

INDIA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE Diary

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Indo–Russian Ties

BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP: *Commemorating India–Russia Friendship: Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation of 1971* by Achala Moulik (AuthorsUpFront: 2021)

DISCUSSANTS: H.E. Mr. Denis Alipov;
G.D. Bakshi; Achala Moulik

MODERATOR: Shri K.N. Shrivastava, Director, IIC

10 August 2022

As someone who was brought up in Moscow and still carries fond memories of her childhood years there, and has a PhD in Russian from Moscow State University, I was delighted to attend this programme.

Mr. Alipov complimented the author, describing her as one of the most important historians of Indo–Russian friendship, also saying that the book under discussion is very readable and gives a holistic and solid analysis. He emphasised that Indo–Russian friendship has stood the test of time. Referring to the treaty of 1971, he said it was a significant milestone in Indo–Russian friendship that played a major role in Russian assistance to India in the Indo-Pak war of 1971 that led to the creation of Bangladesh.

Achala spoke eloquently and her address demonstrated the depth of her research. She pointed out that American support to Pakistan propelled Indira Gandhi to sign the landmark treaty in 1971, which was also a military pact, explicitly stating under Clause 12 that one country was to assist the other if it is under attack, which indeed happened when Pakistan attacked India in the same year and Russia assisted India in that war. She emphasised that in her understanding, there was no hint of submission or subjugation in the Treaty, but genuine friendship on equal terms, despite India being very militarily and economically backward then, unlike American treaties with several West Asian and Southeast Asian countries that were not on equal terms.

Moreover, she also explored the history of Indo–Russian ties before and during the British colonisation of India in the 1700s and 1800s. Referring to the Revolt of 1857, when the British were hanging rebels on trees to die of thirst or hunger, she mentioned that Czar Nicholas I, who otherwise helped suppress many revolts within Europe for the then existing regimes, on hearing of the cruelty of the British in India, wrote to Queen Victoria that while it is alright to shoot armed rebels, such inhuman treatment gives a bad name to European civilisation. Queen Victoria was convinced and stopped the atrocities.

Achala highlighted that it was Tolstoy who suggested the formula of non-cooperation as a form of unarmed resistance, which was picked up by Mahatma Gandhi. She then referred to Swami Vivekanand's great admiration for the Russian people, having prophesised 22 years before the Russian Revolution that the next great movement in human civilisation would come from the Russians.

Curiously, Achala did not refer to the strong Soviet influence on Indian revolutionary freedom fighters like Bhupendranath Datta (Swami Vivekanand's blood-brother), Shripad Amrut Dange, Muzaffar Ahmed, Bhagat Singh and Udham Singh, which is actually a very important facet of our historical ties.

G.D. Bakshi mentioned that the historical sweep of the book from ancient to medieval to modern times impressed him greatly. He recalled with a considerable degree of nostalgia that he graduated from the Indian Military Academy, Dehradun, in 1971 to immediately plunge into the Indo–Pak war that year, and he saw the valuable Indo–Soviet Treaty being implemented in practice on the battlefield, with Soviet assistance in the form of military equipment and a Soviet nuclear submarine checking US naval deployment in the Bay of Bengal. He candidly mentioned that India couldn't have won that war were it not for the friendship treaty with the Soviet Union, given active American support to Pakistan.

■ LAVLIN THADANI

Human Fragility

IIC DIAMOND JUBILEE READINGS AND TALK:

Poems are the Dreams of the Earth

Readings and talk by Raúl Zurita, accompanied by translator Anna Deeny Morales who read in English

WELCOME: Shri K.N. Shrivastava, Director, IIC
Introduction by Sharmistha Mohanty

COLLABORATION: *Almost Island*

22 August 2022

In the programme, 'Poems are the Dreams of the Earth', the Chilean poet Raul Zurita's works were read out in Spanish and English translation by him and Anna Deeny Morales, respectively. Sharmistha Mohanty of *Almost Island* introduced Zurita as one of Latin America's most celebrated and controversial

poets who had been arrested as a young man when General Pinochet came to power.

Among his books are *Purgatory* and *Anti Paradiso*, epic, intimate and lyrical all at once. He uses multiple voices, souls and writes about wounds and deaths. He seeks to move between genres and has a fluid style. Talking about humans and the landscape, he speaks of suffering and injustice, as well as fulfilment, to which the mountains, deserts and seas are witness, and thus achieve a cosmic dimension. He seeks not just to write books or paint paintings, but to make life a work of art. Raul Zurita and Anna Deeny Morales traversed poems that he has been writing for numerous years.

Amongst them were 'Desert of Atacama' which speaks of the dignity of the desert of Atacama, as Chile is all desert. 'Cities of Water' is another passionate poem: 'You know you're dead for love, but he loves you. You lift up your face, cities of water in your eyes.'

■ RACHNA JOSHI

Sensitive Response to People and Places

PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION: *Twin Sisters with Cameras*

An exhibition of photographs by Debalina Mazumder and Manobina Roy

Curated by Sabeena Gadihoke, Mallika Leuzinger and Tapati Guha-Thakurta

SPECIAL PROGRAMMES: Curators Walks

On 20, 21 and 27 August 2022 at 5 pm—Curators Walk with Sabeena Gadihoke

COLLABORATION: CREA and Jadunath Bhavan, a unit of CSSSC and with generous support by Photo South Asia, an initiative of the Murthy-Naik Foundation

13 to 27 August 2022

This was an unusual, moving photography exhibition. The black & white photographs were taken over a period of nearly 50 years by twin sisters Debalina Mazumdar and Manobina Roy, who was married to Bimal Roy, pioneer of serious, finely crafted cinema in Hindustani. The sisters were blessed with an ability to compose their photographs with unobtrusive grace and a feeling for the subtleties of natural light. When only 12-years-old, the twins were initiated into photography by their father Benode Behari Sen-Roy, an educationist, the principal of Meston High School, in Ram Nagar, Benares, then ruled by the Maharaja.



Sen-Roy encouraged his daughters to work in his darkroom so that they would learn to develop the film negative exposed in the camera and make enlarged photo prints of them on the enlarger. This schooling gave Debalina and Manobina the confidence to take pictures of their choice.

The very large exhibition had portraits of and by each of them of family members and their friends, landscapes with people and street scenes from trips abroad to England—the photos were from London really, Greece, and some from Russia. There were a few pictures taken by Bimal Roy of his wife and members of the family.

Manobina and Debalina stuck to taking photographs of what they knew best, their own environment, and yet their efforts rose way above the usual images of family and related activities, rubbing shoulders, as it were, quietly with art. This was possible because of each one's empathy with people. The photographs taken in London and Greece, taken mainly by Manobina, also worked because of a sensitive response to people and places.



■ PARTHA CHATTERJEE

Complex Simplicity in Depiction of Reality

RETROSPECTIVE: *Life in Focus:*

Filmmaker Pramod Mathur

12 and 13 August 2022

This programme was a tribute to Pramod Mathur, esteemed filmmaker and media professional.

The first evening was devoted to a session of tributes by colleagues, friends and co-workers associated with him for decades. Some were present on stage and others had sent video messages from USA, Germany, Finland and Switzerland.

The opening by his wife and colleague, Neelima Mathur, was followed with Aruna Vasudev, Raghu Rai, Naresh Bedi, Rajiv Mehrotra, Indrani Mishra, P. D. Valsan, S. Dhanpal and Milin Kapoor. Monica Lal, Michael Camerini, Cheryl Groff, Ron Hess, Abdul Ashraf Dali, Sang-ki Lee, Iikka Vehkalahti and Meinolf Fritzen were present virtually.

They highlighted the prominent qualities of Pramod Mathur—his non-intrusive, candid style of film-making, the consciousness of the Other, pursuit of the Truth, complex simplicity in depiction of reality, his smiling and gentlemanly countenance, and his contribution to



systemic changes in the media in the 1980s and 1990s.

The next day was devoted to screenings, with post-screening conversations:

'Jungle Dreams'—*The Filmmaker and Protagonist Relationship* with Pankaj Johar, documentary filmmaker; 'Are you with Me?'—*Living with HIV* with Loon Gangte, HIV/AIDS activist; 'Sannate ka Chhand'—S. H. Vatsyayan's *Contribution to Hindi Literature* with Om Thanvi, writer and journalist; 'Krishna—The Divine Lover'—*Sensual Reality in Indian Culture* with Shovana Narayan, Kathak danseuse; and 'Look at My India' (an unfinished film)—*Western Hegemony in the Documentary Sector* with Neelima Mathur.

There was also a brainstorming session: 'Morphing of the Documentary in the Era of Social Media', again a mix of on-site and video presentations by Milin Kapoor, Anandana Kapur, Iikka Vehkalahti, Amudhan R. P., and moderated by Aparna Sanyal. It threw light on the possible emerging scenarios of documentary filmmaking in the years ahead.

The programme ended with a Conversation between Tanushree Sengupta and Neelima Mathur on 'Growing and Living with a Filmmaker', a mix of professional and personal shared anecdotes.

■ NEELIMA MATHUR

Films from the Dominican Republic

COLLABORATION: *India International Centre and The Embassy of the Dominican Republic in India*

8,11 & 29 August and 1 September 2022

Think of the Caribbean and immediately our minds are flooded with images of a pristine blue sea, a very romantic area, abounding with tourists. But are all the islands of the Caribbean Sea as immaculate? The Embassy of the Dominican Republic in India, through its films *The Caribbean Fantasy* and *Candela*, seeks to answer this question. The river Ozama, which goes through the capital Santo Domingo, among other cities, plays the lead role in the documentary *Caribbean Fantasy*. The film, through the eyes of a boatman Ruddy and his paramour Morena, highlights the life, misery and unhappiness of the Dominican capital. The conversations on the boat on the river Ozama, which is filled with all kinds of discarded objects, underpin the despair of the nation's citizens who go so far as to

claim that their Constitution was written only for the benefit of the government and not the masses.

If *Caribbean Fantasy* only vaguely talks about the deception felt by the masses, the national award winning film *Candela* depicts several of them through very few characters. Besides natural calamities like hurricanes which feature in most discussions of the residents of the city, Haitian immigration is seen as a big problem. The Dominicans' disillusionment with life also stems from the fact that willing workers are unable to carry out their duties due to corruption at the higher level, the police are offered bribes—and it is often wiser to accept this—to turn a blind eye, low wages, and last but not least, that it is very normal that menfolk in the city suddenly disappear. The introduction to the film, however, states that the imminent hurricane on the river will destroy everything, but then the sun will come out. An introduction which may be taken metaphorically.

Both the films are recent productions, the former being made in 2016 and the latter as recent as 2021, and hence give its viewers the current unhappy scenario in the country. So, a pristine sea and beach do not always lend happiness.

■ SWATI DASGUPTA

Saint Poets of the Meghwals

SYMPOSIUM & PERFORMANCE:

SYMPOSIUM: *Digitising the Local*
Conducted by Dr. Shubha Chaudhuri
The Sacred Secular

COLLABORATION: *Archives and Archives and Research Centre for Ethnomusicology, American Institute of Indian Studies; and with the support of the Modern Endangered Archives Program, University of California*

19 September 2022

The evening of desert numbers sung by the reputed Meghwal musicians of Udaipur included a well arranged selection of conventional and lesser known compositions from Krishna Leela, Kabir, as also bardic specialities unique to this singing group. The programme was a connoisseur's playlist of choices which were sacred, secular and sonorous to the ears. The medium pace of the numbers made the audience embrace every nuance of the music with understanding. The rhythm of the music was even keel so that there was a compact selection of notes played out in each number.

Alongside the attraction of the music was the variety of musical instruments accompanying the singing. Apart from the percussion inputs there was also a pair

of cymbals which is a must for bhajan renditions, and the sarangi musically played out the intervals between the singing.

The programme also showed a degree of choreographed presentation, as the performing artists formed selective groups and came to the forefront during their turn. Thus, after the high pitched numbers were duly rendered, the group found themselves rightfully taking their places in the rear, while their fellow musicians came front stage. This allowed the audience to savour the strengths of individual renditions, and one left the programme with a fair idea of each musician's contribution to the evening. The short explanatory introductions before each number were an added bonus.

In addition to the sarangi as accompaniment was the tendura, which added further resonance to the rendition. The dholak and the clappers were the visual and aural drama outlining the singing with verve, besides making the beat catchy.

The choreographic appeal of the numbers evoked the desert feel in the best way possible, within the restrictions of an enclosed auditorium space, topped with professional lighting and acoustic arrangements. Had the venue been shifted outdoors, the exclusive desert flair would have authenticated the singing further.

■ SUBHRA MAZUMDAR

Looking at Me Through You

IIC DIAMOND JUBILEE—CULTURE & CREATIVITY:

Legacy and Change
Workshop: Looking at me through you
An experiential learning module on Looking at Contemporary Art—Together
Curated by Learning through Arts, Narrative and Discourse (LAND)
Facilitated by Shobita Punja and Kriti Sood

22 to 24 September 2022

This workshop provided an aesthetic space of peace, trust and art. Participants experienced the inter-relatedness and commonality we all share but often forget, bombarded as we are by societal pressures to isolate, divide and compete. The role of art in establishing non-verbal bridges is immense, yet immeasurable. This was used very effectively to foster community feeling among the participants within just three two-hour sessions.

The module was thoughtfully structured to gently pry open one's defences and allow prejudices to evaporate just by paying attention to the other's points of view. Sharing responses to a curated slide show of artworks enriched the viewing for everyone, as each person's interpretation revealed a slightly or significantly different facet. Superficial looking (of people as well as artworks) makes our lives poorer without our even noticing the loss.

One artist's journey (Vicky Roy, the award-winning photographer who spring-boarded from Delhi's Salaam Baalak Trust) helped show how each piece of art contains an entire spectrum of experience. We need to make greater efforts to read these clues when viewing art, and understand that each engagement with art affects us and widens our world view. By changing us, art changes the world.

The last session brought a sharing of who we are at a deeper level than was expressed the first day when strangers shared mundane achievements by way of introduction. The emphasis at the end of the workshop was on quality of being, hopes, and a shared fundamental need for joy.

The facilitators of the workshop had formulated a strong roadmap for the sessions. Young Kriti Sood maintained a light control, allowing spontaneous contributions to interweave their magic, confident that this magic itself will ensure adherence to the time restraints.

It is not often that we are offered a zone to explore who we are through deeper looking at works of art. These explorations are usually offered under the labels of religion or of spirituality, while they rightfully are integral to each person's life, regardless of age, class, caste, creed, or any other category that divides.

■ **BHARATI MIRCHANDANI**

Exquisite Carnatic Vocal and Bharatanatyam Recitals

IIC DOUBLE BILL DANCE AND MUSIC RECITALS:

Carnatic Vocal Duet by Delhi Sisters—Madhavi Sitaraman and Vaishnavi Sitaraman from Delhi, disciples of Trichur Brothers

Bharatanatyam Recital by Veena Kumar from Delhi, disciple of Guru Justin McCarthy

15 September 2022

An evening featuring performances by young, upcoming artists held the promise of new discoveries. The first of these was a Carnatic vocal recital by the teenaged Delhi sisters, Madhavi and Vaishnavi Sitaraman, disciples of the Trichur brothers.

They were spot on with the mix of compositions and ragams, offering variety and richness in their fare. They began with the beautiful, popular varnam in Sri ragam, followed by a brisk composition in Arabhi ragam. The central piece of the concert was the popular 'Kaa Vaa Vaa' in Varali ragam, prefaced by an alapana and embellished with kalpana swaras. Their concert ended with a Western note in Shankarabharanam and the beautiful tillana in Paras by Swati Tirunal.

While the sisters were earnest in their efforts, they would do well to focus on some basics such as adherence to Sruti and rigorous practising of the basic exercises in three speeds. They have time on their side



and a long career ahead of them. The Delhi sisters and their accompanists need to listen and respond to each other in order to make good music as a team.

The evening concluded with a Bharatanatyam recital by Veena Kumar, disciple of Justin McCarthy. Veena was accompanied by a sparse but experienced team of Justin McCarthy (Nattuvangam) and Sudha Raghuram (Vocal). Veena chose the classic Khamas varnam (Samiyai Azhaituvadi) as her centre piece, danced at a leisurely pace and embellished by Sudha's nuanced exploration of the ragam. The varnam was prefaced by the popular Tyagaraja composition in Pantuvarali ragam (Shambho Mahadeva) and followed by a delectable Javali in Vasantha ragam. Unencumbered by the mridangam and violin, Sudha's vocal support was exquisite and enhanced the beautiful selection of pieces by Veena Kumar.

The performance was marked by Veena's strong stage presence and unhurried approach. One looks forward to seeing a more evolved abhinaya repertoire and lithe footwork from this promising young dancer.

■ **RAHUL RAJAGOPALAN**

The Yearbook of Indian Poetry in English 2021

BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP: *Yearbook of Indian Poetry in English 2021*

Edited by Sukrita Paul Kumar and Vinita Agrawal (Hawakal Publishers: 2022)

DISCUSSANTS: *Mustansir Dalvi; Ms Shilpa D. Thapliyal; Satya Dash; Sukrita Paul Kumar, poet, critic,*

academic and Co-Editor of the book; and Ms Vinita Agrawal, Editor, curator and Co-Editor of the book

12 September 2022

The Yearbook of Indian Poetry in English founded jointly by Sukrita Paul Kumar and Vinita Agrawal is an annual series of anthologies of poems written in English by Indian poets and the Indian diaspora. The inaugural issue was published in June 2021. This session was held on the occasion of the publication of the second volume. The aim of the series is to present

quality poems in English by Indian poets, published in India and abroad. These anthologies will eventually help discern the dynamics of the aesthetics of Indian poetry in English.

In the context of instabilities and uncertainties experienced in contemporary life, it is not surprising that many poems of the *Yearbook* emerge creatively from a special focus on home, house, identity roots, and indeed the question of language which is also deeply linked with the idea of homing. This edition is also embedded with concerted poems on imperialism, gender, mental health, childhood traumas, upbringing, ecology and environment, language, particularly the mother tongue, birds, mining, prostitutes, racism, mythology, identity, sensuality and spirituality, to name a few.

The session on the *Yearbook* included both the Editors, as well as Mustansir Dalvi, Shilpa Thapliyal and Satya Dash on the panel. Mustansir also represented the Review Committee set up for the *Yearbook* 2021. He stated that the anthology was a measure to 'keep a record of our times' through the medium of poetry. Shilpa described the book as an 'overarching umbrella and more' of poetry and poignant writing. Satya described the *Yearbook* as a reference book-cum-compendium that archived poetry written by Indians in English. The panel was in agreement that the *Yearbook* represented the aesthetic dynamics of poetry in English in our country.

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Japan from India's Perspective

EXHIBITION: *Japan from India's Perspective*
Organised as part of the ongoing commemorative events to mark the 70th Anniversary of the establishment of India–Japan Diplomatic Relations

COLLABORATION: *Embassy of Japan*

21 to 30 September 2022

This was an exhibition of the best photographs taken by Indian visitors to Japan submitted as part of the past five editions of Click! Japan Photo Contest'. The photographs covered a range of subjects from traditional Japanese architecture, including temples and shrines, people and landscape, as also a section called 'History of Japan–India', and a screening of short documentaries on Japanese culture, crafts, shrines and temples.

A colourful exposition, the show held the sparkle and precision associated with Japan. Divided subject-wise, the photographs were by Indians, most of whom have not been just visitors to Japan, but have spent time there as students, employees, or kin of personnel from the diplomatic corps serving in Japan. Hence, their view and attention to frames would be carefully



selected and planned. For instance, in Odaiba, the Hanabi or fireworks of December Saturdays all the way up in the sky, the spectacular Rainbow Bridge in the middle and illuminated boats below, could not be a chance click by its photographer.

The photos defined seasons, festivities, architecture, urban scenarios, and natural phenomena—altogether its energy and yet its serenity, from Mt. Fuji to skyscrapers of Tokyo, both solid against the constant ravage of earthquakes. A land of contrasts—so technology driven, yet so replete with nature's scenic beauty, preserved and intact! Famous for its *onsens* or hot water spring baths, while most other countries offer spa facilities exclusive to humans at high premium, it is a gratifying sight to see snow monkeys enjoying a hot spring bath in the freezing weather, all free of cost!

These clearly were not tourist-like photographs. Most were experiences to be stored in quiet corners of the mind, as touching and deeply felt memories of wonder and admiration that Indians hold for a nation that has risen from devastation, now standing tall as a symbol of discipline, precision and progress, yet so sensitive and serene in practice, an amazing combination of the ancient and the modern, a country from where we have so much to learn.

■ ARUNA BHOWMICK



Pakistan at 75

DISCUSSION: *Pakistan at 75*

PANELISTS: *Amb. T. C. A. Raghavan; Tilak Devasher; Sanjay Kathuria; Smruti Pattanaik; and Senator Mushahid Hussain (recorded presentation)*

CHAIR: *Ashok K. Mehta*

22 August 2022

India, V.S. Naipaul once said, was an area of darkness. Today, after the Sri Lankan implosion, it is Pakistan, flooded, economically challenged and in political disarray, that is in the ICU. At this discussion, the participants expressed serious concern about the state Pakistan finds itself in.

Pakistan, Kathuria pointed out, had gone to the IMF a record 23 times, more than any other country. Another loan won't help to put the toothpaste back into the tube without the necessary structural reform that is on no one's agenda. Inflation is at a staggering 42 per cent, the Pakistan Rupee is haemorrhaging support, and only Sino–Saudi handouts are keeping Pakistan's head above water. If Pakistan, Kathuria said, is a lost cause in the making, it is because 20 odd families run the country, crony capitalism is rampant and, the military's budget leaves little for progress and development. Embarrassingly, even Bangladesh is doing better than Pakistan. Lurking in the shadows is another crisis, the debt to China, growing like Jack's beanstalk.

Unprecedented civil–military strife is another problem with former PM Imran Khan's radical anti-army rants giving the political establishment more space, even if Rawalpindi (where the brasshats sit) still rules the roost, argued Raghavan. However, Imran Khan is using 'language' never before used by politicians. Raghavan compared Pakistan today to the short-lived Weimar Republic. Perhaps, even that could well turn out to be a compliment.

Even considering Imran Khan's support, it is still too early to say that the all-powerful Pakistan Army is on the back foot, agreed Devasher, but the rifts are potentially damaging. The strategic plus of a Taliban win in Afghanistan hasn't provided Pakistan the expected impetus: the Afghans haven't agreed to the Durand Line, they won't act against the Tehrik-e-Taliban, and horror of horrors, India is sending Kabul humanitarian aid. Then, there are Balochi groups, fighting for independence and hitting where it hurts. Besides, Imran Khan had left even Pakistan's apologists angry. Both China and the Saudis are happier with PM Shehbaz Sharif, as is the United States of America.

Senator Mushahid Hussain, the only Pakistani speaker, complimented the Pakistani people for their resilience and their ability to bounce back. They certainly had after 1971, he declared. Calling Islamabad a 'soft state and a strong society,' he asserted that Pakistan was the freest Muslim democracy with a free media.

Which brings us to India and Pakistan. Hussain, rather optimistically, hoped for a Canada–United States kind of relationship between India and Pakistan and blamed growing intolerance in India for bilateral problems. Strategic analyst Smruti Pattanaik mentioned there haven't been bilateral discussions between the two countries after the Pathankot terror attack in 2016. Unless terrorism ends and with SAARC almost breathing its last, back channel dialogues were one way out. There was talk of 'creative diplomacy', but also an acknowledgment of the 'centrality' of Kashmir, where India and Pakistan have impossibly different positions. The absence of bilateral trade is hurting both countries, but with Pakistan not in the BIMSTEC or even the BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal) axis, it is 'almost as if Pakistan is in Antarctica!'

However, Indo–Pak ties are unpredictable, Raghavan reminded everyone. Who had imagined, for instance, that Modi would visit Pakistan? The even handed reactions after the Brahmos missile misfire (it had landed in Pakistan) may be a faint silver lining, but there is more cause for pessimism than optimism.

■ **SRINJOY CHOWDHURY**

In Honour of Simon Digby

DISCUSSION: *Objects, Images, Stories: Simon Digby's Historical Method*

*Edited by Francesca Orsini
(Oxford University Press: 2022)*

DISCUSSANTS: *Narayani Gupta; Shahid Amin; John Seyller; and Francesca Orsini*

8 September 2022

Objects, Images, Stories: Simon Digby's Historical Method edited by Francesca Orsini is a compilation of essays related to themes on which Simon Digby had worked, such as aspects of medieval Indian history and Sufism. The evening began with Narayani Gupta providing a brief overview of Digby and his writings. She reminisced about how, every year, usually in September, Simon Digby visited India and stayed at the India International Centre, making it his base camp.

Following this, Iqtidar Alam Khan spoke about his relationship with Simon Digby. Among those present

at the function, Khan undoubtedly had the longest association with Digby. The text of his Urdu speech was read out by Sohail Hashmi. Iqtidar Alam Khan noted that it was not just with him that Digby shared a deep bond. In due course of time, he had established close intellectual and personal relationships with several historians at Aligarh.

Two other speakers, John Seyller and Shahid Amin, spoke about Simon Digby and his work. Seyller made a riveting presentation providing the audience with a glimpse of some fascinating facets related to Mughal

painting, especially practices of painting. Shahid Amin spoke about the wide range of Digby's scholarship. His interests were not limited to Indian history, and he could have informed conversations on movies and film songs. Amin also referred to his memorable visits to Digby's home in Jersey, England. Fond recollections of Ratindranath Sen, a close friend of Digby, were also read out in the programme. The evening culminated with Francesca Orsini providing a brief overview of the book.

■ AMAR FAROOQUI

Problems and Solutions?

TALK: *State of the Indian Media*

Apoorvanand and Ananya Vajpeyi in Conversation with Suhas Borker

This conversation marks the 32nd Anniversary of the Presidential Assent to the Prasar Bharati Act, 1990 and is the 29th discussion in the annual series

COLLABORATION: *Jan Prasar*

12 September 2022

Suhas Borker said that for the first time only academics had been invited to this media conversation series to bring objectivity to the discussion and view the Indian media in the context of India's democratic polity. He flagged the issues of undeclared emergency, corporatisation of media, fake news, an oppressive environment for journalists, and trolling of those criticising the government which often criminalises dissent.

Apoorvanand stated that *godji* media out of fear supports the government and denies space to the opposition. He exposed regional newspapers and channels supporting the government and campaigning against Muslims without fear, in mission mode, because of the majoritarian ideology. So, he said, the common space of people of diverse faiths gets destroyed.

Illiberal democracy and authoritarianism in India was traced by Ananya Vajpeyi to damages suffered by the pillars sustaining democracy which she claimed cannot be salvaged by the media alone. Describing



social media as a game changer, she thought competing media narratives must get anchored in truth and facts, and advocated public audit of media, its performance, credibility and transparency.

Borker mentioned the attempts at the hostile takeover of NDTV. Apoorvanand pointed out that punitive action against journalists led to the deprivation of information and endangered democracy. Borker quoted, '*Kos Kos par badle paani, chaar kos par bani*', embodying India's pluralism which was often negated by dominant media narratives pushed by the government.

Self censorship by journalists, warned Vajpeyi, devalued their reports and articles. Borker said that real issues like unemployment, mishandling of COVID, tribulations of migrant workers, devastation of MSMEs, sale of national assets to crony capitalists are ignored, and false narratives are pushed through the media.

■ S. N. SAHU

Importance of Data and Privacy

IIC DIAMOND JUBILEE—DIGITAL GOVERNANCE:

Data: New Oil and Privacy Rights

SPEAKERS: Nikhil Pahwa; Rama Vedashree;
Sreenidhi Srinivasan; Mansi Kedia; Amber Sinha

MODERATOR: Apar Gupta

23 September 2022

In a world beset with rapidly evolving technology, the deliberative process of law making has no chance of keeping pace. In 2017, the Supreme Court of India rested all controversy regarding the status of the fundamental right to privacy—it linked it to every fundamental right. Thereafter, there was increased activity around the formation of a personal data protection bill. This bill was withdrawn in the last session of Parliament. On the other side, the Indian government was arguing in the Supreme Court that privacy is not a fundamental right under the Indian Constitution. Has the stance changed and what can we hope for?

The seminar excellently highlighted the importance of data and privacy. Concerned about the issue, Nikhil Pahwa argued that we need to understand why

privacy and data are important and why we are in this mess. He also blamed advertising for global market failure.

At the same time, Apar Gupta also shed light on the economic value of data. He said it is often under-emphasised when we focus on the criticism, and went on to talk about his own usage of digital technologies and sometimes, total dependence on them.

An experienced lawyer and member of the Krishna Committee, Rama Vedashree also argued in this context. She said, 'I strongly believe that we need a robust privacy law plus an enforcement framework, because I think the Supreme Court recognising privacy as a fundamental right was a pioneering milestone.'

Sreenidhi Srinivasan compared it in the global context. She referred to Chinese, Russian and European models of the Internet and data governance and asked: when it comes to privacy, is this really wrong, and what is the potential impact on users?

However, research fellow and economist Mansi Kedia differed with Pahwa and Rama. Amber Sinha agreed with Mansi Kedia and said, 'there is a lot of attention to governance around personal data. It's not just data worldwide. Regulators are talking about algorithmic activism.'

■ M. SHAHID SIDDIQUI

Democracy: The Road Ahead

IIC DIAMOND JUBILEE DISCUSSION — CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRACY

THEME 1: Institutional Functioning and Accountability

*Parliament: Overcoming the Functional Crisis, Restoring the Centrality of Debate and Consensus Making
A dialogue with Seshadri Chari; and Pavan K. Varma*

DISCUSSANT: Chakshu Roy

CHAIR: Balveer Arora

1 August 2022

The challenge to democracy discussion, under the rubric of 'Institutional Functioning and Accountability', was envisaged as a mediated dialogue between Seshadri Chari and Pavan Varma. Chari began by underscoring the significance of the proper functioning of Parliament, the centrality of debate and consensus making; likening them to the three idols in the temple of democracy—Parliament.

Varma lamented the woeful lack of civilised debate and the constant disruption of Parliament as a vicious cycle, which was legitimised when the present government was in the Opposition. He also highlighted that the onus to build consensus lies with the treasury benches. Opposition requests for debates on various bills had been in vain and there was a complete breakdown of trust between the ruling party and them.

Chakshu Roy suggested whether bipartisanship could be built on issues of a more technical nature, and if citizens could play a more proactive role in the process, rather than merely exercising their franchise periodically.

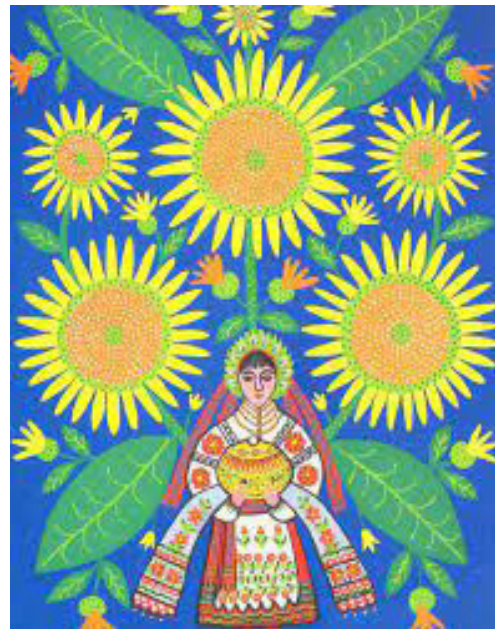
Chari conceded to the issues of whatboutery and playing to the gallery by members in times of live telecasting of Parliamentary debates. He proposed punitive action as a remedy for disruption of the working of Parliament. However, Varma disagreed that punishment would work in the case of an insensitive government that muzzled dissent, and it was Utopian to believe that a party in power would punish one of its own. Instead, he emphasised the resolving of root causes.

Punitive recourse applying to everyone cutting across party lines, televising committee meetings as well as making it mandatory for all bills to go through the select committee were some recommendations made by Chari.

The dialogue concluded on a broad consensus; that the trust deficit between the party in power and the

Opposition needed to be addressed, the latter given more time in Parliament, where it gets to foreground its agenda, and augmenting the number of days Parliament functions in order to meet contemporary challenges.

■ **AJAY JAISINGHANI**



Exhibition : 'The Ukrainian World of Maria Prymachenko'—11 to 18 August 2022

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.



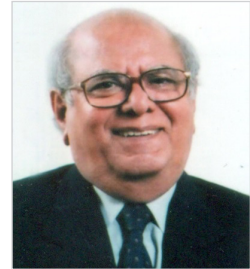
SHRI S. S. LAL
M-1051



SHRI S. C. JAIN
M-1174



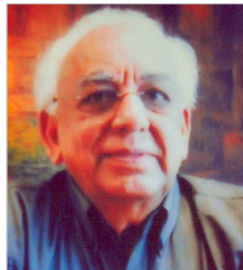
**CDR. SURESHWAR
D. SINHA (RETD.)**
M-1352



**DR. PRADEEP R.
MEHENDIRATTA**
M-1610



SHRI ARUN K. MEHTA
M-1758



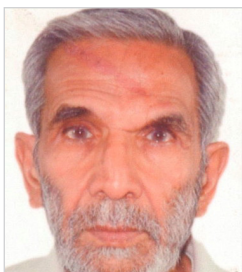
DR. V. KRISHNAMURTHY
M-2127



**SHRI U. V. KRISHNAM
RAJU** | M-3333



**DR. (SMT.) R. A.
BHUJWALA** | A-2366



**SHRI CHAND KISHORE
SAINT** | A-3530



SHRI RAM A PODDAR
A-4496



SMT. ASHA YADAV
A-5387



**DR. MINOTI
CHATTERJEE** | A-5730



SMT. CHETNA KOHLI
A-7118



MS. URMILLA KAPUR
M-3948

And the following Members
(photographs not available):
DR. J. S. GANDHI (M-2311)



Director's Note

By the time this edition of the IIC Diary is available to Members, the *IIC Experience: A Festival of the Arts, 2022*, would have concluded and the wonderful energy that surrounded it would have somewhat diminished, only to be revived by Diwali. We will be bringing out a special issue of the IIC Diary next month featuring only the Festival and all the programmes that were organised.

The take-away counter in the main veranda has re-started and orders are serviced between noon and 8 pm. With the cool weather setting in, the weekend cuisines have also returned, much to the appreciation and delight of Members. Members can enjoy varied cuisines from Friday to Sunday in the Dining Hall and Lotus lounge. The same can also be ordered as take-away by placing orders in advance. A special dinner was organised on the occasion of Ganesh Chaturthi in September.

The installation of signages at the Main Centre is well underway and in some areas the work has been completed. The external way-finding signages are in Rajasthan black stone with hone finish and inlay whereas the external identification signages are in DuPont Corian with cut letters. The internal signages are in frosted acrylic with flat bed printing. The entire project will be completed in a month from now.

The Solar PV plant on the roof of the Main Centre was installed a couple of years ago. I am very happy to report that this has resulted in a large amount of energy-saving. Another Solar Plant will now be installed at the Annexe. The Centre is in discussion with Tata Power Solar for this work.

As private transport is moving towards the use of Electric Vehicles, we are considering how we can benefit Members in this regard. It is proposed to set up an EV charging station which we hope our Members will patronise.

The Centre generates a good amount of horticultural and garden waste. A part of it is presently being converted into organic manure through vermiculture and composting. Acting on the suggestion of the President, IIC, to re-use the entire garden waste for organic composting, it has now been decided to install an Organic Waste Composting Plant. This will enable us to reduce the waste burden on the environment, and meet the Centre's own organic manure requirements.

Members can now charge their Smart Cards online, and also place orders online. Members may access the online facilities link either from the 'About Page' of the IIC Website (<https://iicdelhi.in>) or by using <http://member.iicdelhi.in> URL.

The Centre wishes its Members joy and good health in the festive season

K. N. SHRIVASTAVA