

Editorial



Understanding south Asian cultures through religion, language, symbols of authority, hybrid films and post-colonial influences

Whether it was under Hindu, Muslim or European rulers the South Asian cultural society represents a curious mixture of a number of religions, languages, norms and beliefs. Like Southern Europe, South Asia is criss-crossed by a number of races like the Australasians, Dravidians, Aryans, Mongolians coming as far as from China and the Middle East who settled in the area centuries ago. Therefore even after almost 70 years of Partition of India and Pakistan or 47 years of independence of Bangladesh, the cultural expressions of any part of the sub-continent continues to represent a delicate blend of a pluralist society transcending the boundaries of religion and native culture.

This issue begins with a well observed and thoughtful commentary by M J Warsi who debates convincingly that 'culture should be an integral part of language pedagogy'. Based on the author's rich experience of being part of both south Asia and the western world (mainly in the United States of America), provides some useful thoughts from the current emphasis of teaching second language in US elementary Schools. Warsi examines the rationale behind learning other language other than their mother tongue (or for those diasporic population). He debates that the traditions and values of culture allows us to understand the idioms of 'other languages'. Warsi cites examples of the importance of lunar calendar for both Hindu and Muslim religions which has resulted in so many writers and poets in both religious literature concentrating on the subject. The importance of understanding cultural heritage in understanding foreign languages is well illustrated by the author. Taking south Asian case study Warsi argues that even watching Bollywood cinema and TV serials (which is now mushrooming in all satellite channels) could significantly improve the diaspora populations understanding of south Asian languages.

Balkrishan Shivram's article 'The authority of the Padshahs in Sixteenth Century Mughal India' provides a critical appreciation of Mughal theory and sovereignty through the analysis of symbols of authority. The well substantiated research article analyses the power of authority. Shivram attempts to explain how the Mughal rulers claimed authority over its subjects and portrayed as guardians of the Islamic revelation of the 'Sharia' law. The article examines the lack of constitutional check and its implications on public relation leading to the legitimization of the rulers for both Muslim and the Hindus. There is a good discussion on the mechanism of the

unique Mughal court (Durbar). In terms of cultural understandings, the relationship between the Emperors and the subjects of diverse and vast south Asian regions (from Rajasthan to the Murwar) is aptly discussed in this illuminating paper.

Following Shirran's historical article Rafiqul Islam's reflects on the sensitive topic of 'Islam in Bangladesh society' from contemporary context. Here the author focuses on the development of Islam in the region of Bengal from a historical perspective (from Hindu, Buddhist to the Modernist colonial period). Islam examines the distinctive form of Islam in this region due to its remoteness from the seat of the influential Moghul period (located in Delhi). The significant aspect of conversion to Islam which lasted for hundreds of years is also discussed. However, the author rightly highlights the mystic tradition of 'Sufism' and the role of 'Sufi missionaries' which became popular in Bengal and continues to draw hundreds of people to a number of 'Sufi shrines' in the region. With extended background context the author digs deep into the emerging religious practice and the use of Islam in the current political practice of Bangladesh.

Our final article is the second part of Anna Claydon's rigorous research on 'British-south Asian cinema and identity' where the author continues to provide insights into complex identification of British south Asian identity with their multiple cultural influences (including post-colonialism). While the focus still remains with the British south Asian Sikh film maker Gurinder Chadha, Claydon takes the discourse with American identity along with the parallels with Jane Austen's 'pride and prejudice'.

M J Francis provides the book review of Archana Verma's volume 'Culture and Visual Flax at Historical Bagh in Central India' (2007) and Ali Tirmize compiles a report on an international conference on 'Islamic Art and Architecture' held at Lahore (2008)>

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