

Formation of Shiite Muslim Community and “Iranian” residents in Mumbai

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The speaker explored historical formation and contemporary reconfiguration of “Iranians” in Mumbai.

Historically close ties between today’s Iran and Mumbai have often been noted. A certain presence of a migrant population from today’s Iran has always been felt in Mumbai, especially during the modern period. As a result, “Irani” (literally, Iranian) had taken an important position in the cosmopolitan city in various terms, even in the middle to late 20th century.

However, according to field research conducted in the Shiite community in Mumbai, a speaker describing “Irani” does not always mean an Iranian or Persian. Rather, the signifié of “Iranian” has been reconfigured in the social context based on statistical, religious, and linguistic aspects. In a religious context, the Shiite Muslim context, “Irani” means a Twelver Shiite, the majority religion in Iran, irrespective of ethnicity. Although “Irani” people are still quite numerically important in terms of religion, “Irani” people came to stand for quite a small figure in the data according to linguistic usage. In recent years, Iranians as Persian speakers came to account for a negligibly small number. However, the speakers describe that point carefully to devote attention to this figure of the data in terms of religious education among Shiites, who are supported by Iranian education to encourage the Persian language as a religious language. In his conclusion, he proposed and argued the static notion of Irani in Mumbai.