

## Odyssey of Thought

**BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP:** *The Great Hindu Civilisation: Achievement, Neglect, Bias and the Way Forward*

By Pavan K. Varma (New Delhi: Westland Non-fiction, 2021)

**DISCUSSANTS:** *Seshadri Chari; Shri K. N. Shrivastava; and Pavan K. Varma*

**CHAIR:** *Dr. Karan Singh*

**11 October 2021**

This book is the latest addition to the author's wide array of notable publications, and a much-needed title in these present times. Unlike many other great civilisations of the past, Hindu civilisation has not become an antique part of history. It is important to know more about this because it has survived despite its weaknesses and because of its strengths.

The webinar was very engaging and discussions centred on the many facets of the book—both substantial and controversial. Dr. Karan Singh praised the book for its research and its 'majestic sweep', but also pointed out errors with a disclaimer that only two errors in such a huge volume was actually a tribute to the book!

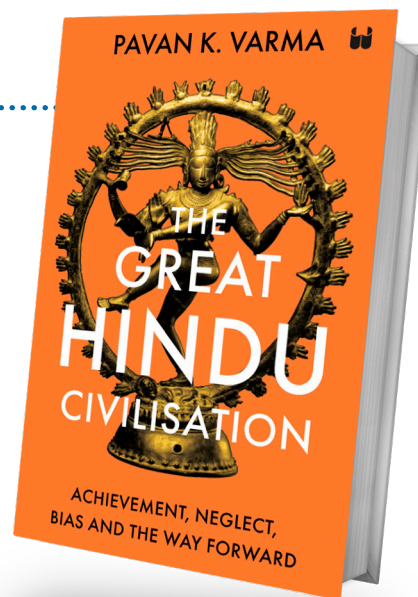
Seshadri Chari pointed out quite candidly that the author 'had taken a big risk' because many readers would suspect him of being an RSS man till they actually reached the end

of the book! He complimented Varma for eloquently writing about the core features of Hindu civilisation in his Preface, and for not making any attempt to define the term 'Hindu', which he used in the title of the book. Chari quoted from many books—*We, the People* by Nani Palkhivala, *Hindu Polity* by K. P. Jaiswal, etc. He remarked that the most important facet of the book was the differentiation between modernisation and Westernisation.

K. N. Shrivastava commented that the book was very well researched. He said that he liked the way Varma represented Hinduism's greatest strength as being founded first and foremost in the odyssey of thought. 'I like the way you have expounded that facts should be told as they are', laying emphasis in the book on the Islamic chapters and the Bhakti movement of the country. He felt that working together to eliminate the bad practices so that the real glory of Hindu civilisation is not rejected by the world community was the way forward.

The author explained the purpose for writing the book. 'I strongly believe that there is a lack of interest, bordering on indifference among Hindus themselves, to the great treasury of wisdom that exists within Hinduism and Hindu civilisation.' He wanted to fill that gap. And provide pointers. 'I took on board blemishes but tried to put them in perspective'.

He spoke about the remarkable achievements of our civilisation in the fields of art, culture, science, literature, political science and the 'cerebral legacy' of its wonderful



scriptures. He was forthright in his insights about British colonisation and the Islamic invasion. 'The main purpose is not the physical subjugation of the conquered but the colonisation of their mind. And what it did to Hindu civilisation.' He stated that his intention was not to be one-sided or dismissive. He did not deny the Muslim development of a syncretic culture and interface. 'But I must acknowledge what else happened in history as facts and the manner that Hinduism survived that.'

He spoke about the great challenge today—reform within Hinduism. 'Swami Vivekanand, Ambedkar, Gandhi, Sri

Aurobindo, all advocated this, but where is that reform today? That is why I say that what we need is not Hindutva but Hindu Satya. Let that shine through once again as we introspect about this great civilisation and let us correct this distortion both on the Left and the Right!' Needless to say, the author ended his remarks with his confident, all knowing trademark smile!

Dr. Karan Singh concluded that the book had a beautiful cover and was very good. He remarked, 'Every intellectual book stands for its principle.'

■ SANJULA SHARMA

## Bleak Vision

**FILM:** *Ivan's Childhood*

**DIRECTOR:** *Andrei Tarkovsky*

**11 to 17 October 2021**


*Ivan's Childhood* (1962) is Andrei Tarkovsky's first feature film. It is set in Soviet Russia during World War II. Hitler's Nazi army is already a palpably threatening force on Russian soil. The Soviet communists are fighting heroically and in their midst is Ivan Bondarev, a 12-year-old orphan spying on the enemy. His mother has been shot by the Germans and his father, a border guard, has been killed at the outset of the invasion.

Ivan is a child spy, loved by all the people he works for, and his courage borders on the reckless. His adult soldier comrades fear for his safety, but find him indispensable to report on enemy positions because of his ability to make himself inconspicuous.

Vadim Yusov's poetic, melancholic Black and White photography brings alive Tarkovsky's bleak vision of war and its impact on the psyche of ordinary sensitive people. Ivan has lost his childhood irretrievably; Lyudmila Feginova's editing poignantly brings home this point in short flashback scenes with Ivan and his mother in happier times. Particularly affecting is the final elegiac scene of the film where little Ivan is seen on a river bank running behind a little girl in play. This acquires a heart-breaking resonance when it is juxtaposed to an earlier one after the victory of the Allies over the Germans, and a passport-sized photo of Ivan turns up amongst those shot by the Germans at the close of the war.

Tarkovsky films the entire milieu of a land at war with shattering authenticity, perhaps unequalled in the annals of cinema. His vision of the violence of war being the worst of all diseases affecting humankind as it destroys not only the body, but also the mind and soul, haunts you. He bolsters this idea subtly by inserting graphics on the nature of violence by the prescient German medieval artist Albrecht Durer, seen by Ivan in a book. Tarkovsky handles time and memory like a true master.

■ PARTHA CHATTERJEE



India International Centre  
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INDIA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE IIC where ideas grow

**Ivan's Childhood (Ivanovo detstvo/Russia)**  
(91 min; 1962; b/w; Russian with English subtitles)  
Director: Andrei Tarkovsky

Recipient of the Golden Gate Award for Best Director, San Francisco International Film Festival 1962; and Golden Lion, Venice Film Festival 1962

Programme • 11 - 17 Oct 2021 • IIC Website - [www.iicdelhi.in/](http://www.iicdelhi.in/) • All Day

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# Powerful and Disturbing

**FILM:** *The Invisible Visible*

**DIRECTOR:** Kireet Khurana

**COLLABORATION:** *Business and Community Foundation*

**8 October 2021**

Veteran documentarist and AD filmmaker, Kireet Khurana's *Invisible Visible*, made in 2019, is a deeply disturbing documentary about the homeless and marginalised in India. It is made in collaboration with the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, and guided by the leading researcher on the subject, Tarique Mohd Qureshi (founder of Koshish, an NGO). It has been shot in several locations—



Patna, Muzzafarpur, Mumbai, Kanpur, and some villages in Maharashtra. The structure is episodic.

The most moving episode is set in a shelter home for women in Muzzafarpur which was being run as a brothel. Protesting young women, many in their early teens, were being supplied to various powerful people for sexual favours. Those who protested were murdered. It was an NGO named Seva Sankalp Evam Vikas Samiti, run with generous grants from the government. Thanks to a detailed research report by Tata Institute of Social Sciences on the scandal, a Delhi Court sentenced Brajesh Thakur, the director of the establishment, and 18 others, to serve a back-to-back life sentence in prison. That economically marginalised young women should be easy prey for sexual perverts with clout is a matter of undying national shame.

There are 70 million Indian citizens who live on the streets of various cities and towns; the plight of the homeless is brought home by the team in Mumbai after talking to the hapless victims of the state's neglect. One of the street dwellers declares in despair after being repeatedly harassed by the police and municipal workers, 'Get 4-5 litres of kerosene and burn us to death. The problem will cease to exist.' There are many others who are willing to fight for their rights. Not everything is bleak. An elderly lady in an old age home for the poor is suddenly united with her son who takes her back home.

The inputs of Tarique Mohd Qureshi must be appreciated, along with Kireet Khurana's powerful direction.

■ PARTHA CHATTERJEE

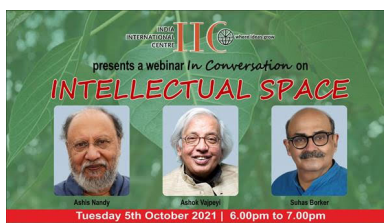
# Plural Space

**WEBINAR:** *In Conversation on Intellectual Space*

**PANELLISTS:** *Ashis Nandy; Ashok Vajpeyi; and Suhas Borker*

**5 October 2021**

For the first time, an in-house webcast was done from a makeshift IIC studio with a single, fixed auto camera, with three panellists in the same frame—an innovative way to reach out across tough Covid times. Interestingly, the three panellists—Ashis Nandy, Ashok Vajpeyi and Suhas Borker—are all elected representatives from IIC's



individual members' constituency, talking of 'Intellectual Space', both at the micro level (IIC is not a club but an intellectual hub) and the macro level (India, Bharat—virtual disappearance of civilised discourse), when, in 2022, IIC reaches the landmark of 60 years and India commemorates 75 years of Independence.

The context of the conversation was the strong public perception that there is an 'undeclared emergency' and that the 'media is under siege' in India. Fake news, tweets and violent threats from assembly lines of troll factories—symptomatic of a Goebbelsian mindset—are subverting democratic processes. TV studios have become courts, anchors have become judges, and prime time debates are hearings. A false narrative is let loose; information is suppressed; the Prime Minister gives no interviews; no



one can ask any questions; dissent and criticism are curbed; there is no question hour in Parliament; federalism is under severe attack.

Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci, who gave much thought to the role of intellectuals in society and was imprisoned by Mussolini's fascist regime, was born exactly 73 years before, in 1891, the same day the IIC was founded in 1962 (22 January). Democracy developed deep roots in countries with strong civil society institutions. How could books be proscribed by universities? Was this an attempt

to de-intellectualise society? Given the very grain of Indian intellectual tradition, which was rich with contradictions and full of dissent and debate, all such attempts would miserably fail (*purva paksha* being as important as *uttar paksha*, involving a deep familiarity with the opponent's point of view before criticising it, for example the powerful interpretation of Sāṅkhya). Since the academic freedom of universities was being curbed, should the role of free discussion and dissent be taken over by civil society institutions like IIC? Space for ideas has to be essentially a plural space.

■ SUHAS BORKER

## Drive and Depression

**FILM:** *Sylvia Plath: Voices and Visions*

**DIRECTOR:** *Lawrence Pitkethly*

*Produced by New York Center for Visual History*

**4 to 10 October 2021**

Sylvia Plath, American poet, novelist and short-story writer, gained recognition posthumously by winning the Pulitzer Award in 1982 for her collected poems. A documentary on her by Juliana Carvalho, titled *Sylvia Plath: Voices and Visions*, gives a good insight into the person that Sylvia was. In the documentary, her mother, Aurelia Schober Plath, speaks about her daughter's intellect and challenges.

Born in 1932 in Boston, Sylvia's first poem was published in the children's section of the *Boston Herald*, when she was just eight years old. Over the next few years, many of her poems were published in regional magazines and newspapers.

'By the time Sylvia turned 11 she began keeping a journal,' her mother Aurelia said. She also showed early promise as an

artist, winning an award for her paintings from the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards in 1947.

What is ironic is that, despite the fact that Sylvia was driven to succeed, she was also at the same time fighting depression.

According to her mother, Sylvia was deeply impacted by the death of her father less than two weeks after her eighth birthday in 1940. It made Sylvia lose her faith in religion, and she was ambivalent about it till the end of her life. A visit to her father's grave later prompted her to write the poem 'Electra on Azalea Path'.

She married a poet, Ted Hughes, in 1956, but they had a tumultuous marriage. His having an affair shattered her further. Even though Sylvia excelled academically, she was clinically depressed for most of her adult life, and was treated multiple times with electroconvulsive therapy. She attempted suicide a few times, and finally killed herself in her kitchen in 1963. Her daughter Freida and son Nicolas were aged just two and one, respectively, at the time.

Sylvia is best known for *The Colossus and Other Poems*; *Ariel*; and *The Bell Jar*.

■ YESHI SELI





body elections. She also highlighted the dilemmas of the visible and invisible sides of the negotiating table, where group concerns are conveniently ignored at the other end of the table due to vested interests, making the peacemaking

exercise futile. Pradip Phanjoubam attempted to provide the key to the how's and why's of the situation through theoretical insights from Weber, Engels, Gramsci and others, rounding off his remarks by proposing a new and dynamic moral imagination, one that, although inspired by tradition, must be flexible to address changing realities.

The poster is for a webinar titled "PEACEWOMEN OF NORTHEAST INDIA" organized by WISCOMP and IIC. It is part of the WISCOMP Dialogues series. The event is scheduled for 1 November 2021, from 4:30 PM to 6:00 PM. The speakers listed are Dr. Roshmi Goswami (Feminist Human Rights Activist and Independent Researcher), Pradip Phanjoubam (Editor, Imphal Review of Arts & Politics and author of The Northeast Question: Conflicts and Frontiers), Patricia Mukhim (Editor, The Shillong Times), and Dr. Rakhee Kalita Moral (Moderator, Associate Professor, Department of English and Chair, Women's Studies Center, Cotton University, Guwahati). The poster also includes a brief description of the dialogue's focus on Northeast India's geo-political emergence and the role of women in peacebuilding.

Roshmi Goswami highlighted that women of the northeast have played a crucial role in the framing of UN-CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women). According to her, these organic leaders played a pivotal role in expanding the definition of violence in the provisions of CEDAW. Despite this significant achievement, the ambivalent and often complacent and complicit role of the burgeoning middle class poses a serious problem for peace efforts.

Many assertions of the distinguished panel, seemingly contradictory, finally converged to complement each other in meaningful ways. Rakhee Kalita brought the discussion together by underlining that both the silent peacewomen with their murmurs of resistance from the street and everyday quotidian life, together with the potent voices of women journalists and women from the field of literature, foreground the significance of peacewomen of northeast India. These offer hope for a new way of talking peace, she asserted.

■ LAKSHMI BHATIA

## A Window to the Central European Present and Past

**FILM FESTIVAL:** *Istvan Szabo Retrospective: Central European Present and Past in Film*

**COLLABORATION:** *Liszt Institute-Hungarian Cultural Centre Delhi; and University of Delhi*

**15 November 2021**

Istvan Szabo, director exemplar in more than one sense, has defined the way we make films and appreciate our times and the times gone by. Watching his films also makes us imbricate ourselves in the ongoing battle of ideas, including the way we deal with our nemesis and have in the past rebuilt our broken societies.

The retrospective of four of Szabo's films, i.e., *Father* (1966), *Budapest Tales* (1977), *Hanussen* (1982) and *Col. Redl* (1988)

was a timely tribute to the master. The retrospective was accompanied by an engaging workshop conducted by one of the creative contemporary interpreters of Istvan Szabo's cinematic oeuvre, Balazs Varga of the prestigious ELTE (Eötvös Loránd) University of Budapest. The presence of an enthusiastic group of scholars from the city, including those from the Centre for Media Studies, JNU, was a reminder that the IIC has remained at the centre of viewing and discoursing serious world cinema.

The four films represented some of the important phases and recurrent themes of Istvan Szabo's repertoire. The search for the lost father, for example, and the seamless change of times in a cinematic landscape gave *Father* the touch of a masterpiece. The young boy Tako, in the process of looking for his dead father, in fact weaves a fantastic world around the latter. Soon, the grown-up Tako, a youth participating in the 1956 Hungarian revolution, while reliving the fantasy also discovers that he needs to search for the history of his true father. This is a film about history and myth making, and yet it is also a coming-of-age story and therefore remains timeless.

India International Centre  
presents István Szabó Retrospective: Central European Present and Past in Film



**8 Nov 2021 at 6:30 PM**  
**Budapest Tales** (Hungary)  
(90 min; 1977; dud; Hungarian with English subtitles)  
Director: István Szabó



**9 Nov 2021 at 6:30 PM**  
**Hanussen** (Hungary)  
(140 min; 1988; dud; Hungarian with English subtitles)  
Director: István Szabó



**12 Nov 2021 at 6:30 PM**  
**Father** (Hungary)  
(88 min; 1966; dud; Hungarian with English subtitles)  
Director: István Szabó



**15 Nov 2021 at 6:30 PM**  
**Colonel Redl** (Hungary)  
(144 min; 1985; dud; Hungarian with English subtitles)  
Director: István Szabó

Venue: CD Deshmukh Auditorium

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*Budapest Tales* represents the finest of post-war European cinema, talking about rebuilding the community with hope and human goodness. In the workshop session, Varga underscored the idea that 'the tram' and 'the depot', the two central motifs of the film, symbolised Budapest itself, while also delivering a universal message. A broken tram taken to the tracks and started by a couple of men became home for all those devastated souls who travelled from all over, and symbolised much-needed hope in the critical post-war era.

The wounded Austrian soldier, Klaus Schneider, assumes the name Hanussen when it was discovered that he could see and tell the future, with the ability to hypnotise. His move to Berlin and rise in fame coincided with the rise of another Austrian wounded soldier, who was also giving the Germans a dream for the future while destroying its democracy. The

two careers came closer with Hanussen seeing the rise of the other future teller as jeopardising his own life. The burning of the Reichstag in 1933 lay in the future, as also Hanussen's death by the followers of the other Austrian, who, while not shown in the film, could be easily identified by members of the audience as Hitler.

Klaus Maria Brandauer, one of the finest contemporary actors, played Alfred Redl, the soldier from a peasant background who rose to the position of a senior army officer who ultimately succumbed to human frailties. The film brought us the complexities of life lived during the last phases of the Imperial era. What tied the films in the retrospective was the ongoing battle for its soul that European society has been witnessing to its peril, as recorded by Istvan Szabo.

■ RAKESH BATBYAL

## Qawwali Festival

**EXHIBITION:** *The Qawwali Photo Project*

**COLLABORATION:** *Sufi Kathak Foundation*

**18 to 28 November 2021**

This unique photo exhibition showcased different facets of Qawwali as an integral part of 'Understanding Qawwali', the ten-day festival conceived and curated by Manjari Chaturvedi, with photographers Dinesh Khanna, Mustafa Qureshi and Leena Kejriwal.

The photo exhibition opened with 'Dastaan-e-Qawwali', a musical introduction to the art and ethos of Qawwali by Janab Askari Naqvi, the famous *Qissago* (storyteller) from Lucknow. Talking about the syncretic tradition of Qawwali, Askari traced its historical and spiritual dimensions, demonstrating the choicest *Qalaams* strewn in the storyline.

Opening with the invocatory *Qual* 'Mann Kunto Maula', he proceeded to 'Kanhaiya yaad hai tumko hamari'. The 'Rang' and 'Saman', the multi-hued shades and the vibrant atmosphere of Qawwali were created with anecdotes and demonstrations with Khusro's compositions like 'Ritu aayi Basant', the popular 'Chhap Tilak' and also 'Bhar do jholi', concluding with 'Gori sove sej par' recited by Amir Khusro



at the death of his Pir-o-Murshid Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya. The savour and feel of Qawwali set a perfect preface to the inauguration of the exhibition that captured all of this, like visual poetry.

The photo exhibition captured not just Qawwali performances but also photos related to its practitioners associated with different Sufi traditions or Silsilas, like the Chishtia Silsila and many more flourishing across the subcontinent. If Mustafa Qureshi documented the Qawwals from Deva Sharif and Safipur Silsila, including Qawwals protesting at Shaheen Bagh, Dinesh Khanna focused on Qawwals from Punjab and Ajmer Sharif, with a unique collage of the whole ambience of, and around, the famous Dargah. One could see the rows of big vessels where the prasad is cooked or the little shops in the by-lanes selling flowers to *chadars* and colourful bangles. Dinesh also captured the Deccan Story featuring Qawwals Nasir and Nazir Ahmad Warsi and their day-to-day life practising and teaching this spiritual form of music at their traditional home in Hyderabad. Reena showcased the section of female Qawwals like Chanchal Bharati and the younger generation of girls learning and practising the art form.



The photo exhibition also had a listening corner for 'Qawwali Capsules', with vignettes of recorded renditions by Qawwals like Wajahat Hussain Badayuni, Atiq Hussain Khan Bandanawaz from Hyderabad, Farid Ayaz from Pakistan, Hyder Bax from Lucknow and Miraz Ali Chishti from Nizamuddin Dargah. A live performance of Qawwali every evening was a bonus for visitors to the Art Gallery.

■ MANJARI SINHA

## The Tradition of Qawwali

**SYMPOSIUM:** *Symposium on Qawwali: An Academic Study*

Conceptualised by Manjari Chaturvedi

**COLLABORATION:** *Sufi Kathak Foundation*

**27 November 2021**

This was the sixth edition of the 'Understanding Qawwali' series. Featuring lectures, talks and conversations, the event seemed to be a bit of a mixed affair, lacking in coherence of structure as an academic platform.

Raziuddin Aquil made an insightful presentation on Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya's defence of *sama'* at Sultan Ghiyasuddin Tughluq's court. Giving textual references, he outlined the argument made by the Sufi saint who talked about *halal*, *haram*, *makruh* and *mubah* categories within Islam in his impassioned defence of the practice of *sama'* within Chishti Sufi circles of Hazrat-i-Dehli.



While his conversation with Qawwal Chanchal Bharti was interesting and revealing in several aspects of the Qawwali tradition, Danish Iqbal's own musings seemed fragmented and bordered on what is easily accessible through a basic online search. In these troubled times, perhaps the most beautiful memory that Qawwal Chanchal Bharti shared from her childhood was the fact that she regularly witnessed

Qawwali performances in the temples of Banaras. She talked about the way she struggled with her family, imbibing the Qawwali tradition from Ustad Iqbal Afzal Sabri and Ustad Iqbal Ahmed Khan, and the way she has managed to carve a niche for herself over the last 35 years on stage.

Followed by a screening of his film *Sufi Sama*, Yousuf Saeed made a presentation about the development of Qawwali in the Awadh region. He threw light on the localised practices of the notable Sufis, poets and Qawwals of the Awadh region, stressing the importance of the continuity of the tradition in small towns such as Bahraich, Ashrafpur, Bansa and Dewa.



The last presentation of the symposium was by Madan Gopal Singh, who has, by now, achieved a singular status in his domain, being able to weave his argument through a series of poetic references. Talking about the Qawwali tradition in Punjab, he spoke about the way in which it was able to create a language between languages, highlighting the fact that Hazrat Sultan Bahu wrote his scholarly work in Persian but chose to write poetry in Punjabi. He ended his meandering talk by stressing that Qawwali has always been an important agent in community formation and it is this aspect that we need to hold on to.



■ IRFAN ZUBERI

## The Future of Hand-crafted Textiles

**ILLUSTRATED LECTURE:** *Crafting a Future: Stories of Indian Textiles and Sustainable Practices*

**SPEAKER:** Archana Shah

**COLLABORATION:** *Dastkar; and Creative Dignity*

**26 November 2021**

A trail blazer in the field of traditional textiles across India, Archana Shah presented an informative slide show based on her latest book, *Crafting a Future: Stories of Indian Textiles and Sustainable Practices*. She was introduced by David Abraham, designer and friend, and Laila Tyabji, doyenne of collaboration with craftspersons. The presentation encompassed a wide range—from the glamour industry that makes an ethnic sari look like exotica from Paris, to the smiling villager spinning yarn with wrinkled hands; weaving communities from Ladakh and Andhra Pradesh to cooperatives and individual designer interventions; and also trends and developments over recent decades.

Shah emphasised the need for correct semantics: to use the term ‘hand-crafted’ rather than the common but careless term, ‘hand-woven’, because of the huge interrelated nature of carders, spinners, dyers, tool manufacturers, and more, who all contribute to the work of the weaver. We learnt that even though power looms have made huge inroads into the handloom industry, the difference made by hand spun yarn to the final product has contributed to more employment in hand spinning over the past decade. Other textile attributes possible only through hand crafting, i.e., uniqueness of each product, need to be explored and exploited to help sustain Indian hand-crafts.

Policies made by governments should include craftspeople in decision making. Shah herself often stayed in the homes of weaving families and learnt firsthand about their needs and aspirations. They are very clear about issues like personal dignity, health, children’s education, freedom afforded by working within family and home, climate, local crops and other issues that vary from place to place. Even regions adjoining each other, like Ladakh and Kashmir, have evolved totally distinct materials, styles and methodology from each other. There is no way one policy could be right for the entire gamut of traditions across this nation’s length and breadth.

This was an evening to feast on the richness and variety still alive in India.

■ BHARATI MIRCHANDANI

# Geet-Prakar

**MUSIC APPRECIATION PROMOTION:** *Geet-prakars: Genre in Gwalior Gharana of Hindustani Classical Music*

*Illustrated lecture by Shashwati Mandal*

**26 November 2021**

This lecture-demonstration was based on the many performance facets of the Gwalior gharana. Shashwati Mandal presented the characteristic *prakars* of the school by touching upon the distinct features of each compositional variety, without any crossovers or grey areas.

This unpolluted Gwalior session effloresced right at the start through the array of the *bol baant taans* wherein each syllable of the khayal lent itself to sargam taans that descended upon the senses. The 'behlawā' syllabic follow-up utilised the phraseology of the khayal to explain how music and sargam can be juxtaposed in a charming duet of sorts. The presenter, being well-versed in the grammar behind her music, clearly defined the speciality of the tarana compositions at Gwalior,

which, she said, was not limited to a combination of Farsi and Hindi wording, but expostulated an untried exclusivity of khayal numa tarana, a unique feature of the Gwalior school.

The tempo of its singing the medium format, one learnt, was demanded by this tarana brand because of the layout of its 'chanda' or intervals between each beat.

The lec-dem also made listeners privy to the fact that the tarana was not just a fast-paced attraction, but combined the syllabic along with tabla chants. Known as *trivat*, this style was further spliced by the Gwalior greats into 'Chaturanga', which was a combination of verse, raga and pakhawaj beat.

One of the more unusual revelatory asides that the speaker touched upon was the custom of singing thumri in the bandish style, and the pièce-de-résistance surely was the Raga Saagar compositions wherein every line of the verse was sung to a different raga, albeit from a similar time of day. It was served up in the form of the characteristic Gwalior 'tappa' where the scale cascaded down every note at speed, but with each 'avartan' explicitly pronounced and sung to perfection. The concert ended with the audience longing for just a bit more.

■ SUBHRA MAZUMDAR

# Of Trails and Trysts

**INDIAN ARCHAEOLOGY:** *Dara Shukoh ki Qabar ki Khoj*

*Illustrated lecture by Sanjeev Kumar Singh*

**CHAIR:** *Aleem Ashraf Khan*

*The lecture was delivered in Hindi*

**8 November 2021**

If Dara Shukoh, as the genuine-could-have-been-Emperor-who-never-was, is a rarity, the fascinating hunt for tracking his tomb and the attempt to precisely pin it in the precincts of Maqbara-i-Humayun is startlingly even rarer.

Persuasively rendered, this presentation skilfully braided together the polyphonic contradictions of greatness, so emblematic of Sufic Dara in popular imagination, and the cautionary tale about the embarrassing consequences of handing political power to the unschooled. Dara Shukoh's barbaric beheading at Khirzabad on Aurangzeb's orders, the interring of Shukoh in the *tekhana* of Humayun's Tomb, the willfull lack of any inscriptional gravestone, and the triad



positioning of his marble cenotaph in conjunction with the graves of Akbar's sons, Murad and Daniyal, were felicitously yarned with an implicit activist flavour by Singh.

To unravel the exilic puzzle and multiple discordant accounts associated with Dara's *takiya*—his ultimate resting place—Singh meandered far in his unknowing by embarking on a steady and considered process of historical, archaeological, architectural, archival, chronological and necropolic

accounts. This enabled him to untangle event from myth, narrativise and deftly sift the curse of memory, and tease out ways of layered readings of sources and the different dimensions they presented.

Singh lauded Alamgir's handpicked Mirza Muhammad Kazim's *Alamgir Namah* as the piece de resistance as it provided the clearest, definitive and conclusive reference to Dara's sepulcher, stating 'his body being buried in the basement chamber below the dome where Akbar's sons lay buried'. Singh's Dara is the third cenotaph on the northwestern side, in line with the two contiguous cenotaphs cited. Critiquing distinguishing features of Mughal gravestones and discerning nuanced patterns in their local variations were incorporated by Singh to bolster and reinforce the claim.

A welcome digestif, this exciting assertion demands both heft and depth in granularly and sensitively scrutinising a long-neglected vignette of history whose true time is long overdue.

■ BEEBA SOBTI



## Synergy between Science and Philosophy

**SEMINAR:** *Science of Mind in the Philosophies of the World—A Dialogue between Science and Philosophy*

**COLLABORATION:** *World Buddhist Culture Trust (WBCT)*

**12 to 13 November 2021**

This two-day webinar started with a uniquely creative ceremony to mark the launch of an academic retreat on the same theme. The event turned into a broad survey of philosophical positions on concepts of Self and Reason, with a glance at meditative and literary traditions from the Upanishadic to the Sufi to the Greek and modern-Western. While the Director, IIC, Shri K. N. Shrivastava emphasised the need to recognise the synergy between science and philosophy, Lama Doboomb Tulku, Managing Trustee, WBCT, dwelt on the etymological roots of the word 'science' and its 19th-century modifications, and on His Holiness the Dalai Lama's interest in the theme.

Mohini Mullick set the theme with her layered talk on 'The Mind: Its Role in Indian and Western Thought Traditions',

insisting on retaining the cultural specificity of terms such as Reason and Rationality (which have no Sanskrit equivalent), and Sanskrit words such as *manas* and *cit*. Stressing that there was no monolithic Indian tradition, she did point to the worldly and practical focus one often finds in Indian thought traditions.

Vijay Tankha took us through a detailed survey of Greek thinking on the category of the Self or Soul, from Homer to Herodotus to Heraclitus, pointing out some interesting affinities with ideas found in India on dietetics and transmigration. K. M. George focused on classical Christian philosophical-theological understanding on the body-mind unity via two metaphors from the writing of the late 4th-century Christian theologian Gregory of Nyssa: the metaphors of moving up (anabasis) and of transfiguration.

Zakaria Abbas, a young medical doctor, spoke of the Islamic tradition and the role of the concept of the soul (in its interior and external sense, and its imaginative and reasoning capacities) in the quest for knowledge, which is a divine command. Akhlaque Ahmad 'Ahan' dwelt on the Sufi traditions of meditation—*Muraq'ba*- and *Zikr*—leading to a personal connection with the Almighty through self-knowledge.

Bhagchandra Jain Bhaskar elaborated on the Science of Mind in Jainism and Buddhism, with a detailed exegesis





on Jaina thinking on the nature of mind. Another young scholar, Guneet Kaur Gill, spoke on Sikh philosophy and its elaborations on Brahman, Jiva, Maya, Atman and Seva. In the concluding session, Ashok Vohra systematically critiqued the Mind-Brain Identity Theory, insisting that the mind was not reducible to a materialist paradigm, i.e., brain functions.

The thought-provoking programme ended with Sudhamahi Reghunathan inviting all present to participate in an open house in which important suggestions for future conversations

were articulated. These included focusing on research on meditation and neuroplasticity so as to bridge the mind/brain and faith/science divide, to deliberations on how these messages can be disseminated, especially amongst the youth, to foster harmony and build a more holistic understanding of health and social well-being. The programme ended on an aesthetic note with danseuse Shovana Narayan's brief lecture-demonstration.

■ MAYA JOSHI

## Stark Humanitarian Tragedy

**DISCUSSION:** *Post-Taliban Developments in Afghanistan*

*Roundtable discussion on Current Developments in Afghanistan: Relevance for India*

*Led by Shri Shyam Saran, Life Trustee, IIC; Suhasini Haider; and Amar Sinha*

**CHAIR:** *C. Uday Bhaskar*

**COLLABORATION:** *South Asia Monitor*

**22 November 2021**

The speakers at this discussion noted with some concern that although the conditions continued to be tragic in Afghanistan, yet it was no longer prime time news. Several dimensions of the Afghan issue were discussed, namely: the geopolitical changes in the neighbourhood, their impact on the global order, China's growing influence and expansion towards the West, Pakistan's growing relevance, and most of all, the catastrophic conditions of civil society, the imminent economic collapse that the world, including the UN, had still not found ways to address. In this scenario, India was trying to find a role for itself.

Shyam Saran noted that India's role in the last few years had generated a lot of goodwill which was its greatest strength, but now we need to find some ways of sustaining it and developing it as we move ahead in the future.

He cautioned against China's expansionist intentions, even though Afghanistan has always been difficult and believes it can depend upon Pakistan to safeguard its interests here. However, Central Asian expansion will be a matter of concern to Russia too.

The recent meeting in Delhi of the National Security Advisors from regional nations was an opportunity for India to position itself as a regional security provider.

Suhasini Haider was of the view that India's wait-and-watch policy was going nowhere. India needs to work out a framework for engagement in Afghanistan. Engage with the trade and transit network of the region as a beginning, she suggested.

Afghan youth and citizens are disappointed as India stopped issuing e-visas, resulting in a loss of goodwill built over the years. Some students are stranded there, and even medical visas have stopped. India has to find its own voice in Afghanistan, otherwise we risk being silent for the future, she said.



Concluding the discussion, Amar Sinha asked pertinent questions. Engagement, Yes! But what do we engage for? What do we achieve? Who are we dealing with? Our policies have to be clearly thought out. At the moment, we will be dealing with a government that isn't even legitimate. Afghans, too, see the Taliban as an imposition.

He clarified that our policy of wait-and-watch doesn't mean we do nothing. It gives the Taliban or the regime in Kabul time to self-destroy. Our policy should be to see that the longevity of this regime is as short as possible.

Answering another question pertaining to Pakistan and China not attending the Regional Security Dialogue, he said it

simply exposed China's limitations of having an independent policy towards Afghanistan. 'It just follows Pakistan's policy, thinking that Pakistan can control terror organisations and hand over Afghanistan to them on a platter.' However, the dialogue was a great opportunity for other participating regional countries to hold candid discussions on the Taliban. There was a convergence of views on the situation there.

In his concluding remarks, Uday Bhaskar noted with dismay the helplessness of the people of Afghanistan facing a stark humanitarian tragedy, and called upon India, civil society and the IIC to reflect upon the arid nature of global response.

■ VICHITRA SHARMA

## Direction of the Tide

### NEIGHBOURHOOD FIRST

**COORDINATOR:** *Ashok K. Mehta*

**WEBINAR:** *India–Maldives Relations*

**PANELLISTS:** *Gulbin Sultana; N. Sathiya Moorthy; and Sripathi Narayanan*

**CHAIR:** *Ashok K. Mehta*

**1 December 2021**

Behind the serene beauty of the Maldives islands lies a troubled political history. Since the nation's independence in 1965, the archipelago has often been gripped by an internal turmoil that spills over into its relationship with neighbouring India.

The panellists at the recent event voiced concern at a new development that may cast a pall on the current India–Maldives bonhomie. The release of Maldives' former president Abdulla Yameen from house arrest after a Supreme Court verdict overturned his graft conviction has serious implications for India. Yameen, who tilted markedly towards China during his spell in power, can now not only return to politics but also contest the upcoming presidential elections in 2023. Should Yameen's Progressive Party of Maldives gain ground, it could vastly change the security dynamics in the Indian Ocean region at a time when China is flexing its muscles globally.

This would effectively also lead to a freeze in the traditional warm ties between India and the Maldives. As the panellists pointed out, under the current democratically elected President, Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, the India–Maldives relationship has flourished. India has inked key infrastructure development and trade agreements with the Maldives, besides being a strategic partner of the nation in enhancing regional maritime security.

The participants also expressed worry on the 'India Out' campaign in the Maldives, regarded by political observers as an orchestration of social media or the opposition waiting in the wings to come to power. The forces behind 'India Out' question the military presence of India on the small island and view it as an attempt to impinge on its sovereignty. Should this campaign, driven by anti-India sentiments, gain further momentum, it will throw uncertainty over the future of bilateral relations between India and the Maldives.

With just two years to go before presidential elections, there are also internal dissensions within the ruling Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) to contend with. Mohamed Nasheed, the first democratically elected president of the Maldives, is unhappy with the functioning of the Solih government. He also advocates a parliamentary form of government in the Maldives, while Solih thinks otherwise.

Clearly, all is not well in Maldives' politics. The big question is the direction of the tide in the island, and its spillover in India.

■ KAVITA CHARANJI

# DEPARTURES

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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.



**SMT. SATYA VARMA**  
A-2946



**SHRI. ANIP SACHTHEY**  
A-6117



**RADM. H. C. MALHOTRA (RETD.)**  
A-3189



**SMT. RAMO RANI**  
A-3552



**DR. TAJAMUL HAQUE**  
A-5695



**DR. (SMT.) RANI RAY**  
A-1218



**MS. TANVIR KOREISHI**  
A-6203



**SHRI P. K. LAHIRI**  
M-2898



**SHRI G. S. BALI**  
M-4053

**And the following Members (photographs not available):  
MS. DIANA J. KHAMBATTA (A-5238); SHRI V. M. M. NAIR (M-2748)**



## Director's Note

Although the COVID-19 pandemic is not over, the fear has reduced somewhat, and it is heartening to see that the footfalls at the Centre have significantly increased. The physical programmes being conducted at the Centre have also started steadily increasing. During the *Diwali* festival, Members were attracted by our special Gift Packs of Special Cakes. The ongoing take-away facility is becoming more and more popular. In view of the pandemic guidelines of the Central and Delhi Governments, the catering venues are restricted to 50% capacity. Often, a wait-list for a table in the Main Dining Hall was being seen. Hence, the Annexe has been made fully operational. The popular barbeque at the Annexe Lounge Terrace, which had been discontinued due to the pandemic, has been re-started. The barbeque is available during the lunch hours but would be soon extended to dinner as well.

Members can enjoy taking a stroll around the Gardens of the Centre where Chrysanthemums in varieties like Raja, Maharaja of Sikkim, Snowball, Sonar Bangla, Kasturba Gandhi, Pompom and Marigold and Calendula are bursting with colour. Once again, a selection of seedlings of winter flowers has been prepared by our own Garden staff for sale to Members.

After careful assessment and on the advice of the House Committee, the carpet in the Main Lounge was removed. Its flooring, laid down in the 1960s, has been cleaned and polished. It has retained its original beauty. The appearance of the Lounge has been enhanced.

The Centre has engaged the services of an expert agency to standardise its signages. The materials and colours to be used will blend with the existing architecture. These signages will be simple and facilitate smooth movement of Members and Guests within the premises.

The elevator for the Main Dining Hall, Terrace Pergola and Conference Room-II is under fabrication. It is expected to be commissioned by March 2022.

A free Eye Camp for the Centre's employees and their family members was organised in collaboration with Dr. Shroff's Charity Eye Hospital. During the camp, vision-testing and screening of eye ailments were carried out. The employees and their family members were given free spectacles and referral for free treatment, including cataract surgery, at Dr. Shroff's Eye Hospital. Over 200 employees and their family members attended the camp. A free Blood Check-up Camp was also held with the assistance of Dr. Ashwani Kumar (M-4070). This was followed by a talk on 'Diabetes'.

The Centre has been using National Informatics Centre (NIC) facilities for its email services to reach out to Members. Due to certain NIC security protocols relating to bulk emails, delivery of information to Members was getting delayed. Further, analytic reports were not getting generated in the NIC system, due to which it was difficult to ascertain whether the emails had indeed been delivered to the recipients. The Centre has upgraded and modernised its bulk email services by introducing a secure and powerful cloud-based system that leverages a dedicated infrastructure. The new system will ensure prompt delivery of the emails to the recipients. It also supports anti-spam and anti-virus email solutions that prevent disruption.

As Members are aware, the last date for the submission of the completed STAM Application Form for 2021-22 was 31.10.2021. All the applications received are currently under the consideration of the STAM Selection Committee. Nava Nalanda Mahavihara, Takshila Educational Society and Delhi Skill Entrepreneurship University have been recently inducted as Institutional Members.

As reported before, the Centre has digitised its rare collections and legacy records running into over 20 lakh pages. This resource would be placed on the digital portal of the Centre, christened 'DigiLib'. Library is now open for Members from 9.30 a.m. to 8.00 p.m. on all working days, and from 10.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. on Sundays and Gazetted Holidays.

■ K. N. SHRIVASTAVA