

INDIA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE **II** **Diary**

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Pure et Sonore

PERFORMANCE : *Classical Hues: An Evening of Opera and Art Song*

SINGER : Pallavi Seth

PIANIST : Svetlana Radashkevich

16 May 2023

Western music has had a niche audience in the capital with limited offerings typically dominated by Western performers. As more opportunities have become available for local talent to engage in the art form, multiple choral groups have emerged and Indian singers have found their voice in genres ranging from opera to sacred works and musical theatre. This evening's concert offered a treat for aficionados as *mezzo-soprano* Pallavi Seth regaled the audience with arias and art songs.

Seth's musical prowess was evident from the moment she stepped onto the stage. Her command over her voice and the ability to emote were apparent, underscoring years of international training and experience. She effortlessly navigated a repertoire spanning various styles and languages, showcasing her versatility as a performer. From soaring high notes to nuanced phrasing, she displayed technical proficiency as well as sensitivity to the lyrics. Pianist Svetlana Radashkevich's skilful accompaniment enriched the overall experience.

The first part of the programme featured arias from the late Romantic era: 'Connais tu le pays' from the opera *Mignon* by Thomas, 'Ah! Quel Diner' from *La Perichole* by Offenbach, and 'Habanera' from *Carmen* by Bizet. Seth was able to bring out the longing for 'a land where there is eternal springtime under an ever-blue sky' in the first aria, the drunken playfulness of the second 'tipsy aria' (with a wine glass prop) and the provocative rebelliousness of love in the third aria.

The second part of the programme featured 11 art songs—a genre akin to *Lieder*—with literary texts set to



music, typically accompanied by the piano. The dreamy French song 'Après un rêve' by Faure was followed by a playful German serenade by Brahms, a mellow 'Offrande' and hopeful 'L'énamourée' by Hahn, another dream reference in the Italian 'Sogno' by Tosti, followed by the flirty Neapolitan 'A vucchella', full of wordplay.

After Debussy's 'Beau soir' validated a beautiful evening, Seth sang two songs in English based on poems from *Gitanjali* by Tagore, set to music by Carpenter. These were particularly special, bringing together her Indian heritage and Western training. After another song about verses having wings by Hahn, the concert concluded with yet another dream reference in the Russian 'Son' (CoH) by Rachmaninov. The evening ended all too soon with the audience craving more engagement with the singer, and to paraphrase Faure, with her voice 'pure et sonore'.

■ PUNITA SINGH

Lost in Translation

TALK : *The Catalan and Spanish Sanskrit Dictionaries, updating Sanskrit Lexicography*

SPEAKER : Òscar Pujol

CHAIR : Sudha Gopalakrishnan

SUPPORTED BY : Ministry of External Affairs
10 April 2023

In a lucid exposition of Western and Indian linguistic theory, Oscar Pujol said that while compiling his Sanskrit dictionaries in Catalan and Spanish, he sought to address distortions in Sir Monier-Williams' Sanskrit–English dictionary. Lexicographers of the 19th century attempted a logical classification of meaning that often created a 'historical mirage'. Thus, Monier-Williams would first decompose a word into its meaningful units (e.g., for the word *samartha*, 'sam' and 'artha'), then taking the sense of these units individually, would reconstruct a scheme that was conceptual rather than empirically grounded, arguing that the current sense of *samartha* as 'capable' had evolved from its original meaning of 'having a similar or suitable aim or object'. However persuasive this presentation, it is true neither historically—*samartha* connotes 'capable' as early as the Mahabharata—nor to the principle of Indian grammarians, accepted in contemporary Western linguistics, that a word's *rudha* or accepted meaning prevails over its etymology.



For his own dictionaries, Pujol chose words included in existing Sanskrit and European-language dictionaries, but made his own selection from textual sources in order to bring out how different philosophical schools emphasised distinct shades of meaning. He aimed at 'encyclopaedic' dictionaries useful to Westerners coming to Sanskrit from an interest in Indian philosophy. His original contribution was to reference derivations from both European etymologists (Manfred Mayrhofer) and the Sanskrit tradition. For instance, Western philologists cite references to *kamala* (lotus) as 'pale pink' in the Rig Veda, whereas in the *unadi* sutras—attributed to Panini—it is explained as 'that which adorns water'. He clarified that words included in the *unadi* list are recognised as non-transparent and difficult to relate to a known root.

He concluded with a plea to set up a team and a time-bound plan to compile a Sanskrit–English dictionary adhering to contemporary lexicographic standards.

■ NIHARIKA GUPTA

A Persian Masterpiece

DISCUSSION : *Revisiting Sadeq Hedayat's 'Blind Owl': Writings on a Modern Persian Novel*

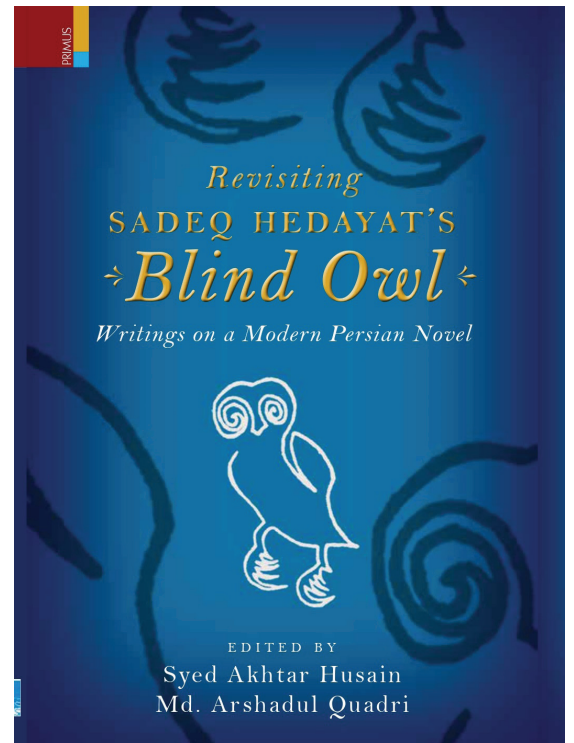
Release of the book edited by Syed Akhtar Husain and Md. Arshadul Quadri (New Delhi: Primus Books, 2023)

DISCUSSANTS : Syed Akhtar Husain; Md. Arshadul Quadri; Udaya Kumar; and Ranjani Mazumdar

CHAIR : Sukrita Paul Kumar

27 April 2023

This book is a compilation of papers presented at a conference organised by the IIC–IRD in 2016, to mark the 80th year of the novel's publication in India. It contains 13 essays which look at the novel from various lenses—historical, psycho-analytical, cinematic and literary.



Hedayat's *Blind Owl*, which has been translated into 41 languages, is considered a milestone in the realm of modern Persian novel writing. The narrator of the story is an anonymous painter, who makes some brutal confessions to a shadow on his wall that resembles an owl.

Brevity is the soul of this novel. Husain pointed out that while the novel may have been written in Persian, the technique is not at all Iranian. It is inspired by Western writers like Edgar Allan Poe, Anton Chekhov and Franz Kafka. Quadri added that the novel, which is often compared to Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, is a workbook to unravel the riddles of life.

Cultural linkages between India and Iran have a long history, said Sukrita Paul Kumar in her introductory

remarks, reiterating the 'need to know our neighbours'. She also spoke about how no two translations of the novel are alike, and the transmutation that happens in the process.

Udaya Kumar used the Malayalam translation of the novel by Vilasini, titled *Kurudan Moonga*, as an entry point into his reflections on the work. He argued that the novel marks a different strand of modernism, which is very distinct from canonical modernism. This was followed by remarks from Ranjani Mazumdar, who spoke about Hedayat's preoccupations with the grotesque, his play with horror, and how adaptations can give novels an afterlife.

■ MEDHA V.

Glory of the Mughals

PLAY : *Sons of Babur*

PRESENTED BY : *Pierrot's Troupe*

DIRECTED BY : *M. Syeed Alam*

SCRIPT : *Salman Khurshid*

ADAPTATION : *Ather Farouqui*

26 May 2023

Staged many times in India and abroad, *Sons of Babur*, scripted by Salman Khurshid and adapted for the stage by Ather Farouqui, is a satirical play within a play that was staged before a packed and receptive audience.

The play imaginatively stitches together the excited interrogations of a hallucinating, deeply disturbed Bengali college student, steeped in present-day political metaphors, who is struggling to make sense of the much acclaimed glory of the Mughals. Not quite anachronistic, the story sees Rudra 'travel', in 'beam-me-up-Scotty' style to Rangoon, and through creatively imagined reminiscences of the desolate last Mughal Bahadur Shah Zafar, exiled in Rangoon for his part in the 1857 rebellion against British rulers, seeks understandings about each Mughal emperor's role in the enrichment, or otherwise, of the splendour of Hindustan.

In the vibrant 'dream' dialogues between Rudra and the ageing, despondent philosopher-king Bahadur

Shah Zafar, neither justifies the ills of his times. Their excited and amusing exchanges are accompanied by energetically dramatised portrayals of all the Mughal Emperors, warts and all, thereby avoiding a flat narration of their achievements.

Starting with the Timurid Zahir-ud-din Babur his successors are all critiqued as the relationship between 'raja' and *praja* is interrogated and Rudra explains modern concepts like democracy to Bahadur Shah 'Jophor' (his Bengali enunciation). In turn the Emperor explains that rulers can be good or bad, 'daymo-craycy' or no 'daymo-craycy'. That Akbar is always 'great' because he abolished the Jizya tax on non-Muslims or developed a syncretic creed Din-e-ilahi, and Aurangzeb always a 'tyrant' because he killed to become king, even if he made the Empire economically sound, are thus questionable simplistic assessments of these sons of Babur.

This deconstruction of recorded history becomes more interesting as a clearly revised script introduces the newer modes of power-play once globalisation allows a re-entry of 'phoren' leaders (G20), a phenomenon Rudra tries to explain to Emperor 'Zafar' (finally pronounced correctly).

Does the play seek the restoration of 'truth', if there is a truth in historical renderings, is a question only the playwright can answer as audiences continue to enjoy the play.

■ RANI SHANKARDASS

Forest Archaeology

TALK : *Ancient Itinerants and Medieval Rulers in Bandhavgarh's Forests*

SPEAKER : Nayanjot Lahiri

CHAIR : Upinder Singh

COLLABORATION : Ashoka University

18 April 2023

The beauty and rich heritage of Bandhavgarh's forests came to life in Nayanjot Lahiri's discussion of the site based on recent fieldwork conducted by her along with her students. Lahiri focuses on the forest as more than a mere transitional space or an 'other' that must yield to civilisation. Instead, the terrain of the forest becomes the focus of her work in Bandhavgarh in what Upinder Singh, at the end of the lecture, called 'forest archaeology'. Accompanied by stunning visuals, Lahiri iterated the importance of the forest landscape, which is intrinsic to the rock-cut caves of the early historic period as well as the later temples, built by the Kalachuri and the Vaghela dynasties in Bandhavgarh.

The rock-cut caves, the earliest dating back to the Magha dynasty, were carved out of the forest rock and blended into the forest landscape. Lahiri argues, contrary to perception, that these were not primarily for religious communities. The occasional religious markers like the figure of a Jain

Tirthankara were incidental. No specific religious faith could be affixed to the caves. These were spaces for itinerant groups and mendicants, now often roamed by tigers whose pugmarks dot the caves.

A distinct change occurred when the Kalachuri dynasty's political presence in Bandhavgarh became apparent from the 8th century CE onwards. Unlike the caves, the temples, carved out of rock quarried from the forests, soared above, noticeably altering the landscape. Lahiri speculates that some of the forest may have been cleared to accommodate these changes and paddy cultivation practised. The space is scattered with Shaiva and Vaishnava motifs. This includes a dramatic *in situ* sculptural series, depicting Varaha, Matsya and Kashyapa. Here, Lahiri drew attention to the magnificent Sheshashayi Vishnu where the deity's feet point towards a water channel that drips all year round. She commented that in the monsoon, the sleeping Vishnu would be in a pool of water and the spot for the figure would appear to be a very deliberate choice to bring to life its mythology.

Drawing on both architectural and inscriptional evidence, Lahiri traced the shift in religious balance and architectural form in Bandhavgarh's forests. She interspersed her narrative with anecdotes from the site. Here, the forests are not only the site of change, they are an active component of change.

■ MAYUKHI GHOSH

Romance of the Railways

TALK : *Indian Railway Buildings: Heritage, History and Beyond*

SPEAKER : Vinoo N. Mathur

CHAIR : Sumantra Bhowmick

18 May 2023

The illustrated lecture by Vinoo N. Mathur, author of the recently published book of the same title (Niyogi Books, 2022), was held in the 'Frontiers of History' series. The talk covered a 100-year period from 1853 to 1953 and presented an overview of railway stations and other buildings built by the British Raj in India. The speaker classified the structures based on architectural styles prevalent in Europe, starting from the Classical to the Romanesque and Gothic Revivalist of 12th century Europe.

The first railway lines to be built in India were from Bori Bundar to Thane in 1853 and Howrah to Hooghly in 1854. However, the Royapuram Station in Chennai was the first to be built in the Classical Revival design in 1856, followed by Madras Central in 1873, in the Romanesque style. The architecture included the Victorian Gothic style of vertical,

cloud-kissing tall spires and Indo-Saracenic elements such as *jharokhas*, canopies and screens. Further, he illustrated styles that evolved in the Princely States in the 20th century, which often incorporated local and regional elements. Mathur concluded the talk by citing changes in priorities resulting from India's Independence in 1947. At this time the need was to focus on the functional aspects of railway stations rather than the monumental, and styles took a back seat.

The adoption of Neoclassical vocabulary by the British Raj in India in the construction of railway stations raises an important issue of the use of monumental architecture to impress colonised subjects. Many scholars such as Phiroze Vasunia (*The Classics and Colonial India*), Michael Mann (*A British Rome in India: Calcutta—Capital for an Empire*) and Partho Datta (*The Book Review*) have stressed that the adoption of European architectural traditions in India should be seen in the context of state ritual and display of power primarily for the consumption of the European elite. The priority shifted after 1947 to the expansion of railway lines and the stupendous architecture of railway stations was no longer emphasised.

■ HIMANSHU PRABHA RAY

Historical Friendship in Jeopardy?

DISCUSSION : *India–Bhutan–China Border Issues*

PANELLISTS : *V. P. Haran; P. S. Pannu; and Madhuri Sukhija*

CHAIR : *Ashok K. Mehta*

26 May 2023

The Indo–Bhutanese relationship has stood the test of time and endured since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1968. India's Prime Minister, the late Jawaharlal Nehru, was the first to visit the kingdom. During his visit, he had declared that any attack on Bhutan would be considered an attack on India. Similarly, when the current Prime Minister Narendra Modi chose Bhutan for his first state visit after taking oath of office, the objective was to foster the relationship further and to assure the neighbour of India's continued support. But is it a one-way street?

Chinese moves over the years to claim and encroach on Bhutanese land and construction of roads close to Indian borders including Doklam are matters of great concern for India. China has solved border disputes with 14 countries, except India and Bhutan.

Bhutan's Prime Minister Lotay Tshering's recent remarks to a Belgian newspaper over a possible solution of the Bhutan–China border dispute came into sharp focus at the discussion.

The question is, will India accept the Bhutan–China deal. Experts felt that India cannot take Bhutan for granted as it may no longer keep India in the loop on matters of India's concern. China is eyeing Jampheri ridge, close to the Siliguri corridor, and any intrusion in that area will endanger India's security. Torsa Nala is India's red line.

Whether the King of Bhutan, HM Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk, during his visit to India in April 2023 was able to remove India's apprehensions on this issue remains a moot point. Even though Bhutan remains circumspect about designs of the P-5 nations, will it give more concessions to one of them—China in the future—at the cost of historical friendship with India remains to be seen.

■ VIJAY NAIK

The EU between Peace and War

TALK : *War at the Gate: The European Union Facing its Truth*

SPEAKER : *Hervé Juvin*

CHAIR : *Come Carpentier de Gourdon*

3 April 2023

The speaker noted the stunning pace of change in the geopolitical scene. Saudi Arabia and Iran have signed a diplomatic agreement. China plays global peacemaker. Iran and Syria are returning to regional and global institutions and will probably in the near future join BRICS. However, the problem with Europe, according to him, is the European Union's (EU) radical inability to cope with such changes because it puts its ideology before reality. The EU continues to lecture the outside world, but few pay attention to its lessons anymore.

The EU is fighting a war in Ukraine that has nothing to do with its core interests. The US is for now the winner of the current conflict which costs Russia heavily, while European nations are paying a major price to support Ukraine while enforcing multiple sanctions on Russia. Meanwhile, the US military complex is selling huge amounts of weapons to its captive European clients and its energy sector is booming thanks to LNG exports to the EU at very high prices. Let us

not forget the allegedly US-sponsored terrorist sabotage of the Nord Stream 2 Pipeline. Everybody knows the truth but few publicly designate the aggressor.

The biggest mistake at the root of this crisis was to ignore the balance of power and the national interests of European states. Germany built its industrial export base by relying on US security guarantees funded by US taxpayers and it accumulated enormous trade surpluses by tapping cheap energy from Russia. Such a deal which enabled it to enjoy the 'best of both worlds' could not last. The EU may even break apart if the Germans are no longer willing or able to finance its enormous structural deficits.

The Ukrainian army has already lost the war. NATO is certainly not winning but the US and their British accomplices have often deployed the ultimate violence when their vital interests are at stake—just take a look at the current situation in Serbia/Kosovo, Libya, Palestine, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Syria. The growing threats to the US dollar and the financialisation and dematerialisation of the economy are bringing us to the edge of a third world war.

The speaker talked about his international initiative for 'good strategic neighbourhood' between 'non-aligned' countries. The US needs to be brought to the negotiating table as an equal partner to other powers, not as the controlling 'hyperpower' that it no longer is.

What is good for world peace will also be good for US taxpayers and consumers.

To achieve this, he argued, the US and its allies and rivals should be invited to urgently address issues of universal concern, such as the environment, social conditions, local empowerment, and sound regulation of scientific

innovations which often result in highly harmful or dangerous technologies. This seems to be the long-term policy of India too. Hervé Juvin expressed the hope that the EU would play its role in this initiative.

■ COME CARPENTIER DE GOURDON

From Democracy to Autocracy

BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP : *Teardrop Diplomacy: China's Sri Lanka Foray* by Asanga Abeyagoonasekera (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023)

DISCUSSANTS : C. Raja Mohan; Smruti S. Pattanaik; Rajeswari Rajagopalan; and Asanga Abeyagoonasekera

MODERATOR : Ashok K. Kantha

9 May 2023

A year after Sri Lanka was plunged into a political and economic crisis, *Teardrop Diplomacy: China's Sri Lanka Foray*, a compilation of commentator and strategic studies expert, Asanga Abeyagoonasekera's articles published between 2019–2022 provides a critical, if sometimes repetitive, insight into the island nation's slide from democracy to autocracy. The underlying daily social, political and economic distress that was simmering over the three years in which the Rajapaksas had returned to power, erupted in April 2022 with massive street protests, as the general public saw hours of power cuts, winding queues for fuel, a currency collapse and massive shortages.

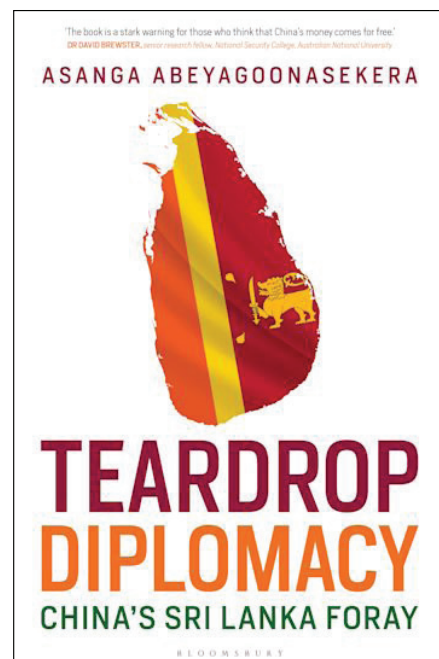
During the discussion, the author argued that the entwining of Sri Lankan policy with Chinese statecraft had led to concerning shifts in Colombo, that went so far as to defend China's view on human rights—a position that can interfere with domestic reconciliation and peace building within Sri Lanka.

C. Raja Mohan underscored the similarities in the economic and political crises witnessed in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan in the last year, and the lessons for India. Pointing out that the structural problems of heavy dependence on China remain the same, even if the specifics differ, it will be in India's interest to listen to its neighbours in this era of new great power rivalries where China has a major role.

In response to the economic crisis, India extended nearly four billion dollars in aid to the crippled economy in 2022, averting a default and providing Sri Lanka a breather to begin repaying its loans, even as the Rajapaksas were forced out of power in the wake of massive anti-government protests between April and July last year. Ashok K. Kantha argued that India's support to Sri Lanka went beyond the imperative of countering China alone but was framed in Delhi's neighbourhood first policy that seeks to bind India's core security interests with national aspirations of neighbouring South Asian countries.

For Sri Lanka the challenges are manifold. Abeyagoonasekera made a case that the teardrop shaped island nation is caught between China's attempt to expand its strategic footprint through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and US-led efforts to counter it in the Indo-Pacific with partners like India. In their midst Lanka needs to find its own feet, and a year on from the crisis, must, as Kantha said, pivot away from emergency management to the formulation of a long-term strategy that will safeguard it from such a crisis in the future.

■ MAYA MIRCHANDANI



Correlating Parliament and Democracy

BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP : *House of the People: Parliament and the Making of Indian Democracy* by Ronojoy Sen (Cambridge University Press; New edition, 2022)

DISCUSSANTS : Yamini Aiyar; M. R. Madhavan; Raju Ramachandran; and Ronojoy Sen

MODERATOR : Alex Travelli

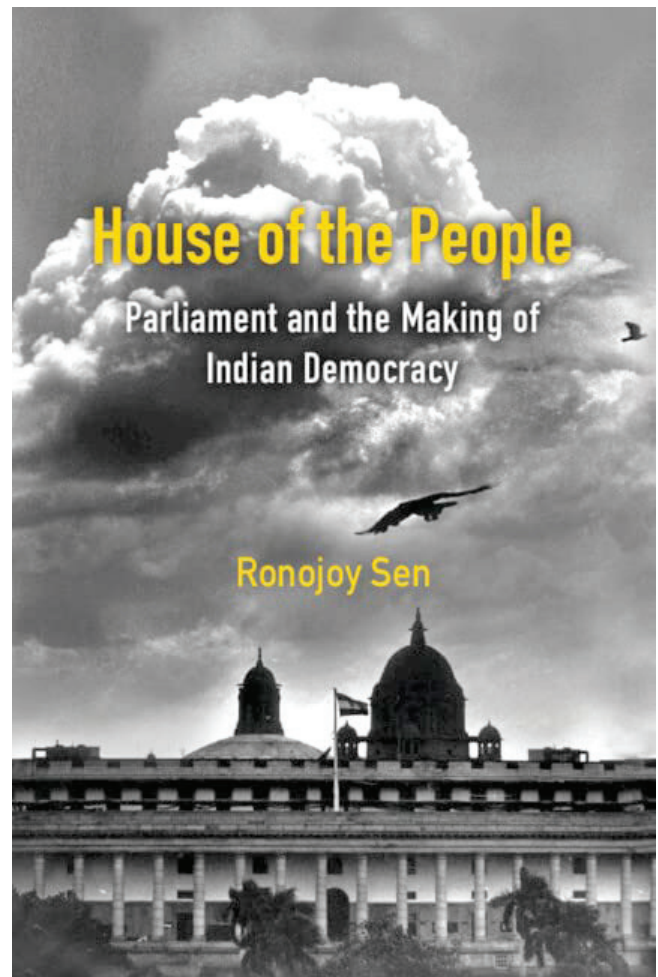
13 April 2023

Understanding the functioning of the Indian Parliament forms a core part of understanding Indian democracy because it stands as a critical parameter of its institutional health. Ronojoy Sen's book *House of the People: Parliament and the Making of Indian Democracy* explores two significant questions in this context. The first concerns the effectiveness of Parliament's work in articulating diverse demands and translating them into legislation. The second examines the transformations in Parliament brought forth by the practice of Indian democracy.

This institutional biography of the Indian Parliament cuts across the domains of politics, history and law to present the trajectory and contradictions of India's democracy through the past 17 Lok Sabhas. The major themes outlined in the book range from the historical evolution of the Constituent Assembly; changing socio-political composition of Parliament; disruptions as a defining feature; understudied aspects of the Committee System; issues of corruption and criminality; and contemporary concerns around the decline of this institution.

The discussion, moderated by Alex Travelli, provoked myriad thoughts on the institutional efficacy of the Indian Parliament. At the outset, Yamini Aiyar talked about the broken state capacity coupled with lack of clarity over the role of MPs. This paved the way for discussion about the unconstitutional nature of the Anti-Defection Law taking centre stage. Both Aiyar and M. R. Madhavan spoke extensively about the roadblocks posed by this Law to Parliamentary reforms.

Sen conceded that MPs in fact feel stifled by the Anti-Defection Law. He also outlined the scope of anthropological work that can be undertaken on the critical role that MPs



are constitutionally supposed to play, but end up catering to basic public services delivery instead.

In light of the theme of disruptions, Madhavan pointed out how the decline of Parliament goes back prior to 2014 and is not a new phenomenon as evident in the book. Sen's response came as a clarification stating that these tactics of disruptions have been more frequently used between 2014 and 2022 than ever before. Taking forward one of the assumptions in the book, in lieu of disruptions, Raju Ramachandran expressed his disagreement with the televised proceedings fuelling disruptive behaviour. He then conveyed his understanding of areas that need further exploration from the legal lens. These included current forms of disruptions, Money Bills, and the position of the Basic Structure Doctrine.

The discussion culminated with the panel engaging with the audience's questions about representation, delimitation, the role of the Judiciary in scrutinising Money Bills, and the relationship between educational qualifications and Parliamentary performance.

■ SAURYA MISHRA

Culture and the Constitution

SEMINAR : *Cultural Constitutionalism in India*

KEYNOTE SPEAKER : *Justice V. Ramasubramanian*

COLLABORATION : *Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy*

13 May 2023

Global scholarship on constitutional law has recognised a clear link between culture and constitutional arrangements. The aim of this seminar was to probe the idea of cultural constitutionalism in India, and ask if culture can inform constitutional arrangements in our country. Jurists have posited that culture consists of four components—beliefs and values (e.g., religion), inherited traditions (e.g., shared history), material factors (e.g., economic development), and emotional attachments (e.g., identity). Which of these factors informed the drafting of our Constitution? How have they shaped its subsequent evolution? Should they?

In a brilliant address, keynote speaker Justice V. Ramasubramanian remarked on the (positive) fact that this seminar was being held outside the legal fraternity. Cultural constitutionalism today, he said, is looked upon either as a right-wing agenda or left-wing propaganda. In order to dissect



(From left) Mathew John; Arghya Sengupta; V. Ramasubramanian; K. N. Shrivastava; Soumen Sen; Vikramjit Banerjee

the meaning of cultural constitutionalism, he divided his talk into three parts to answer the following questions: how do you define culture?; did we have a developed justice system prior to the framing of the Constitution or were we determined by Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence alone?; and, whether, and to what extent, did culture shape our Constitution.

The panellists argued that the Constitution today is a living document that continues to be shaped by generations of Indian judges. How can it be more closely aligned to its Indian roots? How do traditionally Indic thoughts such as the relevance of the community, and not just the individual, the spiritual bases of our existence find expression, in the Constitution? And finally, how can documents in Indian languages, both on law and philosophy, be made available to constitutional scholars, lawyers and courts to shape arguments?

The Gentle Revolutionary

DISCUSSION : *Remembering Revolutionaries: The Legacy of Ela Bhatt*

SPEAKERS : *Martha 'Marty' Alter Chen; Indira Jaising; Vijay Mahajan; Savitaben; and Kantaben*

CHAIR : *Devaki Jain*

MODERATOR : *Renana Jhabvala*

COLLABORATION : *SEWA Bharat*

3 April 2023

The programme organised to honour the life and legacy of Ela Bhatt coincided with the birth date of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, a freedom fighter, social activist and champion of women's rights.

Elaben R. Bhatt (1933–2022), often referred to as the gentle revolutionary, pioneered women's economic empowerment in India and globally. She founded the largest and the first trade union of informal women workers, SEWA, and worked tirelessly all her life to bring visibility and voice to marginalised women workers. As SEWA's leader, Elaben brought the self-employed, the home-based workers, the domestic workers, the informal wage workers, and many more into the ambit of the labour movement.

The programme began with an introduction by Renana



(From left) Renana Jhabvala; Indira Jaising; Devaki Jain; Martha 'Marty' Alter Chen; and Vijay Mahajan

Jhabvala, followed by the screening of a short film on Elaben's legacy. Devaki Jain, a long-time friend of Elaben, highlighted how both Elaben and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay strongly believed in the economic empowerment of men and women equally. Vijay Mahajan reflected on her role in the microfinance movement in India, and Marty Chen talked about her setting up WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing), a global network focused on empowering poor working women in the informal economy. Elaben's efforts in facilitating poor working women to connect with the complex judicial system and to use the legal machinery for advocating for their demands were shared by Indira Jaising. Savitaben and Kantaben from SEWA Gujarat also spoke evocatively about their long association with Elaben, of what they had learnt from her, including the light-hearted moments together.

■ SHALINI SINHA

Catastrophic Seismic Events

SEMINAR : *Workshop on Addressing Earthquake Risk in India*

WELCOME ADDRESS : *Shri Shyam Saran, President, IIC*

INTRODUCTION : *Dr. Shailesh Nayak, Life Trustee, IIC*

INAUGURAL ADDRESS : *P. K. Mishra*

12 April 2023

Powerful and massive earthquakes cause tens of thousands of fatalities and horrendous and widespread devastation. On 6 February 2023, the 7.8 magnitude earthquake which struck Türkiye and Syria killed more than 59,000 persons, injured more than 130,000 and displaced millions, was one of the deadliest natural disasters in recent history. As in the case of cyclones, tsunamis or floods, timely detection and prediction of earthquakes could save lives but our current scientific knowledge is not sufficient to predict these catastrophic seismic events.

The seismic zone map of India puts 59 per cent of India's land area under threat of moderate to severe seismic hazard. The plate boundary regions of the Himalaya, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, North-Eastern India and some regions in the plate interior like Kachchh are extremely vulnerable to earthquakes.

The one-day workshop on earthquake risk in India took up the entire gamut of issues: seismogenesis, plate interior earthquake, triggered earthquake, earthquake precursor, microzonation, surface deformation, earthquake-induced landslides, earthquake impact on moraine-dammed lakes, earthquake response, and disaster response and awareness about earthquakes. It was addressed by the country's top domain experts in seismology, geology, geophysics and disaster management, and scientists from allied areas. Earlier in January 2023, the IIC had hosted an interactive exhibition which showcased India's advances in seismological research and round-the-clock earthquake monitoring.

Apart from examining the possibility of a major earthquake in the Himalayan region (Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh) in the near future and actions required to be taken to meet that exigency, the workshop discussed designing and implementation of strict building codes to minimise earthquake impact, integration of microzonation maps in urban planning, state of precursor research and knowledge of triggered earthquakes in the country, status of response, relief and rescue mechanisms at the central, state and local levels in an earthquake event, preparations required in terms of providing medical care, shelter and food, and the need for public outreach programmes to sensitise people, especially children. The IIC needs to be congratulated for organising this brain-storming workshop in a critical area of national disaster management.

■ **SUHAS BORKER**

Falls in the Elderly

DISCUSSION : *Falls: A Leading Cause of Disabilities in the Elderly—Prevention and Solutions*

PRESENTATION BY : *Rajendra Prasad*

DISCUSSANTS : *P. V. M. Rao; Patanjali Nayar; Mohd. Ameer; Tarun Lala; and Ravinder Singh*

CHAIR : *Ashok Rajgopal*

CHIEF GUEST : *Shri K. N. Shrivastava, Director, IIC*

COLLABORATION : *KARA Medical Foundation*

12 May 2023

The number of people, predominantly the elderly, dying of strokes and disabilities is not reported as extensively as road accidents, said Rajendra Prasad, among his opening statements. Globally, more than 6.8

lakh individuals die of falls each year, of which over 80 per cent belong to lower income countries.

The discussion covered the causes, prevention and solution of disabilities, primarily among those above 60 years of age—about 137 million people in India. Among the key causes of disabilities are falls, mental health disease, head injuries from road accidents, Parkinson's, arthritis and spondylitis.

Prasad elaborated that one of the warning signals is recurrent falls; typically the first few are overlooked by the family who only visit the doctor after the second or third fall. Along with physical injuries the falls also bear economic and psychological impacts—insurance does not accommodate the cost of caregivers, rehabilitation and assistive devices; and isolation leads to mental health challenges.

Prasad highlighted that women are twice as prone to falls and injuries as their male counterparts. Women form 36 per cent of the population diagnosed with osteoporosis,

chiefly because of vitamin D deficiency, early menopause, and genetic predisposition of Indians to osteoporosis. Bone density scans are recommended for early detection and action.

A layperson should take five preventive measures to check falls: making homes elderly friendly and safe; periodic eye and health check-ups; getting medication reviewed regularly; staying active; and use of neuro-rehab and assistive technology. He emphasised that an integrated programme is required for the elderly in India

that brings together prevention, cure and rehabilitation as in other countries.

Among the other issues discussed by the panellists were: the need for exposure to the sun for vitamin D; use of sticks while walking; the lack of inclusion of rehabilitation and assistive technology as a part of follow-up treatment plan in health care; assessment of falls by a physician or physiotherapist, etc.

■ SHWETA KESHRI

The Bird Quest

TALK : *India @75: Celebrating 75 Birds of India—From Ladakh to Little Andaman*

CHIEF GUEST : *Ramesh Pandey*

SPEAKER : *Asani Bhaduri*

CHAIR : *Vijay Dhasmana*

9 May 2023

Asani Bhaduri, a passionate birder, presented an illustrated lecture celebrating 75 birds found in various parts of India. The 75 birds were selected from more than a thousand bird species observed by Bhaduri in his 10-year-long quest for birds which took him from the cold deserts of Ladakh to the tropical rainforests of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

In his well-curated collection of birds, Bhaduri focused on birds that are often overlooked in birding circles. He selected birds that highlighted the abundant biodiversity of India, paying much needed attention to forest birds from North-East India and Little Andaman. Given that his 10-year quest to observe rare and ecologically important birds was a personal journey, Bhaduri also included birds that were personal favourites.

Bhaduri talked about how birds find a place in Indian folklore, mythology and folk culture. The black-necked crane, for example, is viewed as an embodiment of the sixth Dalai Lama. Many Hindu deities have avian *vahanas* (or mounts). The northern goshawk (*Baaq*), carried by Guru Gobind Singh, symbolises independence, fearlessness and nobility in the Sikh community, and embodies the qualities the Sikh Guru wanted in his Khalsa.

Some of the important birds discussed in the lecture were Brandt's/black-headed mountain finch, best seen in Sikkim and Ladakh; the Spanish sparrow in Desert National Park, Rajasthan and Punjab; the rufous-necked hornbill, in the broad-leaved evergreen forests of West Bengal, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh; the ruddy kingfisher in the Sunderbans and the foothills of the Eastern Himalayas;



Andaman Teal

the pied imperial pigeon and the Andaman teal/Sunda teal, both of which are best seen in various parts of the Andaman and Nicobar islands.

During the lecture, Bhaduri listed the identifying marks of various birds, their habitats and the best location to observe them. The personality of birds, the quality that makes them culturally significant, is a topic of interest for Bhaduri. He tries to build a new mythology around often ignored birds—calling an extensively migratory bird ‘the globetrotter’ or describing a forest bird as ‘pulpy-diet freak’ for its propensity to consume pulpy fruits all day long.

Bhaduri talked about Little Andaman being the last remaining ‘remote island’ and how its beautiful beaches are now witnessing construction and development, something which will negatively impact its flora and fauna. In the Q&A session following the lecture, the panel talked about the ethics of birding, and how the lure of social media fame is pushing youngsters to take up unethical practices like using bird calls, feeding birds, and disturbing birds in order to get a mid-air photograph. The changing behaviour of birds that live on the margins of human habitations, in light of increasing urbanisation, was also discussed by the panel. Bhaduri cited examples of cranes and falcons nesting in pylons to illustrate this change in behaviour.

■ AKSHAY BHAGWAT

Human Goodness

FILM : *All that Breathes*

DIRECTOR : *Shaunak Sen*

31 May 2023

The packed auditorium clearly mirrored the eager anticipation of a diverse audience, including regular cinema-goers, the cognoscenti, as well as a large number of young enthusiasts—both filmmakers and environmental activists. It was obvious that the audience was eagerly waiting for the documentary which received an Oscar nomination.

Interestingly, the environmental project at the centre of a story that may seem to be of a legion of birds at first glance is deeply human. Set in Wazirabad, a suburb of Delhi that is also home to the capital's dreadful waste dumps, the documentary follows three male protagonists living in this part of the city defined by non-existent lanes and heavy waterlogging even in minimal rain. Notwithstanding the crowded human existence and fates cursed with ill luck and loss, the one thing they haven't lost is their compassion. The leader, his brother and a young enthusiast take it upon

themselves to care for the kites that fall alarmingly from the sky due to ill health and harm done to them mostly as a result of the deepening ecological crisis at the site and in the city where they are living off human and animal remains.

The poignant documentary delves into the challenges faced by both the kites and these men as they navigate the complexities of compassionate care in a world marred by environmental degradation and human suffering. Made during a time when communal violence too ravaged some parts of the city, the documentary manages to present a parallel story without actually depicting the violence. This nuanced approach to storytelling had a profound effect on the audience, with a thought provoking premise and a slow burn, blurring the boundaries between the conventional styles of documentaries.

With the operation of an excellent team of cinematographers, the documentary succeeds in weaving a story of human—non-human animal predicaments and goes a long way in helping sensitise humans about the need to listen to non-human animals and their angst and pathos. This, as it has been shown so successfully, is the best of human goodness.

■ RAKESH BATABYAL

Timeless Beauty

FILM : *Mask Art of Majuli*

DIRECTOR : *Utpal Borpujari*

PRODUCED BY : *Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts—North East Regional Centre*

3 May 2023

This 55-minute film opens with a panoramic view of the Brahmaputra, India's largest river by volume (by length it is the Ganga)—a pure expanse of beauty with still waters that run deep. From the left of the screen enter the masked dancers of Majuli, enacting tales from the epics.

The numerous Satras (Vaishnavite monasteries) of Majuli, the world's largest inhabited river island, are not only religious places of great significance, but also form the heart of Sattriya culture that was created by 15th century saint, poet, playwright, social reformer and cultural icon Srimanta Sankardev.

Celibate monks performed the Sattriya dance originally. Chinha Yatras were popular too. Each Satra had a speciality and Chamaguri Satra is still known for masks. Now only two families are left, making this a unique art.

These masks are of three types: *Bor*, or the largest ones with joints; *Lotokan*, the medium sized; and *Mukha*, or the ones for the face, with flexible jaws. The overall impact is one of awe, worship and homage.

It is the beauty of Indian performing arts traditions that most of its dance forms are ascribed to divinity. It is an act of propitiation more than performance. In one shot, there is Narasimha, the half-lion, half-human incarnation of Vishnu performing with little Prahalad sitting on one side of the stage, and his evil father Hrinakashyapu pacing. Then, someone in the audience is recording it on a cellphone! At once, 500 years merge seamlessly with today, proving once again that Indian dance and music are eternal and traditions live on.

The mask-makers of Majuli are simple, handsome, hard working men who collect special clay from the delta of the mighty river; bamboo from the forests; and with simple tools and a piece of rag, create masks of art. Each face is neatly painted and patterned.

Excellent camera work by Chida Bora and understated music by Sourav Mahanta make this film a timeless beauty. The camera and filmmakers are non-invasive. They let the subject speak and don't dominate the discourse. Utpal Borpujari proves an excellent documenter and the IGNCA North East branch (then headed by Richa Negi) has done yeoman service in supporting such a film.

As it started, so it ends—with a panoramic, full screen view of vanar sena of children entering the screen from the left and exiting to the right, in a real forest scape. This film is a must-see for all anthropologists, art historians and art lovers. It is not a film but a work of art.

■ ASHISH MOHAN KHOKAR

Democracy as a Movement

TALK : *Nehru's Discourse on Democracy*

SPEAKER : *Madhavan K. Palat*

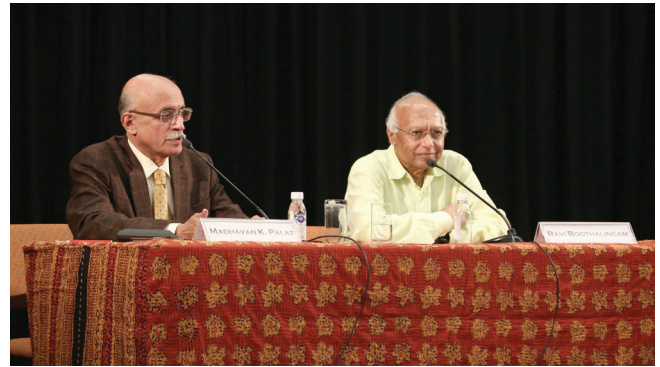
CHAIR : *Ravi Bhoothalingam*

5 April 2023

Nehru always presented himself as a democrat, a liberal social democrat and a socialist. His greatest concern was the problems that democracy faces and the dangers to it. By that time it was clear that democracy faced primarily two dangers: (a) democracy could elect a dictator—Napoleon and Hitler were elected dictators; (b) the other being ‘tyranny of the majority’. In a society which has a majority on a permanent basis, as is the case of India, there would always be a danger of majority dominance.

Nehru considered democracy in India a well-established tradition by 1947. Even before Gandhi, India had a democratic tradition of civic culture which critiqued colonial rule. By the time India became independent it had a 70-year experience of democratic culture. He also argued that India had an ancient tradition of democracy in panchayats. It was not a British inspiration.

How would democracy and institutions combine was his biggest concern. Nehru saw democracy as a perpetual movement. A movement implied instability, disruption and change; it had to be institutionalised for stability. However, a problem in the democratic process is not solved by the courts, press or the Constitution but a democratic movement itself. He, therefore, stressed that the movement was where he based his hope.



Madhavan K. Palat (Left); and Ravi Bhoothalingam

Adult suffrage was an absolute requirement for him for which he was bitterly criticised. How could an illiterate population vote? Nehru answered, ‘If it is assumed that the educated are more rational and better informed, there is no evidence of that. Educated people also vote according to their interest not according to rationality and the poor know their interest and vote according to it’. He and the Constituent Assembly repeatedly pointed out that the most educated and the most advanced civilisation of Europe produced Hitler.

Further, he had problems with one-party dictatorship. His experience of Indian politics was only of one party and one movement. He was in favour of multiple or a two-party system because a government must go out of power for democracy to be energised. He saw his party as a continuation of the freedom movement, so the Congress was itself a movement and not a party. Nonetheless, he acknowledged even without a two-party system India had a two-ideology system. Congress’s secularism was pitted against Hindutva. In the first two general elections his clear target was communalism which was Hindutva.

■ SHUBHENDRA TYAGI

Is Pakistan Imploding?

TALK: *What on Earth is Happening to Pakistan*

SPEAKER : *T. C. A. Raghavan*

MODERATOR : *Suhas Borker*

INTRODUCTION : *Vinay Kumar*

COLLABORATION : *Press Club of India*

29 May 2023

After a Monsoon on steroids, hyperinflation post the Ukraine war and the after-effects of COVID, violence—fuelled by Imran Khan’s losing a vote of no-confidence in Parliament—spilled on to the streets in Pakistan. It got worse, said T. C. A. Raghavan, former high commissioner to Islamabad: with the return of the Taliban (an otherwise

positive move for Pakistan), the menace of the Tehrik-e-Taliban is evident, the ‘superior judiciary’ is divided, with half supporting Imran Khan and the other half with the India-obsessed Army and the Shehbaz Sharif government and now, there’s dissent even in the military.

So, is Pakistan imploding? Is it a semi-Sudan? Or is it all wishful thinking? ‘Yes, it’s dysfunctional all right, but it’s not a Sudan-like situation’, acknowledged Raghavan. Pakistan isn’t a failing state, even if some people think so. Another 1971 (when the country was split with the birth of Bangladesh) isn’t on the cards, he added.

If Pakistan’s nuclear weapons are safer today than two decades ago, when, Raghavan said, ‘it looked like terrorists had got close to them’, Imran Khan, the very fissionable street fighting man (dismissed by the intelligentsia as Im the Dim) is what Pakistani politics is now all about. The

Army hates him; he was its darling, once. The people disliked him; he's an icon today, partly after the economic woes that have swamped Pakistan. Will his political party, the PTI, be allowed to fight the national polls? What happens if he isn't? Will he retain support? Or will he fade away? 'People are realising that Imran Khan can say

anything' and 'the Army's made up its mind to deal with him', to 'neutralise him', and that seems likely. So, martial law? Not quite, argued Raghavan. 'The Pakistan of today is too complex for Army rule'. The Generals will stay in control and Pakistan will teeter on the brink.

■ SRINJOY CHOWDHURY

Of Terracotta and Stone

EXHIBITION : *Metaphors of the Inner Realm: An Exhibition of Sculptures by Latika Katt*

INAUGURATION BY : *Mani Shankar Aiyar*

7 to 20 April 2023

Latika Katt is a well-known sculptor and artist. The works displayed at the Gandhi–King Plaza included works in several mediums: bronze, terracotta, stone and ceramic. Inspired to a large extent by nature, some of the works like the *Banana Plant* in bronze, *Breeze on Fields* in stone, and *Fields* in ceramic and bronze showed a finesse that comes from a mature handling of the material. They were well crafted pieces. The series inspired by the ghats of Varanasi was equally emotive and showcased the subtle nuances of the ghats through some beautiful details in bronze.



A few pieces which were influenced by the pandemic showed a deep sensitivity and the creative working of Katt's inner self. Sculpture is a form and material-based exploration, and the artist, well-versed in this space, has been able to bring form to life through the works in terracotta and stone.

It would have been nice to see a better display, and maybe the outdoors in the heat did not do justice to the brilliant works! However, for those who visited, it would have been a memorable experience.

■ LOLITA DUTTA

An Ode to Gurcharan Singh

EXHIBITION : *One Pot: An Exhibition of Ceramics by Delhi Blue Pottery Trust*

INAUGURATION BY : *Mansimran Singh*

7 to 16 April 2023

Pottery in India dates back thousands of years, and is an integral part of our daily life. Keeping this tradition, the late Gurcharan Singh pioneered the concept of studio pottery in India.

At the Delhi Blue Pottery, he trained several potters, many of whom are well established in the field. The exhibition was an ode to this great man, and showcased some truly well-crafted pottery.

As the name 'One Pot' suggests, each potter displayed one piece from their works. Pottery is a tangible art form, and connects the artist to the very concept of forms of clay. It evokes deep emotion, and the works exemplified the forms, textures and colours of the pots displayed.

There were works of veterans like Ira Choudhuri, Ray Meekar and Mansimran Singh, and an exquisite piece of P. R. Daroz glazed in deep cobalt blue with a tinge of aqua.

It was evident that all the potters who were a part of this show

love what they do, and their feel for the material comes from deep within, as most of their quotes said.

The exhibition was a treat for anyone connected to pottery and art, as each work was a masterpiece, true to form, colour and final finish. Each work was noteworthy of the artist, there was a bit of soul in each piece, and there must be deep respect for the wonderful Gurcharan Singh.

The exhibition was worth the visit, and I would sum it up in the words of Shanko Choudhury: 'Probably the greatest contribution made by Gurcharan Singh was to spread the consciousness of the beauty and charm of hand thrown pottery.'

■ LOLITA DUTTA



Japanese ‘Sit-Down’ Comedy

PERFORMANCE : *Rakugo*

PRESENTED BY : *Katsura Sunshine*

COLLABORATION : *The Japan Foundation*

22 May 2023

I was very intrigued by the fact that IIC was hosting a Rakugo performance. I had no idea what it was and my curiosity was tickled.

Rakugo is a centuries-old Japanese form of storytelling. It is an oral tradition that requires the audience to use imagination while enjoying each story. And an imaginary world is created within the mind of each listener.... In fact, it is a traditional Japanese form of ‘sit-down’ comedy.

The critically acclaimed Canadian performer Katsura Sunshine, is billed as the only Western master of the traditional Japanese comic storytelling art of Rakugo and he was performing for the first time in India.

The hall was full to capacity and the air of anticipation was obvious. The audience comprised mainly young people and for some reason, I knew the performance would be a great success.

Wearing the traditional kimono, Sunshine knelt on a small



platform and started telling his stories. Sunshine’s stories were funny, clever and extremely entertaining. Often the stories were based on niceties and nuances in Japanese culture. As a result, Sunshine spent as much time explaining aspects of Japanese culture and language as he did performing the stories. Not only did he bring a laugh but also a unique perspective of Japanese culture.

Full of self-deprecating humour, Sunshine often placed himself in scenarios where he plays the outsider comically humbled and embarrassed by his ignorance.

Audience participation was incredible and their reaction also comprised an integral part of the experience. Katsura had them literally eating out of his hands.

■ POONAM SAHI

Affirming Life

A Year of Poetry at IIC : *Conceptualised by Gitanjali Surendran*

A God at the Door : *Tishani Doshi in conversation with Sumana Roy*

20 April 2023

Tishani Doshi has published seven works of fiction and poetry, the most recent of which are *Small Days and Nights* (Bloomsbury), shortlisted for the RSL Ondaatje Award and a New York Times Bestsellers Editor’s Choice, and a collection of poems, *A God at the Door* (HarperCollins), shortlisted for the Forward Poetry Prize 2021. For 15 years, she worked as the lead dancer with the Chandrolekha Group in Madras.

Doshi presented a mix of poems—some old and some new—picking up on key words and obsessions she touched upon in her works. She started with a grandmother poem, despite her Creative Writing Professor saying snootily that he did not want her to start with one. It was not about her grandmother, but someone else’s in Trinidad who had links to Madras, and to indentured labourers. She mentioned the Vicco Vajradanti toothpaste that she saw in her bathroom.



Tishani Doshi (Left) and Sumana Roy

Of mixed origin, Tishani had a Gujarati father and a Welsh mother. She also mentioned her 15-year sojourn in Madras with Chandrolekha’s troupe and read out poems on the city. She read poems from her books *Contours of the Body*; *Girls are Coming Out of the Woods*; and *A God at the Door*. Tishani mentioned the work she did on Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath.

Finally, Tishani was in conversation with Sumana Roy who asked her the meaning of her name. She said it was made up by her *fey*, her father’s sister. The meaning of her book, *A God at the Door*, delineated the inner and the outer—the *akam* and the *puram*. Asked whether her poems are permeated by sadness, she said not sadness since the act of writing is both positive and optimistic.

■ RACHNA JOSHI

Vignettes from Shakespeare

PLAY : *Simply Shakespeare*

A SOLO THEATRICAL PERFORMANCE BY :
Keshav Roy

CONCEPT, SCRIPT & DIRECTION : *Renu Roy*
SUPPORTED BY : *KCT Group*

21 April 2023

Simply Shakespeare, an 80-minute performance, was conceived, scripted and directed by Renu Roy. Keshav Roy, her son, gave a riveting solo performance, doing speeches of the pivotal characters from some of Shakespeare's plays. Keshav Roy punctuated the gaps between different scenes with witty, interesting bits of information on Shakespeare—possibly the greatest of all poet-playwrights in Western drama—and anecdotes, including his amusing encounter with his first director of a Shakespeare play, a retired Irish Brigadier, who, on learning that young Roy was an actor, said, 'I don't like ac-tors'!

Keshav Roy's was a good old-fashioned, high energy performance giving precedence to clarity of speech and intensity of emotion. His Mark Anthony from *Julius Caesar*, cannily rousing the populace to action against the assassins of Julius Caesar, the Roman Emperor, was in the classical tradition. Then *Othello*, broken by Iago's insinuations against the sleeping Desdemona, was moving, and reminded one of Orson Welles' intense performance from his filmed



version of *Othello*. From *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo's heart-rending sorrow on learning of his beloved Juliet's death was convincing. A sympathetic interpretation of the so-called rapacious Jewish moneylender Shylock's character in *The Merchant of Venice* was entirely credible. Most moving of all was his recitation of Shakespeare's sonnet on the death of his son.

Renu Roy's concept, script and direction are to be lauded. The stage design and lighting were both dramatic and stylish, and the choice of the colour 'red' to uphold the central idea of the performance typifying the playwright's acute awareness of life's ups and downs was most apt. The (recorded) background music was always in consonance with the ideas and emotions so powerfully conveyed by Keshav Roy on stage. Congratulations to IIC and the KCT Group whose support made the show possible.

■ PARTHA CHATTERJEE

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 A. S. BAWA
A-1392



MR. JONATHAN A. MASON
A-3850



DR. POORNIMA ADVANI
A-4528



LT. GEN. AJAI SINGH (RETD)
A-4542



MS. DARSHANI GHILDYAL
A-4269



DR. ZARINA BHATTY
A-5653



SMT. JALABALA VAIDYA
A-7642



SHRI BUTSHIKAN SINGH
M-3395



SMT. USHA MALHOTRA
M-3429



SHRI V. K. VERMA
M-4136



JUSTICE VINOD KUMAR BALI
M-4409



DR. SUBHASH AIRY
OA-627



SHRI VINAY KUMAR GUGNANI
OA-733



Message from the Director

Dear Members,

The United Nations, at the recommendation of the Government of India, has declared 2023 the International Year of Millets, and to commemorate this, the Centre has undertaken several initiatives, including the introduction of millets in its menus. As the weather Gods showed mercy with rains amidst the otherwise harsh heat of April, 'Feasting with Millets' allowed the Members to relish it with both healthy and innovative preparations by the IIC catering team which has undergone special training in incorporating millets.

A few summer special foods have been added to the Main Dining menu and curated dinners will be available in the Lotus Lounge in the coming weeks. In response to many requests, the domestic wine portfolio in the Bar has been increased, allowing Members to choose from a wider range of options.

These are months when few risk sitting out in the sun and it was the perfect time to re-lay the grass of the Rose Garden, Fountain Lawns and the Lawn in front of the Main Verandah. The work is expected to be completed in a month's time after which these lawns, with freshly laid grass, will be accessible to Members.

For those interested in horticulture, a digital book of the trees at the IIC is coming soon. There are about 92 trees in the Main Centre and Annexe. They have been barcoded. The barcodes can be scanned for various kinds of information about the trees such as their names and descriptions, when they were planted and their fruiting seasons.

The IIC Library, from time to time, informs Members about the journals/magazines that can be accessed easily from public domains. Now, *Daedalus*, an open access Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, is available in e-version. Members can access it at <https://www.amacad.org/daedalus> free of cost. Additionally, the Library now also has a license for the online edition of *Financial Times*. Members who wish to access it may contact the Library Staff. The open resources are listed on the IIC Website under 'Library link'/'What's New' section for ready accessibility.

The Centre is also pleased to announce that the waste water generated is now being treated efficiently by the rejuvenated Sewage Treatment Plant (STP). The treated water is of excellent quality and is being utilised in the gardens, lawns, ponds, and for washing and fire safety.

We have started upgrading the audio-visual equipment of the conference and programme venues. A Technical Advisory Committee comprising IIC officials, Shri Rajiv Mehrotra (M-2793) and Shri Amit Chandra (a subject expert) is advising and overseeing the upgradation work. This work at the C. D. Deshmukh Auditorium is expected to be completed in a couple of months.

The upholstery of the chairs in the Library and Annexe Lounge is very old and faded. It is being replaced with a new one. The carpet in the Annexe Lounge is also being replaced. All the assets of the Centre (furniture, fixtures and moveable assets) are now bar-coded. The bar-coding is helping in proper inventory—management and accounting.

The Advisory Council which advises on the programmes and activities which the Centre may usefully undertake, has been reconstituted. The House Committee, Library Committee, Editorial Board, Finance Committee and Executive Committee too have been reconstituted. The composition of all these advisory bodies can be viewed on the IIC Website.

Between 26 July 2022 and 31 May 2023, the Centre has enrolled 241 new members in various categories. The details of the newly enrolled members can also be viewed on the IIC Website.

To leave Members with something to look forward to, the IIC–International Research Division is organising an international conference, 'Inter-Asia: Histories of Mobility and Ideas of Asianism', in February 2024, to highlight stories of Asians whose journeys as pilgrims, traders, diplomats, artists and political leaders have contributed to the diffusion of arts, ideas and ways of life, and a sense of Asian identity.

K. N. SHRIVASTAVA

This issue of the Diary has been assembled and edited by Omita Goyal, Chief Editor; Ritu Singh, Deputy Editor; Shweta Keshri, Asstt. Editor. Published by Kanwal Wali, for the India International Centre, 40, Max Mueller Marg, Lodhi Estate, New Delhi - 110003. Ph.: 24619431. Designed and printed by Niyogi Offset Pvt. Ltd., D-78, Okhla Industrial Area, Phase 1, New Delhi-110020; Phone: 49327000.