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universal appreciation

CONTENTS

VOLUME 50 SUMMER 2023 NUMBER 1

v Editorial

OMITA GOYAL

ARTICLES

1: Our History, Your History, Whose History?

ROMILA THAPAR

18: Caught Between Myth and Reality:
A Nation Called India

JAWHAR SIRCAR

32: Cross-Cultural Conversations and
Search for Authenticity

GURPREET MAHAJAN

PHOTO ESSAY

41: Found and Lost in Burma

PABLO BARTHOLOMEW

ARTICLE

83: Myanmar's Decade of Hope and Gloom:
Implications for India

RAJIV BHATIA

IN CONVERSATION

94: Kazuto Suzuki and Ken Jimbo with

SRINJOY CHOWDHURY

ARTICLES

110: A Sari for Every Body

ARUNDHATI VIRMANI

120: An Adoption Story

TARA NARULA, MAANAV KUMAR

BOOK REVIEWS

130: *Turmoil in Punjab:*

Before and After Blue Star

AVTAR SINGH BHASIN

134: *Humanities, Provocateur:*

Towards a Contemporary Political Aesthetics

SREENATH V. S.

137: *Mumbai/Bombay: Majoritarian Neoliberalism, Informality, Resistance, and Wellbeing*

AMITA BHIDE

142: *Political Economy of Colonial and Post-colonial India*

DIPA SINHA

146: *Satyajit Ray Miscellany:*

On Life, Cinema, People & Much More

PARTHA CHATTERJEE

150: *The Temple of Shiva*

SANJULA SHARMA

153: *Memsahibs: British Women in Colonial India*

ARVINDAR SINGH

157: CONTRIBUTORS

EDITORIAL

Enough said about Parliament House and the sengol; about ethnic violence; about brutal murders on the streets of Delhi. Let's unearth some positive or inspiring news from beneath breaking news.

I only just discovered there is in fact a section called 'Good News' in some online publications, which says something about how deeply buried such news is.

Let me begin at home. My mother's caregiver has a 10-year-old son who lives with us. He goes to the nearby government school. His mother is not literate but is determined to see him through to the end. There are several mothers like her, as she discovered at a parent-teacher meeting, who want their children to have more options in life than they had. The school requires someone in the family to have a mobile phone which is not an unreasonable request these days. WhatsApp is put to good use for a change. His mother gets a daily update of his classes, his homework, his misdemeanors. The school is clearly interested in schooling and this is certainly inspiring considering there is evidence to the contrary as well. But it shows that it can be done.

Some things do change, albeit very slowly. It is heartening to see the opportunities opening up for young people from underprivileged homes—the recently declared UPSC results are a case in point. At the same time some things don't change; in fact they become worse. The medieval treatment of our women athletes protesting because their complaints of sexual harassment by the head of their Federation are not being acted upon belies all claims to women's empowerment and youth being the future of the country. But these women are not victims; their empowerment comes from within and they have the fortitude and determination to fight the long fight, no matter what. To quote one athlete, 'We are not raising this just for ourselves, it's for all the girls who have faced harassment from powerful men and haven't been able to speak out.'

I did say I would not talk about the inauguration of Parliament House but I wonder what will be said a 100 years from now, or even a decade from now, about the boycott of the ceremony and what will be told to children about its origins. When the present government ceases to be in power, will this building no longer be used?

Coming to the contents of this issue, it contains a personal narrative titled 'A Story of Adoption'. Unfortunately India's adoption rate has always been low and is in fact getting lower. There are close to 30 million orphaned and abandoned children in India today—yet the central adoption authority says there are hardly any children available for adoption. What will become of these children; will they ever be counted as the future of India? While the article is a couple's personal journey, it is also a lesson in the laws and the hurdles along the way.

The C. D. Deshmukh Memorial Lecture has been an integral part of the Summer issue since the inception of the series. The title of this year's lecture was 'Our History, Your History, Whose History?' It was delivered by Professor Romila Thapar, who is known for her significant contributions to the study of the history of India, but also for her courage in speaking out about the ideology of the establishment as it impacts the study of history.

The other articles in the issue are thoughtful insights into the sari, ubiquitous but never static or unchanging; cross-cultural conversations that enable us to reconnect us with our past and make it relevant for us in the present; the two epics and the construction of the nation's identity; Myanmar's decade of gloom and the implications for India; and an interview with two Japanese economists who visited the Centre as part of a series of programmes marking the 70th anniversary of India–Japan diplomatic relations.

Another narrative is Pablo Bartholomew's photo essay. He describes how a chance e-mail took him on a journey to reconnect with his 'lost' family in Burma. The essay places his personal story in the larger context of the history and present of Burma (Myanmar.)



OMITA GOYAL