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SOUTH ASIAN STUDIES IN BRITAIN: REMEMBERING ROGER BALLARD (20 APRIL 1943–30 SEPTEMBER 2020)

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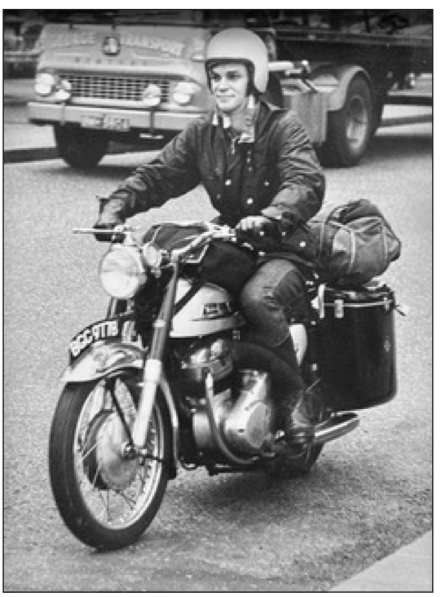
Introduction

Following Roger Ballard's sudden and untimely death, at a time when only a few of us could assemble to remember him, it was decided to put together a compilation of brief tributes from colleagues who worked with or were once taught by him. This also provides insights into his significant role in South Asian Studies in Britain and elsewhere. We begin with a picture (which truly is worth a thousand words) of Roger as a young man in 1964, annotated by his sister, Sylvia:



Source: Keystone Press Agency via Getty Images.

> He was heading to Afghanistan, his first trip as an anthropologist while still at Churchill College, Cambridge. The bike, a Norton, met rather a sad end in Switzerland, and came back in a crate. Roger returned by train. Undaunted, he rearranged everything, and set off again, travelling by train and unbelievably hitchhiking, and had a very successful trip. He said that it was a good thing he did not have the bike, as it would have drawn too much attention, and he would have been robbed if not worse. He was very proud of the return journey, as he hitched a lift from (I think) Tashkent to the Clock Roundabout (Welwyn Garden City) in a single ride with another British research academic who just happened to be in the right place at the right time. Roger's rucksack was stuffed, I remember most vividly as his little sister, with his socks and a goatskin coat, which stank! There was also a beautiful turquoise bowl that our mother (aka Granny, Great Granny or Betty) treasured. He was my big brother and I loved him to bits.

Just after Roger's funeral, I wrote the following notice to my colleagues at Manchester who could not attend:

> *The grave's a fine and private place,*
> *But none, I think, do there embrace.*

So wrote Andrew Marvell around 1650, and COVID-19 restrictions made sure that no one physically embraced at Roger's graveside that quiet afternoon in early October 2020, under a cloudy sky in the Muslim section of the Ashton cemetery. It is a pretty site to be laid to rest, towards the top, looking across to the hills around the town. There were only a few of us present, because of the unavoidable pandemic constraints and travel restrictions: Roger's four sons, Joe and Mark from his first marriage, Zafar and Akbar with their mother Tahirah, plus a few close family friends. There were also three academics, John Zavos and I, both colleagues of his at the University of Manchester, and Seán McLoughlin, his erstwhile PhD student, now professor at the University of Leeds. The plot was prepared, nestling between two large trees, a safe and leafy place ready for him, as Tahirah said, after traumatic days and weeks of his illness and sudden passing. The day was blustery and chilly when we arrived behind the hearse, the sun trying to nudge through while we made our introductions after all the years that had passed. 'You were only five when I last saw you!' I exclaimed to one son, fully grown and the image of the Roger I first met. The washing (*ghusl*) and funerary prayers (*janāzat*) had been done elsewhere, and the women stood back while the sons plus the academics, supervised by the young Imam, shouldered the coffin to the grave to be lowered on ropes. It was not unceremonious—the sheer exactness of the fit into the grave required great care in that moment—but it was palpably a *chthonic* ritual. The board put in place, the slabs wedged over it, we took up the six shovels and lovingly scattered earth into the grave. This was no mere token gesture but a burial of earth by the shovel load, a lot of earth. The physicality of the work put us in touch with Roger. The four sons, each such a different likeness of their father, brought to mind a larger-than-life image of Roger himself rolling up his sleeves to

help us in the task. John commented: 'He would have loved this'. It was down to earth, like the man himself.

Below, we provide a collective overview of Roger's seminal contributions to South Asian Studies in Britain and his impact far beyond the UK, indicating also the diverse nature of scholarship and discourses in this vast and partly highly contested interdisciplinary field of intense hybridity.

1. John Eade, *Professor of Sociology and Anthropology, Department of Social Sciences, University of Roehampton, London,* writes:

   I first met Roger at a workshop held at the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations (CRER) at Bristol before it moved to Aston and then to Warwick. I was immediately struck by his passionate nature and infectious laugh. He seemed a larger than life character, a physically and academically imposing person. We approached the issues of ethnicity and race from very different perspectives. (I was more interested in working across disciplinary boundaries.) When I met him again in Manchester, I realised that he could be quite challenging in the way he expressed his academic approach. He clearly did not approve of the various 'turns' that were influencing many of us seeking to understand changing Britain, but his integrity and passionate commitment shone through his critical engagement. As we know, Roger moved into consultancy and 'applied anthropology' drawing on his extensive knowledge to prepare a multitude of expert witness reports. The last time I met him was before a workshop at Roehampton where we found common ground in discussing our mutual enthusiasm for applying our knowledge and expertise in the 'real world'. As Roger ambled off to the workshop, he left me with his broad smile and trademark laugh.

2. Katy Gardner, *Professor of Anthropology, Department of Anthropology, London School of Economics*, writes:

   Roger was an early pioneer in what is now a well-established field: the study of transnational migration. I first discovered his work as a postgraduate in the late 1980s, falling upon his article which described the differing historical contexts and effects of migration to the UK on two regions of Pakistan with glee (Ballard, 1983). Having recently completed my doctoral fieldwork in Sylhet, Bangladesh, and in the midst of writing a thesis on the effects of migration on a 'Londoni' village, I was delighted to find work in Pakistan which stressed historical specificity and the role of political economy in creating particular diasporic forms. Back then, most research on South Asian migration either was limited to dry accounts of rural to urban migration or focussed on so-called 'ethnic minorities' and essentialising questions of their integration in the UK. In contrast, Roger was one of the earliest researchers to reveal the structural foundations and processual nature of diasporic movement, an

approach that I found inspiring. I was, therefore, excited when he agreed to examine my thesis and thrilled when we were able to collaborate on the ESRC-funded Transnational Communities programme in the late 1990s and early 2000s, a project which developed the comparison between Sylhet and Pakistani transnationalism and foregrounded the all-important role of kinship. I was also delighted to contribute to Roger's edited book *Desh Pardesh* (Ballard, 1994), a volume that has become seminal to the field. Alongside his important academic contributions, what most struck me about Roger was his warmth, humour and boundless enthusiasm. When we last spoke, sadly many years ago, he was researching the practice of *hawala* and its implications for remittance economies with his customary zest (Ballard, 2005, 2006). His passion for South Asia was infectious. I remember him with much fondness.

3. Dr Rishi Handa, *Head of Sanskrit, Head of Religious Studies and Philosophy, St James Senior Boys' School, Surrey,* writes:

   Of the many people I have encountered, few have shaped my worldview as Roger has. He never taught me in the classroom, but his ideas have left a lasting impression on me regarding 'religion', identity and mysticism. During our MA at The School of Oriental & African Studies (SOAS) in 1998–99, Hiren Mistry and I first met Roger in person through Werner Menski, who had introduced us to the fascinating world of legal pluralism. Given Roger's focus on religious pluralism, it was clear why they were kindred spirits, and why both had an equally profound impact on us.

   A year later, Roger invited me to the launch of *Punjabi Identity in a Global Context* (Singh & Thandi, 1999). Little did I know then what role Roger's contribution (Ballard, 1999) would play in my academic and spiritual life. That the book gained attention over the years was arguably because of Roger's seminal paper. Along with his PowerPoint presentation a few years later on teaching South Asian religion, this offered me an apt framework for my PhD thesis on Panjabi 'religious' identities; Roger later refined his model (Ballard, 2011).

   Over two decades, we spoke every few years, mostly by phone. I would update him on my thesis findings, and how my students, both children and adults, and I would discuss his ideas at school and in my private classes on Indian 'religion', respectively. Roger's conceptual framework as well as his ethnographic analyses gave them insights into the variegated nature of Panjabi 'religiosity' in a mature and refined manner. Particularly notable was Roger's acute understanding of mystical experience, and that such experience, as taught by gnostic masters, dissolves the boundaries of the very external identities which polarise religious groups, thereby allowing for harmony between them. Describing the essence of their teachings, he noted that 'virtually all nevertheless share a similar goal: to find some means of penetrating the

self-produced veils of ignorance and insensitivity which obstruct our awareness of the ultimate congruence between our individual microcosmic selves and the universal macrocosm' (Ballard, 1999: 16).

Grateful for these tools, I phoned Roger in 2018 to thank him for his contributions to the field. They were ahead of their time in the late 1990s, as indeed they still are. It seems much of this field is yet to fully understand the implications of Roger's ideas on South Asian 'religiosity'. I was enthused by his excitement to talk about the ideas he was always so passionate about, and that too with someone who felt the same. This was to be my last conversation with Roger, a generous and spirited man to whom I owe a great deal.

4. Virinder S. Kalra, *Professor of Sociology, Head of Department of Sociology University of Warwick*, writes:

   Roger was my PhD supervisor and, though we often had a tumultuous relationship, he enabled me to get on the first rung of an academic career. Perhaps more significantly, my intellectual journey followed a route that Roger paved, through the Northern areas of the Indian subcontinent (Punjab and Azad Kashmir) to the North of England. Transnationalism, before the word was coined, was an important element of Roger's work and one that has been central to my own concerns. Furthermore, Roger's insistence that anthropological work should be relevant offers an ethical imperative that has informed my own academic practice.

5. Seán McLoughlin, *Professor of the Anthropology of Islam, School of Philosophy, Religion and History of Science, University of Leeds*, writes:

   I first encountered Roger when I was a final year undergraduate at Manchester in what was then the Faculty of Theology. It was the start of the 1989–90 academic year. Roger, a very enthusiastic lecturer, newly arrived from the University of Leeds, was teaching twin components of what was then a single course, 'Religion and Society in the Punjab' and 'Ethnic Minorities in Britain'. The late professor of Comparative Religion at Manchester, John Hinnells, had been seeking ways to engage Comparative Religion students, and indeed the wider subject area, with Britain's growing ethnic and religious diversity (Hinnells, 1995 [1984]). Previously, I had volunteered to spend a week on a 'fieldtrip' to explore how such matters played out in the *chota* (little) Panjab of Southall. Until Roger's arrival, Manchester students wishing to explore the relevance of the sociology of modern Britain for their studies of religion had to do so outside the Faculty of Theology.

   I had been raised with the consciousness of being from an Irish Catholic family in England, yet had had no space to frame this for studied reflection until the curriculum of 'Ethnic Minorities in Britain' helped me connect the histories of Jewish, Irish, 'black' and 'Asian' migration and community

formation. Roger taught me that 'religion' must be studied empirically in the context of the wider socio-cultural-economic-political whole and that 'religion' cannot readily be separated from cognate abstract categories such as 'nation', 'ethnicity' and 'race'. This became especially apparent as we studied the Salman Rushdie Affair of 1989 in real time and a new 'Muslim' identity politics emerged to trump 'black' and 'Asian' politics in northern England's inner cities. Roger was a passionate believer in taking cultural and religious differences seriously and sought to illuminate the ways in which they could become both tangible and intangible resources to defy majoritarian institutional logics about which he was always extremely sceptical.

Later, spending time as Roger's PhD student (1992–97), regularly watching and listening to him overflow with comments, ideas and emotion, I came to understand his significance as part of that generation of anthropologists who pioneered research on South Asian diasporas in Britain at both ends of the migration chain. Key for my own academic trajectory was the fieldwork Roger had begun to conduct among Mirpuris from Pakistan-administered Kashmir during the 1980s (Ballard, 1983, 1990). Mirpur is the area to which the majority of those of British Pakistani heritage trace their roots, especially in Bradford. This is where Roger advised me to begin my own fieldwork, investigating local-global forms of 'Muslim' belonging in the period immediately after a copy of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* was burned in the city. While I spent time with people in mosques, schools and public events there, I also followed closely in his footsteps by making extended visits to Mirpur (McLoughlin & Kalra, 1999; McLoughlin & Khan, 2006). Even into the 2010s, as I reached the age Roger was when he arrived in Manchester, I have continued to champion applied, or what is now called 'impactful', ethnographic research on Bradford, Mirpur and their trans-local connections (2017–20).[1] Roger has, indeed, had a foundational and continuing influence upon my academic career.

6. Werner Menski, *Emeritus Professor of South Asian Laws, SOAS, University of London*, writes:

I met Roger first through the British Association of South Asian Studies (BASAS) in the late 1980s and remember that we instantly clicked in appreciating the interdisciplinary forms that Ethnic Minority Studies in Britain needed to take to become meaningful for those who took our classes. Roger was a pioneer in the study of South Asia, especially the Punjab, diaspora and anti-racism. Later, as a guest speaker at SOAS, he deeply influenced many students, particularly through his concept of the 'skilled cultural navigator' and ethnic reconstruction 'on their own terms' (Ballard, 1994: 5, 8). In a postcolonial Law Department, this drove a coach and horses through persistent doctrinal legal argumentations. I had found a soulmate whose writings

became compulsory reading for law students preparing for real life in the community.

In a letter in December 2000, Roger advised paying more attention to the *panchayat* as an institution and critiqued my term *angrezi shari'a* for British Muslim reconstruction of law-related matters, which he saw as risking too close association to text-based formal *shari'a* rather than the customary conventions of *rivaj*. Roger drove me to further efforts in devising the kite model of law, a deeply interdisciplinary form of law-related skilled navigation, which has Roger's intellectual DNA imprinted all over it. His robust and vast contributions to the important art of writing expert reports for courts, especially after his formal retirement in 2003 and through his Centre for Applied South Asian Studies (CASAS), should not go unnoticed. His work in that domain, too, clearly has lasting relevance and impact.

7. Hiren Mistry, *Doctoral Candidate, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, and Resource Teacher, Peel District School Board, Ontario, Canada*, writes:

I first discovered Roger in 1995 through *Desh Pardesh* (Ballard, 1994), midway through my BA at Trent University in Ontario, Canada. Reading the introduction to *Desh Pardesh* quite literally changed my life. Of particular impact was Roger's concept of 'skilled cultural navigation'. Here was an empowering counter-narrative to the work on 'culture conflict' that I was being encouraged to read by my mostly white professors at the time. My sociology professor at Trent, Prof Pradeep Bandyopadhyay, understood Roger's unique contribution to the field of South Asian ethnic minority studies. Our conversations about his book and methodology led me to study Hindu Jurisprudence for an MA at SOAS.

Roger's concept of skilled cultural navigation had personal and professional impacts for me. Conceptualising culture through the linguistic frame encouraged thinking about the ways I could strengthen my own South Asian 'cultural grammar', linguistically, conceptually and in a more earthy sense, by re-embedding myself into my Gujarati family and community networks. Roger's work and the intensive SOAS training deepened reflection on my relationship to culture, custom, community, language and, ultimately, to the notion of belonging.

The concept of the skilled cultural navigator also strengthened my sense of purpose as a public school educator in Toronto. At the time, very few teachers looked like me and shared my life experiences. I wanted to help my students navigate, and not see themselves primarily as victims of cultural conflict. Roger's ideas stimulated thinking about how to make pedagogy responsive to the cultural lives and acts of navigation my diverse students were engaged in. Over the years I would correspond with Roger about my pedagogical

experiments. He was always delighted to hear how his ideas were being applied in a Canadian public school context and often remarked that this is where real change lies. He encouraged me to maintain an anthropological ethic by carefully listening to, observing and documenting what my students say. I will forever be indebted to Roger for his inspiration.

8. Tariq Modood, *Professor of Sociology, Politics and Public Policy and Founding Director of the Research Centre for the Study of Ethnicity and Citizenship, University of Bristol*, writes:

   I came to the field of 'race relations' and racial equality in the late 1980s as an Equal Opportunities Officer in the Personnel Department of the London Borough of Hillingdon and started reading some relevant sociology and urban British anthropology. In this literature, Roger was not a major or prolific figure, but he stood out as a heterodox. The orthodoxy amongst academics, activists and policy professionals was that Britain was like the USA in being a society divided into two: white and black. Roger challenged this Atlantocentricism by passionately arguing that ethnic minorities, with a special focus on those of South Asian origins, had their own sense of doing things and were laying down their own community and cultural infrastructure and would not be captured by a racial, dualist perspective. This chimed with my own sense of what was happening and likely to develop in Britain and I lapped up Roger's writings.

   Even greater than his writings was the impact he made in person. He was a powerful presence in terms of personality and conversational flair, not just passionate argument, but a conviviality that was full of smiles and loud laughter. He was also very hospitable to me during a fellowship at the University of Manchester in 1992–93, even though I was not in his department or even faculty. On arrival I knew a few people in Manchester and he and Tahirah were generous in their hospitality. I have good memories of the liveliness of our conversations, especially in the evenings. Our careers went in different directions, and our paths crossed less and less, but I was shocked to hear of his death and it stimulated those fond memories of my time with him, even though I met him or was in touch with him only a few times in the last 25 years.

9. Dr Mary Searle-Chatterjee, *Formerly Lecturer, Sociology, Manchester Metropolitan University, retired Lecturer, Religions and Theology, University of Manchester,* writes:

   It was a shock to hear of Roger's death because he emanated life and enthusiasm. Scholarly reserve was not his style. He said what he thought and was passionate about his concerns. He refused to tone down his public commitment to the campaign of turban-wearing bus drivers in 1970s Bradford, despite risks to his academic position.

Roger's writings on ethnicity challenged the dominant narrative of racial victimhood, without ever losing sight of the reality of racism and stigmatisation. He showed how groups use cultural resources to resist oppression. His work is still essential reading on student course lists; it is accessible and relevant. He provided new insights into the relations between the British Punjabi diaspora and its homelands. He was unusual in having worked in both Pakistan and India.

He is one of the few social anthropologists whose work has been widely read by professionals and campaigners outside academia, as well as by academics outside his core discipline. His '*Panth, Kismet, Dharm te Qaum*; Continuity and Change in Four Dimensions of Punjabi Religion' (Ballard, 1999), is an invaluable attempt to introduce less ethnocentric approaches into the study of 'religious' traditions. It deserves to be better known.

In 2003, as part of a research project, I interviewed Roger for several hours on aspects of his childhood and youth that led him into South Asian Studies, as well as on the influence of his first 3 years in India as a PhD student at the University of Delhi, under the auspices of the Commonwealth Scholarships Scheme. He gained his doctorate in 1970. He said: 'The lecturers were brilliant. They wiped the floor with me on occasion. It transformed my thinking'. The fruits of that could be seen throughout his life.

Roger could be very kind. He insisted on covering my ethnicity lectures, so that I could be with my father in the last week of his life, even though I was not at the time working in Manchester University.

10. Dr Prakash Shah, *Reader in Culture and Law, Queen Mary, University of London,* writes:

My encounter with Roger and his work, during the mid-1990s, fortuitous or fated, occurred after I fled conventional legal education at the LSE and went to SOAS, where *Desh Pardesh* (Ballard, 1994) was essential reading in Werner Menski's original 'Ethnic Minorities and the Law' module. I began my encounter with anthropology and the larger field of area studies, soon as a co-teacher. The phrases that Werner recounts from *Desh Pardesh* remained mantras for me, repeated but not reflected upon as social processes, until more recently.

Roger did not treat his ideas and writing as intellectual property but shared them generously, even asking for comments on drafts, adding to the humbling experience that characterised our interactions. Roger expressed insights which I found surprising, as I did not expect a *gora* (white man) to have familiarity with Indian culture to the extent that he showed, bringing home how ignorant I was of my own culture. Roger's insights gave me, and many others, a sense that one could be at home in the academic world.

While I was a lawyer with anthropological pretences, Roger had travelled in the other direction, making inroads into the legal world. His presence on my own reading lists became overwhelming when I transported the module to Canterbury and then Queen Mary. I happily confirm what others have said of Roger's personable nature. Whenever asked, he made every effort to contribute and he published his insights in three books I edited, co-editing one of them (Grillo et al, 2009). These studies have been read by successive cohorts of law students.

Roger was also a prolific contributor of expertise in courtrooms, an experience from which he derived first-hand observations for his own anthropology of law. His quest to develop an applied anthropology of South Asians in Britain was built partly on close interactions with legal personnel, institutions and concepts. Besides penning reflections on this experience, he could simultaneously apply his wide-angle lens to problems of cultural alterity in law and human rights, providing a fine-grained picture of the tribulations of making legal complaints of discrimination (Ballard & Parveen, 2008). We sorely miss the resources, predominantly composed of his own work that he carefully collected and put on the website of CASAS, which hopefully can be revived in some way.

Marked out as a maverick by academic conventions, Roger tried to make cultural differences intelligible, pushing against a strong Western cultural tendency to keep the bridges drawn. He was an early critic of a race relations industry, which stipulated that non-whites were intrinsically deprived. The contemporary public discourse on Black and Asian Minority Ethnics (BAMEs), which predicates their success on *gora* largesse, proves that the malaise Roger spoke against has spread so wide and deep into British administrative culture that his 'skilled cultural navigators', too, have become complicit in accepting their allocated places under such *gora* frameworks. Roger was dismayed at academia's frequent failure in cultural literacy, and disappointed at the deepening of anti-cultural and anti-intellectual fundamentalist strains that he diagnosed so compellingly. I doubt, though, that he would have given in, and suspect that he would want us to soldier on.

11. Alison Shaw, *Professor of Social Anthropology, University of Oxford*, writes:

When I started fieldwork with British Pakistanis in the early 1980s, diaspora studies scarcely existed, but I found some useful articles published in the 1970s by Roger and his first wife Catherine, from their fieldwork with Punjabi Sikhs (Ballard & Ballard, 1977). They wrote about topics I was also exploring, including arranged marriage and intergenerational conflict. By the 1980s, usefully for me, Roger's pioneering work was already taking a comparative turn. I would say his key and enduring contribution was to highlight South Asian diversity, challenging prevailing stereotypes that lumped South Asians into

any single ethnic category. Among his enthusiastic and prolific writings, two items stand out for me. One is his edited book *Desh Pardesh* (Ballard, 1994), to which I contributed a chapter; the other is his comparative analysis of Punjabi Sikh and Mirpuri Muslim migration and settlement in Britain (Ballard, 1990), reprinted in Clarke et al. (2010 [1990]).

This analysis highlights differentiation by religion, gender, marriage patterns and kinship in shaping migrants' socio-economic 'trajectories' (very much Roger's word) in Britain, so might imply a cultural determinism. But it also points to the impact of social class, regional and political effects—specifically, migrants' socio-economic starting points in their regions of origin, socio-economic conditions in Britain and the timing of family re-union in Britain—in influencing how families subsequently fared. I often refer students to this article, which remains a useful starting point for understanding diversity and change, not just between but also *within* groups categorised under one ethnic label, a perspective I have used in my work on understanding why high rates of cousin marriage have been sustained by some British Pakistani groups and not others (Shaw, 2014).

12. Jacqueline Suthren Hirst, *Honorary Research Fellow, Department of Religions and Theology, University of Manchester*, writes:

I first met Roger at my Manchester interview in 1993. He asked a question about texts and contexts to which the other candidates had given very clever answers (as reported on their return from the panel). I spoke from my own student and teaching experience. It seemed to go home. From the moment of my appointment to the last time we spoke, Roger was an incredibly supportive colleague, then friend, who changed the way I approached many academic issues and, as I see looking back, helped me develop my own teaching in important ways. I give just three examples.

The first, his article '*Panth, Kismet, Dharm te Qaum*' (Ballard, 1999) built in an original way on Mark Juergensmeyer's work. We had lively discussions about his choice of terms and sometimes schematic approach, but in the radical way in which it disaggregated 'Eurocentric' approaches to 'religion', it profoundly shifted my own thinking. It continues, in my view, to be a vital article not only for students of South Asian religious traditions but for all students of religion. The second example, linked, derived from a period of his fieldwork in Punjab, specifically at the shrine of Baba Hasan Das at Dadyal (Hirst & Zavos, 2011: 5–6). Roger compiled a remarkable slideshow and commentary on this shrine to show how it, like many others, disrupts an essentialised -ism view of religions. He presented this to a conference of teachers we arranged at Manchester on Teaching Across South Asian Religious Traditions. One could see people's understanding changing, on the spot!

My third example is about valuing different languages, something dear to both our hearts, though Roger did tend to refer to 'my' authors writing Indian philosophy in Sanskrit as 'head-bangers', especially at second-marking time! What Roger taught me was how to help students who spoke different South Asian languages to value these as an immense asset, alongside competent English, not as something to hide. I remember an early class where I asked students to raise their hands if they spoke a language other than English. Very few hands went up, a couple of people had learned French or Spanish at school, one Welsh speaker. 'Does no-one here speak a South Asian language, like Punjabi or Bangla?' I queried. The hands trebled. 'I didn't think that counted,' one of them said. They had not yet met Roger. To see students' confidence grow as they used and built on their language skills in dissertation work in particular was one of his many gifts. *Desh Pardesh* (Ballard, 1994) remains on reading lists for Masters' students at SOAS till today. However, it may have developed, the field owes an enormous debt to Roger and his willingness to call things out.

13. Alan Williams, *Professor of Iranian Studies and Comparative Religion, University of Manchester*, writes:

Roger's funeral brought back a flood of fond memories of him and Tahirah, whom I had known since he first arrived in the then Faculty of Theology in 1989. Before Manchester I had previously known many Africanist and Asianist social scientists, at AFRAS Sussex (e.g., David Pocock, Ralph Grillo, R.L. Stirrat), and in London at UCL, SOAS and KCL (e.g., Mary Douglas, Richard and Nancy Tapper). So Roger came as a complete surprise to me when he joined us. With not a breath of the postmodern anthropologist about him, here was an exuberant and expert field anthropologist who saw everywhere as 'the field'—he was a *full-time* anthropologist! He must have seen the theologians and biblical scholars of his new environment (not to mention the odd orientalist like me), as a new ethnic group to get to know, with its own rituals, codes and tribal ways. He and I quickly became firm friends, with our many common interests—but how different we were!—he with his field experience in India and Pakistan, and among members of the South Asian diaspora in the UK, I with my old Persian texts, philology, urban Parsis and classical Sufi poetry. I remember co-teaching a course 'Introduction to the Study of Religion' with him (what the students must have made of it!) as we interrogated one another (always with good humour) before a live audience. Roger was responsible for setting up the combined degree in Comparative Religion and Social Anthropology, the teaching of Urdu by a mother-tongue speaker, and his own practice-focused centre, CASAS. He had many keen students, who got a tremendous kick out of being taught by someone who had actually lived in the field.

He was never quite at home in a theological setting, and would sometimes roll his eyes at the discourse that went on then, back in the day. When it was proposed that the Faculty of Theology should merge into a new single department, which became known as Religions and Theology, he and I were united in supporting it, and it has proved to be a great success. Above all, as many here seem to agree, he was indeed *jolly* Roger, always good-humoured, laughing, larger than life, blunt and ebullient, with a passionate commitment to issues of ethnicity and gender long before they became fashionable. Though he had problems with certain past-their-sell-by-date bureaucratic attitudes and constraints, he relished university life in Manchester, mainly for the very different sorts of students (and colleagues) he met here and inspired. Roger remained busy, curious and intellectually engaged in his passions and commitments until the end. He was indeed an unforgettable friend.

14. Dr John Zavos, *Honorary Research Fellow, Department of Religions and Theology, University of Manchester,* writes:

Roger was a formative influence on my career as an academic for several reasons. Most pragmatically, I got my first break at Manchester as a temporary lecturer because he was on research leave! I remember coming to Manchester with trepidation in my first week, and Roger welcoming me into his and Tahirah's home as I had nowhere to stay—an open-hearted family, a big-hearted man. An initial and rather daunting duty for me at Manchester was to deliver Roger's highly popular undergraduate course titled 'Ethnic Minorities in Britain', which drew so much from his seminal edited book, *Desh Pardesh* (Ballard, 1994). This course, and this book, influenced my research directly, turning my research interests towards diaspora studies, having been firmly rooted in South Asia itself before I came to Manchester. Roger was always interested in the practical application of his knowledge and understanding, something he sought to actualise through CASAS. In addition, although he loved exploring religious practices and ways of being, he was never distracted by the concept of religion itself, seeing this as one of many colonial ideas that had impacted on people's lives in South Asia and beyond in damaging ways. His essay '*Panth, Kismet, Dharm te Qaum*' (Ballard, 1999) was an attempt to break free of 'religion', whilst taking seriously the religiosity of those he encountered in fieldwork. A fabulous intervention, it shows pathways to re-thinking the position of religion in people's lives. This approach was a big reason why Roger was such a refreshing presence in a Department of Religions and Theology. His work was down to earth but challenging, pragmatic and boldly critical. And my experience of his funeral was similar. Turning up at the cemetery in Ashton, I was immediately set to work, carrying, then lowering, the coffin into the earth, along with colleagues and Roger's sons. Then, took part in the full burial of Roger with shovels, mud and physical effort, on a cold

autumn day. As ever, a challenge to our expectations: this time, of what it means to be respectful and to engage in mourning. Thanks Roger, for so persistently chipping away at the monolith. It was an inspiration to many of us working on South Asian religions at Manchester in the 2000s. I think and hope that we took that lead, and chipped away some more…

Concluding Remarks

The mere fact that South Asian Studies exists as a field of expertise, embodied so fully in the life and work of Roger, is proof—if any is needed—that simplistic monisms do not get anyone very far when it comes to analysing developments related to the Indian subcontinent, whether in the past, now, or in the future. Combining the theory and practice of living laws and religions, cultures and languages poses, of course, enormous challenges. Tackling this, inspired by pioneers like Roger, helps in deconstructing what John Zavos refers to above as 'the monolith': that is, replacing essentialisations with real life complexities, whether one perceives these as having Hindu, Muslim or other foundations and characteristics.

South Asia clearly incorporates all of these complexities in different mixities, and now extends very visibly to the whole world, as we are on the verge of having a female US President with partly South Asian roots, Kamala Harris, while there are signs that even Britain may not be far away from having a Prime Minister who is also South Asian (Ashcroft, 2020). And, has nobody noticed that the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, is a Muslim and we have not regressed to the Middle Ages? The credit for this does not go to 'rule of law', because that elastic phrase can mean anything. The credit goes to thinking, hard-working individuals as public servants, who are, indeed, very much Roger's skilled cultural navigators. The increasingly visible Asian Age should not be feared or politicised as a manifestation of ruthless exploitation of new technologies designed to stir up trouble and generate conflicts. It may be useful to remember that countries like Trinidad & Tobago and Guyana have already had leaders with South Asian roots as governors of diverse populations. This is no big deal anymore in the Anthropocene, when demographic realities, engendered by various forms of earlier and current migration, evidently speak for themselves.

Because of that colonial heritage, British contributions to South Asian Studies will forever be coloured by romantic images of enterprising explorers, like a young Roger on his motorbike, and ambivalent memories of colonialism, now reflected in reverse colonisation, as *Desh Pardesh* so seminally demonstrated (Ballard, 1994). Our collective responsibility as academics, now and in the future, will be to demonstrate, by example and in theory as well as in practice, to what extent academic expertise in Area Studies can contribute sensibly, meaningfully and realistically to the multiplicity of developments taking place in South Asia. That truly vast, mindboggling part of our shared, now increasingly endangered world has quietly but steadily gained increasing global significance.

Anybody, it seems, can aspire to be a South Asianist. Indeed, there are many more in that class than we are aware of. The closely related challenges of understanding what it means to be 'South Asian' (in all its multiple diversities), continue at all levels, whether personal, social, political, geostrategic and/or transnational. It remains vital to fine-tune our individual and collective perceptions of all of this through skilled navigation. Here, interdisciplinary opportunities, such as were embodied in Roger's life story and activist intellectual involvement, remain vast.

As Roger taught by example, this actually gives us all, as human beings and as scholars, the freedom to be who we want to be, on our own terms, while also trying to make this troubled world a better place for more people.

Note

1. See https://archive.bradfordsnationalmuseum.org/2018/05/30/bradfords-translocal connections-changing-technologies-media-representations-staying-in-touch-sean-mcloughlin/

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