PREFACE

The widely acknowledged presence of the elements of Indian culture in Southeast Asian Societies has resulted in the growing interest of scholars in the region. Scholars of different hues have chosen to describe this entire process from the ancient times variously as 'Hinduisation', 'Indianisation', 'Brahmanisation' and so on. However, it should be seen as diffusion of Indian culture in Southeast Asia covering a geographical spread beyond Burma (Myanmar), scattered around the Gulf of Siam. This diffusion of Indian culture which was mostly at the hands of Brahmin-Buddhist priests and scholars, merchants and traders, and, princes, had its impact on religion, polity, art, architecture, literature, folklores and almost on every aspect of life of the region. To understand and comprehend the processes responsible for such diffusion, Thailand (ancient Siam) has been chosen as a case study for this thesis, owing to its geographical and historical proximity. The diffusion of Indian culture in Thailand can be traced back to ancient times and the continuance of Indian cultural elements in the contemporary period can be seen in the form of the presence of Sanskrit words in Thai language. The architectural remnants of the Skyline temple of Bangkok reflect Indian influence and the epic Ramayana exhibits the cultural congruity of the two widespread regions.

The modes, patterns, magnitude and intensity of the diffusion have to be understood in an already existing cultural ambience, which made the diffusion and sustenance of Indian culture possible. Any endeavour to arrive at such an understanding has to be based on a historical perspective along with the study of cultural dimensions. An attempt has been made to study and delineate different patterns and components responsible for the diffusion of Indian culture so as to comprehend the nature and scope of India – Southeast Asia interaction from ancient times. Such an approach would be helpful in
determining the dynamics of diffusion and the interplay of historical forces thereof.

The introductory chapter deals with the background of the main theme of the thesis and analyses the nature and scope of the study. It lays down the basic formulations on which the succeeding chapters are based. Second chapter provides the conceptual framework of the thesis and examines the meaning, magnitude and agencies of the Indianization process. Its main thrust is on the modes and patterns of the diffusion of Indian cultural elements in Southeast Asia. Third chapter forms the core of the thesis and is evidential in nature by using the case study of Thailand to explore the spread and intensity of Indianization in Southeast Asia. Fourth chapter highlights the current instances of the earlier diffusion of Indian culture in the Thai society. It surveys the various aspects of the contemporary culture in Southeast Asia and Thailand in particular, for the myriad remnants of the Indian cultural influence. The last chapter draws out the conclusion of the whole research and also attempts to explore the course of action to be developed so as to resurrect the glorious days of India’s relations with Thailand and to build on this sound edifice of close bilateral relations.

Being entirely historical in nature, the primary as well as the secondary sources for this study, have been derived from the annals of Indian as well as Southeast Asian and Thai history. The primary sources are based on inscriptions, archaeological surveys, architectural evidences, traveller’s accounts, government documents, United Nations documents, and memoirs. The study is descriptive, analytical and explanatory, and an attempt has been made to trace the historical affinities between India and Southeast Asia and also to comprehend those aspects of Southeast Asian culture that have an Indian impress.