LSE-UC Berkeley Ban ladesh Su it

F ruary 2019

For s of Sov r ignty: Art, Cin r a, and Popular Cultur

South Asia Centre
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Subir & Malini Chowdhury Center

Established in June 2015, the South Asia Centre harnesses LSE's research & academic focus on South Asia, whose particularities constantly challenge conventional thinking in the social sciences.

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February 2019

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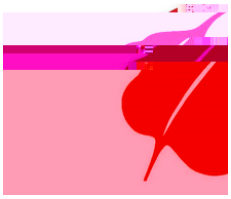

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Int oduction

L-R: Madhuja Mukherjee, Lotte Hoek, Nusrat Sabina Chowdhury, Sugata Ray

The People's Republic of Bangladesh, a nation established in 1972 following its secession from Pakistan, is somewhat of a plasmatic place. Being situated directly at the world's largest delta, riverine silt thus forming much of its land, indeed 'the land of rivers' known as Bangladesh is a country of geomorphic fluidity.

Indeed, Bangladesh is a site of cultural, political, religious, and social fluidity. How does such a mercurial nation negotiate collective identity? The panel on Forms of Sovereignty: Art, Cinema, and Popular Culture in the 2019 LSE/UC Berkeley Bangladesh Summit proposed different and complex notions of sovereignty in Bangladesh that were articulated through cinema, popular culture, and digital media.

The papers in the panel suggested that notions of sovereignty in Bangladesh are shifting and aqueous but rooted in deep political, social, and cultural practices. For South Asia, cinema has strong significance in these three contexts. Thus, as the panel moderator, Sugata Ray, reminded us in his introductory comments, cinematic arts play a fundamental role in South Asian claims to sovereignty.

Indeed, all three papers in the panel highlighted how understanding cinema and other digital artistic platforms within a broader and more porous framework is key to visualizing a more nuanced and multi-directional approach to Bangladeshi selfhood.

The speakers demonstrated
considering cinema and d
culture via the ways in w
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T xt, Sp ch, Idior: Landscap , Languag and th M and ring Flow of Riv r Films

In “Text, Speech, Idiom: Landscape, Language and the Meandering Flow of River Films”, a presentation that focuses primarily on A.J. Kardar’s Jago Hua Savera, a 1959 Pakistani film loosely based on a 1936 novel that tells the st
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his words— spread and consumed via social media— backfired with collective criticism and reproach from the public. On the one hand, Sinha's detractors, mostly in political power at the moment, highlighted these particular words, and the verdict in general, to paint him as unstable, incapable, and even insane.

On the other hand, Sinha's emphasis on the "we-ness" of Bangladesh was fiercely questioned and was read as a snub against the contemporary dominant political narrative in Bangladesh. The layers of irony in this situation illustrate that although Sinha's words ultimately cost him his position, they also revealed the complex relationship between authoritarian power and digital mediation. Chowdhury's paper demonstrated the ways in which the intersections of politics and technology— including censorship, rumor terrorism, and social media connectivity— have often reified, rather than dissipated, conflicting ideas of the people.

The use of 16- millimeter film, rather