

# the india diary international centre

Volume XXXIV No. 5

October – November 2020

## Poignant Memories

**EXHIBITION:** *A Phoenix from the Ashes  
The Destruction and Reconstruction of Warsaw  
1939–1955*

**POLISH ARCHITECTURE:** *An exhibition of  
photographs by some of the leading Polish  
architectural photographers on contemporary  
buildings*

**COLLABORATION:** *Polish Institute, New Delhi  
19 to 28 October 2020*

As the very name suggests, this exhibition captured, through photographs and text, poignant memories of a city ravaged by the Nazi regime during the Second World War.

The first section, titled *Pre-War*, talked about the beauty of a city after 1918 and the First World War. There is a grandeur in the architecture, there are buildings in the Jewish quarter, Baroque styles and colours of the old town, and the squares within the city for stately celebration.

In a section titled *Social Realism*, we saw the construction of the historical district, and the Palace of Science and

Culture; there was also the housing built on the ghetto—this, at a time when socialist powers ran the city.

Perhaps the most evocative images were in the third section called *Wartime*. This was a time when the Nazi regime was determined to annihilate the Polish Jewish community. Many of the photographs were by Jurgen Stroop, commander of the German force. He seemed to have taken pride in capturing images of Jews leaving the city with possessions on their backs, and ruins of the oldest historic part of Warsaw reduced to rubble. Historically, this was also the time of the Warsaw uprising, and a time when Hitler wanted to erase the city from the face of the earth. There were photos which showed explosions, and the constructed ghetto wall where people lived in inhuman conditions.

The next section showed the formation of the Biuro Odbudowy Stolicy, the office of the reconstruction of the city post-war; this was, however, based on a Soviet template of socialism. An image in this section of two women searching in the rubble of torn and broken buildings was heart-rending. There were pictures of the reconstruction of the old town and markets, obviously extensively worked on by renowned architects and conservationists.

The last section showed *Warsaw Today*, with a feature on Polish architecture. It was here that we truly saw the reconstruction of a new modern city. From stadiums, to museums, airport and train terminals, cultural and science centres, we saw the use of contemporary materials like glass, steel, wood and concrete, in keeping with new traditions of architecture worldwide.

The exhibition, although slightly heavy on text content, did manage to capture imagination through black-and-white images, and later colour, showing a city rising like a phoenix which may have been doomed, but for the resilience of its citizens.



■ LOLITA DUTTA

# Unveiling the Tangled Veil

## V.P. DUTT MEMORIAL LECTURE 2020:

*India as a Teacher by Negative Example: Chinese Perceptions of India during the British Colonial Period and their Impact on India–China Relations*

**SPEAKER:** Shri Shyam Saran

**INTRODUCTION:** Shri K.N. Shrivastava

**MODERATOR:** Ashok Kantha

**COLLABORATION:** Institute of Chinese Studies

**7 October 2020**

As in a Chinese landscape scroll gradually unrolling, the same individuals kept reappearing in new contexts with strands of divergent experience—so also did Shyam Saran’s eloquently nuanced lecture, which foregrounded China’s vacillating perceptions about India, amidst a yarn of grudging adulation and shifting qualms.

Seamlessly twinning lore with truism, Saran’s discourse unmasked deeply entrenched biases—initial Chinese acknowledgement of Buddhism as the prism of India’s enduring quintessence, later soured by inherited and

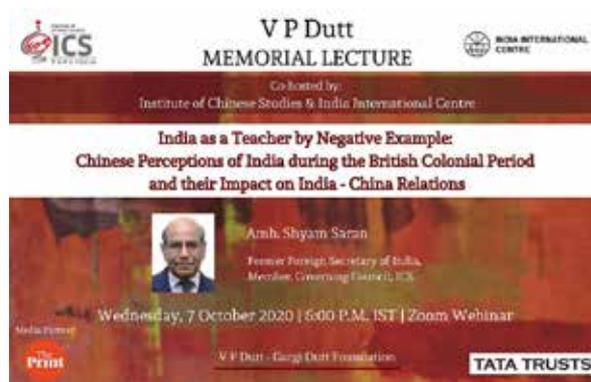
jaundiced impressions of vulnerable India as a failed, fallen, subjugated country, unable to resist British onslaught. This found resonance in the Ming, Qing and Manchu dynasties’ din of India as ‘a springboard for the painful assault on China’, by citing the use of Indian soldiers and policemen in the British depredations in China, prompting intellectuals like Liang Qichao and Chen Duxiu to vilify India as a worst case scenario for China, and thus a teacher by negative example.

Chinese translations of British colonial literature which were crudely racist, and the piquant observations of Zhou Enlai and Ma Hong, smacking of Chinese disdain and contempt against India in the Tibet imbroglio and the 1962

border talks, persist and surface when the Indo–Sino pendulum worsens, and, likewise, camouflage a veneer of camaraderie when the rhetoric harks back to ancient cultural affinities. Saran’s tour de juggernaut underscored the exigency to pursue sinological studies to remove the sludge of

prejudice and petty shenanigans, overarching much of Chinese behaviour towards India.

■ BEEBA SOBTI



# Erosion of the Right to Freedom and Expression

## THE B.G. VERGHESE MEMORIAL LECTURE

*2020: Preserving and Protecting Fundamental Rights—Freedom of Speech, Expression and Right to Protest*

**SPEAKER:** Justice Shri Madan Lokur

**COLLABORATION:** The Media Foundation

**12 to 18 October 2020**

Justice Madan B. Lokur began by saying that while the Constitution has placed reasonable restrictions on exercising the right to free speech, today it is being eroded by ‘twisting and turning’ the law. Emphasising the distinction between free speech and sedition, he cited recent cases in which the expression of an unpalatable opinion was viewed as a criminal offence against the establishment.

Justice Lokur spoke of another method of silencing speech on ‘up charges’, by attributing something to a speaker that he or she never said, forcing them to go through a long drawn out process to be set free. He also gave multiple examples of people being charged with sedition for fake news, arguing that while fake news must be countered, a charge of sedition was not the answer for doing so. He then pointed out that there had been a 30 per cent increase in the number of sedition cases registered between 2018 and 2019 in India, an indication of the weaponising of the sedition law in various states as a means of silencing critics. Finally, he highlighted the use of district- or state-wide internet shutdowns to stifle freedom of expression through prior restraint under ‘the guise of preventing breach of peace’. The lecture was preceded by the presentation of the 2019 Chameli Devi Jain Award for an Outstanding Woman Journalist.

■ SONAM

## Inclusivity of Indian Cuisines

### BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP:

*Turmeric Nation: A Passage through India's Tastes*  
By Shylashri Shankar (New Delhi: Speaking Tiger Books, 2020)

**DISCUSSANTS:** Mita Kapur and Shylashri Shankar

**MODERATOR:** Jasleen Vohra

**CHAIR:** Ranveer Brar

**12 October 2020**

'India's Tastes', in the title of the book, may sound like a paradox to most of us. Can India's tastes, or Indian food, be seen as a singular entity? Or does it vary across the country? And if, as most will agree, food in India is diverse, then is there any common factor in the various Indian cuisines? This was the topic discussed by the author of *Turmeric Nation*, Shylashri Shankar, and the panellists.

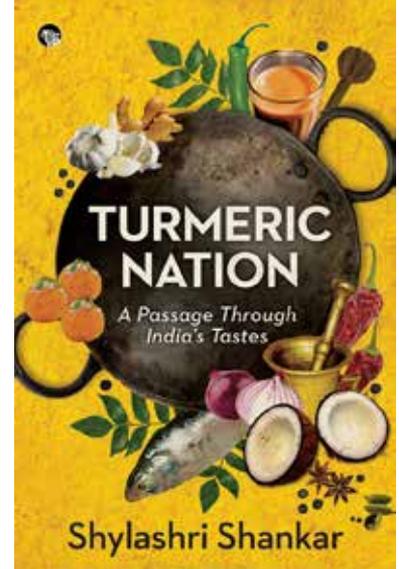
Through her research, Shankar has come to the conclusion that turmeric, used in India as early as the Harappan age, is a pan-Indian ingredient and is considered very important in

several communities, where the use of turmeric is a must to be able to engage in matrimony.

We all have a cultural or regional connection with food, to the extent that we are what we eat. Religion and season also play a large role in what we eat. The

panel was unanimous in the view that food is inherently inclusive, and that taking any food away from the plate is wrong. Therefore, the trend to do away with sugar, fat, gluten, among others, should be discarded. It has been seen that the richer one is, the greater the tendency to do away with certain food items. Fortunately, unlike caste and religion which determine the kind of food eaten, restaurants act as an equaliser, where food becomes egalitarian, and the same food is served to all communities.

■ SWATI DASGUPTA



## Tradition and Liberalism

### WEBINAR:

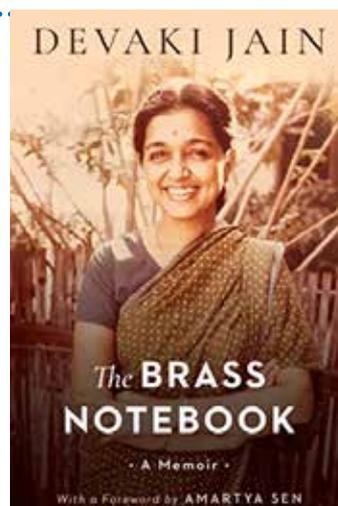
*Launch of The Brass Notebook: A Memoir* By Devaki Jain (New Delhi: Speaking Tiger Books, 2020)

*The author was in conversation with Romila Thapar and Antara Dev Sen*

**MODERATOR:** Kalpana Sharma

**3 October 2020**

This lively and stimulating discussion included seasoned stalwarts, Devaki Jain, the author of the book, Romila Thapar and Antara Dev Sen. Kalpana Sharma, who skilfully moderated the conversation, quoted from the book, 'I seized freedom disregarding conventions'. What had made that possible? Thapar said that in any memoir, there is self-reflection, as also a recognition that background and context matter. Witnessing events and conversations around Independence might have meant imbibing ideas of freedom in one's own life.



Further, she pointed out that both tradition and liberalism had influenced her parents. This explains how Jain's father could encourage her to learn horse riding as a young girl and go abroad to study, but her choice in marriage was completely unacceptable to the family. Dev Sen argued that her own personality better explains Jain's actions, and her feminist consciousness had developed slowly over the years, notwithstanding Gloria Steinem's influence. Devaki Jain reflected that the experiences and thinking of the 1960s and 1970s had motivated her to think about justice and equality, leading to investigation into the causes of

women's impoverishment and the nature of economic development. This feminism is not anti-male, and is pro 'development from below'. In response to a question, she said she had been more influenced by politics and society than by books. The title of the book, inspired by Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*, is both a tribute to an earlier feminist, and an embedding in context, in that brass, a 'lower metal', is well-featured in Indian homes, including that of the author.

■ RATNA M. SUDARSHAN

## Allegory of Good over Evil

**FILM:** *The General (USA)*

**DIRECTORS:** *Clyde Bruckman, Buster Keaton*

**19 to 25 October 2020**

Actor-Director Buster Keaton's silent film, *The General*, made in 1926, has been hailed by critics over the years as an 'epic masterpiece'.

Set against the backdrop of the American Civil War, the film tells the story of Johnny Gray, an ordinary engine driver, and his attempt to woo his lady love through his masterly heroism. With Johnny Gray played by Buster Keaton, the cinematic frames are a whole new experience.

Johnny Gray's true love is a locomotive engine and a beautiful damsel. Life, you would have thought, would have been a bed of roses for him after that. But in fact it's quite the opposite. What unfolds is cinema history's most epic train chase where our hero is up against a bunch of

traitors and rebels who are trying to sabotage the army. The film is the ultimate allegory of good over evil, and love scoring over hate.

Buster Keaton acts, directs and writes the screenplay for the film. Those were the days when Keaton did his own stunts—stunts that leave the audience breathless—while our hero, Johnny Gray sports his infamous dead-pan expression right through. The chase on the rail track set to the original piano score by Killen P. Perry is simply breathtaking.

The scene where our hero single-mindedly keeps the embers in his engine burning with fresh wood, while the theatre of war plays around him, makes for memorable visuals. In an unforgettable moment, he puts out the palm of his hand so his lady love can quickly haul herself onto the train to escape enemy fire!

Criticised at the time by certain sections for having made a comedy of the American Civil War, the film went on to gross over a million US dollars.

■ NUPUR BASU

## Indifferent Coverage of Agriculture in the Media

**MAPPING SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE:**

*Indian Media—Farmers on the Margins*

**SPEAKER:** *Harvir Singh*

**MODERATOR:** *Siraj Hussain*

**23 October 2020**

The agricultural sector is of immense importance to the Indian economy, and plays a significant role in the overall socio-economic fabric of India. Unfortunately, it does not get appropriate media attention. This is evident if we compare the number of people and livelihood dependency on agriculture and the space it gets in media coverage.

Singh talked about the role of farmers being ignored, and the part they played during the pandemic going unappreciated. 'The agriculture sector provided the greatest support to the government which enabled it to distribute free ration and grains to the public. When the whole country was locked up inside their homes, the farmers were working in the fields. Yet, the agricultural sector couldn't find a place in media space', he added.

While citing the examples of Bulandshehar, Baroda and Haryana, Singh said 'the farmers are facing serious



problems, yet there is no mention about them or their contributions. This is the kind of indifferent approach by the media, as also the vernacular media.'

In conclusion, Singh also suggested that being one of the major sectors of the economy, particularly during the prevailing pandemic when all the other sectors are contracting, the agriculture sector should be given as much coverage as other sectors by mainstream media.

■ M. SHAHID SIDDIQUI

# Indian Modernism

## ILLUSTRATED LECTURE:

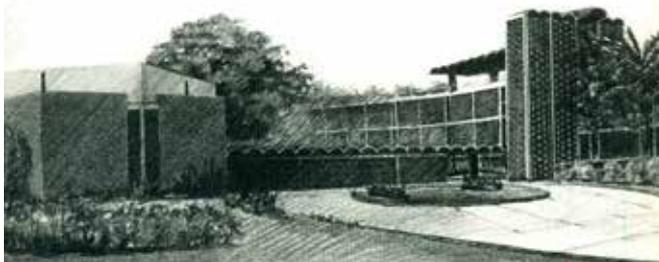
*India International Centre and the Attributes of an Indian Modernism—A Personal Exploration*

**SPEAKER:** Snehanshu Mukherjee

**26 October to 1 November 2020**

This short, thoughtful lecture by Mukherjee explored aspects of the built structures that house the India International Centre (IIC). Illustrated with sketches, architectural drawings, detailed studies and photographs, he explored the philosophy of architect Joseph Allen Stein's masterly resolution of spaces. This lecture has already initiated meaningful discussion among architects.

Newly independent India was promoting industrial style modernism, with foreign architects assigned for important



projects, and Indian architects training in Western modernist studios. Bucking this trend, Stein forged a unique path that Mukherjee feels offers scope for an Indian modernism, unlike the 'directionless urbanscape' of neighbouring Gurugram. The IIC is an example of 'architecture that is understated in its aesthetic and is at the same time beautiful'.

When building the IIC in 1959, Stein used many relatively untested processes for the first time, including prefabricated components. With perfect coordination of design and structure in line with the requirements of the assignment, the buildings have stood the test of time with very little wear and tear. Even in terms of usage, with the increased footfalls and often, the hectic schedule of programmes and festivals held here, the atmosphere of calm serenity remains unruffled. The timeless quality of the rhythms of changing vistas as one moves from the gate through to the Fountain Lawn, the views from various enclosed spaces all blend imperceptibly to include the tombs and gardens beyond the boundaries of the IIC.

Amid trends of shock and awe, the very human scale and fine detailing of the IIC campus is something rare and precious. Mukherjee deserves kudos for highlighting this for us.

■ BHARATI MIRCHANDANI

# Living Together in Peace

## SPECIAL WEBINAR:

*India's Heritage of Karuna & Ahimsa  
Address by His Holiness the Dalai Lama*

**WELCOME:** Shri N.N. Vohra, President, IIC

**MODERATOR:** Rajiv Mehrotra

**26 October 2020**

Watching this webinar I recalled two events of twenty-nine years ago. Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama, gracing the vigil of 30 January 1991 night at the site of Gandhiji's martyrdom in New Delhi, the quiet conviction of which was beautifully captured in a documentary film I made with Ramchandra Gandhi on the vigil (reviewed in IIC Diary, December 1991), and later the same year, an interview I recorded with His Holiness for NHK Japan at his abode in Dharamshala. Nothing had changed, he is 87 now and he was 58 then. I found the same sublime presence, the same grace, the same humility, the same innocent infectious laughter and the same holistic vision.

In his early morning address, the Dalai Lama dwelt at length on his four commitments. Firstly, his commitment as a human being to promote the idea of oneness of seven billion human beings through the secular practice of the Indian tradition of *karuna* and *ahimsa*; to rise above the 'we' and 'they' syndrome; and live together in peace on this planet. Secondly, his responsibility as a Buddhist monk to promote religious harmony; India, he said, was the only country where the major religions traditionally lived together, emphasising basic human values of compassion and love. Thirdly, his commitment towards Tibet; though he had retired from political responsibility, he was committed to preserving the thousand-year-old Tibetan-Buddhist tradition that came from India; he was also very concerned about the ecology of Tibet—major rivers and lakes were drying up under the impact of environmental degradation and global warming. Fourthly, he was committed to reviving ancient Indian knowledge. He said that India presently was too much into the materialistic way of life, and yet it had the ability and opportunity to combine modern knowledge through modern education, with ancient knowledge based on *karuna* and *ahimsa*.

■ SUHAS BORKER

## Routes for Flights of Freedom

### BOOK DISCUSSION WEBINAR:

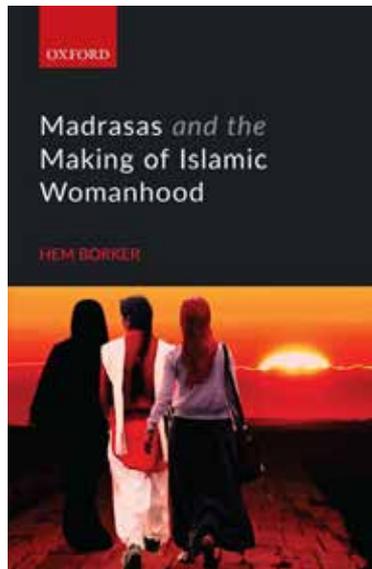
*Madrasas and the Making of Islamic Womanhood*  
By Hem Borker (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018)

**DISCUSSANTS:** Meenakshi Thapan, Aparna Rayaprol and Hem Borker

**MODERATOR:** Humra Quraishi

**28 October 2020**

The discussion was a gentle nudge to understand how young Muslim girls, seemingly confined by the many regimes of madrasas, carve routes for flights of freedom. Thapan and Rayaprol, both well-known sociologists, appreciated the rich descriptions that located agency in the rule-bound confinement of girls attending madrasas. The sensitive portrayals by Borker of the everyday lives of young Muslim girls in madrasas are captivating and engaging. The rich ethnographic content of girls in burqas, engaged in a game of tennis, could be very ordinary images which become instances of the



extraordinary, often missed. There is a dismissive neglect of familiar icons that Borker cites as opportunities for the active minds of the girls to forge new social realities. The many voices convey 'pious submission' or physical restraints to be no constraints for a mindful penetration and for absorbing many co-existing worlds.

From behind the veil and watching life transact on the streets from masked windows, readers would find it difficult to avoid examining the assumptions that disallow valuing surprises in everyday acts. Humra Quraishi moderated the discussion on this thesis-turned-book titled

*Madrasa and the Making of Muslim Womanhood* with sensitivity. The title itself is provocative as madrasas are viewed as flag-bearers for cultural and religious values, and not places that could shape individual identities, or nourish dreams and aspirations.

Borker finds that despite traditional rules and routines and expected compliance by the madrasa inmates, there are big dreams of an aspirational world. Often they reconfigure obedience to cultural beliefs to redefine the ingrained relation to education, marriage and occupational ambitions.

■ ASHA SINGH

## Afghanistan's Peace Process

### NEIGHBOURHOOD FIRST SERIES:

*Coordinated by Ashok Mehta*

**WEBINAR:** *The Afghanistan Peace Process*

**PANELLISTS:** Mahmoud Saikal, Rakesh Sood and Ashok K. Mehta

**CHAIR:** Ashok K. Mehta

**29 October 2020**

Panellist Mahmoud Saikal stated that repeated invasions and war have eroded the social fabric of the country over the years. He added that it was during the period 2002 to 2006 that Afghanistan became a beacon of international cooperation, after toppling the Taliban regime from Kabul. Saikal touched upon the history of the Taliban movement and its politicisation process. In concluding, he commented on the key players in the Afghan Peace Process, and suggested ways in which India can participate in the

same: one way being to establish a trilateral talk involving Kabul and Islamabad, and proactively participating in Afghanistan's economic development.

Laying emphasis on the US's withdrawal from Afghanistan, Sood labelled the Afghan Peace Process as 'The US Troops Withdrawal Agreement'. He then elucidated the key regional stakeholders, and highlighted the lack of synergy between them due to self-interest.

Mehta termed the peace process 'complex' and 'intractable'. He stated that the current talks are at a strategic stalemate as the military advantage is with the Taliban, who are aided and harboured by Pakistan. Drawing parallels with successful peace agreements like the Good Friday Agreement and the Havana Peace Agreement, Mehta added that Afghanistan should not only learn from successful agreements, but also from the failed peace agreements of the Sri Lankan government-LTTE talks and Indo-Pak talks.

■ KUSHAL SINHA

## Mystical Landscape

**ONLINE EXHIBITION:** *Spiti–Paradise Unveiled*  
An exhibition of photographs by Kishore Thukral  
**2 to 15 November 2020**

Spiti, a lesser known terrain in the Lahul and Spiti valley, is a path not often taken. With stark landscapes, cerulean blue skies, monasteries hidden away in mountains, and gentle smiling people, it embodies a spiritual, mystical yet calm landscape.

Kishore Thukral captured it through his lens and through Haiku-like poetry in words. Section one, *Gateway to Paradise*, contained photographs of brightly coloured prayer flags against bright blue skies; fluttering, they appeared like sentinels guarding the passage into the valley.

*Rugged Moonscapes* hauntingly recorded beautiful images of a monochromatic landscape, interspersed with rivers and roads against a backdrop of snow-capped mountains.

In the next section, *Life in Paradise*, Thukral showed the beauty of a landscape where nature abounds with potato, barley and peas. His images of smiling faces and green fields made us ‘see’ the peaceful coexistence of man, nature and life cycles.

*Lama Series of Paradise* focused on the monasteries, tucked away on barren hillsides, small temples, and an



insight into the cultural beauty of Spiti. Well-known for its intricate Thankas, elaborate idols and the vigour of *chham* dances, these images effectively captured the finer nuances of life in this stark landscape. Young and old alike were wreathed in smiles, and the image of a young lama boy showed a thoughtful mind.

In the last section, *Serene Snowscapes*, Thukral once again showed us the beauty of this pristine landscape, where the white reflected the light, a lone eagle flew, a hush seemed to fall on this ethereal panorama of beauty, a paradise in deep valleys.

■ LOLITA DUTTA

## Epicurean and Gastronomic Delight

**FILM:** *Focus Japan—A Culinary Tale—Trails to Oishii Kyoto*.

**COLLABORATION:** *NHK Japan, the Embassy of Japan in New Delhi and the IIC*

**2 to 8 November 2020**

The focus of the film was on tracking a few of the highlights of the fabled Kyoto Oishii cuisine. It was an epicurean and gastronomic delight, even cinematographically exquisite.

Amidst the very picturesque seasonal scapes of Kyoto, the former Imperial capital of Japan, situated in a low-lying basin surrounded by mountains, Kyoto cuisine developed its excellence in vegetables. As the finest vegetables and fresh produce came from around Japan at the behest of

the Imperial court, the temples and the monasteries, Kyoto cuisine became a hallmark of fine dining.

The film took viewers on midnight fishing expeditions in the high seas close to the island of Nishima to catch the nocturnal *hamo*, the fabled saltwater eel using live baby octopus bait; showed glimpses of the *honegiri* process of fish cutting to the Nishiki market at night; the Hamo Mitsui festival in Kyoto over the months of July to August each year; the unique Manganji Togarashi green peppers; the Kamonasu eggplant named after the Kamo shrine; the Shishigatani squash; the Shogoin pickled turnips; delectable fish preparations using seaweed and fermented vegetables in open air rooftop dining as also *in haute* dining; and finally, amidst the tea garden scapes, the making of the *Matcha*, the green tea processes which came to Japan from China in the 16th century.

■ MEKHALA SENGUPTA

# Zeroing in on Climate Change

## WEBINAR AND LAUNCH OF IIC QUARTERLY WINTER 2019/SPRING 2020:

*The Crisis of Climate Change*

**MODERATOR:** Ravi Agarwal

**INTRODUCTION:** Dr. Karan Singh

**SPEAKERS:** Nagraj Adve and Ruchira Talukdar

**11 November 2020**

This was the first time that the special issue of the *IIC Quarterly* was launched online, a sine qua non of the Covid era. Guest Editor Ravi Agarwal mentioned that this issue being dedicated to Climate Change was very relevant, given the desire not to allow temperature and carbon dioxide emissions to exceed a certain level before the year 2050. The articles by Navroz K. Dubash and Soumya Swaminathan deserve mention, he said.

Dr. Karan Singh, in his introductory remarks, said that it was heartening to note that the US under the new administration would be rejoining the Paris Accord. He went on to add that environmental degradation had taken place before our eyes over the years, and thus this issue on the subject

of the 'Crisis of Climate Change' was both timely and appropriate. Nagraj Adve, author of the book, *Global Warming in India: An Overview*, referred to the leadership and imagination vacuum of certain developed countries on this crucial question, and the export of natural gas by the US causing concern.

Ruchira Talukdar of the University of Technology, Sydney, said that the Carbon Tax Legislation in Australia was unfortunately annulled, and the carbon footprint had increased drastically after the Adani group began setting up the Carmichael coal mine in Queensland with disastrous consequences.

■ ARVINDAR SINGH



# Biden's Foreign Policy

## WEBINAR:

*A Foreign Policy Agenda for President-Elect Biden*

**PANELLISTS:** T.P. Sreenivasan, Meera Shankar and Devesh Kapur

**17 November 2020**

This panel was best suited to judge what Biden's foreign policy might be. Each individual has several years of experience and expertise at the very top of their professions, as ambassadors of India and in academia.

T.P. Sreenivasan said that Biden's urgent 'mission is to return to a well-defined, consistent and predictable foreign policy', and 'repair the damage done globally by Trump to international institutions.' Biden plans to return to the WHO before China takes it over completely, and sees India within an Indo-Pacific context, along with American allies Japan, Australia and Indonesia. India has an important role in repairing the disrupted supply chain of China. In short, one may expect stability in bilateral relations based on shared concerns.

Meera Shankar said that Biden, a traditionalist, will effect a 'major transition'. He plans to mend the relationship with NATO, re-enter the Paris Agreement, and the US-Iran Nuclear Deal if Iran will return to compliance under an IAEA certification. US policy has also caused Russia to tilt towards China. China is a formidable challenge to the US for global leadership. This also affects India. Biden will look to extend the START Treaty with Russia for another five years. His China strategy will encompass security and trade issues in a strengthening of coalition partners, including bilateral relations with India.

Devesh Kapur said that Trump may go, 'but "Trumpism" is alive'. There is a polarisation of American society, and as the Republicans have generally performed better than the Democrats, they will influence the mandate. Therefore, Biden will find it hard to get consensus on fundamental issues like Climate Change. Biden, resonating with Trump, also has his version of *atmanirbhar*. He will decouple with China, but more slowly. China is simply too big for the US to impose its will. The UN is broken; the WTO weakened. For India, the relationship will be more predictable, but it will also depend on what India wants.

■ ARUNA RODRIGUES

# Chocolate, Ceramics and Culture

**IN CONVERSATION:** *From Chocolates to Ceramics: Tracking Adil Writer*

*Adil Writer, ceramic artist, painter and architect in conversation with Shernaz Cama*

**COLLABORATION:** *Parzor Foundation and Jiyo Parsi*

**9 to 15 November 2020**

Some of us remember 'Writer's Chocolates' as a specialty which came in delicate wrapping and boxes; a treat of childhood. We are luckier than the grandson of Writer's Chocolates, because he never got to taste this delicacy. Yet, Adil's work is full of memory in his creations of ceramics, stone and paintings. As he states, 'I am a Parsi Zoroastrian. I find fossilized customs unnecessary... but am constantly drawn to my Zoroastrian heritage... I love to discover stories... intrigued by objects... soon becoming extinct'. Adil's other passion is cricket, and he is proud of the large



installations which have become 'conversation pieces' at Sachin Tendulkar's homes in Bombay and Goa. His creations span size and time, each one symbolic and unique.

Preparing for his Parzor *Friday Forum* conversation, he said that his parents gave him the freedom to choose his way of life, and allowed him to leave engineering and architecture. His creativity drew him to Auroville. He has been living for the last 17 years in an art-filled international community, where the residents 'take a non-sectarian approach to life'. Therefore, it is not religion but culture, including the Beatles and Pink Floyd, that drives him to preserve the best. The interesting aspect that emerged from the conversation was how racial memory preserves both the tangible and intangible, while, for members of a demographically dwindling community, simultaneous adaptation and preservation through memory creates objects which intrigue the world. The *Red-Dot* is Adil's trademark, found in every one of his works: a homage to the symbolism of India, signifying blessings, festivity and life itself.

■ **SHERNAZ CAMA**

# Composite Culture of Kashmir

**ILLUSTRATED LECTURE:**

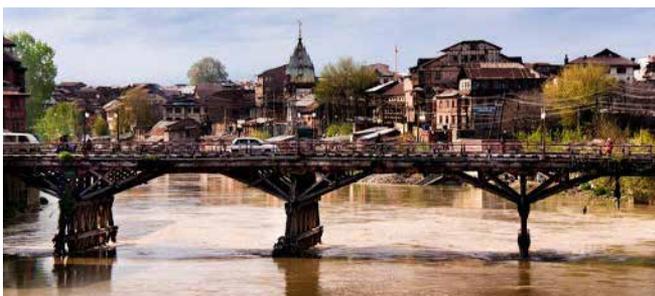
*A Journey through Shehr-I-Kashmir*

**SPEAKER:** *M. Saleem Beg*

**9 to 15 November 2020**

Beg highlighted the composite culture of Kashmir through architectural traditions, generously illustrated with maps and photographs.

Srinagar was for centuries the northernmost city on the route from Central Asia towards the plains of the subcontinent. The river Jhelum with 500 tributaries shaped a riverine settlement that became the 'Venice of the East'. Road access was only built in the late 19th century.



Kalhana, a 12th century poet-historian, described wooden structures five storeys high. No nails or steel were used, yet the structures withstood centuries of weathering and earthquakes. Photographs of a riverfront taken a century apart show almost no change in the size and style of construction. Elaborate *jaali* work and aesthetic projections called *dab* ensured that the indoors were sunlit and airy.

After Independence, across new India, an ethos of steel and concrete vandalised vernacular beauty. INTACH stepped in only in 1988. After intensive documentation, 838 historical properties were listed, and conservation efforts to prevent further 'loss of cohesion' began. The presentation continued with photographs of many one-of-a-kind structures: a 15th century mausoleum of bricks, the stone *Shahi Masjid*; Akbar's *Kathi Darwaza* to commemorate Mughal arrival; as well as typical wooden buildings of which the *kanqah* of Shah Hamdan is most notable.

The Juma Masjid had a stupa-like structure with a *shikhar* above, while the Jhelum temple was topped with a dome. Inscriptions on cenotaphs were in Persian, Sharada and Sanskrit. The syncretic ethos of Srinagar that thrived from 250 BC onwards now needs urgent conservation.

■ **BHARATI MIRCHANDANI**

## Challenges of the New Education Policy 2020

### WEBINAR:

*The New National Education Policy 2020*

**SPEAKERS:** Anurag Behar, Krishna Kumar and Shyam B. Menon

**DISCUSSANTS:** Amitabha Bhattacharya

**CHAIR:** Shri N.N. Vohra, President, IIC

**25 September 2020**

The deliberations centred upon the newly drafted national education policy (NEP), the rationale, the perspective from the point of view of school and higher education, and the possible challenges in the implementation of this new directive.

There is merit in the NEP in that it mentions the importance of establishing income parity among all teachers in primary, secondary and higher education; of empowering teachers; of discontinuing the present system of imparting B.Ed. degrees; giving autonomy to educational institutions; of emphasising the need for developing skills; and the

need for research in the education system. These are all goals to be applauded.

However, the document suffers from a major lacuna. It is deficient in not including any analysis of the reasons for prior successes and failures in education in India, which have led to the present malfunctioning system. There is frequent mention of the education systems of ancient India and their virtues, but there is silence on what has happened in the education field in the last 200 years.

The term 'multi-disciplinary' education is used so frequently that it is difficult to understand both meaning and scope. During the sessions, these exact merits and concerns were raised. The NEP in its current form, while having noble goals, is a vision statement, without the necessary documents or data to support the changes in policy and strategy.

There is also concern that the NEP, if implemented in toto, can result in a dilution of the successful, but stringent, norms developed so far. Further, given the fear which is presently rife across campuses in the country, and the unlikely availability of funding as education is a state subject, the NEP does not bode well in its present form. It will therefore be a challenge to implement it.

■ MEKHALA SENGUPTA

## Pan-human Nature of Disability and Art

### EXHIBITION: *Born to Perform*

*Online exhibition of photographs by Vijay S. Jodha*

**COLLABORATION:** UNESCO, New Delhi Office

**FILM FESTIVAL:** *Framing Abilities – I & II*

*A festival of films on disability organised in collaboration with We Care Film Fest and Brotherhood.*

**30 November to 6 December 2020**

This exhibition commemorated International Day of Persons with Disabilities on 3 December. It featured Jodha's portraits of some of the world's finest and most inspiring performing artists who happen to be physically challenged. It was a compact, colourful collage of dancers, musicians and singers from more than 10 countries in Asia and Europe. The performers were in elaborate costumes, giving a keen vibrancy to the representations, pushing their physical disability to the periphery of perception.

While disability activists may criticise the exhibition for catering to the non-disabled viewer by elevating disability to align it with creativity, the photographs highlighted how art overrides all ideas of disability and ability.

Simultaneously, 'Framing Abilities' was an online festival of films around disability. It comprised 10 award-winning short documentaries from Burma/Japan, Lebanon, India, Iran, Italy, and Trinidad & Tobago. The films delved into the lived realities of ordinary people living with disabilities in their search for meaning and joy as they confront the barriers of an able-bodied society. Both the expositions drew attention to the relatively unexplored area of disability art, moving beyond the mere representations of persons with disabilities through art to the creative potential of artists with disabilities. The global sweep enriched the experience of the viewer by highlighting the pan-human nature of both disability and art.

■ RENU ADDLAKHA

## ‘UJIYAARE KA DAAN’

‘Ujiyaare ka daan’—a poem and ode to Mahatma Gandhi, written by Janaab Krishna Mohan—was presented by Meera Bhatia on the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti on 2 October 2020. Janaab Krishna Mohan was an Indian Revenue Service Officer, and a poet who was the recipient of the prestigious ‘All India Hindi Urdu Sangam’ award,

besides many other awards. The poem Bhatia recited was from a poetry collection titled *Roopras*, which was translated in Hindi script. Two lines from the poem are evocative: *Satya ka paalan karne wale, Ae gyaani vidvaan, Tera jeevan the sansaar ki shaan.*

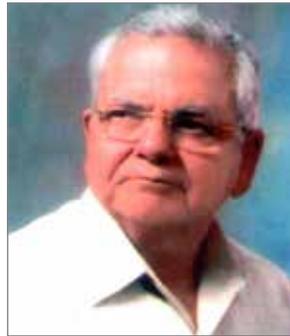
‘By reciting the poem we celebrated and remembered the father of the Nation’, said Bhatia, ‘keeping in line with the culture of the IIC where we mark major national events’.

## DEPARTURES

We are deeply saddened by the passing away of the following Members of the IIC family and convey our heartfelt sympathy to the bereaved families:



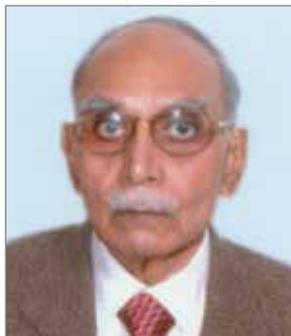
**SHRI ASHOK HARIBHAI DESAI**  
Membership No. L-0353



**DR. SURESH CHANDRA GUPTA**  
Membership No. M-4090



**MS. PREM K. KRISHNAN**  
Membership No. A-4065



**DR. S. P. VISHNOI**  
Membership No. M-2472



**SMT. PREMINDA SEN**  
Membership No. A-0764



**MS REETA SONDHI**  
Membership No. A-4121

Regreat  
inability  
to obtain  
photograph

**SHRI SANJOY BAGCHI**  
Membership No. A-2714



## Director's Note

The pandemic, which hit us in March last year, has adversely affected all our activities and seriously dented our financial position. We also missed organising our annual Art Festival which used to bring a very large number of our Members and others to enjoy the aesthetic presentations and also relish varied cuisines. We shall review the situation in the coming days and see if we can organise a short celebration in Spring.

For the past two years work has been underway to improve the IIC Website, which has since been upgraded and is more accessible. It will keep our Members informed about all major developments at the Centre, particularly providing information about all membership-related matters. For those who have not been browsing our Website, the fresh inductions are as follows: 23 applicants inducted under the Overseas Associate Membership (OAM) category; 16 spouses of deceased Members granted Associate Membership; 11 Associate Members (AM) have been migrated to Member (M) category; 182 applicants have been inducted under the Short Term Associate Membership (STAM) category against available vacancies; 03 Short Term Associate Members have been inducted under the Member (M) category (they were admitted by The Admission Committee [TAC] at its meeting held in March 2020, but had not paid their Membership fees within the given time frame); 02 Short Term Associate Members have been inducted under Associate Member (A) category (they were cleared by the TAC in March 2020 but were late in paying their Membership fees); 08 Institutions were inducted as Corporate Members; and 03 Institutions were inducted as new Corporate Associate Members (CA).

Full details of the aforesaid upgradations/inductions may be seen on the IIC Website.

As per the new Individual Membership Policy, fresh inductions are being done only under the STAM category for an initial period of three years, which is extendable by another two years (i.e., 3+2=5 years) on case-to-case basis. All those who complete five years become eligible for being considered for regular membership (in the M and AM categories). 118 STAM were inducted as regular members in March 2020, based on the decision of The Admission Committee (TAC).

Notwithstanding the varied constraints which arise from the pandemic our excellent cooks and talented catering staff has put in continuing hard work to present, every weekend, special cuisines from different parts of India as well as some popular foreign cuisines. This mini Food Festival has been highly appreciated across the membership. Side by side, our Bakery has been providing a large variety of confectionary, both domestic and continental.

For our winter gardens, we had sown flower seeds and planted seedlings raised by our gardeners from seeds procured from selected sources. Chrysanthemums, in varied colours, have been a grand success. Other flowers are also blooming very well.

In the last Diary, I had written about the establishment at the Centre of the Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) and the Biogas Plant. Both these systems were formally commissioned by President Vohra on 8 October 2020.

Members would be happy to know that we have commenced preparatory work to install an elevator (abutting the Lounge Verandah) to provide easy access to the Dining Hall, Terrace Pergola and Conference Room II.

To meet the very significant adverse financial effect of Covid-19, we are trying our best to raise whatever revenues we can, within the obtaining restrictions, and also curtailing expenditures on all fronts. The Finance Review Committee (FRC), constituted by the President, is regularly reviewing the Centre's financial position.

The 'Protocol for IIC Members', reflected on the IIC Website, has also been circulated to all our Members. We expect Members to adhere to the Protocol in letter and spirit, and preserve the enviable ethos of the Centre.

Our Library has been progressively enhancing the provision of easy-to-use search systems to enable our readers and scholars to conveniently access primary sources, books, newspapers, manuscripts, maps, journals, government publications and reports. Under the Library's digitisation project of retro-conversion from print to digital of its rare collections, 3,145 books comprising 11,79,353 pages have been digitised as of now.

■ K. N. SHRIVASTAVA

---

*This issue of the Diary has been assembled and edited by Omita Goyal, Chief Editor; Ritu Singh, Deputy Editor; Rachna Joshi, Senior Asstt. Editor. Published by Kanwal Wali, for the India International Centre, 40, Max Mueller Marg, Lodhi Estate, New Delhi - 110003. Ph.: 24619431. Designed and printed by Facet Design, D-9, Defence Colony, New Delhi-110024; Phone: 24624336.*