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Mellon Foundation Area and International Studies Fellowships for Incoming Graduate Students

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For the past two months I lived in Delhi, India, gathering preliminary research for my dissertation on Hinduism and visual culture. During my time in Delhi I was able to narrow the focus of my project, meet with informative scholars, administrators, and artists, as well as locate valuable data. Thanks to the Mellon Fellowship, I was able to live in India's capital and travel to multiple cities to advance my research.

Over the course of the summer, I met with gallery owners and museum officials for the first leg of my project focusing on images of the Hindu goddesses in Indian contemporary art. Administrators at the Delhi Art Gallery and the National Museum of Art were especially helpful. This proved to be useful not only in learning about the history of goddess imagery in Indian art, but I was also fortunate enough to be put in touch with artists working in Delhi who provided insight into the role of the Hindu goddess in their work. Additionally, living in Delhi and visiting other cities I had the opportunity to see in-person the burgeoning world of Indian street art, some of which utilizes religious imagery to deliver political or social justice-oriented messages.

Working with museum administrators was enormously helpful, as it was through these connections that I discovered the Narivada project at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts. This project focused on contemporary Indian women's conception of the Goddess and her role in the everyday life. The project asked female painters from eastern India in Bihar to express their perspectives on the role of the Goddess through the medium of Madhubani painting. Through working with administrators at the National Museum of Art and the IGNCA that I was able locate the paintings.

In addition to my focus on contemporary art, I was fortunate to locate a fascinating poster archive, the Poster Women Archive. The archive focuses on posters made to promote the women's movements beginning in the 1970s. The large archive housed by Zubaan Books has proved to be a major contribution to my research.

I have highlighted three of the most significant findings during the summer, though I visited many more galleries, libraries, archives, and crafts bazaars and spoke with numerous people who helped me gather data. The information I collected and the people I connected with during my time in Delhi challenged and advanced my work in critical and exciting ways. I am deeply grateful to everyone who aided me along the way, and especially to the International Division for awarding me the Mellon Fellowship, without which my research would not have been possible, and I look forward to working with the International Division in the future.