



## **India Studies Workshop Australia India Institute**

**28 October 2011  
Report**

### **Background**

At a time when the need for serious and meaningful engagement between India and Australia and for strategic cooperation in a number of areas ranging from regional security to economic growth is widely recognised, there is also a realisation that the understanding of India in Australia is at best limited. Few Australians have sufficient knowledge of contemporary India, while stereotypes of various kind persist. Indian History is no longer taught in schools, while in Australian universities Indian Studies appears to be in deep decline. This is in sharp contrast to 1960s and 1970s, when some of the most exciting work on India in various disciplines took place in Australian universities. In the numbers-driven and resource-strapped environment within universities, Indian Studies appears to have fallen off the higher education curriculum.

This decline has occurred within a shifting architecture of higher education, with changing patterns of governance and new ways of organising the production, distribution and consumption of knowledge. Moreover, new technologies and new uses of technology are changing how, when and where we learn, posing new challenges as well as opportunities. Changing youth cultures are also deeply impacting student aspirations and experiences, determining the curriculum and career choices they make.

Of course, India itself has been changing rapidly over the last couple of decades, claiming relevance not only for its traditional offerings of spirituality, religion and language, but for a range of new developments and innovations such as e-governance, grass-roots activism, democracy and secularism. India now occupies an important place within the global knowledge economy, with every indication that Australia's trade and political relations with India will continue to grow. With a large Indian diaspora now living in Australia, representing almost two percent of the Australian population, the decline in Indian Studies at Australian universities is difficult to justify.

It is against this background that the Australia India Institute (All) hosted a workshop with participation from a number of universities to map the current state of Indian Studies in Australian universities, understand the issues faced and explore the possibilities for a revival and revitalisation of Indian Studies. The meeting was held on 28 October 2011, with participation from nine universities (list of participants attached). The workshop was facilitated by Prof Fazal Rizvi of the Melbourne Graduate School of Education, with opening remarks from Mr Robert Jorgenson, the Chair of the board of All, and Prof Amitabh Mattoo, the Director of All.

## Aims

The workshop aimed to create a nation-wide scan of the state of Indian Studies in Australian universities, develop an understanding of the issues facing Indian Studies in Australian universities, explore challenges and opportunities, and generate a new narrative to frame and promote Indian Studies in the coming years. Often, such gatherings are bogged down by practicalities such as how courses might be developed and how they might be administered, regulated and evaluated. Whilst these are important considerations, this was not the focus of this meeting, which aimed instead to create a space for thinking freely and collaboratively in the first instance, and to develop a framework for future discussion that focused on such particulars. The aims of the workshop were to:

- Map the current state of Indian Studies in various universities in Australia, and examine some of the reasons for its decline
- Generate a contextual framework for understanding this decline, acknowledging changes in the architecture of Australian higher education, as well as those taking place in India itself
- Discuss recent shifts in youth cultures, and the ways in which the new technologies are changing the organization and dissemination of knowledge, and how this is reshaping student interests, aspirations and expectations
- Brainstorm, in view of these shifts, ideas for the development and promotion of a new narrative for Indian Studies
- Explore challenges and opportunities faced, and possible strategies to develop and promote Indian Studies in Australia

## Key Discussions

### *India Studies: Current Status and Issues*

- There is, in all universities, a steep decline in the number of students in Indian Studies – particularly in the areas of history and language. The students taking Hindi remains low.
- There is significant decline in the number of staff who might be regarded as India specialists. Australian National University, La Trobe University, and the Universities of Sydney, Queensland and Melbourne, were once major centers of Indian Studies, but each has experienced decline. Despite this decline, universities such as ANU, and the Universities of Sydney and Queensland have struggled to maintain a commitment to Indian Studies.
- There is some interest in a focus on India in Business, Law, Media, Architecture, Medical and other faculties, with a range of innovative study options, such as placements in Indian law firms, student exchanges and immersion programs.
- Although there is a decline in interest in Indian Studies, in some universities such as University of Technology Sydney, there is an increase in PhD studies in India-related topics.
- In Adelaide, traditional studies in Indian history saw a steep decline. However, a refocusing of the subject as 'Incredible India' had a much wider appeal and there are now 70 students enrolled in the subject.
- Many students of such courses as Buddhism are mature-age, higher degree students, pointing to a growing interest in India at the Masters level.
- There are some interesting models of cross-disciplinary cooperation – for instance between Indian Studies and Climate Studies under the broader umbrella of Asian Studies
- There have been completed and uncompleted attempts to map Indian/Asian Studies in Australia in the past. There is a need to update this information to get a more accurate picture of Indian Studies in Australian universities.
- With an increasing vocationalization of university curriculum in Australia, initiatives are needed to link Indian Studies with professional preparation and development.
- Australian universities need to monitor curriculum developments in the schools sector, such as the National Curriculum, to ensure the generating student interest in India.
- India scholars might consider ways of harnessing the experiences, interests and networks of the growing Indian diaspora in Australia.

## *A New Narrative*

- Traditional narratives supporting Indian Studies were based on disciplinary knowledge of India, and were couched in the language of Area Studies. A new narrative reflecting India's engagement with the processes of globalization, its strategic importance within the region and its cultural links might now be more appropriate.
- Current narratives of India appear focused around some overarching themes:
  - India as a land for spirituality, religion, culture and language
  - Contemporary India as an emerging economic and technological giant
  - India and Australia as historically connected with each other through the processes of British colonialism
  - India as a global phenomenon, rather than a geographic location – as a distributed concept (and inclusive of diasporic India) rather than a place

These themes need to be integrated into a coherent narrative, linking the past with the future.

- Interest in investing in Indian Studies depends very much on government attitude and approach – previously, rise and decline in studies of Japan and Indonesia have been driven by such an interest. The importance of India to governments needs to be stressed.
- Any narrative that is developed would need to 'speak' to a variety of groups – the government to interest it in investing in Indian Studies, the university Academic Boards and Deans to encourage and invest in these courses, the community at large, and prospective students in particular
- Any new narrative of India should portray that it matters now and in the future, and that as an emerging global power within Australia's own region, it will play an important role in Australia's national interests. In this sense, Indian scholars need to look at the ways in which studies of China are now justified in Australia.
- A better understanding is needed of the nature and interests of students in order to develop not only a narrative but also programs (both structure and content). However it is important not to view student interests as homogenous, but differentiated across undergraduate, postgraduate and research levels.

## *Strategies for Promoting Indian Studies*

- Consolidate and make visible the work that is already going on in the field, and put scholars in touch with each other across disciplines and universities
  - Organize an Australia-wide conference to bring together PhD students and researchers who are doing work on India in Australia in various fields. This is both to showcase as well as to stimulate new collaborations and studies
  - Create post-doctoral positions to encourage scholars in the field
  - Support publication opportunities for PhD students and post-doctoral scholars
  - Generate links with key Indian institutions in both teaching and research, utilizing the new communication synchronous technologies
  - Generate alumni associations and listservs to create a network of scholars in the field
- Generate interest in Indian Studies
  - Bring Australian and overseas luminaries to teach higher degree courses – often student interest is driven by the opportunity to work with renowned scholars
  - Set up events that bring together prospective students and organize programs that would show India as an attractive and interesting and useful field of study
  - Offer summer or winter programs and short courses as well as undergraduate courses that involve guided travel to India – most scholars' interest in India is triggered by a trip to India

- Create greater study abroad opportunities for Australian students and staff
  - Share resources across Australian universities in the development of study tours based around particular themes, with student credit transfer
  - Consider establishing a field center in India, jointly funded by participating universities, and used to provide orientation to India and logistics support
  - Develop links with Indian universities to enable student and staff exchange and mobility around mutually recognized experiences
- Develop creative strategies to maximize funding through collaboration
  - Explore possibilities of joint faculty appointments
  - Consider joint program offerings, especially using online and dual-mode programs
  - Explore interest on the part of Indian benefactors endowing Chairs in Australian universities, as they have done in the US
  - Work closely with the Asian Studies faculties/institutes to consolidate India as part of Asia
  - Explore multi-university, short course offerings that involve a trip to India – such summer or winter courses could serve as a taster for more sustained engagement

## **Recommendations**

There was strong agreement at the meeting that such a strategic, multi-university meeting provided a significant opportunity to develop collaborative ways to promote Indian Studies, and that the Australia India Institute was well-placed to continue efforts in this direction in the following ways:

1. Develop a comprehensive report, incorporating previous reports and surveys, on the current state of Indian Studies, with recommendations for its development and revival, to inform the Henry Review
2. Using the Open University as a model, develop collaborative programs, initially at the MA level, using a 'cafeteria' approach, involving some core subjects and some elective options. More work is needed before such a course can be developed, and this should include some research on the type of students taking on-line courses from the Open University; the types of credit and award systems in use, and how these may fit within the larger programs of different universities; and different models for sharing and compensation for such jointly developed and offered programs
3. Become a site for all the institutions in Australia that offer Indian Studies, so that anyone needing any information about possibilities is able to access it via All.
4. Set up a field school in India where any Australian student groups or researchers are able to gather. This field school should be a hub for Australian researchers in India and provide the type of infrastructure that can support students and researchers. It could be jointly funded by all Australian universities and managed by All through a local manager. This could be set up in collaboration with a reputed local institution
5. Create a website – or a space on its website as well as on the Asia Institute website – advertising India-related events that it organizes
6. Organize a series of events in the community, in addition to the Tiffin Talks, to generate interest in learning more about India
7. Develop links with research institutes in India to explore possibilities of Australian researchers to do part of their research in India at these institutions
8. Advocate for continuing Teaching and Research appointments in the broad area of Indian studies in Australian universities. Such appointments are necessary to mentor and guide the next generation of academics, and are key if Indian studies is to thrive in the long term

# India Studies Workshop

## Australia India Institute

28 October 2011

List of Attendees

Title	Organisation
Professor Fazal Rizvi (Facilitator)	The University of Melbourne
Dr Adam Bowles	University of Queensland
Assoc Professor Bharat Dave	The University of Melbourne
Dr Assa Doron	Australian National University
Dr John Dunham	Former Staff Member, University of Melbourne
Dr Devleena Ghosh	University of Technology, Sydney
Dr Radhika Gorur	The University of Melbourne
Assoc Prof Ramaswami Harindranath	The University of Melbourne
Professor Pookong Kee	Asia Institute
Professor Amitabh Mattoo	The University of Melbourne
Mrs Adjita Mattoo	Visiting Scholar, The University of Melbourne
Professor Peter Mayer	University of Adelaide
Dr Adrian McNeil	Macquarie University
Dr Carolyn O'Brien	The University of Melbourne
Assoc Professor Ursula Rao	University of New South Wales
Dr David Templeman	Monash University
Dr Eric Meadows	Deakin University
Dr Greg Bailey	La Trobe University
Professor Peter Friedlander	La Trobe University