

MOTWANI JADEJA INSTITUTE FOR AMERICAN STUDIES (MJIAS)

SPECIAL

DC TO DELHI

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# NEWSLETTER



## Foreword

This special issue is a celebration of the people who chose to spend their time at the Motwani Jadeja Institute for American Studies (MJIAS), engaging deeply with questions that go beyond the classroom. Each reflection in these pages will tell you a story – of curiosity, discovery and the changes that take place when various perspectives come together to discuss and deliberate meaningfully and critically.

The fellowship experience at MJIAS was designed to encourage intellectual risk-taking. We invited our fellows to not only learn but also to think individually, to question assumptions and to present their work in larger conversations that shape our society. Reading their reflections, we are reminded that academia is not only about scholarship but also about self-understanding.

We were also delighted to host three American Institute of Indian Studies (AIIS) fellows who came to India to study Urdu and learn more about the heritage of our country. Their presence added a unique linguistic and cross-cultural dimension to MJIAS that resonated with our commitment to international dialogue and global learning.

As you read through these reflections, we hope you can feel the open, exploratory and deeply human spirit of MJIAS. Our sincere gratitude goes to the faculty and staff whose guidance made this fellowship experience possible and most of all, to the fellows themselves, whose words will continue to inspire us for years to come.

With warm regards,  
**Raj and Mohan**

**Professor (Dr.)  
C Raj Kumar**

Founding Vice Chancellor,  
O.P. Jindal Global University &  
President, Motwani Jadeja  
Institute for American Studies  
(MJIAS)

**Professor (Dr.)  
Mohan Kumar**

Director General, Motwani Jadeja  
Institute for American Studies (MJIAS) &  
Dean, Strategic and International  
Initiatives, Office of the Vice Chancellor,  
O.P. Jindal Global University



# Reflections by the Fellows



## Mr. Glenn Levine

Senior Fellow, MJIAS;  
Senior Advisor, Washington Global Advisors.

Sometimes what one sees isn't what one imagines will be relevant. One morning, about 6:00AM in Mumbai, I watched a group of newspaper delivery men sitting on the side of a street, assembling stacks of morning newspapers into customized bundles for home delivery by bicycle. At least six languages were visible across different newspapers; some households received newspapers in more than two languages, in addition to English. Two weeks later in New Delhi, I had the honor of touring the Supreme Court's new administrative operations, meeting the Chief Justice, and learning how the Court publishes its decisions in 16 languages, in addition to English.

One observation on the street was of a mundane daily activity that looked like tedium; the other was the most elevated and technologically sophisticated, using AI to make complex legal opinions accessible online to 1.4 billion people. In India, it's not evident what's mundane and what's profound.

My work focuses on both the grand diplomatic and the pragmatic commercial aspects of the India-Middle East-Europe economic corridor (IMEC). Had I come to India as a tourist, I might have noticed the roadside newspaper couriers. Had I come as a lawyer, I might have heard something about the Court's translation services. I'm reasonably confident that, but for the MJIAS Fellowship, I would never have seen the mundane and the elevated concurrently. This observation informs my thinking about IMEC. For the system to function organically, without coercion or fleeting inducements, we want to marry both approaches. My job now is to begin writing for publication and, hopefully, contribute to the scholarly, popular, and business literature that will influence IMEC's emerging diplomatic and commercial arrangements. MJIAS created the chance to see the mundane and elevated, and to learn enough not to proclaim which is which. I am confident that such framing will be helpful to government officials and businesspeople in the US in the years ahead.



## Prof. (Dr.) Stephen M. Grenier

Senior Fellow, MJIAS;  
Faculty Director, Global Security  
Studies Program at Johns Hopkins University.

India's economic rise is well-documented, but I was less familiar with the social, cultural, and political developments taking place there. The Motwani Jadeja Institute for American Studies program provided me time to better understand the opportunities and challenges facing both our countries. One thing is clear. Young people in India, like those in the United States, are challenging their government to expand access to quality education, reduce bureaucratic red tape, protect human rights and the environment, and foster a responsible entrepreneurial atmosphere that will allow technological innovation to thrive. How leaders in New Delhi and Washington respond to their demands will be one of this century's defining storylines.



## Prof. (Dr.) Christelle Scharff

Senior Fellow, MJIAS;  
Professor of Computer Science, Associate Dean,  
and Co-director of the AI Lab at Pace University.

My stay at MJIAS was an enriching experience, both intellectually and personally. I learned a lot about India's legal system, constitution, and government through conversations with officials, scholars, and policymakers, which helped me better understand the complexity of US-India relations. What I appreciated most was the diversity of the group of fellows. The exchanges among us were as valuable as the formal sessions. The schedule was intense but very well structured, and it offered many different ways to approach India's political, institutional, and cultural realities.

My project on generative AI and fashion gained a new depth during this stay. Discussions with experts, specially fashion buyers, opened my eyes to the extraordinary diversity of Indian fashion and the creativity of local designers. Visiting the National Handicrafts and Handlooms Museum in Delhi was a particularly memorable moment and gave me a concrete sense of India's textile heritage and its contemporary vitality.

This experience supports my goal of building long-lasting collaborations between India and the United States. I look forward to staying in touch and continuing these exchanges, and I thank everyone at MJIAS, OP Jindal Global University and Pace University for the opportunity to live this experience.



## Prof. (Dr.) Erik Braun

Senior Fellow, MJIAS;  
Associate Professor in the  
Department of Religious Studies  
at the University of Virginia.

My time as an inaugural fellow in the Motwani Jadeja Institute for American Studies (MJIAS) of O.P. Jindal Global University has offered me factual discoveries and, perhaps more important, fresh insight into the enormous challenge any scholar faces when trying to explain the role of religion and spirituality in such a dynamic and complicated society. Both the former and the latter, held in tension, dovetail for me through two sayings (both curiously related to, of all things, wood). The first is from de Montaigne. He had the phrase "I am human; nothing human is alien to me," engraved on a ceiling beam in his study. Every time he looked up from his work the carved words reminded him of the common humanity he assumed among all people. A person or group might be bizarre or even repellent, but not completely other. Shared humanity still allowed for understanding. Academic thought has moved far from such an assumption, and, in fact, many perspectives today are hostile to such a claim. Yet, in learning of a massive social uplift program in Orissa, a place where I lived twenty-five years ago when such a program did not exist at all, or in listening to geopolitical considerations from the Indian perspective, or in my own research trips to ashrams in the south, that saying Montaigne gazed up at in his study reminds me that academic analysis depends on such a humanistic impulse. It helps me to fathom what the guru Papaji meant when he said, quite seriously and literally, that "Nothing ever happened." The other saying comes from Kant, as translated by Isaiah Berlin: "Out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing was ever made." Spending hours with a biographer in Tiruvannamalai discussing gurus' attitudes toward ethics and in visiting the Ramana Ashram there and the Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, the messiness of human lives is evident. Reality rarely matches the ideal and never seems to over the long haul. (Part of the genius of Ramana, in fact, was his ability to dodge ideals foisted on him and his thought, though this created its own problems for institutionalization.) Religious lives are just as messy as any others, and travel during the MJIAS fellowship has reminded me of the complexity of context in South Asia and people's actions within it.



## Ms. Katheryn Purcell

Fellow, MJIAS;  
Ph.D. candidate at Indiana University and  
Assistant Director of International Services at  
Mississippi State University.

During my stay at MJIAS, I have felt very grateful for the wonderful hospitality that OP Jindal Global University has provided. I have loved the opportunity to connect with Indian academics and government officials, to see new places in and around New Delhi, and to learn more about the soul of India. This is my fourth time traveling to India, but I have never had the opportunity to build such a strong connection to a particular university, as has been the case with OP Jindal. I am excited to plan my next trip to New Delhi and to OP Jindal Global University specifically in order to collaborate on global education research and teaching. I have already recommended this fellowship to a colleague for next year's cohort, and I look forward to continuing this professional connection for years to come!



## Mr. Samuel Gregory Baron

Fellow, MJIAS;  
Foreign Policy Analyst.

My time as a Motwani Jadeja Fellow was both professionally enriching and personally memorable. The fellowship offered rare, close-up exposure to leading thinkers in India's policy community, from conversations with senior government officials to candid exchanges with scholars working on Indo-Pacific geopolitics and strategy. Equally impactful was the generosity and warmth of the Indian people and the dedicated staff at MJIAS, whose care and hospitality shaped my experience day-to-day. Traveling beyond Delhi, to Mumbai for research and to Bhubaneswar for cultural immersion, further deepened my appreciation for India's regional diversity and complexity. Taken together, my participation in the Motwani Jadeja Fellowship not only sharpened my understanding of India's role in the world – but left me with new friendships and lasting insights that will extend long beyond the fellowship.



## Dr. Andrew Huebner

Fellow, MJIAS;  
Historian specializing in transnational  
U.S.-Eastern European relations.

My time with MJIAS has been a phenomenal adventure beyond my expectations. As a historian, I'm marvelled at the places and experiences we have had in a diverse country with both a challenging past and a hopeful future. The dialogues we have across our cohort and over the past few weeks are unlike any experience I have had before - it is not every day one can engage with such an interdisciplinary group of scholars and practitioners. Never in my life would I have expected to be privileged to meet so many bright minds and policymakers, especially as an early career scholar still not used to being called 'Dr. Huebner'! Not only have I made meaningful connections with everyone in this program, I feel energized at the chance to take back with me what I've seen and learned here in India.



## Mr. James Cornelius Diddams

Fellow, MJIAS;  
Managing Editor of Providence:  
A Journal of Christianity &  
American Foreign Policy.

What I enjoyed most about the fellowship was the opportunity to spend sustained time in conversation with government officials, think tank leaders, and academics, whose generosity and intellectual seriousness made the experience deeply rewarding. Each meeting offered not only insight into contemporary policy debates, but a clearer sense of how those debates are shaped by Indian history, institutions, and culture. Being in New Delhi gave those conversations a sense of immediacy and texture that would have been impossible to replicate at a distance. The visit to Odisha was a particular highlight, where encountering an ancient temple added historical and civilizational depth to the modern political and intellectual discussions I was having throughout the fellowship. Overall, the experience was both enjoyable and energizing, and it left me eager to continue engaging with India and the community that MJIAS has brought together around serious exchange.



## Mr. Keerthi Martyn

Fellow, MJIAS;  
Research Assistant with the Indo-Pacific Security Program at the Center for a New American Security (CNAS).

My time in India through MJIAS profoundly shaped my understanding of the country's complexity, vibrancy, ambition, and future opportunity. As someone early in their career and increasingly committed to bolstering the U.S.–India relationship, I moved from solely an intellectual grasp of its strategic importance to a deeper emotional understanding of why these ties matter. Our early immersion in the Indian legal system and constitutional framework highlighted the immense scale and complexity of the judiciary, while also emphasizing how those very traits strengthen Indian democracy and our role as democratic nations. Additionally, as a Gen Z member myself, I was especially struck by the optimism and ambition of India's next generation. The talent, drive, and sheer scale of India's youth population should not be underestimated. This was reinforced through engagements with younger scholars and future practitioners in various meetings, and the MJIAS visit to Bhubaneswar and the Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT) and the Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS). These experiences made clear that India's future, if properly harnessed, remains extraordinarily bright. I was also fortunate to visit Mumbai, where the energy of the city and its role as a “gateway”, highlighted India's growing global potential. Former U.S. Senator William Fulbright once said, “The essence of intercultural education is the acquisition of empathy.” Through MJIAS, I gained an enduring sense of empathy that I will carry forward as an American, a Gen Z-er, and someone committed to strengthening the U.S.–India relationship in the years ahead.



## Ms. Lauren Piper

Fellow, MJIAS;  
Senior Analyst at Rhodium Group.

My time with MJIAS has been very fulfilling and fruitful! The MJIAS team has organized engagements with policymakers, think tankers, academics, and other stakeholders that have illuminated many aspects of the US-India relationship. I am looking forward to the rest of my time at OP Jindal Global University, and to future cooperation!



## Ms. Ruby Scanlon

Fellow, MJIAS;  
Research Associate for the  
Technology and National Security  
Program at the Center for a  
New American Security (CNAS).

I'm absolutely loving my stay so far at OP Jindal Global University and am so thankful for the programming assembled by the MJIAS staff and everything I've learned from the Institute so far. This is my first time in India and I've relished the opportunity to learn so much and so quickly in just the first 2 or 3 weeks. I've also appreciated the opportunity to get to know my fellow cohort members. We all come from such diverse backgrounds, and it's a pleasure to learn more about folks' history, motivations, and goals. I've provided a photo from our visit to the Sun Temple in Orissa – it was great to get out of Delhi and see more of the abundant diversity India has to offer.



## Mr. Kieran Adams

Urdu Language Fellow  
at the American Institute  
of Indian Studies.

At OP Jindal Global University I got to see what is possible at a cutting edge institution that truly values collaboration, bringing together different perspectives and fields as well as countries and continents. Spending time with the MJIAS fellows showed me the many dimensions of fostering these cross-border connections. Between the fellows and the faculty we explored the many ties that bind the American and Indian spheres, as well as what more can be possible. I appreciated both our dialogues about international relations as much as sharing the sweeter aspects of exchange through song and dance. The spirit of global connection at OP Jindal is necessary for our present moment, as we have much more to learn from each other by working towards opening doors instead of closing them.



## Ms. Summer Ann Bordon

Urdu Language Fellow  
at the American Institute of Indian Studies.

I am grateful to all the wonderful folks at MJIAS for facilitating such an engaging weekend with the MJIAS fellows. My experiences at OP Jindal exposed me to sides of both India and the United States that I had not seen before. Attending Republic Day celebrations and visiting India's first and only constitution museum deepen my understanding of Indian history's continued relevance to the present moment. As both our nations face unprecedented times, I especially appreciated the opportunity to speak candidly and compassionately with students, professors, staff, and MJIAS fellows about subjects close to my heart. I also had a blast exploring Delhi, as well as OP Jindal's peaceful campus. Thank you again to everyone who made this weekend so special.



## Mr. Elijah Perkins

Urdu Language Fellow  
at the American Institute of Indian Studies.

Although I was only present with the MJIAS Fellows at OP Jindal Global University for three days, I cannot fully express how overwhelmed I was by the hospitality. With few expectations upon arrival, the MJIAS program at JGU truly set the bar high. Engaging discussions with professors, thorough programming, and the sense of a lively student atmosphere all contributed to a wonderful first impression. Among other things, it was an honor to meet JGU's world-class faculty, experience National Flag Day on campus underneath the monumental tri-colour national flag and visit India's only constitution museum. From touring the university's stunning facilities, discovering Delhi's unique allure, and meeting countless friendly campus dogs, my time at JGU with the MJIAS Fellows is one I will likely never forget.



# Fellows snapshot of their memorable time in India







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**AT**  
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