

Dear Friends and Patrons.

With Covid infection cases receding, our lives have started normalizing. People are less afraid to travel or go out to eat and enjoy outdoor and indoor events. However, the Covid pandemic has changed all of us in some ways – perhaps forever. It has taught us the advantages of remote communication via Zoom and webinar. It has given us a pause to think about things that are important in our lives. It has made us more efficient in what and how we do things. Some of these changes will stay with us for a longtime, others may be ephemeral depending on what kind of pain we have to go through in the impending recession, that most of the economists are predicting for 2023.

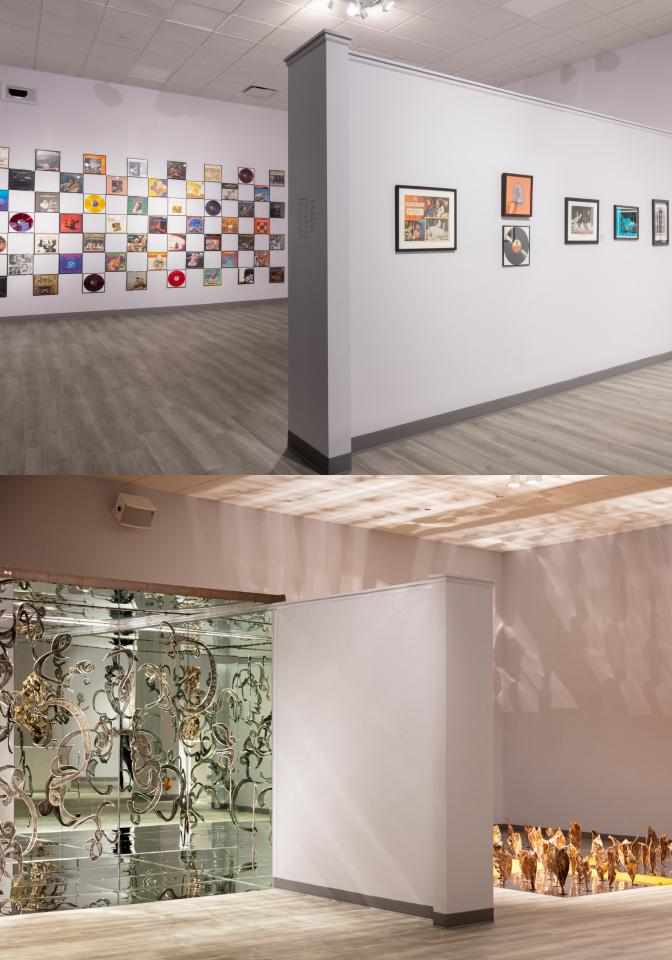
During 2022 South Asia Institute saw an increase in audiences physically interacting with our exhibits and events. We held three new exhibits this year – two, in the first floor gallery and one in the second floor gallery. The first exhibit was featured copper sculptures by Amin Gulgee, along with a performance by nineteen dancers and performers. This immersive performance happened during Chicago Expo week and was very well attended and liked by all. The second exhibit about South Asian Identity, featured portraiture by South Asian Artists from the Hundal Collection.

The third exhibit was about temporary anti memorials to the 75th anniversary of the Partition of British India into India and Pakistan in 1947 and the later independence of Bangladesh in 1971. The exhibition titled "Unbearable Memories, Unspeakable Histories" was a retrospective of Pritika Chowdhry"s experiential art installations. The exhibition's title alludes to the painful and silenced narratives that have been elided from mainstream discourses of the Partition.

Along with these three exhibits our calendar was busy with musical events, film screenings, performances, book readings and cross-cultural events. With the help of DCASE we staged a two day outdoor, music and dance event in the adjoining empty lot, to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Independence of India and Pakistan. This free Freedom Fest event involved multiple South Asian Bands, musicians and dance companies from all over the United States. In continuation of this tradition, we staged a concert by the Greatest Tabla Master ever – Zakir Hussain, in Milwaukee in November of 2022.

2022 was a banner year for grants, sponsorships and individual donations to South Asia Institute. We salute these organizations, corporations and individuals as we strive to build a cultural institution for all - South Asians and others.

Best Regards Team SAI



EXHIBITIONS

RAVI SHANKAR: RAGAMALA TO ROCKSTAR NOVEMBER 2021 - MARCH 2022

South Asia Institute was very pleased to debut the art and music exhibition, "Ravi Shankar: Ragamala to Rockstar - A Retrospective of The Maestro's Life in Music", the first US Exhibition of Concert Poster Art, Photography and Film celebrating Ravi Shankar.

Legendary sitar pioneer Ravi Shankar, whom George Harrison called the "Godfather of World Music", was instrumental in bringing Indian classical music to mainstream audiences in the west. Shankar became a pop culture superstar and a celebrity unlike anyone who looked or sounded like him before. Mentoring high-profile artists like Phillip Glass, John Coltrane, and George Harrison of The Beatles, Shankar's musical diplomacy brought Eastern music and cultural ideology to mainstream Western culture.

The exhibition provided a rare glimpse into the legendary music icon's eventful life and his overwhelming impact on the music world and pop culture. It was an opportunity for audiences to experience the legendary musician's groundbreaking career in music through an unprecedented collection of rare concert posters, psychedelic art prints, flyers, photographs, videos, record covers and personal artifacts.

AMIN GULGEE: THE SPIDER SPEAKETH IN TONGUES

APRIL - JULY, 2022

The South Asia Institute held an exhibition titled The Spider Speaketh in Tongues, that was an encapsulation of Amin Gulgee's practice curated by Adam Fahy-Majeed. This immersive exhibition presented an opportunity to entangle oneself in Gulgee's aesthetic web. His praxis explores unlikely connections to uncover alternative narratives resisting conceptual categorization.

For over three decades, Amin Gulgee has been spinning threads that interweave sculpture (primarily in copper and bronze), performance and curation. His curatorial practice spans over two decades and in 2017, Gulgee was the Chief Curator of the inaugural Karachi Biennale, Pakistan's first biennial. Performance is an integral aspect of both his practice and he has enacted over 30 performances throughout his trajectory.

Gulgee's work had been shown in 47 solo-exhibitions across the world. He has 10 public works, including Reaching for the Skies (2019) in the Rose Garden of the United Nations, New York.

Curated by Adam Fahy-Majeed

BY OUR OWN HANDS / THROUGH OUR OWN EYES / IN OUR OWN WORDS

ONGOING FROM JULY, 2022

By our own hands / Through our own eyes / In our own words, curated by Amelia Hansen was an exploration of identity that aimed to expand the South Asian narrative. In 45 works by 20 different artists from the Hundal collection, it explored portraits of and by South Asians.

Informed by themes of authorship, identity, authenticity, perception, and the gaze, this exhibition sought to raise a variety of questions: What changes when we paint ourselves? What happens when we tell our own stories? How do we construct our own identities through art?

The hope was that by engaging with the topic, it would uncover an -unseen perspective-, an alternative to the conventionalized, perhaps orientalist perception of South Asia held by many Western collectors, cultural institutions, and everyday people, giving a glimpse of what things might look like if made by our own hands, through our own eyes, and in our own words.

Curated by Amelia Hansen

PRITIKA CHOWDHRY: UNBEARABLE MEMORIES, UNSPEAKABLE HISTORIES PARTITION ANTI-MEMORIAL PROJECT

AUGUST - DECEMBER, 2022

Pritika Chowdhry's exhibition "Unbearable Memories, Unspeakable Histories" investigated the Partition of India in 1947, which created Pakistan, and eventually, Bangladesh in 1971. Chowdhry's experiential art installations are temporary anti-memorials to the Partition. The exhibition's title, alludes to the painful and silenced narratives that have been elided from mainstream discourses of the Partition.

The Partition triggered the largest and most rapid migration in human history. Over 20 million people were displaced, approximately 2 million people died and over 300,000 women were abducted during the communal violence that ensued.

Chowdhry's artworks bear witness to the trauma of the Partition and its effects through the lens of diasporic post-memory. Known as the Partition Anti-Memorial Project the body of work seeks to address and examine the many facets of the Partition from a counter-memory perspective.



PROGRAMS Music

JANUARY, 2022

MUSICAL WORKSHOP: LEARNING THE RAVI WAY WITH SITARIST GAURAV MAZUMDAR

This program was presented with our community partners, Merit School of Music, Fulcrum Point New Music Project, and Mandala South Asian Performing Arts. Internationally renowned, Grammy nominated Sitarist and the long-time student of Ravi Shankar, Gaurav Mazumdar, revealed the roots of the raga – a melodic framework for improvisation and composition that plays a major role in Indian music theory. Attendees learned more about the sensibilities of the legendary sitarist Ravi Shankar, basic minor scales translated into raga, and got an understanding of Hindustani classical music.

INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC CONCERT: GAURAV MAZUMDAR

At this concert in honor of his guru Ravi Shankar, the sitar virtuoso Gaurav Mazumdar emphasized his musical recordings. In between compositions, he shared his fond memories of Shankar, who is fondly remembered today as the "godfather of world music"

Mazumdar has been offering audiences around the world compelling experiences with one of the world's most ancient and sacred traditions, Indian Classical Music. He has championed the preservation of the art form through his performances and educational initiatives and like his longtime teacher and guru, the legendary sitarist Ravi Shankar, he has been committed to expanding cross-cultural exchanges through his music. Mazumdar has performed with Daniel Hope, Philip Glass, Kenny Werner and George Harrison and is the only Indian artist to perform at the Vatican in Italy.

MAY, 2022

BENGALI SPIRITUAL SONGS BY OCHIN PAKHI

Ochin Pakhi is a group of young, enthusiastic, spiritually motivated, fun-loving musicians who have presented the folk songs from West Bengal and Bangladesh since September 2017. The first ensemble of its kind in Chicago, they call themselves "Ochin Pakhi", Bengali for "The unknown bird". The phrase was first used by Lalon Fakir (Shah), a prominent Bengali philosopher, mystic, songwriter, social reformer, and thinker, in one of his famous songs, "Khachar Bhitor Ochin Pakhi", and refers to their heart. At their concert at SAI, Ochin Pakhi presented their soulful rendition of music from the Bengal region, which was a spirited introduction to Bengali Qawwali music for many. Their repertoire included songs and poems of the Nobel laureate, poet, and philosopher, Rabindranath Tagore; Bengali philosopher, mystic, songwriter, social reformer, and thinker Fakir Lalon Shah; the national poet of Bangladesh Kaji Nazrul Islam, as well as traditional folk songs of Bengal and several of their own compositions.





FUNKADESI: AN INTIMATE EVENING OF SONGS AND STORIES

During this concert Chicago's celebrated musical supergroup, Funkadesi shared an "unplugged" acoustic set of music from their 25-year repertoire along with new and original material. Deeply rooted in tradition, their music ranges from South Asian classical, folk and film melodies, to West African, Caribbean, Latin, Brazilian, and Reggae blended with American Funk and Soul. They also be shared the story of their long musical journey spanning several generations and discussed their creative process and inner workings.

AUGUST, 2022

FREEDOM FESTIVAL / DAY 1 & 2

The two day South Asian Freedom Festival celebrating the 75th anniversary of the independence of Pakistan and India was a first for Chicago and its residents. The histories of the people and these two countries are complicated and intertwined. The two-day festival featured dance and music programming that included performances by artists of both Indian and Pakistani heritage that showcased talent and tradition, highlighting the shared arts and culture of the two nations while honoring their differences.

The artists included Karsh Kale & Fareed Haque Project, Priya Darshini, Max ZT, Alex Austin, Greg Fundis, Soham Dance Space, Riyaaz Qawwali, DJ Spin Cycle aka Ankur Malhotra, Jina Brass Band Featuring Members of Funkadesi; Ishti Collective, DJ Ase Wonder and Zeshan B.

SEPTEMBER, 2022

CULTURAL CONNECTIONS: HEART OF AFGHANISTAN X QAIS ESSAR

An in-depth view of Afghan culture through music, poetry, art and cultural heritage, the Heart of Afghanistan featured four brilliant Afghan musicians: famed singer and Afghan TV star Ahmad Fanoos on vocals & harmonium, his sons Elham Fanoos on piano and Mehran Fanoos on violin, and Hamid Habibzada on tabla. Unable to perform inside Afghanistan today, the group carries the flame of Afghanistan's rich and complex musical heritage, from its early history to the modern era.

Qais Essar is an Afghan-American musician, based in Phoenix, Arizona. A rabab player and songwriter, he is most noted for the song "The Crown Sleeps" from the film The Breadwinner, which won the Canadian Screen Award for Best Original Song at the 6th Canadian Screen Awards in 2018

RAGAMALA: THE 10TH ANNUAL INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC FESTIVALS

Entering its tenth year, the highly celebrated all night, the annual Ragamala Indian classical music showcase took place at the Chicago Cultural Center in Preston Bradley Hall, under the largest Tiffany Dome in the world, as part of World Music Festival: Chicago.

Ragamala consistently features and highlights the work and artistry of well known established Indian classical artists, alongside younger, exceptionally gifted musicians who are carrying on the long historied musical tradition. Over 100 Indian classical musicians and dancers have performed for Ragamala since its inception and in many cases the artists made their Chicago and Midwest debut performances or created special jugalbandi (duets) projects to premiere at Ragamala.

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CULTURAL CONNECTIONS: EAST MEETS MIDDLE EAST (EMME)

East Meets Middle East (EMME) is a musical collective across continents celebrating the rich traditions of the Middle East and South Asia that brings together related string instruments such as the Middle Eastern oud and the Indian sarod, and percussion instruments like the Indian tabla and Middle Eastern darbuka and riq. EMME transcends boundaries creating musical dialogue that fluidly moves through raga and maqam, tala and iqa- the music theories and rhythms found in South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. The group's message is to inform people, through their music, about the similarities and distinctions between Middle Eastern and South Asian cultures.

From Kolkata, India, Subrata Bhattacharya (tabla) and Abhisek Lahiri (sarod) collaborated with Ronnie Malley (oud) and George Lawler (percussion) in Chicago at SAI to create a cross-cultural palette of improvisations and original compositions.

NAVIGATING BORDERS

Navigating Borders brought two cultures together - Indian and Korean - in one collaborative event. At this event, participants navigated these two country's borders through discussion and a shared celebration of culture. South Asia and Korea share a common history of being divided by an arbitrary line that gave rise to new nations, India and Pakistan and North and South Korea.

A talk by Hardeep Dhillon PhD. was titled: South Asia and the Long Shadows of 1947 A talk by Ji-Yeon Yuh PhD. was titled: Divided Korea: History and the Consequences.

A joint musical concert included a performance by the Ensemble from Korean Performing Arts Institute of Chicago (KPAC) Sandeep Bharadwaj (violin) and Subramanian Krishnamurthy (tabla/percussion).







ZAKIR HUSSAIN WITH NILADRI KUMAR IN CONCERTS

Zakir Hussain, the acknowledged master of the Indian tabla, and Niladri Kumar, the incredibly gifted young sitarist, were at the very top of their form, and together represented the very essence of music: rhythm and melody at this concert . The performance was an opportunity for transcendent flights of musical imagination grounded in one of the world's great musical traditions of South Asia. It was a night of music that pushed the boundaries of traditions.

TALKS

FEBRUARY, 2022

OLIVER CRASKE DISCUSSES "INDIAN SUN: THE LIFE AND MUSIC OF RAVI SHANKAR"

In his recent book "Indian Sun: The Life and Music of Ravi Shankar" (2020), London-based writer Oliver Craske presents readers with the first full portrait of the legendary Ravi Shankar, a musician who influenced—and continues to influence—countless artists. Craske has described the captivating, restless workaholic from his lonely and traumatic childhood in Varanasi to his youthful stardom in his brother's dance troupe, from his intensive study of the sitar to his revival of India's national music scene. Craske was joined in this conversation by award winning Chicago music writer Aaron Cohen (Chicago Tribune, DownBeat, Washington Post, The Nation, NPR).

JULY, 2022

AZRA RAZA: READING POETRY TO READ OURSELVES

Dr. Azra Raza, renowned physician, scientist, and author, returned to South Asia Institute for a Poetry Mehfil. In addition to her numerous scientific accomplishments, she has committed to memory thousands of verses of poetry in Urdu, English, Punjabi, and Persian. Her book, Ghalib: Epistemologies of Elegance, co-authored with fellow Ghalib aficionado, the late Sara Suleri, is an invaluable translation of Ghalib's poetry for both the Urdu scholar as well as the novice.

A resident of Chicago for many years, she has conducted Urdu Mehfils since 1986, regularly featuring many great writers and poets. At the SAI Mehfil, Raza shared a selection of Mirza Ghalib's powerful poetry.

Along with her recitations, she translated and interpretd the traditionally complex lyrics in her distinctive style that has endeared her to audiences all over the US and overseas.

DIPIKA MUKHERJEE: DIALECT OF DISTANT HARBORS BOOK LAUNCH

Dipika Mukherjee moved to Chicago from Shanghai in 2012 and spends a lot of time at the neighborhood Harold Washington Public Library. She is the author of the novels Shambala Junction and Ode to Broken Things, and the story collection, Rules of Desire. With wonder, empathy, and even rage, her new book Dialect of Distant Harbors summons a shared humanity to examine issues of illness and family. Dipika Mukherjee's poems redefine belonging and migration in a misogynistic and racist world. "A grievous vastness to this world," she writes, "beyond human experience."

The Panelists at the event included Faisal Mohyuddinwho is a writer, artist, and educator, along with Mary Anne Mohanraj who is author of Bodies in Motion (HarperCollins) and ten other titles.

NOVEMBER, 2022

CONVERSATIONS AT SAI: AT THE INTERSECTION OF FAITH, CULTURE AND MUSIC

AT THE INTERSECTION OF FAITH, CULTURE AND MUSIC was a conversation between Sonny (Artistic Director of Riyaaz Qawwali) and Aaron Cohen (award winning Chicago music writer) exploring the role of faith, spirituality and heritage through musical expression.

Riyaaz Qawwali is the only American qawwali ensemble - an ethnically and spiritually diverse group of musicians with origins in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh. They are dedicated to honoring the 700-year old tradition of qawwali and promoting this devotional musical form. Aaron Cohen is the author of "Move on Up: Chicago Soul Music and Black Cultural Power" (University of Chicago Press) which looks at the social and musical changes that shaped R&B in Chicago during the 1960s and 1970s. He is also the author of Aretha Franklin's 'Amazing Grace' (Bloomsbury).

SEP-DEC, 2022

ARTIST TOUR WITH PRITIKA CHOWDHRY "UNBEARABLE MEMORIES, UNSPEAKABLE HISTORIES" EXHIBITION

SEPEMBER | OCTOBER | NOVEMBER | DECECEMBER

The artist Pritika Chowdhry led tours through the experiential art installations of her exhibtion "Unbearable Memories, Unspeakable Histories" that investigated the Partition of India in 1947.

Pritika Chowdhry is a sociopolitical, feminist, interdisciplinary artist, who creates large-scale sculptures and site-sensitive installations that reference her personal intergenerational effects of the geopolitical trauma.

She has dedicated her work to cataloging the violence of colonialism/imperialism alongside global acts of resistance.





Dipika Mukherjee











THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE

APRIL, 2022

KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN: COLLABORATIVE PERFORMANCE BY AMIN GULGEE

This was a collaborative live performance with the artist and several Chicago based actors, dancers, visual artists and musicians. During the experiential event installations and projections were employed emotively while the audience were free to move through the space, amidst the sculptures while the performance occurred.

All the senses were engaged in this journey of touch, sight, hearing and smell transmitting information to the brain to help understand the world around us.

Performers: Sam Abrams (The Baptism), Kat Arbour (Trilogy), Ashwaty Chennat (The Warrior), Keny de la Peña (The Immortality of the Crab), Anene Ejikeme (The Interrogation), Sofia Fernández Díaz (Dancing the Egg), Sofia Gabriel del Callejo (Dancing the Egg), Amin Gulgee (The Pilgrimage), Sami Ismat (Remembering), Mallory Iszard (Space Lizard), Shalaka Kulkarni (The Migrant), Jeff Mattson (Trilogy), Hassan Raazee (The Lament), Shiwali Varshney Tenner (Weightless), Amaya Torres (Remembering the Dead), Irene Wa (Spiderwoman), Bryan Waterhouse (The Oracle), Jon Zell (Trilogy).

JUNE, 2022

UNVEILED: WRITTEN & PERFORMED BY ROHINA MALIK

Unveiled: A One Woman Play by Rohina Malik

In this critically acclaimed highly entertaining, one-woman show, that was laced with humor, the award-winning Chicago-based playwright, actress and performance artist, Rohina Malik tackled the issues of racial bias, bigotry and negative stereotyping that continue to trigger violence nationwide.

In this performance titled Unveiled, she demonstrated her power as a storyteller while portraying four Muslim women serving tea and uncovering what lies beneath the veil.

Malik was born and raised in London, England. She has performed in theaters across the United States, in Europe and South Africa.

FILM SCREENINGS

JANUARY, 2022

TENTH DECADE: LIVE IN ESCONDIDO

Cinematographer and director Alan Kozlowski recorded this intimate look at the 91-year-old Ravi Shankar performing in October 2011 at the California Center for the Arts in Escondido. Known for his work on documentaries featuring the likes of Jeff Bridges and Jackson Browne as well as feature films such as Travellers and Magicians, Kozlowski offers a uniquely personal perspective on Ravi Shankar

OCTOBER, 2022

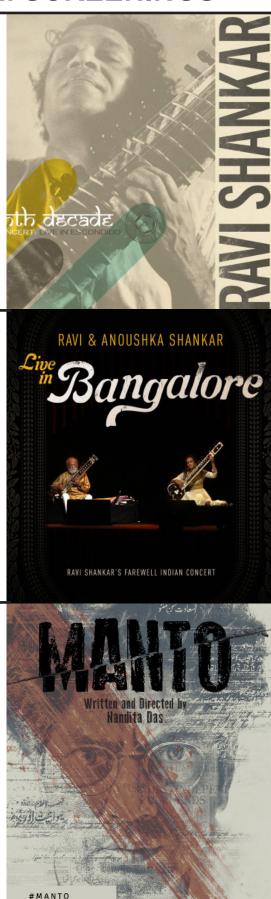
RAVI AND ANOUSHKA SHANKAR LIVE IN BANGALORE

On February 7, 2012, two months before his 92nd birthday, Ravi Shankar performed with his daughter Anoushka at the sold-out Bangaluru Palace Grounds in Bangalore, India. With a set including Raga Yaman Kalyan, Raga Tilak Shyam, Raga Khamaj, and Folk medley, they played for over three hours to the delight of an enthralled audience.

OCTOBER, 2022 ___

PARTITION, SOUTH ASIAN CINEMAS AND MANTO

Manto is a 2018 Indian biographical film based on the life of the prominent author Saadat Hasan Manto, written and directed by Nandita Das. Manto is based on the 1940s post-Independence period of India. The film stars Nawazuddin Siddiqui in the title character of Indo-Pakistani, author and writer Saadat Hasan Manto. Tahir Raj Bhasin plays the 1940s Bollywood superstar Shyam Chadda, Manto's friend, confidant, and inspiration for a number of stories. The film was followed by a talk by Rini Bhattacharya Mehta titled "Partition, South Asian Cinemas, and Manto





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ABOUT 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.

SOUTH ASIA INSTITUTE

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Co-Founder and Director Shireen Ahmad

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