WHY EUROPE GREW RICH AND ASIA DID NOT

By Erum Sattar, SAI Intern; SJD Candidate, Harvard Law School

In the first panel of the Symposium, Prasannan Parthasarathi, Director, Professor and Director of Graduate Studies, Boston College discussed his research and findings from his new book, *Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not: Global Economic Divergence, 1600-1850* in a comprehensive and wide-ranging presentation. Parimal Patil, Professor of Religion and Indian Philosophy, Chair of the Department of South Asian Studies, Harvard University moderated the discussion. Professor Parthasarathi shows that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, both Europe and India had high standards of living and commercial sophistication with highly developed market economies, advanced contracting systems and the use of money. At the time, India was a sink for bullion attracting a quarter of global volume in exchange for its high quality cotton exports. India was the leading exporter of cotton products and Europe was looking to outcompete it. Ecological pressures in the form of deforestation in England, led to the adoption of coal to be adopted in the British isles which spearheaded the divergence between the two regions. There is evidence that till the nineteenth century, India was heavily forested in comparison.

Professor Parthasarathi shows that it was the adoption of coal in Britain that produced innovations in the steam engine and iron including the use of water pumps to pump water out of mines and it was only when coal was applied to the smelting of iron that led to a metallurgical revolution. His research shows that it was only with the advent of colonial government under the expanding role of the East India Company that did not protect domestic suppliers with a host of measures and wanted to keep India open to British exports that the acquired skills of India’s manufacturers were dissipated leading to the start of the great divergence.