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Rising India
and
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Communities
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East Asia



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EDITED BY

K. Kesavapany • A. Mani • P. Ramasamy



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PREFACE

The Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) published a major work, *Indian Communities in Southeast Asia*, edited by the late Professor K.S. Sandhu and Professor A. Mani in the early 1990s. That study provided an extensive treatment of Indians in various Southeast Asian countries.

In the past decade, the economic rise of India; the migration of skilled Indian personnel across international borders; the changing perception of India in relation to its global role; and, more importantly, the slow transformation of its foreign policy have posed new scholarly and academic challenges for scholars of international political economy, in general, and ethnic studies, in particular.

ISEAS decided to take up the intellectual challenge of understanding the relationship between the rise of India and Indian communities in East Asia. It organized a two-day conference on the topic, “Rise of India and Indians in East Asia”, in October 2006. The conference also received support from the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA). The conference sought to answer several questions: what does “rising India” mean? How are members of the Indian communities in East Asia responding to the rise? How is India tapping into the energies of these Indians, such as by organizing the annual *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas* (Overseas Indian Day)? Will India pay greater attention to people of Indian origin? Will Indians in East Asia, in turn, identify themselves with their ancestral land, or will they view the identification as jeopardizing their links with the countries where they have settled? The present volume, which contains thirty-five chapters, is the product of that conference.

Like the volume published in the early 1990s, the study of Indians in East Asia adopts a country-based perspective. However, unlike the earlier volume, the country study of Indians in East Asia is interwoven into the phenomenon of India’s rise. This is not a study of India’s relations with overseas Indians, of the transformation of India’s foreign policy, or of India’s emergence as a great

power. It is the study of Indian communities in East Asia in the context of a rising India. The term “Indian communities” refers to both those Indians who migrated and settled in different national settings during the colonial period, and those who have arrived, more recently, as skilled migrants.

The chapters in this volume are organized under the broad categories of regional and historical perspectives, and country perspectives. The book focuses on three major themes. The first theme, a continuation from the earlier volume, examines the contemporary position of Indians in the East Asian region. The aim of this section is to identify the challenges, problems and successes of Indians in the region in the previous five decades. Related to this theme is the examination of community formations, integration and efforts to form social movements, including self-help groups, amongst Indians in countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, Myanmar and Indonesia. The second theme examines the phenomenon of “new Indians”, which includes the arrival of thousands of people from the sub-continent in the countries of East Asia. The phenomenon includes the migration of professionals, businessmen, domestic workers, plantation workers, and those employed in the construction sector. The third theme looks at the impact of a rising India on settled Indian communities as well as the “new Indians” — recently arrived professionals — in the East Asian region.

In spite of the thematic focus, the study takes into account the situation on the ground, where the existing Indian communities, the “new Indians” or a “rising India” did not develop a unified framework to relate to one another and did not coordinate their relations under the umbrella of diaspora management. Individuals and groups in the sub-continent responded to opportunities in Southeast Asia and beyond not as parts of a diaspora coordinated from South Asia. This feature of their migration allowed individuals and groups to assimilate or integrate themselves into various parts of Southeast Asia with ease. As the nation-states of East Asia largely determined the outcome for individuals and groups, the nation-state is used as the demarcation for most chapters of this book, while allowing for a few overview chapters that address partial regional approaches to the study of Indians in East Asia.

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