

SUMMER 2018



# IIC Quarterly

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*Harold A. Davis*

# IIC SUMMER 2018 Quarterly

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The India International Centre is a society promoting understanding and amity between the different communities of the world by undertaking or supporting the study of their past and present cultures, by disseminating or exchanging knowledge thereof and by providing such other facilities as would lead to their universal appreciation



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# EDITORIAL

**T**his is the month of June. Each year, since 2015, 21 June is celebrated across the world as International Day for Yoga. Despite being contested by many, yoga is a basic principle, a philosophy that cuts across all boundaries. Originating in the Sanskrit *yuj*, meaning ‘to yoke’, yoga is a body of knowledge that shows us a way of life that harmonises the body and mind through physical exercise and meditation.

Yoga is more relevant today than ever before. Life is becoming increasingly stressful and competitive, and this has an adverse impact on our physical and mental health. Even the young are not spared and suicide among youth is not unknown. Nor can we be insulated from the violence and terror that we experience, either directly or indirectly. Unfortunately, this is the reality. Yoga is certainly not the panacea for all ills, but it could help us find some respite.

The Summer issue of the *IIC Quarterly* is not thematic, and the articles cover a wide range of topics—from mythology to law; from literature to globalisation. I will introduce them briefly here.

The theme of mythology is the core of Ratnottama Sengupta’s paper in this issue. Today, mere mention of religion and Hinduism in particular gives rise to heated emotions. In this climate, her paper comes as a breath of fresh air, as it looks beyond the ugly politics of it. She eloquently shows how mythology, gods and icons have been, are, and will continue to be a part of our lives. Taking examples from literature, cinema, art, theatre and television, she takes us through the endless retellings of the epics and other stories, right up to the iconic film *PK*, which, in the words of a film critic, is as much philosophy as film.

In a slightly different context, Sutapa Dutta looks at interpretations of literature in terms of the reciprocal relationship between a writer and the socio-political situation in which he or she writes, the effect literature has on the time it was written, and how it might impact future generations. In doing this, she focuses

on two historical novels written in India in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay—social reformer, freedom fighter, institution builder, a feminist ahead of her times, and the force behind the revival of Indian crafts and textiles—has a special place in the history of the IIC as Life Trustee and its first Vice-President. This issue has a paper by Varsha Shenoy that gives us a different insight to Kamaladevi's life, the Chitrapur Saraswat Brahmin community into which she was born, the social-cultural milieu in which she was raised, and how the community viewed the 'woman question'.

Kavita Sharma's paper looks at an under-researched aspect of the phenomenon of globalisation—transnational relationships, and more specifically, inter-parental child abduction. She examines in detail the debates in this field, and the effect on children and women who bear the brunt when they are forced to flee from a failed marriage.

Partha Ghosh draws attention to a neglected and shrinking community in his paper on Parsi personal law. He examines a specific case pending in the Supreme Court, in which some of the critical questions being pondered are whether a Parsi woman ceases to be a Parsi once she marries a non-Parsi. Or, can a non-Parsi woman join the Parsi fold if she marries a Parsi? The crux of personal law reform, concludes Ghosh, is gender justice.

Sometime last year, I came across an article by journalist Swapna Majumdar on Joyita Mondal, India's first transgender judge of a Lok Adalat and a social worker from West Bengal. I asked Swapna if she would interview her for the *Quarterly*. Joyita's life story is a lesson not only in how to beat adversity, but how to funnel that into helping others in similar circumstances.

The photo essay on Rajinder Puri's cartoons by Partha Chatterjee and Arvind Singh is based on their recent book. The cartoons are hilarious and satirical; they reflect his political activism, as well as the times in which we live.

We have all endured the bitter summer heat, and I hope that when this issue reaches you, temperatures will have mellowed and we can look forward to the rains.



OMITA GOYAL