

The American Institute of Bangladesh Studies (AIBS) sponsored two Bangladesh Scholars to present at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mounstuart Elphinstone International Conference held at the Elphinstone College in Mumbai April 20-21, 2017.

The aim of the inter-ORC (Overseas Research Centers) conference (which included AIAS, AIFS, AIPS and AISLS) focused on the construction, transformation, and resilience of colonial forms of knowledge in South Asia through study of Mounstuart Elphinstone (1779-1859). Elphinstone's intellectual legacy included the first colonial account of Afghanistan (1815), a foundational history of India (1842), and substantive institution-building as Governor of Bombay (1819-27), particularly in the area of education wherein he placed a premium value on local histories and languages. Elphinstone's work in the areas of education, local language engagement and the production of history had a variety of contemporaneous ramifications and retain considerable salience throughout South Asia today.

Below are two final reports from the AIBS sponsored scholars.

**M. M. Azizul Islam Rasel, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh**

*"Dutch Perception of the Mughals, Bengal and Assam: A Study of a Seventeenth Century Dutch Travelogue"*

This was an excellent two-day conference followed by a visit to historical Mountstuart Elphinstone College, Asiatic Society of Mumbai and National Archives of Maharashtra. Scholars from United States of America, Srilanka, Nepal, India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh presented their papers. The conference was held on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of April. The first day of the conference had four sessions and a keynote address. The sessions were Knowledge and Geography of a Greater Bombay? Elphinstone's Legacy, A Knowing Power - Bourgeois Ideology and Colonial Surveillance, Empire at the Frontier Part I, and Empire at the Frontier Part II.

The second day's session included The Politics of Imperial Knowledge, Teaching/Denying Empire/ History, Appropriating the West, Discarding Empire and the Persistence of History at the Frontier.

I presented my paper in the second session of the first day. The title of the session was 'A Knowing Power: Bourgeois Ideology and Colonial Surveillance'. There were two other presenters in this session. They were: Professor Shah Mohhamd Hanifi, Professor of James Madison University and Prache Despande, Associate Professor at Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta. The title of my paper was "Dutch Perception of the Mughals, Bengal and Assam: A Study of a Seventeenth Century Dutch Travelogue". In this paper I spoke about the importance of the early modern Dutch travel literature in studying the history of early modern Bengal. I investigated how the early modern European travel literatures, particularly Dutch travel writing, have perceived and represented Bengal and Assam. This paper is important in the field of early modern Bengal as it discussed different aspects of the society, culture, politics

and flora and fauna of eastern Bengal depicted in the European travel literature. This paper is intended to be published in a book edited Dr. Shah Muhammad Hanifi and Spencer Leonard and is forthcoming from Hurst Publication, London in 2018.

The conference was very important, as it was a congregation of the scholars from different parts of the globe engaged in South Asian Studies. This was the perfect place to present Bangladesh Studies in international academia and situate it broader field of South Asian Studies.



International Conference II - Mounstuart Elphinstone

## Session II: A Knowing Power - Bougeois Ideology and Colonial Surveillance

Shah Mahmud Hanifi, Prachi Deshpande,  
M M Azizul Islam Rasel

April 20, 2017 | 11.00 AM - 12.45 PM



## **Natasha Kabir, Jahangirnagar University Bangladesh**

*“From the Perspectives of Feminism, Colonialism, and Nationalism in South Asia: Saga of British Occupied India”*

My presentation was part of Session IV: Empire at the Frontier (Part II) that also included presenters Hakeem Naim from UC Davis and Noreen Naseer from University of Peshawar. The following is a summary of my presentation.

If the nation is an imagined community, that imagining is profoundly gendered. National fantasies, be they colonial, anticolonial or post-colonial, also play upon the connections between women, land or nations. To begin with, across the colonial spectrum, the nation state or its guiding principles are often imagined liberally as a woman. The proposal aims that figures of Britannia and during colonial period Mother India, for example, have continuously circulated as symbols of the national temper. Such figures can be imagined as abstractions, allegories, goddesses or real life women (such as Elizabeth in the first case, and Kali or the Rani of Jhansi). Resistance itself is imagined as a woman-Delacroix commemorated the spirit of the French revolution.

Nationalism transforms the ‘subservient’ uneducated and speculated upper class woman of the nineteenth century, “into the’ articulate, educated ‘woman of the mid- twentieth century, active in professions and public life. Westernization does not lead to this transformation but rather produces educated women in India. Therefore, the nationalist-feminist project in India posits a paradoxical solution to the ‘women question’.

Under colonial rule, the image of nation or culture as a mother worked to evoke both female power and female helplessness. The nation as mother protected her son from colonial ravages, but also she ravages by colonization and in need of her son’s protection.

I networked with several scholars from Afghanistan, Nepal and India. This conference enhanced opportunities for me to work along with the National archive based in Mumbai. This conference also made possible the opportunity to work with Hurst publication to arrange for regional co-distribution of conference volumes and future works.



International Conference II - Mounstuart Elphinstone



## Session IV: Empire at the Frontier (Part Two)

Hakeem Naim, Noreen Naseer,  
Natashia Irshat Kabir

April 20, 2017 | 4.15 PM - 6.00 PM