

INDIA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE IIC Diary

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December 2021–January 2022

A Musical Feast

IIC WINTER FESTIVAL OF DANCE AND MUSIC

Sitar Recital: Rajeev Janardhan

Kuchipudi Recital: Gururaju

16 December 2021

Saptguitar Recital: Satish Sharma

Bharatanatyam Recital: Lakshmi Parthasarathy Athreya

17 December 2021

The Winter Festival of classical music and dance offered a sumptuous fare with sitar, saptguitar, Kuchipudi and Bharatanatyam recitals.

The melodious Sitar recital by Rajeev Janardhan, a seasoned representative of the famed Imdadkhani Etawah Gharana, brought alive the old-world charm, playing some of the nostalgic compositions of Ustads like Imdad Khan, Inayat Khan and Vilayat Khan, in raag *Khamaj*. Trained under Pt. Bimalendu Mukherjee and further groomed under Pt. Arvind Parikh, Rajeev impressed with his authentic *talim* (training) and relentless *riyaz* (practice), evident in his *Chaindari*, the relaxed delineation of the romantic raga. Aply accompanied on tabla by Athar Hussain, he also sang and played Bandishi thumris like *Na manungi...* and *Aaj mori kalai murak gai*, which made the concluding Ghazal redundant.

The captivating Kuchipudi recital by Gururaju, a brilliant disciple of Guru Vijayanthi Kashi and a senior dancer of



her Shambhavi Ensemble, opened with *Poorva-rang Vidhi* in accordance with the *Natya Shastra* of Bharata Muni.

Consecrating the stage, purifying it with rituals like the sprinkling of sacred water and *Sugandhi* (fragrance) with incense sticks complete with Vedic chants in serene *Swaras of Revathi*, he proceeded to invoke Ganesha with *Jai Jai Jitavari* composed in raga *Hamsadhvani* and *Adi-tala*.

Ramayana Shabdham next depicted the engrossing story from *Rama-Janma* to his coronation in raga *Mohanam*. This was followed by *Shiva-Stuti* where goddess Saraswati played the veena, Indra played the flute, Lakshmi sang in her golden voice, Vishnu played the mridangam and Brahma played the cymbals, set to Raag *Malika* and *Taal-Malika*. Graceful Gururaju concluded his arresting recital with the traditional *Tarangam*, dancing on the edges of a brass plate depicting Krishna's sports and *Raas-Leela* from *Krishna-Leela-Tarangini* with intricate footwork.

The next evening opened with an intriguing Saptaguitar performance by Satish Sharma,



who has created this seven-string nylon fretless guitar. His selection of raga *Puria Dhanashri* was apt for the evening concert according to the time theory of Hindustani music, but within a couple of minutes, his Alap reached the *Taar Saptak* and then to the *Gat* compositions in the medium and fast tempo of *Teentaal*, reaching the *Jhala* in a hurried way. It was disappointing to find that he had not even bothered to tune his instrument properly. Athar Hussain on Tabla did his best to please the audience.

The two-day festival reached its climax with the mesmerising Bharatanatyam recital by the SNA Yuva Puraskar Awardee

Lakshmi Parthasarathy Athreya from Chennai presenting two stories from the Ramayana. The first one was *Anjaneya Raghu-Rama Doota*, a composition of Swathi Thirunala choreographed by her Guru Smt. Chitra Vishveshwaram, and the second was *Rama Nama Babua* from *Krishna Karnamritha*, choreographed by the Odissi exponent Smt. Sharmila Biswas. Anjani-Putra Hanuman's devotion for Rama in the first composition and mother Yashoda's *vatsalya* (motherly love) while putting the young Krishna to sleep, underlined the depth of emotions in the subtle Abhinaya of the sensitive dancer.

■ MANJARI SINHA

An Illustrious Person

IN CONVERSATION: *Talking Asian Cinema*

Siddharth Srinivasan in conversation with Aruna Vasudev
3 December 2021

This was an exhilarating conversation between Siddharth Srinivasan, an award-winning independent filmmaker, and Aruna Vasudev. He had an uphill task in attempting to compress Aruna's most distinguished and prodigiously eventful life into an hour-long discussion. Aruna is a pioneer with many firsts to her name—first Indian Head Girl of Lawrence School Sanawar, the first to introduce Asian cinema to the world by editing and publishing the quarterly *Cinemaya* in 1988, the first woman president of FIPRESCI India, and the first to start a Festival of Asian and Arab Cinema, 'Cinefan', in 1999.



What made the evening memorable was how successfully Siddharth delved into Aruna's early years in Paris during the heydays of the student revolution in the 1960s, working alongside legendary French Nouvelle Vague filmmakers like Alain Resnais and Claude Chabrol; her time in New York working as a film editor and then at the UN where Marlon Brando asked her out on a date; her missed opportunity of assisting Satyajit Ray on a film that never got made; and her years at INTACH working alongside Chidananda Dasgupta who became a dear friend.

Along the way, Aruna was introduced to Asian cinema at the Hong Kong and Hawaii film festivals and was stunned by the richness and diversity of these undiscovered cultural treasures. The seed for starting a journal on the cinemas of Asia—with contributors from Japan, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka, etc.—was planted and became a driving passion. The information available in the pages of *Cinemaya* is invaluable.

The first Conference on Asian cinema held in Delhi led to the formation of NETPAC (Network of Promotion of Asian Cinema) which today is a worldwide organisation. Its members are spread across the world and the organisation has jury representation at over 30 international festivals, including Berlin, Toronto and Busan. Filmmakers young and old were all very close to Aruna and owe her a great debt for her tireless efforts at shining a light on their work—G. Aravindan, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Aparna Sen, Buddhadeb Dasgupta, Mani Kaul, Kumar Shahani, Anurag Kashyap—just to name a few.

During the Q&A session following the discussion, the audience urged Aruna to write her memoirs, and expressed a desire to see more Asian films; Mark Tully reminisced about Aruna's supportive parents and her stint at the BBC; Raman Chawla recalled his first meeting with Aruna at the French Cultural Centre which led to his working with her for Cinefan; and I touched upon the exciting new world Aruna introduced me to when I started working with her on *Cinemaya*. Even today one comes across people from all spheres of the film industry who fondly remember how Aruna has touched and changed their lives.

■ INDU SHRIKENT

Film Noir

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SEASON'S FINALE: A Selection of Film Noir Classics
December 2021
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A clutch of Film Noir classics from the 1940s were screened at the IIC in December 2021. Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1941), based on a James M. Cain novel and co-scripted with Raymond Chandler, a master crime fiction writer, still compels attention 80 years later. Ideas like love, hate and murder, interpreted by a master filmmaker, reveal certain fundamental truths about human nature. Rene Clair's *Then There Were None*, based on Agatha Christie's crime novel, continues to impress with its mastery of craft. The film was a one-off for the French master exiled in Hollywood whose speciality was delicious serio-comedy.

Since Film Noir deals with the darker aspects of human nature, it allows discerning filmmakers and script writers to show their understanding of life's paradoxes. In Carol Reid's masterly *The Third Man*, with an original screenplay by Graham Greene, a perceptive moralist, we see the not-so-ghostly presence of Harry Lime, loved by a woman, while

he is being sought by the joint Allied forces in Vienna just after World War II for selling spurious penicillin at a huge profit, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of children. That Harry Lime receives his comeuppance is a moot point, and does little to make us understand the terrifying ambiguity in human nature.

The Postman Always Rings Twice, based on a James M. Cain novel directed by Tay Garnett is about a beautiful young woman married to an old man, who takes in an attractive lodger as a paying guest to supplement her meagre income. The house also doubles as a small café in a quiet town. Mutual physical attraction and monetary need/greed lead to the murder of the old husband. Carnal desires triumph, however temporarily, over societal sanction, with disastrous result.

The main attraction, however, was John Huston's *The Maltese Falcon* on the eponymous novel by Dashiell Hammett, the first master of the crime novel in 20th century American fiction. An elusive medieval statue of great value of a falcon turns out to be a fake and results in murder and violence.

Séance on a Wet Afternoon by Ronald Neame is a moving film about a childless couple and a kidnapped girl child who survives the bizarre ending unscathed.

■ PARTHA CHATTERJEE

The Flying Sikh And Partition

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ILLUSTRATED LECTURE: The Legacy of Divide:
Tracing the Presence of Partition Memories in Contemporary Indian Films

SPEAKER: Meera Shirodkar

CHAIR: Partha Chatterjee

17 December 2021
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In her address, Meera Shirodkar described mass media and mainstream cinema as a popular medium to bring the true description of the traumatic events of the partition of the subcontinent before the modern generation. She went on to add that although many films had been made on the holocaust, for example, partition had been much less covered by the film world, and even the well-known director Gulzar had expressed similar views. Thus, partition remained pent up in people's hearts.

The film *Bhag Milkha Bhag*, based on the autobiography of Milkha Singh and made by noted director Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, shows Milkha Singh returning to his village in Pakistan, and only then was he able to come to terms with the torment of this extremely tragic event of his life. This, she said, was a relevant message. Clips from the film showing Milkha Singh escaping during the genocide and some of his sports events were also shown.



In the conversation with the speaker at the conclusion of the programme, Partha Chatterjee said that the presentation was a telling one and pointed out that it was not correct to show oneself as a community or nation superior to another people, and regardless of community, everyone was responsible for the genocide in 1947. He said that films like *Dharamputra*, produced by B.R. Chopra, should also be viewed as it represented partition from a different perspective.

■ ARVINDAR SINGH

Drivers of Evolution

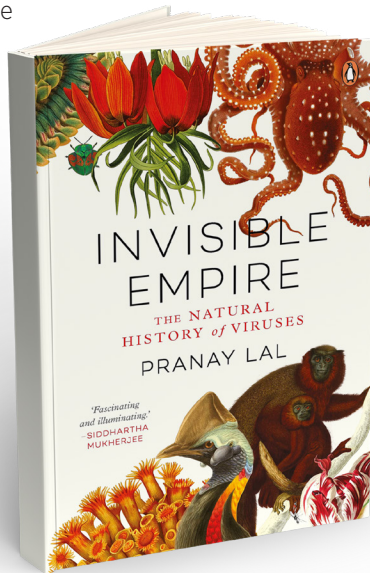
ILLUSTRATED LECTURE: *The Invisible Empire: The Natural History of Viruses*

Illustrated lecture by Pranay Lal

7 December 2021

This programme was held around the release of this book by Pranay Lal. Lal began by informing the audience about the great diversity in microbes. He mentioned that a microbe can be a tiny worm: for example, a nematode is present in hundreds, perhaps thousands, of pinches of soil. For every human being, there are 1 billion nematodes in this world. Apart from nematodes, he also talked about protozoa, mucor, bacteria and viruses. While microbes, bacteria and worms can be seen through a microscope, most viruses can only be seen, through an electron microscope. Viruses do not have colour as they are tiny and well below the wavelength of visible light.

Lal said that the existence of viruses is essential for our existence. He described the importance of viruses in



today's scenario of climate change, elaborating on how the viruses sink carbon-capturing bacterial organisms at the bottom of the oceans and keep them there for thousands of years. In the case of a significant reduction in the number of such viruses, the entrapped carbon dioxide will start emitting from oceans and contribute to accelerated climate change.

He went on to discuss how the divergence of egg-producing mammals into placenta bearers took place because of the repeated infection by a virus called 'Foamy'. Throughout our evolution, this virus got integrated into the mammalian DNA. Hence, it is astonishing to learn that the gene which defines the creation of the placenta in any mammal is a virus.

Viruses which live in the human body serve a definite function, he said. For example, the absence of anellovirus in the human body can lead to the development of skin cancers. The presence of viruses in the digestive system controls the speed and direction of digestion of food, and also controls the bacterial population in the digestive system. The author concluded the session by stating that viruses are the drivers of evolution.

■ VIKRAM DATTA

The Many Ramayanas

WEBINAR: *The Multivalence of an Epic: Texts and Recitations of the Ramayana*

COLLABORATION: *International Research Division, IIC*

11 December 2021

Once, Rama sent Hanuman underground to retrieve a ring he had lost. Hanuman was captured and handed over to the king of spirits. When he told him who he was, the king brought a platter filled with rings and asked Hanuman to identify his master's. He told Hanuman there have been thousands of Ramas, and each left his ring behind when he had to depart this world.

This Hindi folktale, retold by A.K. Ramanujan to illustrate the number of Rama stories, came to my mind while attending this splendid Webinar. Through profound talks, renditions

and musical presentations, it substantiated the philosophical, aesthetic, ethical, historic and literary dimensions of the many Rama stories ubiquitous in south India and Southeast Asia. As Sudha Gopalakrishnan explained, the Webinar was meant to recover for audiences the experience of listening to the Rama-katha, which, for most people today, is mediated by print, just as we move increasingly to virtual encounters.

K.N. Shrivastava, Director, IIC, welcomed the gathering, and Shri. N.N. Vohra, President, IIC, presented the inaugural address, saying how the Webinar reflected many facets of the collective imagination of generations down the centuries. While Parul Pandya Dhar gave a worthy overview of her edited book, *The Multivalence of an Epic: Retelling the Ramayana in South India and Southeast Asia*, historian Raziuddin Aquil introduced the book to the audience.

One of the most memorable sessions was the talk by H.S. Shivaprakash on the various Ramayanas in Kannada. He presented selections from Kuvempu and Gopala Krishna Adiga. Naresh Keerthi spoke about Jain Ramayanas, reciting from Nagachandra. Suganya Anandakichenin recited the



beautiful lullabies of Kulasekhara Azhvar, speaking of Dasharatha's lament. An erudite David Shulman discussed the contributions of the Tamil poet Kambar, and his deep understanding of human guilt.

Two versions in Malayalam were presented by Sudha Gopalakrishnan—one was the *Ramayana Champu* by the 16th century poet Punam Namboodiri, and the other was a modern interpretation, *Chintavishtayaya Sita*, by Kumaran Asan. Kesavan Veluthat spoke radiantly about how Ezhuthachan democratised literary Malayalam through the *Adhyatma Ramayana*, and Radha Madhavan rendered passages from Ezhuthachan's *Ayodhyakanda*

and *Sundarakanda*. K. Ramachandra Reddy recited from Kanakanti Papparaju's *Uttara Ramayana* in Telugu (17th century), and Azeez Tharuvana narrated the Ramayana of the Adiya Adivasis of Wayanad, Kerala. M.N. Karassery presented portions from the brilliant Mappila Ramayanam (*Lamayanam*) by Hassan Kutty, in the tradition of the 'Mappila Pattu,' the folk songs of Malabari Muslims.

Carnatic musician Sangeetha Sivakumar's beautiful renditions of Rama compositions by Tyagaraja, Sadasiva Brahmendrar, Arunachalaki and Bhadrachala Ramadasa brought the Webinar to an appropriate conclusion.

■ S. GOPALAKRISHNAN

Symbolic Associations

ILLUSTRATED LECTURE: *The Bible through the Eyes of European and Mughal Painters—A Comparison*

SPEAKER: Aparna Joshi

22 December 2021

Joshi commenced her talk by taking the audience on a virtual journey, starting with the symbolic association of the base colours and tools primarily used in ancient paintings across different religious traditions. The European and the Indian versions of a range of paintings on Biblical themes and characters like St. Jerome, the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, etc., were discussed and compared, especially in terms of the symbolic significance of the additional features of these paintings, and how the depictions change or are tweaked in these two different traditions under comparison, depending on the respective needs and contexts. The lecture dwelt on broader issues

as to the kinds of roles women were seen to be playing in the paintings. References from the *Ragamala* and the *Baramasa* paintings were brought in as well to discuss how women were generally presented as consorts or mothers of divine figures and not the main subjects of the paintings.

Rembrandt's and Mansoor's versions of the paintings of Dara Shikoh's wedding were also discussed, where the author compared the two on the basis of distinctions between the facial features of the groom under both schools of painting, the colour palettes and pigments used in the paintings, etc., which might go on to 'reflect the painter's frame of mind', as the author postulated. Joshi also flagged very important factors like climate change, UV rays, pollution, etc., being detrimental to the maintenance of these miniature paintings.

The event was followed by a lively and engaged discussion with the audience, which went beyond the issues under discussion, to the Buddhist and the Jaina art traditions too.

■ PRERANA PURNIMA ROY

Right to Privacy

OF BRIDGES & BREAKS—THE CONSTITUTION

AT A CROSSROADS: *Personal Data under the Constitution*

SPEAKERS: *K.V. Viswanathan; and Mariyam Kamil*

MODERATOR: *Lalit Panda*

12 January 2022

This Webinar delved into the right to privacy, as understood post the *Puttaswamy* judgement. It was a delightful mix of academic and practice-related perspectives. The discussion was in the context of the pending Data Protection Bill 2021.

Mariyam Kamil began by emphasising the lack of a clear definition of personal information which could be protected under the privacy law. She then went on to explain the various standards of judicial review evolved by the courts. In interpreting the right to privacy, the standard of proportionality in the judicial review of any violation of the right had two approaches. The reasonable standard allowed the state to justify any violation by showing a legitimate aim, and the use of reasonable means to achieve it. Under the strict approach, the state had to show a compelling interest, and ensure that the least restrictive means are adopted. In *Puttaswamy*, Kamil argued that the Supreme Court has created a hybrid model of proportionality. She stated that the limbs of conducting a balancing exercise, and assessing the least restrictive measure to be taken by the state, made the hybrid model difficult to adopt for courts. She also pointed to the influence exercised by the Canadian and

German models of judicial review, as also the incorporation of the ideas of two academics. It was felt that there was an uncritical acceptance of certain models drawn from foreign authors whose views had drawn a lot of academic criticism.

K. V. Viswanathan imparted a sense of robustness to the discussion, drawing upon his extensive litigation experience. He bemoaned the lack of awareness of privacy rights. People parted with information readily and willingly, oblivious to the various ways it could be exploited. One must ideally evaluate the quantum of information to be given. It should be just enough to fulfil the purpose for which the information was requested. He traced the evolution of the right to privacy in India, asserting that any invasion of privacy should be by law and subject to judicial oversight. The bill was diluting the high standards which were proposed by the Srikrishna Commission for protection of informational privacy.

He emphatically warned against the proposal in the bill which provides for authentication of entries in electoral rolls by Aadhar number, and the unguided power for the electoral registration officer to strike a person off the rolls if he has reason to suspect any problem in authentication. In the midst of elections, such striking off (if malafide) would be impossible to challenge, leading to serious undermining of democratic elections.

The Webinar left one with the question raised by Kamil about the feasibility of implementing the hybrid model evolved in the *Puttaswamy* judgement. Viswanathan seemed to hint that it may not be such an issue, leaving us with a sense of optimism.

■ PRASHANTO SEN

Clash of Civilisations

CONQUISTADORS: *4-part series directed by David Wallace for BBC2/PBS by David Wallace with Michael Wood*

The Fall of the Aztecs

The Conquest of the Incas

The Search for El Dorado

All World is Human

January 2022

Travelling through Mexico to the legendary Aztec capital city of Tenochtitlan, crossing the peaks of the Andes across the Incan Empire, navigating the length of the Amazon river to its mouth in the Atlantic, and exploring Florida, Texas and the deserts of North Mexico are the journeys undertaken by British broadcaster and historian Michael Wood, as he traverses in the footsteps of the legendary Spanish conquistadors—Cortes, Pizarro, Orellana and Cabeza de Vaca—intrepid men but cruel conquerors, who made these perilous odysseys in the 16th century in pursuit of gold and fame.

Cortes was ambitious and financed his own expedition in 1519 and was astonished when he discovered a

civilisation with its own writing, architecture, law and religion. Wood follows his letters and the memoirs of his companions as they make their way into Mexico and the conquest of the Aztecs.

The slave girl La Malinche, given to Cortes as a gift, was instrumental as an interpreter and mediator with the Aztecs, and as Wood underscores, has a vexed legacy in Mexico today. Wood makes his way by foot and through rain, as Cortes would have, to fight Montezuma in Tenochtitlan. Montezuma received Cortes in his palace; however, Cortes insulted the gods of the Aztecs and arrested Montezuma. Montezuma lost the trust of his own people who killed him, but the Aztecs were finally defeated by the Spaniards.

Though Cortes was honoured by the king and became the most famous man in Christendom, Wood says it was a tainted victory for, in achieving his dream, he single-handedly destroyed a civilisation.

In 1533, Pizarro and his men, after many attempts to explore Peru in search of Incan gold, reached the foot of the Andes. Wood follows the route taken by his army across the Andes, through the steep paths called the Incan steps, until they reached the town of Cajamarca, where they first encountered the Incan emperor Atahualpa.



As Wood narrates, when Atahualpa rejected Christianity, the Spanish arrested him and offered to set him free only if he filled the room with gold. Atahualpa kept his promise but was still put to death.

Pizarro marched on to Cuzco, where he appointed a puppet king Manco, but the Spaniards treated him with contempt. Eventually Pizarro was killed by one of his own allies and the Spaniards stabbed Manco. As Wood says, though the Inca Empire ended, the deeper culture was tenacious and survives to this day; the people of the Andes still revere the ancestral spirits of the Incas.

In pursuit of the mythical el Dorado, Wood takes the route of Gonzalo Pizarro, who is joined by his cousin Orellana in 1541, seeking the legendary city of gold.

Reaching the river Coca and losing many men in the expedition, they built a boat to carry the infirm, when Orellana offered to take the raft with a few men downstream and return with replenishments.

Wood then follows the journey taken by Orellana and his men, as they became the first Europeans to see the Amazon region and encounter natives, both friendly and hostile. They finally reached the mouth of the river, a journey of 2,500 miles. Pizarro accused Orellana of treason, but he cleared his name only to perish in his next expedition to the Amazon.

In 1528, the Narvaez expedition tried to land through the swamps along the shores of North America in Florida, but with no interpreters and supplies running out, they were met by hostile tribes and other insurmountable obstacles.

Wood travels across the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, where the expedition had made barges and tried to sail back to Mexico across the Gulf. But Narvaez went missing, and it was Cabeza de Vaca and three survivors who wrote an account of this journey across America and northern Mexico.

Vaca was taken a slave by the Indians, who barely kept him alive, but he escaped and met the three other survivors as they tried to make their

way back to Mexico. Crossing through lands rich in minerals, they were the first Europeans to travel across the continent, where they learnt the languages of the trading community and were treated as shamans who had supernatural and healing powers. They made a journey of over 2,000 miles, and Vaca reached his own people after ten years—the first to have walked across the continent.

Wood concludes the series by flagging the role of the Valladolid Debate in 1550–51, which raised the question of the rights and treatment of the native people of the Americas. This was one of the earliest examples of moral debates on these questions which led to an amelioration of their conditions.

■ AJAY JAISINGHANI

In Her Own Words

FILM: *Worn Out with Desire to Write* (UK)
(1985; English and with subtitles)

DIRECTORS: Alan Benson, Daniel Wiles
24 to 30 January

This is an engaging 54-minute documentary on the French novelist, playwright, writer Marguerite Duras. Directed by Alan Benson, the documentary has Duras recounting her childhood spent in Vietnam.

Duras lived with her mother and two brothers. Her mother, who was a school teacher, was struggling to make both ends meet. The older brother, Pierre, was a bully, who, she says, took over as the man of the house, and the younger, Paul, who she feels is a bit challenged and weak.

Duras says her family lived in France between 1922 and 1924, and moved to French Indochina when her mother got posted there after her father died in 1921. The family struggled financially, and things worsened after her mother made a bad

investment in an isolated property around an area of rice farmland, Duras recounts. She said her mother always looked stressed and unhappy. Duras, in a bid to distract herself from the challenges her mother was facing, started to focus on herself. She began to dress up and wear makeup, and caught the fancy of a much older man with whom she had a relationship. She was in her early teens then.

Her book, *The Lover*, was based on the experience she had with the man. The book was awarded the Prix Goncourt and was translated into more than 40 languages.

Duras speaks about the condition of natives in Vietnam with a lot of empathy. She identified being one of them, but at the same time, was aware of her good looks. She liked the attention she got from others who used to stare at her as she was white. The footage in the documentary on Vietnam brings her narrative to life.

When she moved to France in 1931, the music that she heard on the deck of the ship made her forget and leave everything behind her, and she began to look forward to her life in France. Overall, an engaging documentary where one gets to hear about the writer in her own words.

■ YESHI SELI

A Scientific Feat

BOOK LAUNCH: *Building Dakshin Gangotri at Antarctica: A Miracle*, by Harsh K. Gupta, (Generic, 2021)
The book was released by Shri N.N. Vohra, President, IIC

Followed by: Illustrated lecture by Harsh Gupta

CHAIR: Shri N.N. Vohra, President, IIC
15 December 2021

The Third Indian Scientific Expedition to Antarctica led by Harsh Gupta established India's first wintering station, 'Dakshin Gangotri', in record time, during the Antarctic summer of 1983-84. This record remains unbeaten to this day. This well-illustrated book recreates the atmosphere of excitement, challenge and fierce determination to make the country proud, along with meticulous planning and execution, which enabled this 'Miracle' feat!



Tireless industry was the antidote to briefly dampened spirits after the near fatal MI-8 helicopter crash three days after arriving at Antarctica. Shri N.N. Vohra, President, IIC, mentioned the enquiries of Late Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, regarding the position of medical facilities on board the accompanying ship attending the five people who went into freezing water.

Imagine digging 1.5 metres deep over an area of 620 square metres to place the raft foundation and build a double-storied structure complete with heating, laboratories, snow melting tank, commissioning of three generators, fuel dump, living quarters for 12 wintering team members, setting up of a medical room, communication room, gymnasium, recreation room, etc., and all in 60 days. Several days were lost due to white-outs and blizzards.

The triumph of Dakshin Gangotri bears testimony to the commitment to scientific exploration, both the outstanding team and those who extended unconditional support.

Family Insights

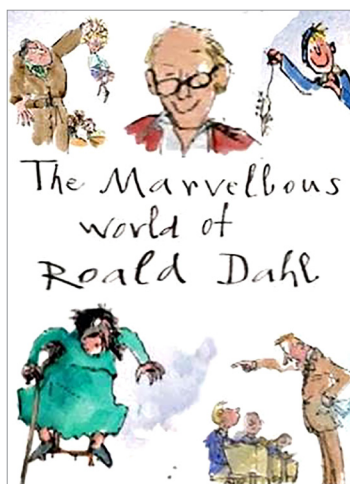
FILM: *The Marvellous World of Roald Dahl*
(2016; English)

DIRECTOR: Andrew Thompson
27 December to 2 January 2022

This is a wonderful BBC documentary on the life of Roald Dahl—one of the most celebrated writers of all time.

The documentary has real footage of the writer and takes us through his life when he began his career as a fighter pilot which ended after his plane crashed over Africa. In one scene, a small boy is asking Dahl whether he enjoyed flying; he answers in the negative, saying that as his plane had crashed it was not a pleasant memory.

His wife, Liccy, gave insights into the person that Dahl was. His daughter Lucy and biographer Donald Sturrock also run us through his life. Illustrator Quentin Blake



had created exclusive drawings for the film. Lucy Dahl explains how her mother's (Patricia Neal) stroke became the inspiration for Roald's invented vocabulary for the BFG. Roald also gained popularity with noted luminaries like President Roosevelt and Walt Disney.

As a pilot, Roald Dahl came to know all about gremlins. These mythical little creatures were what pilots and engineers blamed for unexplained mechanical failures, but for Roald they were to open the door to much greater things. The first book he wrote, *The Gremlins*, was bought by Walt Disney and caught the attention of Eleanor Roosevelt

(wife of the American President) who read it out to her grandchildren. It was after this that Roald was invited to the White House and became a friend of the Roosevelt family.

Winston Churchill saw his relationship with American President Roosevelt as very useful. Roald helped Churchill to get on with Roosevelt by telling him what was going on in his mind. This documentary received the BAFTA Scotland Award in 2017.

■ YESHI SELI

Policy Crisis and Lack of Strategic Planning

WEBINAR: *State of the Indian Economy*

SPEAKERS: Surajit Mazumdar; Partha Sen; R. Kavita Rao; Vikas Rawal; and Zakaria Siddiqui

MODERATOR: Suhas Borker

COLLABORATION: *Working Group on Alternative Strategies*

23 December 2021

This was the seventh discussion on the State of the Indian Economy. All the speakers came armed with power point presentations, but due to the prevailing COVID-19 situation, the format was a Webinar, which is available on call on the IIC YouTube channel.

Surajit Mazumdar said that for India's industrial sector, a mere recovery to the pre-COVID-19 situation would not amount to much, given that stagnation and a shrinking

relative significance in the economy have been its features for the past decade. Partha Sen and Kavita Rao delved on the fiscal policy. In response to COVID-19, fiscal policy was not leveraged and redistribution was given short shrift. There were also concerns expressed for the next financial year in respect to the finances of states: the question posed was, can the continued eschewal of fiscal policy to expand demand and reduce inequalities and reliance mainly on supply side measures produce a magic that has been conspicuous by its absence for a long time? The answer was obviously negative.

Partha Sen spoke on the issue of climate change. What exactly was India up to post-Glasgow conference? Was there a net-zero commitment on serious modelling? Was there any effort going to be made to phase out coal? Vikas Rawal took up the agriculture sector. He spoke about the two sides to the government's approach (even after the repeal of the three farm laws which had come after a historic struggle by farmers): denial of the agrarian crisis, and agriculture as shock absorber of the economy. Rawal highlighted the government's inaction when there was a significant disruption of the global supply chains and volatility of global prices adversely impacting Indian

agriculture. Zakaria Siddiqui questioned the low rank of India in the Global Hunger Index (GHI) and what the government was doing about it. Official insensitivity and apathy towards these indicators through budget allocations, statistical capacity and bureaucratic procedures had hindered the flow of necessary and timely information that was crucial for taking corrective measures. The government's pointing

out of some methodological fallacy in the index could not take us away from the sheer size of malnutrition among children which was indefensible by any standard. Moderator Suhas Borker said that the incisive discussion's take-away pointed to a policy crisis, compounded by a lack of strategic planning impacting the Indian economy.

■ **SUHAS BORKER**

Popular Conceptions and Academic Writings

SERIES: *History and Heritage: The Afterlife of Monuments*

24 November and 27 December 2021; and 21 January 2022

This series of monthly lectures in collaboration with IIC draws attention to the importance of monuments not only as relics of a bygone age, but as reminders of a cultural environment that we have sought to nurture and develop. This milieu emerged because of an active engagement with the past and constitutes our legacy to future generations. Monuments thus reflect our understanding of the world that we have preserved around us.

Shashank Shekhar Sinha's inaugural talk in the series titled, 'Monuments and their Connected Histories: Stories from Delhi, Agra and Fatehpur Sikri' highlighted the need to reappraise the way monuments are perceived and projected, since monuments are sites of public consumption of historical knowledge. They are spaces where the visitor comes close to the idea of experiencing history. Stories and myths have long been propagated by tourist guides and it is these that invariably become the popular conception of a monument's past. It is imperative that the current gap between academia and popular understanding of history be bridged by means of easily accessible, updated information and crisp writing available in a language of choice to the visitor.

The second lecture on 'The Discovery and Dispersal of Relics: The Modern History of Buddhism' by Himanshu

Prabha Ray expanded on the issues raised earlier with reference to the archaeology of Sarnath, the site of the Buddha's first sermon, as also its 20th century history when the Mulagandhakuti temple was built at the archaeological site at the initiative of Anagarika Dharmapala and the Mahabodhi Society. An important issue that the talk stressed was the need to step away from the compartmentalisation of religious architecture into 'Buddhist', 'Hindu,' 'Jain,' 'Muslim', and so on, since archaeological evidence at Sarnath shows that religious space was shared across religions, and this is repeated at many other monuments and archaeological sites.

Parul Pandya Dhar drew attention to the 'Temple Complexes of the Western Deccan: Beyond the Tangible-Intangible Divide'. The temples at Badami, Aihole and Pattadakal, located within 50km from each other in north Karnataka are admired for their aesthetic appeal and listed as World



Heritage sites. However, the nature of artistic ferment and the role of builders, performers, patrons and visitors in defining the inner and outer worlds of these temples have remained unattended to in cultural heritage research and interpretation.

As sites of public connect, monuments are spaces for bridging the gap between popular conceptions and academic writings. It is hoped that by recording and circulating the talks on YouTube channels, the IIC will take the lead in a wider dispersal of this information.

■ **HIMANSHU PRABHA RAY**

New Variants

DISCUSSION: *Omicron: Enigma or End?*

PANELLISTS: *G.C. Khilnani; Gagandeep Kang; and Manindra Agrawal*

CHAIR: *K. Srinath Reddy*

29 January 2022

The discussion began with Srinath Reddy introducing the new variant of the COVID-19 virus, named Omicron. He said that the variant has spread rapidly across the globe and has led to a resurgence in the number of breakthrough infections at considerable speed.

Kang drew attention to some fundamental aspects, namely: the phenomena known as epistasis where the virus was able to evade immunity due to the mutation. Responding to whether two doses of vaccinations offer protection against this strain of the virus, she said if the double vaccination was within six months, there is reasonable protection against severe disease. However, beyond six months the protection falls quite rapidly, but gets boosted again to well over 80 per cent with a booster dose. Kang mentioned that boosters mostly help people highly susceptible to the virus, namely, older adults who are immunocompromised with comorbidities.

Agrawal addressed issues related to creating a supermodel to predict the spread across India. He spoke about the challenges associated with developing an effective prediction model for Omicron, given several mild and asymptomatic infections and the entirely different behaviour pattern of the current Omicron wave compared to the earlier waves of COVID-19. He mentioned that his model can predict the factor by which we are missing undetected cases with reasonable accuracy. He mentioned that the new virus was three times more infective than the Delta variant, which was probably the reason for an exponential rise in the number of cases. The loss of immunity in the population was only to the tune of 10 per cent.

Khilnani addressed the important issue concerning treatment options for infected individuals, the effectiveness of antiviral drugs, monoclonal antibodies, and home care safety. He mentioned that if the patient has good immunity (less than 60 years, no obesity, hypertension, diabetes, transplants, kidney disease, chemotherapy, etc.), the main treatment is to keep a watch for any complications and offer symptomatic treatment. He mentioned that two antivirals effectively reduce viral load in people with comorbidities if started within five days of symptoms. These drugs in early trials have been shown to reduce the severity of symptoms to the tune of 30 per cent. However, he cautioned that these drugs should be used under strict medical supervision,

and only in a select group of high-risk patients. Home care, Khilnani said, was fine unless an individual has a persistent high fever for five days, in which case they should seek immediate medical care.

Lahariya spoke in detail about public health measures to be taken by the public and governmental agencies. He emphasised the need for data-driven, decentralised action to accelerate local response

at the district and sub-district levels, adherence to COVID-appropriate behaviour and focused testing approaches. The programme ended with an interactive question and answer session and an informative discussion on the role of immunity and universal coronavirus vaccines. The panellists shed light on the misconceptions related to super spreader events and spread of infections. They believe there is no need to keep schools closed, and spoke about the transition to endemicity wherein the virus will be present at a low transmission rate in the community. The discussion also took account of practical aspects of protection, such as the use of masks and the correct method of wearing them.



■ VIKRAM DATTA

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 BALDEV LAL
M-1169



**SHRI PARAMJIT SINGH
BAWA**
M-2119



SHRI HASMUKH SHAH
M-2332



SHRI VISHNU BHAGWAN
M-3088



SHRI VINOD DUA
M-4005



SHRI RUPINDER SINGH SURI
M-4230



SHRI KRISHAN VARMA
M-4298



SHRI M. A. CHOWDHURY
A-0231



SMT. KAVITA NAGPAL
A-2539



MS. ASHA MALHOTRA
A-2653



SHRI VINOD KUMAR GUPTA
A-5120



SMT. MALA PAL
A-5542



MISS MALA MARWAH
A-5955



**DR. CHANDAN SOURAV
MITRA**
A-6189

**And the following Member (photograph not available):
SHRI MAHESH PRASAD (M-2267)**



Director's Note

Delhi's unusually cold and wet winter is finally giving way to clear skies and bright sun. Even during the coldest months, the Centre's gardens brought a ray of light. Now, the gardens are in full bloom and colourful. Some winter annuals such as Pansy, Gazania, Dianthus, Geranium, Oriental lily, French marigold and Calendula will continue to bloom over the next few months. Begonia (Flame vine) and Roses are also in bloom. Members can be seen walking along the garden paths and admiring the flowers and foliage.

Although interrupted by COVID-induced closures, the winter months were also enlivened with delicious food—from *Purani Dilli ki sair*, *Kolkata Diaries*, and Hyderabadi cuisine to French, Italian and other Continental fare. Our Christmas plum cakes as usual were relished by the members. There was a Christmas buffet with related bakery items served in the Rose Garden. A special continental meal was prepared to ring in the New Year.

We have commenced the construction of the shaft for the Elevator for Conference Room 2 and Main Dining Hall. The Elevator is expected to be ready for use by the end of April, 2022. The painting of the exposed concrete façade of the buildings has been completed. We have ensured that the colour of the paint matches with the original. A firm has been assigned to create uniform and elegant signages for the Centre. The design, font and material for internal signages have been finalised in consultation with ADAC. The refurbishing of some rooms in the new wing and of the Main Reception are underway.

The IRD's initiative, 'SAMHiTA: South Asian Manuscript Histories and Textual Archive', is now set to start. The IIC is entering into an MoU with the Ministry of External Affairs, which will support the pilot phase of cataloguing, digitising and online publication of 1,100 manuscripts from Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, the Wellcome Collection, London, the Indian Institute Library, Oxford, and the University of Copenhagen, over a period of 12 months. Besides defining the policy, standards and workflows for the project, these collaborations will bring to light rare early copies of influential texts, and represent manuscripts from different traditions, from early medieval to modern times.

Now that the third wave of the pandemic is on the wane, the government is relaxing restrictions. We hope to see a greater number of members and their guests staying at the hostel and booking venues for events.

■ K. N. SHRIVASTAVA