

A Guide to India:

Attending the 2021 International Big History Conference



SSLA at Symbiosis International University, Viman Nagar New Campus, Autumn 2019

SPONSORS:

International Big History Association
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Asian Big History Association
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Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts, Viman Nagar,
Pune, Maharashtra, India

August, 2021



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Pune in South Asia

Welcome

A Guide to Pune and India: International Big History Conference

Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts
Viman Nagar, Pune, Maharashtra, India

1-5 August 2021



Symbiosis International University, Viman Nagar New Campus



Students and mandala at Onam Festival, Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts.

We are delighted that you will be with us in India for the 2021 Big History Conference! Its theme is *Changing the World: Community, Science and Engagement with Big History*. For conference details and registration, please go to the IBHA website at <bighistory.org>. This guidebook is to help you plan your time with us in South Asia.

India is the world's most diverse and complex country, where hundreds of languages and dozens of religions coexist. You will discover variations on many customs. Look at your experiences from an Indian point-of-view. Events that might seem unique to outsiders make perfect sense in a South Asian system. An internal logic runs through Indian life. In many ways, it is a *lassiez-faire* society, which allows maximum diversity within a nation-state system of over a billion people.

Location: Pune

Although the region was long settled, as evidenced by megaliths and prehistoric remains, the modern community of Pune began by the 9th century CE as a farming village at the confluence of the Mula and Mutha river systems. Serving as a base of the Maratha Empire in the 18th century, it fell to the British in 1817. Pune then arose as a centre for India's independence and reform movements, including the work of Savitribai Phule, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Mohandas Gandhi.

Location



Bronze Age megalith, Lohegaon



Pune landscape, Henry Salt, c. 1804



Shepherd and flock, central Pune, c. 1950



Entrance to Shaniwarwada Fortress, c. 1865



Pune as seen from the north side of the Mula-Mutha River

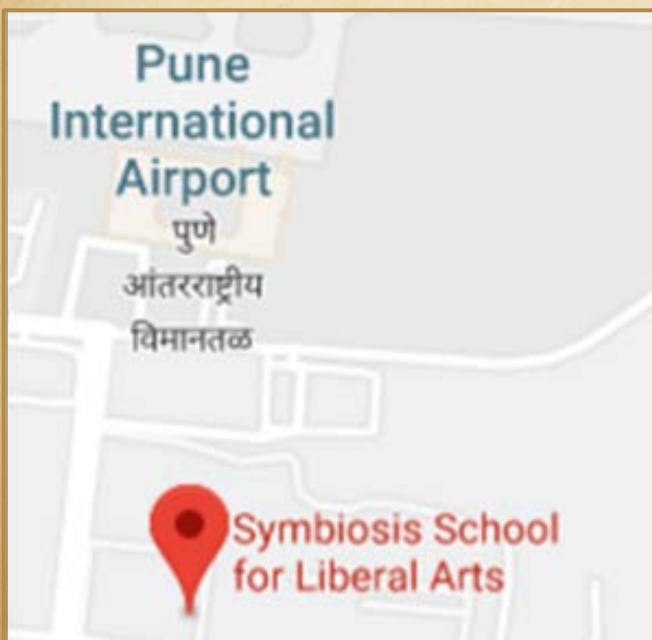
A military garrison and quiet garden city for retirees, Pune had only about a million people in 1970. Expansion of engineering firms, manufacturing companies, schools and the IT industry drew many workers, students and service providers to the city, causing it to grow to over six million residents today and making it India's ninth largest city.

Location

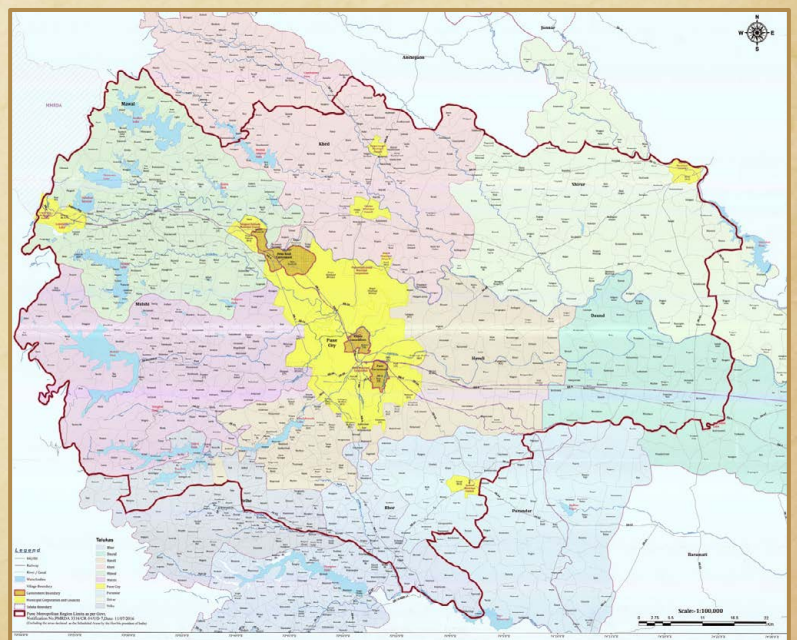
Pune is called the 'Oxford of the East', because of its many universities, colleges, schools, and training facilities. Our conference will be held at one of these new institutions, the Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts: <<https://www.ssla.edu.in/>>. The area in which the conference will take place is Viman Nagar, in the north-east corner of the city. Originally this area was part of the agricultural village of Lohegaon and then became home to one of the first airfields in India. Viman Nagar was only opened to development in the last twenty years and is undergoing rapid growth. SSLA is less than a kilometre from the Pune International Airport.



Downtown Pune, which has more two-wheelers than any other city in the world!



SSLA and Pune International Airport



Pune city map

Location



Symbiosis campuses, Viman Nagar: Old campus



Symbiosis campuses, Viman Nagar: Auditorium



SSLA students at the New Campus

SSLA's students will attend the conference, so panel sessions will be held in our classrooms and halls, while keynote panels, performances and special events will take place in our Courtyard, Rotunda and Auditorium.

Visas | Inoculations and Health

India requires visas, and the process is complex, so follow these suggestions closely and start the process soon. First, go to the Indian government's webpages on visas: <indianvisaonline.gov.in>. You may apply for an e-visa, which is quicker and cheaper, but it will limit your opportunities in India. If you file for a full tourist visa, you have it for ten years.

Attendees should file for a tourist visa; other categories will mire you down in complexity. For the purposes of this conference, you will be engaging in cultural tourism. If, however, your visit is combined with other, personal reasons for being in India, such as work, then you should file for a visa based on those reasons. Note: For those who plan to attend the seminar in Mumbai at the Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education, Tata Institute for Fundamental Research, they will need to apply for a business visa. The forms will ask for details of a resident contact in India, so you are welcome to use me as your link:

Barry Rodrigue

Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts
Symbiosis Campus, S No. 227, Plot 11, 3rd Floor
Law School Building, Opposite Pune International Airport
Symbiosis Road, Viman Nagar, Pune 411014
Maharashtra, India 411014
Tel: +91 020-26551202

Residents of each country have different requirements. The application process in the United States, for example, is done online in a two-part process that requires electronic shifting between the government-approved travel agency and the Indian Consulate. Do not try to do this process through a different travel service - use the government-contracted agency and follow the instructions carefully.

Mozilla Firefox or Internet Explorer need to be used to fill out the online forms. Other search engines, like Google, will crash your application (but not tell you what is wrong). Treat it as a creative experience, be in the moment, make a warm cup of tea ... smile and relax. It is worth the effort!

Inoculations and Health

Check with your national centre for disease control and your personal health centre's travel clinic. You can also access articles such as:

Ramesh Verma, Pardeep Khanna and Suraj Chawla, 'Recommended Vaccines for International Travelers to India', Human Vaccines and Immunotherapies, vol. 11, no. 10, October 2015, pp. 2455-2457, National Library of Medicine, <www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4635693/>.

Although the conference will be in an urban centre, you will arrive during the western monsoon, which opens up chances for mosquito-borne infection. Bring mosquito repellent. Also, if you sign up for one of the post-conference seminars, you may travel in rural areas, which might recommend a wider range of inoculation. Your physician will be your best informant.

The bacterial flora is different here, so your body could react. Do not eat leafy vegetables or salads during the monsoons, only fully cooked foods. Do not drink tap water. The university has water purifiers and coolers from which you can fill your water bottles. You should bring anti-diarrheal medication for chronic conditions, as well as hand-sanitizer. As elsewhere in Eurafasia, Indian toilets are a mix of Eastern and Western styles with a bidet or bucket of water. Carry a small wad of your own toilet paper, if desired, as it's not always available in washrooms outside of the university, especially in rural areas. A good all-purpose item is a small packet of moist wipes. Tampons are hard to find as most Indian women use sanitary napkins, so bring your own.

Inoculations and Health | Registration

The Symbiosis Health Centre is at SSLA, so access to medical officers and physicians is convenient, as well as access to Sahyadri Hospital. There are many pharmacies and chemists shops in the neighbourhood, but they might carry different pharmaceuticals than what you customarily use. A flight surgeon's rule of thumb is that jet lag will last a day for each time zone crossed. Everyone has their own remedies: drink lots of water / restrict fluid intake, stay awake before you fly / sleep before you fly. No matter your recipes, you will feel tired. Arrive early and get rested!



Lowell Gustafson and Lucy Lafitte wait for their lunch, after a twenty hour plane trip and a six hour bus ride, Lonar, Maharashtra, March 2018.

Registration

Registration and enrolment for services and events will be done through the IBHA website <bighistory.org>. There are three separate forms that need to be filled out online.

- 1) Conference registration.
- 2) Room-meals-tour-seminar enrollment.
- 3) Topic abstract, if presenting a paper.

It is imperative to fill these forms out as soon as possible, since this will be an action-packed event and we don't want folks to miss out on anything. Only those who have registered (and made the appropriate payment) will be scheduled in the program. There are a limited number of rooms available through SSLA and limited space at the seminars - so make your reservations now!



First Big History class at SSLA, Spring 2018

Housing | Dining

We have reserved a university-approved guesthouse, the Hotel Silver Crest, near to the conference site. It can accommodate up to sixty people in double-occupancy rooms at about ₹2000 (\$30) a day. The rooms are arranged in suites of three bedrooms with shared sitting room and bathroom. A restaurant is next to the lobby. As folks register for the conference, the Silver Crest rooms will fill up, hence the need to register as soon as possible to reserve a room. As needed, we will reserve additional hostels.



Hotel Silver Crest in Viman Nagar, Pune



If people prefer, they may book their own accommodations separate from the university-assisted housing. There are a full range of hotels available that can be accessed online. It is, however, recommended that rooms be taken near the conference, since getting around the growing city of Pune can be a challenge - there is a lot of traffic and construction underway. Even though the streets are crowded, they are safe.

Dining

Folks may sign up for meals catered by the university dining services, which serves delicious Indian-style breakfast, lunch, tea, and dinner. The cost is about ₹2000 (\$30) a day for four meals. Since the food services must plan in advance, reserve these soon. There is also a canteen and snack bar on campus, where you can get impromptu meals, tea, and juice. In addition, there are restaurants, stores and cafes in the neighbourhood.



Dining hall at Symbiosis during the Onam harvest festival



Seminars

Please see the conference website at <bighistory.org> for seminar details. The costs and fees for the seminars will be managed separately from those of the main conference. The host organizations will coordinate beds, food, local transportation to heritage and ecology sites, guides, etc.

The cost will be different for each seminar, since they will entail different activities. We estimate that the room and board will be similar to the cost at the conference, about ₹2000 (\$30) a day, based on double occupancy. The cost will be paid to the seminar hosts.

To get from the Pune conference to the seminar site of your choice on Thursday, August 6th, everyone will book their own transportation, be it by air, bus, or train. If booked in advance, airline flights can be reasonably priced at under ₹4000 (\$100).

If enough people would like to take an overnight sleeper bus or train to Bangalore, Patna, Shimla, or Bhuj, it is possible, as these sites are within a full day's travel of Pune. Guwahati, however, would require air transportation. We provide contacts for you with two experienced travel agencies below.

Travel Agencies

There are many fine travel agents who you can consult for tickets. Two agents with whom we have successfully worked are shown below. (Note: These are not travel agents for your tourist visa).

Christine Wei, Director
Cross Culture Travel
225 Franklin Street, 26th Floor
Boston, Massachusetts
02110 USA

Office: +01 617 426 3123
Mobile: +01 617 217 3300
<cct@cross-culture.net>

In operation since 1994, Cross Culture Travel is a long-term member of the U.S. Better Business Bureau. Besides managing the firm, their director, Christine Wei, personally leads tours to India, China and other locations around the world.

Shishir Nikam
Black Swan Journeys
Sun Grace Apartments, C-2
Anand Park, Aundh
Pune, Maharashtra
411007 India

Mobile: +91 98221 32092
Email: <shishir@black-swan.in>
website: <www.blackswanjourneys.com>

Travel Agencies | Money

In South Asia, Black Swan Journeys is an experiential travel company that started over eight years ago with the goal to re-imagine travel. In journeying with local chefs, archaeologists, artists and musicians, they specialize in offering experiences that celebrate stories of shared cultural heritage. From tracing pre-historic rock-painting and burial sites in Aneundi to stepping into 300 year-old havelis at the heritage village of Garli to working with artisans on art forms that are endangered, they invite the traveller to encounter and embrace diverse traditions. They offer a range of itineraries customized and curated for traveller interests in art, history, music, cuisine, and culture.

Cross-Culture Travel would be especially helpful for booking flights from your home country to India, while Black Swan Journeys would be helpful within India. Black Swan could also arrange overland travel if preferred, and could set-up a group rate from Pune to the seminars. But to make this happen, folks will have to fill out the conference registration forms soon!



Pune Railway Station

Money

Bring cash. Only larger vendors and hotels take credit cards. For a majority of transactions, most people will accept only rupees. So, change your currency at home or at the airport, since currency exchange on the street in India is time-consuming, due to the government's attempt to curtail illegal transactions. Many overseas banks and currency exchanges do not stock Indian rupees, so it is a good idea to make your exchange inside the airport at your city-of-entry in India.

Electronics and Telephones

India has 220 volt AC power (the U.S. has 110 volt AC). Most cell-phones will work with an adapter. Some electrical sockets will accommodate a variety of international electrical plugs, but, by and large, you should have an Indian / international adapter. The Indian sockets will vary in round or block-pronged outlets. There are many electrical shops here that will fill your needs.

Having a mobile telephone connection in India is useful for transportation services and to stay in touch with people locally. Check to see if your cell phone service offers a plan for India that you could purchase during your stay. The WhatsApp mobile application can be used - when Wi-Fi is available - to make phone calls or video contacts with others in India, or internationally with those who also have WhatsApp. SSIA and the Symbiosis guesthouses have Wi-Fi connections.

Clothing

The seasons in India are different than elsewhere because of the monsoons, which run from June to October in Pune. For the conference in August, it will be about 25°C / 75°F with light winds and rain - quite pleasant. Although it is warm, shorts are worn only by children. Bring light, tropical-weight clothes, as well as ultra-light rain gear, a hat or an umbrella. We are in the Sahyadri Mountains on the Deccan Plateau, so it is not as humid as on the coast. Bring sunscreen.



The Sahyadri Mountains from a trail between the Bhaja Caves and Fort Lohagad.

Clothing

You will be going in and out of air-conditioned spaces, so have a bag or pack where you can keep a light sweater and scarf, as well as light raingear. Wear shoes that you can put on and take off easily, and that have a good grip on the soles. There is a Western urban myth that cowhide shoes and accessories are not to be worn in Hindu countries. Cows are considered sacred and beef is not eaten in Maharashtra, but leather products are common.

For travel to seminars and other locales, carry a compact kit that includes a small, very light towel and toiletries. Washing machines and dryers will not be available, so light clothing is important for quick washing and drying in your room. Indian clothing may be purchased at many stores while in India.



Students on Traditional Day at SSLA



SSLA staff at staff picnic.

A Sample of Creative Materials

These are a few suggestions relating to India and some of our presenters.

The Caravan: A Journal of Politics and Culture, New Delhi:
<<https://caravanmagazine.in/>>

Shanti Bose and Sunanda Bose, dance, music and society:
<<http://www.shantibose.com/home.html>>;
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fsYjtDyKFXg>>



Lewis Dartnell, The Knowledge: How to Build the World from Scratch: <<http://the-knowledge.org/en-gb/>>

Nigel Hughes, Rati Basu, Bipattaran and Ensemble, Monisha and the Stone Forest, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UDrRBwp9vds>>

Richa Minocha, 'Gender, Environment and Social Transformation: A Case of Selected Villages in Himachal Pradesh', Indian Journal of Gender Studies, vol. 22, no. 3, 2015: 335-357.

Barry Rodrigue, Leonid Grinin, and Andrey Korotayev, From Big Bang to Galactic Civilizations: A Big History Anthology, Delhi: Primus Books, 2015-2017:
Vol. I, Our Place in the Universe: An Introduction to Big History, 2015;
Vol. II, Education and Understanding: Big History around the World, 2016;
Vol. III, The Ways that Big History Works: Cosmos, Life, Society and our Future, 2017.

Vandana Singh, The Woman Who Thought She was a Planet and Other Stories, New Delhi: Zubaan, 2013.

Shubhangi Swarup, Latitudes of Longing: A Novel, Noida: HarperCollins India, 2018.

Well Being / Vikalp Sangam is a WhatsApp chain-of-communication on South Asian and Global Ecology and Activism. To join it, contact Miland Wani at Kalpavriksh - Environment Action Group : <milindwani@yahoo.com>. Milind is editor of People in Conservation, which is based in Pune, India.



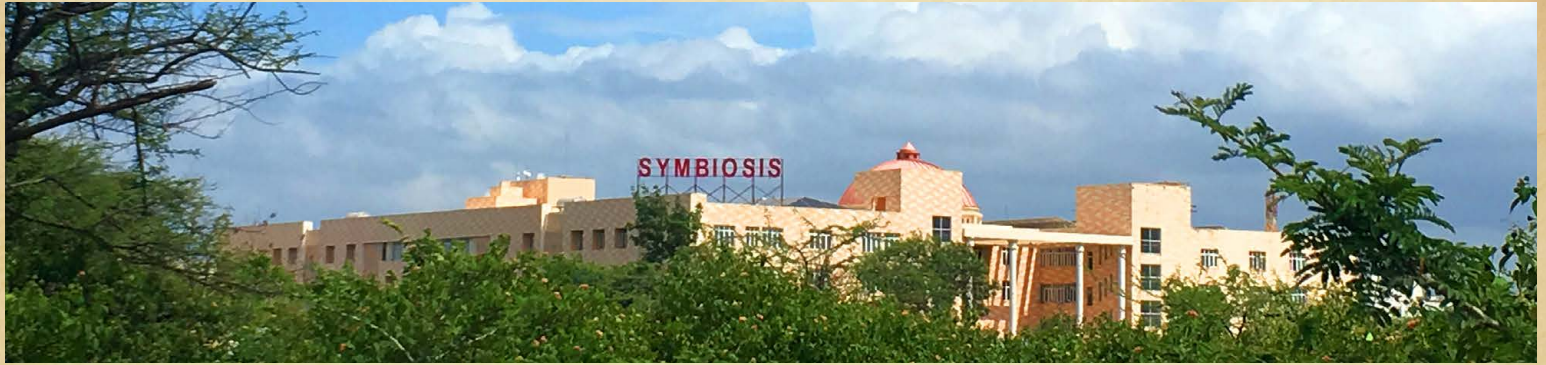
Faculty and staff of the Indian Association for Big History at SSLA: Anju Badhe, Barry Rodrigue, Priya Karve, Afshan Majid.

Editor's Note: This guidebook was assembled by Barry Rodrigue with Orla and Sanat Hazra, Sulakshana Sen, Anita Patankar, Mala Advani, Penelope Markle, Richa Minocha, Lowell Gustafson, and Lucy Laffitte. We welcome new ideas for its improvement. To share your thoughts, please contact Barry Rodrigue at <barry.rodrigue@ssla.edu.in>.

Changing the World: Community, Science and Engagement with Big History

5th Global Conference of the International Big History Association & Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts

1-5 August, 2021



SSLA at Symbiosis International University, Viman Nagar New Campus, Autumn 2019

Big History seeks to understand the integrated history of the cosmos, Earth, life and humanity, using the best available empirical evidence and scholarly methods.



International Big History Association

The International Big History Association's Fifth Global Conference, in collaboration with Symbiosis International University, will be held in the summer of 2021 in India. Its theme focuses on *Changing the World: Community, Science and Engagement with Big History*. The IBHA has held conferences on meaning, teaching and research, and so now will address issues of community and change around our planet. In other words: How can big history help us in its application to world issues?



SYMBIOSIS SCHOOL
FOR LIBERAL ARTS

India is a powerhouse of innovative development, with cultural and intellectual traditions reaching back thousands of years. Symbiosis is an embodiment of this heritage and enterprise, a truly modern synthesis. Situated along the Mula-Mutha River, its six campuses in the city of Pune lie on the Deccan Plateau, 600 meters above the Arabian Sea.

Founded in 1971, Symbiosis was begun with the intent of providing a 'home away from home' for African and Asian students studying in India.



First Big History class at SSLA, Spring 2018

Its students come from more than 85 countries, so, appropriately, its Sanskrit motto is वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् - Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam - 'The World is One Family'. A not-for-profit university, Symbiosis serves almost 30,000 students.

Our conference will be co-sponsored with the Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts (SSLA), one of the university's most innovative programmes.

Launched in 2011, SSLA was the first liberal arts school in an Indian university and remains the only four-year degree and honours programme. SSLA is home to the India Association for Big History, which formed in 2016. Two years later, the first course in Big History in South Asia began at SSLA, growing out of its Anthropology Department.

Today, the course is co-taught as 'Humanity and Big History: Our Challenge for Survival' by an historian and a physicist, and is required for all third-year students. In March 2018, SSLA sponsored the First Annual Conference of Interdisciplinarity and Big History in co-operation with the Asian Big History Association, J.F. Oberlin University (Tokyo), and the IBHA.

Other sponsors of the conference include the Asian Big History Association and the Indian Association for Big History. We will also be hosting a digital component of the conference for those who cannot attend in person.

Accommodations

Symbiosis-approved guesthouses near the SSLA campus will be available at reasonable rates. Double-occupancy rooms will run at ₹2000 (~\$30) a night, with three meals a day available at the

Symbiosis dining hall for an additional ₹2000 per day. Rickshaws as well as cabs are available, and Symbiosis will provide a bus at the start and end of each day.

Schedule

People will arrive on the weekend of July 30th. The Pune International Airport is less than a kilometer from the campus. You can check into your room, then relax and socialize with friends and colleagues. On Sunday mid-day, we have arranged for a tour of the city for ₹1800 (~\$26), followed by tea and a presentation orienting you to India.

The conference panels the panels will run from August 2nd through 5th. Throughout the conference, there will be interactive plenary panel presentations, lively conversation time, warm tea and good Indian meals. On Wednesday afternoon and evening, there will be a festival on the theme of the engaged creativity of Asia. On Thursday morning, August 5th, we will have an IBHA /ABHA members assembly.

After the members meeting on Thursday morning, we will break into groups that will fly to different parts of India for theme-based interactions. The three-day seminars that we have arranged thus far with host organizations are:

- **Mumbai, Maharashtra:** 'Science and Changing Society'. Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education, Tata Institute for Fundamental Research <www.hbcse.tifr.res.in>
- **Bhuj, Kutch, Gujarat:** 'Landscape and Adapting Heritage'. Kachchh Heritage Arts Music Information Resources | Khamir <www.khamir.org>



Discussion at the Fireflies Intercultural Centre, Dinnepalaya, Karnataka, June 2018



Indian big historians and community activists, Spring 2018

- **Patna, Bihar: 'Agrarian Life and Renewal.'** Tarumitra: Friends of Trees <www.tarumitra.org>
- **Guwahati, Assam: 'Indigenous-Tribal Heritage and Innovation'.** All-India Indigenous-Tribal Federation <<https://tinyurl.com/AITF-org>>
- **Bengaluru, Karnataka: 'Eco-Spirituality and New Global Needs,'** Fireflies Intercultural Centre <www.pipaltree.org.in>
- **Shimla, Himachal Pradesh: 'Gender, Environment and Social Transformation'.** Jan Abhiyan Sanstha (JAS) [Society for People's Initiatives] <www.jasindia.org>

The seminars will take place August 7th-9th. Each location can accommodate up to about 30 participants. Attendees will stay at a local organization that is active in local change-making and will learn about their activities, including visits to their field stations. There will also be visits to heritage sites and trekking in ecological areas, in addition to panel presentations by conference and community members.

The seminars are located near major cities, so participants can fly home from there on August 10th, or proceed to other destinations. Travel into and out of India as well as between Indian cities is reasonably priced, especially if reservations are made well in advance. We will provide links to experienced travel agents.

Our Ecology Committee will make an energy audit and design projects to mitigate conference impacts. These activities will include plantation of indigenous flora and waterway enhancement; they will continue as community-service projects. There also will be child care at the conference, with activities related to big history and community. In addition, we will provide a guide-book about India, with information on visas, inoculations and other essential knowledge.

We must begin reserving rooms and meals, arranging transportation, and allocating slots for the excursions. So, please go to <bighistory.org> and fill out the form to let us know if you would like 1) SSLA arranged housing or meals, 2) the tour of Pune, and 3) which seminar you might like to attend. If you plan to submit a paper, let us know your paper's title and provide a draft abstract, as the conference manual is in development. You do not have to pay for these items until you arrive in India, but by filling the forms now, it will help us plan for your visit with us!

We look forward to seeing you at the 2021 Big History Conference in Maharashtra!

Warm wishes,

Barry, Richa, Oishika & Sulakshana
Organizers of the 2021 Conference

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Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts, Symbiosis International [Deemed University] | Pune, Maharashtra, India | <www.ssla.edu.in>

Optional Post-Conference Seminars



A map of India with six locations marked by red circles and letters A through F. Red lines connect these markers to corresponding seminar photographs and descriptions on the right. A red star marks Pune in central India.

A

B

C

D

E

F

PUNE

F

JAS - Shimla, Himachal Pradesh
Gender, Environment and Social Transformation
<www.jasindia.org>

E

AITF - Guwahati, Assam
Indigenous-Tribal Heritage and Innovation
<<https://tinyurl.com/AITF-org>>

D

Tarumitra - Patna, Bihar
Agrarian Life and Renewal
<www.tarumitra.org>

C

Fireflies-Bengaluru, Karnataka
Eco-Spirituality and New Global Needs
<www.pipaltree.org.in>

B

Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education / TIFR - Mumbai, Maharashtra
Science & Changing Society
<www.hbcse.tifr.res.in>

A

Khamir - Bhuj, Kutch, Gujarat
Landscape and Adapting Heritage
<www.khamir.org>