

MONSOON

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Social media has sparked a renaissance of new ideas. Facebook news feeds and Twitter timelines are constantly flooded with photos, videos and articles concerning both local and global issues. UNC Monsoon aims to ride this wave and produce marketable online and print content that brings South Asian voices to the forefront. Prior to Monsoon, UNC Sangam sponsored Diaspora, a campus magazine devoted to South Asian affairs. However, we felt that Diaspora was in need of a rebranding in its mission and name.

Monsoon's mission is to creatively foster dialogue about all eight South Asian countries: Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, Maldives, Afghanistan, and Bhutan. It seeks to fight both the misrepresentation and underrepresentation of South Asia in mainstream media by producing original content that informs, entertains, and also fosters discussion.

The problem UNC Monsoon addresses is the symbolic annihilation of South Asians by the mainstream media. Our select portrayals, ranging from convenience store clerks to cardiologists, have masked our true identities. The lack of media coverage on South Asian current events has perpetuated the obscurity the subcontinent holds in the minds of most Americans. Providing a platform for South Asian voices to share real stories will reveal the immense diversity our community boasts.

Thank you for taking the time to read our magazine.

Sincerely,

Anisha Padma and Parth Shah

Monsoon Co-Editors

As I sit looking out at the rain-lashed Mumbai skyline, I am reminded vividly of how water can be a destructive force. Roads are underwater, umbrella-scalpers throng the stoplights, mosquitoes swarm, and landslides plague the slopes of the Western Ghats. But in the northern plains the monsoon has yet to arrive; crops wither under the searing sun, rice-fields turn into mudflats, rivers and canals are reduced to a green trickle. South Asia is a continent of water extremes: without the Himalayan glaciers and the monsoon rains much of India would be an uninhabitable desert. But every spring, hot air rising from the northern mountains pulls warm, moist air inland off the Indian Ocean. By June and July dark clouds have overspread most of the subcontinent and torrential rains replenish the great South Asian rivers, bringing new life to the fields and cities of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

It is this complex, dual nature of water that finds its way into South Asia's legend, lore, and literature. The performing arts in South Asia incorporate manifold images of water. There are bhajans that praise water deities like the river goddess Ganga and the rain god Indra. There are Sufi and Bhakti songs by medieval poet saints that narrate the riverside romances of Radha-Krishna and Sohni-Mahiwal, and transform human love into an image of divine love. Indian classical dance drama portrays the descent of the Ganga from heaven, the churning of the cosmic sea, and the peacock dancing at the onset of the monsoon rains. The Muharram odes of the Shi'i describe in poignant detail the thirst

STREAMS OF SPIRIT

BY AFROZ TAJ



of the martyrs on the banks of the Euphrates. And Miyan Tansen, the legendary composer from the court of Mughal Emperor Akbar, is credited with the ability to make rain by performing his raga Malhar.

The social fabric of India itself is described in reference to the two mighty rivers Ganga and Jamuna that flow parallel across hundreds of kilometers of north India to finally join at the Sangam confluence in Allahabad. The Ganga is sacred to Hindus from the moment it emerges from beneath the Gaumukh glacier, while the Jamuna served as the main

artery of Indo-Islamic kingdoms, reflecting the dome of the Taj Mahal and the bastions of the Red Forts of Delhi and Agra. As these two radically different civilizations merged over the past millennium, we speak of the development of "Ganga-Jamuni" culture, the rich mixture of the Hindu and Muslim arts that reflects centuries of cross-inspiration.

Portrayals of water in art profoundly deepen our cultural understanding of the role of water in our societies and lives. South Asia faces pressing water issues: most of its major rivers cross one or more international boundaries leading to conflicts about usage rights and flood control. Sacred rivers draw millions of pilgrims seeking redemption, and as a result, are critically polluted but still considered spiritually pure. Global warming has chased the Himalayan glaciers further up into the mountains; the day may not be far off when they disappear entirely even as mega-cities downstream fail to plan for future growth in water needs. In short, water divides as well as unites, pollutes and cleanses, takes life and restores it afresh.

Photo Courtesy of Afroz Taj

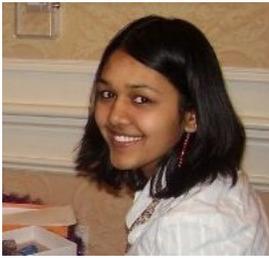


Dr. Afroz Taj is an Associate Professor in Asian Studies at UNC and host of Geet Bazaar.

*This piece was first published in *Connections*.

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SARVANI GANDHAVADI

It was 12:30 am, I arrived at Anna International Airport in Chennai. The hot sticky air reached my skin as soon as I stepped out of the cool AC enclosed building. Cows on the highway, honking, mosquitos, colorful fabrics, power cuts and fresh green coconuts are all characteristics exclusively of India. The steady chugging of the overnight train rocked me to sleep on the journey from Anantapur to Hyderabad. When I woke up, the mountainous landscapes were replaced by people getting ready to perform daily chores in the backyards of small villages. What words can I use to describe one of the most dynamic and historically rich cities in India? The amount of activity overloads our senses and the struggle between autos, motor bikes, cars, buses and pedestrians never ends. Everyone is traveling with a purpose in waves of unidentifiable masses. It's no wonder traveling 16 kilometers (10 miles) seemed like an impossible feat but became quickly worthwhile after reaching the Byrraju foundation office. The site, made for hundreds of workers, was equipped with every resource necessary for full on rural transformation. The American style lecture halls, posters of facets in rural life, individual cubicles all existed as remnants of what used to be a lively thriving community dedicated to helping rural villages. I spent the first two weeks visiting 8 villages near the north of Hyderabad in the Ranga Reddy district with clinics run by Care Hospitals and Byrraju Foundation. A small room with two desks, a examination table, a cabinet and a fan made up the contents of each clinic. A nurse who works from 9-5 everyday of the week except Sunday and a MBBS qualified doctor care for the patients for free. Speaking of free, lets talk about how cost efficient these clinics are. Even clinic with the highest montly expenditure spent about 15,000 rupees which is \$250. This clinic is able to provide a

month's worth of health care to low income individuals at the same rate of some medications or one health check up in the US. The clinics used to be completely funded by an industry called Satyam Computers but when the company went under, Care Hospitals took over. Along with the transfer also came associated financial burdens. Medicines used to be completely free when Satyam Computers was still involved but it also lead to patients misusing, throwing away or disregarding medicines. For that reason, the clinics started charging 5 rupees so patients would feel like they were investing in their health. Though Care Hospitals covers a large portion of the finances needed to run the clinics there is still a portion that requires steady funding. Donations are fine but how long will a donor continue donating? The individuals running Care Rural Health Mission figured that if they increased the prices of the medicines, but at a rate still lower than outside sources, then the cost to run the clinic can break even with the amount of money earned from the sale of medicines. So the end goal changed from serving individuals in the communities who have nothing to self sustaining the clinic. The concept seems very effective at first but it is also dependent on a crucial component: patient volumes. You would think the free services that the clinic is providing would attract an overload of patients but that was not the case. After learning this background information on the clinics, I decided to shift the focus of my project from simply prenatal and postnatal surveys to a more general understanding of where these community members go for health care. I went around the community in each of the 8 villages with guidance from the nurses. Each village has its own unique population and configuration. For example I found the village called Devar Yamjal was much more close knit and filled with younger married couples where the women are housewives. On the other hand, due to the proximity to companies, the women in village of Dulapally have a job outside of just housework. After a few weeks of being in the communities, I learned that anemia, muscle weakness, vaginal discharge, gastric issues, diabetes and hypertension were the main problems the women faced. The Dulapally clinic became a casual meeting place for the women to come talk to the nurse between their household chores about the latest

town gossip about who's getting married or that one girl who got her period (which is a huge deal by the way). Through these stories I learned a lot about the life of a Indian village woman. I met one lady who was stuggling with very, very high diabetes and nerve pains because the doctors could not figure out what was wrong without surgery. Even the surgery only has a 50% chance of working. For individuals like her, who's medical problems are beyond the clinic's capacity to treat, they have to go to hospitals. Indian biases also came into play such as assuming the clinic was run by the government instead of privately owned by Care Hospitals and in India anything government run has a reputation of being lower quality. I also found that when the nurses dispense medication there was a lack of transferring knowledge about the medicines and illnesses to the patient. The pills would be identified by color and size as the nurse asked the patient if they were taking the small pill, white pill, round pill or green pill. The nurses and doctors did some couching on what to eat and not to eat but only through verbal communication. Currently, the nurses, who already work 48 hours a week are the ones who are also responsible for promoting public education and outreach to near by neighborhoods. This is a very ineffective way of trying to educate the village about health problems, symptoms, methods of treatment and services provided by the clinic. Towards end of my six week project, I created brochures for three different health issues in both Telugu and English: Diabetes, Hypertension and common women's problems such as anemia, muscle weakness and vaginal discharge. Along with the brochures I suggested that Care Rural Health Mission try to allocate some reasources specifically to public outreach because the nurses, though interested, faced issues of transportation and financial burden when they tried to reach out to surrounding neighborhoods about getting health check ups. Not only will spending time and funding for public outreach clear up some common misconceptions about the clinic but also teach individuals who do not take the initiative to address health issues to do so. I'm hoping through this community members will be empowered to learn more about their bodies and health.

KANE BORDERS'S SUMMER EXPERIENCE

It all began as most things do for foreigners in India: unexpectedly. As I opened the bright red Krishna-covered door of the Self-Employed Women's Association Grih Rin Office (SEWA) in Rajendra Place, New Delhi and mouthed to myself the opening greeting I had planned out in Hindi for the secretary (namaste, mausam bahut garmii hai, jaise registan hai!), I was met by the sight of a completely empty office, except for the financial manager, Deepti, who was working in the back office. I approached her, again beginning to try to communicate my point in Hindi (Namaste Deepti, sab log kahape hai? Meine socha ki ham aaj ek, ek . . .). In smooth British-flavored English she finished my sentence, "Yes, we were supposed to do a financial literacy session today, but something came up and everyone went to Ahmedabad to meet with a group of consultants. I leave tomorrow morning. Are you coming?" I bobbed my head excitedly and went straight to my computer to determine where in the world Ahmedabad was. I found that Ahmedabad is home to the SEWA head offices and is one of the most important business hubs of Gujarat, a state in western India known for commerce, Mahatma Gandhi and of course, Narendra Modi, the recently elected Indian Prime Minister. Upon arriving, after a 6 AM plane ride from Delhi, the presence of these three occasionally contradictory forces was unmistakable: East Asian, European and Australian businessmen sit quietly working next to "khadi" (traditional Gandhian cotton clothes) stores in the airport lobby, while the dominating image of Mr. Modi roars his ubiquitous campaign slogan, "Acche din anne vale hai" (Good days are coming). Since Mr. Modi had only been elected several days ago, I asked my colleague Deepti if there would be celebrations in the city today. She laughed and said, "No, there were yesterday, but people will go back to work today. This is Ahmedabad." We followed suit and headed to a 10 AM meeting at the SEWA Bank (a key branch of SEWA) to meet the team of consultants we would be working with. As Deepti and I finally paid the auto-valla who had managed to fill us in on all the flaws of his wife in a mere 5 minutes and entered the SEWA Bank offices, we were met by about 40 bustling women all wearing traditional saris talking in rapid-fire

Gujarati and Hindi. On the wall you could see the story that revealed the birth of this unique all-women housing development organization. A sarong-clad Gandhi at the head of the salt march walked into a photo showing the massive collective labor movements on the Ahmedabad Bridge in the 1970's, which spilled out into a picture of the determined Ela Bhatt (the founder of SEWA) and finally a grainy shot of Hilary Clinton chatting with SEWA women during her visit in 2005. SEWA's all-women grassroots approach towards housing development is largely a product of the Gandhi-inspired collective labor movements that took place in the 1970's. As I found out later, this is why inviting these consultants to conduct a general appraisal of the SEWA approach to providing housing development was such a momentous step (and why my financial literacy sessions had to be relocated for a week). After gaping around at the scene for several minutes, we were finally shepherded into a small room with Shruti Gonsalves – the head of SEWA Grih Rin – talking on the phone while three women I didn't know were busily working on their laptops around a table. After introductions, we quickly put together a weekly plan that included three trips to the houses of women who had taken out loans with SEWA and two trips to SEWA offices in these informal settlements. We then all jumped into autos and headed out for our first field visit. As we slowly pulled up to a small neighborhood of about 150 small brick houses lined up in four neat rows, we were greeted by the sight of a small crowd forming at the entrance to the settlement, with a tall, lighter-skinned man wearing large-rimmed fake gold Ray-Bans standing at the front of the group. The consultants and I got out of the cars hesitatingly, unsure of what to make of this Akshay Kumar imitator standing in front of us, but , but Shruti brusquely waved the crowd aside and strode into the settlement with two other SEWA women at her side. We gave a slight nod to Akshay and followed her into the settlement. As we walked through the settlement, we were struck by how well organized and clean this settlement was compared to others we had seen in Delhi. Instead of running streams of open sewage, tin-roof huts and trash piles dotting the paths, there were well-planned lanes lined with small brick houses that even occasionally had a small toilet in the back. It turns out that about 50 women had come together in this settlement to take a large

infrastructure improvement loan from SEWA that enabled them to make all of these improvements. As we sat down with one of these women we learned that SEWA employees regularly verified the speed and quality of the work being done by the hired contractors in order to be sure there were no issues. SEWA also conducted an income survey with all 50 women to determine if there was an adequate repayment capacity for a loan of this size. All in all, the visit was revealing. Although there were still on average about ten people crammed in a house the size of a large UNC dorm room, the quality of life in this settlement was vastly better due to the availability of financial mechanisms (in this case a large infrastructure improvement loan). However, as the week went on and we talked with other SEWA employees and clients, the difficulties faced by organizations like SEWA became more and more apparent. Due to the issues associated with land ownership and conservative federal and state laws, it is exceptionally difficult to be profitable as a bank when dealing with this sector of the population, which makes sustainable private sector growth unlikely. Other possible paths for SEWA are available, such as expanding with the backing of the Indian government or foreign donors until a sustainable model is established or simply remaining a housing company that works on a very small scale. I'm not sure what will happen, but I do know that organizations like SEWA will continue seeking solutions to these difficult housing issues in the hope that one day all people will be able to live and work in the formal sector, which would be a step forward for all of us.



Kane Borders, MGF Fellow '14, is currently studying abroad in India for the 2014-2015 year.

AP: *What type of art do you create?*

MS: I love to dabble in all kinds of art, anywhere from painting to prints to sculptures. Recently I've been more into scratchboards as a medium.

AP: *That's really interesting! Why have you starting leaning towards scratchboards?*

MS: Scratch art is a really intricate art where small details really come forward to create pieces that are realistic. It's also really challenging to scratch because rather than focusing on the shadows of a subject which drawing requires, the focus of scratchboard art are the highlights of the face and creating light to make a piece.

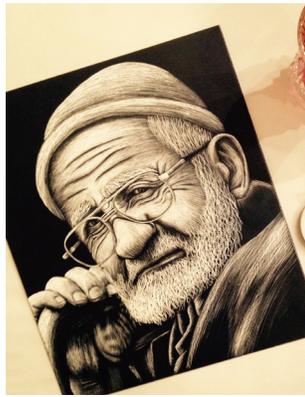
AP: *What is one of your favorite pieces?*

MS: My favorite piece of mine is probably the old Afghan lady. It was inspired by own grandmother, and even though it's not her portrait I feel like I captured her strength in it. There's also an emotion in her eyes, a kind of sadness, with a barely there smile; it's almost haunting to look at. It's the look of a woman who's experienced much hardship in her life and yet her strength silently shines through.



AP: *Where do you draw inspiration from?*

MS: My biggest inspiration is the country of my origin, Afghanistan. Everything about the country inspires my art, the echoes of traditional music in the mountainside, the bright colors of ethnic beading, the smell of fresh baked bread from the tandoor...I've never been given the chance to travel to back Afghanistan, so my art became my way of discovering and exploring it instead.



ARTIST'S SPOTLIGHT: MEDINA SADAT

BY ANISHA PADMA

AP: *Can you describe your creative process?*

MS: The scratchboard itself consists of a layer of white clay and a layer of black ink laid on top of it. To get the white clay to show, the ink must be scratched off using the sharp tip of any scratch tool. This is why it's important to focus on the highlights of the face, because essentially scratch-art is adding white to a black panel. My own process requires a research period, where I find images and the stories of people to inspire me and give my work direction. Once I have in mind my subject, I usually create a playlist that captures the same direction, and then begin to scratch.

AP: *Who is an artist that you look up to?*

MS: The artist that inspired my latest fascination with portraits of Afghanistan is Ustad Ghulam Ali Omid, probably not very well known in the States. He has this one painting of an old Afghan man with the biggest, brightest grin on his face, and it just spoke to me. I absolutely loved everything about and it inspired me to finally try to draw a portrait.

AP: *Do you mainly compose portraits?*

MS: I used to shy away from composing portraits and always felt intimidated by the intricacy of capturing a person. This past summer was actually the first time I tried my hand at drawing a human and it's changed my whole perspective on art. Capturing a person is an emotional journey; I got to know the person I was drawing, not personally, but by the lines in their face. Every wrinkle told a story, every pair of eyes spoke of life experience. The whole process helped me grow not only as an artist but as a person.

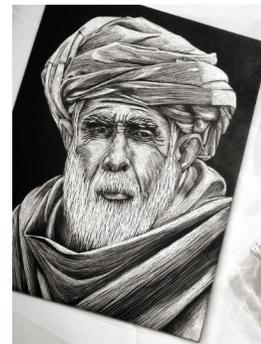


Photos Courtesy of Medina Sadat

Medina studies Political Science and Global Studies at UNC.

AP: *Do you have any last words you want to leave us with?*

MS: My art started as a way for me to build a bridge to the homeland I never had the pleasure of seeing. It evolved into something bigger though. I feel like my art has grown to help others understand Afghanistan too. It shows that in a country as war torn as Afghanistan, beauty and light does remain. My art gives voice to that beauty and lets that light shine through.



Yakshagana is a 700 year old traditional theatrical art form which is identified by its use of vibrant mask-like makeup and colorful costumes. The diverse performances originate from the south Indian region of Karnataka and are derived from Indian epics and devotional texts. Yakshagana troupes, or *melas*, travel and perform various tales.

Vidya Kolyur, the only female Yakshagana mela leader, started her training at the early age of six. Kolyur has performed with groups all over India and has even performed overseas in Japan and the United States.

In September, her mela performed in Memorial Hall at UNC Chapel Hill.

“I want to keep the tradition of Yakshagana, I want to spread the art form,” Kolyur said.

At the request of her mother, Kolyur earned a degree in physics. But watching her father, a long time Yakshagana actor, perform on stage pushed Kolyur to devote her life to spreading the art form. Kolyur started Yakshagana at the age of six, and unable to perform with males, continued in female melas. Once all the girls in her melas left Yakshagana to get married, Kolyur vowed that even when married she would continue Yakshagana.

THE MAKEUP

The makeup is a distinct component of Yakshagana. The performers mix red, yellow, and white colored powders with coconut oil and apply it to their skin. This natural based makeup is completely waterproof; just as it is applied with coconut oil, it will only come off with coconut oil. Rice powder is then added to create texture to the makeup, giving an impression that the performer is wearing a mask.

The costumes traditionally have a limited range of colors, spanning from green, red, white, and black. In the words of Kolyur’s father: “If it does not follow tradition, do not do it.” The way the clothing is tied together is distinct per character; the same pieces of fabric can be tied in different ways to create different costumes. The large and bulky pieces of

jewelry worn on Though not real, the large and bulky pieces of jewelry reflect light on stage like a disco ball. The foot wide headdresses also play a role in that, reflecting light as the actors turn their heads or dance.

THE CAST

Some of the cast members in a Yakshagana mela are a king, a hero, a female role (played by a male), a comin, and a demon/antagonist role. While these are often seen as critical components to a cast, scenes or even whole plays can be done omitting one or more of these cast members. Interestingly, though a particular member may specialize in a particular role, they still have to be trained in all the forms.

The main characters usually have a distinct entry sequence. Take for example the powerful entrance of the king. The arm and shoulder are spread out to show status. When the demon enters, he is covered by a cloth because at first he must be hidden because of his fearsome presence. As the demon enters he cries out, something that is distinct to only the antagonist role.

THE PERFORMANCE

It is the job of the “bhagavata”— the singer — to give the “shruti”—the pitch. The bhagavata holds the highest position in the Yakshagana group, as he serves as the narrator as well. The chenda and the maddale are two instruments that add “tala,” or the rhythm to the song. Just as with the actors, musicians are expected to be able to play both instruments even if they have a particular specialization. When the dancers perform, their feet and movements must correspond to the tala. With bells tied to their feet, the dancers perform intricate dance steps, moving their eyes and face to create creative facial expressions to supplement their gestures in their acting.

An intriguing part of the Yakshagana dance component is the spinning. The last Yakshagana member must spin before exiting the stage, spinning in their heavy costume up to 100 times! It is common to see Yakshagana members continue spinning until the audience breaks into applause.

BY SNIGDHA DAS

YAKSHA-WHAT? A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF YAKSHAGANA



INTERVIEW WITH RAHUL BOSE: WOMEN IN BOLLYWOOD AND MEDIA

BY PARTH SHAH

Bollywood actor Rahul Bose never misses a beat. When introduced as “a rising star” during his talk at UNC-Chapel Hill, Bose was quick to fire back: “If at 47 I’m a rising star, then hopefully by 90 I will have risen!” Bose’s career has taken him from the silver screen to the rugby field, where he played for



India’s national team for 10 years. He is also known for his social activism with India’s educational NGO, Pratham, and for launching The Foundation, an anti-discrimination organization. Bose spoke to Monsoon reporters about the objectification of women in Bollywood. He didn’t take kindly to the question at first.

“What about American movies? What about American magazines? The objectification of women is not a Bollywood problem.”

At first, the conversation focused on item numbers. These cutaway dance scenes showcase near-naked women lip syncing to sexually suggestive lyrics. Though typically they have nothing to do with the plot of the movie, item numbers have become characteristic to many commercially successful Bollywood films. Bose said item numbers are a last resort in order to attract audiences. “When a filmmaker decides to interrupt the plot of his film with a half-naked woman dancing, it means the filmmaker has lost confidence in his film,” said Bose. Take the song ‘Aa Re Pritam Pyaare’ from the 2012 film *Rowdy Rathore*. The song features three scantily

clad women surrounded by hundreds of drunk men, dancing to an echoing chorus which roughly translates to, “If I take of my top, the fun will begin.” However,

Bose cautions against dismissing item numbers solely for their sexual content. “Is the woman who is half naked and dancing actually a secret service agent who is doing this just to get some guys drunk and pally with her?” he said. “Context

is what we refuse to look at in this knee jerk world.” Since the 2012 Delhi gang rape, India has been put in the hot seat for gender violence in the country. This past January, CNN Indian Broadcasting Network surveyed people to see why they thought men raped women.

Along with claiming things like the inability of men to control themselves, many respondents argued the sexualized depiction of women in movies and advertisements perpetuate rape.

However, Bose doesn’t believe the solution is as simple as pointing the blame on Bollywood. “If I tell you motorcycle accidents have been on the rise for five years

and you look at the statistics, ban motorcycles... similarly, if I tell you incidents of crimes against women have increased, ban the Hindi movies. That’s absolutely not the way to stop crimes against women.” Bose also said the responsibility doesn’t just fall on the film industry’s shoulders. Just as with celebrities in the West, Bollywood actors and actresses receive their fair share of scrutiny from the mainstream media. Take actress Deepika Padukone for example. In September, she fired back at The Times of India for tweeting out a photo of her cleavage with the caption: “OMG Deepika Padukone’s cleavage show!” After Padukone posted a lengthy reply denouncing the media’s highly sexualized coverage of women, The Times of India bit back, calling Padukone a hypocrite for performing in her fair share of item numbers.

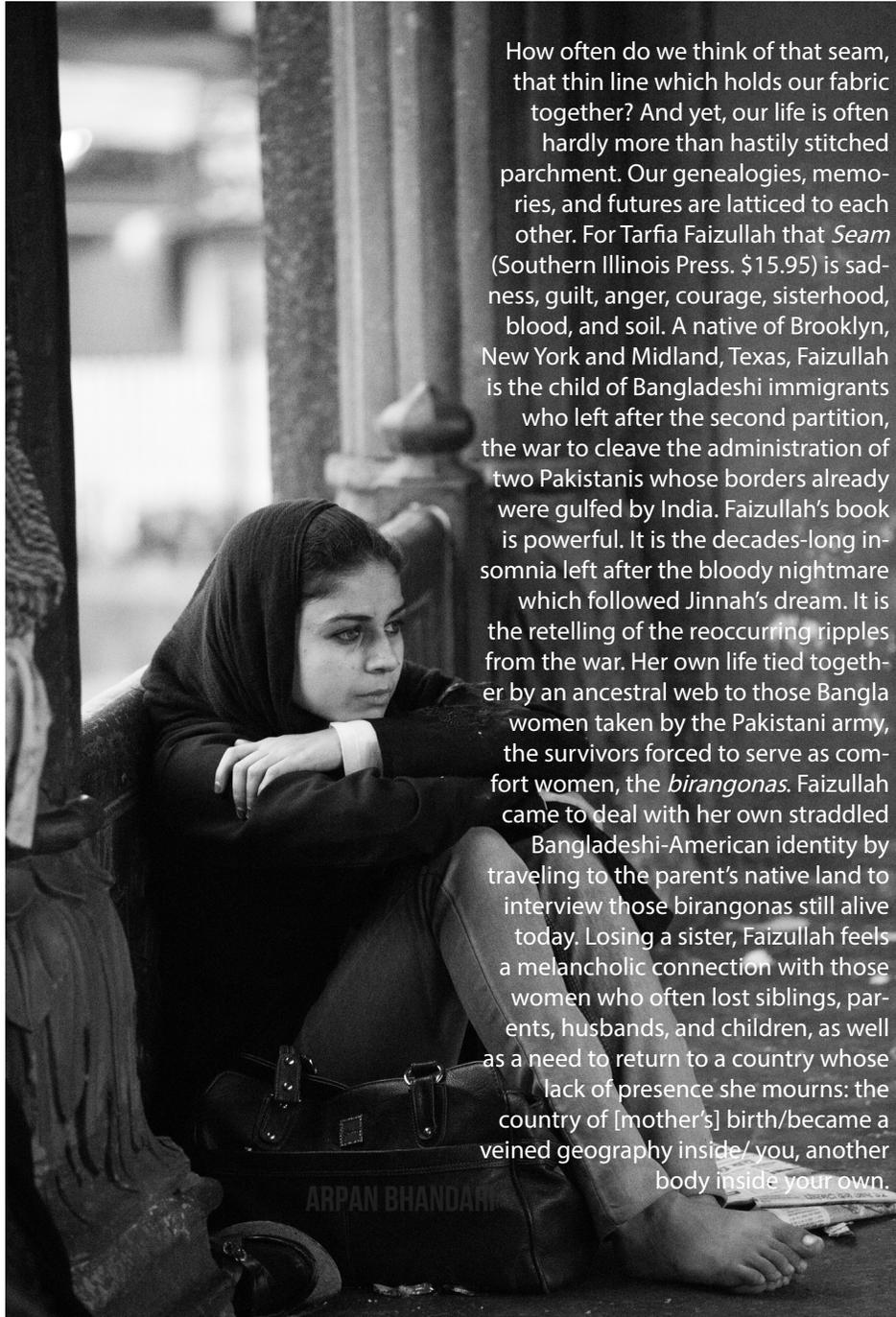
Bose doesn’t expect the mainstream media in India to change its behavior any time soon. “Your mainstream media isn’t going to change overnight. When it’s hip and cool to do something they will,” he said. “The same newspaper that had a gratuitous picture of a film actress but hello – you just had a campaign against gender violence.” Rather, Bose said alternative media is the ideal platform for promoting gender equity. “The game is going to be won and lost online. The sooner we get there, the better.”



Staff of Monsoon with Rahul Bose. The Carolina Asia Center was one of the main sponsors of the event.

POETRY REVIEW OF *SEAM*

BY ANDREW ASHLEY



How often do we think of that seam, that thin line which holds our fabric together? And yet, our life is often hardly more than hastily stitched parchment. Our genealogies, memories, and futures are latticed to each other. For Tarfia Faizullah that *Seam* (Southern Illinois Press. \$15.95) is sadness, guilt, anger, courage, sisterhood, blood, and soil. A native of Brooklyn, New York and Midland, Texas, Faizullah is the child of Bangladeshi immigrants who left after the second partition, the war to cleave the administration of two Pakistanis whose borders already were gulfed by India. Faizullah's book is powerful. It is the decades-long insomnia left after the bloody nightmare which followed Jinnah's dream. It is the retelling of the reoccurring ripples from the war. Her own life tied together by an ancestral web to those Bangla women taken by the Pakistani army, the survivors forced to serve as comfort women, the *birangonas*. Faizullah came to deal with her own straddled Bangladeshi-American identity by traveling to the parent's native land to interview those birangonas still alive today. Losing a sister, Faizullah feels a melancholic connection with those women who often lost siblings, parents, husbands, and children, as well as a need to return to a country whose lack of presence she mourns: the country of [mother's] birth/became a veined geography inside/ you, another body inside your own.

Unlike most chapbooks, *Seam*, which won the Crab Orchard Series First Book Award, is a compelling narrative. Poetry, unlike prose, often conspires with emotions to make us read empathetically. When done poorly, the reader merely scoffs at the poet's solipsism. Faizullah is one of those rare poets, like Seamus Heaney or Natasha Trethewey, that uses this emotive currency to compress space-time, reader-poet-interviewer, as if one garment sewn together with empathy. The reader is transported to the Birangona's guilt, the shame of surviving, the violence done to them by the army, the violence of unforgiving from others in their community. At the same time, other poems such as "the interviewer acknowledges desire", we feel the sensuality of struggling to find one's home in a place a family fled. Drawing influence liberally by another powerful American, Faizullah interweaves her own musings with the words of Willa Cather. She also melds the verse of Thomas Tranströmer's, whose imagery so often captures the desolation of Swedish winters, to speak to the humid horrors of Dhaka. *Seam* is perhaps the most powerful book of poetry from 2014. For those who often shy away from verse, you will find yourself enthralled by the narrative, and, like the poet-interviewer, you will feel the guilt for your voyeuristic desire to see and feel more of the women's bravery and suffering.

23 films, two Filmfare Awards, countless magazine photo-shoots, and Bollywood actress Deepika Padukone is under fire for her cleavage.

Padukone came into the field in 2007, starting out as a Kingfisher calendar model. She took the stage by storm in her performance as a 1970's dream girl, Shantipriya, in *Om Shanti Om*. Accumulating offers overnight, she went on to deliver blockbuster performances in movies such as *Cocktail*, *Yeh Jaawani Hai Deewani*, and *Goliyon Ki Rasleela: Ramleela*. So why is Veronica/Naina/Leela being objectified by the leading newspaper of India?



Photo Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

On September 14, Times of India tweeted a video clip with the headlines “OMG: Deepika Padukone’s cleavage show!”

The video showed Deepika Padukone at a film promotion event over a year ago, which happened to be shot at a high angle. So yes, there was cleavage involved. Deepika retaliated back by tweeting at the newspaper

“YES! I am a woman. I have breasts AND a cleavage! You got a problem!?!?”

The newspaper immediately tweeted back insisting they only tweeted the original video because she looked so great.

Several days later, Padukone wrote on her Facebook page about the “regressive tactics that are still being employed to draw a reader’s attention at a time when we are striving for women’s equality and empowerment.”

POLICING DEEPIKA’S BODY

BY SOUMYA VISHWANATH



Photo Courtesy of Twitter

She wrote: “In a time where women should be applauded for making headway in a male-dominated society, we blur the lines between REEL and REAL life and dilute all our efforts by making a one-year old back sliding piece of a news a headline.”

Padukone and those who stand by her only expected an apology from the newspaper. Needless to say, they were disappointed. Instead of issuing an apology, the newspaper decided to write their opinion on the matter through another article. In “Dear Deepika, our point of view...”, Times of India goes on to blast “Deepika, we accept your reel vs. real argument, but what about all the times, and there have been many, when you have flaunted your body off screen — while dancing on stage, posing for magazine covers, or doing photo ops at movie promotional functions? What ‘role’ do you play there? So why the hypocrisy?”

The article went on to publish photos from previous photo-shoots where the actress was “flaunting” her body and went on to state that Deepika only brought this argument into media to promote her new film *Finding Fanny*. If Times of India insisted they only tweeted about her because she looked “so great”, then why are they insisting that she flaunted her body off-screen?

Times of India is a business and it comes to no surprise that glamorized pop culture stories bring in readers. But in a country where a sexual assault on a woman is reported every 22 minutes, does the newspaper industry have a responsibility to paint a more respectful image of women?



Photo Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

MAULA JATT VS. GENERAL ZIA: PUNJABI CINEMA, POLITICS AND NATIONAL IDEOLOGY IN PAKISTAN

Having sharpened his *gandhasa*, a farming implement that consists of a long wooden pole with a wide blade, Maula Jatt defiantly marches out to confront his enemies, the Malik clan, in an epic battle to death. His thirst for revenge, he has declared, will remain until he has eliminated the entire patrilineal lineage of his enemies. Maula Jatt is beyond doubt the most popular character in Pakistani Punjabi cinema. Such was the popularity of the character that Maula featured in a host of films including *Weshi Jatt* (1975), *Maula Jatt* (1979), *Jatt in London* (1981), *Maula Bukhsh* (1988), *Gandhasa* (1991) and *Maula te Mukho* (1991). One would not be wrong in surmising that the character of Maula Jatt emerged as the most successful superhero franchise in South Asian cinema to date. Indeed, the film *Maula Jatt* proved to be one of the biggest commercial successes in the history of Pakistani cinema. This was despite it officially being banned by the military regime of General Zia-ul-Haq (1924-1988) who sought to legitimize his dictatorship through ushering in an era of strict censorship and Islamization. Though the film was ostensibly banned on the grounds of the extreme violence depicted, the character of Maula Jatt posed a threat to General Zia's vision of Pakistan itself. Not only did Maula show scant respect for the law and order mechanisms of the state, he celebrated attributes that challenged Zia's attempts at shaping a national ideology.

The popularity of the character of Maula Jatt symbolised an important shift in Pakistani popular culture. Prior to this, the quintessential hero in most Pakistani films had been depicted as being educated, Ur-

du-speaking, morally upright, well-groomed and soft-spoken. These were qualities that encapsulated the ideals and visions of nation-building in the young state of Pakistan.

In contrast, Maula Jatt marked the emergence of a new type of a hero, one who was rural, loud, hyper-masculine, unabashedly violent, fluent in colloquial Punjabi, and had very little to do with the nation or state.

In terms of dress, conduct, speech, and values, Maula was at odds with previous presentations of heroes and ideals of nation-building.

In many ways, he posed a challenge to nationalist visions. He was firmly grounded in a regional identity (Punjabi), celebrated communal alliances (including caste) over a national identity, and displayed total disregard towards the everyday institutions of the state – primarily the police and judiciary. The commercial success of films like *Maula Jatt* firmly established the ascendancy of a new genre of rural revenge sagas. Indeed, the film *Maula Jatt* was to go on to determine the aesthetic, linguistic and narrative content of much of Punjabi (both in India and Pakistan) and Pakistani cinema. The extent of this is clearly visible not just from the story-lines of the films but also from the large number of film titles that began to feature caste labels like 'Jatt', 'Gujjar' (e.g. *Dara Gujjar*) and 'Dogar' (e.g. *Weshi Dogar*), thus clearly celebrating rural and caste-centred identities.

BY IQBAL SEVEA

Dr. Iqbal Singh Sevea is an Assistant Professor of History at UNC Chapel Hill. His new book, *The Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal: Islam and Nationalism in Late Colonial India* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), uses the controversial South Asian Muslim intellectual, Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), as a foil to a broader analysis of the engagement between Muslim intellectuals and western socio-political thought.

This shift from the presentation of the hero as a genteel figure towards the valorisation of the violent, rural and colloquial was reflective of socio-political changes in Pakistan. At the level of political discourse, the 1970s witnessed a new emphasis on populism targeted at segments of society - the urban poor and rural masses - that had felt marginalised by the political elite and disconnected with its visions of national development. This shift in political discourse was also accompanied by a renewed pride in traditional/rural values and attire. The new hero, as characterised by Maula Jatt, reflected these developments in the socio-political milieu. Shedding western attire and sherwanis, which came to be associated with the urban elite, clad in kurta and chaadra (long cloth tied from the waist down), he symbolised a celebration of the 'real' and manly rural folk as opposed to the urban sections of Pakistan.

The celebration of caste identities, questioning of official attempts at shaping a national ideology and the utter disregard for the everyday forms of the state make the *Maula Jatt* films and subsequent Punjabi films into important political statements; political statements that had to be monitored and censored by General Zia's regime. It is however important to note that despite being officially banned, the film *Maula Jatt* emerged as a huge hit. Cinemas in Punjab found ways of illegally screening the film. Thus, even watching the film became a political act.

Bhutan is the only country in the world that measures development -- improvements in access to education, healthcare, and standard of living -- through Gross National Happiness (GNH). GNH measures the "happiness" of the citizens in the country through its four pillars:

- Fair socio-economic development
- Conservation and environmental protection
- Promotion of culture
- Good governance

BHUTAN'S GRAPPLE WITH TRADITION

BY ALEKHYA MALLAVARAPU



Photo Courtesy of Dr. Benjamin Meier

GNH quantifies well-being and happiness by measuring over 100 variables, such as working hours, emotional balance, and literacy. Citizens were asked about the "sufficiency" of these different variables in a 2010 GNH survey. People were considered happy if they achieved sufficiency in at least 66 percent of these variables and considered unhappy if less than 50 percent. The current GNH is 0.743 - the closer the figure is to 1, the happier the people.

Roughly two-thirds of the Bhutanese population is Buddhist. The religion places focus on balancing material wealth while appreciating surroundings and respecting nature - these same principles make up the pillars of GNH. Leading a modest life and respecting elders are also cherished in Bhutanese culture. One way the government enforces this lifestyle preservation is by upholding a mandatory behavior and dress code called the Driglam Namzha.

In contrast to Bhutan, most countries use Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as an indicator for development. Generally, a higher GDP means a wealthier country. Unlike GDP, GNH emphasizes social welfare through access to non-material goods such as education, healthcare, and religious expression. In order to promote GNH, the government focuses on policies that improve environmental, political, and mental wellness. For example, there's a policy that keeps a min-

imum of 60 percent of Bhutan's land under forest cover.

The concept GNH was first introduced in the early 1970's as a response to GDP, shortly after Bhutan opened its borders to the rest of the world.

However, GNH's reliability comes to question as Bhutan continues to face obstacles in balancing globalization and preserving its cultural history.

In the 1970's, Bhutan opened up its borders to tourists and trade; prior to this time, the country remained relatively isolated from the rest of the world. Television broadcasting (introduced in 1999) and the Internet have increased access to western ideals that are impressionable on the Bhutanese youth. Additionally, urban migration has increased especially amongst this young population, who seek places with better facilities and public services. With the youth leaving rural areas where traditions are stronger, some fear a decline in upholding traditions. This clash between tradition and urbanization brings to question which policies should be supported more: those which present new opportunities or those which preserve familiar traditions?

Despite this clash with globalization, reverting to isolationism is not an option for Bhutan. Developing econom-

ically is a crucial factor for success in today's rapid paced world. In 2013, Bhutan's Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay, expressed concern that Bhutan's increased focus on GNH rather than GDP distracted the government from providing basic services necessary for nation's people. Though GNH may appear to be losing some momentum, UNC public policy professor Benjamin Meier doesn't expect the founding principles of the measure to be lost.

"Even though GNH as a measure is being phased out, it doesnot necessarily mean

that the way the Bhutanese government approaches its responsibility to its own people is changing," he said.

Maintaining tradition has been a goal of Bhutan ever since it opened its borders to the rest of the world. However, preserving culture and developing economically don't have to be mutually exclusive.

FORECASTING NARENDRA MODI'S SUCCESS

BY HINAL PATEL

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent stint in the spotlight has sparked questions about his leadership ability.

Modi was sworn in this past May in what marked the largest democratic election in history. Although seen as a controversial figure by some Western nations, his win by an overwhelming majority in the Indian elections gave him a clear mandate.

For more than one third of India's population who live below the poverty line, (and for many more who struggle to increase their standard of living) Modi's reputation as a job creator has made him a beacon of hope. Under his leadership as chief minister of Gujarat, Modi greatly increased foreign investment through his partnerships with countries such as Japan and China. Since taking office, he has made trips to Bhutan, Nepal, and Japan and his primary goal has been to increase diplomatic relations with neighboring countries as well as to foster business partnerships with economic powerhouses such as the United States and China.

The excitement and energy that Modi has brought to India over the last year or so can be compared to that brought by Barack Obama during the 2008 presidential campaign. In fact, many parallels can be drawn between the two world figures and their respective campaigns, from an emphasis on strong communication

skills to the use of catchy slogans. Both also worked hard to gain the support of the youth, continuing to emphasize the young population as tomorrow's leaders and problem solvers. In his most recent speech at Madison Square Garden, Narendra Modi stated, "A nation, whose youths are committed to make the future of the country, will not have to look behind. This country [India] is going to progress with the support of youths".

Despite the buzz, many question Modi's ability to implement an economic project in size and scale to the one he implemented in Gujarat. Is such a project feasible? Can India continue to grow at its current rate? All of these are important questions that remain to be answered and will no doubt be very important in the coming months.



Photo Courtesy of: Wikimedia Commons



Photo Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

THE REAL PRICE OF WORLD CUP 2022

BY NAINTARA VISWANATH



Photos Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

The USA Men's Soccer team put up a commendable fight at the 2014 World Cup in Brazil. Tim Howard's outstanding saves and Klinsman's superior coaching took the team to the Round of 16 where they lost in extra time. A strong #WeBelieveThatWeWillWin media campaign coupled with the US team's valiant efforts helped thrust soccer to the forefront of audiences' minds this summer.

But how does soccer cross paths with South Asian migrant workers?

The 2022 World Cup was awarded to the tiny, oil-rich country called Qatar. Immediately, it stopped being referred to as "the place next to Dubai" and was thrust into the international spotlight. This spotlight shined brightest on the gross human rights injustices occurring in this nation smaller than the state of Connecticut. Non-Qataris make up the largest proportion of the country's labor force, dwarfing the local Qatari population with a 60:40 ratio. Indians and Pakistanis alone are 36% of the country's population, with Nepalis, Bangladeshis, and Sri Lankans making South Asians a majority of this expatriate labor force. While a lot of these South Asian workers have white-collar jobs, a large chunk of this population serve as construction workers.

As the host of an international sporting event, Qatar is being closely followed by the world in terms of its social and legal laws. It received a lot of backlash ranging from the fact that temperatures

are too hot to play soccer to the fact that the country doesn't allow alcohol in public. But at the center of this issue lays the mistreatment of migrant laborers; an issue that is seeing spotlight although it has been occurring for years.

Kafala, the labour system prevalent across the Gulf countries, requires migrant workers to work with the kafeel or sponsor who gives them employment for the period of their contract.

Workers are not permitted to leave the country or change employment without written permission from the kafeel. This regressive form of dealing with expatriate labor has evident remnants of indentured servitude.

When Human Rights Watch got an opportunity to speak with construction workers, the top complaint focused on their meager wages ranging from \$8-11/day for a grueling 10 hour work day outdoors in average temperatures of 96.8 degrees Fahrenheit. Other concerns focus on lack of safety for these construction workers and cramped living spaces that lack air-conditioning and potable water. Migrant worker deaths have become a commonality with coffins of bodies being sent back to their home countries with no real explanation for their deaths.

Numerous organizations, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, are finally getting to enter Qatar and expose these conditions to the international world. Human Rights Watch is calling for the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to leverage the member countries' powers in a demand for greater protection and extensive change for in the rights of these migrant workers. Qatar's foreign ministry announced earlier this year that about reforming labor laws but no concrete changes have been made to date.

Walking by the corniche, the road along the waterfront, with skyscrapers lining the once deserted lands, wealth disparity is apparent in Qatar. Local Qataris live in mansions with a constant inflow of oil money yet South Asian migrant workers live in squalor struggling to make ends meet.





Photo Courtesy of Dr. Afroz Taj and Mr. John Caldwell

POSTCARD FROM WAGAH

BY AFROZ TAJ AND JOHN CALDWELL

The minibus windshield is opaque with condensation as we hurtle through the rain toward the Wagah Border. The monsoon has arrived with a vengeance. Our driver, Captain Rajender, smears the fog frantically with his hand as the wipers on the outside clack back and forth ineffectually. The bus is full of our study abroad students: those that aren't asleep or queasy look like they are remembering the umbrellas left in their suitcases back at the guest house.

We approach the Pakistan border along the old Grand Trunk Road. Corn fields give way to tea stalls and souvenir stands. We drive past hundreds of parked vehicles into a special lot behind the immigration offices. The rain lets up as we file out of the bus; only the trees and the wind conspire to splash us with sudden miniature cloudbursts as we navigate a maze of railings and ankle-deep puddles to get to our seats.

I don't know of any other international border that is also a spectator sport. Ranks of bleachers line both sides of the road. We're sitting in the VIP seats right near the gate that connects India and Pakistan; the hoi-polloi has stadium style seating a few hundred meters back into Indian territory. The festivities are already in progress: patriotic songs are blaring from numerous speakers and to our right a mob of young people is danc-

ing wildly in the middle of the road. I look to my left: the border gates are open and through the gap we can see the Pakistani bleachers, arranged amphitheater style. In the brief pauses between the Indian songs we can hear snippets of music from the Pakistani side; ironically some of the same songs and singers make it into the playlist of both sides.

The temperature has dropped about ten degrees centigrade, and with the breeze, the soaked benches, and the wet clothes, we are almost chilly. The clouds seem to be blowing in every direction at once. Long ropes like horizontal tornadoes twist into towering thunderheads. One minute a white bank of cloud rears up against a black sky, the next minute the heavens erupt into pendulous black udders. And rarely, when gaps in the various cloud layers coincide, we get a glimpse of blue late afternoon sky.

An amaltas tree in full bloom dances in the wind just inside the Indian border; its bright yellow blossoms blow into Pakistan with each gust of wind. Birds struggle against the airy undertow overhead and are blown back and forth across the border, no visa required.

We've crossed the border at Wagah many times but it's always been during the day when it's open for business. Now it's a rainy afternoon and we're here to watch the nightly "Beating Retreat." The im-

promptu dancers have taken their seats but an improbable man in a white suit is leading the crowd in patriotic cheers. He jumps and gesticulates wildly working the crowd into a jingoistic frenzy. "Bharat Mata Ki Jai!" "Hindustan Zindabad!" The cheap seats leap up in excitement. The elite seats join in somewhat more halfheartedly, thinking, perhaps, of the fact that both India and Pakistan are nuclear nations with a lot to lose in the event of another war.

A sudden siren sounds. A hush falls over the crowd. Suddenly two smartly dressed women officers march in rapid goose steps toward the border. Just as they are about to march right across into Pakistan, they execute a quick 90 degree spin, take up their positions at the gateposts and salute each other with exaggerated movements. The crowd roars as two Pakistani officers mimic the same maneuvers on the other side of the border. As I watch this mirror image posturing repeated again and again, I wonder who choreographed this whole ceremony. When do they rehearse? Does each side regularly introduce variations that are then duly copied by the other? If so, we're witnessing a bizarre performance, a collaborative celebration of hostility. But I guess where there's collaboration, there's communication.

It was raining torrentially in August 1947 when Cecil Radcliffe drew an arbitrary line down the middle of the map; no one was really sure which side of the new border they were on until months had passed and the five rivers of Punjab flowed red with human blood. But that generation is almost gone now and both India and Pakistan have their own internal problems to solve. The Wagah ceremony, for all its patriotic fervor, has a strange subtext of hope. Do people come just to cheer on the home team? Or do they come to catch a glimpse of the human face of the enemy on the other side of the gate?

The border guards throw both gates open wide as the flags are lowered. The buglers sound the retreat and I'm surprised that they are playing in the same key. They must tune up before the ceremony. As the guards fold their respective flags, others move to close the gate.

"Leave it open!" shouts someone from the crowd.

The people around us chuckle. I like to think that they've heard it on the Pakistani side and are smiling there as well.

After the ceremony a guard beckons us to follow him. Faiyyaz Farooqi of the Border Security Force has arranged a special treat for us. We traipse behind one of the border office buildings. A narrow path leads to Zero Point where a concrete pylon marks an angle of Pakistani territory projecting into India. Beyond the marker Pakistani families are close enough to talk to, to wave at. I see that people want to exchange greetings but the guards look on forbiddingly. It's their job to keep would-be friends apart.

A sleek black dog lopes past us and slips unharmed through the razor wire into Pakistan.

He pauses for a minute and grins back over his shoulder as if daring us to follow, then trots off across the fields. Behind him, night rolls in on the wheels of renewed rain.

Dr. Afroz Taj is an associate professor in the South Asian Studies Department in UNC. His research and teaching centers around South Asian media, with emphasis on the film industry and television. His book, *The Court of Indra and the Rebirth of North Indian Drama*, explores the origins of the Urdu-Hindi musical theater in mid-nineteenth-century Lucknow.

Mr. John Caldwell is a lecturer in the Hindi-Urdu department at UNC. His research interests include South Asian film and media culture, the music of South Asia, comparative musicology, second language learning and technology, and poetry and poetics.



Photo Courtesy of Dinesh McCoy

WHO IS SOUTH ASIAN?: FINDING A (HALF) SRI LANKAN IDENTITY

BY DINESH MCCOY

I first felt odd about it when a white friend called out my lack of knowledge about Bollywood, capping it off with the statement,

**"So you're really much more
White than Sri Lankan,
right?"**

The "it" I am talking about is the act of testing my South Asian cultural authenticity as a half-Sri Lankan and half-white American.

Before I begin, let me note that I have a profound respect and appreciation for

my family and am thankful for the care and the grace of my parents in raising three children. Additionally, this is not a piece intended to ignore the ways I have benefited from being half-white in a culture where whiteness itself has become so privileged in our American society that it is largely viewed outside the bounds of a "culture" itself.

Instead, what I hope to discuss is the way that my experience as a half-Sri Lankan has been marked by confusion both personally and in my interactions with others in a society that asks us all so often to check a single box to define our entire

ancestral history.

First, as many of the both South Asian and non-South Asian self-assigned cultural gate-keepers that I have interacted with note, I did indeed grow up in a majority white environment. Such an environment comes with being a half-white Christian growing up in the heart of the old Rust Belt in Toledo, Ohio.

My mother moved from Sri Lanka to the United States in the 1970s to Bowling Green, Ohio, the town where she would meet my father and marry him in the 1980s while attending Bowling

Green State University. She traveled to America after her father obtained a professor position at the university. My father grew up in a rural Ohio environment, the son of working-class parents with a large extended family in the same town.

Then came my generation. Three mixed-race children surrounded mainly by our white American family, joined to our Sri Lankan heritage in the area only by my maternal grandparents and my mother's brother, who also married a white American woman.

My access to interaction with learning about my South Asian heritage was markedly limited, only embodied by occasional Sri Lankan meals and interactions my immediate family as well as with my two South Asian best-friends, one from India and the other from Pakistan. This was early grade school, all of us preoccupied by our mutual love for Star Wars and our burgeoning competition of who could finish the Harry Potter books fastest.

I never learned Tamil (the native language of my mother). I never attended a South Asian-style wedding. I can't remember watching any South-Asian films. These were simply things I was never exposed to.

Perhaps the first time I felt conscious of this lack of knowledge of and connection with half my cultural roots was when I went to Sri Lanka in 2003 with my family. The country was in the midst of a cease-fire agreement, which gave us the opportunity to travel there for the first time as an entire family.

It was an eye-opening experience as I visited my mother's homeland, welcomed by my extended family, but very much feeling like a tourist. As we traveled to the modest home my mother spent the first few years of her life in, I found it so difficult to imagine my connection to the place, just one generation away from my reality. As we visited the bomb-damaged church my mother was baptised in as a child,

ability to understand it as part of the history of my own life. The profound sadness expressed by family members as we toured these places of my mother's past together was largely lost on me as a 10-year-old whose concerns were thousands of miles removed from the space.

This is an experience I have continued to struggle with as a half-Tamil Sri-Lankan American. It was 2009 when the Sri Lankan Civil War ended in a brutal and violent fashion as the mainly Sinhalese Sri Lankan Army took full control of the majority Tamil North. While I don't pretend to understand the politics of the entire conflict, I remember reading the BBC headline quickly that announced the war's end, before nearly mindlessly forwarding the article to my parents to view some time later. How could I have dealt with this news that is so connected to the people I am tied within my blood but never before really known? The answer is that I largely didn't try to deal with it, and only now have I made a more concerted effort to read and research the conflict more on my own.

I thought about stopping this story here, at a place of feeling disconnected from both my Sri Lankan culture because of my lack of access to things I have tried to define as "Sri Lankan."

Yet, while attending a speaking event at UNC by author Junot Díaz, his comments on "authenticity" struck a chord with me. He said we must escape the desire to search for and define the authentic person in relation to their culture,

describing how different members of American communities will make statements like "he isn't black enough" or "he isn't authentically Latino" to define a person in relation to preconceived experiences that define the generalized experiences of those entire groups.

These statements helped bring together the disparate ideas I had been working through as I thought about this piece. I'm not South Asian because of my ability to access the things that would make me fit one narrative of South Asian-ness.

I encountered the space without the I'm South Asian simply because I am South Asian.

Who I am is as descendent of South Asian ancestors is not defined by how many "cultural" experiences I can check off a list of South Asian-ness. Nor is it defined by how personally connected I feel to the culture of my ancestors, regardless of my more recent attempts to connect with that culture.

My Sri Lankan-ness is in my blood. It's in the story of how my mother's family left their homeland just years before the entire region they call home became embroiled in civil war. It's in the experience of new opportunities in the United States, as well as the process of adaptation to the new cultural and environmental landscape of this home. It's in the decision of my Sri Lankan ancestors to convert to Christianity in Sri Lanka during the 1800s. It's in my mother's naturalization ceremony. It's in Fourth of July celebrations spent eating strawberry shortcake and watching fireworks in the grass with both my white and Sri Lankan families. It's in being asked "Where are you from?" followed up by the question, "No really, where are you from?" after my first answer of Florida isn't satisfying enough. It's in my name being pronounced in variations from "Danish" to "Dancer." It's in being called out incorrectly as a "Mexican" by a group of party-goers as I jogged through the quad one night.

My story of South Asian identity is just that: a single story. It's a story of feeling disconnected from my South Asian culture, but in understanding that feeling as something that only happens within the context of being part of a larger story of the American South Asian community. Additionally, this story that hopefully demonstrates the need to be very careful in approaching discussions around identity with the template of defining the "other" as the basis for the claims we make. We each are a product of both our histories and who we choose to say we are.

Let us all do our best avoid the pressure of our society to decide who "belongs" within our constructed identity groups, and instead give everyone a chance to process their own histories and identities.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT BOX TO CHECK

BY DEBANJALI KUNDU

In high school, most of my friends were white. Growing up, I'd heard horror stories about "brown gossip" and competition for grades—and I told myself I was firmly staying out of it.

So I was called an oreo: brown on the outside but white on the inside, where it really mattered.

For one, what does it really mean to "be white"? We ape whiteness like it's something to be proud of—slather our daughters with Fair and Lovely, wax their arms and straighten their hair. Our historians have spent generation upon generation trying to prove that we are closer to Caucasians, that Aryan (read: foreign) blood runs through our veins—as if colored blood is not enough. In fact, in 1923 the Supreme Court even ruled Indians to be Caucasian, although there were "unmistakable and profound differences" between the two groups.



I know South Asian guys who talk about scoring white girls because that's the highest notch on the bedpost they aspire to. I have friends who only introduce themselves by the "white" pronunciation of their name—the one that's closer to English or shortened by a couple syllables. Some of those same friends routinely use the saying, "white is right."

That motto doesn't work for my coffee-colored skin and dark hair. We are unable to accept the darker parts of us—and not just the physical. Joy Liburd, publicity chair for the UNC chapter of NAACP, told me there's not a single member of the organization from the South Asian community. It begets the question: are we unwilling to relate with other minority groups?

With the model minority tag slapped upon us, it's difficult to say that we suffer from the same systems of oppression as other minorities. Study upon study has been published on the wide range of adverse outcomes minorities face, from lower standardized testing scores to socioeconomic status. Yet on average, Asian Americans have the largest percentage of high school graduates, higher incomes, live in better neighborhoods, and enjoy better health—even more so than whites.

There is no Ferguson for South Asians to rally behind, although the Wisconsin Sikh temple shooting left an entire community devastated. No one accuses me of getting into UNC because of

affirmative action—although they do assume my parents are pushing me into the healthcare field. Having an "African-American sounding name" makes a person less likely to be hired, in the same way that your "neighborhood" IT service is not from Kentucky and the representative's name is probably not Bob.

I'm drawing parallels between communities because the similarities are there.

But while solidarity is important, how much can we identify with others without losing a part of ourselves? The term "color" is meant to refer to all minorities—but does lumping us together erase individual difference? The South Asian experience is, by definition, different from those of other people of color. My experience is different from yours, as yours is from mine..

So the question remains, where do we find the box that we fit squarely into—the one that we can check off with a sense of satisfaction, where we feel like yes, we belong? Or consider this: is the box even necessary to create at all?



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