

Between Music, Dance and Ritual: Performing Arts at the Borneo Research Council Conference

the middle classes, the backbone of Hindutva'. Yoginder Sikand added that the weakness of the low-caste (Dalit) movement in Gujarat made the state very fertile for communal violence. An alliance between Muslims and Dalits in states like Bihar had prevented violence, he argued.

An idea of who participates in communal violence is often related to one's explanation for the occurrence of violence. A speaker from the audience argued that the middle class youth was more involved in rioting than Jan Breman admitted, claiming that hooliganism was for them an important motivation to participate. 'You have to be initiated into using violence', Breman answered. He believed that direct and actual participation in violence does not come so easy to the middle class.

Leaving history to tradesmen

'We historians need to break the artificial boundaries. We should not study a Hindu or a Muslim history, but we should simply look at the process of state-building.' Together with Shahid Amin, historian Barbara Metcalf broke a lance for a rethinking of Indian history. They emphasized how critical a historical narrative has become for the continuing of communal violence, and how dangerous it is to leave history to common sense. In colonial times, a narrative of Hindu-Muslim differences has come up to legitimize the English presence in India. This version of Indian history has become national common sense and is repeated over and over again to widen the rift between Hindus and Muslims. 'Just after independence, an Indian politician cautioned rightly that "we should not leave history to tradesmen". An uncanny remark, given the nature of the current regime.'

A history of conquest and consequent suppression by Muslim invaders, Shahid Amin argued, is full of essentialist notions. A Hindu identity has become bound up with ideas of the 'otherness' of Muslims. 'Hindus have inscribed in their collective psyche that the bigoted, fanatical Muslims have come to attack us.'

Instead, Shahid Amin believes, attention should be paid to the forms of Indian syncretism that have come up over the centuries. Non-sectarian histories should be written, which pay attention to the composite culture of India. Historians should write new versions of the encounter between Hindus and Muslims. 'It is time to write professionally about the facts of our medieval past and memories of Muslim suppression. We cannot run away from it and leave it to the nationalists to give us the definitive history of Muslim conquest. Our nation can never be made habitable by ruining the dwelling in which Indians have lived together for centuries.'

What does the Gujarat violence hold for the future? Jan Breman recounted how he met a Muslim woman living in a Hindu neighbourhood. She worried that the nearby Muslim slum was going to attack her (Hindu) neighbourhood. Three days later, she was sent away by her Hindu neighbours 'for her own safety'. 'The violence is segregating Indian society. Many young Hindus do not know a single Muslim, while Muslims make up 20 per cent of the population of cities like Ahmedabad.' 'When segregation goes too far', Breman concluded, 'there is no going back'. Shahid Amin remarked that although the Indian constitution reserves the right to propagate one's fate to all Indians, in practice this right is only given to Hindus. Gitandra Shri stated that '[t]he Hindu-Muslim violence is also a conflict between those who believe in a plural society and those who believe in a multicultural society'. <

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The Seventh Biennial International Conference of the Borneo Research Council (BRC) focused on issues in development in twenty-first-century Borneo and for the first time featured two major panels on the performing arts, in addition to a separate session of individual papers. Inevitably, the change and continued relevance of the traditional art forms of Borneo were among the issues discussed by a number of specialists in the performing arts who had come from Borneo, Malaysia, Europe, and the USA. It is to be hoped that at future BRC Conferences this forum will also feature local Dayak researchers.



Young students at the Dayak Cultural Foundation practising traditional Iban women's dance (*ngajat indu*) in modern slacks, while manipulating woven *pua kumbu* cloths.

Report >
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By Clara Brakel & Patricia Matusky

The first panel entitled 'Between Music, Dance and Ritual: Some Aspects of Kulintang in Sabah', focused on the *kulintang* gong-chime of Sabah. The four papers presented in this panel were the result of a long-term study of the *kulintang* (from 1998 to 2000) to examine its repertory, music practices, distribution, function, and use in select Sabahan and Filipino societies. Jacqueline Pugh-Kitingan of Universiti Malaysia Sabah showed the widespread distribution of the *kulintang* among ethnic groups throughout the state of Sabah, with particular reference to Dusunic cultures, while Sunetra Fernando from the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, spoke about the heterogeneity of music practices and repertoires played on the *kulintang* along the east coast of Sabah. The use of the *kulintang* in relation to dance in village and court contexts was discussed by Mohammed Anis of the University of Malaya. Finally, Hanafi Hussin, a doctoral student in theatre at the University of Malaya, reported on his research on a spirit medium ritual (the *moginum* of the Bobohizan) and function of the *kulintang* music in that ceremony among the Tatana ethnic group in the area of Kuala Penyu, Sabah. While the summaries of this panel are published by the BRC, the in-depth individual studies will be published as a collection by the group of researchers concerned.

The second panel on music and dance, entitled 'Preservation-Modernization-Reinvention in the Performing Arts of Borneo', was meant to begin examining current trends in the performing arts of Borneo. Five presenters explored the state of music and dance performances in traditional settings, academic contexts, and public settings such as those arranged by the culture ministries, hotels, and private organizations. With a variety of viewpoints and approaches, the speakers

discussed examples of innovation of the traditional arts in Borneo, addressing modernization versus preservation in the music, songs, and dances of Sarawak and Sabah.

First, Patricia Matusky of Central Michigan University set out some of the basic issues of the panel in a paper entitled 'The Significance of Preservation: To Save or Not to Save?', illustrating why preservation and documentation are imperative when considering research in the traditional arts. The Dayak Cultural Foundation Ethnic Orchestra, a recent example of 'modernization' in the sense of incorporating Western influences into originally Dayak music and dance, was discussed by Clara Brakel of Leiden University. Jacqueline Pugh-Kitingan showed various, more or less satisfactory examples of adaptation of traditional dance and music forms in Sabah and Mhd. Anis Md. Nor used a live demonstration to show how traditional Iban dance patterns may change in various contexts. This very lively panel ended with an example of the adaptation of the long-dance-song (*belian dadu*), often considered one of the most



Young music students at the Dayak Cultural Foundation practising with traditional Iban mouth-organs (*engkerurai*). On the table in front of them are two mouth-organs (*engkerurai*) and two one-stringed fiddles (*serunai*).

attractive musical genres of the Kenyah communities in Sarawak, for urban audiences and students in government schools and institutions, by Chong Pek Lin, music lecturer at Maktab Perguruan Batu Lintang, Kuching, Sarawak.

The session of individual papers on performing arts encompassed both music and theatre. Nur Afifah Vanitha Abdullah of the Universiti Malaysia Sarawak spoke about the *bangsawan* theatrical genre in Sarawak. While little information exists on the history of this genre, an elucidation of the roots of *bangsawan* in peninsular Malaysia and its dissemination throughout Southeast Asia might provide more research possibilities. Two papers dealt with tube zithers and gong-chimes in Sabah. Jacqueline Pugh-Kitingan explained terminology and performance techniques on the *tongkungan* tube zither and the relationship to the hanging-gong orchestras from the Kadazandusun Culture of Tambunan in Sabah. In contrast, Jedol Dayou, also of the Universiti Malaysia Sabah, offered a technical description of the acoustic properties of the *kulintang* gong-chime of Sabah.

The general feeling was that continued relevance of the traditional art forms in the more urban regions of Borneo was especially pressing in today's world of global communication, modern technology, and easy access to influences from the Western world. Therefore, presenters of performing arts papers at this conference intend to continue and expand the discussion at the next BRC Conference in 2004 and beyond. <

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The Forum on Violence in Gujarat was organized by Asian Studies in Amsterdam (ASIA), University of Amsterdam (UvA). The ASIA panel consisted of the sociologist Jan Breman (UvA), the Islamist Yoginder Sikand (Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World, ISIM), historian Shahid Amin (Delhi University), historian Barbara Metcalf (University of California at Davis), novelist Gitandri Shri, and was chaired by the anthropologist Peter van der Veer (UvA).

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