

SOUTH ASIA INSTITUTE

South Asia Institute aims to cultivate the art and culture of South Asia and its diaspora through local and global collaborations, curated exhibitions, innovative programs, and educational initiatives that aim to engage diverse communities. At the Institute, the common heritage and identity of South Asian Americans are showcased while celebrating the common connections and values that are shared with the universal community at large. Art and cultural expression bring together diverse peoples in a shared experience, resulting in a better understanding and greater tolerance for ethnic differences.

First generation immigrants from South Asia and longtime residents of Chicago, it was the passion for South Asian Art that inspired the founders, Shireen and Afzal Ahmad, to assemble one of the most significant collections of South Asian art in the United States over a period of 50+ years. The collection includes works ranging from early Moghul Miniatures to Modern and Contemporary masterpieces by artists from the region and the diaspora. Having enjoyed living with the works, it has always been their mission to share the collection on a much larger scale and promote South Asian Art and cultural heritage in the United States. It was with that goal in mind that they established the South Asia Institute which officially opened its doors in October 2019, just prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. They are strongly committed to their mission and continuously explore avenues to advance it in meaningful ways.

Co-Founder and President
Afzal Ahmad

Co-Founder and Director
Shireen Ahmad

Exhibition Curator
Laura Kina

Exhibition Manager / Design and Layout
Andrea Moratinos

Shelly Jyoti - Indigo: The Blue Gold
at South Asia Institute, Chicago, IL.
July 22, 2023 - December 16, 2023

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SHHELLY JYOTI INDIGO: THE BLUE GOLD

EXHIBITION GUIDE

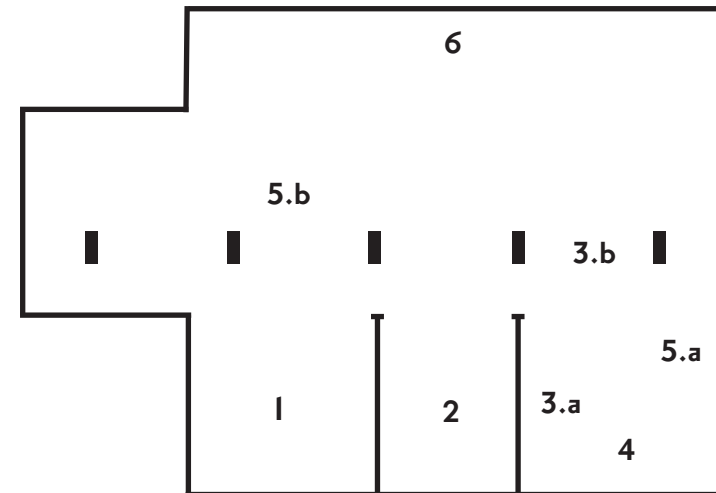
EXHIBITION SECTIONS

Known as the “King of Dyes,” “Devil’s Dye,” and “Blue Gold,” indigo (*Indigofera tinctoria*) in the Indian subcontinent can be traced back to 2nd millennium BCE. Shelly Jyoti’s exhibition, titled “Indigo: The Blue Gold” is a mid-career retrospective of Jyoti’s investigation into the subcontinent’s 18-19th century colonial trade of natural indigo dye. The exhibition focuses specifically on indigo’s long history from several perspectives, including global trade, forced labor, slavery, and indentured labor, migration, and colonization in terms of India’s colonial history. Exhibition contributor Barbara Hanson Forsyth explains, “*Indigofera* originated in Africa more than 150 million years ago and then spread to India where it was first cultivated for use as a dye.” Different varieties of true indigo (not to be confused with European woad) are grown around the world with the earliest known uses of indigo dye dating back 6,000 years ago in Peru.

The exhibition features over forty new artworks along with a selection of Jyoti’s installations, poetry, drawing, fashion, and textiles from the past decade including her signature “Indigo Narratives” series, which traveled extensively across the US and India from 2009–2018. Jyoti’s art uses recurring iconographic symbols including Gandhi’s spinning wheel, fish, and ships to tell the story of indigo. Since 2009, Jyoti, has been creating contemporary hand spun woven khadi textile works utilizing traditional indigo dye and ajrakh (Arabic: blue) reverse block printing techniques that trace back to ancient Indus Valley Civilization (3,300–1,300 BCE). Jyoti’s original textile art is produced in the studios of master craftsmen Juned Ismail Mohamed Khatri, son of the legendary Dr. Ismail Mohamed Khatri, in Ajrakhpur, Bhuj, Gujarat.

Shelly Jyoti is a visual artist, fashion designer, poet, and an independent curator whose work references the cultural context of Indian history. She is trained as a fashion designer from National Institute of Fashion Technology, New Delhi, and she earned her MA in English with American Literature from Punjab University, Chandigarh.

Exhibition curated by Laura Kina, Vincent de Paul Professor, The Art School, DePaul University.



1. TRADE AND MIGRATION

2. THE MOSAIC WALL OF INDIGO:

Red, white, and black make blue

3.a-b INDIGO PLANT, COLOR, AND DYE:

Celebrating the Subaltern with a Nearly 5,000-Year-old Textile Tradition

4. CONTEMPORARY PRINTED FASHION

5.a-b INDIGO FARMERS IN COLONIAL BENGAL AND GANDHI’S INTERVENTION

6. INDIGO AS TRANSNATIONAL GLOBAL COMMODITY