

CALL FOR PAPERS

Unsettling environments:

People, land, water and air in India

A symposium convened by

Te Pūtahi Rangahau o Inia ki Aotearoa | New Zealand India Research Institute

Dates: 17-18 February 2027

Venue: Te Herenga Waka | Victoria University of Wellington

This symposium invites scholars working on India, from any disciplinary background in the humanities and social sciences, to think rigorously and concretely about land, water, and air, not as abstract environmental categories but as the ground of human life, shared, contested, managed, imagined, and fought over. We are interested in how people in India relate to these elemental resources across a range of registers: as commons held and governed collectively, as sites of enclosure and dispossession, as sources of livelihood and aspiration, and as grounds of exclusion where access is denied by caste, class, gender, or policy. The symposium takes seriously both the material stakes of resource governance and the ways in which communities understand, narrate, and contest their relationship to land, water, and air.

Papers should be grounded in specific places, communities, or practices. We are especially interested in work that brings environmental and ecological questions into conversation with questions of equity, rights, and aspiration, and that resists treating “India” as a single undifferentiated unit. Possible regional foci include, but are not limited to, Uttarakhand and the Western Ghats, river basin communities across peninsular India, and urban air and water governance in cities such as Chennai, Bangalore, Delhi, Kolkata.

Themes

Contributions may address any of the following, or combinations of them:

- Land — tenure, ownership, dispossession, agrarian change, forest and common land governance
- Water — rivers, groundwater, irrigation, flooding, scarcity, and customary rights
- Air — pollution, breath, heat, health and the atmospheric dimensions of environmental precarity
- Resource commons — collective governance, enclosure, and the politics of access and exclusion
- Livelihoods and labour — the people whose lives are organised around land, water, and air
- Aspirations and exclusions — who is included in or shut out of resource futures
- Environmental governance and equity — law, policy, activism, and community-led management
- Infrastructures of extraction — data centres, energy, and water demand, and their burden on already-stressed environments
- Resistance and refusal — movements and practices that contest dispossession and enclosure
- Memory and archive — how communities record their relationship to place and resource over time
- Co-production of knowledge — participatory, ethnographic, and community-based research methods

Publication

This symposium is designed with publication as a key deliverable. Papers presented at the symposium will be considered for an edited volume or journal special issue arising from the event. Presenters should be prepared to develop their papers for publication following the symposium. Further details on the publication plan and method of selecting papers for publication will be confirmed in the acceptance notification.

Who Should Submit

We invite submissions from scholars based in Aotearoa New Zealand, including postgraduate researchers. We particularly encourage PhD candidates and recent doctoral graduates to submit. Limited funding support to cover travel and accommodation expenses will be available to PhD scholars enrolled in a New Zealand university and to those who have completed a PhD degree within the last year from a New Zealand university. However, as funding is limited, there will be a selection process.

We also welcome papers from overseas scholars but will not be able to provide any funding for their travel to Wellington. We may however offer modest accommodation to a limited number of overseas participants, subject to a selection process.

Format

The symposium will run as a focused one-and-a-half-day event. In keeping with its aim to be more interactive and dialogic than a conventional conference, we invite contributions suited to a range of formats, including:

- Standard papers (20 minutes)
- Roundtables organised around a shared regional, methodological, or policy focus

Submission details

- Abstract length for standard presentation: 200 words, including a brief note on method and regional focus. A separate short author bio of 100 words, including PhD status, should accompany the abstract.
- Roundtable or panel proposals: 200 words, including names of proposed participants; a separate statement containing short bios of the participants (200 words)
- Submission deadline: **14 September 2026**
- Notification of acceptance: 30 September 2026
- Submission platform: email to: India-Research@vuw.ac.nz
- Enquiries: Dr Sita Venkateswar s.venkateswar@massey.ac.nz; Dr Jane Buckingham jane.buckingham@canterbury.ac.nz; Dr Nayantara Sheoran Appleton nayantara.s.appleton@vuw.ac.nz

Costs and attendance

There is no registration fee for the symposium. But travel funding cannot be guaranteed for all participants. We have limited funding, and priority will be given to PhD students. Scholars based in Aotearoa New Zealand are encouraged to apply for funding from their own universities. In case there is a problem, they may contact the conveners who can offer limited support. Overseas participants will have to secure their own funding.