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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

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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.

A "Bangladeshi" Descendant Muslim Community in Northern Thailand: Its formation process

Mineo Takada[1]

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Abstract—Thailand is a majority Buddhist country. However, there is a Muslim population in some parts of the country. One such community is a so-called "Indian" Muslim community in northern Thailand. In fact, they originally came from East Bengal, now Bangladesh, not India. A large community of such Bangladeshi descendants can be found in Chiang Mai and other groups of them live in some smaller towns in northern Thailand.

This paper discusses the migration processes, routes, and settlement processes of a group in northern Thailand. When the author started researching them, they declared themselves "Bangladee" (Thai pronunciation of Bangladesh), but they added that they did not know where their ancestors came from, only knowing place names like Chittagong or Noakhali. This paper will focus on an examination of their settlement processes and community formation. It will also emphasize the importance of the land route connection between South Asia and Southeast Asia[2]

Keywords: Muslims, northern Thailand, Bangladesh, Bengal, migration, British colonial era, community formation

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1.Introduction

This paper examines some small communities of Bangladeshi Muslim descendants in northern Thailand. It first discusses Muslim and South Asian studies in Thailand before describing the communities.

In Thailand, a Buddhist country, Muslims are a significant portion of the population. General studies have examined Muslims in Thailand (Bajnid, 1999; Gilquin, 2005; Saowanee 2009). At the same time, many South Asians and their descendants have immigrated to Thailand. Some studies are notable (Hussain, 1982; Mani, 1993; Sato, 1995). However, when looking specifically at northern Thailand, there are few relevant studies. Wang (2011) presents a good and detailed case study of the Yunnanese Muslims (Chin Ho) in northern Thailand, but this is not a study of South Asians. Suthep (2013) presents the only exceptional case study of the South Asian descendant community in Chiang Mai, a capital city in northern Thailand. In this sense, his study is valuable. However, the study seems questionable in some crucial aspects. This paper, together with a previous study (Takada, 2018), is expected to fill the gap in the above-mentioned studies and contribute to a clearer understanding of South Asians and Muslims in northern Thailand.

2."Bangladeshi" Muslims in Northern Thailand: A definition

In the wake of globalization, many Muslim groups have migrated from abroad and settled in northern Thailand. This paper examines the indigenous and quasi-indigenous Muslim communities in the area. There are three categories of Muslim people in northern Thailand: Chinese Muslims, "Indian" Muslims, and other Muslims from central or southern Thailand. The most prominent are the Chinese Muslims from Yunnan, the Chin Ho, in Chiang Mai and surrounding areas.

"Indian" Muslims are harder to describe. The most prominent subgroup is the so-called "Indian" people, which will be discussed later. There are at least three or four other subgroups: "Pakistani" Muslims from Pakistan; "Tamil" Muslims from Tamil Nadu; "Burmese" Muslims from Myanmar; and "Rohingyas" from Rakhine State. Despite being called "Burmese" or "Rohingyas," they are clearly South Asian descendants

who resemble "Indians" or "South Asians." It is extremely difficult for ordinary Thai people to distinguish between them.

If the scope of this paper is limited to Chiang Mai and surrounding areas, one could exclude the "Pakistanis" because they are more concentrated in the Chiang Rai area. One could also exclude "Tamils" because they are so few. One could also exclude "Burmese Muslims" and "Rohingyas" because most of them are newcomers and illegal immigrants, or have a similar status from a legal point of view.

Who are the "Indian" Muslims in the Chiang Mai area? This is a difficult question to answer, as previous works have referred to these people as "Indian" Muslims and some as "Pakistanis." This nomenclature may mislead readers unfamiliar with these peoples. They are neither "Indian" in the sense of present-day India, nor "Pakistani" in the sense of present-day Pakistan. It is best to ask them directly about their identity.

"We are 'Bangla' or 'Bangladee' (Thai pronunciation of 'Bangladesh')". Most of them insist that their ancestors came from "Chittagong" or "Noakhali." These are place names from the eastern part of present-day Bangladesh. They learned these names indirectly from a father or grandfather. These "fathers" were not first-generation migrants, so they didn't know these words well.

Most of the "fathers" (first-generation migrants or early migrants) didn't teach their children about their villages or mother tongue, Bangla. They just described their place of origin as "Chittagong" or "Noakhali". Today, these place names are unfamiliar to most people, as one person explained: "We don't know what these words mean or if they're place names for districts, villages, or divisions. We just know they're place names in eastern Bangladesh.

It's clear they hail from eastern "Bengal" in colonial times, or the eastern part of the former Pakistan region, or the eastern part of present-day Bangladesh. We will discuss this later, but for now, we'll refer to them as "Bangladeshi" Muslims.

They are mostly concentrated in the Chang Klan area on the southern outskirts of Chiang Mai city. Some of them live in an area near the northern gate of Chang Pueak. They are also scattered in other

parts of the city and in smaller nearby towns such as Doi Saket, San Kamphaeng and Non Bean. In addition, a significant number of them live in Mae Sariang, a border town located about 200 km southwest of Chiang Mai, and its surrounding areas. They estimate 400-500 households and 1500 population; however, it is difficult to determine the exact number because of intermarriage with other Muslim groups.

3. Reconstruction of their "history" from the narratives of the descendants of the present

Today, the "Bangladeshi" Muslims in northern Thailand have vague memories of their "fathers." I'll discuss three points: their early history and occupation, settlement process, and the days immediately after settlement.

3.1 Early history of the "Bangladeshi" Muslims

Perhaps one of the "oldest" stories about their "fathers" is that of an old man, Abdul A., who lives in Nong Baen, a small village outside Chiang Mai. He said:

"My father was a farmer and so am I. I was born here and may be the fourth or fifth generation. Adding my own age (87), it would be at least 200 years or more (after the first ancestor settled)".

He was likely one of the oldest men, and his account was crucial. If reliable, it suggests the first generation migrated around 1800 AD. However, the date of settlement is suspicious compared to other accounts.

A more detailed and apparently more reliable story was given by the other man, Abdul B. (68), from the same village.

> "My wife's father (WF) was the first to settle in this village. At that time there were many "Bangladeshis" (then "Bengalis") in this village, I have heard. It was perhaps around 1900 or so. I heard that there were 3 or 4 of the first generation and 2 or 3 of the second generation. At that time, the course of the Pin River ran right through the village and there was a relatively large river port just outside the village. Many people, including

> "Bangladeshis", had come and gone, using the port for trade. I do not know exactly who the first person (a "Bangladeshi" who came and settled) was, but from what I have heard, the person came here to trade and met a local girl and decided to marry her and settle down. He invited the other 'Bangladeshis' who visited the village for trade or travel to settle in the village and as they married local girls, our 'Bangladeshi' community was formed. I have heard that this Nong Baen village is the oldest "Bangladeshi" settlement in this area. After this village, other settlements like Chiang Mai, San Kamphaeng or Doi Saket were formed."

This is the most detailed and reliable story the author heard. It says several "Bangladeshi" (Bengali) petty traders traveled extensively on foot or by boat in northern Thailand around the mid-19th century. It's hard to know what they sold, but it was probably clothing or small daily-use items. One of them met a local girl, married her, and settled down as a farmer in her father's place. As a Muslim, he had to uphold the Islamic faith, so he asked his wife to convert. One by one, the men married local women in an almost identical path. Together, they formed some small "Bangladeshi" Muslim communities in the area.

The same Abdul B. went on to say.

> "The first generations all did the farm work. It took about 7 days from here to Chiang Mai (at that time) because the road was bad. So, some people decided to stay in Chiang Mai city; they started many other occupations there like cow trading, butchering, meat selling, vegetable selling and subsistence trading".

His earlier statement and this narrative are contradictory. His WF came to the village to trade, then started farming. Most 'Bangladeshis' were involved in trade or trade-related occupations before coming to the village. Then, they settled down and changed their occupation to farming. A few years later, some found it difficult to participate in agricultural work and tried to move to Chiang Mai city to develop other professions.

There are several reasons to believe this. Bowie (1988) reported some very interesting points about the people and their movement. She

described "oxen caravan traders" (164-171). "There were long-distance oxen and mule caravan traders who came from as far as Yunnan, China, bringing such goods as opium, raw silk, copper pots and pans, silk thread, medicines." In the case of the Yunnan-Chiang Mai or Yunnan-Eastern Burma routes, the main participants in these oxen caravans were "Ho" (Chin Ho), Yunnan Muslims. In the case of the Chiang Mai-Moulmein route, the main bearers of the oxen caravan were unclear. Some scholars suggested Karen people, while others suggested Muslim people. The most likely candidate of these 'Muslims' were 'Bangladeshis,' as they are the most numerous Muslim populations after the Chin Ho group in Chiang Mai and surrounding areas.

Bowie described another interesting occupation as boat trading (171-179), reporting the following: "Smaller river-traders plied the Ping River, trading goods between Mae Rim and Chiang Mai or Thaawang-phrao, some even going as far as Wang Lung. (176)". She did not name the participants, but Abdul B's narrative suggests that some of the boat traders were 'Bangladeshi.' At the same time, Bowie described more subtle forms of trade: foot trade (182-186) as "...thousands of petty traders, both male and female, travelling on foot,... (182)". Some "Bangladeshis" who lacked funds for boats engaged in this type of small-scale trade.

This trade was set up amid several diplomatic accords, particularly those concerning foreign trade. In the case of Lan Na (tributary state of Siam in the 19th century), including Chiang Mai, "The Treaty between the Government of Siam and the Government of India to Promote Commerce between British Burma and the Territories of Chiang Mai … was signed in Calcutta on January 14, 1873" (Ongsakul, 2005:180), and "negotiated a second Treaty of Chiang Mai in 1883" (183). As a result, the British Consulate was opened in Chiang Mai in 1884, and "Burmese, Shan, and Indian traders, now British subjects, settled in Lan Na and set up shops." (239). At that time, 'Indian' referred to anyone from British India, including 'Bangladeshis' ('Bengali Muslims' or 'Chittagonians', Muslims from the Chittagong region, the easternmost part of colonial Bengal). In other words, it was after 1884 that the number of 'Burmese, Shan and Indian traders' increased. This also coincides with the fact that "The population around urban centres such as Chiangmai seem to have expanded rapidly during the second

(half) of the 19th Century" (Gehan, 1985:98).

3.2 The first wave of migration: a "probable" story

Is it reasonable to estimate that the first Bangladeshis arrived in northern Thailand around 1884 or later? Could one say that the first generation of migrants were clothing or small goods traders? Probably not. The first group of "Bangladeshis" probably arrived in the area around the middle of the 19th century. Their occupations seem to have been related to animal husbandry. Though the author has no historical material to support this claim, there is much evidence that suggests it.

We have important oral evidence about the first Imam of the Chang Clan Mosque in Chiang Mai. Suthep's (2013) study of "Bangladeshis" (or "Pakistanis") in Chiang Mai is the only one of its kind. He submitted the original dissertation of this book in 1977. His study was conducted in the early or mid-1970s. In this study, he wrote a saying of the Imam from his research days in the mid-1970s as "The first migrant who found the Chang-Klan Pakistani Muslim community was originally a cattle trader, from Eastern Bengal of India, who married a Burmese woman, brought cattle from the border Burmese areas to trade, and finally around 1870, (settled permanently in) the City of Chiang Mai." (ibid: XlV). He also wrote, as one of "The first group of Pakistani migrants … known later as Usman Miyashi, was the pioneer settler of the Chang-klarn Pakistani Muslim quarter, … Miyashi took up peddling as his major occupation. His business involved frequent travel with pack oxen between Rangoon and Moulmein in Burma and the northern Thai border towns …" (31). Usman Miyashi's account suggests the following: First, the initial occupations of the first groups of "Bangladeshis" were cattle traders or oxen caravan leaders. Second, they arrived in northern Thailand immediately after the mid-19th century and settled in Chiang Mai around 1870.

Secondly, some witnesses describe their "fathers" as cattle breeders or herders, so they also pursued careers in related fields. For example, Abdul C. from San Kamphaeng offers the following account:

> "My father and mother's father were butchers. They raised cows or goats and sold them, or slaughtered them and sold their meat".

This was made possible by the presence of grazing land, which facilitated the sustainable rearing and maintenance of livestock. He continued:

> "We now purchase cows or goats (from others), not rearing them (by ourselves). We slaughter them and sell the meat. We also process the meat and sell it as dried beef."

A gentleman of Mae Sariang explains the circumstances.

> "There are some butchers here in Mae Sariang, including relatives. They used to raise and slaughter cows and sell the meat. Sometimes Muslim people brought cows from Burma, but now they buy cows from Karen or get them from the Myanmar side through Mae Sam Leab, mainly from Meiktila near Mandalay."

Thirdly some people still work with cows. These include cattle herders and meat processing and sales professionals (such as butchers and meat vendors, etc.).

The above witnesses and related facts provide evidence that some of their "fathers," likely the first wave of "Bangladeshi" migrants, were engaged in occupations like cow-herding or working as oxen caravan laborers. These individuals may have initially crossed Burma's fields and lower hills without a specific destination in mind. However, upon hearing rumors of fertile grasslands, they may have begun a journey eastward.

They came to northern Thailand to herd cattle and initially visited temporarily, selling cows before heading back to Burma or even East Bengal. They kept coming back, becoming used to the area and gaining knowledge. One man decided to stay, presumably due to his emotional bond with a local woman. Abdul B.'s accounts show this process clearly. These events likely happened before the 1884 British Consulate was set up, so in the 1860s or 1870s. For the same reason, it is not possible to determine their exact route.

3.3 Migration route

The British consulate opened in Chiang Mai in 1884. As a result, the number of "British subjects"—including Burmese, Shan, and Indians—in the city increased rapidly. However, there may be a history that precedes this.

The most common route of communication from Chiang Mai (or more broadly Lan Na) to the south was to Moulmein in eastern Burma, not Bangkok. For example, a historical study of Lan Na reveals that "Because of the slow connection, mail from Europe and even from North America was sent to Chiang Mai via Moulmein in Burma" (PENTH 2002: 142).

It described 19th-century circumstances. A British diplomat's journey from Bangkok to Chiang Mai, then to Moulmein and southern Thailand, around 1860 (Schomburgk 1863), revealed noteworthy points: 1) Bangkok-Chiang Mai was difficult and took a long time; 2) the Chiang Mai-Moulmein journey was easier and shorter; 3) so, Moulmein was the common route from Chiang Mai to the world.

It should be noted that the communication route between Chiang Mai and Moulmein went through the small town of Mae Sariang rather than Mae Sot because Mae Sariang was part of the Lan Na territory (Pongsawat 2007: 386). Around 1900, the volume of trade between Lan Na and Moulmein exceeded that between Lan Na and Bangkok (Kakizaki 2000). Furthermore, due to the difficulty of communicating with other parts of Thailand, the Upper Salween Basin area (Mae Sariang, Mae Hong Son, etc.) depended on trade with Moulmein even in the first half of the twentieth century (ibid., ch. 5).

Considering all these facts, the communication route between Chiang Mai and Moulmein had developed and was established before British power. Many people used the difficult, narrow route, and the "Bangladeshi" forerunners followed it. We conclude that the first wave of "Bangladeshi" migrants followed this route, i.e., from Moulmein to Chiang Mai via Mae Sariang. It's hard to determine the route between eastern Bangladesh and Moulmein. Considering their profession, they may have walked all the way from their villages.

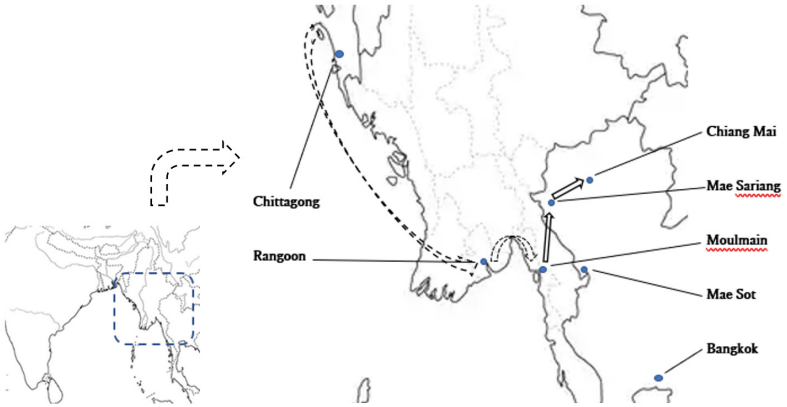

Figure 1 Maps showing the location of the related area from Chittagong to northern Thailand

3.4 Second wave of migrants and beyond: the establishment of settlements

One can better understand their situation after 1884 and the establishment of the British Consulate in Chiang Mai.

Many migrants traveled from the northern Chittagong region, particularly from Mirsarai, to Rangoon. A study of local history offers an account of a renowned local editor who published Bangla-language periodicals in Rangoon. In the early 20th century, many readers in this region read his journals, particularly an issue that highlighted the high cost of steamboat fares (Choudhury 2004). This evidence suggests that 1. Many migrants arrived in Rangoon from eastern Bengal; 2. A significant number of them were literate; and 3. These migrants likely used a steamboat service from Chittagong to Rangoon, starting in the late 19th century.

Newcomers in Rangoon struggled to enter the business market and sought opportunities elsewhere. Some heard of a border town in the Salween River forests and took a local car service to Papun, near the Thai border. Some "fathers" opened tailoring shops. This story was

told by several people in Mae Sariang. Some of the "fathers" were lured by the opportunity in the undeveloped Thai side of the border. They walked to the riverbank on the Burmese side, crossed the border by boat to Tha Tafan—a tiny river port on the Thai side—and traveled by foot or elephant to Mae Sariang, a western border town in the former Lan Na Kingdom. Some of them opened small garment shops there. Many of their followers, who were mostly relatives or people from the same area, came and settled in the town. After that, they established themselves permanently in the town. According to witnesses, their descendants' shops are now located in the city center. They maintain a beautiful mosque near the main market.

Many stayed in Mae Sariang, but some, including old-timers and newcomers, moved further north or northeast. One of those who moved north was the father of a 78-year-old man in Mae La Noi, a small bazaar cluster located 30 kilometers north of Mae Sariang. He provided the following account.

> "I belong to the second generation. My father first came from Comilla, somewhere in eastern Bangladesh. He came to Papun, Myanmar, for two or three days and then to Mae Sarinag because he had a friend there. That was more than 70 years ago. He opened a shop in Mae Sariang and then another here, Me La Noi. He kept these two shops and raised us. My mother was a second-generation "Bangladeshi," but I don't know anything about her father."

So the "Bangladeshis" scattered from Mae Sariang to the north. Some of them went further to Mae Hong Son where there are still some "Bangladeshi" descendants. The old man continues talking:

> " At first he bought clothes from Myanmar, perhaps in Papun. In the year 2500 (1947 in the Buddhist calendar) or so, a road opened to Chiang Mai. Then he changed his place of purchase to Chiang Mai. He walked for 4 days through a narrow and difficult mountain road to Hot (a town halfway between Mae Sariang and Chiang Mai) and rode on a wood gas vehicle to Chiang Mai. There he bought some clothes and went back to Hot. On the way he asked local people to help him when he comes back; on

> the way back he hired some local people as porters in Hot. He walked back with them for 4 days from Hot to Mae Sariang".

Communication between Mae Sariang and Chiang Mai was somehow established, but it was a very difficult and time-consuming trip: about 10 days for a round trip. Therefore, it was natural that some "Bangladeshis" decided to migrate further to Chiang Mai.

An old man keeping a shop in Muang Mai Market in Chiang Mai explains.

> "I came to Thailand by plane in 1962. From Chittagong to Rangoon to Bangkok and then to Chiang Mai. I was born here, but I do not know exactly when, because my father sent me back to my village home in Bangladesh at a very early age for education. My grandfather (FF) first came to Mae Sariang. (He opened and ran) a shop at the market. My father moved back to Chiang Mai. I do not know well, but maybe for a business reason. (Shows the author some rolls of cloth) A lot of these are here because of that, I think."

Pursuing their own business opportunities, they gradually made their way to northern Thailand. Some of them went further than Chiang Mai. Abdul C. from San Kamphaeng explains:

> "Among (Bangladeshi) Muslims, my grandfather (MF) was the first man to come here from Chang Pueak (an area nearby the northern gate of Chiang Mai's old town)."

As mentioned above, "Bangladeshi" Muslims came to northern Thailand and established their communities in Mae Sariang and surrounding areas or in Chiang Mai and its neighboring small towns.

4. Complicated settling process

However, their settlement process was not uniform or easy at all. Some cases of migration and settlement were quite complicated and full of hardships. These will be examined next.

4.1 Different arrival times and different migration routes

We concluded that the typical migration process was that the first wave of migrants from Bangladesh (then East Bengal) came to Mae Sariang. Then some of them moved to Chiang Mai. Then they dispersed to the small towns or settlements near these towns. However, in the case of Non Baen, there is an oral legend that the migration of the first generation of "Bangladeshis" happened earlier than in the case of Chiang Mai. If we assume that the very first migrants were those who participated in cattle or oxen caravans, then some of them came and settled first in Non Baen. With this assumption, the whole story can be understood without contradiction. Their migration and settlement process might be different from those of the subsequent immigrants.

In addition, we can infer the existence of some other routes and settlement processes. The most plausible one appears in the following stories of the Imam of the Chang Pueak Mosque in Chiang Mai:

> "(As far as he has heard) there are basically four migration routes through which "Bangladeshi" Muslims moved to Chiang Mai: 1. Mae Sot/ Tak route, 2. Mae Sariang route, 3. Mae Sai route, and 4. Wiang Heng/ Fang route. (Ancestors of the "Bangladeshis") moved through these points. ... There was a kind of base camp for the caravans. The place was right by the White Elephant statue near Chang Pueak. Those who came through the Chiang Rai (Mae Sai)/Wiang Heng routes had gathered in the neighboring place of the camp".

Of the four routes he described, the third and fourth are plausible because these two routes suggest the existence of the northern route from Burma to northern Thailand. Some eyewitnesses reported the presence of "Bangladeshi" Muslim descendants in eastern Burmese cities, such as Lashio. If this were true, then it is natural to infer the existence of the northward route to Chiang Mai.

4.2 Disappearance of some first ancestors and the fate of their male children

Some attention should also be paid to a fact that some people (today's "Bangladeshi" Muslims) insist on. They heard from their own

"fathers" (fathers or grandfathers) that the first ancestors, for whom the ancestors of their "fathers" were 3-5 generations ago, had most likely returned to their own home villages or to the places through which they traveled. The reason for their departure was not clear. They may have had to leave for business reasons; they may have been struck down by illness or accident while traveling and died. Or they may have simply felt homesick and returned to their home village. In any case, it is certain that at least some of their first "fathers" had gone elsewhere, leaving their wives and children behind in Thailand. In these cases, their wives, who had converted to Islam, had struggled to raise their children, and bring them up as decent Muslims.

In some cases, the early "forefathers" seemed to have some anxiety about the quality of Islamic education for their boys in northern Thailand. At the end of the 19th century or the beginning of the 20th century, very few people in northern Thailand had sufficient knowledge of Islam and were able to teach for Muslim children. In addition, some ancestors seem to have had the desire to give their boys full ability to master the Bangla language at the same time as their Islamic education. Since it was impossible to fulfill these life goals in northern Thailand, these ancestors brought the boys back to their own villages for education. They left the boys in the village and returned to Thailand alone. Most of the boys stayed in the villages, grew up there, and ended their lives among other local people in Bangladesh. We can hardly trace the fate of these people from an exceptional case of the old man of the Muang Mai market as we saw it before. He told the story of his own life: that he was born in Chiang Mai, went with his father to his father's home village at a very early age, grew up there, and later came back to Chiang Mai. This is the only reported case of the return of such a boy. However, it can easily be inferred that there are many more such boys who have followed a similar path in life.

4.3 Nationality and citizenship

Thailand has a policy of nationality by jus soli, which is the principle of assigning nationality by place of birth (Otomo, 2011). Many migrants to Thailand (not only to Thailand, but also to countries with similar nationality policies) have been severely affected by this policy. This is also the case for 'Bangladeshi' Muslims. For example, Abdul B.

makes this point as follows.

> "Many first-generation migrants could not obtain Thai citizenship due to the provisions of the Thai Citizenship Act, and at best they obtained a work permit and ended their lives without Thai citizenship. Their children, on the other hand, were granted Thai citizenship by law (jus soli). Thailand has a conscription system and the boys, not all but some selected, served in the army at the age of 18. Those boys who had completed their service in the army had asked the Thai authorities to issue a formal status for their fathers, and as a result they obtained a "permanent residence permit" for their fathers."

Many had somehow obtained work permits, or permanent residence permits and formally settled on Thai soil. Of course, it is easy to imagine that some of them did not (or could not) obtain permission at all and ended their lives without formal legal status. However, by the second generation and beyond, almost all of them had been granted Thai citizenship. They had become Thai citizens. As a result, the "Bangladeshi" Muslim communities in northern Thailand as a whole were transformed into Thai Muslim communities

4.4 Some Cases of Complicated Migration Processes

Some cases have rather complicated migration processes, as in the cases of double or triple steps of migration. Abdul B. explains how it works below.

> "My father had served in the British Indian Army (the Indian Army in colonial times) and advanced to Tavoi in southern Burma (in the 1930s?); he was honorably discharged from the army there. He had opened a small grocery shop in Tavoi and stayed there for years. But as a result of the so-called "Burmanization" policy after independence, he had to leave and moved to Kanchanaburi in western Thailand.
>
> I was born there. ... I met a man in Bangkok by chance and traveled with him to his home village. That is this village. I met his daughter and married her."

In this case, his father was the first-generation migrant, having migrated from Bangladesh to Tavoi, Burma, and then again to Kanchanaburi in central Thailand. In the next generation, the speaker himself migrated from Kanchanaburi to Bangkok and then migrated again to settle in a village in northern Thailand. The case of his wife's father is also complicated:

> "My wife's father was born somewhere in eastern Bangladesh. I only heard that the place was near the sea. He, like my father, had served in the British Indian Army and left the army in Rangoon. I do not know exactly, but he had stayed there for years. He had to leave Rangoon for the same political reason and moved to Bangkok. There he met a "Bangladeshi" man who brought him to this village. He met a girl, my wife's mother, and they got married."

In this case, his wife's father was the first-generation migrant, migrating first from Bangladesh to Rangoon, Burma, and then again to Bangkok. He then migrated three times to northern Thailand.

These two cases illustrate the great impact of socio-political change in Burma, especially the so-called "Burmanization" or displacement of the Indian population. In both cases, they moved eastward to Thailand, not westward to their homelands. Moreover, because the timing of their movement was late, after the end of World War II, perhaps in the 1950s, they were forced to move first to central Thailand and then again to northern Thailand. These cases suggest that by studying the case studies of a few migrants in detail, one can learn many things, such as the strong impact of national policies or policy changes on the decision-making of each migrant, the complexity of migration processes, the great variety of migration cases, and some consistent or similar migration patterns even among these vague and diverse cases.

5. Conclusion

"Bangladeshi" Muslims have settled in northern Thailand for a long time. They have formed their communities in Chiang Mai and surrounding areas or in Mae Sariang. Many scholars

and sometimes local people called them «Indian» or «Pakistani», but according to their own identification, they are «Bangladeshi» descendants. The author tries to reconstruct their history from their fragmented memories. Through this case study, it is suggested that the importance of the land route connection between South Asia and Southeast Asia has been underestimated to this day. We should pay more attention to this aspect.

Their migratory processes were not simple or consistent. Depending on the time of their arrival, their modes and routes of migration varied. Some of their early ancestors had left their communities, leaving behind their wives and children. Some even took their male children to their home villages in eastern Bangladesh (then East Bengal) for Islamic education. Those who settled, however, faced the difficulty of obtaining Thai citizenship. In some cases, they were forced to migrate two or more times, mainly because of changes in the larger political situation. Overcoming these hardships, the «Bangladeshi» Muslim communities in northern Thailand have paved the way for the creation of their Thai Muslim communities.

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Nationalism and Indian Community in Malaya during the Japanese Occupation, 1941-1945

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Abstract—This study examines the transformation of the Indian community in Malaya during the Japanese occupation (1941–45), with a focus on the rise of nationalist consciousness and collective identity. Through the formation and activities of the Indian Independence League (IIL) and the Indian National Army (INA), the Indian community experienced significant organizational and ideological changes. Under Subhas Chandra Bose's leadership, civilian participation and support for the INA increased dramatically, fostering a sense of unity and purpose. Comparative analysis highlights the differing wartime experiences of Malaya's major ethnic groups: while Malays benefited from Japanese policies, the Chinese faced harsh repression, leading to intensified interethnic tensions. The findings suggest that the Indian community's collective wartime experiences fostered political unity and national identity, contributing to both the anti-colonial movement and the post-war restructuring of Malaya's multi-ethnic society.

Keywords: Indian Nationalism, Indian Independence League, Indian National Army, Subhas Chandra Bose, Malaya

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1.Introduction

Experiences of Indian community in Malaya during the Japanese occupation include the organization and activities of the Indian Independence League (IIL) and the Indian National Army (INA), and the formation of Azad Hind provisional government. It was one of the non-mainstream national movement, away from the Indian subcontinent. The INA was formulated with the British Indian Army war prisoners in Malaya and Singapore for the first time in December 1941. The first INA was dissolved with the arrest of Mohan Singh, a leader of the INA in December 1942. The INA reorganized with the advent of Subhas Chandra Bose in 1943, was marked with the participation and support of the migrant Indians in many areas of Southeast Asia, especially labouring and merchant classes from South India. The organization and activities of the IIL and the INA, therefore, have exerted a direct effect on the lives and consciousness of the Indian community in Malaya. The part of INA, which had been committed to the Burmese front, was captured by the British Army and tried as war criminals with the defeat of the Japanese empire. The whole process affected the national movement in India to a certain degree. The absorption of the INA tradition by people in mainland India, such as the activities of Defence Committees and the broad mass agitation against the trials, led to mutiny in the Royal Indian Navy. The INA tradition enriched the nationalist tradition of India though it did not fundamentally change the mainstream national movement.

There has been a considerable amount of research on the Indian national movement in Malaya including the INA-related issues. Some studies on modern Indian history give salience to the INA in the sense that it had inherited the revolutionary-terrorist aspects of Indian national movement (Sarkar 1983, 410–411). More studies on the INA put the emphasis on the absorption of INA tradition into mainstream national movement by focusing on the post-war INA trial and mass-upheaval against it (Chandra et al. 1989, 471–486; Chandra 2010, 325–7; Bandyopadhyay 2015, 427–31). There are also many biographical writings which describe Subhas Chandra Bose, a prominent leader of INA, as a national hero (Bose et al. 1973; Mookerjee 1975; Mukherjee 1997; Bose 2011). The INA issue was also dealt with in the bigger scene of

the crash of imperialisms in the World War II, and the Japanese Army along with the INA was estimated as the "hammer-blow" from outside which changed the Indian political outlook overnight (Anderson 2015, 47–48). Indian scholars in Southeast Asia carried out research on the INA and the local Indian national movement as part of their studies on the settlement and localization of migrant Indians. One of the classic studies put the emphasis on the strong national consciousness of the two traditionally separate sections of the Indian community, middle-class merchants and professionals and lower-class labourers who started to share after the IIL and INA organization (Arasaratnam 1970). Another study focused on the characteristics of the Indian population and their economic role, and just briefly mentioned the INA and its meaning to the migrant Indian community (Sandhu 1969). These books did not include the concrete case of the participation or changes of consciousness of local Indian people while they underlined the consolidation of identity and the solidarity of the Indian community. It was in comparatively recent times, after the 1990s, when new research reported the Indian experiences in Southeast Asia including the radical national movement during World War II (Netaji Center 1992; Ramasamy 2000, 90-105).

This article investigates the revolutionary national movement during the first half of the 1940s in Malaya and other regions of Southeast Asia. It also aims at probing the changes of lives of the Indian community and the ultimate influence over the Malayan multi-ethnic society by the reconstruction of the facets of the overseas radical national movement. The next section examines the status of the Indian community immediately after the Japanese occupation and during the first INA period in 1942, by reviewing the trial records of 'enemy agents' who infiltrated India in 1942. The third section tries to reconstruct the invigoration of nationalism among Indian community in the second INA period, 1943 – 5 through circulars of the IIL and the British intelligence reports. The concise analysis of the experiences of other ethnic groups is undertaken in the fourth section from a comparative perspective with the case of Indian community. The conclusion estimates the overall influence of the radical national activities including INA and IIL over the Indian community and Malaysian multi-ethnic society in general.

2.The First Indian National Army and Indian Community in Malaya, 1942 – 3

The Majority of participants in the first INA were former British Indian Army war prisoners. Some civilians were also recruited from Indian society in Malaya. In his interrogation in 1945, Mohan Singh, a leader of the first INA, stated that on 5 December and 19 December 1942 the INA recruited 1,500 civilians on each date (War Office 2004a), but there remains no records of them. The trial records of 'enemy agents', who had infiltrated into India and were captured in 1942, are clear evidence of army recruitment of civilians, as well as the activities of recruitees (Government of India 1997). It is notable that the INA established an intelligence school, trained agents, and dispatched them to India. They established the intelligence school as early as the time of the first INA. Statements of the accused in the trial revealed that the Swaraj Institute in Penang was in charge of intelligence training for Indians in 1942. According to the record of Toye, an intelligence officer who interrogated Mohan Singh after the war, a number of teams comprising more than 130 agents infiltrated India in 1942 but no one returned to the INA side (Toye 1984, 376). There is no known evidence of their engaging in espionage in India. Most agents dispatched during the first INA probably returned home or surrendered to the British police.

Agents were dispatched from Malaya to India in five teams in 1942, two teams which comprised five people each arrived at the Malabar coast and Kathiawar coast in rubber boats after moving in a Japanese submarine on 27 September and 29 September, respectively; other three teams which comprised one, three, and six people each, infiltrated inland between the end of October and November, crossing the Indo-Burma border. Individual members of the team were captured, or surrendered between September and November 1942, and tried in April 1943 after interrogations. The trial record shows us the characteristics of the INA agents and the channels of their recruitment in detail. Although the record reflects only a minority, 19 out of 3,000 of the first INA soldiers from the local Indian community, it is one of the rare official documents (Government of Bengal (Home) Def. Branch 1997). The record gives us clues about the relationship between Indian organizations like the IIL and the INA and the members of the Indian community in general.

No.	Name	Age	Caste or race	Occupation	Residence or native place
1	V. M. A. Khadir	23	Mohammedan	Surveyor	Travancore
2	S. A. Anand Alias Thanu Pillay	30	Nanchinat Vellala	Foreman of Works	Trivandrum Town
3	Mohammed Ghani	19	Mohammedan	Student	Trichinopoly
4	K. A. George	27	Christian	School Teacher	Travancore
5	C. P. Eapen	24	Christian	Stenographer	Travancore
6	Lepon D'Cruz	30	Christian	Salesman	Trivandrum Town
7	S. C. Bardhan	26	Kayastha	Telephone Mechanic	Tepparah (East Bengal)
8	Boniface B. Pereira	26	Christian	Draftsman	Travancore
9	K. Mathai Mammen	24	Christian	Chemist	Travancore
10	C. Gopala Krishna Reddy	22	Reddy	Marine Engineer	Chittoor
11	A. Andrew	28	Christian	Radiographer	Bangalore City
12	K. Lochu Govindan	24	Nair	Clerk	Cochin
13	K. M. Cheriyan Alias M. George	27	Christian	Asst. Examiner of Accounts	Travancore
14	M. Gangadharam	24	Nair	Draftsman	Palghat (Kerala)
15	Suprabhat Ranjan Paul	27	Kayastha	Telephone Lineman	Soeniganny, Bengal
16	Phanindranath Roy	28	Kayastha	Clerk	Tipperah, Bengal
17	Jagdish Mittra Kaura	22	Khatri	Landlord	Punjab
18	Fouja Singh	24	Sikh	Farming	Punjab
19	G. Santha Pillai	24	Christian	Student	Tanjore

Table 1 List of the Accused in the trial of 'Enemy Agents' in 1943

In 1942 and 1943, 19 INA agents who infiltrated India were accused and tried. They were accused of "entering India as Enemy Agents of the Government of Japan" and "conspiracy to deprive the King of the Sovereignty of British India by aiding and assisting the Government of Japan". The personal information of the accused shows that the majority of the agents were from South India and were Christians. This reflects the regional proportion of the Indian community in Malaya. The majority were the professionals, with occupations such as stenographer, chemist, marine engineer, radiographer, and others were listed as student, landlord and farmer. (See Table 1.) This did not match the occupational proportion of the Indian population in Malaya, a majority of which were plantation workers. Only 1 out of 19 was from a plantation, and he was

not a normal labourer, but rather a clerk. People with a comparatively high standard of education were selected as intelligence agents because of the nature of the tasks they performed.

From the interrogation of the accused, we can deduce several facts about the period. The accused uniformly talked about the economic distress during the Japanese occupation. Many of them worked for British companies, or persons before the Japanese occupation, which were closed or being evacuated after the advance of the Japanese. In many cases, the accused started to have a relationship with the IIL, which was originally founded in Kuala Lumpur in 1928 and reactivated in the early 1940s. The process by which the accused became agents gives us insight into the atmosphere of the Indian community during the Japanese occupation. The record depicted a status of abject poverty for the majority of the Indian community "being without work, money, or rice." Many of the accused went through economic hardships when they lost their jobs in the companies or small businesses after the Japanese advance. In their adversities, the accused nos. 9, 11, 12 and 16 started relationships with the IIL, which resulted in getting new jobs in Japanese-run and IIL-related institutions and/or being admitted to the Swaraj Institute for the intelligence training. For example, accused no. 12, was hired as a Hindustani teacher at the IIL and paid 15 dollars a month after losing his original job, a clerk at a publisher's office due to discontinuance of a magazine; later he worked as an interpreter for a Japanese officer in Burma before being dispatched to India. Some of the Indians in Malaya were employed by the Japanese Army through the introduction of the IIL or directly employed by IIL, and therefore were provided minimum protection.

Some statements in the trial record provide clues regarding the early reaction of the Indian community to the Japanese advance and subsequent development of the IIL. The statement of witness no. 1 shows the Indian community prepared a countermeasure in an organized manner while facing immense political change during the Japanese occupation. It also teaches us that the leaders of existing Indian organizations supported the IIL and that the IIL was established as an inclusive organization within a short period of time. Witness no. 1, who was employed in a rubber plantation in Kedah and temporarily

stayed at Raghavan's house in Penang during the Japanese occupation, described what he had witnessed. The Indian community immediately formed Peace Community Committees to maintain law and order in the community and to relieve the anxiety of its members. According to his information, it took some time for the IIL to be formed because it did not exist in Malaya. However, once the IIL was formulated by Rash Behari Bose from Japan and Pritam Singh from Thailand, it supplanted many existing Indian organizations and grew to be a huge organization. The leaders who led the existing organizations became leaders of the IIL. It spread all over Malaya and absorbed the Relief Committee which was a relief organization for poor Indians. The existing chief of the Relief Committee became a chairman of the local IIL in Kedah. It was the Japanese Army who provided the rice to the committee.

Singapore experienced a similar situation in the way that the IIL absorbed existing Indian organizations. The statement of accused no. 8, who was a member of the Indian Passive Defence Force, organized by the president of Indian Association of Singapore under the permission of Governor of British government, provides an insight. He observed the situation of the IIL supplanting the existing organization, the Indian Association of Singapore, because he also worked as an Assistant Food Controller of this organization. After Singapore fell, the IIL subsequently organized, and took over the hospital and the food stores of the Indian Passive Defence Force where he continued to work. This demonstrated that the IIL, which came into existence in Southeast Asia with the Japanese occupation, easily constructed their own organization by taking over existing Indian organizations and material resources.

The IIL spread quickly among Indians. According to witness no. 1, membership of the IIL was secured by payment of a dollar, after which a 'ticket,' countersigned by the Japanese, was given to them. It undoubtedly provided Indians who became members with many forms of preferential treatment. Witness no. 1 tried to prove this by stating his own experience: He was able to enter the Kedah aerodrome and also Penang Harbour merely by showing this ticket. Some of the accused said that Indians who did not join the IIL were unable to secure food, were harassed by sentries, had their houses indiscriminately searched and so on. In general, Indian society was restless after seeing the Chinese

beaten by the Japanese and the Europeans, their previous supervisors and protectors had been removed by the Japanese order. This situation made Indians more dependent upon the IIL, because it now played the role of protector from the violence and material supporters for the Indian community.

Most of the accused contacted the IIL, became members due to their hardships, and finally became agents after getting espionage training. Some of the accused were involved in the agent system through direct contact with the Japanese Army. Some undertook the task of gathering information while working in the government institute (accused nos. 18 and 19); others applied through the wanted-ads and were sent to the Swaraj Institute (accused nos. 15 and 17); and another met a Japanese person casually in a restaurant, who persuaded him to get a job and to go to India (accused no. 14). These people chose to resort to their last option in a distressed situation.

The INA was also organized along with the IIL. The INA not only embraced the Indian war prisoners but also recruited civilians, according to witness no. 1. The trial records lack the further information related to the INA. The INA did not attract the interest of general Indians in this early period without visible activities or prominent leaders.

3. The Indian Community during the second INA period, 1943 – 45

The INA started to exercise influence over Indian society in Malaya with the appearance of Suabhas Chandra Bose in 1943. Bose had considerable supporters groups in India, who were mainly former members of the Forward Bloc, and were prominent figures among the Indian nationalist camp. In addition, the reputation of Bose was almost absolute among the nationalists overseas. In the period of the second INA, the participation of Bose gave significance to the INA and there was large-scale recruitment and training of civilians. The INA connected with the Japanese forces was under the surveillance of the British information agencies. The colonial government was making regular reports on Bose and other INA leaders.

The report of the British Information Agency dated 15 October 1943 stated that the morale of both civil and military Indians was quite high everywhere, and that men and women were coming forward in large numbers to volunteer for the INA. The same report reflected the atmosphere of Indian society in Malaya and estimated the status of Bose as high, stating 'Bose used his appeal and his knowledge of mob psychology to good effect and that the results were fairly gratifying to him' (War Office 2004b) He started to contact the Indian community immediately after he entered Southeast Asia and continued his tour throughout Malaya except for a period of four months when he visited Thailand, Burma, and Indochina. He succeeded in expanding the branches of the IIL to localities and plantations and securing human and material resources. An information report in 1944 stated that recruitment for the INA was widely carried out through the advertisements in newspapers, from posters and by visits of recruitment troops (Government of India 2004).

Reaching Malaya and the taking over of the leadership of the IIL by Bose in July 1943 was followed by renewal of the organization. A circular on this renewal and outline of each department was issued on 13 July by Bose, and another circular, containing more detailed directions on 23 July by the recruitment and training departments (IIL Headquarters (Department of Training) 2007; IIL Headquarters (Department of Recruitment) 2007). Departments of the IIL were reorganized into 12 departments, 5 of which were directly related to the INA. The departments of recruitment and supply were newly established, and the department of training was strengthened by absorbing the existing department of youth. Now recruitment and training became the main tasks of the IIL.

Recruitment was carried out by each branch of the IIL with the chairman of that branch as officer-in-charge. The process of the recruitment involved in sequential order each of the following: enrolment of the applicant, a physical check-up, dispatch of the enrollment document and a report of the physical check-up to the head office. This process of recruitment was simplified in order to attract as many applicants as possible. Some regulations were loosened for the smooth recruitment: the age limit of 17 was abolished, the result of a physical check-up was

not an absolute criterion, and any applicant of sound health could be recruited. Bose aimed to recruit 300,000 new personnel including women, according to the circular of the department of recruitment.

The department of training continued the process afterwards. In the first step, trainees took a two hour training session every day while they stayed home and worked. The second step included full day training and admission into a training camp that was divided into general training and special training. General training would admit 5,000 trainees, and out of these first-step trainees, ones with good marks would be selected for the second-step training. In the third and final step, trainees were admitted to the military camp and trained as members of the INA. There were separate special training institutes including the Swaraj Institute and Azad School in Singapore. Special training institutes limited admission to people with a high educational standard, because they aimed at 'turning them into instructors' through further training, according to the British intelligence report (Government of India 2004). All trainees were provided with a uniform, board, and salary.

Bharat Youth's Training Centres were designed for the elementary military training of civilian recruits. They were founded in early 1943 with a 3-month-course (Government of India 2004). At the end of the course, 10% of the recruits were selected and sent for advance training at the Azad Schools, while the remainders were absorbed into the INA. Other training institutes for civilian recruits were established in Burma and Bangkok. The number of INA soldiers who went through these training institutes from 1943 to mid-1944 was 14,000, in two divisions, training camps and Bharat Youth's Training Centres (War Office 2004c). The US government reported the status of Indian minorities in Southeast Asia under the subtitle of 'The Background of the Indian Independence movement' in September 1943 (Office of Strategic Services Research and Analysis Branch 2004). The document reported that the Indian population in Southeast Asia was a potential human resources for the IIL. The report emphasized the important characteristics of the Indian population in Southeast Asia, noting that 'Indian males greatly outnumber the females' and 'a large proportion of them are between the ages of 15 and 35'. This gender ratio was related to the nature of migration of Indians to Malaya, which was largely a labour driven migration.

The INA experienced the rapid growth after 1943. In the first INA period, Mohan Singh continuously had conflicts with the Japanese army regarding the issue of recruitment (Toye 1984, 365-381). When Bose took over the INA, he could freely recruit the civilians initially on the basis of the backing from Japan, and later with the strong material support from the local Indian community. Active recruitment and regular training in localities involved a considerable number of Indians in Malaya, a military style of life and group activities. Experiences of group activities and organizational lives considerably affected the individual Indians and the Indian society in general. The Indian labouring class in Malaya also experienced changes in their mentality and organization. Many labourers volunteered for the INA from 1943 onwards and volunteer troops, Thondar Padai were organized on plantations (Arsaratnam 1970, 108). Two distinct groups in the Indian community, the urban-dwelling middle class and labouring class, mainly located on plantations, started to find a shared Indian identity through these group experiences (Mani and Ramasamy 2006, 5). Organizational experiences through the INA made the establishment of numerous labour unions and political organizations possible in post-war Indian society in Malaya. A few examples include the Indian Congress of Malaya, founded in 1946, The National Union of Plantation Workers in 1954, and DMK(Dravida Munnetra Khazagam) organized in Singapore (Mani and Ramasamy 2006, 8-9).

The INA experiences also enhanced their national consciousness of the Indian community, providing psychological confidence and pride. The training program in the Officers' Training School emphasized morale training and general knowledge, according to the information report (Government of India 2004). Such topics as the Russian revolution, the Irish revolution and the 1857 revolt of India were taught in the Swaraj Institute. Hoisting the tri-colour flag of India and singing Vande Mataram may have been an important ritual to enhance the Indian national consciousness (Government of India 1997). As a result, Indians in Malaya became fighters for Indian independence, not colonial subjects or oppressed labourers. Enhanced national spirit during World War II encouraged the Indian community to construct organizations and to strengthen solidarity.

According to the new constitution of the IIL, that Malaya Branch

required all branches to make substantial contributions towards organization expenses. Apart from this it was also decided to reduce the contribution from the branches from 25% to 5% of membership fees each month from May 1943 onwards (IIL 2004). However, at the same time, the document emphasized that all branches should be financially independent and that the Relief Fund in particular should be funded and used by each branch. Unlike the first INA period when the Japanese Army provided rice to the Relief Fund of the Indian community, economic relief in this circumstance should be carried out by the Indian community themselves. It also demanded that each branch have constant contact with plantation labourers in order to maintain the sound finance through the membership fee. With the settlement of Japanese occupation, plantations reopened and the labourers started to work and received their salary. Labourers were assisted to join the League as many estates resumed work. The IIL branches depended on the regular membership fee of their members and had worked to guarantee the rights and interests of the Indian community through the negotiations with plantations and factories as earlier. The IIL started to restructure its financial frame from 1943 onwards, when the Japanese regime began in the Malaya region.

The British intelligence Report of late 1943 described the treatment of trainees in Bharat Youth's Training Centre and Azad Schools in detail. Rations were good and were supplied by wealthy local members of the IIL. Recruits were issued khaki shirts and shorts, boots, woolen cloth, socks, hose tops, and wore INA caps and breast badges. They were paid at a rate of $8 per month, while instructors received $27, $16 and $14 per month according to their respective ranks (Government of India 2004). This report mentioned the direct financial support from the Indian community. It is also possible that the salary was, at least, partly covered by fund raising. The circular of the IIL indicated that the costs for local recruitment and first step training should be met by the local committee (IIL Headquarters 2007). The Indian community, with its enhanced national consciousness, financially contributed to the activities of the INA.

These circumstances suggest that the Indian community was not only a source of human resources but also the provider of the INA's

material base. This does not change the fact that the INA was established with the support of Japan, and mainly depended upon the Japanese army. However, it is clear that Indians in Malaya also sacrificed and supported under the system of total mobilization, which affected their entire lives. Unlike the first INA period, when the Indian community economically depended on the IIL, it functioned as the primary source of human and material resources to the INA in the second phase.

4. Comparison with other communities

The Malays who constitute a majority of the Malaya population, did not receive satisfactory treatment during the British colonial period. The British concept of ethnic groups in Malaya categorized Malay people as unsuitable for organized labour therefore did not employ them in the modern industrial units. Usually the Indians and Chinese were considered to be more suitable as industrial workers and were therefore employed in the tin mines and various plantations which gave jobs in quantity. The Malays stayed mainly in rural areas engaged in traditional agriculture, and consequently lagged behind the other communities economically. On the other hand, the Malays who belonged to the ruling class had access to the British administrative structure (Hashim 1983, 18-19).

The British colonial rule inevitably brought about certain transformations in politics and governments in Malaya. The British regime overpowered existing local sultans, but maintained them with the residents in order to ensure law and order, especially in tin mining and other areas of economic importance. The traditional ruling class in Malaya was generally cooperative with the British. However, anti-British movements were not absent. There had been protests against the British colonialism from the late nineteenth century onwards. Anti-colonial movements, including the uprising of the Perak and Naning War in 1875, the Pahang Rebellion in 1891, the Kelantan uprising in 1915 etc. emerged from various parts of Malaya. Several groups started to organize against British colonialism from the early twentieth century onwards. For example, there was a group of Arabic educated students with politically advanced ideas in the 1920s and an organization that was vaguely Marxist-oriented, anti-feudal and anti-colonial in nature

formed in 1938 (Hashim 1983, 10-12). However, these organizations were few in number, loosely organized, and remained in an embryonic status, failing to develop into full-fledged nationalist organizations.

The Japanese occupation of three and a half years altered the social situations of Malaya. In the nationalist tradition, although meager, the Malays developed antagonism towards the Japanese rule after occupation. The Japanese government stimulated Malay nationalism by ceding the northern states of Kedah, Kelantan, to Thailand (Kratoska 1998, 85-93). Enforced worship of the Japanese Emperor and use of Japanese language resulted in a sense of cultural estrangement, which also led to the naissance of national consciousness among the masses. The Japanese military government in Malaya gave favourable treatment to the Malays and Indians over the Chinese. Japanese policy regarding Malays was conciliatory and they enjoyed a certain status during the Japanese period. It was the Malay people who substituted for Chinese labourers when the latter refused to provide their labour force to the mines and industrial units taken over by the Japanese (Thompson 2001, 97-8). This certainly rewarded the Malays with considerable benefits, as, up to that point, they had been isolated from the benefit of economic modernization. This somehow broke the existing image formulated by the British, of Malays as suitable for agriculture but not industrial works including manufacturing. These changes possibly soothed the antagonism of the Malay people towards the Japanese military government. The Malay people earned economic gains due to the strong nationalist sentiment of the Chinese, but these gains also deteriorated Malay-Chinese relations.

The relationship between the Malays and Indians was not fundamentally changed by the Japanese occupation. Negative aspects remained latent in their relationships, which in many cases corresponded to the moneylenders-debtors relationship. The indebtedness of farmers, rampant in the Southeast Asia, was one of the social problems that occurred to a lesser degree in Malaya. The authority employed the system of Malay Reservation to protect farmers, who were mainly Malays, and restricted land holdings of non-Malays. There had still been cases of illegal transfer of land ownership and the deprivation of land from the Malay people who were its real cultivators (Thompson 2001, 95). These problems

could not easily be corrected because the Japanese took a supportive approach to the Indians as well.

The Chinese have had a long history of immigration to Malaya, and considerable numbers of Chinese migrants settled there since the fifteenth century. Their movement was increased during the British colonial period due to the modernization of the Malay economy and the active inflow of capital. The British colonial government encouraged immigration of the Chinese, who were considered suitable workers for industrial units and providers of cheap labour. They, along with the Indians, were concentrated mainly in the western coastal area of Peninsular Malaya, where the tin mines and rubber plantations were established. The Chinese dominated retail business and trade in addition to a substantial portion of the tin and rubber industry. Migration of the Chinese actively continued until the 1930s, although most of these immigrants were a 'floating population' who temporarily stayed in Malaya and ultimately returned to their home country (Sandhu 1962, 35).

The Chinese accelerated their anti-Japanese struggle since 1937 when the Sino-Japanese War broke out. The Kuomintang-Communist cooperation which began even before that conflict created an atmosphere among the Chinese that temporarily resolved their inner conflicts and encouraged fighting against the foreign enemy. The Chinese had experienced a very strong national consciousness and unity in the 1940s and the Chinese in Malaya were no exception. Hard line policies of the Japanese military against the Chinese also drove the Chinese to be more nationalistic (Akashi 1970, 61-89). Even before the landing of Japanese forces, local Chinese undertook anti-Japanese activities such as fundraising to support China and strikes and boycotts of Japanese goods in protest of Japan's invasion of China in 1937 (Cheah 2002, 97). Accordingly, the Japanese government in Malaya marked them as a dangerous element and employed repressive policies against them.

On the eve of fall of Singapore, British troops, joined by Chinese volunteers, known as Dalforce, after the name of their commander, Lt. Col. John D. Dalley, fought against the Japanese forces. It was an action that manifested the anti-Japanese sentiments of Chinese people, even though they failed to defend Singapore. The Japanese policy towards Chinese people was very repressive in nature and epitomized in the 'Sook

ching' (meaning clean-up) operation and coercive fund raising name the 'gift of atonement' (Cheah 2002, 97). Japan changed the direction of policy to conciliation by allowing Chinese schools and launching bureaus to improve Japanese-Chinese relationship from 1943. However these changes resulted in only limited success.

There was a big contrast between the treatment of the Chinese and that of the Malays and Indians: The former were dangerous enemies to be restrained and whose economic resources were to be utilized, while the latter were the objects of soothing due to their spontaneous cooperation. These distinctly different treatments led to deterioration in the Malay-Chinese relationship. One of the most visible examples was the ethnic clash in Johor in 1945. The Japanese Army carried out anti-guerrilla operation, which means suppression of a Chinese-led resistance movement. Malay village chiefs, police, and local volunteer corps were involved in the operation as directed by Japanese policy. The Chinese labelled it collaboration, seeing Malays as willing instruments of the Japanese. Ethnic strife began in April and spread to many parts of Johor. Armed members of the 'Malayan Peoples Anti-Japanese Army' attacked Malay people who supported and cooperated with the Japanese operation. The Malays declared a jihad organizing 'Red Bands of Sabilillah Army' under religious leaders (Cheah 2002, 82-83). The strife continued until the end of the war in August, leaving numerous victims and refugees. It was one of the seeds of ethnic conflicts to come in post-independence Malaysia.

5. Conclusion

This research focused on the Indian community and their experiences in Malaya, an ethnic minority in a multi-ethnic society. Collective experiences and strengthening of national consciousness among the Indian community affected its characteristics in general during the Japanese occupation and later. The Indian community established a new organization, the IIL, which was based on existing organizations, and had the backing of the Japanese military government. The IIL rapidly grew and stood as a central organization of the Indian community, providing political

and economic protection to the community during the first INA period until the end of 1942. The INA was also established, mainly with former British Indian Army war prisoners. There had been new recruits from civilians, but their numbers were limited. The first INA, headed by Mohan Singh who was a former officer of British Indian Army, had to depend upon the Japanese Army. The influences of the INA were comparatively limited among civilians.

The situation developed markedly when Subhas Chandra Bose took over the INA in 1943. In the second INA period, Bose strengthened the unity of whole Indian community, which was followed by the active participation and donation of Indian civilian society to the INA. The main function of the IIL turned to the recruiting for the INA from civilians, and the raising of funds. Indian community became providers of human and material resources for the freedom struggle of their homeland. Many civilians experienced the organizational life and were inspired by the revolutionary nationalistic ideas through education and propaganda. The organizational experiences and spread of nationalism influenced the various strata of Indian society, which made active organizational attempts possible among the community after World War II.

The experience of the Indian community during World War II profoundly influenced its members, although the INA failed to achieve its goal to free India by the hands of Indian people. Indian people in Malaya underwent a period of nationalism, using their own means to advance the struggle for Indian independence, and feeling a strong sense of solidarity as a whole community. The establishment of organizations and participation in them were also meaningful experiences for members of the Indian community. It seemed to enhance nationalist sentiments and honed the organisational minds and skills of Indian people, which influenced post-war development of the community.

The collective experiences of the other ethnic communities during the Japanese occupation affected the Malaya multi-ethnic society in post-war period. Three major ethnic groups, the Malays, Chinese, and Indians in Malaya experienced strong nationalist

tendencies in the early 1940s, although the extent of these tendencies differed. Their respective experiences were different in nature, especially their relationships with the Japanese military government. It should also be noted that the different experiences of each ethnic group affected not only their respective relationships with the Japanese but also their relationships with the other groups. This resulted in inter-ethnic conflicts in some areas, which aggravated conflict in ethnic group relationships, even in the post-war period. Although one of the predominant characteristics of Malaya society has been its multi-ethnicity, it has suffered protracted conflicts and tensions among different ethnic and/or religious groups. The different experiences of each ethnic group in the recent past, including the period of the Japanese occupation, has provided important clues to understanding this situation.

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Fluctuating "Indianness" or "Belonging": Singapore Indian Dancers and Their Encounter with Southeast Asia at Ramayana Festival

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Abstract—This article investigates the dynamic relationship between cultural heritage and regional identity among the Indian diaspora in Singapore, specifically focusing on the experiences of classical Indian dancers. Historically, the process of "Indianization" deeply influenced the cultural landscape of Southeast Asia, evidenced by the regional prominence of the Hindu epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Using the context of a regional Ramayana Festival, this paper analyzes how Singaporean Indian dancers, while performing art forms rooted in the Indian subcontinent, negotiate their identity when confronted with diverse Southeast Asian interpretations of the same epic narrative. The study argues that this encounter forces a critical negotiation between the essentialized notion of "Indianness" (the perceived homeland culture) and a localized sense of "Belonging" within the Southeast Asian region. The dancers' performance becomes a site where two impulses intersect: the desire to preserve the purity of classical tradition and the acknowledgment of a unique, diasporic reality. Ultimately, this research demonstrates that identity for the Singapore Indian community is not fixed but is a fluctuating, active process, continuously shaped by regional cultural dialogue and revealing a distinctive Southeast Asian Indian consciousness.

Keywords: Indian performing arts, Ramayana festival, cultural negotiation, diaspora, Indianess, identity and belonging, Singapore

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1.Introduction

In July 2017, I came across an interesting incident relevant to Indian culture in Bangkok. My Thai friend took me to a local restaurant in the evening, and on the way, we got caught in a traffic jam, so he turned on the TV in the car as usual. What surprised me was seeing the Indian TV series, "Mahabharata," in Thai on the display screen. The program was a remake of the 1988 smash hit TV series of the same name. To satisfy my curiosity, I asked him what motivated him to watch this program. He replied as if it were nothing special, "I often watch this program whenever I get caught in a traffic jam. It is good for killing time. For Thai people, the story is very familiar, and there are many good lessons for our daily life." This episode demonstrated the relevance of the major Hindu epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, to people's daily life in contemporary Thai society. It also raised the question of how these epics relate to the daily lives of the Indian diasporas in Singapore, where I have been conducting my fieldwork.

The commercial and cultural exchanges between India and other regions, particularly Southeast Asia, influenced by the historical process of Indianization, led to the introduction of the great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, in those regions from the 9th century onward. These epics played a significant role in the development of written language and oral tradition while also transforming into various art forms, including dance, drama, shadow plays, paintings, sculpture, and architecture in each of these countries (Krishnan 1997, 9). Thus, over an extended period, these epics established their cultural sphere in India and Southeast Asian countries. However, the circumstances in Singapore differ from those in other Southeast Asian nations, with the Ramayana and Mahabharata traditions being predominantly maintained among the Indian diasporas.

In 2024, approximately 35.42 million Indians were living overseas (The New Indian Express 2025). Indian dance and music were transmitted and transformed on a global scale due to the migration of Indians, even before the term "globalization" was coined. James Clifford (1992) discusses this phenomenon in the following way: "Travelers move about under strong cultural, political, and economic compulsions, and that certain travelers are materially privileged, others oppressed...

Travel, in this view, denotes a range of material, spatial practices that produce knowledge, stories, traditions, music, books, diaries, and other cultural expressions" (Clifford 1992, 108). Clifford defines "travel" as a translated term because of its class, gender, and race associations, and because in the process of translation itself, one can learn a lot about peoples, cultures, and histories that are different from one's own. The Indian diasporas abroad place a high value on culture and tradition in preserving their "Indianness." Indeed, Indian dance and music are actively carried on and performed among them, and today, non-Indians also learn and perform those traditions in various parts of the world.

Previous studies discuss that performing arts are often produced and consumed in a multicultural, multiethnic, and sometimes postcolonial arena in which a variety of artistic endeavors, aesthetic values, and political interests interact and compete (Um 2005, 6). Without a doubt, performing arts are increasingly influenced by intercultural creativity and situated in a multicultural setting in the current postmodern and globalized environment. Today, Singapore Indian performing arts groups often represent Singapore as a symbol of a multicultural society at international events and arts festivals, both domestically and internationally, including in India. Athough there has been a growing accumulation of research on Indian diaspora communities in recent years, the story of individual of Indian diasporas and their experiences have received little consideration within a growing body of research (1). John Tomlinson (1999) defines globalization as an empirical condition of the modern world, made possible by what he calls "complex connectivity." He points out that globalization refers to the rapidly developing and ever-densening network of interconnections and inter-dependences that characterize modern social life (Tomlinson 1999, 1-2). In this regard, it is important to consider how globalization has emerged in individuals, how individuals are connected to others and the outside world, and how their experiences influence their identities and belonging. This paper will focus on the incident of Singapore Indian dancers and their encounters with Southeast Asia at the Ramayana Festivals in Bangkok. Firstly, it will explore the process of transmission and the evolution of Indian performing arts in Singapore during the 20th century. Secondly, it will pay brief attention to the Ramayana in Southeast Asia and describe the Ramayana dance-drama created by the Indian dancer Rukmini

Devi. Finally, it will illustrate the recent event, the Ramayana Festival in Bangkok, and the Singapore Indian dancers' experience there. This paper will examine how performing arts practices within diasporic spaces highlight relationships and interconnectivity between Singapore Indian dancers and others at the event and how their experiences reflect and fluctuate their identity and belonging (2).

2. The Indian Diasporas and Indian Performing Arts in Singapore

2.1. Indian Migration in Singapore

Situated at the southern end of the Malaysian peninsula as the confluence of trade routes spanning the Indian Ocean, Singapore is a small city-state and a cosmopolitan city with all the trappings of 21st-century modernity. The establishment of Singapore as a free port by the British in the early 19th century determined the ethnic diversity of Singapore. The economic opportunities arising from a port without the unusual tariffs found elsewhere quickly attracted migrants from China, India, the Malay Peninsula, the Indonesian archipelago, Europe, and other places. By 1827 immigrants from different parts of China became the dominant ethnic group in Singapore, and by the start of the 20th century the ethnic composition of Singapore had stabilized with at least 70 percent of the population being ethnically Chinese, with sizable portions of Malays, Indians, Eurasians, and those of other ethnic backgrounds. Indians are the third-largest racial group in Singapore, after the Chinese and the Malays. While the Indian community forms a small minority of the total population, it has had a significant influence on Singapore's development (Mathews 2018; Rai 2007).

In Singapore today, Vineeta Sinha (2015) argues the description "Indian" carries within its boundaries a myriad of communities—from varied regions, speaking a multitude of languages and adherents of a range of socio-cultural and religious traditions. It also connotes a cultural identity and for some even registers a "national" identity beyond their location in the nation-state of Singapore (Sinha 2018, 191). The term "Indian diaspora," which I use in this paper, includes the early diasporic

Indians who have settled in Singapore since the pre-war days, as well as the new immigrants. From the 19th century onwards, Indians, especially people from South India, began to settle permanently in greater numbers in Singapore, and they have not only established their traditions here but have also assumed greater responsibilities in the economic, political, and cultural development of modern Singapore (3). However, a significant period in the history of the Indian community in Singapore has occurred throughout the past two decades. During that time, a "new" group of Indians from middle-class and upper-middle-class backgrounds accepted the Singapore government's invitation to come to Singapore. This new Indian diaspora comprised mainly service providers and IT personnel and they were able to retain their cultural practices with the support of excellent communication and travel facilities (Kaur 2008; Rai 2015). The older Indian diasporas, already in the third or fourth generation, have through close interaction with them, been reminded, exposed, and brought closer to their traditional practices, attitudes, and way of life. Nevertheless, as Sinha (2018) claims, when taken as a whole, these clusters have changed the social, cultural, and economic makeup of the Indian population as well as its internal political balance (Sinha 2018).

2.-2. The Evolution of Indian Performing Arts in Singapore

In Singapore, Indian culture and traditions have contributed a great deal to building a multicultural society and have even become a symbol of the same. While people from all of India's major ethnolinguistic groups are represented in Singapore, the Tamil community accounts for about 54 % of the country's Indian population. Therefore, the Indian classical music and dance scene in Singapore mostly represents South Indian forms, such as Carnatic music and Bharatanatyam. These are typically associated with Hindu tradition and have been performed at temples during religious festivals since the early 19th century (Takemura 2023, 127).

Indian performing arts were freely viewed by Indian practitioners in public places in the Selegie area long into the 1920s, and Indian dance was initially taught and performed by untrained housewives. In the 1950s, famous dance troupes like Madam Azurie and others visited Singapore on their way to the US, and they performed and occasionally even gave dancing lessons to the locals (Rajan 2008: 636-637). The

period from Singapore's independence to the turn of the century was one of progressive growth in the Indian performing arts scene of the country. As the actions of leaders of this industry and governmental interventions are gradually beginning to pay off, institutions like the Singapore Indian Fine Arts Society (SIFAS), Bhaskar's Arts Academy, Apsaras Arts, and the Temple for Fine Arts—often referred to as the "Big Four"—have solidified their positions, providing vital financial support and momentum to the nascent Indian performing arts scene. SIFAS, a nonprofit Indian organization, had brought in great dancers like Himmath Singh Chauhan to perform and run classes in the 1950s. Later in the 1960s, SIFAS set up a more formal arrangement and joined hands with Kalakshetra, a prominent arts institution, in Chennai, South India. SIFAS follows Kalakshetra's teaching method and syllabus-based curriculum and began to provide training in dance, especially Bharatanatyam and Carnatic music. Today, to strengthen its ties with Kalakshetra, SIFAS not only continues to hire Kalakshetra graduates as teachers but also organize their students' performances in Chennai (Takemura 2023, 127).

Among the dancers who came to Singapore, a few have indeed made it big and contributed immensely toward bringing Indian dance forms certain recognition. As Sykes (2015) claims, no discussion of Indian dance in Singapore is complete without mentioning Bhaskar's Arts Academy and Nrityalaya Aesthetics Society, run by the late Mr. K.P. Bhaskar (1925-2013) and his wife, Santha Bhaskar (1939-2022), who were two of Singapore's first classical Indian dance instructors. Mr. K. P. Bhaskar studied Kathakali in his youth at the Royal College of Dance of Travancore in his native Kerala, with additional training in Kathak, Manipuri, Kandyan (up-country Sri Lankan) dance, and Russian ballet. His gurus included the famous Kathakali dancer Guru Gopinath, Kutralam Ganesam Pillai in the vein of devadasi or "servants of god", and Uday Shankar, with whom he collaborated on the movie "Kalpana" and served as assistant dance director at his Gemini Studio. While making a stopover in Singapore on the way to Australia, he started teaching Bharatanayam in 1952 and soon married the young Malayalee dancer and choreographer Pankyamma Santhamma (later Santha Bhaskar). They set up their dance academy, Bhaskar's Academy of Dance (later called Bhaskar's Arts Academy and the Nrityalaya Aesthetics Society).

After performing frequently in their early years, the Bhaskars turned to teaching and choreography. A talented figure in her own right, Mrs. Santha Bhaskar studied Malay, Chinese, and especially Thai dance at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, and actively integrated different styles into her works, notably The Butterfly Lovers (1958), inspired by a Chinese folk story (Sykes 2015, 495).

Adding to that, in the 1970s, the Apsaras Arts and the Temple of Fine Arts, both related to Kalakshetra, gave impetus and standards to the cultural environment. Moreover, several distinguished institutions teach Indian dance and music to local Singaporeans and members of the Indian diasporas at present. The La Salle-SIA College of the Arts, Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, and the National University of Singapore, the Centre for the Arts, have included Bharatanatyam and Indian music in their curriculum. International Indian schools, such as Global Indian International School and Delhi Public School, are also developing the talent potential of artists. Besides that, some housewives from Chennai, as well as other places like Delhi, Mumbai, and Bangalore, whose husbands are IT personnel and service providers, started holding illegal private lessons in their residences. They began to proliferate in the 2000s. As a result, Singapore's Indian performing arts scene appears to be considerably more complex these days (Takemura 2023, 127).

3. Ramayana in Southeast Asia and Indian Dance-Drama

The Ramayana tradition has served as a major source of inspiration for Southeast Asians' artistic expression of their moral, spiritual, and aesthetic standards and ideals through the creation of poetry, prose, mural paintings, relief sculptures, and dramatic performances (Sachithanantham 2004, xiii). Today, there are various forms of telling the story of Rama in Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Many national epics were derived from the Ramayana: Ramakien in Thailand, Phra Lak Phra Lam in Laos, and Reamker in Cambodia. This indicates the Ramayana's strong influence over literature in many Southeast Asian countries, as so many different national epics were based on this one story (Sarkar 1983). This multilayered presence of the Ramayana in this region shows a remarkably resilient tradition,

whose continuation depends upon its constant recreation and reinvention. With or without state patronage or social pressure, writers and artists, choreographers, and creators of drama, dance drama, and musical operas have been attracted by the Ramayana and have reinterpreted it through a modern idiom (Vatsyayan 2004, 347). Indeed, Illustrations of the Ramayana can be found in various media and contexts, ranging from temple carvings and manuscript illustrations to masks, puppets, textiles, and, most recently, in film and television, where its popularity continues today (Advani 2014). The Ramayana has been reinterpreted in contemporary Southeast Asian popular culture and the popularity of the Ramayana can be considered an important cultural mediator.

In contrast, most choreographers of the twentieth-century in India have attempted to present ballets based on the Ramayana theme. Among them, Rukmini Devi Arundale, a pioneer dancer from Madras (now Chennai), South India, created one of the most significant landmarks of 20th-century Indian dance. Using tradition and creating new interpretations of tradition, Rukmini Devi, a Brahmin with a liberal Theosophical family background, developed a new dance language to convey the ancient epics. She revived the Sadir, which was almost forgotten and had become marginalized in society, performed by devadasi, and reconstructed it as Bharatanatyam at her institution, Kalakshetra (Meduri 2005; Takemura 2023). Her contribution to lending prestige and dignity to a style that had been banned by the alien rulers is unparalleled, both for its sociocultural and purely artistic facets. It was she who first conceived of presenting dance dramas in the Bharatanatyam style on the modern proscenium stage in the 1940s rather than restricting its repertoire to the typical solo dance of the previous decades. She truly became a living symbol of the renaissance of an ancient art form (Vishwanathan 2010, 175).

As I argued in my recent work (2023), Rukumini never stopped searching for new texts to use as the foundation for her production. According to Vishwanathan (2010), Rukmini's interest in a Ramayana dance drama might have been sparked by what she witnessed when traveling to Indonesia (Vishwanathan 2010). Discussing the production during the 1970 Ramayana Seminar in Indonesia, Rukumini expressed herself in the following words:

> *In my choreography, I have very closely followed the music and have devised movements which are completely musical and express the various shades of meaning which Valmiki conveys in the poetry……also I have varied the movements according to the emotions, according to the type of character, according to the times of the day that are portrayed, and have tried to take into account all the variations of mood expressed by Valmiki* (Vastyayan 2010, 175).

An Indian dance scholar, Kapila Vatsyayan claims Rukumini adopted the rules of directly linking the term to the gesture and rendering the rhythmic passages in pure dance sequences (Vastyayan 2010, 178). Rukmini explained as follows:

> *I wish to make it clear that these dramas produced by me are not dance-dramas handed over from the past. But I have followed the rules of Bharata. I have used only the classical styles and technique; the music is purely classical and in the presentation itself I have tried to keep everything as representative of the age of the Ramayana as possible. I have been true to tradition in my attitude to the production…… in the classicism of the styles of the dances and music used. I fully believe that I have done no violence of any kind to the classical tradition* (Vatsyayan 2010, 178).

For this pioneer, the Ramayana served as the ideal vehicle for refining Bharatanatyam dance-drama for the modern proscenium theater and establishing a definitive paradigm for the genre. Using a corps de ballet to provide moments of exquisite choreography, she certainly brought Bharatanatyam a new perspective to portray the Ramayana. In contrast to Ramayana's previous epic narrative presentation style, she included dramatic climax moments by taking a selectively sensitive approach to the story's important episodes as the iconic text to construct an essential Indianness and defined Indian culture and values

(Vatsyayan 2010, 178). Taken as a whole, the ensuing dance drama is innovative in both vision and technique of execution. Rukumini's works are still being undertaken in Kalakshetra today as a tradition, but their example has inspired Kalakshetra alumni both nationally and globally (Takemura 2023, 130).

4. Performing the Ramayana Tradition at the ASEAN Event and Encounters with Southeast Asia

4.1. ASEAN Plus Ramayana Festival in Bangkok

Since the international Ramayana festivals and seminars were first held in Indonesia in 1971, many more events have provided opportunities for diverse performances and interpretations of the epic in the region. Consequently, the Ramayana has been regarded as a representation of cultural unity in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) quest for political and economic unification since 1997. Now, illustrating my latest work (forthcoming), let us exemplify how the Ramayana Festivals serve not only as a contact zone for Singapore Indian dancers to encounter with other Southeast Asian performers but also as an opportunity to reflect their identity.

From April 20-24, 2016, the Ministry of Culture of Thailand organized the "ASEAN Cultural EXPO 2016" with the 234th Year of Rattanakosin City under Royal Benevolence at Sanam Luang and its vicinity in Bangkok. The event aimed to promote the cultural diversity of ASEAN, and the audience could revisit the epic artistry of the Ramayana in a five-day ASEAN Plus Ramayana festival at the National Theatre, with more than 200 performers from around the region, including Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and India as well. While the Hindu version of the Ramayana was depicted by Indian and Singaporean groups using the Bharatanatyam technique, its shape differed greatly from mainland Southeast Asia, where it shares a common culture with Buddhism. The festivals were memorable for the vibrant quality of their diverse performances.

Mrs. Santha Bhaskar, Singapore's head of delegation and the artistic director of the Bhaskar's Arts Academy, led the ensemble, which included

six female Bharatanatyam dancers, six musicians, including two female vocalists, two mridangams, a flute, and a sitar. They performed a piece based on Hanuman's encounter with Sita, entitled "Ashoka Vati (Ashoka Vanam)," with Bharatanatyam form and live Carnatic music. The story was about Sita seated under the Ashoka tree lamenting (using slokas or verses from the original Ramayana by Valmiki) her condition. Her disappointment and deep sorrow force her to attempt suicide. However, Hanuman stops her in her attempt and shows Rama's ring to her. This causes Sita to have second thoughts and change her mind, and she sends her hair jewelry to Rama. Hanuman goes back to Rama singing that he has found Sita. Rama travels to Lanka and crosses the bridge built by Hanuman and his friend. Mrs. Santha Bhaskar described her creative intention of the production as that she wanted to express the uniqueness of Singapore through a different approach from the conventional Indian Ramayana dance-drama productions such as Kalakshetra style (6). She explained in a Thai TV interview, "we are not having Rama and Hanuman in all costumes like other countries come up with costumes. Dancers will be wearing the usual costumes, but they will dance like characters. So, we have more dance rather than acting" (7). Unlike Kalakshetra's tradition, the troupe's Bharatanatyam based production was unique in that, as a new experiment, all the roles were performed by female dancers, and their choreography alone—without the need of special costumes—was used to portray Hanuman and Rama. Especially, the group emphasized choreography and motions above gestures and narrative in a dance-drama manner (Takemura 2025).

During my fieldwork in Singapore in August 2017, I spoke with Mrs. Santha Bhaskar and the dancers from Bhaskar's Arts Academy who performed at the event in Bangkok regarding Ramayana and their experiences. According to Mrs. Santha Bhaskar, she has been drawn to the Ramayana story ever since she had to create a new production in the 1960's. "It is really a human story that imparts a lot of everyday wisdom," she explained. In contrast to her generation, she is concerned that the dancers in her group do not know much about the story and have not even read the Ramayana. Even though Singapore now has new interpretations of the Ramayana in English in the form of novels, comics, and DVDs, these young dancers do not show any interest in it. She claims, "I believe their parents also do not know much about the

Ramayana. If their parents do not teach the traditions to their children, how can I blame our dancers?" On the contrary, she mentioned that the new Indian diasporas, who have been coming to Singapore since the 1990s, are keen on maintaining their traditions and make sure that their children learn it properly. They often ask her about books and websites related to Hindu mythology and the epic (8). In other words, the degree of enjoyment of the Ramayana can be seen in multiple phases among the Indian diasporas.

In Singapore, the Ramayana was considered a religious subject and was never taught at schools in the past. However, over the last two decades, the government has reconsidered the Ramayana as an important cultural legacy, and they are keen to make it a national heritage. The government, through its affiliated agencies, has organized several relevant events and activities; the exhibition of "Ramayana: A Living Tradition" at the Asian Civilizations Museum in 1997, the exhibition of "Ramayana: A Tale of Love and Adventure" at the Peranakan Museum in 2010, the video projection of "The Legend of Ramayana" at the National Museum of Singapore's Banyan Tree during Singapore Night Festival 2019 and so on. In addition, Bhaskar's Arts Academy presents Kathakali and other Bharatanatyam repertoires based on the Ramayana story at schools as part of the Arts Education Program (Takemura 2023). Mrs. Santha Bhaskar emphasizes, "The arts help children realize their identity. It is important to know the great wealth of values passed on from generation to generation" (9). It can be presumed that new generations of Singaporeans may have a basic knowledge of the Ramayana soon.

4.2. Encounter with Southeast Asia and Ambivalence towards "Indianness"

Regarding the Ramayana event in Bangkok, Mrs. Santha Bhaskar stated, "There was an excellent crowd: for dancers, it's always a pleasure to perform in front of a crowd that knows the epic and myths" (10). The main dancer of the troupe, a second-generation Singapore Indian in her mid 40's, is concerned that the young dancers might not properly understand the Ramayana. She agrees that those dancers are more familiar with the Ramayana than others of Indian descent in Singapore. How-

ever, she made the point that there is a significant distinction between "knowing" and "understanding" the Ramayana's characters. Without a doubt, performing the Ramayana on a stage does not necessarily mean understanding the epic (11). In that case, what experience did the young Singapore Indian dancers, who showed no interest in the Ramayana, gain by performing the Ramayana at the ASEAN event in Bangkok?

One of the dancers, a third-generation Singapore Indian in her mid 20's, described her experience in Bangkok, saying:

> *Bangkok was completely different from India. It was quite an enjoyable moment…... We went to India to perform our productions at the International Ramayana Festival in 2015……Over there, they did not treat us nicely…… They treated us like not proper Indian dancers……The venue was terrible in many senses, and they seemed not to care at all……. I, personally could not fit into the environment and really felt I am not that Indian, I am Singaporean* (12).

Going over her recollections of the event, she described her experience in Bangkok as more enriching than that in India, where she had been less than impressed with the local Indian representatives and their hospitality with no respect. In Bangkok, on the other hand, her troupe met with a generous reception in a venue well-furnished with modern equipment. She emphasized the warm hospitality she received there made her feel she was at home in one of her fellow Southeast Asian countries. Performing the Ramayana in India and Thailand sharpened her sense of her own identity and belonging. This young dancer's experiences did not necessarily strengthen her identification as an Indian, but it was an element that reaffirmed her identity as a Singaporean.

The other dancer, third-generation Singapore Indian in her late 20's, stated her feelings about the event and her encounters with other dancers in Bangkok with these words:

> *I enjoyed being there. There were different kinds of dance*

> *repertoire based on the Ramayana…… We do not have that kind of choreography and body movements in our Bharatanatyam…... They (Thai and Cambodian dancers) came and talked to me after the performance, and they told me they liked our production. …… They said, our choreography was completely original and unique. They have great respect for Indian culture, and they seem to have more sympathy with us rather than dancers from India……I kind of felt that I am proud of what I learned, Indian dance, and quite happy that what we performed was not the same as dancers from India. Because I never felt I am 'Indian' although I learned Bharatanatyam"* (13).

While she had learned Bharatanatyam in her childhood and her family has been deeply involved in the Indian performing arts scene in Singapore over the decades, she always considers herself Singaporean; any sense of "Indianness" was irrelevant. Even though she had performed many Ramayana productions, she had never cared to learn more about the story in detail, something I noted in other young dancers. Ramayana tells us about duty and honor, loyalty, behaving dutifully to their family, good and evil, love and loss, jealousy, and destructive ambitions. In fact, many parts of the story, especially the relationship between men and women with traditional Indian values, do not resonate with the newer generation of Singapore Indians who were nurtured in a contemporary, cosmopolitan culture (14). However, when Southeast Asian dancers shared their feelings with her and acknowledged Indian culture, she felt confused about her identity and began to wonder about her own "Indianness." The Thai and Laotian artists commended Singapore Indian dancers for their distinctive staging and Indian elegance of style, which embody both Singaporean and Indian ideals. Her identity and thought process are undoubtedly rooted in Singapore, but perhaps performing the Ramayana at the ASEAN event had somehow made her more open to "Indianness", albeit in a fragile way, and tenuously. Having mentioned the global circulation of Indian dance, O'Shea (2007) argues that identification must be deliberately developed, even if not necessarily explicitly, rather than emerging naturally from shared national, linguistic, or ethnic roots or from participation in group activities (O'shea 2007, 145-56). By Performing the Ramayana in the

global content and interacting with non-Indian dancers from Southeast Asia, Singapore Indian dancers are confronted with the cultural gyre of the Ramayana, which contains Indian norms, values, and aesthetics, and those experiences make them fluctuate and reinforce their identity and belonging.

5. Conclusion

Against the background of economic globalization and the penetration of new information technology, contemporary Indian cultures are undergoing a radical transformation, resonating with similar changes in other parts of the world. In Singapore today, the accomplishments of Indian performing arts are becoming more widely known and accepted as part of national heritage. This paper aims to contribute to the literature on Indian performing arts by illustrating India's epic tradition, the Ramayana, and its festivals in Southeast Asia.

The Indian community's experience of Singapore's multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-lingual landscape has allowed the community to remain committed to its own socio-cultural and religious leanings. The production of a Singaporean national identity has neither subsumed nor marginalized an ethnic Indian Identity (Sinha 2018, 191). However, as this paper has exemplified, the newer generation of Singapore Indians seem not necessarily to have kept their traditions strongly. They did not have an opportunity to learn the story of Ramayana and its values. More importantly, they have not bothered about it. They "know" what the Ramayana is about through their performance. The experience of Bhaskar's dancers performing on stage at the Ramayana festival in Bangkok does not conceal a prior identity; rather, it is the performance and experience that shape their identity. It is precisely because of this that their identity is fluctuating.

Singapore's national and ethnic identities are closely intertwined; a crucial component is the distinctive fusion and interplay of the country's primary ethnic identities. Prime minister Lee Hsien Loong put it in his speech at the opening of the Singapore Chinese Cultural Center in 2017, "Today we are a modern and developed society, but remain

rooted in our Asian culture. This sense of rootedness gives us a sense of identity and confidence. we are also a multiracial, multi-religious, and multi-cultural society. This diversity is a fundamental aspect of our respective identities" (15). As demonstrated by Prime Minister Lee's speech and the official presentation of ethnic culture in Singapore, it is anticipated that ethnic culture would remain an essential part of Singaporean identity. The Singaporean government acknowledges that a national identity cannot simply replace racial, religious, and linguistic identities, and it hasn't attempted to do so. However, Mr. Chan Chun Sing, Minister of Social and Family Development in Singapore, stated in a public speech in 2014 that identity was not just about the past, but also about their common future. He explained that the Singaporean identity was difficult to define based on a shared past as many in the population have different roots, grew up in different environments, and speak different languages. Instead, he insisted the Singaporean identity should be based on a common future. While it may be difficult to describe a common future among the Indian diasporas as Singaporean, it is certain that these Singapore Indian dancers have managed, through performing the Ramayana, to find their "Indianness" or "belonging" as Singaporeans of their era. The phenomenon of globalization is a reality that permeates everyday life and places, in which the individual is the protagonist. It is none other than the individual who experiences it, interprets its meanings and value, and negotiates it boundaries.

Notes

(1) diaspora studies

(2) The data I used in this paper are interviews, archives, and online materials I have amassed from 2017 to 2025.

(3) The prewar Indian diaspora mainly comprised a labor force, whereas the postwar one included medical, legal, teaching, and administrative professionals. Then followed a waning trend of immigration from the 1960s to the 1980s (Sandhu 1993).

(4) This significantly enhanced the excitement that young girls had exhibited for this creative form. Though small in magni-

tude, the impact of these artists was powerful as they raised the standard of performance and public expectations in Singapore in the 1960s (Rajan 2008, 636-637).

(5) see as example in FUkuok 2023

(6) Interview with Mrs. Santha Bhaskar, August 25, 2017.

(7) NBT WORLD, ASEAN Plus Ramayana, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urQamHkF4NE, accessed July 20, 2017.

(8) Interview with Mrs. Santha Bhaskar, August 25, 2017.

(9) ibid.

(10) ibid.

(11) Interview with T.A., August 26, 2017.

(12) Interview with R. S., August 26, 2017.

(13) Interview with B. M., August 26, 2017.

(14) As Tiwari (2020) argues that the portrayal of the female characters in the epic is startling to our modern sensibilities, for they are displayed as submissive and obedient wives, mothers, and daughters, who lack minds of their own and are thus entirely dictated to by the male characters.

(15) Prime Minister's Office Singapore, "PM Lee Hsien Loong spoke about Singaporean Chinese culture and the Singaporean identity at the official opening of the Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre on 19 May 2017.", May 19, 2017. https://www.pmo.gov.sg/Newsroom/pm-lee-hsien-loong-official-opening-singapore-chinese-cultural-centre, accessed April 20, 2025.

(16) Newspaper

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Communication

The Library of Andrew Rippin: The Rise of a Qurʾānic Philologist[1]

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"It is important to remember the point with which I started: one must decide upon a reading strategy as the first step in understanding – and thus teaching and studying – the Qur'ān" (Rippin 2013, 13).

Andrew Rippin passed away in Victoria, Canada, on 29 November 2016. The current generation of scholars, many of whom began working on Qurʾānic studies within the last decade, have paid a lot of attention to Rippin's scholarship. His books and articles have been translated and reviewed in Arabic, Indonesian, Malay, Persian, Turkish and Urdu languages,[3] and are the subject of dissertations[4] and articles[5] throughout the Muslim world. He is frequently mentioned in social media and in online academic forums. In 2017 Jane Dammen McAuliffe published a detailed essay in a Festschrift dedicated to Rippin in which she notes that he appeared on the Qurʾānic studies scene in 1985, and that his books and edited volumes have contributed to the understanding of Islamic

1 My thanks go to David S. Powers and Bruce Fudge for their constructive comments. All errors are mine.

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3 On the reception of Rippin's works in the Muslim world until 2016, see Daneshgar (2016, 367–385). Recently, some of his edited volumes and articles have been translated into Turkish and Persian.

4 E.g., Muhammad Dimas Geraldy (2024).

5 E.g., Rizal Faturohman Purnama, and Rizal Samsul Mutaqin (2021, 145–155).

texts across the world (McAuliffe 2017, 386–395). As a contribution to Rippin's legacy almost a decade following his death, I would like to share some accounts about the young Rippin who began to build his library in the 1970s and 1980s. His library explains a lot how he became of the most significant historians of Islam and philologists whose ideas and works contributed to Muslim and non-Muslim Qurʾānic studies.

A Young Philologist

Prior to his death, I visited Rippin and his family in Victoria in October and November 2016. He was in the hospital at the time. I was asked by them to check his home library, and to see if the books, theses, and other materials[6] were shelved properly.[7] As I began work, I noticed that Rippin had arranged most of his books based on the language, theme, and type of publication (e.g., periodicals and encyclopedias). He collected materials in Arabic, English, French, German, Hebrew, Indonesian, Italian, Latin, Persian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Syriac, and Turkish. A light brown cabinet in the basement hallway contained Arabic volumes by Sunnī, Sufi and Shīʿī figures, e.g., an edition of *Ḥaqāʾiq al-taʾwīl fī mutashābih al-tanzīl* by al-Sharīf al-Radī (d. c. 1015 CE), with a commentary by Muḥammad al-Riḍā Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ published in Beirut in 1986. Another small cabinet contained his own publications or rare facsimile editions of Qurʾānic codices and Arabic texts.

As a graduate student in the mid 1970s, Rippin studied Persian and the *Gulistān* of Saʿdī. He was an enthusiastic reader of Persian texts and culture and visited Iran prior to 1979. He purchased a copy of Bess Allen Donaldson's *The Wild Rue: A Study of Muhammad Magic and Folklore in Iran*, and he read Ignaz Goldziher's *Islamisme et Parsisme,* which he cited in his Master's thesis and later publications. He also studied Arabic texts and literature, including the Qurʾān. He purchased some copies of the Qurʾān in different countries, including several miniature

6 Among them, unpublished theses that he reviewed as well as texts and unpublished essays that he wrote on several topics, including "vegetarianism". He should have written on vegetarianism following his study of L. Berman's *Vegetarianism and the Jewish tradition* (1982) as well as R. Schwartz's *Judaism and Vegetarianism* (1982).

7 Rippin suggested to me and to some of his close friends to take as many books as we wanted. I chose six volumes. Most of his books and materials, exceeding five hundred items, are now held at the Rippin Collection, Simon Fraser University Library, Canada. A handlist will be compiled in the near future.

Qurʾāns with metal and gilded covers, chains and locks.[8] He liked lexicons, glossaries, and Arabic grammar. He purchased a copy of *Tāj al-ʿarūs min Jawāhir al-Qāmūs* by Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (d. 1791 CE)—cited in his first academic article (Rippin 1979)—and *Asās al-Balāghah* by al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1141 CE). He also began to study Hebrew and Syriac. To improve his skills, he copied texts in each of these languages, and he later reproduced these citations in his Master's thesis.

He also studied Jewish literature, Hebrew texts with Tiberian vocalization, and Biblical texts. In August 1976, he purchased a copy of Rabin's *Qumran Studies*, which he read closely, leaving marginalia on page 117 in Arabic and English (Rabin 1975 [first paperback edition]). He cited this monograph in his later publications and reproduced the section on "Islam and the Qumran Sect" in his "The Qurʾān: Style and Contents" published with Ashgate Press in 2001. Scholars of religion should study Qumran as well as Zoroastrianism and paganism, as they are, according to Rippin, "grounded frequently in philology but also introduce elements of folklore" (Rippin 2006, 241).

Rippin wrote his Master's thesis on philology and terminology: "HRM and Associated and Synonymous Terms in the Qurʾān: An Analysis of Their Use and Meaning". To satisfy a requirement for his Master's degree, he studied Indo-European and Latin philology. Willem Bijlefeld (d. 2013),[9] his MA advisor, exposed Rippin to German and Dutch materials. According to Rippin, "[Bijlefeld] guided me through much German material, translated Dutch for me and provided the necessary feedback in order to write this thesis" (Rippin 1976, v). Subsequently, Rippin purchased, studied and cited Latin treatises (e.g., G. Flügel's *Corani textus arabicus*), German texts (e.g., R. Paret's *Der Koran* and Th. Nöldeke's *Geschichte des Qorans*), and French materials (e.g., T. Fahd. *La divination arabe*).

In the 1970s, Rippin read and was influenced by three books written by the Japanese scholar, Toshihiko Izutsu (d. 1993): *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qurʾān; God and Man in the Koran;* and *The Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Koran.* Rippin spoke highly of Izutsu's scholarship: "The study of the Qurʾān was, with Izutsu, moved out of its

8 See "Andrew Rippin" (2014).

9 On Bijlefeld's legacy, see "Seminary Mourns Loss" (online source).

biblical context and situated in an explicit methodological framework of semantic analysis" (Rippin 2004, x).

Rippin's understanding of Qurʾānic studies was also influenced by Jeffrey, Jomier, Katsh, Kister, van der Leeuw, Mead, Mingana, Moubarac, Ringgren, Snouck-Hurgronje and Watt. He received his Master's degree in November 1976, at the age of 26. He could now read and write Arabic and Hebrew (Rippin 1976,15–21), and inscribe Qurʾānic verses (Rippin 1976, 76).

Inclusive Approach

In 1978, Rippin visited the Kazi Publications & Import, INC. in Illinois and purchased Rev. Ahmad Shah's *Miftah-ul-Quran, a Concordance and Complete Glossary of the Holy Quran* (1906), in the three languages of Arabic, English and Urdu. According to the bookplate, on which Rippin signed his name, this was the first Urdu text that he purchased.

In 1977, Rippin enrolled as a PhD student at McGill University, where Charles J. Adams (d. 2011) became his thesis advisor.[10] He also worked to expand his academic networks, establishing contact with other professors like Hermann Landolt, Issa Boullata (d. 2019), Donald P. Little (d. 2017).[11] Between 1978 and 1979, he spent a year as a guest student at SOAS, London, where he studied with John Wansbrough (d. 2003). Rippin had heard about Wansbrough after completing his Master's thesis. Once Wansbrough's *Qur'anic Studies* came out, Rippin bought a copy to write a review. Prior to this moment, Rippin could only viewed the field of *Qurʾānic studies* from the eyes of the abovesaid Muslim and non-Muslim scholars. However, Wansbrough's book enriched his academic life. In April 1978, Rippin published a short review of Wansbrough's Qurʾānic Studies that was finally released in 1977 (Rippin 1978, 120). Wansbrough, according to Rippin, could challenge the field of Qurʾānic studies and tackle the origins of Islam effectively in the last century:

> Although literature on the Qurʾān has proliferated in recent years, views of the book have not changed substantially from those expounded in the second edition of Nöldeke's *Geschichtes*

10 On Adams, see Lawson (1991, 1–5).

11 For the full list of McGill University's Faculty, see McAuliffe (2017).

> *des Qorans* (1909-1938). This book by Wansbrough, however, marks a new era in Qurʾānic studies and it is likely that, in its wake, a wholesale reevaluation of previous work done on the Qurʾān will have to take place (Rippin 1978, 120).

Impressed with Wansbrough's competency in Semitic and Germanic languages, Rippin was eager to study primary sources with him. Rippin knew that Wansbrough was forging a path for scholars to rethink method and theory in the study of the Qurʾān. He raised, as Rippin wrote, serious questions about:

> all accepted notions concerning the composition, collection, and chronology of the Qurʾān by using a variety of insights from biblical studies (e.g., oral tradition, prophetic motifs) in his analysis of the Qurʾānic text. Coupled with this is an examination of Qurʾānic exegesis prior to the tenth century which elucidates the development of the major trends in that exegesis (Rippin 1978, 120).

In his PhD thesis, Rippin added the following comment about Wansbrough:

> Finally, I consider it a great privilege to be in the position to need to acknowledge my greatest debt to Dr. John Wansbrough, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. During the academic year 1978-79, I was able to impose myself upon Dr. Wansbrough's time, energy and goodwill as a SOAS Research Student. Dr. Wansbrough's enthusiasm for my work, his willingness to read it and comment upon it even after I left London, has been a constant source of encouragement to me. Dr. Wansbrough's influence will, I think, be seen throughout this thesis and, while I am sure that he may not agree with everything I have done and said in it (Rippin 1981, vii).

At SOAS, Rippin remained in close contact with his Ph.D. advisor, Adams, who had mixed feelings about Wansbrough's *Qurʾānic Studies*. Although he admired the novelty of the book's thesis, he critiqued its complexity and confusion. Adams wrote, "Any scholar who wishes to probe Wansbrough's ideas deeply must be equipped with several lan-

guages in addition to English and the Arabic that is basic to all such inquiries" (Adams 1997, 75).

Rippin had learned the languages needed to grasp Wansbrough's ideas. He could also, like Wansbrough, read German, in particular Paret's *Der Koran: Übersetzung* (1961). At the same time he studied further works along with that of Wansbrough related to the origin of the Qurʾān. In his Ph.D. thesis "The Quranic asbāb al-nuzūl material: An Analysis of Its Use and Development in Exegesis", Rippin studied and cited a wide range of primary and secondary sources, including al-Wāḥidī's (d. 1075 CE) *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* and Ḥājjī Khalīfa's (d. 1657 CE) *Kashf al-Ẓunūn*. He also read Goldziher's *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung* and reread Nöldeke/Schwally's *Geschichte des Qorans*. In London, Rippin studied several primary Arabic texts with Wansbrough, including *Qaṭf al-Thamar fī Muwāfaqāt Sayyidinā ʿUmar*, a text in verse about "a common object or person, in this case, ʿUmar" (Rippin 1981, 23). Impressed by Wansbrough's citation of original exegetical manuscripts, Rippin examined manuscript copies of al-Samarqandī's *Tafsīr* and Māturīdī's *al-Taʾwīlāt* —And we now know that Muslim scholars of tafsīr (not mufassirūn) in Asia and Europe have only paid more attention to such exegetical texts in recent years.

Like Wansbrough, Rippin did not regard Abū ʿUbayda's *Majāz al-Qurʾān* and al-Farrā's *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān* as true *asbāb al-nuzūl* texts (Rippin 1981, 89–90). But he did consult these sources for his article on Qurʾānic semantics, "Qurʾān 7.40: 'Until the Camel Passes through the Eye of the Needle'" (1980). Rippin's Ph.D. thesis contains numerous references to and interpretations of Wansbrough's *Qurʾānic Studies* —a practice that he continued until his death.[12] He also read and reviewed books by Richard Bell and Watt about the formative periods of Islam. Further he developed his studies about history of Mecca and Medina with a particular attention to Patricia Crone's (d. 2015) critical monograph: *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (1987). Rippin's engagement with recent publications on history of Islam and pre- and post-Islamic Arabia allowed him to discuss the formation and development of various trends in Qurʾānic studies in his further articles and reviews.

12 Rippin attempted to reformulate some of the Wansbrough's statements and hypotheses: Rippin (1997a).

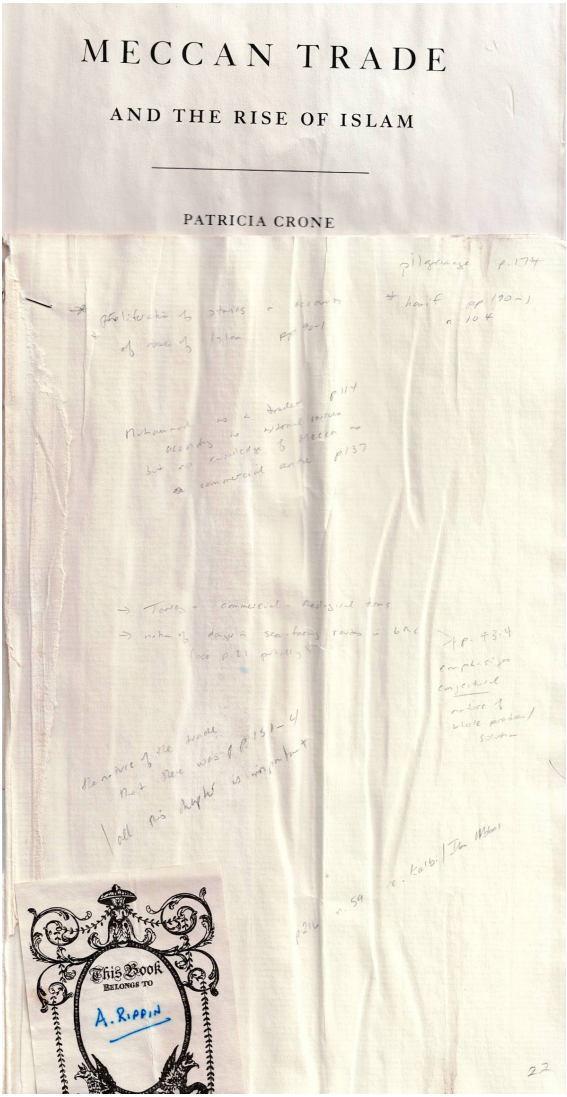


Figure 1 Rippin's Notes on Crone's Meccan Trade. Photo by Majid Daneshgar

In 1979-1980, while he was finishing his Ph.D., Rippin taught for one year at Michigan State University. He defended his Ph.D. thesis in February 1981. Soon had he secured a teaching position at the University of Calgary, Canada (see, McAuliffe 2017). With the benefit of financial support from the university, he purchased several Arabic books on *tafsīr* and the Qurʾānic sciences, most of them he cites in his publications.

Remembering Earlier Scholars

Rippin was impressed by Harris Birkeland (d. 1961), a Norwegian scholar of religion. As a Master's student, he read Birkeland's "The Lord Guideth; Studies on Primitive Islam" (1950), which he cited in his thesis.

In the 1980s he purchased a copy of his Stress patterns in Arabic (1954) and *The Legend of the Opening of Muhammad's Breast* (1955). According to Rippin, Birkland's works are essential for students of Islamic origins, and especially, early Qurʾānic exegesis. Scholars like Birkeland understood how *Sīra, Taʾrīkh* and *Ḥadīth* functioned as sources about the origins of Islam. Subsequently, Rippin placed Uri Rubin's Muhammadology next to Birkeland's studies (Rippin 1997b). He lamented the fact that Colin Turner excluded Birkeland from the list of "prominent" scholars of the Qurʾān in his *The Koran: Critical Concepts in Islamic Studies* (Rippin 2006b). Out of respect for Birkeland and in response to his critics, Rippin republished one of his articles "Old Muslim Opposition against Interpretation of the Koran" in his edited volume *The Qurʾān: Formative Interpretation* (1999).[13]

While travelling with Rippin in 2013, I asked him about his favorite scholar of Islam in the past. "Ignaz Goldziher," he responded immediately. He had frequently cited Goldziher (d. 1921) and he purchased an English version of *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung* in 2006. Notwithstanding his respect for Goldziher, Rippin believed that one scholar cannot produce a monograph on early Muslim literature covering all historical and religious topics and areas. Such

13 The late Shahab Ahmed (d. 2015) reviewed Rippin's book and wondered why Birkeland should have been listed in the book. According to Ahmed, Birkeland misidentified "the family *tafsir* transmitted by Muhammad b. Sa'd al-'Awfi." See Ahmed (2003, 217).

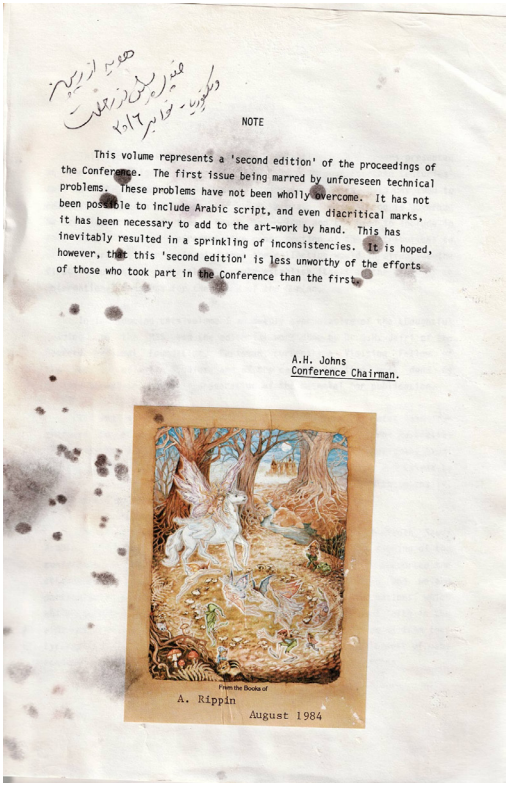
projects need to be done by a team of scholars in collaboration with scholars of Islamic history and religious studies (McAuliffe, 2017). The late professor Claude Gilliot (d. 2025) inform us that Rippin, in 1984, sent invitation letters to leading Muslim and non-Muslim scholars on *tafsīr* literature to come to Calgary, Canada for a conference on "the history of the interpretation of the Qurʾān" (Gilliot 2017). The conference, held in April 1985, "was an ambitious undertaking, gathering a group of internationally renowned scholars for three days of papers and presentations" (Gilliot 2017). The goal of the conference was to "re-create a history of the reaction to the Qurʾān" (cited in McAuliffe, 2017). Rippin's favorite topic, *Nāsikh and Mansūkh* — a topic that he had discussed frequently with Wansbrough in London — was treated by David S. Powers (1988), a historian of Islam (and, of course, a philologist) whose remarkable projects on *Zayd*, the adopted son of the Prophet was admired by Rippin. Lectures on *atharī* and Shīʿī *tafsīr* and *taʾwīl* literature were given by Jane D. McAuliffe and Mahmoud Ayyub (d. 2021), respectively. The late Anthony Johns (d. 2025) delivered a lecture on the Southeast Asian exegetical tradition, inserting this topic into the study of the Qurʾān. The lectures were revised and published as an edited collection.

The Southeast Asian Commentaries on the Qurʾāna

Eight months prior to the Calgary conference, Rippin added a new volume on Qurʾānic studies to his library, the proceedings of the "International Congress for the Study of the Qurʾān", edited by Anthony Johns, held at the Australian National University, Canberra, between 8-13 May 1980. He studied the text with great interest. Many scholars from different backgrounds attended this conference, some of whom, like Lode Frank Brakel (d. 1981), discussed the application of Qurʾānic verses in Malay-Indonesian classical texts.[14] Rippin paid close attention to an essay by the Malaysian scholar Muhammad Abul Qasem, "al-Ghazali's Theory of Qurʾān Exegesis according to One's Personal Opinion" (1980). It is my impression that this volume stimulated Rippin's interest in Southeast Asian exegetical studies. He

14 Although Brakel attended the conference, he passed away before sending his article "Quranic Quotations in the Poetry of Hamzah Pansuri" for publication. See Johns (1980, 185).

frequently reminded me of recent scholarship on Islam in Southeast Asia, especially publications by Anthony Johns and his student Peter G. Riddell. Like Rippin, Riddell was a multilingual scholar who worked with Arabic manuscripts and Hebrew texts. They knew each other for a long time, and Rippin always desired to see further works by Riddell on the origin of tafsīr in Southeast Asia.


NOTE

This volume represents a 'second edition' of the proceedings of the Conference. The first issue being marred by unforeseen technical problems. These problems have not been wholly overcome. It has not been possible to include Arabic script, and even diacritical marks, it has been necessary to add to the art-work by hand. This has inevitably resulted in a sprinkling of inconsistencies. It is hoped, however, that this 'second edition' is less unworthy of the efforts of those who took part in the Conference than the first.

A.H. Johns
Conference Chairman.

From the Books of
A. Rippin
August 1984

Figure 2 Rippin's Bookplate- The proceedings of the International Congress for the Study of the Qurʾān, edited by Anthony Johns in 1980. Photo Majid Daneshgar.

I was motivated to run a joint project with both. In 2012-2013, Rippin, Riddell and I discussed how to move the field of Qurʾānic studies in a different direction and towards lesser-known areas.[15] We initiated a project entitled: "The Interpretation of the Qurʾān in the Malay-Indonesian World" to address early and modern Muslim exegetical activities in the Archipelago. And the three of us published *The Qurʾān in the Malay-Indonesian World: Context and Interpretation* with Routledge in 2016. This was Rippin's last publication.

Reviews and More Reviews

During an online conversation with Rippin in 2015, he told me about his intention to review S.H. Nasr's The Study Qurʾān. Alas, he was unable to accomplish this task. But he did manage to write reviews of no less than 186 books in his personal library! For Rippin, a book review was as important as an academic article, and he advised me to begin writing books reviews prior to completing my Ph.D. thesis. The book review facilitates revision and correction, a task in which Rippin was engaged for more than four decades. His long list of book reviews, covering not only pure studies on religions and Islam but also interdisciplinary subjects like religion and science, helps to explain how he produced a series of articles on new methods and theories in the study of Islam and the Qurʾān, and to write on groundbreaking studies by his predecessors and colleagues. In 1978, he wrote short reviews of books of William Graham and John Wansbrough.[16] Rippin's later reviews were sharper and more critical.[17]

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A few days before Rippin's passing, several of his friends, colleagues and students gathered in his home library. Some of us picked up his publications and related how they had changed the field of Islamic studies for the better. Rippin's library presents us with evidence of his philological knowledge and expertise, through which he became a well-versed reader of the scriptures, including the Bible and the Qurʾān, as

15 Email contact with Rippin and Riddell (dated March 6, 2013).

16 For the list of his publications, see Daneshgar and Saleh (2017, 399–422).

17 See, for example, A. Rippin (2016).

well as the humanities. His library demonstrates his passion for learning new languages, cultures, and people. Although it may not be much different from the library of other scholars of the Qurʾān, I wanted to remember the legacy of Andrew Rippin almost a decade following his death and to show how a scholar's home library can shed light on his scholarship.

Andrew Rippin (1950-2016)
Dean of Humanities at University of Victoria, 2009.
Photo Credit: Syd Bauman

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