

Introduction

Jirayudh Sinthuphan

This issue of Asian Review is a product of the Asian Consortium of South Asian Studies. The article in this volume explores the profound and multifaceted ways in which communities of South Asian descent have migrated to, settled in, and dynamically reshaped their identities within Southeast Asia. Moving beyond the historical narrative of South Asian Diaspora, these studies demonstrate that the notions of belonging, diasporic identity and national identity are not static concepts but are continuously negotiated, performed, and politicized in response to local contexts and global shifts.

The papers collectively reveal a complex history of South Asian migration. We first travel to Northern Thailand with *A Bangladeshi Descendant Muslim Community in Northern Thailand: Its formation process* by Mineo TANADA. This essay meticulously traces the migration, settlement, and identity formation of a community originating from East Bengal (now Bangladesh), challenging conventional understanding by highlighting the crucial role of land-route connections between South and Southeast Asia, and illuminating how fluid self-identification can be within local Thai society.

Shifting to the political realm, *Nationalism and Indian Community in Malaya during the Japanese Occupation, 1941-1945* by Ji Eun LEE examines a critical period of collective identity formation. This work analyzes the transformative effects of the Japanese occupation on the Indian community in Malaya, detailing how participation in the Indian Independence League (IIL) and the Indian National Army (INA) fostered an unprecedented level of political unity and nationalist consciousness. It underscores how global geopolitical conflict acted as a powerful catalyst, fundamentally altering the community's

relationship with both its homeland and its adopted country.

Finally, *Fluctuating “Indianness” or “Belonging”: Singapore Indian Dancers and Their Encounter with Southeast Asia at Ramayana Festival* by Yoshiaki TAKEMURA engages with the question of cultural negotiation. This essay focuses on the modern-day dilemma of cultural identity, exploring how Singaporean Indian dancers navigate the performance of classical Indian art forms. Their encounter with diverse Southeast Asian interpretations of the Ramayana highlights the tension between preserving cultural heritage and embracing a distinct, regional sense of belonging, ultimately showcasing identity as a vibrant, performed process.

Together, these essays offer a powerful testament to the complexity and resilience of the South Asian diaspora. They force us to look critically at the labels we use, reminding us that communities are perpetually in motion, adapting their sense of self in a complex web of cultural, political, and geographical encounters across the Southeast Asian landscape.

The issue also includes a communication piece by Majid DANESHGAR, which reflects on the scholarly legacy of Andrew Rippin, one of the most influential modern historians of Islam and Qur’anic philologists. The piece highlights Rippin’s rigorous philological approach, his expansive intellectual curiosity, his pivotal role in advancing research on *tafsir* across regions including Southeast Asia, and his dedication to mentoring and reviewing scholarship. Nearly a decade after his passing, the communication piece presents Rippin’s library as a window into the intellectual journey of a scholar whose work significantly transformed the field.