

Interview with Dr Shailendra Bhandare 10.07.2024

Keywords

SB: Shailendra Bhandare

SG: Shreya Gupta

SG: Hello, I'm Shreya Gupta. I'm a third year PhD researcher at the University of Exeter and the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, working on an AHRC funded collaborative doctoral project, titled decolonizing collections, investigating knowledge formation networks in colonial India with special reference to numismatics. The project looks at the history of four collections of Indian coins that are currently held in the Ashmolean, the British Museum in London, and the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. While these collections are named after four European male coin collectors, we know very little about the Indian dealer scholars and collectors who helped them in assembling these collections. My aim is to uncover their role in creating these coin collections, and in producing expert knowledge about Indian history and numismatics on their basis. This interview was conducted as part of my PhD research under the topic afterlife of South Asian coin collections in UK museums. Here, I'm interviewing coin collectors, curators and scholars who work with Indian coins to inquire about the afterlives of these collections after they're acquired by UK museums, as well as understanding the interests and motivations of coin collectors and curators in collecting, studying and working with coins from South Asia.

(1:20): Today I am interviewing Dr Shailendra Bhandare. Shailen, can I ask you to introduce yourself.

SB: Well, I'm Shailendra Bhandare. I am the Senior Assistant Keeper for Oriental and South Asian coin collection, South Asian and Far Eastern coin collections and paper money, at the Ashmolean.

SG: Okay, great lovely. Okay, so first question is what sparked your interest in numismatics, and especially of studying coins from South Asia?

SB (1:48): Right, um, I started as a collector, mainly, as someone who was interested in history, right, from my sort of school days. I believe I started collecting coins when I was about six or seven years old. And, you know, stamps and coins were sort of mean, collectibles, going back. And then gradually, I, I mean, I think I would say that the first sort of excitement for coins was that it was something tangible past in your hands. That was that was the kind of thing something that was very historic, and you can actually touch it.

SG: Yeah

SB (2:31): That was that was something quite, quite exciting about coins. But then I also started reading books. I think when I was about 12, or 13 years old, I went to a coin

exhibition in Bombay, and I bought a couple of books. One of them was a book set, which is called Coins by Parmeshwari Lal Gupta.

SG: The standard.

SB: Everybody talks about that.

SG: Yeah.

SB (2:58): So yeah, I mean, I and then it actually contextualized these coins for me into the wider frame of Indian history. And that's what sort of piqued my interest further and then I started becoming more and more interested in I mean, I was collecting till I would imagine until about 1990s, early 1990s. And then I, my main drive was to actually seeing them as historical objects and the way the role they played in writing of history as a source of historical information. So those were the kinds of things that actually drove me first, right,

SG: which is also why you were interested specifically in Indian coins. Of course, you were collecting in India

SB (3:43): I was interested in Indian coins, I was specifically in Indian coins, I was specifically interested in what was broadly called as ancient Indian coins. When I was collecting, I, whatever, I mean, my I had no great means of spending money as a schoolboy and a young man, then. So I didn't have a lot of money to spend, but within my means, I've had a fairly decent collection of Western Satraps. And, because and again, that was because, mainly because those those were the kinds of coins that were available readily in, in in Bombay when I was growing up and because of the collection, you know, the contacts with Gujarat were quite strong, many of the dealers were Gujaratis themselves. So, we used to get a lot of stuff in Bombay on the numismatic market, which was mainly from Maharashtra, Gujarat, Malwa, bit of Karnataka.

SG: Western India

SB: Yes, western India, but not so much from say, Bengal or somewhere like that. And around that same time, were 13 or 14 years old, I also became aware of what was essentially the coin society in Bombay, which was called Mudra Bharati and it was started in 1984, we had probably the first major exhibition of coins in what was then called the Prince of Wales Museum. And it was called 'Two and a Half Thousand Years of Indian Coinage' or something like that. And that museum that that exhibition was was created by a sort of group of South Bombay cultural enthusiasts, almost like an NGO, which was called Khandahar.

SG: Khandahar

SB (4:40): And that was sort of, you know, looking at historical relics and conservation kind of agendas in Bombay. And though that there was a, there was a, there was a part of that bigger group that is, hat that was kind of, they did this exhibition. When I when I

went there, I became sort of aware of a community, that was basically you know, kindred spirits, as it were and, and collecting coins. And they introduced me to this society, called a group called Mudra Bharati, which used to meet every first Sunday of every month in a school, which was opposite the VT station. And there used to be some sort of semi academic focus that, somebody used to give a talk, some scholar used to come in, you know, and then after the talk was over there was exchange and sale of coins. So, that was my sort of first introduction into the, into the community, as it were. But I believe before my entry, there was also the community had already been sort of formalized, there was a Numismatic Society of Bombay functioning in the 1970s. And in the early 1980s, one of the members of the community of the of that that society then went on to find found the Numismatic Research Institute in Nasik, Mr. Maheshwari.

SG: Yeah

SB (7:01): And so, that's sort of backing of collectors who were kind of interested in academics of it had already existed. Mudra Bharati was a sort of a second incarnation, or maybe a younger incarnation of the of the same group as it were.

SG: Makes sense.

SB: And I believe Mudra Bharati functioned for at least six or seven years.

SG: Okay.

SB: So, I think it was still functioning in late 80s, early 90s, and then it sort of withered away.

SG: I see. So, yeah.

SB: So, those were the kinds of prices.

SG: Yeah. Okay. And once you once you, really got into this era of collecting, so to say, who were the other people that sort of mentored you, who guided you?

SB: There were certainly people I was quite, I was quite fortunate that they probably saw that I was a serious

SG: Collector

SB (10:26): Collector, and well not just a serious collector. But I was enthusiastic about it. I mean, as I said I couldn't acquire a lot, but I could learn a lot. So, they were they were people from this earlier group, who were quite senior was like my more or more or less, even older than my father at times. With whom then I know a lot of them have died in recently because, you know, now in this day and age, they will be more than 80 or 90 years old. 40, 35 or 40 years ago, they were in their 50s and 60s. And they were, kind of, you know, offshoot of this earlier Numismatic Society of Bombay group. So, there was a gentleman by the name of Mr. R T Somaiya, there was a doctor, there was a guy called

Dr. S K Punshi, there was Jagdish Gandhi, there was somebody called Dinsesh Mody, there was a guy called Parvez Patel. They were all basically South Bombay cultural enthusiasts, and they had established, they had their own established network. So for example, people like Mr. Somaiya, were also part of something called Kutchi hobby circle. So the Kutch hobby circle was another group like Mudra Bharati, in terms of networking, who were essentially focusing on coins and stamps, not just coins, but also stamps. And they were also part of a wider stamp related network in the city. So there was a Philatelic Society of India and or Philatelic Society of Bombay, I believe. So Kutch Hobby Circle was, you know, part of. Basically, all of all of them were Gujarati or Kutchis. And they, they you know, they used to have their, their exhibitions as well. So, through these through these networks, yes, I met a lot of nice people. So, after Mr. Maheshwari started the Numismatic Research Institute in Nasik, the remnants of the Numismatic Society of Bombay, used to meet once in two months, I think it was, at the house of Dr. Punshi.

(SG): Okay.

SB (12:33): So, then I started going there as well. And this was strictly by invitation, you used to get an old-fashioned letter saying, you know, the next and it was called Bombay Numismatic Study Circle. So, people people met there, had a had a discussion, had nice cups of tea and snacks courtesy Mrs Punshi. For two, two and a half hours, we dispersed. But these these were the kind of avenues to people to interact and connect with each other,

SG: to form a community.

SB (13:07): So, they can kind of, you know, all the seniors actually quite kind of liked me, because they thought I was doing like I was learning. And I would, you know, they would ask my advice to sort of decipher things, you know, I learned scripts and languages, and you know, sort of all the sort of tools that one needs to acquire for studying coins. So I did it sort of under my own steam, and, ..

SG: Of course

SB: I was self taught. So they quite appreciative. They were very appreciative of that. So

SG: That's sweet.

SB: Yeah. So I was I was I was mentored by a lot of people, I would say

SG: Yeah, yeah. It's good to have a community.

SB: Yeah.

SG: So of course, there's a huge gap. And then you start stuck, then you came to the UK and started working at

SB (13:50): Between that and UK, I think I should mention, one thing that I've mentioned, that definitely is about the wider networks within India. And when I was doing my master's, me and my friend dabbled in sort of collecting coins across India and selling them but not selling them on the open market as such, but, you know, we had a group of close friends and I knew their collections very well, and I knew what they wanted. So just sort of kind of filling the gaps in their collection. And then our, our aim was not to earn any money out of it. Our aim was to actually, if we were happy if our expenses were paid for, so we had a free trip.

SG: Yes. Yeah.

SG: To different parts of India

SB: And we used to have a railway timetable, we used to get on the train, and just hop on hop off at various places, end up in Delhi and come back straight. And, of course, there were other activities going on at that point. So for example, in 1989, there was a major, first major national exhibitions of coins was held in Nagpur, and that was through the Indian Coin Society. And we all went there. And that was the kind of first time where we sort of from a metropolitan network of collectors, I was put into sort of more countrywide network of dealers and collectors. So that was a good opportunity. And then I made became the regional secretary for Indian Coin Society for a while. So I ran the membership in Bombay and western India, for a while and distributed the, you know, they came up. Their modus operandi was very much like Oriental Numismatic Society. They had a meeting, they used to have a regional secretary, and they used to have a journal, or a newsletter, that came out with a few information. And then they also had plans to issue a journal which never materialized and the journal has become sort of it was called Nidhi and then it has sporadically. Now, apparently, I just heard that in the third issue of Nidhi is out, after about, what, 40 years. So it's become a very sporadic thing, but there were other publications which were also, you know, where one could publish research. So, there was for example, the Nasik Institute had the Numismatic Digest. There was a private publications house who started a series called Numismatic Studies in Delhi, and he published about seven or eight volumes of it. In South India, there was a South Indian Numismatic Society, which held regular conferences and brought out a journal. And we attended some of those. So, I think the 1989 1990 Indian Coin Society exhibitions in Nagpur were really the precursor to actually graduating into the country wide network.

SG: Yeah.

SB (16:54): So that those that was the kind of exciting thing. I came to, I mean, the UK thing happened much later, because then I decided to get into history rather than my previous job, which was ..

SG: You switched carriers and

SB: I switched careers. I worked for two years in the pharmaceutical industry, and I didn't like it. So basically, I decided to become a historian.

SG: Yeah.

SB: And then I become, I was actually doing my Masters while I was while I was being a pharmacist in a company.

SG: Okay.

SB (17:24): So there was some there was a little bit of the overlap. So I finished my master's and I enrolled for a PhD. And then I came to England, I came to UK to collect data for for that thesis in the British Museum. That was my first trip, that was in 1996.

SG: Okay. Um, and your thesis was on

SB: my thesis was on the history of the Satavahanas as seen from coins, really.

SG: Okay. Yeah. And so, after finishing your PhD, you then decided to essentially apply?

SB (17:54): Well, I mean, I didn't apply I was I was asked actually, because, I was given my first sort of small opportunity. Well, what happened essentially was that in 1996, I applied for a Royal Numismatic Society grant and also the International Numismatic Commission's Young Numismatic Numismatist fellowship.

SG: Okay

SB: Both of them did not come to me in 1996. So, 1996 trip was undertaken on the basis of a private financial support from a private charitable foundation in India, which was run by one of the biggest collectors of Satavahana coins in those days. That's how I saw he said ...

SG: So he was interested

SB (18:39): He was interested and he sort of supported my that first trip. But then fortuitously, what I had applied for in 1996 came through in 1997. So, it was back in your in Europe in 1997. And while I was there, I attended the Numismatic, International Numismatic Congress in Berlin. And I had a mentor there by the name of Professor Peter Berghause who I had met in Bombay, through you know, these other sort of coin collecting networks. Peter used to work on Roman coins found in India, Peter was a classical numismatist but he came to India every year because he was very active with the Rotary Club. And he built he had lots of projects that he sort of, you know, was overseeing sanitation projects, etc. But at the end of it, then he sort of took a holiday to in Kerala. from Calcutta, he came to Bombay and from Bombay, he went to Kerala and he did it for several years. So we met in Bombay. So it was Peter who was at that time, probably was it the President of the INC or the Vice President of the INC, and he suggested that I should apply for this particular funding. Like, you know, this, this

particular Young Fellowship, whatever it was called. So, I did and it that was given to me in 1997. Peter was also instrumental in setting me up with the museum in Germany, who had 6000 Indian coins to catalogue. So, I stayed there for three months. I did it

SG (20:07): Catalogued the collection

Sb: Yeah, catalogued and rearranged the collection. And I was paid one Mark per coin. And out of which they took away nearly 3000 Marks for internal expenses. So I went home with 3000 something Marks, which, with which money, I was able to buy my first computer and finish my thesis on it.

SG: Amazing, right, yeah, so.

SB : So, I finished my thesis in, I submitted my thesis. But while these conversations were going on, in Berlin, I was approached by Mark Blackburn who was the, then the keeper of the Coin Room in Fitzwilliam. And they had a visiting fellowship program courtesy Charles Wallace, what's it called Charles Wallace fellowships

SG: India Trust.

SB: That's right, that's right.

SG: Yeah.

SB (21:02): So, I came to Cambridge, as soon as I had finished my thesis and rearranged their collection of 18th and 19th century Indian coins. And while I was there, since I had got my PhD, the British Museum approached me to with the proposal that I could be appointed as a postdoctoral fellow of the Society for South Asian Studies with external funding for three years to do a very similar job that I did in the in Cambridge with the British Museum collection. So, I did finish that and then this opportunity came by before the before. So, I applied for this job. And since then, I'm here. So

SG: Oh, you mean before, after finishing the BM?

SB: Well, it wasn't. The three years hadn't finished, because, it was before the end of 3 years. I finished the rearrangement.

SG: Yeah

SB: I finished my job.

SG: Of course, of course. Yeah. Okay. Got it.

SB: So there we are.

SG: That's quite a trajectory. So, at the Ashmolean, what was essentially your role? What was your day to day?

SB: Well, I mean, as a, as a curator, I would believe in a single line, I'm supposed to make the collections accessible.

SG: That's a good line.

SB (22:16): And you could make them accessible by doing lots of things, you could do research, you could do exhibitions, you could do catalogs, you could put them online, you could teach with them. And that was, I mean, what what, what probably singles out the Ashmolean job, from the rest of it is that we are a University Museum, and we have, we teach with objects, and that is something which is a unique kind of thing that we do with our collection. So that is something I mean, we do, we used to do that in the British Museum as well but it was kind of ad hoc, whereas here it is more structured, and it's integrated.

SG: It's a teaching collection.

SB: It's a teaching collection. So that is what I personally liked about my main like, you know what was what, if you asked what I like best about the job is that it is that the fact that it actually allows you to teach with objects. So

SG: I see. So the Indian coins in the Ashmolean collection, how many people are interested in seeing them? Do you get visitors often?

SB: Well, I mean, the new coin collection has sort of grown and the part, well, my appointment the job that was created in the Ashmolean was on the back of acquiring a major collection of Gandharan coins.

SG: Okay

SB (23:29): So, it has become a leading establishment, particularly for coin coins of sort of Hellenic and post Hellenic times, from the northern northwestern part of the subcontinent. And prior to that, the collections here, or would be best described as incidental. I mean, of course, the college collections, some nice, there's some very important, I mean, there are very important and rare coins here. But prior to well, in the 19th, in the 20, early 20th century, nobody was collecting Oriental coins with any particular interest as such. You know, we got them as as incidental sort of holdings, when the collections was sort of, you know, regularized and redistributed and reformed within the university. Of course, then there was the Oriental the Indian

SG: Indian Institute

SB (24:31): Indian Institute's collection then also came here, etc. So, yeah, so from that point of view, we've had Bodleian had a few coins and they came over here.

Christchurch, some of the coin collections from the colleges. So, for example, the new St. John's had a fellow called Dr. Stapleton who was an educational officer in Bengal, he built a collection of Bengal Sultans that came here. But by and large, it was the Senior,

Robert Senior collection of Gandharan coins that actually was kind of a major leap forward into the subcontinental holdings here. And then subsequently, we also acquired another collection of Hellenistic coins, the Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek coins of Professor Adrian Hollis. So, it's sort of complemented the collection. And these these things were kind of doable when the ethics debate was not so strictly followed, I must say. So now, of course, we can't we don't acquire anything, almost. Which is a shame because they were I mean, for example, there was a very important collection of Punch Mark coins, which was a local collection of Terry Hardaker, the foremost coin collector and researcher on this very enigmatic series of coins. We could have had that but we couldn't because it was unprovenanced.

SG: Okay. Right, so I was asking, how often do people come to look at the collection?

SB: Yeah, I mean, they do. Ooh how often as in

SG: I mean, you don't have to give me a number. But in general, what I'm trying to understand is there is interest in people seeing the collection

SB (26:31): Yes, yes, yes, of course like you know we, apart from having people who actually come to see the collections we've also had the focus of Oriental Numismatic Society. So we've had meetings here, ever since I've been here, I do two or three meetings in a year. So you know, so there is a cluster of people who are interested in oriental coins. We also had other sort of you know, related issues. So for example, we had for three years we had Lyce Jankowski that here who rearranged and put in very good order on all our Chinese collection.

SG: Okay.

SB: So now that has become, you know, a major kind of focus.

SG: attractive point

SB (26:48): Yeah, so people do come. There's a lot of teaching that happens alongside this and I do three or four lectures, in a term for students of FAME's, we I do a Global Middle Ages lecture with my colleague, Julian. And we were also doing sort of early modern India, so the Mughals and onwards, which I believe we will resuscitate when Nandini joins.

SG: Hopefully.

SB: At some point. Yeah, so

SG: Okay. And do these coins go out to other museums for loans?

SB: Yes, yes, they have. I mean, this year itself, we are sending our Jahangir Gold coins to the V&A.

SG: For the Mughals exhibition

SB (27:34): We have sent we have we have we have sent coins, we also have obviously have display coins from the Oriental collection. So, for example, two or three years ago, we had an exhibition upstairs called 'Imagining the Divine' and we put in some coins from collection there. Yeah, I mean, we have we have loaned coins out,

SG: okay, including to museums in India.

SB: No, now this is something that has has not happened as yet. I mean, we haven't sent coins to India, we haven't really sent any objects to India per se, on temporary displays.

SG: Is it because they haven't asked or an opportunity hasn't come up

SB (28:11): I have no idea what whether they're asked to Eastern Arts department. They certainly haven't asked me

SG: Okay

SB: As in, they haven't asked for it. Nobody has asked for coins.

SG: Right, I see.

SB: Um, there have been periodic talks about, but they happen in India, they're not happening here, about, you know, creating bridges, and, you know, sort of doing collaborative projects. So, for example, there was one in the pipeline for a long time with the Hinduja Foundation.

SG: Okay

SB: For that matter. Yeah. So things like that.

SG: I see

SB: So, we have no, I don't think, I think probably mainly because the timeframe is not very convenient. We would not, I mean, I believe the Indians want us want objects to be loaned for a longer time, which we can't handle. So

SG (29:03): I see. Okay. And obviously, most of the collections are stored here in the Coin Room. And but some of them are on display in the permanent galleries.

SB: Yes.

SG: Yeah. Including the Indian Islamic collections. Yeah. Okay. Coming to, about information that is available about these coins online, so there is the online database.

SB: Yes, there is an online database, which is being slowly populated.

SG: Okay.

SB: There is, I believe that are most of the Gandharan coins are online now.

SG: Okay.

SB: Yeah. About five and a half thousand? Yeah.

SG: Okay. So that's a work in progress.

SB: That's a work in progress.

SG: Okay. And the, when you put them on the database, it goes with additional information, including provenance, collectors

SB: Yes, it does. It also goes with the tickets actually

SG: With the tickets.

SB: Yeah so.

SG: With the coin tickets also. Great. And, for people who come to see the collection, do you also get a lot of visitors from India, people who you are in touch with

SB: Yes, we have have had we've had, we've had fair a fair number of people from India, also. I mean, I would say that the main flow of visitors to this place has been through the Oriental Numismatic Society. And people just just don't sort of turn up and say, I want to see Indian coins. They probably have some other, they're part of some of the network.

SG: Yeah

SB: Yeah. already.

SG: To know about the coins, yeah. Yeah. And well, technically speaking, the collection is accessible to anyone who

SB: Absolutely, yeah, yeah, yeah, it's a public collection. So.

SG (30:33): It's a public collection. Yeah. So you actually the ONS brings me to my next question, which was, you've mentioned some of the earliest societies that you joined, when you were in India. Which, which are some of the societies that you're still working with, besides ONS

SB: Besides ONS

SG: Or well actually, you could elaborate on that. What is

SB: Well, I mean, I'm on, ONS actually, I'm, I'm sort of managing ONS because I'm on the council.

SG: Yeah.

SB: I have been on the council of the audience. I've recently come off it.

SG: Yeah.

SB: But I've been I'm still on the editorial boards of these kinds of you know, the ONS journal as well as the RNS journal. In India, I sit on the academic committee of Gyanpravaha.

SG: Okay

SB: I'm closely associated with Asiatic Society of Mumbai, CSMVS. Yeah, so those, history department in the University

SG: In Bombay

SB: In Bombay, yeah.

SG: And these continue to be like forums where you're lecturing and giving talks

SB: Absolutely

SG: also places where you're meeting people.

SB: Yeah, yeah, yeah, indeed. Here, it's mainly ONS and RNS.

SG: Yeah.

SB (31:40): I mean, there is a Numismatic Society of Mumbai, there's also smaller societies, which, of course I, there is a there's a society for this long name, it's called it's called a society for collectors of rare items or something like that. In Puna. So, there is a Numismatic Society of Calcutta, there is the Chennai Coin Club. So, there are these places where, of course nowadays, because of, mainly through social media, the presence is, you know, you could be present without being actually physically present.

SG: Yeah.

SB: So yeah, so I'm constantly in touch with a lot of people, particularly with regard with regard to identification and things like that. So people want to sort of

SG: need help in identifying.

SB: Need help in identifying. So yeah

SG: Well, it's interesting, because you're one of those people who has your foot in both the places very firmly, like you have

SB: Yes, yes

SG: You have a very good collecting network in India, but also here.

SB (32:35): And that has been mainly the result fortuitously, of the communication shift. I mean, you know, and I won't, I would imagine that that without this communication shift that has happened in the last 10 years or so, thanks mainly to social media, that wouldn't be possible

SG: For more and more people to sort of contact you and get in touch with you. Yeah. Okay. Last question, which is about the Ashmolean's coin collections. What are some of the exciting decolonising projects going on? Besides mine

SB: Well, one is yours. Well, the second one, which is about, which deals with casts. And this is again, this is floated with my colleague, Milena. And that is about how casts of classical sculptures were involved in colonial. Well, they started going to the colonies mainly as pedagogical tools. But then they started having their own lives as well as kind of objects in their own right, 'things' as Arjun Appadurai would say. So that is one one more going thing going on. The third one is in is in incubation at the moment, and that is something to do with digitization.

SG: Okay, interesting.

SB (34:00): So it's with our digital collections manager, Aruna and she's kind of interested in knowing or unpicking the post life of digitizing. I mean, currently, the theme across the museum world and in the world, in the world is that everything has to be put online. And there's a lot of emphasis on digitizing collections in with a view to actually making them more secure, as well as providing them with, you know, greater access that people can actually see. But how does that then what sort of effects does that that particular drive has in on A) museological discipline as such, but also the networks of knowledge formation, which is like what you are doing, really

SG: Yeah

SB: And how then certain agendas, certain academic agenda has also become limiting in itself. So, for example, the fact that Europe has had a tradition of having a particular kind of classical and ancient coinage.

SG: Absolutely.

SB: How does that then evolve into devising digital methods and methodologies, which are limiting?

SG: Yeah.

SB: Because elsewhere in the world, the coinages are not the same?

SG (35:32): Yeah, no, I understand what you mean. Yeah, that is quite interesting. And that also, even with the collection that you have here, of course, when it's acquired, it's acquired from a particular collector, but then it is sorted into types, right?

SB: Absolutely.

SG: Yeah, it's sorted into types. And I'm guessing that the way the classification system works, also stands to privilege

SB: Completely.

SG: Yeah, one type of collections over these

SB (35: 58): Also, before you arrived today, we were having a discussion with Julian because he's interested in doing a project like this. And Paul was like, you know, giving his own piece of mind about it. And one of the things that he noticed, noted was that it's, it's all very good, for example, linked open data is excellent. But after at the end of it, the people who are actually feeding the data in are humans, and if they can make a mistake, then the mistakes then get linked as well.

SG: Yeah

SB (36:28): So, it's one thing to actually have access to data, it's completely another thing to actually understand whether the data is of a particular quality or not. Or, indeed, if there are any mistakes that have been created or not. So, it seems to be an ongoing, and probably it will go on till the end of the time. Because it's like, it's, it's, it's going on with this this, you know, the basis of it is to actually make data available, which is it's a it's a kind of noble, you know, supposition, but it has its own sort of afterlife. And this is what Aruna was trying to unpick, which I thought was quite quite fascinating

SG: Yeah it is

SB (37:11): Because, you know, it is it involves a certain degree of Eurocentric pushing of methods or, you know, ideas or whatever else about. The other part is, you know, when when these become, so, for example, if certain methods of digitizing collections were to be applied to coins, which originally belonged to these countries, those countries have been now created into other entities through colonial the colonial era. For example, Gandhara, is sort of covers

SG: Afghanistan, Pakistan

SB: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Northwestern India. So, who are the correct, you know, who are who are the stakeholders here, and how do you know, so there is there is a very distinct imprint of colonialism in those kinds of projects.

SG: So, makes sense. It's more complicated than that.

SB: It's very much complicated. Yeah

SG (38:09): Since since you have an exhibition coming up, when you're sort of putting the coins on display, what are what are sort of like your guiding motivations, like you said that your role is to make the collection accessible.

SB: My personal motivation is to create human stories. So I I'm very much on to the cognitive aspect of numismatics. I do not do rags and bones numismatics, as in weighing coins and measuring coins and looking at dies and that kind of thing. I think the the human connection is of a greater interest to me in how numismatic methodologies can help us in create, explaining, and writing the past is far more important. And I have done lectures on this, I have lectured in CSMVS two years back under under one of the sort of their endowment projects, programs. And it was about all about writing history from coins, because I personally think that a lot of numismatics that is taught in India particularly is only about attribution.

SG: Okay.

SB: So only about

SG: attributing this coin,

SB (39:27): Well, this is how Gupta coins look, and this is what Kushan's coins show and that's about it really. They don't actually tell you how these this data set is important in writing history. What, what how do you actually make it more interesting? If an Indian coin is found in Egypt, what does it tell you, when Egyptian coin is found in India, what does what does that tell you? So those are the kinds of stories that I'm more interested in unpicking personally. That's what that was, is my main interest.

SG: Yeah

SB: So the human aspect of it.

SG (40:00): The human aspect of it. Yeah. And of course, coins are also very tough to display, given their size, etc. But there have been innovations now.

SB: There have been innovations, there have been digital aids, there have been like, in the in the exhibition, we will have, we have taken help of actually, like interventions like tactility, engagement with, you know, a sort of an immersive experience. So for example, in the exhibition, we have a workstation, which is which is going to be called, 'Who would you like to commemorate?' it was about icon making and money. So that's,

people will sit there and hands on and actually make their own banknotes or coins stick them on a piece of on a steel sheet with fridge magnets. So those are the things that that make it make it worthwhile. Also, any any coin exhibition needs a lot of graphic support

SG: Of course

SB: So that's most important.

SG: Yeah, thank you very much. That was really useful.

SB: Pleasure