"Hri"- a sound or a vibration, the utterance of which awakens the empathy that is an inherent part of every sentient being.

Regionalism no longer remains a prisoner of platitude, since there is a consensus that geopolitical friction, poverty and pressing environmental issues as well as cultural and social dislocation must be addressed through the regional framework. The Hri endeavour, besides engaging in political issues of cross-border relevance, focuses on culture, music, literature and the performing arts.

- serious scholarship in the arenas of politics and culture
- animating the intellectual and cultural space in Southasia
- conferences and networking activities

2012 was an important year for Hri, marking its entry into the third year of existence. Slowly but surely, the fledgling institute began to make its presence known. Gradually emerging as a platform for serious discussion, networking and research, the Hri Institute has also demonstrated that it is possible to make a mark despite a small coordinating office and staff dispersed throughout the region.
Many Histories: Connecting Southasian Archives

As part of this initiative, we are working on creating and maintaining an active network of localised archives across the region. The aim is to garner greater recognition of the individual archives, as well as the importance of archiving in general. The ever-growing online database listing private archives and collections of Southasia is a rich resource, especially for historians, scholars, researchers and students.

Forbidden Love: The Love Legends of Southasia

Researching and documenting the love legends of Punjab, is an attempt to simultaneously address the geopolitical as well as social contradictions that afflict Southasia in a mass scale today. There has been a need felt for a cultural project in Southasia which brings issues of cross-national and cross-cultural to a level where the mass public can empathise.

Music on the move: The Gandharva of Nepal

Research on the specific musical styles and techniques of five Gandharva communities across the country, focusing on the modes of diffusion; the barriers to the traditional modes of transmission; and the study of new methods that can be utilized to allow the Gandharva community to pass down their musical knowledge as a means of livelihood.
The Many Histories: Connecting Southasian Archives initiative aimed at creating a better understanding of regional history and the state of the archives that sustain it is in its third year now. In Southasia today, the immense importance of both social and historical archives for the overall advancement of society is yet to be recognised, and the past year at Hri was focussed on highlighting the importance of preserving and linking the Subcontinent’s existing archives and collections. Progressing steadily in this direction is the work on identifying and listing local archives. Understanding the limitations of collecting data online, researchers at Hri actively travelled in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and parts of India to interact with local collectors and archivists. In the process, we came across several interesting collections, which would not have surfaced otherwise. Over the last year, several such collections have been featured as articles and blogs and also added to the database. Our evolving database of collections consists of collections of books, manuscripts, audio visual material, photographs, government records, and international publications. Details of the collections are presented where available, and regularly updated in order to provide a useful service to students, journalists, researchers, academics and other members of the public.

Hri organised the first-ever meeting of archivists from across the region, ‘Archives Southasia: Creating, Curating, Connecting’, in Bangalore in July 2012. It provided a unique platform to work toward ensuring that archives do not become morgues. Archivists, scholars and collectors from Bangalore, Chennai, Dhaka, Ernakulam, Kathmandu, Kolkata, Lahore, Mumbai, New Delhi and Yangon, shared experiences and valuable insights on the possibilities of making archives dynamic spaces not only re-look at history, but redefine it.

Inspired by the rich diversity and depth of experience and knowledge in the group, several ideas for future activities emerged including compiling a guide for archivists on copyright laws; a film festival on films that draw from archives; organizing skill sharing and training workshops; and a travelling exhibition that will showcase not only specific documents or collections, but also focusing on the art and science of archiving itself. A curatorial team at Hri is now working on putting together the exhibition.

The ‘Archives of Southasia’ series, a joint initiative with our sister organisation, Himal Southasian stemmed from the Hri conference. The pieces here combine original research with the extensive experience of professional researchers and archivists. These have been published in Himal Southasian, January 2013.
Over the last two years, research in *Forbidden Love: The Love Legends of Southasia*; has explored the traditional and contemporary celebrations of four famous folk love legends of Punjab, in the backdrop of increasingly rigid and intolerant Southasian societies. The idea of using the research material to talk about issues of love and what is taboo – traditionally and in the modern day, took a concrete shape in the second half of 2012. Stimulating reach-out programmes with youth in different schools, colleges and universities in different parts of India and Pakistan were conducted; four workshops in India and two in Pakistan. Six more workshops will be conducted in the coming months.

In Mumbai, two workshops were held: the first one at the Youth Discussion Forum at Mindsprings Enrichment Centre and the second one in a Personal Development class with students of Shishuvan School. Participants in both the workshops were young adults, some shy and some more than enthusiastic to talk about love; not just romantic love but also about love of family and friends. The centuries-old love legends of Punjab helped trigger vibrant discussions where teenagers talked about love, desire and breaking barriers. The biggest take-away from these workshops was the reminder that teenagers are not too young to talk about these love legends and what is socially sanctioned and prohibited. The issue is more one of how the material is presented, and how young people are invited to respond to it.

At a one-day workshop in BBK DAV College for women in Amritsar, the discussion referred to several contemporary incidents alongside the love legends to talk about modern reality and relevance of love legends. Audio-visual clips from two Punjabi films were shared with the students, sparking them to share their own experiences openly. They enjoyed the clips and commented on the patriarchal values being asserted through these films, issues of gender discrimination, dual standards of society when extending to a person, the liberty to love. Some students were of the opinion that the women in these love legends are representative of contemporary women who are struggling against patriarchy and violent masculinity and also seen negotiating their space while questioning social norms and patriarchal structures. The students at this workshop also created their own expressions using blank walls and chart papers as canvasses. A similar workshop was also held at Dev Samaj College for girls in Ferozepur, India.
In Pakistan, two workshops were held at the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS). 40 students from the course, Gender and Power participated in the first one; the majority of the students were young women, with only three boys forming the minority group. Audio-visual elements showing clips from movies based on these love legends formed part of the workshop; this was a part of the research material as formulated by the Hri team. The discussion began with how love stories have taken metaphysical dimensions which is in contrast to how we generally look at traditions and culture. We associate individual inhibition with traditions but here in these love legends, an extreme act of individuality becomes metaphysical. The students enjoyed taking part in this discussion and next talked about the concept of forbidden love, discussing what would be forbidden love for their parents and now for them. The workshop was well received by students and participating faculty who felt inspired to design an anthropology course around the concept of love, inspired by Hri’s research into ‘Forbidden Love’.

The second workshop at LUMS was with the class of “Imagining Lahore”. Two guests, Iqbal Qaiser, an expert on Punjabi history and Safdar Mahi, a well known singer of Waris Shah’s Heer were invited to join this particular session. The workshop which included about twenty students began by discussing the relevance of folk love stories in contemporary society with references to Hindi cinema. Since the class was focused on Lahore, Iqbal Qaiser spoke about Lahore as a cultural city and the importance of a few particular localities in terms of performing arts. Soon he incorporated the topic of folk love legends and the different mediums that they have been performed in over the years. Mahi’s spell-binding performance brought alive legends of doomed lovers, igniting intense discussions amongst the students.
Network meeting with PCF partners
In the past year, the Hri Institute participated in the six-monthly meetings of the Prince Claus Fund Network Committee. These meetings, held in Lima and Amsterdam, provided valuable opportunities to network with like-minded organisations and individuals and promote exchange of ideas.

A Southasian evening
The Bangalore conference was an occasion to co-organise a public event, “An evening with Southasian Artists”. The packed National Gallery of Modern Art auditorium witnessed presentations by Salima Hashmi (Pakistan) and Shahidul Alam (Bangladesh). The podium being shared by Pakistani and Bangladeshi artists for the first time in Bangalore established Hri’s public presence in the city as a vibrant platform for regional art. The Hindu, reported the event as one that saw artists from Bangladesh and Pakistan share their views on a wide range of issues, providing insights into the culture and politics of our neighbouring nations.

Local archives
In November 2012, Hri was invited to present the archives project at a one-day symposium titled, ‘The State of Nepal’s Photo Archives’. The event was organised by UNESCO in collaboration with Nepal Picture Library to discuss the state of Nepal’s photo archives. The first of its kind to take place in Nepal, the symposium attempted to map existing photo collections and archives all over the country, discussed challenges in their archiving and encouraged participants to network and explore ways of working together in the future.

Our first in Burma
In a first for Hri in Burma, “Burma and Nepal – Culture and Politics in Transition: A Discussion with Kanak Mani Dixit” was co-organised in November 2012 with the Pansodan Gallery Art Network, and the Forum for Development Alternatives in Yangon. Kanak Mani Dixit, Editor and Publisher of Himal Southasian and Chair of Hri joined a group of activists, intellectuals, and educators to discuss challenges and opportunities Burma may face in this complicated time of transition. The session was engaging, especially in the context of the challenges of ‘development’ when the country experiences sudden in-flows of aid and investment.
BA(a)P of street art

May 2012

Bollywood Art Project (BAP), a public art project celebrating hundred years of Bollywood, has reiterated that Bollywood is indeed larger than life. Conceptualised and executed by young professionals and artists, Ranjit Dahiya, Mallika Chabra and Swati Rao from Chandigarh Art School, together with Tony Peters and Sruti Viswesaran, the BAP aims to create several works of street art across various Indian cities. Their first venture is a mural created on a wall on Chapel Road in suburban Mumbai. Read more: http://blog.hrisouthasian.org/2012/05/15/baap-of-street-art/

The way of Abu Abraham

May 2012

Abu devoted the last three decades of his life to keeping politicians on their toes, offering up at least one cartoon per day. His unique minimalist style, coupled with acerbic wit and astute political analysis, make him as relevant today as during the decades in which he lived and worked. Abu died on 1 December 2002, thus putting to rest “the conscience of the left and the pea under the princess’s mattress” as The Guardian once described him. Read more: http://blog.hrisouthasian.org/2012/05/31/the-way-of-abu-abraham/

Manto, my Garain

May 2012

In Chandigarh I learnt that Manto belonged to Papraudi, a village near Samrala in Ludhiana district. We Punjabis have a fluid definition of the term ‘village’. Whenever a Bihari labourer received a visitor, we used to say that someone had come to meet him from his village. It did not matter that one was from Gopalganj at the western end of Bihar and the other from Kotihar in the east. Similarly, when we move out of our villages the concept of village expanded along with the distance from native place. Living in Europe or North America, someone from Bahawalpur (West Punjab) and other one from Patiala (East Punjab) can comfortably claim that they belong to same village. Manto’s village is just 15 km from my village, Daudpur — in the same district and tehsil. This piece of information made me feel closer to Sadayat Hasan Manto. From a mere reader I became his garain or someone from the same village.’ Read more: http://blog.hrisouthasian.org/2012/05/14/manto-my-garain
Framing the gurkhas  
*November 2012*

The literature on Gurkha and the number of articles written on them are few, given their more than 60 years of history in Singapore. ‘There is an overwhelming sense of aura alongside a vacuum of information about this community,’ says Zainal. ‘And how we fill up that vacuum is by amusing ourselves with tales of how they can jump off a high wall, rip someone’s head off with their bare hands,’ he adds. Zainal wanted to challenge this, knowing that the Gurkha were regular people like other Singaporeans. He was wondering how to get others to know more about them.


Heer, Sahiban come alive yet again on the big screen  
*December 2012*

Bollywood’s latest mega-project starring Shahrukh Khan and Katrina Kaif, *Jab Tak Jaan*, also uses elements from folk music which first won the hearts of the people as far back as 1935. The song, *Heer* translated above once again taps on these icon. The use of the song also needs to seen in reference to the man behind the project; Yash Chopra. A Punjabi, Chopra belonged to that generation of film-makers, Indians and Pakistani, which was born prior to the birth of their countries. Their understandings of India-Pakistan and such folk stories goes beyond the narrow interpretation of nationalism and national culture that haunts most of the film-makers born after 1947.

Read more: [http://blog.hrisouthasian.org/2012/12/03/heer-sahiban-come-alive-yet-again-on-the-big-screen/](http://blog.hrisouthasian.org/2012/12/03/heer-sahiban-come-alive-yet-again-on-the-big-screen/)

The Afterlife of Birds  
*January 2013*

Abhishek Majumdar’s ‘Afterlife of Birds’ travelled to Prithvi Theatre, Mumbai this December and received a hearty applause. The play, which touched many a local chord, was crafted from interviews of parents of young Muslim boys in Delhi’s Jamia Nagar accused of involvement in terror attacks and testimonies of women who were associated with the movement for a Tamil homeland led by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) before they sought asylum in London.

Read more: [http://blog.hrisouthasian.org/2013/01/03/the-afterlife-of-birds/](http://blog.hrisouthasian.org/2013/01/03/the-afterlife-of-birds/)
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