Understating South Asia interculturally and communicatively: What the contemporary scholarship tells us

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Abstract
This article reviews contemporary intercultural scholarship by examining published papers in 16 communication journals (5 of them were dedicated intercultural journals) between 2007 and 2018. The analysis found that the number of manuscripts published in 12 years \((n = 191, \text{ or approximately } 2.5\% \text{ of } 7452 \text{ published papers})\) on South Asian issues and populations is meager. Based on the reading of the intercultural manuscripts, this article identified eight key areas of scholarly attention, including acculturation and cultural adaptation, intercultural transitions, language and verbal communication, communication for social change, negotiation of identities, technology-based communication, media and mediated communication, and new dynamics in the contemporary era. Later, this article talked about “silent zones” of contemporary intercultural scholarship—topics or areas that are under-researched and then described potential pathways of future scholarship in imagining a more tolerant, just and equal South Asia.

KEYWORDS
communication, identity, intercultural, media, silent zones, South Asia, technology

1 | INTRODUCTION

As an integral part of the global South, socio-politically and geo-strategically, South Asia is very diverse, both demographically as well as culturally. On one hand, it is one of the most populated regions of the globe, and on the other hand, it is the home of many schools of thoughts and religions, as well as numerous languages and ethnicities,
Asian populations were reflected and represented in the contemporary intercultural communication scholarship. In International Journal of Communication, carefully studied. The journals (except for the listed regional journals) that published “international,” “intercultural,” “communication” in their titles), that is, Intercultural Communication Studies, International Journal of Intercultural Relations, Journal of Intercultural Communication Research, Journal of International and Intercultural Communication, and Language and Intercultural Communication.

This manuscript describes how this region and situated issues as well as the lives and the experiences of South Asian populations were reflected and represented in the contemporary intercultural communication scholarship. In doing so, communication studies journal articles that published culture and communication scholarship between 2007 and 2018 were studied. Five of them specifically focused on intercultural issues (and, all of them had the term “intercultural” in their titles), that is, Intercultural Communication Studies, International Journal of Intercultural Relations, Journal of Intercultural Communication Research, Journal of International and Intercultural Communication, and Language and Intercultural Communication.

This analysis also consulted the latest Council of Communication Associations(The Council of Communication Associations is an umbrella organization, which currently includes seven national and international communication associations, including the International Communication Association (ICA) and the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC). https://communicationassociations.wordpress.com) list of ISI (Institute for Scientific Information-Thomson-Reuters) journals (total 77 journals were included in the latest report prepared by Dr. Linda Putnam and Dr. Patrice Buzanell). The aim and scope/journal information of all the 77 journals were carefully studied. The journals (except for the listed regional journals) that published “international,” “intercultural,” and “critical cultural” scholarships were included in this research. That is, Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies, Communication, Culture and Critique, Critical Studies in Media Communication, International Communication Gazette, International Journal of Communication, and Media, Culture & Society. It is also noted that a few top-ranking journals published in “all aspects”/“all areas”/”wider body” of the field of communication; those journals were also included in this study. They are Communication Monographs, Communication Research, Communication Theory, Human Communication Research, and Journal of Communication. In this manner, a total of 16 communication journals—5 dedicated intercultural communication journals and 11 additional communication journals—were studied in this research.

To search articles within the selected journals, the country names (e.g., Pakistan, Afghanistan) and phrases for denoting South Asian populations (e.g., Indian, Nepalese) were provided as keywords. From the search results, information about journal articles (only) was collected; in other words, in this process, entries like book reviews were eliminated. Within the search results, the final list of articles was prepared on the basis of the following: (i) some of the articles collected using the keyword “Indian” were talking about Native American or American Indian populations; these articles were not included in this analysis; (ii) some of the articles researched multiple countries; if an article studied less than four countries (even if only one South Asian country was included), then the article was considered; (iii) owing to technological issues, sometimes repeated entries, and non-South Asian articles appeared; after careful examination, those articles were eliminated; and (iv) finally, the articles published between 2007 and 2018 were selected for analysis. Although the manuscript is qualitatively focused, the next few paragraphs are talking about the representation of South Asian topics and matters in the published scholarship.

Out of 7452 articles published in the 16 communication journals (between 2007 and 2018), 191 articles investigated South Asian matters, among them 148 articles focused on India. On the other hand, 1920 articles were published (2007–2018) in the five intercultural journals; while South Asia was the subject of study in 56 articles, 44 of them talked about India. From Table 1, it is evident that nearly 2.5% of the published articles researched on South Asian populations and their issues. India received most of the attention among the South Asian countries, approximately 2% of the published researches studied India; in other words, the rest of South Asia received meager attention, about 0.6% papers focused on that region. While some articles were published on Afghanistan, Nepal, and Pakistan (i.e., 5–10 articles in 12 years), Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka received negligible attention (i.e., 1–3 articles in 12 years), and no paper was published on the Maldives. Among the publication outlets, Journal of
### TABLE 1: Articles published in communication journals between 2007 and 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the journals (alphabetical)</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>South Asia</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>Rest of S. Asia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>%b</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercultural communication journals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercultural Communication Studies</td>
<td>481</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Journal of Intercultural Relations</td>
<td>693</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Intercultural Communication Research</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9.05</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of International and Intercultural Comm.</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language and Intercultural Communication</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reputed culture/communication journals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Monographs</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Research</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Theory</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication, Culture and Critique</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8.08</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Studies in Media Communication</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Communication Research</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Communication Gazette</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Journal of Communication</td>
<td>1522</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Communication</td>
<td>581</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media, Culture &amp; Society</td>
<td>789</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercultural communication journals</td>
<td>1920</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All culture/communication journals</td>
<td>7452</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a* Articles (2007–2018) that studied fewer than four countries are included in the calculation.  
*b* Rounded to two decimal places.
Intercultural Communication Research, and Communication, Culture and Critique were the most invested in South Asia (nearly 8%–9% published articles), and 3%–5% of the published papers in Journal of International and Intercultural Communication, International Communication Gazette, and Media, Culture & Society focused on South Asian affairs. This is despite the fact that approximately one-fourth of the global populations, that is, 1.92 billion people, live in eight South Asian countries (i.e., Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka; United Nations, 2019). In terms of language, religion, and ethnicity, South Asia is one of the most diverse regions in the world. Linguistically speaking, South Asian populations speak in 664 living languages, which is about 10% of the languages spoken globally; however, 195 South Asian languages are endangered, and in addition, 38 languages are on the brink of extinction (Eberhard et al., 2019). In terms of religion, South Asia is the home of several religions, including Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism, and Zoroastrianism; it would be noteworthy that the more than 95% of Hindu and Jain populations, 90% of Sikh populations, and a third of all Muslims are South Asian (Pechilis & Raj, 2013).

After identifying the articles, all the 191 published articles were collected and studied. Grounded theory methodology was used for analyzing the contents of the manuscripts (Charmaz, 2000; Strauss & Corbin 1990). To compare and contrast the concepts found in the journal contents, the constant comparison technique was used (Strauss & Corbin 1990). To analyze data systematically, open coding, axial coding, and selective coding were done. First, using open coding process, distinct concepts were identified. Next, after studying relationships among the discrete concepts, related concepts were grouped; in this process, conceptual categories were emerged. Gradually, in the axial coding process, relationships among the categories were derived. Finally, the thematic integration was accomplished through the selective coding process (Denzin & Lincoln 2003; Strauss & Corbin 1990). A table containing the axial and selective codes is presented in Annexure A. As a result of the coding process, eight themes were identified; they were—acculturation and cultural adaptation, intercultural transitions, language and verbal communication, communication for social change, negotiation of identities (caste, gender, and religion), technology-based communication, media and mediated communication, and new dynamics in the contemporary era. However, by no means were these themes mutually exclusive; many of the journal articles can be potentially considered for multiple themes.

Intercultural communication, as an academic discipline, is invested in studying societal relationships, dynamics, and interactions (Calhoun, 2002). However, as a relatively new area of study, the field is indebted to several well-established academic disciplines, including sociology. For instance, intercultural transition theories, which study issues related to migration and cultural adaptation, are rooted in the concept of “the stranger” as theorized by Simmel (1921) and Schütz (1944). As an emerging field of study, intercultural communication scholarship is invested in researching several social, cultural, and political dynamics of the contemporary world. Over the years, the academic discipline paid scholarly attention to a variety of topic areas; including migration matters, cultural adaptation, acculturation, language (acquisition and maintenance), identity matters, and markers (such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, religion, and so on), communication of co-cultural/underserved populations, popular cultural artifacts and expressions, and conflict, among others. In recent years, some new topic areas are increasingly receiving more scholarly attention, such as diasporic matters, ecological, and sustainability concerns, as well as new media communication. To understand and transform South Asia, intercultural communication scholarship can play meaningful role, particularly when migration, multilingualism, discrimination, conflict, resistance, as well as emerging techno-cultures characterize many of the everyday realities of this region. Grounded in the theories and approaches of intercultural communication studies, the aforementioned eight themes are presented below.

2 ACCULTURATION AND CULTURAL ADAPTATION

As a major area of intercultural communication scholarship, scholars continue focusing on the topics of acculturation, competence, and face negotiations. Several papers addressed acculturation experiences of South Asian immigrants (micro, macro, and meso dimensions), who moved to various developed countries; these articles paid
attention to key factors, both micro and macro, which influenced the lives and lived-realities of the migrants. Some of the individual and/or family level factors they discussed were perceived competence, resilience, perception of social support, exposure to mediated discourse, family allocentrism, and ethnic identity (Safdar et al., 2012). In terms of macro (including transnational) factors, the scholars focused on postcolonial dynamics and hybridity, the role of race, ethnicity and larger structural forces, stereotypical perceptions and attitudes, prejudicial feelings (including cognitive beliefs, emotional feelings, and attitudinal evaluations), and favorability (Bhatia & Ram, 2009).

Some of the articles discussed acculturative stress and adjustment strategies practiced by the South Asian immigrants. According to the scholars, discrimination in foreign spaces, threat to ethnic identities, unfavorable occupational and financial mobility, language barriers, and homesickness were some of the top causes of acculturative stress (Jibeen & Khalid, 2010a). They showed that a higher level of social support, income, autonomy, and personal growth were associated with positive functioning, whereas social dysfunction, anxiety, nonrelevant jobs, younger age of participants’ children yielded negative health outcomes for migrants. To cope with stresses related to cultural adaptation, according to scholars, South Asian immigrants use several strategies, both online and offline, to ensure their physical and psychological well-being (Jibeen, 2011; Jibeen & Khalid, 2010b). For example, inter-generational communication of narrative of face and face-saving, including respecting the family heritage and traditions and saving the face of family/family members were discussed by Baig et al. (2014). On the other hand, Aricat et al. (2015) showed that through trial and error, the migrants, as an online acculturation strategy, sought to maintain their social and cultural identities, personal dignities by using and handling online devices appropriately.

### 3 | INTERCULTURAL TRANSITIONS

Understanding intercultural transitions is an important focus of scholarly emphasis in this globalized era when transnational and global movements became increasingly evident. Several articles focused on the South Asian diaspora and the emerging diasporic realities. Two major aspects that emerged in those manuscripts were (i) language maintenance (specifically in the context of multilingualism, social literacy practices, and attitude toward diversity) and (ii) the nuances of diasporic identity-ranging from prior exposure to the ethnic culture of the home country to the issues of hybridity and the lack of comfortable fit between cultural identity and place (Bardhan, 2011; Boivin, 2016). While the manuscripts paid attention to power dynamics of nation-state and transnational forces as well as local–global power shifts, one of the articles focused on the role of raising consciousness about oppressions and exclusions of diasporic communities in negotiating forces of globalization.

A few articles investigated the topic of diasporic film culture; these articles, on the one hand, invested in understanding the issues of cultural authenticity and construction of “otherness” in film-representations (it is worth noting that some of such representations are distinctly different from the Bollywood styles); and, on the other hand, the scholars explored the structural issues and challenges associated with diasporic film productions, including the access to resources and infrastructure, transnational and local networks and resources (including human resources), as well as the legal and informal transnational circulation of film (Mudliar & Pal, 2015; Smets et al., 2013).

Another key area of emphasis identified in intercultural-transition articles was related to parenting and socialization of the migrants in the host culture. These articles described how parents intergenerationally communicate information and values pertaining to race and ethnicity to prepare their children to handle discrimination in an increasingly diverse and globalized world (e.g., Iqbal, 2014). For example, one article showed that the migrant children were taught the values of “independence” and “family closeness” as the most important socialization values, which were guided by the cultural and religious–moral goals of the migrated South Asian families (Ganapathy-Coleman, 2013).

While international migration received major attention in the intercultural scholarship, a few articles talked about domestic migrations as well. In those articles, the processes of intercultural contact and the emerging trends of mobility of the migrants were discussed. For instance, one article discussed how an “un-Indian” look and
proficiency in the English language made indigenous migrant workers from North East India as desirable workers in hospitality industries across the nation (Kikon, 2018).

4 | LANGUAGE AND VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Intersections of intercultural communication and language constituted the foci of several articles. Some of those articles studied the South Asian diaspora and their language learning, linguistic abilities, and usages of languages in multicultural settings. Several communicative aspects, such as language contact and training, acquisition of multilingualism, linguistic cosmopolitanism, socio-linguistic impact of empowerment, accents and dialects, roles of ethnic media and performance, and gratification of language in social media were explored in those manuscripts (Hossain & Veenstra, 2017; Ramasubramanian & Doshi, 2017; Sharma, 2018). For example, one article argued that one who keeps multilingual notebooks for language learning would more likely become a good language learner (Radwańska-Williams, 2009). On the other hand, another article discussed aspects of accents and linguistic authenticity by examining linguistics hegemony, linguistic cosmopolitanism, brown voices (of South Asians), and legitimation of South Asian English (Antony, 2013).

Argumentation and cross-cultural comparison of argument frames were examined by the scholars in a few articles. In understanding the processes of arguments and acts of arguing, the scholars examined the aspects of verbal aggressiveness, argument-motives, personalization of conflict along with motivations practice, and cultural dimensions of argumentation (Hample & Anagondahalli, 2015; Rapanta & Hample, 2015). In addition, the roles and influences of age, gender, space (national, international), and purpose (e.g., education, business) were also explored in those articles. For example, Croucher et al. (2009) described how different types of dissents (e.g., displaced dissent, latent dissent), operated in organizational contexts.

Another aspect that received scholarly attention was hate speech and hate spin in mediated environments. These articles documented how the application of hate speech and hate spin often caused incitement of hatred, as well as how they coerced targeted groups and mobilized supporters in both online and offline spaces (George, 2016, 2017). Moreover, the manuscripts problematized the aspects of freedom of expression and its limits, and argued that in terms of exercising legal restriction, the current legal provisions were insufficient, especially for highly organized campaigns; and argued that the existing laws were largely counter-productive as they often empower the intolerance sections of society.

Finally, a few articles explored the message framing and semantic components of language communication. To examine message framing, the articles studied the role of interpersonal discussion, mediating relationships, knowledge, attitude, and practice, as well as self-efficacy in influencing/predicting behavior change of the participants (Chatterjee et al., 2009; McKinley et al., 2017). In addition, semantic aspects of several South Asian terminologies (e.g., Azadi in the context of Kashmir conflict; Luthra, 2016), and phrases (e.g., Kolaveri Di—“why this murderous rage”, which catalyzed the debate in the mediated public sphere about corruption in India; Punathambekar & Mohan, 2017) were also studied by the scholars. They showed that multiple or contradictory interpretations and polyvalence of language and expressions not only bridged the popular and the political but also opened up novel avenues for citizen participation and performativity.

5 | COMMUNICATION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Increasingly, critical intercultural communication scholars are arguing in favor of legitimizing unheard voices from the margins and creating avenues to bring about social change. Many scholars have theorized and studied the aspects of resistance, activism, and organizing social movements in bringing about meaningful changes in society, particularly at the margins. Challenging and questioning the dominant modes and models of development, the
scholars legitimized the role of participatory communication, resistive tactics, and articulation of counter-publicity. For example, one article critiqued the dominant practice of land-grabbing, which caused large-scale displacement of rural populations (Pal & Dutta, 2013), whereas another article documented a women-initiated collective resistance, namely Gulabi Gang, against gender and caste related violence in India (Richards, 2016). In terms of organizing for social movement, scholars explored both online and offline avenues for activism. While acknowledging the potential of online social media to bring about social change, the articles examine the role of large-scale networking and alliances, particularly when the underserved sections were experiencing a lack of Internet access and inadequate computational knowledge and skills (Chadha & Harlow, 2015; Ganesh, 2018). The scholars argued that it was crucial to ensure the implementation of legal provisions that safeguard marginalized populations by using both online and offline activism together to achieve meaningful success.

The concept and roles of voice in the context of social change was studied in various manuscripts. These articles paid attention to structural as well as cultural aspects to legitimize voices and agencies from the margins. More specifically, these articles talked about the material and communicative absences, and emphasize the acts of reflexive engagements and listening to the narratives of situated inequalities (e.g., Dutta, 2018b). For instance, one of the articles foregrounded the voices of hunger; in arguing that hunger is a key marker of health disparity, the article discussed the implications of hunger in everyday life and its consequences on physical and psychological health in marginalized communities (Dutta et al., 2013). In similar context (i.e., voice and resistance), the role(s) of gender and gendered narratives were explored in multiple articles. Several such articles studied female sex workers and their narratives in everyday negotiations with health risks, disparities, and vulnerabilities (Basnyat, 2017; Basu, 2011; Basu & Dutta, 2009). The scholars, by paying attention to dialogic engagement and participatory communication, emphasized the role of civic education (including information and communication technology [ICT] enabled education) to raise consciousness and autonomy to reclaim women’s human rights (Sengupta et al., 2007).

While legitimizing the voices from the underserved spaces, the scholars also problematized the grand narratives and poly-narratives of health practices. Questioning the grand narratives of the dominant biomedical model, the scholars emphasized the role of understanding culture in the context of health, as well as foregrounded the contradictions between scientific discourse and lived experiences of the participants (Clair et al., 2016; de Souza, 2012). Similarly, they explored the role of empathy and narrative-empathy to uncover overlapping of narratives (e.g., peripheral stories, contentious stories) and antagonism that existed in the grassroots.

In addition, the scholars studied folk culture, music, and performativity to open up possibilities for social change (U. Dutta, 2016). For instance, by conceptualizing folk music and folk media as the medium of the oppressed, scholars showed that ethnic minority communities in Afghanistan, who experienced exclusion and persecution, used folk music and media to resist exclusionary narratives as well as to raise awareness on social and environmental issues (e.g., biodiversity conservations), particularly when such media and performances were locally accepted and adaptable, economic and requires no literacy or modern technology (Höivik & Luger, 2009; Karimi, 2017).

6 | NEGOTIATION OF IDENTITIES

Cultural and communicative aspects of intercultural identity and identity markers in contemporary South Asian contexts were explored in various manuscripts. Three key identity elements discussed below are caste, gender, and religious identities.

6.1 | Caste identities

Caste is an important marker of discrimination in South Asian societies, especially when it is still actively practiced in various parts and in various forms. In problematizing the practices of caste, a few articles have theorized as well
as compared the concept of caste and race in the postcolonial context (Das, 2013, 2014). Drawing from several examples of discrimination and xenophobia, the articles, on the one hand, showed how the disenfranchised communities were excluded from the mainstream; and on the other hand, they challenged the discourse of homogenous nation-state as well as the discourse of national integration in the post-liberalized era. One article examined the role of caste-based discriminations, deception motives, and sexual harassments in academic spaces (specifically, List of Sexual Harassment Accused, #LoSHA); it showed that while the upper caste scholars have dominated the discourses of sexual harassment in academia the voices and antagonisms from lower caste women, specifically Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi, were erased from the discursive spaces (Rao, 2018).

Such acts of discriminations and prejudices were also visible in other work environments. Scholars have noted occupational stereotypes in the global organizations, where "low-status" employees often use micro-resistance to survive and constantly negotiate with the power-resistance dialectics and the dominant capitalist narratives in multinational workplaces (Leonardi & Rodriguez-Lluesma, 2013; Pal & Buzzanell, 2013).

Some of the manuscripts centered their discussion on ethnic identity in South Asia. The scholars discussed aspects and efforts of preservation of minority-cultural identity, who experienced institutional discrimination, and negotiated with their tenuous social position; the articles argued that in spite of earnest initiatives of community members to preserve their culture, spiritual heritage, and community ethics; the task of preserving cultural identity was becoming increasingly difficult in the backdrop of capitalistic influences of globalization and for growing reluctance and lack of enthusiasm among the youths (Mitra, 2011; Sharapan, 2016).

6.2 | Gender identities

Nuances of gender identity, negotiations, and lived experiences were represented in several journal articles. Some of them paid specific attention to experiential realities of South Asian women, who migrated to the United States. The articles documented the narratives and creative storytelling of experiences by the women engineering students (D. Dutta, 2016) and the "dependent" (H4 visa holders) women (Mallapragada, 2016) and their online activism. By examining their identity struggles, identity dislocations as well as structural and societal pressures on women, the scholars showed how the enactments of women agencies paved new avenues for social transformation.

A few manuscripts focused on women's roles and participation in the entertainment industry. These articles discussed how feminine triumph (e.g., Hard Kaur—first South Asian diasporic female rapper; Dattatreyan, 2014) in the entertainment world (de)constructed gendered norms in the post-liberalization world. Some of the manuscripts discussed how women agencies were instrumental in questioning and resisting age-old traditions toward larger sociopolitical activism. For instance, the scholars noted several spiritual (female priest), emotional, and esthetic (e.g., wearing Burqa—face veils and Bindi—a colored dot at the center of the forehead) performances of women participants communicatively and strategically asserted femininity, and redefined competence and thereby challenged normative expectations (Ansari, 2008; Antony, 2010; Shenoy-Packer, 2013).

Narratives of oppressions and exclusion of women in the spaces of discursivity were represented in several articles. By questioning the dominant version of history, scholars brought forth the gendered narratives of historical events (e.g., the partition of India and Pakistan, the independence movement of Bangladesh) and thereby imagined newer ways of understanding counter-history (Islam, 2012; Luthra, 2012; Mazid, 2018). In other words, legitimizing violence (including rape and torture) and vulnerability, the articles emphasized feminist consciousness and woman's agency to understanding and imagining the pain as a part of gender politics.
6.3 Religious identity

In terms of religious identity, two sub-themes emerged prominently; they were religious politics and mediatization of religion. For the first subtheme, the scholars discussed how right-wing politics of South Asia used digital social media platforms to engage net-savvy nonexperts, and propagated nationalist, religious (more specifically Hindu) and ideological discourses to create a populist techno-culture in the cyberspace (Govil & Baishya, 2018; Udupa, 2015). Such an online move was deeply intertwined with the mediatization practices of religion and/or religio-nationalist politics. In this respect, scholars studied a variety of topics, ranging from (Islamic) televangelism to representatives of religious minorities in film, as well as (re) designing soap operas to reach a wider audience to promote religious ideologies (Chakrabarti, 2014; Eisenlohr, 2017; Thobani, 2014). The articles showed that to naturalize religious discourses in popular culture, the mediated channels and avenues embraced various approaches (e.g., a bottom-up pyramid approach) and influenced several aspects of religious identity, including subjectivities and belongings as well as regional geopolitics.

7 TECHNOLOGY-BASED COMMUNICATION

Today, we are increasingly experiencing the influence of ICTs in every aspect of our lives; they are not only shaping our day-to-day interactions but also opening up new possibilities in ever-emerging ways. Several aspects of intercultural new media studies were explored by the scholars. The proliferation of the Internet is also intimately associated with the emerging issues of privacy and information security. To study the aforementioned security/privacy concerns, scholars examined the nuances of net neutrality, privacy trade-offs, and associated techno-politics, to investigate the topics related to identity infrastructure for a national identification system and free basics of digital apps (Prasad, 2018; Schwittay, 2011).

The act of online participation of citizens to address social issues was investigated in several articles. A few articles focused on attitude, behavior, and perceptions of the youth and their online civic engagements. They noted that today’s youth, on the one hand, displayed apathy and largely rejected traditional party politics; and on the other hand, they explored alternative forms of online activism to help local communities both materially and communicatively (Ilavarasan, 2013; Ullah, 2013). The aspects of organizing resistance and social movement by using digital platforms were discussed in a few articles. These articles documented how people and nongovernmental organizations, on one hand, questioned the oppressive structures of State-corporate nexus and status quo, and on the other hand, mobilized offline and online resources for local–global organizing (e.g., seeking justice for victims of man-made disasters and organizing anti-corruption social movement), to emerge as counterhegemonic forces (Pal & Dutta, 2012; Thomas, 2017).

Another topic that received attention from scholars was communication behavior in corporate environments (e.g., Sarkar, 2017; Zaidman & Malach-Pines, 2014). Some of the articles studied global virtual teams and examined cross-cultural differences among participants in terms of values and behavior, and examined how they operated in complex online environments, describing how they managed cultural differences and their consequences and negotiated with and exhibited in-group favoritism. Other articles examined corporate interventions and charitable initiatives in the social sector of South Asia, arguing that while such actions were important in raising funds and building online communities, oftentimes, those interventions following neoliberal principles reinforced divisions of class, caste, and gender.

The role of the public sector and government initiatives and interventions in the domain of ICTs were explored in several articles. The articles examined the role of free and open-source public sector software and cyber kiosks to bridge social divides and promote digital literacy in rural sectors, specifically to ensure the economic and social development of vulnerable groups (Sreekumar, 2007). Taking a different strand, one article examined regulatory interventions of government by studying the implication of Internet shutdown and authoritarian practices by the
state, and argued that such moves not only normalized the communication ruptures but also strategically prevented mobilization of people and thereby denied the existence of the “others” (Thomas, 2014b).

Online communicative practices of people in their everyday life were studied in multiple articles. A variety of topics ranging from practices of digital romance, norms of text messaging to usages, and/or control of digital device in classroom settings were discussed by the scholars (Arora & Scheiber, 2017; Dutta et al., 2018; Shuter & Chattopadhyay, 2010). A variety of communicative aspects including morality, hyper-connectivity, impolite and/or uncivil online behavior (e.g., revenge porn, slut-shaming), and digital distractions in academic spaces were explored by the scholars to understand the nuances of cultural interactions, contradictions, and associated tension.

Another area of scholarly emphasis was the right-wing nationalist (and religious) politics in South Asia and their mediations in social media. These articles explored several faces and facets of political communication and campaigns, and discussed how the leaders and/or parties in their mediated populism efforts used several rhetorical strategies including popular idioms as well as performative efforts in the mediated platforms in the name of dialoguing with citizens and democratizing social media (Pal et al., 2017; Sinha, 2018).

Finally, a few articles focused on the contents available or shared by users in the digital environment. These articles discussed new/emerging meanings and implications of digital contents such as memes, viral videos, subversive parodies, and sexual contents, which were produced, distributed, and appropriated globally, along with their implications in marketplaces and in our everyday lives (Cunningham-Engram et al., 2009; Kumar, 2015).

8 MEDIA AND MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

Studies of media remain as one of the most prominent areas of research within the intercultural communication scholarship. The issue of censorship was addressed in a couple of articles. These articles studied several aspects of censorship, including freedom of speech, sensorial governmentality, the role of state power, and public contestation, particularly in the backdrop of political anxiety and upheaval, and increased media activism in the contemporary era (Rajkhowa, 2015; Schulz, 2015).

A few articles explored the relationships between children and mediated environments. They discussed media-rich and media-deprived environments and their implications on children’s creativity and civic participation, and talked about how they were intertwined with the social class of children (e.g., the vulnerability and poverty of slum children were discussed; Antony, 2012; Banaji, 2015).

Some of the manuscripts discuss the experimentation of media (specifically in radio and television) and their implications on society at large. The articles talked about the emergence of television and radio operations beyond government control, which, according to scholars, in itself can be seen as a new cultural signifier, where, on the one hand, experience of freelancers and newer preferences over news content was noticed; on the other hand, such opportunities were seen as precursors of imaginings on empowerment, subversion, and resistance which could plausibly challenge the structures of exclusion and inequality (Roy, 2011; Sen, 2014). In terms of mediated contents, a couple of articles discussed the roles and implications of radio soap operas in regional development, particularly when those programs used local language, voices, and culturally meaningful sound strategies to communicate messages (e.g., Skuse, 2011).

News media’s representations (including nontextual and visual representations) of one region or one nation-state (along with local incidents) in the backdrop of religion, terrorism, and conflicts were studied in a few articles. The implications of imperialist agendas, uneven globalization, Western press’ negative bias and media-frames in representing global South, the domestic politics of South Asian countries, and the white man’s eternal burden to rescue brown people were discussed by the scholars (Aday, 2010; Schwartz-DuPre, 2010; Thomas, 2014a).
NEW DYNAMICS IN THE CONTEMPORARY ERA

The world has seen various new dynamics (social, cultural, political, and more) in the last few years that are intimately tied to neoliberalism and proliferation of technologies. Several articles studied the imagining of nation-states (primarily India) in this 21st century. In this regard, scholars studied nation-branding campaigns, communicative acts of organizations as well as popular cultural artifacts. Some of the key aspects that emerged or addressed in those articles were communicative and representational strategies of organizations and/or state, naturalization of dominant interventions in globalized era, global brand and consumerism, and the role(s) of state in silencing dissidents and media surveillance (Edwards & Ramamurthy, 2016; Mitra, 2010).

Some manuscripts examined popular cultural artifacts and their influence on contemporary society. By studying representations of South Asian culture, values, and aspirations in films, as well as Diasporic performances, the scholars explored several aspects related to popular culture, including, global flows and consumption of popular culture, globalized identity (specifically in cases of diasporic populations), and hybridity, Western influence on Oriental culture, South Asian values and familial emotions, and the acts and opposition of reaffirmation of patriarchy and caste-based identities (Kapur, 2009; Rao, 2010).

The topic of sports and sports communication received attention from several scholars. In this regard, the scholarly research examined several sports leagues (such as Indian Premier league [Cricket], Elite Football League of India) and the possibilities of organizing sports mega-event in South Asian countries (specifically in India; Agur, 2015; Polson & Whiteside, 2014). A variety of topics including sports-branding and promotion of globalization, gambling, and corruption relating to sports, implications of organizing sports such as international development and commercial consequences as well as global aspirations of nation-states were discussed in those articles (e.g., Polson & Whiteside, 2016).

Newer avenues of mediated practices and governance were addressed in a couple of articles. For example, the application of big data in creating national biometric identities in South Asian nations were discussed in the light of databased democracies and databased identities by paying attention to agencies of population at the margins (Arora, 2016).

SILENT ZONES

While numerically South Asian populations and their issues were underrepresented in culture and communication journals, in terms of research topics too, the scholarship fell short and/or was silent in multiple ways. The next section will focus on the “silent zones” of current scholarship. Here, “silent zone” denotes the topics or domain of studies that were ill-represented/never researched so far, and/or potentially need more attention in the future. Although received meager scholarly attention in the communication studies scholarship (specifically in the journals included in this study); interculturally speaking, South Asia is not only the home of nearly one-fourth of humanity, it is rich in terms of linguistic diversity, philosophical and spiritual sophistication, and innumerable cultural expressions (both traditional and contemporary). In spite of such unique qualities, the region experienced several forms of inequalities, disparities, and underdevelopment over the years. Moreover, rampant corruption, social malpractices (including identity-based discriminations), and superstitions in the region need more scholarly attentions and actions. On the other hand, the emergence of new technologies and innovative communicative means, if harnessed, could open up new potentials for transforming and imagining the space as more equal, just, and humane.

ISSUES RELATE TO IDENTITIES

Several identity markers remained under-researched in the current scholarship. For instance, issues related to disability were never addressed, even when more than 45 million (estimated) South Asian population are disabled (either visually, orthopedically, or relating to speech and hearing) and often have to experience bullying and stigma
in their everyday existence (Gudlavalleti, 2018). Similarly, LGBTQ and third-gender issues were also scantily attended; this is despite the fact that in many of the South Asian countries (e.g., Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka), homosexuality is still considered as a criminal act, and the homosexual populations have to face lifelong stigmatization and discrimination in both private and public lives (Duncan, 2017).

Another less researched aspect was political identity; while political violence and its consequences such as casualties and forced evictions is prevalent in many parts of South Asia, scholarly attention seemed to be inadequate. For both human interventions (legally as well as coercively) and for natural causes (e.g., tsunami, cyclones), many people have to migrate involuntarily; more studies on migrating cultures and behaviors, including de-territorialization and re-territorialization, would be beneficial for future knowledge production. Some related topics such as circular migration and experiences of environmental refugees (particularly in the context of climate change) also need more research. In addition, scholarly focus on body shaming, taboo-rituals, rape culture, religious fanaticism, untouchability, and other forms of cultural segregation is still meager.

12 | ISSUES RELATE TO MEDIA

While Bollywood film industry received some scholarly attention, the movies produced in other South Asian vernaculars (e.g., Bengali, Telugu, and Malayalam) were understudied, even though numerous films are produced in those languages annually. Issues related to piracy and illegal consumption of mediated products/discourses, also rampant in many parts of South Asia, were also overlooked. Another under-researched topic was new/emerging media-avenues such as YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook channels/pages; this is particularly important as many of the top mediators (i.e., owners/performers/producers of those channels) of the globe are South Asians (Abuljadail et al., 2018).

13 | LANGUAGES AND CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS

Another aspect that warrants urgent attention is near-extinct languages and cultural expressions. As many of the South Asian languages do not have any written script and/or are spoken by a handful of people, it is crucial to mindfully study and preserve those languages. Moreover, to ensure the ecology of language and a plurality of linguistic expressions, scholars should take responsibilities and conduct action-oriented research, particularly when global institutions (e.g., UN) are predicting the disappearance of half of the living languages by the end of the 21st century (Austin & Sallabank, 2011). Apart from language, local/indigenous cultural expressions, including dance, folklore, art, theater, songs, and crafts, are also experiencing severe threats of extinction in the neoliberal era; it is important to develop community-academia networks of solidarity and to initiate organized efforts to preserve and promote invaluable cultural resources before they are dying out.

14 | POVERTY AND CONDITIONS OF MARGINALIZATION

It is a matter of grave concern that South Asia is the home of more than one-third of the global poor. Many of the marginalized South Asian communities, particularly those who are indigenous and/or live in geographically isolated regions are experiencing extreme forms of disparities, poverty, and hunger. Moreover, according to Transparency International (2019), many of the South Asian governments are nontransparent and very corrupt (e.g., the ranks of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nepal are 173, 146, 120, and 113, respectively [out of 198 countries studied]). Owing to resource disparities, dominant coercions, and lack of access to infrastructures/facilities, vast populations of South Asia is experiencing a vicious cycle of life-threatening poverty. In addition, Necro-political
agendas, anthropocentric activities, and environmental degradations continually worsen their lived experiences. Intercultural scholars need to create avenues to contribute to global missions (e.g., Sustainable Development Goals), co-create access to resources as well as solutions to contextual problems (Dutta, 2020a, 2020b), and co-design avenues for grassroots innovations (refer to the initiatives of National Innovation Foundation-India) to make the world more habitable, just, and equal.

15 | INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES (ICTS)

Another key concern regarding the global South (including South Asia) is a digital divide and information poverty/inequality. As per ICT Development Index-2017 (by United Nations International Telecommunication Union), a tool for measuring digital divide, South Asian countries, except for the Maldives, performed poorly; for example, the ranks of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka are 159, 147, 121, 140, 134, 148, and 117, respectively (out of 178 countries studied). The situation is far more dire in remote and isolated regions. It is, therefore, necessary to conduct action-oriented intercultural research to develop information solutions with active involvement of information/digital have-nots, by paying attention to local languages, heritage, knowledge, practices, and aspirations (Dutta & Das, 2015). Another concerning matter related to information technology that received practically no scholarly attention is South Asian student- and youth-participations in online suicide games such as MoMo and Blue-Whale. Similarly, interactions and transactions (both legal and illegal) of South Asian populations in dark webs (including usage of crypto currencies) remain unexplored in the current scholarship. In addition, the scholarship never interrogated emerging technological advancements such as virtual and augmented realities as well as artificial intelligence and their influences on human behaviors and society at large.

16 | IN SEARCH OF NEW APPROACHES

Finally, it is crucial for future scholarship to invest in developing new approaches and innovative methodologies in addressing/researching ever-emergent contextual complexities of South Asia. For instance, centric meta-theoretical perspectives (as proposed by Asante & Miike, 2013), de-westernizing, de-colonial, de-linking, and indigenous methodologies (not an exhaustive list) can potentially guide us to envision art-based, performative, and multisensory (Dutta, 2019a) approaches to reflexively address contextual issues relating to caste, class, race, ethnicity, gender, and power dynamics. For example, in the context of conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and interreligious dialog, South Asian scholars have developed meaningful approaches that are grounded in Gandhian, Buddhist (Brummans et al., 2013), Sufi, and Bhakti (Dutta, 2019b) philosophies. Such a reflexive intercultural engagement would aid not only future scholarship to overcome ethnocentric and mono-cultural tendencies but also encourage other scholars to explore new possibilities and areas of inquiry (e.g., Anthropocene, post-truth, post-human, and transhuman paradigms).

17 | CONCLUSION

This article, by reviewing the contemporary intercultural scholarship (both conventional [e.g., acculturation, transition, identity, and language communication] and emerging [e.g., social change communication, technology-enabled communication]) and then by identifying some potential avenues (and silent zones) for future research, hopes to contribute to building a more equal and plural South Asia that would potentially celebrate “multiculturalism without hierarchy” (Asante, 2003). Therefore, for us (future intercultural researchers), it is central to prepare us as empathic, resilient, and culturally literate inquirers to legitimize alternate imaginings and knowledge productions as well as dreaming an ecologic and plural world (linguistically, spiritually, ideologically, etc.).
REFERENCES


**AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**

**Uttaran Dutta** is an assistant professor of intercultural communication in the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at Arizona State University, United States. His research focuses on sustainable development and social change in marginalized communities, analyzing the importance of culture, communication, design, and innovation in transforming the lives of people who are socially, politically, and economically underserved. In his work, he co-developed cost-effective solutions (e.g., creating access to health and education, and building digital apps for preserving culture) together with local participants using local resources toward empowering underserved populations. He has published articles and chapters in communication journals and books, and presented his research at communication conferences.

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**ANNEXURE A IDENTIFICATION OF THEMES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selective codes</th>
<th>Axial codes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acculturation and cultural adaptation</td>
<td>Characteristics and factors of acculturation</td>
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<td>Host-migrant relationships</td>
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<td>Acculturation stress</td>
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<td>Acculturation strategies</td>
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<td>Facework and face saving</td>
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<td>Intercultural transitions</td>
<td>Diaspora and diasporic identity</td>
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<td>Language maintenance</td>
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<td>Family communication and socialization</td>
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<td>Diasporic film culture</td>
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<td>Language and verbal communication</td>
<td>Argumentation and argument frames</td>
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<td>Language and identity</td>
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<td>Hate Speech</td>
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<td>Message framing and semantics</td>
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### APPENDIX A (Continued)

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Communication for social change</td>
<td>Communicative resistance</td>
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<td>Gender and social change</td>
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<td>Voices and narratives</td>
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<td>Activism and organizing</td>
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<td>Performance and social change</td>
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<td>Caste identity</td>
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<td>• Harassment and violence</td>
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<td>• Race, ethnicity and caste relationship</td>
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<td>• “Low-status” workers (not always low-caste)</td>
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<td>Gender identity</td>
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<td>• Sharing of experiences</td>
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<td>• Oppressions and exclusions</td>
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<td>• Entertainment world and gender</td>
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<td>• Tradition of society and gender</td>
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<td>Religious identity</td>
<td>Religious identity</td>
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<td>• Religious (and nationalist) politics</td>
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<td>• Mediatization of religion</td>
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<td>Technology-based communication</td>
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<td>Online participation and engagement</td>
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<td>Everyday practices of technology</td>
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<td>Digital contents</td>
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<td>Government, infrastructure and information technology</td>
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<td>Corporate sector and information technology</td>
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<td>Media and mediated communication</td>
<td>Censorship and bans</td>
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<td>Children and media</td>
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<td>Representation of culture and regions/nations</td>
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<td>Imagining new South Asia</td>
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<td>Influences of popular culture</td>
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<td>Film and entertainment industry</td>
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<td>World of sports</td>
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