



UNIVERSITY
OF WOLLONGONG
AUSTRALIA

University of Wollongong
Research Online

Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts - Papers

Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts

2012

Culture shock: mending Australia's fractured relationship with India

Sukhmani Khorana

University of Wollongong, skhorana@uow.edu.au

Publication Details

Khorana, S. (2012). Culture shock: mending Australia's fractured relationship with India. *The Conversation*, (24 May)

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library:
research-pubs@uow.edu.au

Culture shock: mending Australia's fractured relationship with India

Abstract

On my last visit to India in April this year, I found the nation in the grip of Indian Premier League (IPL) fever, or so the umpteen news channels had me believe.

With Katy Perry in a kitsch Indian costume, a South African percussion band, and the usual Bollywood ensemble performing at the opening ceremony, it appeared to be turning into a transnational celebration of cricket, as well as a tangible expression of India's ascendancy).

Despite the coming together of previously sworn enemies on the cricket field, such as India's Harbhajan Singh and Australia's Andrew Symonds during the IPL series, I wondered if the two nations could really talk to one another – a shared language and a similar understanding of parliamentary democracy notwithstanding.

Keywords

relationship, australia, india, fractured, mending, shock, culture

Disciplines

Arts and Humanities | Law

Publication Details

Khorana, S. (2012). Culture shock: mending Australia's fractured relationship with India. *The Conversation*, (24 May)

24 May 2012, 2.28pm AEST

Culture shock: mending Australia's fractured relationship with India

Author



[Sukhmani Khorana](#)

[Lecturer in Digital and International Media at University of Wollongong](#)

Disclosure Statement

Sukhmani Khorana does not work for, consult to, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has no relevant affiliations.

UNIVERSITY OF
WOLLONGONG



uow.edu.au

Provides funding as a [Member](#) of The Conversation.



Australia isn't viewed well in India, and it will take more than cricket to fix the relationship.
AAP/David Hunt

On my last visit to India in April this year, I found the nation in the grip of Indian Premier League (IPL) fever, or so the umpteen news channels had me believe.

With Katy Perry in a kitsch Indian costume, a South African percussion band, and the usual Bollywood ensemble performing at the opening ceremony, it appeared to be turning into a transnational celebration of cricket, as well as a tangible expression of [India's ascendancy](#)).

Despite the coming together of previously sworn enemies on the cricket field, such as India's Harbhajan Singh and Australia's Andrew Symonds during the IPL series, I wondered if the two nations could really talk to one another – a shared language and a similar understanding of parliamentary democracy notwithstanding.

The first step

This question was first posed at the height of the student attack crisis in 2009-2010. At this time, Age journalist Sushi Das exclaimed that both sides were engaging in a [dialogue of the deaf](#)).

It was during then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's visit to India to help abate the situation that another example of the communication malaise arose. In a press release that was later withdrawn, Rudd [suggested](#) barbecues hosted by Australian families as a gesture of inclusion towards Indian students. While a clever idea from a community-building perspective, it displayed the oblivion of the PM and his advisers on obvious matters of India's cultural reality. A large percentage of India's population does not eat meat.

In an egalitarian world, I would have called for both nations meeting half way. But given India's increasing political and cultural might, the sheer size of its (consuming) population, and its perception of Australia as prejudiced, Australian authorities, cultural organisations and individuals may just have to extend their hands first.

Interviewing journalists at a leading news channel in Delhi last year, I was told (under the condition of anonymity) that most middle class Indians do not regard Australia as racist in the colonial sense, but do perceive it as lacking cultural astuteness. In their eyes, a nation that fails to fully acknowledge India's economic and cultural emergence, but continues to highlight its poverty, exoticism and third-world chaos, is insignificant and even worthy of being sledged.

Building bridges

Australia is home to a mighty and very enterprising South Asian diaspora which must be drawn upon to improve, and update our knowledge of modern India.

Australians need to be comfortable with the India that exists within their national borders before they can embark on a journey across the Pacific for strategic or other purposes.

Australia's federal and state governments, and its universities, have the most crucial role to play in ensuring that the nation's engagement with India is genuine. I am not discounting the importance of the economic/trade motivation that underlies a large portion of our current efforts, but this needs to be accompanied by cultural openness.

Any engagement with India must be preceded by a conscious dismantling of our Eurocentrism, which must then be replaced with a willingness to engage with the subcontinent's paradoxes on its own terms. This in turn will ensure hospitality, and reciprocity.

I had a serendipitous experience of such engagement when waiting at Singapore's Changi airport to board a flight to Delhi. There I met an Australian businessman travelling in the opposite direction, who spoke at great length not just about the cost effectiveness of sourcing glass bottles for his beverage company from India, but also of the sheer pleasure of exploring Mumbai on an auto-rickshaw.

On reaching Delhi, I got in touch with an old friend who, after having undertaken music studies in Adelaide, had returned to India and was trying to facilitate a cultural exchange program between his two beloved countries. These ambassadors, along with the official ones, must be aided and applauded.