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Contours of Cultural Heritage

BOOK RELEASE

Nature, Tradition and Originality, a Collection of Essays; Ancient Springs and New India—Convocation Addresses and Tributes (Aditya Prakashan); India's Cultural Heritage and Identity, a Collection of Essays; Human Development in Indian Perspective, a Collection of Essays; and Role of Culture in Development (D. K. Printworld) by Dr. (Mrs.) Kapila Vatsyayan

RELEASE by Dr. Karan Singh

COMMENTS: Kavita A. Sharma and Hiranmay Karlekar

CHAIR: Shri N. N. Vohra

17 September 2018

In an impressive and well-attended function, five volumes, all authored by Dr. (Mrs.) Kapila Vatsyayan, were released by Dr. Karan Singh. He admired Dr. Vatsyayan's extraordinary creativity, and her expression of the multiple contours of our cultural heritage, in very clear and understandable terms.

Hiranmay Karlekar focused his comments on the essay, 'Oral and the Written Word: Opposite or Complementary', contained in the volume *India's Cultural Heritage and Identity*. He remarked that the oral tradition has played an important role in perpetuating India's cultural heritage, and has been the backbone of cultures, particularly of tribal people, who lack the written script. He echoed

Dr. Vatsyayan's concern over the 'vanishing languages' in India. With the onslaught of electronic media, especially television, the spoken word is increasingly becoming irrelevant.

Kavita Sharma spoke on the volume, *Human Development in Indian Perspective*. Referring to the term 'human resource development', she questioned if there is real 'human development' taking place, and is there an Indian perspective, she pondered. She elaborated on Dr. Vatsyayan's suggestion that we need to work towards the development of a human as a human being, and as a person. She admired Dr. Vatsyayan for having rightly brought out the distinction between standard of life, as against standard of living, and the need for a dialogue for the development of civilisations, rather than the clash of civilisations.

President of IIC, Shri N. N. Vohra, noted that the concerns relating to identity and culture have come to the fore in recent times, and we need to be bothered about how the upcoming generations are going to be 'fed', in the cultural sense.

■ CHANDRA MOHAN



Launch of Dr. (Mrs.) Kapila Vatsyayan's Books

Kabir Sandhya

PERFORMANCE

Kabir Sandhya

7 September 2018

The verses of the medieval saint–poet Kabir have been a popular choice with classical artists and maestros as a concluding item for their concerts. Thus, an exclusive concert of Kabir *bhajans* is a rarity, seldom undertaken for fear of the concert becoming jaded and repetitive. But the *Kabir Sandhya* concert, based on the poetry of the medieval saint, set to lyrical offerings by Pandit Madhup Mudgal and his troupe, dispelled any such apprehensions.

In his highly coordinated presentation, Pandit Madhup Mudgal brought forth the intrinsic inclusiveness of this genre. Having taken the presentation out of a tight-laced classical format, he managed to project its spiritual and meditative essence, using the classical framework. Somewhere along the way, there were hints of his late guru, the legendary Pandit Kumar Gandharv, in the musical style, but alongside, Pandit Mudgal displayed a high level of compositional innovation. By infusing his solo performance with choral stretches, of both male and female voices, he included a literary refrain-like element in the concert. The accompanying instruments were also handpicked, keeping in mind the characteristics of *bhajan* presentation, where the *mridang*, rather than the *tabla*, resonated as the beat accompaniment. Even the



Pandit Madhup Mudgal in Concert

grouping of the choir was focalised on producing the right harmonisation of the music.

The music was selected thoughtfully. The interspersing of the oft-heard with less common pieces revealed that thorough research had preceded the concert. The overwhelming response of the audience reiterated the mesmeric draw of a *Kabir Sandhya* even today.

■ SUBHRA MAZUMDAR

Open Frame 2018

MINI-INPUT: BEST OF PUBLIC TELEVISION

Screenings and Discussions

COLLABORATION: Public Service Broadcasting Trust and Goethe-Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan

10 to 18 September 2018

INPUT, the consortium of International Public Service Broadcasters, represents the best of public service television programming from around the world. At Open Frame, MINI-INPUT was presented with a view to showcasing some of the best public service broadcasting films and programmes from around the world, and exploring unconventional and new ways of telling stories. The objective was to emphasise the role of



Panel Discussion: Narratives from the Hinterland

documentaries in public service broadcasting, and the ways in which the agendas of broadcasting need to and can be expanded in keeping with the digital revolution. Led by Iris Yudai, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and Deniz Sertkol, Goethe-Institut, Germany, it was an intensive training in how to tell effective and powerful stories, and bringing untold, difficult and important stories to people.

■ THE PSBT TEAM

Culture and Heritage of Agra

CULTURE AND HERITAGE

The Future of the Taj Depends on the Future of Agra: Finding a Way Forward

SPEAKERS: Manu Mahajan; Amita Baig; and Renu Khosla

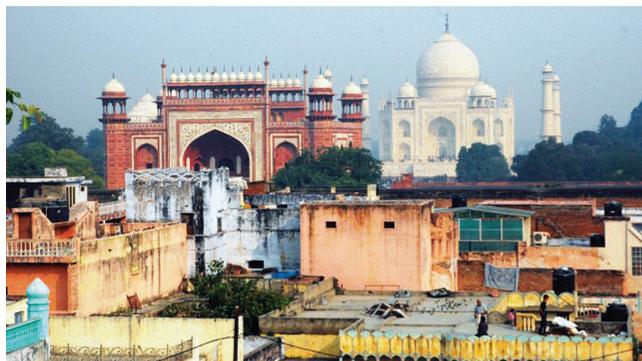
CHAIR: Shri Shyam Saran

COLLABORATION: World Monuments Fund

29 September 2018

The Chair began the programme by raising a pertinent concern regarding the isolation of heritage sites as 'islands' in the wider social, economic and cultural fabric of a city. He also shared the worry of preserving the pristine glory of the Taj Mahal amidst the problems of pollution and urbanisation in Agra. Amita Baig highlighted the significance of four UNESCO World Heritage Sites that lie within and around Agra. She identified the complex ground reality and the multiple management issues of the Taj and Agra city. Her suggestion was to use the Supreme Court judgement constructively to find a way forward.

One of the ways could be to consider developing Agra as a hub for tourism. Renu Khosla's presentation was an illustration of the collapsing heritage of Agra—tangible and



View of Taj Mahal

intangible. It linked the state of heritage with the concerns of health, sanitation, poverty, pollution, infrastructure, and so forth. Her suggestion was to look beyond the Taj, and connect all the dots in terms of good infrastructure, innovative vision, motivational intent, community participation and socio-economic inclusion in the planning and development of the city. Manu Mahajan focused on the key issues of air and water pollution in the city. He also shared his concerns on the proposal to nominate Agra as a World Heritage City, particularly in light of the issues related to transportation, water, community awareness, local economy, among others. He suggested that any plan for the Taj Mahal, or Agra city, must strive for a balance between tourism and benefit to the local people.

■ NAVIN PIPLANI

A Sculptor's World View

ART MATTERS

Discussion on the Life and Work of Meera Mukherjee

SPEAKERS: Geeta Kapur; Georg Lechner; and Geeti Sen

Followed by the launch of a book on Meera Mukherjee, Purity of Vision (Akar Prakar, Emami Art & Mapin Publishing 2018)

COLLABORATION: The Raza Foundation

17 September 2018

The riveting discussion between George Lechner and Geeti Sen on the sculptor, Meera Mukherjee, was accompanied by the launch of a book on her life and work titled, *Purity of Vision*. Lechner and Sen knew the artist closely, and have collected seminal works from her large oeuvre of lost wax technique sculptures, which she learnt from the metal craftsmen of Bastar.

Sen pointed out that the sculptures should be read beyond

realism, and what made them unique was Meera's world view; she transformed deities into people, the heroes of everyday, like the winnowing woman sculpture titled, 'the spirit of daily work'. Sen felt that the artist's identification was completely with the artisan; even her first book was on the metal craftsmen of Bastar, where she lived for two years. Learning the old, extremely laborious technique of *cire perdue*, Meera put all her earnings and time into her work. Her last image of Buddha was cast in as many as 64 parts; her work was clearly her religion.

Lechner said that from her teachers at the Munich Art Academy, like Tony Stadler and Heinrich Kirchner, Meera acquired some of the German intuition for expressionism, using the face and body to express sublime and superhuman dimensions. Like Stadler, she was also ridden with self-doubt, always questioning her work, calling for *das übende Dasein* (rehearsing and repeating), or, as Meera called it, the artist's prayer.

It emerged from the talk that Meera saw her artistic role as that of a conscience keeper and a visionary, with the self and the universe being inseparable.

■ SABA HASAN

Ageing Gracefully

FESTIVAL

Film Festival for Generation

*COLLABORATION: Heidelberg Centre
South Asia*

24 to 26 September 2018

This festival was a blend of Indian and German cinema which dealt with the often neglected themes of ageing, dementia, palliative care and death. It aimed to bring these subjects to the forefront, and unravel the taboos attached to them. The festival began with the screening of the German documentary film, *Forget Me Not (Vergiss Mein Nicht)*, by David Sieveking. It is a brutally honest glimpse into the life of his mother, suffering from Alzheimer's disease. It bared the agony and frustration faced by her family and loved ones, and contrasted it with the absolutely naïve and oblivious nature of the patient; thus asking—who is it that really suffers?

Six more films were screened. The Hindi–Indie film *Mukti Bhawan* is a tale of an ageing father who goes to the holy city of Benaras to prepare himself for death. He is accompanied by his son who, surrounded by death all around him, begins to understand the meaning of life. *Astu* tells the heartwarming tale of a retired Sanskrit professor suffering from Alzheimer's disease, who, on seeing an elephant across the road, starts following it. He is lost to his family, and is taken in by the mahout and his wife, finding an acceptance that his own family could never offer. It shows how hard yet how easy it is to love. *Benche Thakar Gaan* is a heartening Bengali movie about a young



Still from the film *Mukti Bhawan*

gerontologist who teaches the lodgers of an old age home about how life is a joy that should not be snubbed until death were to overcome it. The finale was a German documentary called *Sputnik Moment*, which discusses the issues and opportunities brought about by increased longevity, and the ways it could be addressed. Each film was followed by a discussion with renowned experts in the field, including Mohan Agashe, Christiane Brosius and Barbara Wackernagel-Jacobs, among others. The festival was an enriching experience for the youth and aged alike, who were present in equal numbers throughout.

■ **KEN GEORGE**

The Soul of Portugal

PERFORMANCE

Fado Violado—Fado Fusion

*COLLABORATION: Portuguese Embassy
Cultural Centre*

23 September 2018

The auditorium was bursting at the seams with an audience waiting to absorb the magic of Fado. The elegant Ana Pinhal, flanked by two virtuosos—one on the classical guitar, and the other on the Portuguese guitar—did not disappoint as she sang with heightened emotion. She made an eclectic choice of songs that were so infused with feeling and expression, that it almost didn't matter

that one did not know any Portuguese. Ana paid tribute to those who had made Fado popular in Portugal, and worldwide. She interspersed her songs with remarks on women's equality, and light-hearted humour.

Since Fado is a genre that can be used to sing about anything, the songs moved from love and longing to friendship and dining. *Saudades do Brasil* was a particularly captivating piece as one could sense the nostalgia infused in the rendering of this song. The listeners were caught up in the magic of Fado, and found themselves clapping in time to *Marcha dos Centenarios*, a spritely piece. As Ana finished with the last song on the list, the crowd was on its feet and clapped long and hard, compelling her to entertain it with a bonus number. As 'Fado' is 'destiny', the spectators were undeniably fortunate to have this evening in theirs.

■ **RIMA ZAHEER**

Marginalisation of Female Narratives

BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP

She Goes to War: Women Militants of India by Rashmi Saksena (New Delhi: Speaking Tiger, 2018)

DISCUSSANTS: *Ajai Sahni; Sanjoy Hazarika; and Maya Mirchandani*

CHAIR: *M. Maroof Raza*

6 September 2018

The book under discussion covers women's experiences from Kashmir, North East India and Naxalite areas, among others. Maroof Raza set the tone by focusing on questions dealing with women's motivations to choose the path of violence, their roles after renouncing violence, and the lessons the government could draw from their experiences.

As a reporter, the author had realised how indispensable women were to insurgencies. The marginalisation of female narratives by both the state and militant outfits

was the motivation behind her book. Women who survive the conflict form the strongest constituency for peace, but unfortunately they are hardly represented in peace talks. Besides the long experience of living in conflict zones, the other motivation prompting women to go to war is the quest to avenge the oppression faced by their menfolk.

For Ajai Sahni, it was the author's unmediated narration of women's experiences which shed light on the complexity of conflict zones. The fundamental contribution of the book, he said, was the author's presentation of the extraordinary range of roles in which women participated in conflicts. Maya Mirchandani highlighted the candour with which the women interviewees opened up to the author, something that may not have been possible in case of a male author. Every story in the book was different, in the sense that different motivations and cultural nuances were visible in them, Mirchandani noted. The role of women as peace-builders would get acknowledged only when these narratives are understood intricately. Finally, terming the book as an extremely difficult endeavour, Sanjoy Hazarika noted how the psychological impact of conflict has not been analysed properly, which had led to a neglect of post-conflict traumas, especially in the case of women.

■ PRATEEK JOSHI

Displacement of People

DISCUSSION

People on the Run, People on the Move: Displacement, Security and Gender in South Asia

PANELLISTS: *Paula Banerjee; Ranabir Samaddar; and Sanjoy Hazarika*

CHAIR: *Meenakshi Gopinath*

COLLABORATION: *WISCOMP*

7 September 2018

Displacement is a human issue, and a contentious one. The definition of genocide, statelessness, refugee status determination, citizenship, human rights, humaneness and legal processes were discussed in this programme, with a further detailing of the differences between the Rohingya and the Bangladeshis, and why they must be kept separate. The related discussion points were the generic migration process of refugees, the displaced Mewad community, the Assam NRC registration process, why the Myanmar government is silent about the Rohingya, and the Bangladeshi immigration process. Nostalgia is an

important part of the life of refugees, but the Rohingya do not have the right to feel nostalgia, in fact, no rights at all! Mention was made of 13 women detained under the Foreigners Act in a West Bengal jail; all the women were found to be Rohingya, incarcerated indefinitely. Udayan Mishra spoke of an alternative definition of the Rohingya displacement in terms of ocean space and natural disasters as they happen in Bangladesh.

Whilst housing such displaced persons, we have robbed many of their memory. The Asianisation of Orientalism, the growing mistrust between communities, leading to a territorial trap, depoliticising community while simultaneously developing ethnic stereotypes in an effort to sanitise and purify states—are all motivated by state boundaries, the displaced and the stateless, which will at the end relocate adults and leave the children stateless!

■ MEKHALA SENGUPTA

Rethinking about Wickedness

TALK

Rethinking about Wickedness: From Nigamasarma to the Palestinian West Bank

SPEAKERS: David Shulman

MODERATOR: Shuddhabrata Sengupta

COLLABORATION: *The Foundation for Indian Contemporary Art*

1 September 2018

David Shulman, the versatile, internationally celebrated polymath, gave an illuminating talk in which his philosophical ideas impinged upon the existential. He examined the ethics transforming a debauched Brahmin in *Panduranga Mahatyam Telani Rama* by Pandit Ramakrishna, from the golden age of Telugu literature. Nigamasarma, who stripped his mother even of her gold ornaments, saw people facing starvation, courageously preserving their dignity. The experience changed him into a moral, caring being.

Shulman moved on to the daily existential problems of sensitive Israeli Jews—he is himself a Jew—vis-à-vis the native Muslim Palestinians, who actually owned the land, and were deprived of it by the United States of America and Britain, who forcibly created a country for the Jews in 1948. The army, terrified of its own shadow, is perpetrating continuous injustice on the Palestinians on their own land in an attempt to rob them of their selfhood. He quotes from his own experience of a visit to a legitimate piece of Palestinian land, occupied forcibly by Israeli settlers, that had a well on it. Palestinian shepherds were unable to let their sheep drink water there, because armed Israeli soldiers prevented them from doing so. When Shulman questioned a soldier, he said he was following orders, despite knowing that they were absurd. Another soldier said, 'I don't know anything, I know my gun.' A student wrote to him saying, 'I'll never think those things I was taught to think', buoying his hopes. Shulman ended by observing sadly, 'Nothing human beings fear more than knowing that they are free.'

■ PARTHA CHATTERJEE

Importance of Doklam

IIC-ICS CONVERSATION SERIES DISCUSSION

Doklam Revisited

SPEAKERS: Praveen Bakshi; D. S. Hooda; V. P. Haran; and Ashok Kantha

INTRODUCTION AND ANCHOR: Sushant Singh

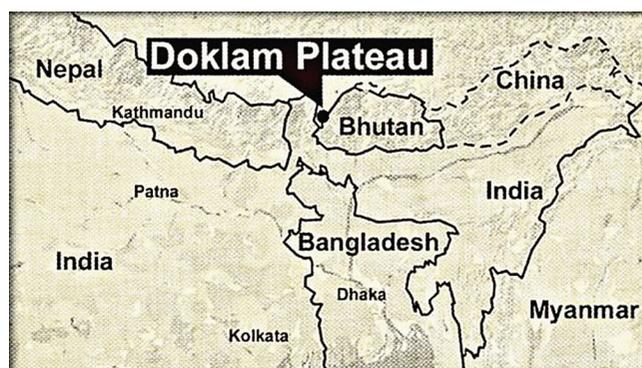
COLLABORATION: *Institute of Chinese Studies*

14 September 2018

It is a little over a year since India and China withdrew their troops from Doklam, near the strategic India–Bhutan–China tri-junction. The tensions between the two countries over the construction of a road by the Chinese army in Doklam have since subsided. But there could be other hotspots. Praveen Bakshi, then Eastern Army Commander, and D. S. Hooda, then heading the Northern Command, expressed their concerns about a repeat of Doklam-like incidents. They also emphasised the need for the Indian army to build infrastructure in vulnerable border areas. Of particular concern are Ladakh and Sikkim. A major source of worry is Arunachal Pradesh, said Hooda.

Former Indian Ambassador to China Ashok Kantha said that the developments at Doklam were not surprising, given China's past record. But China was not prepared for India's firmness, as the conflict escalated. 'China did not anticipate forceful action taken by us,' said Kantha. V. P. Haran, who was Ambassador to Syria and Bhutan, traced the trajectory of the India–Bhutan relationship. He said that Bhutan is a small country, sandwiched between two of the world's most populous countries. Bhutan, he said, recognises the convergence of interest with India, particularly in relation to sensitive areas like the Siliguri Corridor.

■ KAVITA CHARANJI



Map of Doklam Plateau

Mental Health

DISCUSSION

Why We Need to Speak About Mental Health

PANELLISTS: Amit Sen; Vidhi Chadha; Seher Hashmi; and Sanjeev Agarwal

MODERATOR: Shubha Menon

COLLABORATION: You, Me & Mental Health—ANHAD

15 October 2018

The IIC, keeping abreast of societal concerns and discourse, organised a discussion on *Why We Need to Talk about Mental Health*, in an attempt to fight the stigma around mental dysfunctionality. The panel comprised a psychiatrist and a clinical psychologist, providing two different aspects of therapy. Others on the panel were a patient and a caregiver, balancing the diverse perspectives related to health imbalances. Both the medical and the non-medical therapists reiterated the need for holistic and culturally appropriate processes in reaching out to young

people for mental health care solutions. Global trends have to be cognisant of local needs.

It was heartening to see the courage and confidence of Seher Hashmi, who, in the process of seeking support, shared the experiences of friends, family and relatives. The unflinching support of family helped her tide over the many lows, enabling her to reflect on her journey. An animated discussion followed, regarding the signs and symbols of depression, from the point of view of both professionals and caregivers. Some of the senior professionals in the audience insisted on mental health problems being placed at par with other diseases, while others said that ongoing research is providing new perspectives on lifestyle and mental health. The dialogue put into perspective the need for awareness, prevention and community empowerment, and gave meaning to the phrase, 'expression is the opposite of depression'.

■ ASHA SINGH

Politics of Ageing

FRONTIERS OF HISTORY

Coming of Age: Ageing and its Global and Local Politics

SPEAKERS: Kavita Sivaramakrishnan

DISCUSSANT: Rama Baru

CHAIR: Mathew Cherian

4 October 2018

Ageing has emerged as a global problem in recent times. As Mathew Cherian stated, Kavita Sivaramakrishnan's recent book, which was the peg for the discussion, rethinks ageing as a demographic crisis, and provides some extraordinary insights into the ageing world. Kavita, in her scholarly delivery, provided a deep understanding of the ageing situation in the Indian context, comparing it with the privileged Western world. She gave a convincing orientation to approaches to old age, bringing in anthropological, historical and gerontological perspectives. Discussing debates on ageing, pathophysiology and care in Asia, Africa, America and Europe, Kavita highlighted the differences in ageing experiences across the continents.

Ageing discourses have mainly been dominated by American studies, but this must change and the cultural heterogeneity that exists among older people needs to be recognised. Planning for older persons in the developing world has to take into account their own societal resources, and a different geopolitical landscape. Welfare policies of the West need not fit the model for the developing world. Countries like India and China must develop their own local agenda, so that there is a new approach to the demographic transition taking place. Globally, while the ageing of the population is seen as a crisis, it may not be so, given the individual Asian and African experiences.

As Rama Baru pointed out, the perspective shared by Kavita interrogates the global with the local, and it is important to understand the different disciplinary contributions to the field of ageing and how these intersect with each other.

■ MALA KAPUR SHANKARDASS

Dissenter Extraordinaire

TALK

Mahatma Gandhi: 150 Years

Gandhi as a Dissenter

Inaugural lecture by Ashis Nandy

CHAIR: Ashok Vajpeyi

COLLABORATION: The Raza Foundation

8 October 2018

Gandhi, the quintessential dissenter, was the abiding leitmotif of Ashis Nandy's inaugural lecture commemorating the Mahatma's 150th birth year. Bapu's acuity of vision, universality of theme, equanimity, and ubiquitous faith in innate goodness was adroitly wefted in Nandy's lore of Gandhi's overarching loneliness.

Engagingly ensconced in 'robust scepticism', Gandhi's stance as an unequivocal radical critic of Western modernity, as reinforced by Nandy, was not only the key to his dissent, but also mirrored the most crucial theoretical foundation of his entire strategy of *Swaraj*.

By seamlessly merging the iconic and multivalent Gandhi—functioning as an expression of worldly concerns, philosophical leanings and personal demons—Nandy's groundbreaking elucidation of the ethos and pathos of the Mahatma heralded a new 'classic' of rare *scholia* which lingers in the realms of the exoteric and esoteric with crystalline clarity.

The iconoclast synonymous with *satyagraha*, *ahimsa* and civic, social and religious demur belonged to that pantheon of global leaders whose disquisition of modern science, technology, brute nation states, theories of progress and evolution, spirit of ruthless competitiveness and betrayal of democratic purity rallied both critics and admirers to target their senseless energies against Gandhi.

The defining trait of Gandhi was 'gentle anarchism', and given the dictum that nothing dates as quickly as modernity, Gandhi's despair chose dissent as a vital orb of his humanistic oeuvre. Nandy's bursts of rapture saw keenly, spoke aptly, moved flexibly and throbbed pulsatingly about the yin-yang of Gandhi's universe. The cognoscente that Nandy is, took Gandhi's words to the audience's hearts.

■ BEEBA SOBTI

Engineers and the Society

TALK

Interlinking of Rivers and Management of Water Resources

Presentations by A. B. Pandya, and S. Masood Husain

CHAIR: S. K. Sarkar

COLLABORATION: Consulting Engineers Association of India (CEAI)

10 October 2018

The notion of interlinking was discussed from the perspective of environmental concerns, and a technocratic, engineering approach to water distribution and governance, involving the abstract need to supply water across India's landscape. The first speaker and Chair of the discussion, S. K. Sarkar from TERI, presented a perspective wherein he identified the gaps in the knowledge on riverine systems, within the technical approaches to water distribution in India. The second speaker, A. B. Pandya, elaborated on human interdependence on water, energy and land as part of the concerns of development projects that address potential future gaps in water access, and

finally tried to make a case for the inter-linking system as a source of water supply for all in the country. He focused on reiterating the necessity of terminology, in coining the term inter-basin linking, as opposed to the interlinking of rivers. The rationale for this remained that rivers are political entities, and fall across state boundaries, which makes them contentious. On the other hand, inter-basin transfer allows for a holistic view of the subject of water as a scientific or abstract concept for engineers to shape and imagine on paper. Finally, S. Masood Husain presented some details of the actual ongoings within the project, regarding the various bodies working on water balance and feasibility studies, and the challenges ahead.

S. K. Sarkar mentioned that the Interlinking of Rivers (ILR) project has had a long history. Dr. Pandya pointed to inequitable water distribution, and the ideal that was set by PM Modi, in irrigation systems for farms across the country, irrespective of their locations. Husain, a member of the Central Water Commission, laid out a clear picture of the execution of the ILR over the past several years.

■ TARINI MANCHANDA

Where the Mind is Free

DISCUSSION

Where the Mind is Free and Knowledge is Within Reach: Higher Education, Public Funding and Equity

SPEAKERS: Satish Deshpande; Apoorvanand; Nandita Narain; and Sukumar

CHAIR: Harsh Mander

COLLABORATION: Centre for Equity Studies; and The Wire

11 October 2018

The panel attempted to address the problems faced by one of the most significant public goods in this subcontinent, higher education. The staggering crisis is apparent when one looks at a series of events which have engulfed higher education institutions in the past few years. Four

stellar educationists: Satish Deshpande, Apoorvanand, Nandita Narain and Sukumar, raised various issues and dimensions about the same.

The concerns raised both by the audience and the speakers can be understood in two ways. Firstly, the systemic ways in which the education system is embedded in dominant caste–class ideology, and the growing market economy. The social value of learning is married to the economic value of the students, and access to the latter is marked by existing systems of discrimination. It is in this context that Apoorvanand sees the growth of various coaching centres as threatening the existence and relevance of universities. Secondly, the concerted political attacks on students of higher educational institutions has put democracy itself on trial. The ideological and structural hurdles may lead one to dismay; however, Deshpande insisted that the university is a space of dissent in design, a challenge to this inherent quality of a university would mean to write off democracy itself.

■ LEKI THUNGON

Researching Chandernagore

CULTURE AND HERITAGE

Coordinated by Amita Baig

DISCUSSION: *People, Heritage and The Future: The Chandernagore Initiative*

SPEAKERS: Aishwarya Tipnis

CHAIR: Bertrand de Hartingh

16 October 2018

This was an enthralling evening with Aishwarya Tipnis elaborating on work initiated in 2010, via a French assignment, to explore French influences in Chandernagore. Her passion for Indo–French heritage was ignited. Appalled that many recently documented buildings were being demolished soon after her assignment lapsed, she began to use every forum to speak and write about Chandernagore, elevating the local issue to a national concern.

Tipnis worked with sporadic and minimal finances, yet achieved maximum results largely due to her passion-driven expertise: involving youth as citizen–historians to document buildings and people’s memories; holding *addas* where local people could address concerns; making heritage fun by organising games and competitions for children and youth. Each session was at a heritage venue, with special lighting installed by a local contractor. People were delighted at how pretty the



Chandernagore

old buildings looked. Local attitudes of ‘heritage means nothing’ and ‘high-rise apartment blocks spell profit’ got gradually transformed.

As her first conservation project, she has chosen the derelict Registry Building, with no roof and two trees growing within, marked for demolition for over two decades. Initiating crowd-funding prompted the state to step in with finances. When this building is reborn as a hub for vital citizen activities, she will have set a methodology that can be replicated all over the country.

Tipnis has brought appreciation to neglected, unrecognised heritage. Already people of Chandernagore have a greater sense of pride and belonging, while tourism and global recognition are also attracting wealth.

■ BHARATI MIRCHANDANI

China in the Indian Ocean

DISCUSSION

ICS-IIC Roundtable on China in the Indian Ocean: Evolving Doctrine, Presence and Prospects

SPEAKERS: Gopal Suri; Pradeep Chauhan; and Anil Chopra

CHAIR: Ashok Kantha

COLLABORATION: Institute of Chinese Studies

17 October 2018

China signalled its ambitions quite early in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), as noted in the Communist Party of China's 18th National Congress, where transnational economic development was intertwined with its geopolitical ambitions. This advent of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and the process of acquiring overseas bases, and viewing the South China Sea as a strategic backwater was the manifestation of this vision. With these opening remarks, Ashok Kantha opened the floor for the panellists.

Gopal Suri explained how China's expanding role in the Indian Ocean is driven by its quest to secure its growing

demand for resources. A significant chunk of China's oil and gas imports passes through the Indian Ocean. Pradeep Chauhan described how Chinese geopolitical goals outweighed its economic agendas as well, given the core spatial assumptions underpinning the Chinese grand strategy. The BRI could be best understood as a Chinese geostrategic means to attain geoeconomic goals. Chauhan termed it as an extractive model of connectivity. The lack of an international pushback against Chinese expansionism, and Americans being outplayed in the South China Sea only emboldened Beijing further.

For Anil Chopra, Chinese deployments in peacetime were not the right indicators to gauge China's position in the IOR. Since China's rise coincided with that of the digital age, excess literature on the issue obfuscated the ground realities. In the process, the Chinese only play along with the narrative as the world seems to accept China as a global power. Maritime power stems from a strong economy, which in turn supports a stronger navy. It is too early to deduce the same for China, since its rise is barely four decades old. Further, China has a disadvantageous maritime geography, and even if it controls the South and East China seas, it cannot break into the Pacific or Indian Ocean Region, except through chokepoints. Peacetime deployments should not be construed as domination, Chopra stressed.

■ PRATEEK JOSHI

Keeping Marx Meaningful

DISCUSSION

Round Table on Karl Marx

SPEAKERS: Ashis Nandy; Dhruv Raina; Ajay Verma; and Irfan Habib

CHAIR: Ramin Jahanbegloo

COLLABORATION: O. P. Jindal Global University, Sonapat

20 October 2018

The conference to commemorate Karl Marx's 150th birth anniversary was appropriately panelled by social scientists, scholars, philosophers and historians who sought to collectively examine the continuing impact and relevance of Marxist thought.

Irfan Habib began by delivering his insights on economic nationalism and its connection to Marxist philosophy. Dhruv Raina carried Habib's impetus further by explaining

how the history and philosophy of science underlies Marxist thought. Ajay Verma added to the momentum by exploring the idea of consciousness in Marxist thought, and juxtaposing Marx with Ambedkar. The round table became more animated with Ashis Nandy's participation. A trained psychologist, he stated that both Russia and China presently follow a primitive form of capitalism, after the collapse of communism. He also pointed out, interestingly, the relationship of science and nature as analogous to Marx and human beings.

Ramin Jahanbegloo consolidated all the divergent and compatible points of view to end a stimulating exchange of ideas. The ensuing questions to the panellists were mostly from the younger members at the table, which was heartening as it established that analysing Karl Marx will undoubtedly carry on for another 150 years.

As the world turns increasingly to the right, keeping the balance with discussions on Marx becomes almost a necessity.

■ RIMA ZAHEER

NOTICE

Members are requested to kindly update their contact details, including valid e-mail ID, with the Membership Department.

OBITUARY

L-0324	Shri Narayan Datt Tiwari
M-1725	Vice Admiral K. K. Nayyar (Retd.)
M-1874	Shri Pran Nevile
M-2537	Dr. N. C. Mehta
M-2637	Shri Sharat Kumar
M-2865	Shri S. Ramaiah
M-3444	Shri Gautam B. Shah
A-2558	Shri Nazar Hayat Tiwana
A-3188	Smt. Neena Ranjan
A-3575	Shri Vishnu Khare
A-3974	Prof. Sudhir Kaicker
A-4601	Smt. Saroj Saxena
A-5361	Smt. Bali Anant Singh



Director's Note

Our Annual Festival, 'IIC Experience: A Festival of the Arts, 2018', was a festival with a difference! In furtherance with one of our objectives—to showcase art and culture of lesser known areas and people of India—this year's Festival, as suggested by President Vohra almost a year back, and, later, endorsed by the Board of Trustees, focused on the North-Eastern states of India, a region which is still vastly unfamiliar to those living in other parts of the country. It was not an easy task to meaningfully present even the essential facets of eight states—music, theatre, art, weaving and other handicrafts, literature, history and cuisine—in less than five days. As the curtains were drawn on the annual Festival, encomiums poured in from varied quarters—from within our membership and far beyond. An adequate coverage of the programmes which were presented during the Festival will be included in a supplement which is proposed to be published later this year.

Some of our Members had raised certain issues at the last AGM, held on 31 March 2018. In variance with past practice, I have held two meetings with the concerned Members, and informed them about the actions taken on issues raised by them.

One of our continuing efforts is to minimise the use of paper to the maximum possible extent. Thus, we have discontinued sending bills by post to Members; these are now being sent only via email. To ensure against any avoidable inconvenience, we once again request Members to please inform the Membership Office of their to date email id, telephone numbers and postal addresses.

It has been decided that e-voting system will be adopted for elections to the Board and the Executive Committee. For the forthcoming elections (tenure 2019–2021), Members can exercise their franchise through e-voting or by the ballot system. For the latter, they shall have to cast their vote at the Voting Booths which will be set up at the Centre and not through post, as was earlier permissible.

Members who require an accessible toilet with assistive facilities will be pleased to know that the washroom adjoining the Auditorium foyer has been renovated with pleasant shades of blue. It has the following features:

- a wheelchair-width door
- wheelchair-height toilet seat (WC) with grab bars
- an emergency call-bell switch
- wheelchair-height hand wash basin and dryer

The IIC—International Research Division is organising a Conference on 'India and Central Asia', on 3–4 December 2018, in collaboration with the Institute of Indo–Persian Studies. The discussions at this Conference shall provide an opportunity to scholars and area specialists to reflect on several important themes, to enhance understanding of our neighbours. Those who are interested are welcome to benefit from the projected interactions.

Air Marshal (Retd.) Naresh Verma