

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

Volume XXXIX No. 2

April – May 2025

The Power of Solidarity

SEMINAR: *Celebrating Bandung @ 70: Bandung Spirit and the Role of the Global South*

INAUGURATION BY: *Ina Hagniningtyas
Krisnamurthi*

WELCOME REMARKS: *K. N. Shrivastava*

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS: *Nitya Nanda*

KEYNOTE ADDRESS: *Shyam Saran*

COLLABORATION: *Council for Social Development;
Bandung India Network; and People's Forum for a
Multi-Polar World*

24 April 2025

The historic Bandung Conference of 29 newly independent Afro-Asian countries, held in 1955 in Indonesia, should not be just 'a page in the history books', felt Ina Krisnamurthi, the Indonesian ambassador to India, especially now, with the world becoming 'unpredictable' and 'global institutions becoming weaker'.

After a minute's silence to mourn the passing of Pope Francis on 21 April and the terrorist attack on tourists in Pahalgam on 22 April, Krisnamurthi began by describing the Pahalgam terror attack as 'unpardonable' and 'heinous'. The current global landscape is challenging and instability is evident throughout Southeast Asia. This is why the Bandung conference was important, particularly because this is a time of asymmetric warfare, of cyber and drone attacks, of fake news and countries seeking refuge in authoritarianism. The 1955 conference was about 'the power of solidarity' and an 'ideal vision of a world based on mutual respect'. Apart from the 'core values of Bandung', Krisnamurthi spoke of India's support for Indonesia during the independence movement and later.

Bandung was about anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism, and participants had expressed concern about the East-West divide and the threat of nuclear war, said Shyam Saran. Now, the world again sees 'two superpowers contesting for hegemony'. He remembered the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) as the 'largest peace movement



in history'. Saran regretted that no one had spoken about reviving the movement and the lack of visionary statesmen. He wondered what Europe would do in the (Donald) Trump era. 'Would Europe become the new Yugoslavia?', he asked, remembering Yugoslavian President Josip Tito's participation in the NAM movement, which began after the Belgrade Conference of 1961.

Chairing the inaugural session, K. Srinath Reddy, pointed out that the world wasn't flat as author Thomas Friedman had written, but 'tilted', with all the resultant disadvantages. The 'allure of globalisation' was a 'false hope', and to counter the 'folly of high-income countries', it was necessary to unite and redeem the pledge of Bandung.

The Trump factor dominated subsequent discussions, with speaker Biswajit Dhar saying he was an executioner playing victim. Trump, he said, wants to eliminate the multilateral trading system, while Sunanda Sen said Trump had threatened BRICS, a grouping that includes Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, among other countries. She also favoured closer South-South ties. Dealings with Pakistan couldn't happen, for 'obvious reasons', she said, but India could look forward to stronger links with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and other BRICS countries. R. R. Rashmi, speaking about climate change, mentioned American intransigence.

Former diplomat Nalin Surie provided a thought-provoking question that readers would take home. After his tribute to the 29 far-sighted countries at Bandung, he wondered if humanity had progressed since that epochal meeting. Or has humanity 'regressed'?

■ **SRINJOY CHOWDHURY**

Revisiting Vietnam's Reunification Day

TALK: *When Saigon Fell: An Eyewitness Remembers*

ILLUSTRATED LECTURE BY: Nayan Chanda

CHAIR: Ronen Sen

9 May 2025

When a North Vietnamese Army (NVA) soldier burst into his flat and, after a thorough search, looked longingly at the bread and eggs on the kitchen counter, Nayan Chanda, then working for the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, invited him to breakfast. The Vietnamese, after a decade of war with the Americans, were 'more comfortable with Asians'. Saigon, now Ho Chi Minh City, had just fallen and the Americans, after dropping 7.5 million tonnes of bombs on Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos—more than what the Allies had dropped during World War II—had left, the last helicopter flying off just before the first NVA tanks broke through. Chanda, introduced by Ronen Sen, a veteran diplomat, brought back images the world saw 50 years ago: Marines at the front gate of the US Embassy tear-gassing South Vietnamese citizens desperate to leave; NVA tanks crashing into the Presidential Palace; NVA soldiers described by James Fenton, the English journalist and poet, as 'extraordinarily well-behaved in peace', in sandals made of car tyres; piles of uniforms on the streets, abandoned by South Vietnamese soldiers; people pityingly throwing clothes to them as they fled; children waving Viet Cong flags.

Remarkably sagacious, the NVA were. Later, in Hanoi, when Chanda asked a senior official for a glimpse of the



files the Americans had left behind, he demurred. 'The war is over. I have no desire to rub salt in America's wounds,' was the reply. Ho Chi Minh himself had forbidden him to gloat after the French defeat in Dien Bien Phu in 1954, he said. Vietnam needed help to rebuild. Chanda spoke of *Time's* chief of bureau in Saigon, educated in California, close to most top South Vietnamese officials. He had 'missed the flight out', he told Chanda, though his family members had left. Only later did Chanda learn that he was the highest-ranking North Vietnamese spy in Saigon, his intelligence undoubtedly priceless. He remembers an astonished NVA soldier in the Presidential Palace—the carpets, he thought, were so soft! Vietnam's relationship with China is traditionally uneven, but Chanda remembers people liking *Beijing Review*. The paper, he was told, was ideal for hand-rolled cigarettes! Today's Vietnam, a one-party dictatorship, allows Instagram and Facebook, but the effects of Agent Orange, the carcinogenic defoliant, remain. Fish can't be eaten in some places, but reassuringly, the forests are regenerating.

■ SRINJOY CHOWDHURY

Strengthening a Historical Relationship

TALK: *India–Egypt: Old Ties & New Frontiers*

SPEAKER: Kamel Zayed Kamel Galal

CHAIR: Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury

21 April 2025

Kamel Zayed Kamel Galal gave a riveting speech on India–Egypt relations, beginning with their historical background. He traced the relationship between the two ancient civilisations to 4,500 years. Moving to modern times, he stated that Mahatma Gandhi and Egyptian revolutionary and statesman Saad Zaghloul shared a common vision of independence and that the former believed 'Egypt resembled India in its rebellion against the British Empire'. Jawaharlal Nehru and Gamal Abdel Nasser, the second President of Egypt, led the liberation movements and established a new paradigm of friendship.

The relationship has grown further, with 2014 being an important benchmark. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Abdel Fattah Saeed Hussein Khalil El-Sisi signed several strategic agreements extending to sectors ranging from defence to security, connectivity and trade. On 25 June 2023, Sisi conferred Modi with the 'Order of the Nile', the highest civilian award of Egypt, showcasing India's significance.

Against the turbulent situation in West Asia, Egypt has emerged as the hub of negotiations between different parties. As tensions increase, Egypt has extended medical and humanitarian aid to Palestine. It is also an important player in reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts. It has worked to broker peace between Israel and Palestine. India too has played a major role as a voice for peace in West Asia.

'We have held discussions with Indian interlocutors on the security front and joined hands to combat terrorism. The geopolitical situation in the region is very fluid. There is also the danger of increased radicalisation in the coming years,' said Kamel.

On the economic front, Kamel said that there is a need for increased trade. 'The potential for trade is much more,' he stated, adding that India needs to be more proactive.

Kamel noted that cultural ties are important to both the ancient civilisations with a common interest in investing in people-to-people relations.

■ KAVITA CHARANJI

India's Complex Regional Dynamics

DISCUSSION: *Neighborhood Conundrum*

SPEAKERS: *Mohan Kumar; Manjeev S. Puri; and Indrani Bagchi*

CHAIR: *Y. K. Sinha*

28 April 2025

Amid a changing geopolitical reality, the discussion examined India's complex relationships with its immediate neighbours. Triggered by the recent terrorist attack on tourists in Pahalgam, the conversation emphasised the volatility and strategic complexity India faces by using this incident as a prism to investigate more regional concerns.

The panellists offered varied perspectives encompassing diplomacy, multilateral affairs and media viewpoints. Their analysis underlined India's fragile balancing act between claiming regional leadership and administering erratic and diverse neighbourly ties.

The South Asian climate is experiencing political instability, security challenges and uneven economic relationships. The panellists expressed concern over Pakistan's continuing 'terror ties' and Afghanistan's Taliban-led administration. Although the increasing Chinese influence was recognised as alarming, a thorough debate on Beijing's position was postponed for later forums.

India's relationships with other neighbours are varied. Bhutan is regarded as a stable strategic partner in hydropower collaboration. Despite political uncertainty and growing Islamic identity politics, relations with Bangladesh stay mostly favourable. Nepal's changing political scene demands careful diplomacy honouring its

rising civic maturity. Ethnic and tribal tensions continue to affect security along the India–Myanmar border. Sri Lanka's political and economic crisis highlighted India's humanitarian and strategic side, with financial support of over US\$4 billion in 2022. India's 'patient diplomacy' in the Maldives reflects its strategy for building trust and mutual understanding for long-term goals of regional security and cooperation.

Panellists noted resource restrictions as a major impediment, with India's present US\$4 trillion GDP limiting prolonged regional influence; scaling the economy to US\$10–15 trillion is crucial to improving India's regional influence.

Regional integration—economic, physical, digital and energy—remains challenging, however, as domestic concerns impede development in energy connectivity with neighbours. Calls for a 'Gujral Doctrine 2.0' underlined the need to revive India's goodwill policy (excluding Pakistan), emphasising institutional connections over leader-centric diplomacy.

Panellists suggested clear communication on China's strategic moves, distinguishing between non-strategic collaboration and 'red lines' to define unacceptable actions or consequences. India must commence regional stability through pragmatic, economically robust and institutionally resilient policies as the US' attention moves away from South Asia.

The discussion concluded with the observation that India has ironically 'achieved more foreign policy success with distant allies' than with neighbours. It emphasised the complex reality of India's regional environment and underlined that India's progress relied on strategic patience, economic power and delicate diplomacy with its neighbours.

■ M. SHAHID SIDDIQUI

Cinema Transcends Borders

BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP: *Hindi Cinema and Pakistan: Screening the Idea and the Reality by Meenakshi Bharat*

DISCUSSANTS: *Ira Bhaskar; Amit Khanna; Nishat Haider; Kamayani Kumar; and Meenakshi Bharat*

MODERATOR: *Jasleen Vohra*

9 May 2025

On an evening when the threat of full-scale war between India and Pakistan loomed ominously, a panel of distinguished speakers gathered before an eager audience to explore perspectives beyond the simplistic good-versus-evil narratives that have long plagued discussions about the two countries.

Meenakshi Bharat's book examines how Hindi cinema, since the 1947 Partition, has repeatedly returned to the idea of Pakistan, sometimes as a romanticised 'other', and at other times as a hostile antagonist. Bharat's interest in cultural trauma and cinematic memory stems from a

deep engagement with Partition, despite no direct familial displacement. Her exhaustive book spans genres such as Partition narratives, spy thrillers, war epics, sports dramas and cross-border romances.

Jasleen Vohra highlighted cinema's role in shaping public memory, fostering empathy and reinforcing division. She commended the book's balanced perspective and its nuanced reading of cinematic portrayals through familial, romantic, adversarial and humorous lenses. Ira Bhaskar described Partition as the 'originating wound' of many such films, noting the use of melodrama to convey emotional and political complexities. Hindi cinema's visual and aural strategies, like lush songs, familial melodrama and sports showdowns, translate abstract trauma into visceral experience for mass audiences.

Nishat Haider emphasised how the book engages with trauma theory and memory studies, portraying Pakistan as both an estranged sibling and a feared other, raising questions around gender, desire and identity. Kamayani

Kumar spoke of the Partition's enduring imprint on Indian cultural consciousness, kept alive not only through cinema but also through literature, oral history and digital storytelling. Amit Khanna added an industry perspective, pointing out that representations of Pakistan are shaped as much by market demands and audience expectations as by ideology.

The book is a scholarly work that highlights the cultural and psychological impact of Partition and how Hindi cinema continues to negotiate India's fraught relationship with its neighbour. *Veer Zaara* which romanticises Pakistan, or *Gadar* which vilifies it, demonstrate how cinematic tropes turn Partition into an emotional script, shaping public memory as much as they reflect it. These portrayals serve as a rehearsal space for the nation to process trauma, fear and reconciliation, rendering Partition a living current that continues to inform questions of belonging, religion and identity today.

■ **RICHA VADINI SINGH**

Tracing Histories through a Lens

EXHIBITION: *Chitrakar Legacy: A Journey through Nepal and India*

CURATED BY: *Kiran Man Chitrakar; and Cristeena Chitrakar*

COLLABORATION: *Embassy of Nepal, New Delhi; and B. P. Koirala India–Nepal Foundation*

5 to 16 April 2025

Spanning over a century, the photography exhibition showcased Nepal's royal, political, cultural and spiritual life, captured by four generations of the Chitrakar family—Dirgha Man Chitrakar (1877–1951), Ganesh Man Chitrakar (1916–1985), Kiran Man Chitrakar, and Swaraj Man Chitrakar. The family's photographic journey mirrors the evolution of both Nepalese society and the art of photography itself.

Dirgha Man Chitrakar worked as a court painter and photographer for nearly 50 years, starting with Prime Minister Chandra Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana, who held the position from 1901 to 1929. When photography was introduced to Nepal in the late 1800s and cameras were only accessible to the court and a few elites, he added it to his visual repertoire. He accompanied the Prime Minister on his trip to England and France in 1908. Besides the court's glamour, he photographed daily ordinary life and landscape that offered a rare glimpse of Nepal, which was

closed to outside visitors until the mid-1950s. He also visited Banaras, where he took photographs that encapsulate the shared sacred geography of Nepal and India.

When Dirgha Man Chitrakar retired from the palace, his only son, Ganesh Man Chitrakar, took over. After Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana, who served from 1948 to 1951 and was the last Rana to assume the position, left Nepal, Ganesh transitioned from being a palace photographer to working with USAID and later UNESCO. His work in aerial and colour photography contributed significantly to documenting Nepal's cultural heritage. Among his works were also images from a spiritual journey through India in 1977.



The exhibition also offered a visual exploration of the cultural continuities between Nepal and India, from formal photographs of India's first ambassador to Nepal, Surjit Singh Majithia, at the palace in Kathmandu and national security advisor Ajit Doval overseeing earthquake efforts in 2015, to changes in temple architecture and shared festivals.

Works by Kiran Man Chitrakar and Swaraj Man Chitrakar, the third and fourth generations of the family, recording the changes in these landscapes, were also showcased. As they continue to expand on this visual dialogue, Cristeena Chitrakar, Kiran Man Chitrakar's daughter and an art historian, has preserved the family's legacy in the book *Nepal Remembered: Historical Images from Dirgha Man and Ganesh Man Chitrakar*.

■ **RITIKA KOCHHAR**

Celebrating Art in Children's Books

EXHIBITION: *Becoming*

CURATED BY: Richa Jha

COLLABORATION: *Pickle Yolk Books*

23 April to 6 May 2025

A delightful exhibition celebrating Indian children's book illustrations enlivened the gallery with rarely displayed art and a carnival of interactive features. It engaged both adults and children, together or by themselves, in viewing the display, reading and solving puzzles, among other activities.

Presenting evolving styles and approaches, the vibrant exhibition highlighted the role picture books play in shaping our sense of self. The relationship of self with space and time was emphasised.

Richa Jha, author and publisher, brought her passion for children's books to her curation. Large canvas prints of selected illustrations showcased the nuanced details and emotions that enriched text. The juxtaposition of different styles, with vivid multicolours next to monochromes or stark black and



whites, offered diverse content to viewers. The exhibition reflected India's content richness and vibrancy in this space. Works of international artists were also included, acknowledging global influences.

About 80 per cent of the works on display were those of contemporary artists, while the first section featured one of India's earliest children's books—Abanindranath Tagore's *Khirer Putul* (1896)—and other pioneering works that helped shape new concepts of nationhood. However, many important contributors to the interim phase were missing. Works of illustrators of children's magazines and comics were also not on display. While the exhibition did not claim to be a comprehensive collection, it will hopefully inspire more such efforts of curation in this significant and prolific field.

The exhibition offered an immersive experience to viewers of all ages. An enormous volume of preliminary work may have been done in accessing original artworks, which was reflected in the quality of amplified illustrations. Digital interventions, especially fonts, enabled seamless viewership from small books to oversized prints. It is imperative that such a collection not

be restricted to the few who could attend the exhibition and it must also tour metros and smaller towns.

■ **BHARATI MIRCHANDANI**

Stories from the Himalayas

FESTIVAL: *Mountain Film Festival*

COLLABORATION: *Indian Mountaineering Foundation*

3 May 2025

The festival showcased a catalogue of shorts that explore facets of life in India's mountainous regions. I was struck by the intriguing concepts and independent filmmaking prowess on display as many of the shorts explored singular people, places and lifestyles, and the filmmakers had captured these stories against obvious budgetary and logistical odds. These constraints, ironically, also prevented these films from truly soaring. Some of them, however, stood out.

In Search of Kasturi-Musk Deer, Neha Dixit's ode to the rarely seen musk deer, was made by someone passionate about wildlife and the environment. Given the difficulty of capturing the notoriously shy musk deer on camera, it

is miraculous that Dixit even managed to do so within a noticeably limited schedule and budget. The voice-over of the film was very poignant and bore witness to the film's beating heart and commitment to conservation. One can only wish Dixit could have spent more time and afforded us a more detailed glimpse into the life of this endangered animal.

Life Uphill—The Tenzin Dolma Story and *Gaddi—Life of a Himalayan Shepherd*, both directed by Akshat Jain, were fascinating insights into the singular lives of people living in the Himalayas. While the former tells of a tea shop owner, a child bride and a young mother who one day unexpectedly takes up marathon running in the inhospitable environs surrounding her, the latter explores the lonely, peripatetic life of Gaddi shepherds who tend to their flocks far from family and urban life. Both films eminently could—and should—be further developed into feature-length documentaries.

Ganga Girls is a rousing short on an eponymous all-women's white water rafting team, entirely comprised of local village women living by the banks of the Ganges who would otherwise never have dreamt of participating

in this male-dominated sport but for the brave efforts of a young woman kayaker, Naina Adhikari. She has made it her mission in life to empower women through kayaking, defying the gender ceilings so prevalent in sports, and deserves all the credit she gets. Adhikari graced the screening with her presence.

The Mountain Film Festival, now in its third edition, offers a rare insight into all things mountain-related in the subcontinent and affords many independent filmmakers a valuable platform to showcase their work.

■ **SIDHARTH SRINIVASAN**

Mirroring Contemporary Realities

EXHIBITION: *From Eight with Art—Painting the Soul of North East India*

WORKS BY: *Sujit Das; Phaibhakupar Karlukhi; Millan Laishram; Lalhming Mawii; Mrinmoy Debbarman; Tase Vinei; Phir Reniya; and Karma Tenrab*

COLLABORATION: *Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region*

30 May to 5 June 2025

Curated as part of the ongoing series, 'A Fabric of Narratives: The Many Facets of North East India', the sophisticated set of works on display marked a pleasant change from the typical presentation of art from the region, featuring local culture, textile, attire, rituals and festivals, children at play and women at work. Deeply engaged with the transformation of their surroundings



and at the crossroads of the 'old and the new', the artists drew inspiration from ancestral stories, craft techniques, landscapes, botanical art and visual traditions.

The works reflected artists' adaptation to the changing times, neither overwhelmed nor ruining the 'progress'; re-interpretation of scriptures; portrayal of tongue-in-cheek responses to the fallouts of technology; and growing aspirations amidst noise, upheaval and conflicts in the region.

The curator in her introduction wrote, 'Art doesn't just come from a place—it grows with it, shaped by its people, landscapes, histories and rhythms. "From Eight With Art" is thus more than an exhibition, not nostalgic but nuanced, both a visual journey and a cultural mirror—revealing how artists observe, interpret and re-imagine the beliefs, life, struggles and joys

of their communities.' One walked out of the exhibition having learnt the wealth of talent in the region that is yet to be explored.

■ **ARUNA BHOWMICK**

Of Darkness and Light

INTERNATIONAL PUPPET FILM FESTIVAL: *PuppetOscope (Out of the Shadows)*

COLLABORATION: *Kathkatha Puppet Arts Trust; and Goethe Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan*

3 to 6 April 2025

The festival, dedicated to Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, included a seminar, shadow puppetry performances and a screening of films. While there were many noteworthy programmes, among the highlights was the film *Nee Engey* (Where are You) by R. V. Ramani, a veteran cinematographer and documentarist. It is about the disappearing traditions of shadow puppet theatre in the southern states of India. In a series of conversations with three generations of practitioners of the art it reveals the difficulties they face in sustaining their work amidst

dwindling audiences. It gives the impression of being an audio-visual diary, and a very eloquent one that pits the art of shadow puppets against a fast-changing world that has neither the time nor the inclination to appreciate this delicate, difficult art form. Ramani's documentary, made in 2003, remains relevant today.

The Adventures of Prince Achmed, made by a pioneer of shadow puppet animation film, Lotte Reiniger, with her husband Carl Koch, in 1926, still holds the viewer's attention. It was made with the most rudimentary means, filming a single image at a time—a back-breaking job. That Reiniger created enduring poetry out of such limitations is awe-inspiring. The students of the digital revolution of our time, working in animation movie-making, at least some of them will, it is hoped, grasp the enormous difficulties in making this memorable production.

There were many other contemporary animation films screened, which made impressive use of all the electronic technology available to them and elegantly told stories

that concern each director. They were stories ranging from four to 20 minutes. *Our Tales* by L. Flavia Hevia from Mexico deals with the memories of immigrant women trying to adapt to a new environment by carrying an object of everyday use from their past. The evocation of the movement of time is both gentle and poetic.

The Canadian film *Chiaroscuro* by Elias Djemil-Matassov is a virtuoso exercise in the play of light and shadow in the art of puppetry. *Persephone*, also a Canadian production, directed by Emile Racine, is ambitious in its intellectual and philosophical quests. Blending mythological references with personal echoes of them, it displays an artistic ability commensurate with the scale of intended intellectual ambition.

Among the performances was 'Sita Apaharan: Ram-Raavan Yuddha', presented in the traditional Karnataka style of shadow puppetry by the theatre group Shri Raja

Rama Togalu Gombe Mela from Hassan, Karnataka. In an all-night performance at Max Mueller Bhavan, New Delhi, another festival venue, the audience was entranced, and a third stayed to watch until dawn!

The last performance of the festival was an adaptation of Satyajit Ray's celebrated 1969 musical film, *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* (The Adventures of Goopy and Bagha). The 30-minute shadow puppet version of the story, presented by UNIMA Puppeteers Trust—India, was constantly entertaining and witty.

Anurupa Roy, a dedicated puppeteer, lover of all aspects of puppetry and an indefatigable organiser of cultural programmes, deserves to be most heartily thanked for making this festival possible.

■ PARTHA CHATTERJEE

Embracing Life—and Death

FILM: *A Fly on the Wall*

DIRECTORS: Shonali Bose; and Nilesch Maniyar

COLLABORATION: Foundation for Universal Responsibility of His Holiness the Dalai Lama

23 May 2025

The protagonist of the documentary and a friend of the filmmakers, Chika Kapadia, had no wish to cheat death; in fact, he embraced it. This was emphasised by Rajiv Mehrotra, curator of the 'Films of the Spirit' series. Mehrotra explained the concept of death in Tibetan Buddhism, stating it was as much a part of life, and that 'you prepare for death the day you are born'.

Not quite so for Kapadia. An electrical engineer by profession, he lived life to the fullest. A hectic corporate life in Los Angeles, followed by three years as a stand-up comedian in Mumbai, till he finally retired to Ubud, Bali.

A routine visit to the dentist for a root canal revealed a lump in his throat. It turned out to be anaplastic thyroid cancer (ATC). It was already in its fourth stage and he had four months to live. Realising that death had chosen him, Kapadia decided on an unusual step. He met his closest friend, Shonali Bose, at the club and asked her, 'Would she be kind enough to film his last days and finally his death?' Devastated by the news but realising that Kapadia needed her filmmaking expertise, Bose agreed.

The result is an extraordinary film, full of grace and dignity, poignant and haunting. Permission had to be secured



for filming from Dignitas, a facility in Zurich that assists in voluntary suicide. Throughout the film, Bose balances her objectivity as a filmmaker and her overwhelming emotional distress with admirable aplomb. Even when she does break down, the camera is carefully focussed on her chin and quivering lips and not her eyes. She also has to contend with Kapadia's family members who had no wish for a cinematic record of his last moments.

On the momentous day, Kapadia takes an antiemetic drug, followed by a lethal overdose of 15 grams of powdered pentobarbital dissolved in water half an hour later, with a Parle-G biscuit to offset the bitter taste.

A view of the retreating back of a distraught Bose with her camera equipment left the audience with many silent thoughts.

■ SRIDHAR BALAN

A Tribute to a Literary Icon

PLAY: *Meet Mark Twain*

PERFORMANCE BY: *Keshav Roy*

CONCEPT, SCRIPT & DIRECTION: *Renu Roy*

COLLABORATION: *KCT Group; and the Lalit Delhi*

25 April 2025

In a compelling solo theatrical performance, the production brought to life the timeless wit and wisdom of Samuel Langhorne Clemens—better known by his pen name, Mark Twain. With incisive humour and profound insight, Twain's reflections on life, love, morality and society resonate just as powerfully today as they did over a century ago.

The 70-minute performance was uninterrupted, cleverly designed by the director to maintain a seamless emotional connection with the audience. Set aesthetically in the intimate space of the protagonist's library—complete with armchairs, a smoke machine to mimic fog and the evocative sound of a foghorn—the stage captured the atmosphere of Twain's world.

Twain, often hailed as the 'father of American literature' and the 'greatest humorist the United States has produced', is best known for classics like *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the latter named among the 'Great American Novels'. However, this production went beyond Twain's fiction, drawing from his essays, speeches and autobiographical reflections to present a portrait of the man behind the legend.

Keshav Roy's solo performance was the centrepiece of the production. He portrayed Twain with remarkable dexterity, delivering monologues filled with sharp satire, dry wit and moments of philosophical depth. His performance bridged theatrical storytelling and stand-up comedy, capturing both the humour and gravity of Twain's observations. From biting critiques of human folly to uplifting reminders about personal integrity, Roy held the audience in rapt attention.

Renu Roy's script carefully curated Twain's best-known quotes and reflections, creating a narrative that feels fresh and relevant. Whether touching on politics, human nature, or personal growth, Twain's voice emerged as strikingly modern. The script evoked laughter, introspection and admiration, particularly when delivering lines such as, 'If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything,' or 'Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect.'

More than a theatrical tribute, the production was a philosophical journey. Twain's disdain for hypocrisy, his love of language and his deep empathy for human imperfection were remarkably represented. Keshav Roy's performance captured this emotional range, making Twain's world accessible and thought-provoking for a contemporary audience.

With a blend of storytelling, satire and historical reflection, the production invited viewers to rediscover Twain, not just as a literary figure, but as a voice of enduring relevance.

■ **MANOHAR KHUSHALANI**

A Poet for All Ages

TALK: *I'm Kabir and I'm Not, says Kabir*

SPEAKER: *Anand*

30 May 2025

Anand's talk was a captivating exploration of authenticity, identity and living traditions. The poet, musician and anti-caste activist presented his book *The Notbook of Kabir: Thinner than Water, Fiercer than Fire*, interweaving philosophy, music and radical thought.

The title's clever wordplay—*Notbook*—signals Anand's rejection of canonical approaches to Kabir. He called it 'the most inauthentic book on Kabir', arguing that 'there is no authentic Kabir'. Instead of seeking a fixed historical figure in lifeless texts, Anand celebrates the real Kabir who lives in oral traditions, sung by folk artists, qawwals and commoners in diverse dialects across centuries, constantly transformed and reborn in every voice.

Kabir emerges as 'a disembodied spectre', a shared consciousness and collective signature (*kahat* Kabir) that must be forged repeatedly. His words are 'mutable,

not fixated on fixity, flowing and changing like a river'. This democratic fluidity connects Kabir to Buddha's Śūnyavāda (doctrine of emptiness), 14th-century Dalit saint Chokhamela's poetry and Ambedkar's rejection of caste and scriptures.

The *Notbook* is influenced by Anand's personal journey of breaking away from 'stifling Brahminical Carnatic music' and his caste identity of being a Brahmin by birth. Encountering Kabir through Kumar Gandharva and Ambedkar rekindled his relationship with music, making Kabir his 'constant, distant companion'. The book compiles 50 Kabir songs with impressionistic translations, prioritising spirit over literal accuracy, though Anand acknowledges that translation 'doesn't sing'—only performance reveals true meaning.

While the talk addressed profound questions, the atmosphere was informal and playful. Musical performances, including songs from Tamil, Marathi, Pali and Braj traditions, were immersive. Anand's rendition of '*Hamaare des mai na Dharaa, nahi Gaganaa*' (In this world of mine, no space, no sky) offered sonic meditation on negation as liberation, echoing Buddha's *Bahiya Sutta*. He also performed Thiruvalluvar and Sivaguru pieces, underlining cross-cultural philosophical connections.

Anand used only one instrument—the ukulele—which he playfully likened to himself, calling them both ‘Naacheez’ (Nobody). His deep voice scaled volume highs and lows within single breaths, with remarkable dexterity, embodying the Notbook’s subtitle: ‘Thinner than water, fiercer than fire’.

The talk demonstrated how ancient wisdom traditions remain vibrantly alive, continuously challenging social orders, while offering paths to liberation through song, poetry and community engagement.

■ AMITABHA KHARE

Wisdom of the Musical Gurus

TALK: *The Many Routes to Bhav in Thumri*

ILLUSTRATED LECTURE BY: Vidya Rao

9 April 2025

‘You cannot perform thumri without *bhav* (emotions),’ said Vidya Rao. To explain *bhav*, she drew from the wisdom of ‘great thumri singers’, including her guru Naina Devi, who, Rao recalled, believed pedagogy is rooted in comprehending sentiments individually and not handed over outright. She presented video clips of performances by Naina Devi, Mahadev Prasad Mishra, Shipra Bose and Birju Maharaj, among others, urging the audience to find emotions while noting the voice modulations, dialogue and vocatives.

Rao exhibited humility in her confession of having acquired only a few of the numerous skills, like different emotions evoked by Devi in singing ‘*Barsan Lagi Badariya*’. In the song, while *kajri*, *dhun* (tune) and *chaiti* are tied together musically, *kajri* expresses rain through vocatives like ‘aah’ or ‘ho’ inserted by the singer, said Rao. Through Devi’s performance, Rao illustrated how ‘thumri addresses and brings the audience into the performance’.

Mishra’s alap, incorporating a compact voice modulation, evoked spirituality and pathos. In his performance of ‘*Vyakul Bhayee*’, addressed to God, he used the vocative ‘ho’ repeatedly—a technique used to invite the audience to sit and listen. ‘This slight modulation in the voice has to be done with so much economy, otherwise it becomes horrible,’ Rao said. Similarly, Siddheshwari Devi’s full-throated composition ‘*Aawo Aawo Nagariya*’ stretched ‘aawo’ and ‘nagariya’ into a beautiful rendition.

Shipra Bose’s dulcet tones in ‘*Bhanwra Rey Hum Pardesi Log*’ evoked ‘edginess and pain’. Rao explained that these emotions cannot be ‘forced but discovered, not only through introspection, but also by looking at the world and singing about it’. Birju Maharaj’s performance depicting ‘*laye-baat*’, the synchronisation of movement with the musical beat, was truly romantic. In his rendition of ‘*Jaane de Mayika*’, his eyes followed his notes as his flirtatious voice filled the room with joy.

Answering questions on the dialectics of mysticism, Rao affirmed that artistic performances transport the listeners beyond materialistic reality. She emphasised the importance of *riyaz*, hard work and starting afresh every day. Such discussions on great musicians and their practice offer a window into understanding classical music and its various dimensions. One only wished Rao had performed too.

■ AJANTA DUTT

An Enchanting Classical Evening

PERFORMANCE: *IIC Spring Festival of Music & Dance*

ODISSI RECITAL BY: Sarita Mishra

KATHAK RECITAL BY: Varsha Dasgupta

17 April 2025

Dance has the powerful ability to use imagery, lights and music to tell stories. Both Bangalore’s Sarita Mishra and Delhi-based Varsha Dasgupta showcased how classical dance could bring to life not just Hindu epics like the Ramayana but also popular sonnets of William Shakespeare.

Mishra, a disciple of Bichitrananda Swain and Aruna Mohanty, began her performance with



an invocation to Lord Shiva. The various facets of Lord Shiva and his attributes were aesthetically presented, combining statuesque poses with lyrical footwork. But it was her next presentation, ‘*Sitaharan*’, a piece choreographed by Kelucharan Mohapatra on the abduction of Sita by Ravana, which stood out. Mishra used *abhinaya* to depict interactions first between Sita and Rama as she persuades him to bring her the golden deer and then with Lakshmana as she orders him to go into the forest to save Rama after hearing the latter’s cries for help. As she seamlessly switched characters, the visual drama of Lakshmana drawing three protective lines and warning Sita

not to cross them, Ravana's cunning plan to draw her out, Sita's abduction, and Jatayu's desperate attempts to save her were enhanced by superb light design and music.

Varsha Dasgupta began with a Ganesh Vandana followed by short dance pieces that demonstrated her talent and skill through intricate and rhythmic footwork, leaps and multiple spins (*chakkars*). She then presented an Indian version of Shakespeare's famous sonnet 18 titled 'Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day'. Translated into Braj,

Avadhi and Hindi by her teacher, Abhimanyu Lal, the piece employed metaphors to describe the beauty of the beloved, replacing the English summer with the Indian spring as the season of beauty, blooming flowers and love. Dasgupta did full justice to her guru's choreography, using hand movements and subtle expressions to portray that while physical beauty may fade over time, the charm of the beloved remains forever immortalised through poetry.

■ **SWAPNA MAJUMDAR**

New Findings Challenge History

TALK: *Recent Archaeological Investigations in Tamil Nadu*

ILLUSTRATED LECTURE BY: *K. Rajan*

CHAIR: *Upinder Singh*

COLLABORATION: *Ashoka University, Sonipat*

11 April 2025

In January 2025, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. K. Stalin released a report, 'Antiquity of Iron: Recent Radiometric Dates from Tamil Nadu', by the Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology. In excavations across six sites—Adichanallur, Sivagalai, Mayiladumparai, Mangadu, Thelunganur and Kilnamandi—the archaeologists discovered iron objects dating back to 2,953–3,345 BCE, indicating that the introduction of iron in Tamil Nadu can be traced back to the 4th century BCE. The assessment was made using advanced dating techniques, accelerator mass spectrometry (AMS) and optically stimulated luminescence (OSL).

In her introductory remarks, Upinder Singh said, 'Archaeological research in Tamil Nadu has created quite a buzz. It seems that it could force us to rethink long-cherished ideas about the origins of writing, the origins of

city life, and also the beginnings of technology.' She added that K. Rajan was at the forefront of these excavations and the research originating from them.

The report challenged widely accepted theories in the timeline of India's history, such as the emergence of the Iron Age and the introduction of the Brahmi script. Earlier, the Iron Age was believed to date back to around 1,000 BCE. The excavations suggest that it was contemporaneous with the Copper and Bronze Age in other parts of India. For instance, iron objects in Mayiladumparai were dated 2,175 BCE. At a burial site in Sivagalai, 80 iron objects were found and dated to 3,345 BCE. Rajan said that Tamil Nadu is home to 7,520 sites from the Palaeolithic, Microlithic and Neolithic periods, with only 0.47 per cent of these excavated so far. He also stated that 'unlike northern India, Tamil Nadu could not experience the Copper Age due to non-availability of sufficient exploitable copper ore'. He mentioned that a large number of high-tin bronze objects collected from several urn burial sites were primarily imports.

Regarding Brahmi, Rajan explained that while historians have placed the origin of this script in the 3rd century BCE, recent findings suggest its roots date back to the 5th century BCE. At Porunthal in the Amaravati river valley, four storage jars with paddy were found. One of the jars had 'Vaira' written in Brahmi. These samples were dated to 490 BCE and 450 BCE. 'That means it was 200 years before King Ashoka,' Rajan said, leaving the audience intrigued.

■ **SUSAN VERMA MISHRA**

Legends of Himalayan Heights

DISCUSSION: *The Sherpa Trail*

ILLUSTRATED LECTURE BY: *Nandini Purandare and Deepa Balsavar*

CHAIR: *Ashok Abbey*

COLLABORATION: *The Himalayan Club*

5 April 2025

At the outset, might it be clarified that this programme was not about the 2023 G20 deliberations led by India's Sherpa.

In 1937, a young lad teamed up with John Martyn and Jack Gibson, masters at The Doon School, to cross the Kalindi Khal on the Alaknanda–Bhagirathi watershed. Sixteen years on, this same man would acquire recognition the world over for the first ascent of Everest. He—Tenzing Norgay Sherpa—was soon to be appointed director of field training at India's premier Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (HMI) in Darjeeling, led by Narendra Dhar Jayal as founding principal and Gurdial Singh 'Guru' donning the advisory mantle. Several Sherpas became instructors at the HMI.

Spurred initially by national ambition in the quest for a vast range of Himalayan summits, the sport of mountaineering began taking root. Venturing across the high Himalayan passes to augment slender livelihoods, the robust Sherpa community of hardy men (and women!) then attained pole position as mountaineering compatriots. For reasons of



access and proximity, Darjeeling became the focal point. *The Sherpa Trail: Stories from Darjeeling and Beyond*, co-authored by Nandini Purandare and Deepa Balsavar, owes much of its early understanding to meticulous dossiers drawn up by 'Townie memsahib', as Joan Townend was known. Wife of an ICS officer in the Bengal cadre, she was just as indefatigable as Elizabeth Hawley, the Kathmandu

chronicler who knew everything about every peak, Sherpa and mountaineer!

Much of Townend's affinity with the Himalaya centred on the Sherpas of Darjeeling. In his obituary of Townend, C. E. J. Crawford wrote, "'Townie memsahib' was concerned with them as people, for their livelihood and welfare, and at the same time strove to see that the standard of 'Club Porters' was kept high. Himalayan Club Chit Books were issued to each Sherpa, and a Porter's Register compiled. This register was a work of loving care, for it was compiled in her own hand, with a photograph and a climbing record of each man.' The Sherpa legacy became embedded in Townend's Tiger Badges.

Purandare and Balsavar are to be commended for their vibrant magnum opus, notwithstanding Ashok Abbey's fulsomely endearing introduction, prompting the ladies' jocular remark that there was nothing left for them to say!

■ SUDHIR SAHI

Addressing the Global Crisis

RELEASE OF THE IIC QUARTERLY (WINTER 2024–SPRING 2025): *Energy Transition and Climate Justice: A Path Less Travelled* by Dr. Karan Singh

EDITED BY: Mritiunjoy Mohanty; Runa Sarkar; and Omita Goyal

DISCUSSANTS: Ashwini K. Swain; Nagraj Adve; Mritiunjoy Mohanty; and Runa Sarkar

CHAIR: Dr. Karan Singh

23 April 2025

The release of this special issue of the *IIC Quarterly* opened with a moment of silence honouring the tourists who lost their lives in a terrorist attack in Pahalgam. K. N. Shrivastava welcomed the audience, emphasising the urgency and timeliness of the theme. Omita Goyal elaborated on the rationale behind the selection, while the presence of contributors and literary figures lent distinction to the evening.

After formally unveiling the volume, Dr. Karan Singh initiated the discussion by introducing the panellists, starting with Ashwini K. Swain, who focussed on India's energy transition. He outlined India's targets of achieving 50 per cent non-fossil fuel capacity and 450 GW of renewable energy by 2030, energy independence by 2047, and reaching net-zero emissions by 2070. Swain highlighted key challenges like overambitious targets, disjointed policy mandates, regional disparities, integration of costs and resolving land conflicts. He advocated for decentralised energy systems and wider rooftop solar adoption, especially for the poor. India still lacks high-efficiency technology and relies on imports.

Nagraj Adve framed the energy transition within the broad context of the climate crisis and socio-economic inequality.



He emphasised the impacts of rising temperatures on outdoor workers, the need for multiple energy transitions and a just transition that ensures decent jobs and climate justice for both people and ecosystems. He advocated for land-sharing solar models to prevent displacement and urged a shift in India's development model towards meeting basic needs and reducing elite consumption.

Mritiunjoy Mohanty argued that climate justice must guide global energy policy, warning against overreliance on market-led solutions, which often neglect funding for adaptation. He called for community empowerment, bottom-up governance and the integration of traditional knowledge. He read excerpts from K. Satchidanandan's poem 'Our Tribe', published in the volume, and stressed 'collective choice problems don't get solved by voting'.

Runa Sarkar said that a just energy transition in India must be policy-driven, and not market-led, due to rising energy demand and limited short-term demand for green energy. Focussing on policy, she reflected on top-down policy approaches, political economy, distribution reforms and energy justice. She also pointed out the importance of community participation, traditional practices, regional planning and local governance.

Singh concluded the discussion by contemplating a shift in population policies, unmet targets, and the need for inclusive, collective climate efforts.

■ PRIYANKA MISRA

Cosmic Conundrums

TALK: *Conformal Cyclic Cosmology*

LECTURE BY: *Roger Penrose*

PANELLIST: *Alexia M. Lopez*

CHAIR: *Ranjit Nair*

COLLABORATION: *Centre for Philosophy and Foundations of Science*

1 April 2025

Alexia M. Lopez's research team discovered two large-scale cosmic structures, the Giant Arc in 2021 and the Big Ring in 2024, that challenge the Cosmological Principle, which states that the universe, when observed on a large scale, is homogeneous and isotropic.

Nobel Laureate Roger Penrose described his theory of Conformal Cyclic Cosmology (CCC) in opposition to the 'Inflationary Big Bang Cosmology', the currently widely accepted model of the universe. Penrose sought to explain Lopez's findings in the framework of his theory.

According to CCC, the universe goes through an eternal succession of 'aeons', with the 'remote future'—after about 10^{100} years or so—of one aeon smoothly passing over to the 'Big Bang' of the following aeon. 'Our Big Bang is the remote future of the previous aeon,' he said. The infinite future of the first aeon and the beginning of the following aeon, according to Penrose, are very similar and mathematically equivalent in 'conformal geometric' terms, because mass becomes irrelevant or absent (equivalently, absence of scale) in both these states of the universe. The states are dominated by energy in the form of radiation (photons) and/or gravitational waves, which also endows them with low entropy.

The inflationary Big Bang picture, on the other hand, states that the universe, or space-time itself, came into existence from a point of infinite density called the Big Bang about 13.7 billion years ago. This expanded exponentially fast for a

tiny fraction (10^{-32}) of a second after which it has expanded at a much slower rate, during which period stars, galaxies, galactic clusters, planets and life—as we know it—emerged.

Penrose also dwelt on the observational proofs of CCC that his research group has found in the form of footprints of events of the previous aeon on the Cosmic Microwave Background (CMB) in our aeon. CMB is the all-pervasive remnant radiation after photons decoupled from matter at the 'last scattering surface' (LSS) about 380,000 years after the Big Bang, beyond which the universe of the past cannot be observed.

Analysing the sky maps of the CMB provided by NASA's Wilkinson Microwave Anisotropy Probe (WMAP) satellite (2010) and by the European Space Agency's (ESA's) Planck satellite (2013), Penrose's team identified concentric circular patterns in the maps. Low temperature variance across them, as compared to elsewhere, suggested imprints of spherical ripples of gravitational waves generated by violent activity before the Big Bang, such as colliding Super Massive Black Holes (SMBHs), the last surviving objects in the previous aeon. 'The gravitational energy just bursts through the crossover surface (separating the aeons)', Penrose remarked.

The team also identified six bright circular spots at identical locations in the two maps, which have been termed as 'Hawking Points'. According to Penrose, these are the footprints of the 'Hawking radiation' emitted by the evaporation of the final few SMBHs in the previous aeon, which emerge into the current aeon as concentrated energy streams.

Penrose explained the two ultra-large-scale structures discovered by Lopez through his CCC theory. The enormous amount of energy bursting into the current aeon from the previous one, and interacting with matter at the LSS, could be nucleating centres for galaxies in circular formations, he said. In the ensuing discussion with Penrose, Lopez said that the Giant Arc her team discovered could be part of a ring much larger than the one detected later.

■ **RAMASESHAN RAMACHANDRAN**

Call for a 'Namami Gange' Approach

DISCUSSION: *Can we Rejuvenate Yamuna?*

LEAD PRESENTATION BY: *Asok Kumar G.*

PANELLISTS: *D. P. Mathuria; Manu Bhatnagar; and Srinivas Chokkakula*

COLLABORATION: *Centre for Policy Research*

23 May 2025

In the captivating talk, water governance took the centre stage with the question: 'Can Yamuna be revived, and can Ganga's clean-up success offer a model?'

The packed room with many from the top leadership of the government, in this field, present, signalled the urgency of the issue. Leading the session was Asok Kumar G., former director general of the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG). He is credited with transforming the government's Ganga clean-up programme 'Namami Gange', launched in June 2014 with a budget outlay of ₹20,000 crore, into a globally recognised restoration effort. In December 2022, the UN recognised the mission as one of the top 10 World Restoration Flagships to revive the natural world. The programme tracks Ganga's progress across four pillars—pollution abatement (Nirmal Ganga); improving ecology and flow (Aviral Ganga); strengthening people–river connections (Jan Ganga); and facilitating research and policy (Gyan Ganga). In 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi added another pillar, Arth Ganga, linking river rejuvenation to local economies.

Delhi's Yamuna, Kumar observed, presented a far grimmer picture. A 22-km stretch, which is barely 2 per cent of the river length, contributes over 80 per cent of the pollution load. 'This is a shame on the national capital,' he remarked. Kumar advocated for decentralised sewage treatment plants, real-time monitoring, community-led initiatives and an empowered Yamuna task force.

The panel outlined a multi-faceted approach to cleaning Yamuna. D. P. Mathuria explained how Yamuna's crisis is not merely about pollution but the lack of flow, as 90 per cent of its water is diverted for irrigation. He pointed out that three proposed dams—Renuka Dam in Himachal Pradesh, and Kishau Dam and Lakhwar-Vyasi Dam in Uttarakhand—could augment water supply. Manu Bhatnagar cautioned against

focussing solely on pollution, arguing that restoration of natural flow and ecosystem services must be prioritised, suggesting a basin-wide water budget, crop diversification, and stricter enforcement of environmental regulations. Revival of Yamuna hinges on what Kumar called the 5 Ps: political will, people's participation, planning, performance and public/private finances.

The audience asked questions about decentralised sewage treatment plants (STPs), public responsibility, groundwater health and interstate water politics. While the Yamuna's plight seems gloomy, the session gave a message: with the Ganga's blueprint and a collective resolve, a cleaner Yamuna may be an achievable reality.

■ SAURYA MISHRA

A Question of Ethics

SEMINAR: *Odyssey of AI: Challenges and Opportunities Beyond DeepSeek*

WELCOME REMARKS BY: K. N. Shrivastava

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY: Seyed E. Hasnain

29 April 2025

In an enlightening afternoon of ideas, reflections and discourses, the seminar brought together scholars and practitioners at the intersection of science, ethics and society. The theme, 'From Code to Conscience: Rethinking AI's Role in Society', positioned Artificial Intelligence (AI) not only as a technological phenomenon, but a crucible for confronting the moral and philosophical imperatives of our time.

K. N. Shrivastava, in his welcome address, foregrounded the urgency of engaging deeply with the multifaceted implications of AI. In his keynote remarks, Seyed E. Hasnain situated AI within a broader civilisational context, inviting participants to rethink not just what AI can do, but what it ought to do and who it must serve.

Debasisa Mohanty opened the first session with his presentation on 'Navigating the New World of AI/ML: A User's Perspective'. Drawing on his experience in biomedical research, Mohanty emphasised that AI is already embedded in the daily realities of knowledge creation, transforming scientific workflows and experimental design, raising questions about interpretability, reliability



and access. Shandar Ahmad followed with a talk on 'The Societal Impact of AI'. He explored the ethical terrain of algorithmic power, from reinforcing bias to challenging structures of inclusion and justice, urging participants to approach AI not just as coders or consumers, but as engaged citizens. An interdisciplinary pivot was offered by Ganesh Bagler, whose presentation on 'Computational Gastronomy: Blending Food with AI-ML' showcased his work that applies data science and AI to culinary practices and food systems. In the last session, Naveen Kumar spoke about 'Trust in AI Systems'. He laid out three essential pillars of responsible AI—transparency, accountability and explainability—arguing that trust is not a by-product of performance but a foundational requirement for any ethical AI ecosystem.

The active participation of the audience in the question-and-answer session reflected the deep curiosity and ethical seriousness the subject demands.

■ USHA MUJOO MUNSHI

A Healing Touch

DISCUSSION: *Leprosy in India: Down but Not Out—What are We Doing About it?*

PANELLISTS: Lily Gangmei; Rashmi Shukla; Ritu Ghosh; Srilekha Penna; and Ashok Agarwal

MODERATOR: Lalit Kant

COLLABORATION: NLR India Foundation

5 May 2025

The discussion brought together experts across sectors to discuss challenges and strategies for leprosy eradication. Lalit Kant, in his introductory remarks, stated that leprosy is both an ancient and a modern disease, from being referred to as '*kushtha*' in ancient texts like the Vedas and the Charaka Samhita to new cases still being reported globally. While the WHO, in 2001, had declared that leprosy, as a public health issue, had been eliminated globally, about 1.8 lakh new cases were reported internationally in August 2024. India accounts for over 50 per cent of the global

burden, with approximately 100,000 cases and 5,000 disabilities reported annually. In April 2021, WHO launched the 'Global Leprosy Strategy 2021–2030', aimed at interrupting transmission and achieving zero new cases of leprosy in over 100 countries by 2030.

India's National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP) is targeting a 50 per cent reduction in new cases by 2027. Critical components are early detection, contact tracing, treatment and preventive care. Stigma prevents many from coming forward until it is too late to prevent disability. Also crucial are community mobilisation, awareness generation, education and the role of the media in ensuring early detection and combating fear, stigma and discrimination. Legal provisions, in addition to social attitudes, also support discrimination against individuals affected by leprosy. In 2018, the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy challenged these discriminatory provisions in the union government and state laws in the Supreme Court. Following this, in April 2023, 31 discriminatory provisions were repealed, while 88 remain active in the form of acts, statutes and rules in 22 states.

The discussion highlighted that leprosy is curable, less infectious than diseases like tuberculosis, and about 95 per cent of the population is naturally immune. Currently, the recommended treatment regimen includes three medicines—dapson, rifampicin and clofazimine—called multi-drug treatment (MDT). To interrupt transmission, WHO suggests contact tracing followed by the administration of a single dose of rifampicin as post-exposure prophylaxis (SDR-PEP).

Several vaccines were also discussed for preventive measures. *Mycobacterium Indicus Pranii* (MIP), India's first home-grown vaccine for leprosy, approved by the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) and the US-FDA, has both immunoprophylaxis and immunotherapeutic properties. LepVax, developed by the US, is currently under clinical trial.

The discussion underlined that leprosy can be eliminated through commitment, collaboration and creating awareness.

■ KONINIKA RAY

Contributions of Unsung Women

SEMINAR: *Reclaiming the Founding Mothers of the Indian Constitution*

OPENING REMARKS AND CHAIR: N. N. Vohra

SPEAKER: Achyut Chetan

SPECIAL REMARKS: Meenakshi Gopinath

CLOSING REMARKS: Gita Mittal

COLLABORATION: WISCOMP

25 April 2025

women members of the Constituent Assembly passively accepted the Constitution—they were, in fact, active drafters. Between March and April 1947, Amrit Kaur and Hansa Mehta wrote powerful notes of dissent on several critical issues, including those against the fundamental right to free practice of religion, a constitutional mandate for military conscription and classification of certain fundamental rights as enforceable and others as non-enforceable. Chetan also employed visual materials, such as a photograph of Durgabai Deshmukh from the 1920s, delivering her speech before the Constituent Assembly. These visuals were symbolic of the daunting task these women faced—less than 20 women addressing a hall full of over 200 argumentative and opinionated men, all working towards drafting the Constitution of a newly independent India.

Both Meenakshi Gopinath and Chetan alluded to the array of constitutional issues that women members contributed to, such as women's suffrage, freedom of expression, differential pay and safety at the workplace, and ending child marriage, to name a few. Quite critically, members such as Renuka Ray robustly participated in discussions around the reform of Hindu personal law. In their interventions, they drew from their rich experiences steeped in the national as well as international women's movements. Through his work on the role of women in Constitution-making, Chetan wishes to counter the trope of the Constitution only having founding fathers. He also hopes that by acknowledging the founding mothers, the Indian Constitution can become a site of dialogue between multiple generations of not only legal academics but also feminist scholars. This recovery of women's voices in the making of the Constitution will hopefully initiate an inquiry into feminism's investment in constitutionalism at large. For much of that, we only have our founding mothers to thank!

■ RITWIKA SHARMA



As a student of constitutional law, one repeatedly encounters mentions of the 'founding fathers' of the Constitution. Achyut Chetan's stellar work on the 'founding mothers' of the Indian republic shifts the focus not just to the women who were part of the Constitution-making exercise, but also to the value of their interventions made during the Constituent Assembly debates. Through both his work and this talk, Chetan dispels the notion that the

How Policing Impacts Women's Safety

TALK: *Combating Sexual Harassment in Public Spaces and Fostering Greater Female Participation in the Workforce*

SPEAKER: Girija Borker

CHAIR: Meeran Chadha Borwankar

22 May 2025

Meeran Chadha Borwankar opened the session, recounting being once asked, 'Why don't practitioners take advantage of the research done by academicians?', and said that the talk exemplified instances of practitioners and academicians coming together.

Girija Borker's presentation covered three key aspects—identifying the problem, studying the consequences and finding policing solutions.

Borker's research investigates violence against women, and how it is pervasive in public spaces. She began by defining harassment as anything that makes women feel uncomfortable. The problem identified by her research was that police reports did not reflect the reality. She presented a dataset from a study conducted in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, which highlighted a discrepancy—the percentage of harassment recorded by the police was significantly lower than the data collected from women through a household survey. In further contrast, crowdsourced data showed 100 per cent harassment reported by women.

Borker highlighted the consequences of harassment in public spaces. How safe women feel while travelling impacts their education, career and expenditure. This often leads them to compromise on their choice of colleges, coaching institutes and jobs.

Borker spoke about a randomised controlled trial (RCT) conducted in collaboration with SHE (Safety, Health and Environment) Teams, an initiative of the Hyderabad City Police (HCP) launched in 2014, which deployed undercover officers for specialised patrolling to ensure the safety of women. The researchers suggested adding uniformed officers to SHE Teams in 100 of the 350 hotspots being patrolled. It was found that visible policing patrols reduced severe forms of harassment, such as forceful touching and intimidation, by 27 per cent.

To study the attitude of police officers towards sexual harassment and their role in suppressing it, a lab experiment was conducted where 354 HCP officers were shown nine videos depicting harassment and other related crimes. After each video, the officers answered a short survey recording their propensity to punish or tolerate these crimes. This experiment formed the base for a 30-hour training session conducted for police officers in Bihar to combat sexual harassment.

Borker concluded by sharing three key takeaways: there is a need to invest in understanding the problem, policing can help reduce severe forms of harassment, and officers with a favourable attitude towards understanding and addressing sexual harassment cases are required.

■ KRITIKA AGRAWAL

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 JITENDRA
SHARMA | A-1919



DR. (MS.) ANITA GHAI
A-3823



VADM. D. B. KAPILA
(RETD.) | A-4522



MS. MANJUSREE
CHOWDHURY | A-5195



SMT. MANJU
MALHOTRA | A-5591



DR. K. KASTURIRANGAN
A-7070



LT. GEN. A. S. KALKAT
(RETD.) | M-2421



Director's Note

Each summer feels hotter than the one before. To combat the extreme heat and offer some respite, the Centre has introduced several summer favourites at the Catering outlets. These include fresh mango, *aam panna*, buttermilk, fresh watermelon juice, and cold soups of gazpacho, cucumber, and leek and potato.

A special Navratri menu was added to both the Main and Annexe Dining menu cards during the nine days of the festival, which included *kuttu ka pakora*, *singhare ka pakora*, *kaddu ki sabzi*, *kuttu ki poori*, *singhare ke atte ka halwa*, among other delicacies. Two more culinary experiences: 'Awadhi Dastarkhwan', curated by Farhan Zaidi, Founder, Truly Awadh, and 'Punjabi Tadka', prepared by the chefs of IIC, were presented.

The carpet flooring of the Annexe Lounge has been replaced with new aesthetic tiles. Renovation of all kitchens of the Centre, to be carried out in phases, will begin in June.

The renovation of 18 Hostel rooms at the Main Centre began in April this year, and is expected to be completed by the end of July. This is the first of the six phases of the Hostel room renovation project. It is planned to renovate all the Hostel rooms, both the Main Centre and the Annexe, over a period of two years.

Lecture Room I will soon be redesigned into a multipurpose space to expand its user base. This venue will also be equipped with film-screening facilities.

The construction of the staircase for the Terrace Pergola as an additional fire-safety measure has been completed; a fire check door has been installed at the exit. The installation of a sewage treatment plant (STP) at the Annexe is expected to be completed by mid-July. Replacement of a section of the damaged sewer line at the Main Centre is in progress and is expected to be completed by the end of June.

Several Members have expressed the need for bigger lockers in the Library. These will be ready for use by the end of June.

Along with expansion of facilities comes the need for more storage, especially storage of books, IIC publications, and Membership and Catering records. After carefully weeding out the old records which were kept in the second basement of Kamaladevi Block, compactors are being installed there to store the remaining records and books.

The IT department's server room has been renovated to create more space and accommodate advanced infrastructure. New data centre features include a fire suppression system, access control, power management with UPS's, a climate control system, structured networking, a compact layout with raised flooring, rodent control, and an alarm system for electricity or fire failures. A feedback management system has been introduced for various services, including Hostel, Catering and Banquet. Members who avail of these services receive an SMS with four options—Excellent, Very Good, Good and Bad—which are reviewed by the respective department heads.

A team from IIC-IRD visited Nepal in April in connection with SAMHiTA (South Asian Manuscript Histories and Textual Archive) Pilot Phase II. It is planned to digitise and document about 600 ancient manuscripts lying in various private and public repositories of Nepal. An MoU in this connection between the Centre and Nepal Art Council is shortly going to be signed.

Members will be pleased to note that the sale of organic compost prepared at the Centre using the organic waste composter on garden wastes began in May this year. The compost is lab-tested and meets the essential nutrient requirements for the healthy growth of plants. Interested members can purchase it at the Gandhi-King Memorial Plaza.

Members are reminded to refrain from loud conversations and the use of mobile phones inside the Dining Halls and Lounge. Offering tips to the waiting staff at the Catering venues is strictly prohibited.

The last date of receiving the Annual Subscription Fee 2025–26 from Members was 31 May. After sending several reminders, the Centre has deactivated the membership of those who did not make the payment. They may contact the Membership department at member.iic@nic.in for the restoration of their membership.

K. N. SHRIVASTAVA