SAARC CULTURAL CENTRE
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SOUTH ASIAN ASSOCIATION FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION

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Editorial

Year 2013 closed with the successful conclusion of the scheduled programmes that ranged from heritage to art and craft. In keeping with the SAARC Agenda for Culture, the SAARC Cultural Centre's unstinted commitment to preserve the unique culture of South Asia is best expressed in its programmes. The highlight of our activities during the last quarter of 2013 included a SAARC Exhibition and Design Workshop on 'Handicraft in the SAARC Region' and launching of the SAARC Literary Festivals.

Weaving, may it be textile or words are products of culture that have overarching impact on lifestyles and sentiments of people. As part of the publication programme, two Anthologies of Poetry and Short Stories; Wheel of Life, a compilation of papers presented at the Designers Workshop held in 2012 and two books of abstracts containing the papers presented at the SAARC Regional Seminar on Traditional Knowledge and Traditional Cultural Expressions and the SAARC International Conference on Development of Archives in South Asia were launched and are available online. The SAARC Cultural Centre wishes all its readers a Happy News and looks forward to a fruitful year ahead.

-Editor

News in Highlight...

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Achievements: SAARC Charter Day, 2013

The 29th SAARC Charter Day was celebrated on 8 December 2012 at Waters Edge Hotel in Batarmulla. Shortlisted photographs from the SAARC Photographic Competition were on display at the venue for the reception for SAARC Charter Day. The Chief Guest Dr. Charitha Herath, Secretary of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting graced the occasion. The messages from the President of Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka H.E. Mahinda Rajapakshe, H.E Mr. Ahmed Saleem, SAARC Secretary General, and Prof. G.L. Pieris, Honorable Minister of Ministry of External Affairs of Sri Lanka, were read out to the officials invited for the occasion. The official reception was followed by cocktails and the soft launch of the photographic exhibition.

Achievements: SAARC Photographic Exhibition

The SAARC Cultural Centre organized its first SAARC Photographic Exhibition and Competition on the twin themes: (1) The Natural Landscape, and (2) Historical Sites. All eight SAARC Member States participated in Competition which was aimed at capturing and showcasing the scenic beauty and landscapes of the SAARC Region, as well as creating awareness about the region.

The SAARC Cultural Centre received 304 photographs which were evaluated by a panel of well-known experts in the field of photography. The adjudicators were:

1. Mr. Lal Hegoda,
2. Mr. Chris Burgess, and
3. Mr. Dominic Sansoni.

WINNERS

Category 1: 'The Natural Landscape'

1st Prize: 'K-2 Second Highest Mountain in the world' by Mohammad Daniel (Pakistan)

2nd Prize: 'Cityscape seen from Chobhar Height ' by Mr. Narayan Maharajan (Nepal)

3rd Prize: 'Symmetrically Balanced' by Mr. Dharmavarapu Chandraka (Sri Lanka)

Category 2: 'Historical Sites'

1st Prize: 'Connecting with the Divine' by Mr. Sangeeth Harshendra Packiyarajah (Sri Lanka)

2nd Prize: 'Evening view of Boudahanath Stupa' by Mr. Narayan Maharajan (Nepal)

3rd Prize: 'Ruwanweli Seya' by Mr. K.A.D.Amanda Samai Jayawardhana (Sri Lanka)

The winners in each category will receive prizes of LKR 25,000, 15,000 and 10,000 respectively.

In addition, five photographs were chosen each from the two thematic categories for 'Honorable Mention', and for the exhibition. Twenty-one other photographs were selected from the entries for the exhibition which was mounted on the occasion of the 29th SAARC Charter Day Reception held on the 8 December 2013.

Achievements: SAARC International Conference on Development of Archives in South Asia: 'The Future of Archives and Archives of the Future' Concludes Successfully

Another landmark achievement of the SAARC Cultural Centre during the last quarter of 2013 was the successful conclusion of the SAARC International Conference on Development of Archives in South Asia: 'The Future of Archives and Archives of the Future' and its associated activity, An Exhibition of Historical Documents and Archival Photographs.

The Conference, which had paper reading sessions and round table discussions, was held from 3-5 December 2013 at the Department of National Archives, No. 7, Philip Gunawardena Mawatha, Colombo 7, Sri Lanka. It was attended by over 100 participants, from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka, the USA and the UK.

The conference was convened with a view to providing a platform to the key stakeholders in the field of archives and records management in the region to assess their preparedness, share their challenges and problems, showcase their achievements, voice their concerns and learn from the experts for effectively managing their existing and future collections over the long-term.

Inaugural Session:

The conference was inaugurated by Hon. Dr. Jagath Balasuriya, Minister of National Heritage, Government of Sri Lanka. The Welcome Address was delivered by Mr. G.L.W. Samarasinghe, Director, SAARC Cultural Centre. Mr. G.P.S.H. de Silva, Former Director, Department of National Archives, Sri Lanka delivered the Keynote Address while Ms. Soundarie David Rodrigo, Deputy Director-Programme, SAARC Cultural Centre proposed the Vote of Thanks.

A total of sixteen research papers were presented in seven academic sessions spread over three days (3-5 December 2013). The sessions were along the following themes:

- Introductory Session (1 Session),
- Country Reports (3 Sessions),
- Digital Preservation of Conventional Archives: Democratising and Privileging (1 Session),
- Future of the Conventional Archives (including paper, film and sound) in Digital Age (1 Session), and
- Digital Archives: Emerging Trends (1 Session)

Round Tables:

Two Round Tables on 'Managing Digital Records: Rhetoric vis-à-vis Practice' and 'Access to Archives in Information Age: Risks and Responsibilities, User Management, and Right to Privacy' were held and were led by Dr. James Nye (Digital South Asia Library, USA) and Ms. Geetanjali Ranawaka (National Intellectual Property Office, Sri Lanka) respectively.

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Plenary Session:

At the conclusion of the Academic Sessions, a Plenary Session was held on 5 December 2013 as a closed-door event with the participation of all Resource Persons and Chair Persons of the Academic Sessions. It was jointly chaired by Dr. Sanjay Garg (Deputy Director-Research, SAARC Cultural Centre and Convener of the Conference) and Dr. C. Saroja Wettasinghe (Director, Department of National Archives, Sri Lanka and Co-Convener of the Conference). The Plenary Committee perused all the Feedback forms received from the participants of the Conference and summarised the main suggestions emerging out of the deliberations and prepared a document laying out a road-map in the form of recommendations for the SAARC Member States. The recommendations will be forwarded to all SAARC Member States.

Valedictory Session:

The Valedictory Session of the conference was held on 5 December 2013 at the auditorium, Department of National Archives, Sri Lanka and was attended by the participants of the conference. Mr. G.L.W. Samarasinghe, Director, SAARC Cultural Centre distributed certificates and mementos to all participants and Special Invitees of the Conference. A Cultural Show and Farewell Dinner was hosted by the Director, SAARC Cultural Centre at Ape Gama, Battaramulla.

Post-Conference Tour:

A full day post-conference tour was organized for the participants of the conference to Galle on 6 December 2013.

Galle is the Southern capital of Sri Lanka and is declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is blessed with natural beauty that has found expression in the form of a magnificent coastal belt expanding from Hikkaduwa to Unawatuna and also houses colonial remnants such as the world famous Galle Fort and the St. Mary's Cathedral.

Commencing the day's activities, participants visited the Maritime Archaeology Museum and Maritime Museum. They were served morning tea at the Maritime Museum. This was followed by a visit to the Galle National Museum, Martin Wickramasinghe Folklore Museum and a visit to Koggala beach. The Martin Wickramasinghe Trust generously hosted the lunch for the delegates.

A Special Interactive Session was arranged with Hon. Kumari Balasooriya, Governor, Southern Province, in an informal setting at the Governor's Residence. This was followed by a visit to the historical Galle Fort. The transport for the post-conference tour was facilitated by the Travel Partner of the conference: Aitken Spence Travels (Pvt.) Ltd.

Associated Activity:

The Archives and the SAARC: An Exhibition of Historical Documents and Archival Photographs

As an associated activity of the conference, an Exhibition of digital prints of historical documents and photographs of archival value in South Asia was mounted at the Conference venue and was inaugurated by Hon. Dr. Jagath Balasuriya, Minister of National Heritage, Government of Sri Lanka and the chief guest of the event. The exhibition remained on public view till 14 December 2013.

Achievements: SAARC Literary Festival on South Asian Novel – 2013 concludes successfully

In keeping with the SAARC Agenda for culture which envisages the diversity in culture needs to be acknowledged as varied experiences are reflected in the richness of cultural expression, the SAARC Cultural Centre organized a 3-day Literary Festival in Bhutan. The Festival was an open forum for writers as well as literary critics to discuss the current status of South Asian Novel and to indulge in exploring the unique cultural tapestry of the South Asian novel. It included presentations, book reviews, lectures, discussions and book reading sessions.

The SAARC Literary Festival, on the theme 'Traversing the Cultural Contours through South Asian Novel', was held at the SAARC Forestry Centre, Taba, Thimphu Bhutan from 18 to 21 December 2013. Delegates from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Sri Lanka participated in the Literary Festival.

The Director of SAARC Cultural Centre hosted the Welcome Dinner on 18 December 2013 at Hotel Phuntsho Pelri. Dr. Sanjay Garg, the Convenor of the Literary Festival, welcomed the Delegates. After the introduction by the Delegates, Mr. Syed Shamsul Haq of Bangladesh made an introductory presentation.

Inaugural Session was held on the morning of 19 December 2013 with the patronage of HE Lyonpo Damcho Dorji, Honourable Minister for Home and Cultural Affairs. The Festival stated with the Marchang Ceremony that was performed by reverend monks to obtain the blessings of the deities for the event.

Welcome address was delivered by the Convenor of the Literary Festival and Deputy Director (Research) of the SAARC Cultural Centre, Dr. Sanjay Garg. In his address, Dr. Garg outlined various initiatives taken by the SAARC Cultural Centre so far for promoting the literature of the region. He gave a background of the launching of the annual Literary Festivals, which are conceived as a platform for the authors, writers, poets and others engaged in the field of literary creation in the region, which will also bring together other stakeholders such as publishers, film-makers, translators, animators, etc. who serve as a vehicle for the dissemination of literary works.

In his address, the Chief Guest, His Excellency Lyonpo Damcho Dorji, Honourable Minister for Home and Cultural Affairs, Royal Government of Bhutan, remarked that culture and novels are synonymous in the sense that without culture there can be no novel. Novels reflect our imagination and our sensitivity toward the human condition and the whole society itself. Novels embody the unspoken thoughts of their writers, and are the direct reflections of experiences, emotions, and outlook that have deep roots in – and also echo the socio-cultural setting to which the writers belong. He elaborated the need to safeguard novels in South Asia as it is a linguistically diverse, with multiple ethnic groups, cultures, religions, castes and colours, and this diversity also finds reflection in the region's literary heritage.

The Keynote Address was delivered by Mr. G.L.W. Samarasinghe, one of the most eminent Sinhala authors in Sri Lanka who has authored more than 50 books, including 8 novels, 20 translations and 4 social reviews. Mr. Samarasinghe's Keynote address focused on the historical development of Literature in South Asia and the need to safeguard its rich heritage.

Country Panels:

The Literary Festival included four Country Panels, namely, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Sri Lanka. In the Country Panels (See Box) each delegation presented the historical developments and current status of literature in their respective countries.

COUNTRY PANELS

Bangladesh

Participants: Prof. Syed Manzoorul Islam, Ms. Selina Hossain and Mir Jahurul Islam.

Moderator: Dr. Pratibha Ray (India)

Bhutan

Participants: Mr. Kuenga Tenzin, Ms. Tanni Bose and Dr. Karma Phuntsho

Moderator: Mir Jahurul Islam (Bangladesh)

India

Participants: Shri Govind Mishra, Dr. Pratibha Ray, and Shri C. Radhakrishnan

Moderator: Daya Dissanayake (Sri Lanka)

Sri Lanka

Participants: Dr. Sunil Wijesiriwardena, Mr. S.A. Udayan, Mr. Daya Dissanayake, Prof. Rohan Gunaratna, Mr. Piyal Kariyawasam

Moderator: Prof. Syed Manzoorul Islam (Bangladesh)

Reading Sessions:

Authors were given an opportunity to read excerpts from their novels and to discuss their writing styles during the Reading Sessions. There were three reading sessions. Ten authors were given the opportunity to present their work. The three reading sessions were chaired by Mr. Harka Gurung (Bhutan), Shri Govind Mishra (India), and Dr. Karma Phuntsho respectively.

Lectures:

The Literary Festival also included three lectures:

1. 'Creating South Asian Harmony Through Literature,' by Prof. Rohan Gunaratna, Sri Lanka;
2. 'Women Writers Contribution in SAARC Countries' by Ms. Sumithra Rahubaddhe, and
3. 'Editing and Publishing Novels in South Asia' by Mr. Vijitha Yapa, Sri Lanka.

Round Table and Plenary Session:

The Round Table and the Plenary Session was Co-chaired by Dr. Sanjay Garg and Mr. Harka Gurung, Director, National Library and Archives, Royal Government of Bhutan. The session discussed the current issues related to development of literature in South Asia and finalized the recommendations aimed at protecting and promoting South Asian Literature.

Field Visit:

On 20 December 2013, a half day field visit was organized to the Textile Museum of Bhutan, the Buddha Point and to the Memorial Chorten in Thimphu, Bhutan.

Valedictory Session:

Dasho (Dr.) Pema Thinley, Vice Chancellor, Royal University of Bhutan graced the occasion as the Chief Guest of the Valedictory Session. In his Concluding remarks, Mr. Harka Gurung mentioned that it was certainly heartening to see that the 4-Day SAARC Literary Festival, 2013 concluded with a positive note and impressive conclusion and recommendations. He pinned down high hopes from the galaxy of writers who gathered here for a common cause and purpose and who were determined to realize the objectives for which this festival had been organized.

The Vote of Thanks was delivered by Mr. Karma Wangchuck, Programme Officer, SAARC Cultural Centre, who thanked each and every individual who was part of organizing the SAARC Literary Festival 2013.

Announcements: SAARC Artist Camp and Exhibition of Paintings (March 2014, Bangladesh)

The Artist camp was a resounding success, held for the third consecutive year in the Maldives 2013. For the first time in the programme, all 8 SAARC countries were represented in the Maldives. The Centre was also able to exhibit the paintings from the SAARC Artist Camp 2011, and 2012 at the National Art Gallery, to coincide with a programme of the George Keyt Foundation.

In 2014, the SAARC Artist Camp and Exhibition of Paintings is proposed to be held in Bangladesh. The Camp will be held for a duration of 5 days, and will be coupled with an Exhibition of Paintings and Interactive Sessions for the participating Artists. This year's focus will be for upcoming, young artists of South Asia.

Announcements: SAARC Capacity Building Workshop on Preparation of Proposals for New Sites for inclusion in the UNESCO's World Heritage List (25-30 March 2014, Thimphu, Bhutan)

The UNESCO World Heritage List includes 981 properties forming part cultural and natural heritage as of 1 January 2014. These include 759 cultural, 193 natural and 29 mixed properties in 160 Countries. Out of these only 53 properties (42 cultural properties + 11 natural properties) are located in the South Asian region. Although SAARC Region possesses a rich civilization and many place of outstanding universal value, the reason for not having many sites listed in the World Heritage List is due to the lack of capacity of the Member States in developing proposals for the new sites for the list of World Heritage Sites. The Workshop will focus on building capacity of the participants to prepare proposals for new site for the lit of World Heritage Sites.

Announcements: SAARC Research Project on Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Sustainable Development in South Asia (28-29 April 2014, Sri Lanka)

As part of its annual research project programme, the SAARC Cultural Centre would launch a Research Project on Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Sustainable Development in South Asia. As part of this project Regional Seminar would be held to identify current situation of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Sustainable Development in South Asia in South Asia (CHTSD). Based on the findings of the Seminar, the SAARC Cultural Centre will call for Proposals and will award research projects amongst the Member States. The research will give an opportunity for the Member States to benefit from conduct in-depth studies on CHTSD and integrate their findings in their multi and bilateral development cooperation policies for the benefit of the people of the region.

Announcements: SAARC Cultural Capital (2015) Meeting (May 2014, Afghanistan)

With a view to explore the feasibility of declaring one of the cities of Afghanistan as the SAARC CULTURAL CAPITAL for the year 2015, the SAARC Cultural Centre will hold a preparatory meeting with the various stakeholders in Afghanistan.

The programme envisages holding of a series of year-long cultural events with a national but with an overall South Asian dimension in the designated city.

Preparing for being a SAARC CULTURAL CAPITAL can provide an opportunity for the city to generate considerable cultural, social and economic benefits and it can help in fostering urban regeneration, boosting the city's image and raising its visibility and profile on a regional and international scale.

Announcements: SAARC Film Festival (May 2014, Sri Lanka)

In 2014, the SAARC Film Festival will continue to call for feature and short films. However, this year there will be a strong emphasis for films that will showcase art and culture of the countries with the aim of bringing together the countries of the Region through the arts. Nominated films will be viewed by the jury prior to it being screened.

The SAARC Film Festival will also have an open category for individual entries for short films, giving young film makers an opportunity to showcase their films. The Open Category will have a screening process, which will be held a month before the Film Festival and only selected films will be screened at the Festival and eligible for an award. The Open category will be limited to the first three films by any Film Director, and the required format would be screening quality DVD's. The theme will be restricted only to 'Culture' and 'Global Understanding'. The Film Festival will be held in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Announcements: Cultural Festival on Traditional Dance (May 2014, India and Sri Lanka)

Dance and music are the oldest and most original art forms in the world and especially numerous and developed in South Asia. Thus even the present-day practice of dance relates to the most ancient past. Traditional dance is an integral part of the music culture in South Asia and exists in numerous incarnations. The Cultural Festival will be held over 4 days in India, with concerts and dance recitals held at various venues, with the opening and closing performances featuring dancers from the entire region. For the opening of the new Centre in Matara another Cultural Festival will be launched.

Announcements: SAARC International Conference on Development of South Asian Museums (June 2014, Sri Lanka)

Museum plays an important role in giving exposition to a country's rich heritage. A museum can bring a whole civilization under one roof and is a parable of its own. The proposed conference on South Asian Museum is aimed at better management of museums in the South Asian Region. The Conference will be will be organized in collaboration with the Department of National Museums and will be held for three days in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Announcements: SAARC Exhibition on Handicrafts (June 2014, Nepal)

The Exhibition and sale of products would run for a total duration of 5 days. During the Exhibition there will also be 2 workshops on "Quality Improvement" and "Modern Trends in Handicrafts" for the benefit of participating representatives from the Handicraft industry. There will also be an opportunity for interested parties to present papers under this topic, where selected papers will be published in a special publication to commemorate this Exhibition on Handicraft.

Announcements: SAARC Literary Festival 2014 (25-28 August 2014, Pakistan)

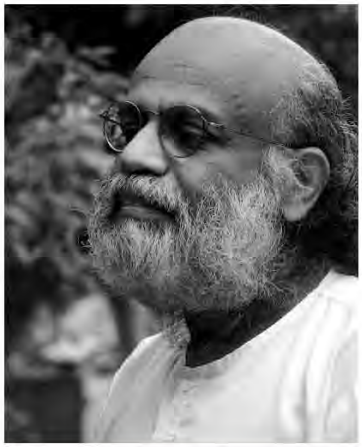
The SAARC Cultural Centre would organize a 4 day Literary Festival in Pakistan. For this purpose partnership with organizers of the leading literary festivals and other collaborative partners in the region would be solicited.

Feature Article:

South Asian Novel

It was a festival in the true sense of the word. A celebration of true human nature, by a group of people who had the same vision, the same thoughts, going beyond race, creed, caste or politics. They were all one family. A family of creative writers. And the Land of Eternal Happiness, had influenced them to be happy in the company of their fellow human beings.

The occasion was the SAARC Literary Festival of the South Asia Novel, held at the SAARC Forestry Center, Thimphu, Bhutan, from December 19 to 21, 2013. Writers from Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka had crossed their political barriers to arrive here, and unfortunately bureaucratic barriers perhaps had not allowed the writers from Afghanistan, Maldives, Nepal and Pakistan to join the festival. Had these writers too been able to join, then the success of the festival would have been far greater.



The Sri Lanka delegation included Sumithra Rahubadda, Sunil Wijesiriwardena, Piyal Kariyawasam, Rohan Gunaratne, S.A. Uthayan and myself, and also G.L.W. Samarasinghe, Director of the SAARC Cultural Center, himself an eminent novelist and translator. From India we had Prathiba Ray, Govind Mishra and C. Radhakrishnan. From Bangladesh had arrived Selina Hossain, Syed Manzoorul Islam, Syed Shamsul Haq, and Jahurul Islam. Among the Bhutanese writers were Dolma Choden Roder, Kinley Dorjee, and Kuenga Tenzin.

The program included panel discussions where all delegates from each country participated, and then there were book reading sessions. Most important was the interaction among the writers, where all became simply South Asian Writers, not divided by geographical or man-made barriers. One example was when the Indian author Radhakrishnan read in English the Sri Lankan author Uthayan's Tamil paper.

Vijitha Yapa, representing the Book Publishers' Association, and as the co-publisher of SAARC Anthologies, had organized a display of most of the Sri Lankan novels in English and English translation.

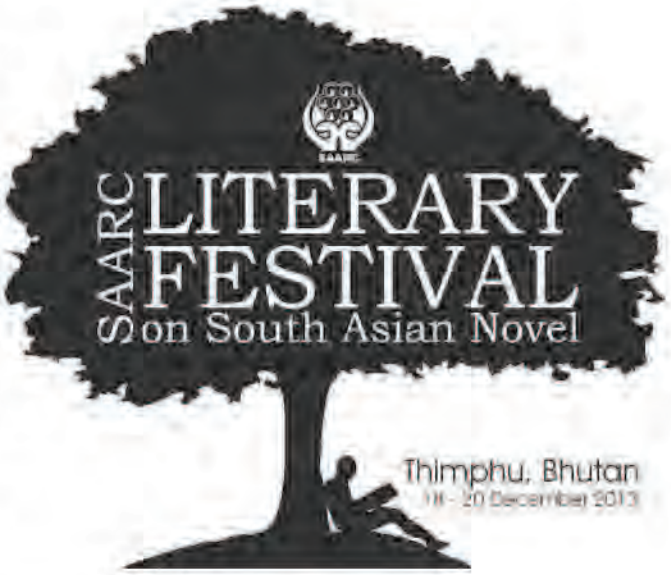
One major issue was that even though writers keep on writing, the reading habit itself has been declining. But that could not mar our enthusiasm, because in the land of a happy people we could see the bright side. Our future looks bright, to some extent. The younger generation is beginning to read even if their parents and teachers do not read. But unfortunately we do not have enough books written for children, which are suitable for children. Many of our talented writers are yet to think of writing a few stories for children. The SAARC aim to have a South Asia conference on Children's literature would be a good idea. They should also have a program to translate children's and youth novels across the borders.

SAARC Cultural center should take up the children's literature as a priority, even before the translation projects for the classics, novels and poetry, because our children, our future should always have priority. What we have in our South Asian countries are mostly the very poor translations of stories written in English for children in western countries, which are not the best reading material for our kids. Most of the children's stories coming from the west cannot be considered as Subhashitha stories, because they always have violence and crimes to get the children to solve these crimes.

And when we write or publish children's books, we should not consider these books as a marketable commodity, but only as our gifts to our children. Profits and royalty payments should never be the concern.

English novels, and translations in English are limited to our own countries, and readers in our neighbouring countries do not get an opportunity to read them. Publishers have not yet been able to find overseas distributors for our novels, not even in India. That is probably why no one outside Sri Lanka has heard of any of the modern Sri Lankan writers. This problem is also something SAARC Cultural center should look into, perhaps to have a South Asian library in every country, and it would be wonderful if they could make it a digital library with free access for all.

We have broken down the geographical barriers and that is why we were able to gather together in Bhutan. The language barrier we can bring down by translating our books into other languages. Political barriers we can breakdown by identifying ourselves as human beings, among 7 billion brother beings on Mother Earth. All the Bengali writers could identify themselves as Bengali, and



not as Bangladeshi or Indian. All Hindi/Urdu writers could identify themselves together. As the first step, through SAARC let us identify ourselves as South Asian writers, and then as Asians and someday as simply writers, without any labels of race, creed, gender or caste. Max Muller is reported to have said "Language is the Rubicon that divides man from beast". But in reality language is what divides man from man. Language is what has turned man in to a beast, as we saw in a thirty years bloody war in our country. The immediate way we can bring us together is by occupying Babel, by using translation as the means of breaking down the divide, so we can understand each other, and through that understanding, to love each other.

It is hoped that this conference would continue once all the writers get back to their homes. We have the means, now through electronic communications and social media to continue this discussion and to share our creative works and our thoughts in cyberspace, not only with those who attended the conference but with all South Asian writers and readers too. Let us become one South Asian family and then venture out to be a global family of human beings.

As those of us who were in Bhutan found that it was impossible to be in the Land of Eternal Happiness without that happiness rubbing off on us too, let us all be happy and contended and let us share our happiness with all human beings through our writings. On this New Year let us strive to find our own inner happiness.

by Daya Dissanayake

Courtesy Daily News, Colombo, 6th January 2014

New Publications

SAARC Cultural Centre Wall Calendar - 2014

SAARC

2014

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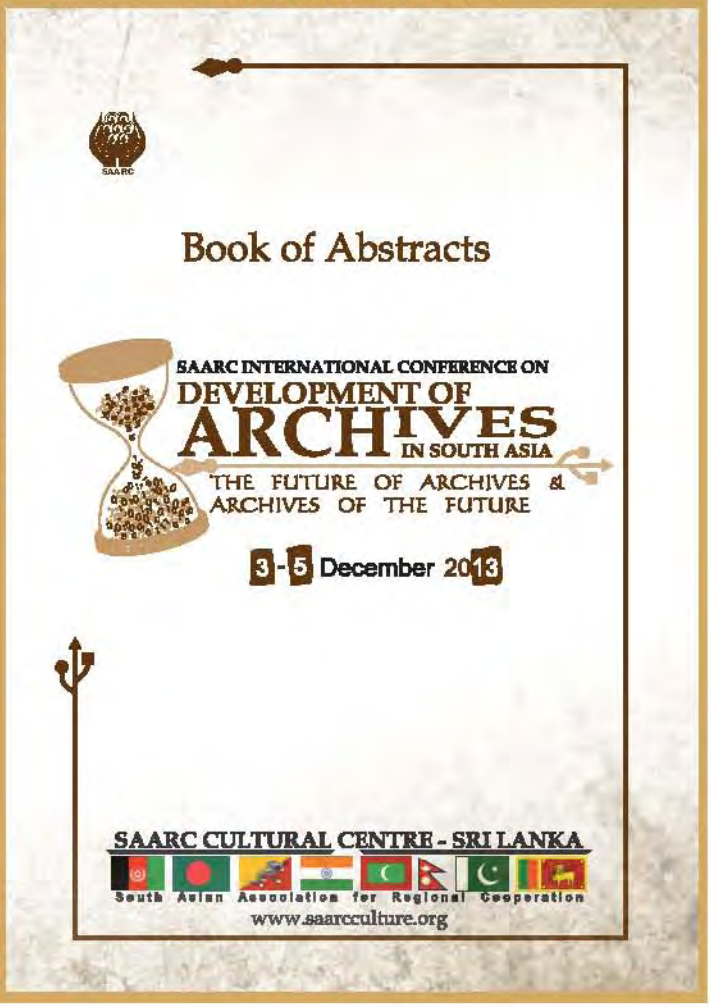
South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation

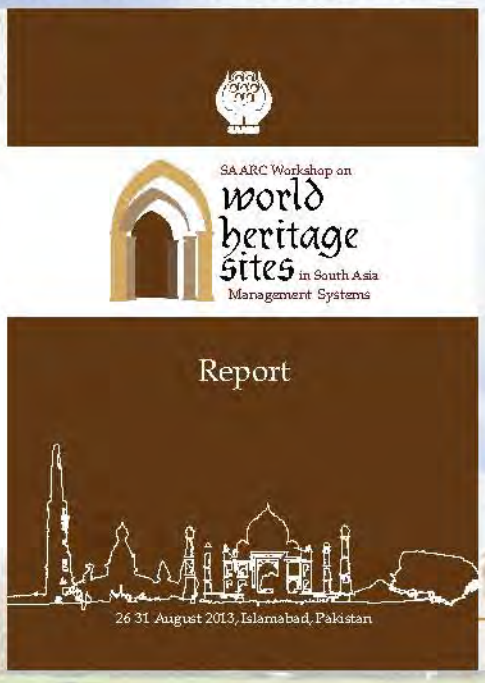
Book of Abstracts - SAARC International Conference on Archives



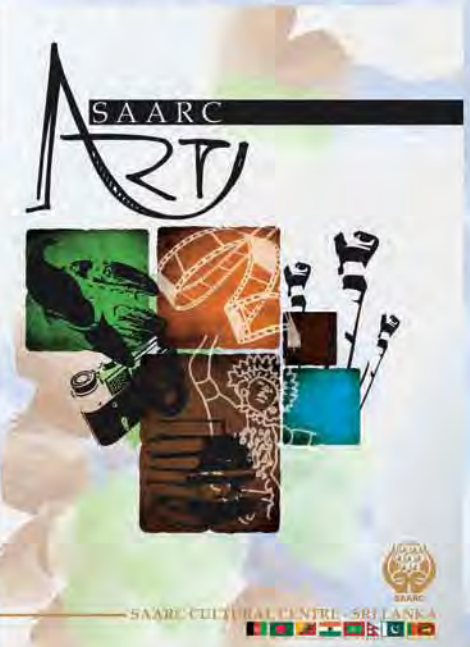
Forthcoming Publications

Monograph on Archives

Report on World Heritage Sites



SAARC Art Magazine



Culture Quote

One individual may die for an idea; but that idea will, after his death, incarnate itself in a thousand lives. That is how the wheel of evolution moves on and the ideas and dreams of one nation are bequeathed to the next.

Subhas Chandra Bose (1897 - 1945)
Indian Freedom Fighter and Statesman

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