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African Identity in Asia: Cultural Effects of Forced Migration

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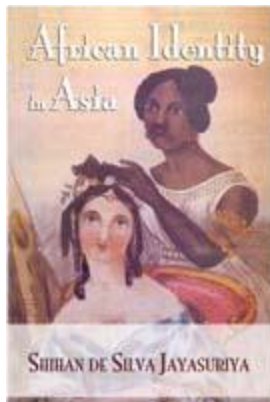
African Identity in Asia: Cultural Effects of Forced Migration

By Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya

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African movement to Asia, unlike the dispersion of slaves across the Atlantic, has not been recognized. Not being part of a significant economic network, forced migrations across the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, which have gone on for several centuries, have not received due attention. The commemorations, in 2007, of the bicentennial of Britain abolishing the trans-Atlantic slave trade has aroused some interest in other African migrations.

While drawing attention to the strong military impact made by even first generation African migrants in Asia, and the descendants of the royal Africans who governed Sachin and Janjira (India), Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya demonstrates that African music and dance have, not only survived the brutalities of forced migration, but have also contributed to the local Middle Eastern and South Asian arts scene. While spirit possession ceremonies have been preserved as a form of cultural identity, new mixed forms of music which evolved in Asia have now become indigenized in the host countries. Unconsciously, forced African migrants have become cultural brokers between two Continents.

Combining historical accounts, both documented and oral, the silent history and conflicting identity of Asia's Africans is explored through case studies, and processes of assimilation, social mobility and marginalization.