly attention to the translation of primary sources, many of the essays bring to light never-before-translated texts, ranging from Persian letters from the Qing archive in Beijing to early Arabic sources on sorcery and magic to commentaries on classic works of Persian literature. The volume also devotes significant space to art historical contributions by several of Thackston's collaborators, and it also features essays from Thackston's colleagues in fields including Semitic Philology, Biblical Studies, and Classics. The volume is completed with a bibliography of Thackston's publications and biographical reflections on his scholarly life.

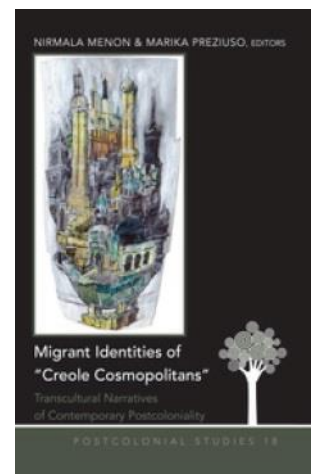


## ***Border Crossings***

Author: **Hanadi Al-Samman**

Publisher: **Peter Lang Publishing, 2014**

Associate Professor Hanadi Al-Samman was recently invited to be the Associate Editor of *Review of Middle East Studies* (RoMES) and to serve on the editorial board of the *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*. She has published an article entitled "Border Crossings: Cultural Collisions and Reconciliations in Hanan Al-Shaykh's *Only in London*," in *Perspectives on the 'Migrant Cosmopolitans': Narratives of Contemporary Postcoloniality*. (Eds. Nirmala Menon and Marika Preziuso. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2014.) She has two other forthcoming articles in the following anthologies: "The Buried Infant Girl (*al-Maw'udah*) as an Archetype of Arab Bad Girlhood," in *Bad Girls of the Arab World*. (Eds. Elizabeth Bishop, Rula Quawas and Nadia Yaqub. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, [Forthcoming 2015]) and "The Art of Teaching Arab Traumas Triumphantly," in *Teaching Arabic Literature*. (Ed. Muhsin al-Musawi. Austin: University of Texas Press, (Forthcoming 2014). She is also co-editing a book with professors Alireza Korangy and Michael Beard entitled "*Beloved: Love and Languishing in Middle Eastern Literatures and Cultures*. It will be published by I.B. Tauris in 2015.





# Calendar of Events

..... Fall 2014



## September 16

STS Colloquium

❖ *Kavita Philip*

3:30 PM – 5:00 PM

341 Mechanical Engineering Building

## September 24

The Art and Craft of the Parallel Entrepreneur

❖ *Giles Jackson*

7:30 PM – 8:30 PM

036 New Cabell Hall

## September 29

ISIS and the Gulf States: A View from Oman

❖ *Reverend Doug Leonard*

4:00 PM

441 Nau Hall

## October 10

Religious Law and the Practice of Philosophy in Islam

3:00 PM

❖ *Frank Griffel*

101 Nau Hall

## October 27

Responding to ISIS Violence Against Women and Girls

9:30 AM – 4:30 PM

Newcomb Hall

## October 29

The Sorrow and the Joy:  
Remembering Hussein's Martyrdom  
in Hyderabad, Pakistan

❖ *Ashok Rajput*

4:30 PM – 6:30 PM

127 Ruffner Hall

## October 30

Global Film Series – “The Lunchbox”

❖ *Ashok Rajput*

6:30 PM

Bryan Hall Faculty Lounge

## October 31

Standard, National, and Colloquial Varieties of Persian

❖ *Corey Miller*

4:30 PM – 5:30 PM

G120 Claude Moore Nursing Building

## November 6

Global Film Series – “Where Do We Go Now”

❖ *John Al-Haddad*

6:30 PM

Bryan Hall Faculty Lounge



# Rebekah McCallum

## OUR ONGOING MEHFIL



Rebekah McCallum

When I first walked into Urdu 7300, an Urdu poetry class, I was quite unsure of myself. I took my seat and looked around as the other students were speaking in Urdu. Some were native Urdu speakers and some had studied the language for several years. I immediately felt out of my element. Based on the syllabus, I hadn't expected to begin by *speaking* in the language of the poetry we would be studying and was therefore somewhat flustered by that and by the competency of my classmates. Humorously now, I can reflect on a she'r (couplet) from a ghazal of Ghalib to indicate my condition in that first class:

*It is somewhat for this reason that I am quiet  
Otherwise, doesn't talk come?  
-Ghalib*

The class was made up of mostly undergraduates; two of us were graduate students. Verbal language capabilities varied, but we could all read the language. Despite being a few years older than most in the class and having been given permission to enroll in the class, I still felt some apprehension. I had limited (intermediate) knowledge of written Hindi, lesser ability in verbal Hindi, and not much knowledge of Urdu.

Granted, Hindi and Urdu are sister languages, twins that share the same grammar and some vocabulary, but differ in script and in the derivation of most of their vocabulary—Urdu from Persian and Arabic, Hindi from Sanskrit. I, along with one other student, would be given the readings in the Devanagari script and would have to expand my vocabulary as we progressed.

Subsequent to that first class, my trepidation was replaced by enthusiasm; the study of the poetry itself enabled that transition.

*We are there, from where to us too  
Does news of us not come?  
-Ghalib*

Poetry as a discipline transcends cultures and articulates space for the reader to enter into, enjoy its ambience, and ruminate. It even allows those less attuned to poetry's nuances and to the intricacies of known and new languages to still partake in its content. The Urdu ghazal's form and content, especially those of a 19<sup>th</sup>-century poet we studied in depth in this class, Ghalib, speak to richness dipped in philosophy of an era gone by. Yet, ghazals are not transient poetry. Like the she'r quoted above, contemporary readers can reap the benefits of a distant poet-philosopher's contemplations. Ghazal poets pull from the 'ghazal universe,' where certain tropes, themes and metaphors are shared, intertwined, rearticulated and expanded to convey meaning.

*I also have language lodged in my mouth  
If only you'd ask me what was wrong?  
-Ghalib*

The above she'r 'speaks' to the essential performative aspect of the ghazal and the actual voice of the poet, intrinsic features that add allure distinctive from the silent or verbal reading of words on paper. Mood and emotion is powerfully conveyed through the practiced articulation of the speaker. Rhythm is essential to its beauty. For a modern-day audience, similarity may be found in the artistic recitations of the spoken word or slam artist.

OUR ONGOING MEHFIL  
continued from page 10

The ambience created or brought to mind when reading ghazals is that of the mushaira or the mehfil. A mushaira was/is a setting containing many poets who verbally outdo each other and also share in the richness of each other's poetry. Each poet gets up to recite one after another, with the most distinguished performing at the end. The event can last from the evening well into the night. A smaller, more intimate gathering is called a mehfil. From the onset, our class was called "Ongoing Mehfil," and based on the tradition, I am beginning to see what that means.

In either setting (mushaira or mehfil), the audience is inextricably involved in the recitation. The poet recites accompanied by shouts from the audience, exhibiting its pleasure, "Vah, vah, vah". Stylishly putting his hand to his face, the poet acknowledges the praise and continues. If "mukarrar" is heard, then the poet will repeat the most recent she'r again.

The last she'r recited is called the maqta and it usually contains the poet's takhallus (pen-name). Often humorous, it expresses a taunt directed at another poet, a tongue-in-cheek jibe at the Beloved, a self-deprecating anecdote, or an exhibition of false humility.

One such maqta is that of Ghalib, that can be translated thus:

*Maybe Ghalib is not worth anything  
But if you get him for free, what's the problem?  
-Ghalib*

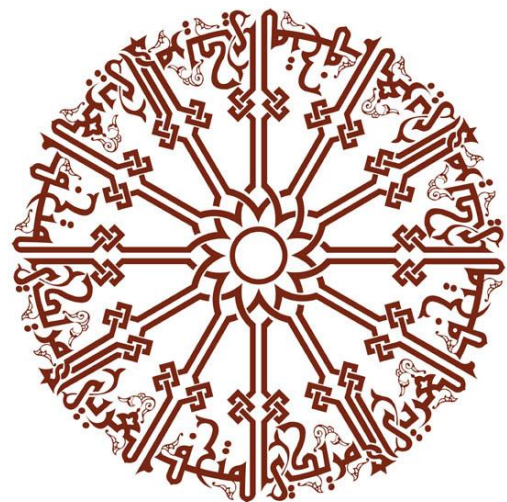
With the ghazal, the performative aspect aids in the translation. The articulation of the words is as important as the articulation of silence. A recitation of the poem can emphasize meanings and moods or provide new ones different from those thought to be inherent. The listener participates in that translation.

*Every time you speak you say, "What are you?"  
You alone say, "What does our conversation  
mean?"  
-Ghalib*

Reciting is both interpreting and conversing; we have noticed the subtleties of this in our studies. Within the class, we have had, and will continue to have, the opportunity to recite, translate, or trans-create ghazals written by Ghalib. The task has been challenging and rewarding. Pushing the limits of the form, we have produced more direct translations as well as translations that allow for contemporary creative ability to shine through. In this article, I have selected she'rs and their translations that we have examined in the class and that speak to our classroom experiences.

Each week, now, as I enter the classroom on Monday evenings, I am excited to partake in the reading of the poetry, explore the meanings and try my hand at translation. I am able to see the poet's place within and separate from the culture which the poetry originated. Every week, we read and analyze a ghazal or examine the life of a poet to see where certain ideas are present or from where they derived. Sometimes humor is expressed, sometimes deep sadness. On these evenings, we explore the poetry into the early hours of the night. Relishing word play, we move through time to Mughal Delhi and back again, carrying the tradition with us. In this way, it is our ongoing mehfil, an intimate evening gathering—a setting created to experience poetry.

REBEKAH McCALLUM



# An Ethnographic Documentary by MESALC Faculty, Ashok Rajput



A *tazia*, representation of the tomb of Imam Hussein during a Shia procession in Hyderabad, Sindh.

On October 29, 2014 University of Virginia students and faculty watched Ashok Rajput's documentary on the martyrdom observances of Imam Hussein, the grandson of Prophet Mohammad. The documentary entitled *The Sorrow and the Joy: Remembering Hussein's Martyrdom in Hyderabad, Pakistan*, provided an opportunity to students to understand the variation in the ritual performances of remembering Hussein's martyrdom. The documentary – filmed in Hyderabad, Sindh, Pakistan in 2011 and 2012 – offers unique views of the ten days of commemorations by various communities in that city. Every year, millions of people in Pakistan and India remember the martyrdom of Hussein and perform various rites and rituals. In his introductory remarks, Ashok Rajput explained the significance of his documentary and said that Muharram ceremonies are dominated by the participation of the Muslim Shia sect but that in Hyderabad, Pakistan, people belonging to Sunni sects of Islam and Hindus also participate in the ceremonies.

The documentary focuses on the outdoor public ceremonies rather than private gatherings at home. The documentary begins with a brief history of the events in which Imam Hussein and his family members were martyred. Through religious posters, the documentary narrates various events of the battle of Karbala. In Islam, iconography of Prophet Mohammad, his companions and other Muslim saints are forbidden. But many posters of Iranian origin depicting the Shia martyrs and the events of Karbala are widely available in Pakistan. Shias decorate these posters in their houses. After a brief history, the documentary shows the Shia ceremonies which begin every year with the erection of the standard at many neighborhood shrines all over the city. The standards, called *alam*, are beautifully decorated by Sindhi woodwork craftsmen. The *alams* are painted with various sacred insignia and symbols.

Later, the documentary shows mourning rituals called *azadari*, performed by men, women, and youth. During these rituals, head and chest beating are carried out to the beats of drumming and to the recitation of dirges. In Hyderabad, women are significantly present at various shrines and gatherings during the Muharram. They also have their separate gatherings, where they recite the dirges to remember the suffering, and recite elegies to praise the tolerance and ideals of Hussein, his family, and followers.

On the tenth day of the month of Muharram, called *Ashura*, Hussein was martyred. It's a state holiday in Pakistan. In Hyderabad, Sindh, several small and big processions, are organized, in which thousands of people participate. During these processions self-flagellations are carried out by men. Shias believe that self-flagellation is carried out to remember the suffering of Hussein and his family. They believe that this act of self-flagellation teaches them the ideals of non-violence and peace, as suggested by Imam Hussein.

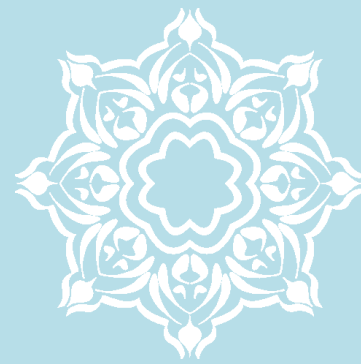


Two *tazias* belonging to Sunni Muhajir procession in Hyderabad, Sindh.

The final part of the documentary focuses on Sunni Muslim processions organized by the Urdu-speaking immigrants known as the Muhajirs. In 1947, after the partition of India and the independence of Pakistan, millions of Muslim immigrants from northern India moved to Sindh province. They brought their unique traditions of *tazia* processions. The musical performances, particularly drumming in these processions, are markedly different from the Shia processions. The documentary shows this diversity and points to the idea of the Sunni traditions of remembering Imam Hussein and his followers' sacrifice. In Sunni *tazia* processions, the atmosphere is of a festive occasion, in contrast to Shia's mourning rituals. This is suggested in the title of the documentary "The Sorrow and the Joy."

The documentary is fast paced and about 45 minutes long. According to Ashok Rajput, he decided to produce an ethnographic documentary in order to show the diverse traditions of Sindh, Pakistan. He said that the Muharram traditions are under threat due to the targeted killings of Shias by radical Muslim groups. The documentary will shortly be available for purchase. Ashok Rajput said that the money from the sale of this documentary will go to the *manganhar* musicians of Hyderabad.

ASHOK RAJPUT



## Hassan, Mahvash & Farzad Milani Scholarship

Thanks to the generosity of the Hassan, Mahvash & Farzad Milani Charitable Trust, the Department of Middle Eastern & South Asian Languages & Cultures is offering a \$4,000 scholarship during the Spring semester of 2015 to a graduate or undergraduate student majoring, minoring, or taking courses in the Department. The scholarship is open to both needs-based and merit-based recipients although preference will be given to those receiving financial aid. Eligible students must be enrolled full time. **Please submit a resume and an essay summarizing your educational interest** to Mr. Cameron Clayton at [rcc8k@eservices.virginia.edu](mailto:rcc8k@eservices.virginia.edu) no later than December 10. The recipient will be informed no later than January 20.



# Middle East & Women Studies at UVA

## A Stop On My Way Back Home



Gaisu Yari

In Jaghori, Afghanistan, I walked three hours to get to high school, but here in Charlottesville I only walk three minutes to get to class. I walked five miles to get to Jaghori's only radio station where I worked as a journalist, but now I drive less than ten minutes to a part-time job on the other side of town. In Afghanistan, I interviewed young girls from different schools for my radio program, and here, in my role as a Shea House Language Assistant, I help students learn Persian.

I never expected to attend the University of Virginia, but from an early age I was determined to learn the most from wherever I could. At UVa, my understanding of the world has grown from the limitations of Jaghori, Taliban rule, and war. These two vastly different experiences have given me a unique platform from which I can once again broadcast my voice. At UVa, I double major in Women and Middle Eastern Studies to prepare for a career promoting

women's rights in Afghanistan, the Middle East, and Northern Africa. Being here has provided me with numerous venues to contribute to a better understanding of my part in the world through sharing my unique perspective. By talking about the obstacles and challenges of my past, I have also been able to reach and positively affect others struggling with those same issues now.

While I still have far to go, looking back on my journey thus far makes me value even more the stopover at UVa. My UVa studies build and expand upon what I started in Afghanistan as a teenager when I was the only female journalist in Jaghori and one of the few in the entire country. What I've learned and lived at UVa will surely open new doors and encourage me to step inside each one, analyzing new ways of thinking and best practices that I can apply to make a difference in the struggles of Afghan women and in the violent struggles in the Middle East.

Accepting the offer to live at the Shea House and being a Language Assistant for the Persian cohort has allowed me to develop stronger connections with people through working with individuals who are willing to learn Persian. In addition to Shea residents, I am using my Persian skills and interest in Persian culture to support any and all students who are Persian or interested in it. I offer a Persian Lab to tutor students taking Persian classes.

These activities facilitate many interesting and nourishing interactions with different cultures I had never encountered before. Among other attributes, my exposure to the culture and dynamic of Shea House definitely adds another layer to my evolving understanding of life itself.

In the end, I view my personal and academic life here at UVa, within my studies and within Shea, as beneficial too in helping map out some of my next steps after graduation. My native language Dari is very close to Persian. Teaching Persian as a Language Assistant has motivated me to continue writing poetry in Persian. My poems reflect on Afghanistan life and harsh realities, and are a catharsis for my feelings towards my country and family there.

GAISU YARI



Sangi Masha, Jaghori Afghanistan

# Multicultural Student Services in the Office of the Dean of Students



Michelle Sawwan

As an undergraduate student in the Department of Middle Eastern & South Asian Languages & Cultures, I developed an interest in exploring the various cultural education programs developed and maintained by students in the Middle Eastern cultural community and supported by the Office of the Dean of Students (ODOS). During my fourth year I interned with ODOS, which led me to a greater appreciation of the diversity within the Middle Eastern community at U.Va. and a better understanding of the domestic and international issues that affect the lives of countless Middle Eastern Americans on a daily basis. I later completed the M.A. program in Middle Eastern Studies and am now serving in ODOS as the multicultural program coordinator. One of my goals is to facilitate connections between academics and student activities, through student-faculty collaborations, in order to share the diversity and complexity within Middle Eastern cultures with the wider University community.

ODOS is committed to helping students make their academic learning practical and their student activities educational, but we also support a well-rounded and healthy student

experience more generally. We offer general support for students, incident reporting and response, and multicultural student support and outreach.<sup>1</sup> At a time of heightened racial and cultural bias and a misunderstanding of Middle Eastern cultures it is worth mentioning that students who experience bias incidents can attain prompt support through the “Just Report It” system. The dean on call service also provides 24-hour crisis management services, and we have resources for hazing prevention and education along with sexual violence education, mediation, and formal adjudication options. Multicultural Student Services is one piece within the wider network of support and resources available through ODOS.

In terms of multicultural enrichment we provide funding for a variety of student activities, particularly those that are outreach-based in scope and collaborative in nature. We coordinate the Middle Eastern Mentoring Program, and we also provide support to the Middle Eastern Leadership Council (MELC). MELC serves as the umbrella organization for several student groups that have a cultural focus. MELC has been instrumental in organizing programs and events to bring in speakers, screen films, and offer service opportunities to help educate the wider community about Middle Eastern cultures. Funding for such activities comes through ODOS, the Cultural Programming Board, the Office of the Vice President & Chief Student Affairs Officer, Student Council, the Parents Fund, and Alumni Hall, among other sources. In our work with and support for student groups we at ODOS are eager to continue in a proud tradition of collaborations between our office, MESALC, and the vibrant student groups on Grounds.

MICHELLE SAWWAN

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.virginia.edu/deanofstudents/programsandservices/>

# Innovative Collaborations:

## Synaesthesia and Inter-institutional Classrooms

---



Geeta Patel

Institutional climates in the United States are currently awash in buzz phrases, raining down like manna from some imaginary heaven: global studies, interdisciplinary studies, new area studies, digital humanities, online courses, and virtual classrooms. In many of these phrases, the university is portrayed as being at the edge of innovation. Though newness is the value being heralded through them, I am not suggesting that the terms in question are so au courant they have no history. To the contrary, many of the mandates that are incipient in these tag-lines have longish lineages that have sometimes shown up at other times under various auspices. The problem at stake here then is not that words are and have been bandied about to fill out a department portfolio or a university strategic plan.

I begin with this list of expressions because when Kavita Philip, an Associate Professor in the Department of History at the University of California, and I, in MESALC at UVa, were talking about new pedagogies that would bring students from our institutions together in productive ways, while attending to the research questions and periods that were central to our academic lives, we found ourselves designing projects in which all of the so called new mandates found a home. Both Philip's research and my own bring disciplines into

difficult tensile conversations. Science, history, finance, and aesthetics come together in shapes, shades and plot-lines that challenge old stories about the proper objects of study.

This essay is a short think piece, written around the innovative practices in which Philip and I were engaged. We decided to co-teach units across University of California, Irvine and UVa that incorporated her research on digital piracy with mine on historical piracy and forms of governance and finance. Piracy is also a concept with which students are familiar—it informs their everyday lives in myriad ways that include piracy on the seas as well as digital piracy, pirated film, pirated books. So we felt that piracy could be a particularly generative and exciting unit for students from both our institutions.

We wanted to think about bringing classes together in several different ways over at least three years, piloting several kinds of collaboration to see what might work best—including online collaboration, the equivalent of face-to-face meetings, and collective virtual classrooms. Since I was teaching business and banking in historical South Asia and Philip was teaching courses in South Asian history, we designed a unit on Indian Ocean piracy.

In the Spring of 2013, the classes at both institutions focused on historiography and the conventions that mandate certain representations of piracy and the aesthetics embedded in practices of historical representations. What pirates did, the comportment of pirates, littoral and oceanic trade networks, the ways in which the various forms of labor that incorporated piracy as a trade were integrated into local ecologies and environmental patterns; ship building and the complexes that included governance, port cities and states that were remade into pirate ones, and the shifting imaging of regional, geographic and area boundaries.

This collaboration was built around digital materials in the humanities that included written and visual materials from art and critical geography, such as photographs and maps from various periods that demarcated geopolitical domains as well as

---



topographies, sea routes and eco-systems. Our students conversed with each other in various ways on-line, so that their understanding of an online classroom was one that expanded the classroom itself across space and time. Since what they were learning also traversed disciplines, the combination could be thought of as a form of synaesthetic learning.

Synaesthesia is usually taken to depict gathering different senses together in various confluences: the waft of a scent mutes into color, sound acquires a color palette, or flavor on the tongue is experienced as color, which one might encounter in wine tasting notes. In recent years, neuroscience researchers have been pressing synaesthesia into the service of new strategies to augment learning. Blending the somatic into epistemologies, pushing at the geo-political boundaries that have been established at particular historical junctures, bringing epistemic trajectories and materials from different disciplines into conversation with each other in the spaces of conjoined classrooms, made us call our venture 'synaesthetic innovation'.

In 2013, students exchanged notes, commented on separate classroom discussions, and responded to each other's blog entries that discussed salient historiographical and historical issues. The exchanges were rich and, varied and some of the insights on the political economies and assumptions that determine historical accounts, such as Eurocentrism and the influence of Atlantic trade networks, were extraordinarily valuable in inculcating critical thinking as well as introducing students to interdisciplinary engagements with geographic areas and histories outside their usual purview (most of our students had had few courses on regions outside the US).

In 2014, Philip and I will be lecturing in each other's classes, and these lectures will be incorporated into relevant units at each university. Thanks to help from the School of Engineering (Science, Technology and Society), the Asia Institute, MESALC and the Dean's office in Arts and Sciences, Philip came to Charlottesville to talk on her work on big data and censuses.

A third of my students in "Business and Banking in South Asia" class are majoring in the sciences, so the lecture empowered them to re-envision the spaces for productive intellectual exchanges in a way that brought together areas that they had imagined as separate. I will deliver a talk via Skype to a class at Irvine in the upcoming months.

In 2015, we plan to combine classes, co-teaching them through one of the virtual classroom formats that will allow us to combine on-line teaching with multiple uses of digital materials in virtual space.

As we continue to explore our classroom collaborations, Philip and I have begun to document the kinds of innovation that have been built into the work on which we have embarked. We are combining classrooms across institutions organized along two different time-lines, the semester and the quarter. Instead of staying with a single set-up for inter-institutional interdisciplinary classrooms, we opted to work at the level of a teaching unit. Using piracy set in the oceans between Africa, the Middle East, Europe, the South Asian peninsula and South East Asia, we textured the global by undoing the ways in which areas had been sedimented into epistemic-political units. Neither the nation as the unit of analysis, nor Cold War-funded political geographies that separated Africa and the Middle East from Asia, nor the more familiar histories of piracy as practice which are settled into the Atlantic sufficed. More than one extant version of area studies had to be revised to suit the material at hand. From shipping, trade, boats, environments, and labor that shapes itself around shifts in weather, fishing, farming, pillage, security, cargo and finance—piracy commands different lineages of knowledge production. The reading and the exercises allowed students to grapple with and critique the failsafe intellectual trajectories that scholars who study different areas are now also challenging. Our students shared the intellectual excitement of these new avenues for research by entering them through the interdisciplinary classroom as a site for synaesthetic learning.

GEETA PATEL

# On Leopards, Cheetahs, and Persian Literature: An Interview with David Laylin



David Laylin (center) participates in a stick dance in Iran

**Q: What are you doing at UVA?**

**A:** It is my great pleasure to be taking a course in Persian Literature with Professor Mahshad Mohit this semester.

**Q: Why did you decide to audit this class?**

**A:** This class is of special interest to me because I have been associated with Iran and Iranians for most of my life. I consider myself bi-cultural. I lived in Iran for 15 years as an Iranian, rather than as a foreigner. I had Iranian family, business partners, mostly spoke Persian and spent much of my time in the mountains, deserts, wetlands and villages of that beautiful country.

**Q: How did you begin travelling and living in Iran?**

**A:** My father did important legal work for Iran's pre-revolution government. Cases included the

Azerbaijan case against Russia at the UN Security Council in 1946 and the Hirmand River treaty of 1973 with Afghanistan. My sister married Nancy Firouz, brother of Eskandar Firouz, who directed the Sazeman Hefazat Mohit Zist for some 15 years until the time of the Revolution.

Iran is at the confluence of the European, Indian and African continents. Its biological diversity is extraordinary! I co-founded the first hunting company in Iran in 1965. At that time, the quantities of game in the comprehensive network of protected areas were amazing. Unfortunately, after the Revolution, the new government was focused on other issues and the work of the Iranian Department of Environment was allowed to deteriorate. Some major species, like the leopard and cheetahs, are now threatened with extinction. Others are not far behind.



AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVID LAYLIN  
continued from page 20

Now, I am associated with an Islamic NGO and an American non-governmental organization by the name of the Persian Wildlife Foundation. The latter works with another NGO in Tehran to improve the wildlife conservation and management situation in Iran. We are trusted by, and work closely with, the Department of Environment and the United Nations Development Program to help educate people at all levels in Iran.

**Q: What are you studying with Mashad?**

**A:** We are currently reading excerpts from a book by one of Iran's foremost novelists, Simin Daneshvar. Her prose is full of interesting Persian expressions and slang. I especially enjoy this, as it makes me feel as if I were back in Iran, inside a family home. Persian is an extremely rich language.



Mahshad Mohit



**Q: What, if any, other classes have you taken? Which has been your favorite?**

**A:** This is the first college-level course that I have taken since 1961. At that time, I was studying Civil Engineering at George Washington University.

I did not study languages in college, but spoke French as a child in Switzerland. Also my mother was from Argentina, my first wife from Uruguay and my first job was with the Inter-American Development Bank.

**Q: How do these classes compare to your experience as an undergrad?**

**A:** Compared to the language teaching philosophy of the 1960s, Mashad's approach is very refreshing and productive.

**Q: What do you think of your classmates?**

**A:** My classmates are very impressive. The Persian reading ability of the two American students is much better than I would have expected, given that they have never been in Iran.

**Q: What do your classmates seem to think of you?**

**A:** Thankfully, they do not seem to mind that there is an age difference of more than fifty years!

**Q: What is next for you? Do you think you will audit any other classes?**

**A:** I avidly look forward to the rest of this course and hope to also study Persian poetry.

DAVID LAYLIN



Photographer: Claude Levet





Department of Middle Eastern &  
South Asian Languages & Cultures

---

142 New Cabell Hall, P.O. Box 400781  
Charlottesville, VA 22904-4781  
Phone: (434) 243-8076 Fax: (434) 243-1528  
Email: [mesa@virginia.edu](mailto:mesa@virginia.edu)

The MESALC Newsletter  
Contact: Cameron Clayton  
Phone: (434) 243-8076  
Email: [rcc8k@virginia.edu](mailto:rcc8k@virginia.edu)

---

**Support Us!**

Please consider supporting the Department of Middle  
Eastern & South Asian Languages & Cultures.

Log on to our website at:  
[www.mesalc.virginia.edu](http://www.mesalc.virginia.edu)  
and click on "Donate"

