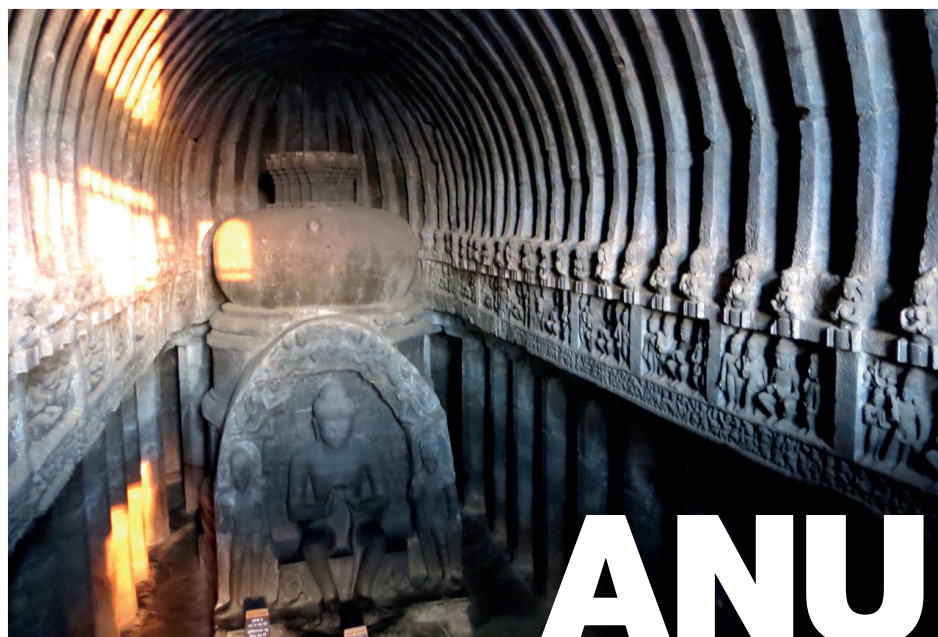




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## WORKING WITH THE CARPENTERS' CORD: STORIES IN THE SHAPING OF ETHNOGRAPHY

**Wednesday 18 September**  
**9.30–11am**

### **Speaker**

Kirin Narayan,  
Australian National University

### **Location**

Marie Reay 3.03, Kambri Precinct  
ANU

**Registration not required**

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Sciences  
Asia & the Pacific

The process of making ethnographic texts is sometimes described in terms of “crafting” with particular “tools.” Might insights gained from actual craftspeople help us? Drawing on fieldwork among hereditary carpenters in Western India, I explore a key tool: the sutra, that refers both to an artisans’ cord and to coded aphorisms. Carpenters, who are known as Suthars, derive their designation from Sutrardhar, “the holder of the sutra”.

While Sutrardhars were historically designers and supervisors for groups of craftsmen, in Sanskrit theatre, the Sutrardhar was a narrator who connected a play’s diverse parts. I follow these intersections of meaning around the carpenters’ cord to explore the uses of narrative in ethnography. Closely attending to the meanings of tools and processes of making in a different domain, I argue, can bring insights to writing ethnography through both correspondences and the limits of comparison.

**Kirin Narayan** (PhD University of California-Berkeley) is Professor of Anthropology and South Asian Studies in the College of Asia

and the Pacific at the Australian National University. Her interest in narrative and ethnography has yielded books in several different genres: *Storytellers, Saints and Scoundrels: Folk Narrative in Hindu Religious Teaching* (1989), a novel, *Love, Stars and All That* (1994), *Mondays on the Dark Night of the Moon: Himalayan Foothill Folktales*, in collaboration with storyteller Urmila Devi Sood (1997), a family memoir, *My Family and Other Saints* (2007), *Alive in the Writing: Crafting Ethnography in the Company of Chekhov* (2012), and *Everyday Creativity: Singing Goddesses in the Himalayan Foothills* (2016). Her current research with Ken George has been supported by an ARC Discovery Project Award and explores the intersections of religion, artisanship, narrative, creativity, and technology in India.

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