The title of this paper is inspired by Before the Divide: Hindi and Urdu Literary Culture ed. Francesca Orsini (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2011) which looks at how the perceived and performed separateness of ‘Urdu’ and ‘Hindi’ falsify the pre-colonial multilingual cultures in North India. This paper subscribes to that argument without implying a sharp divide before and after Partition. At the same time, forms of nationalism and displacement around the historical marker of Partition do form one of the contexts contributing to linguistic ruptures. Languages can become divisive through exclusion of not only what people say, but how they say things. For instance, the English language results in a far more divisive politics of class than any language in South Asia. At the same time, it is also the most common site of consensus and desire. The borders of language mobilize syntax and vocabulary to align with particularities of caste, community, religion and nation. Apart from complicating “language” in the context of territorial division, I also wish to provide experiences of languages, who like people, undergo exile and minoritization, divestment of purpose and legitimacy, and polarization of history. Some, like entrepreneurs during wars, gather importance. Partition, or rather the specifics forms of nationalisms in India and Pakistan, had both effects.

About the Speaker

Date
Monday, 07 Nov 2016
Time
3.00pm to 4.30pm
Venue
AS8 Conference Room, #06-46, Singapore 119260

Please email to sassec@nus.edu.sg to register