

# Plant Life and Imperialism

## Histories of Cannabis in British India



Survey of India Office, Calcutta. August 1826.

**WEDNESDAY, FEB 8, 2023**

**5:30 - 6:30 PM**

Santa Barbara Eastside Branch Library  
1102 E Montecito Street  
Santa Barbara, CA

Free and open to the public. Light refreshments provided.

Please RSVP to:  
[historyassociates@ia.ucsb.edu](mailto:historyassociates@ia.ucsb.edu)

***Are histories of social structures, imperial systems, and the subjecthood of peoples not also histories of plant life?*** Taking one plant genus, that modern botany labels cannabis, this talk explores how and why we should embrace the proximity between human and nonhuman life as a basic condition for narrating history itself. In British India, across the 18th to the 20th centuries, different forms of cannabis substances animated the history of working classes, gender, race, rural communities, and state formation in ways that also echoed the complex biochemistry and psychoactive variability of cannabis intoxicants. To understand the unfolding of modern British imperialism, the ways in which cannabis straddled its statuses as plant, commodity, substance, form, and matter can be crucial as it sheds important light on histories that have so far remained out of focus.



Utathya Chattopadhyaya is an Assistant Professor of History at UC Santa Barbara. He is a scholar of modern South Asia, British imperialism, and comparative colonialism in world history. His research examines how rural geographies, agrarian social life, sacral cosmologies, imperial print culture, and practices of state formation were continuously shaped by substances and pursuits of intoxication. His work brings histories of multispecies entanglements to bear upon categories of social history, such as class, race, caste, gender and the body using critical materialist and anti-imperial approaches to history.



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