

INDIA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE **IIC** **Diary**

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Homage to an Iconic Cartoonist

EXHIBITION: *Abu's World 1924–2002*

COLLABORATION: *Dept. of Cultural Affairs, Govt. of Kerala; and Kerala Lalithakala Akademi*

7 to 19 November 2024

To mark the centenary of renowned cartoonist and political commentator Abu Abraham's birth, his works—from the private collection of his daughters Ayisha and Janaki Abraham—were displayed.

Born on 11 June 1924, in Mavelikara, Kerala as Attupurathu Mathew Abraham, he was popularly known by his pen name Abu. He started drawing cartoons at the age of three and studied French, Mathematics and English at University College, Trivandrum, where he was also a tennis champion, graduating in 1945.

In a career spanning 40 years, Abu worked for several national and international newspapers and journals, including *The Bombay Chronicle*, *Shankar's Weekly*, *Blitz*, *The Tribune*, *The Observer*, *The Guardian*, and *The Indian Express*.

Sharp-witted and astute, it is not just his political commentary that is engaging but also the strength of lines



in his portrayals and his humorous yet hard-hitting punning. Minimal yet expressive, it was enthralling to revisit history and the people who grappled with it—'heroes' who made things possible or not possible. They serve as records of the early days of post-independent India, a nascent country working its way through political ideologies and ideologues jousting with one another, as well as a nation striving for global recognition and credence.

Indira Gandhi's era was stressed by her quirks, foibles, strengths and weaknesses, with the low point of the Emergency, the muzzling of the press, arbitrary dismissals, imprisonments and other forms of excesses.

Abu's cartoon observations remain ageless and relevant many years after they were made. One of his satires says, 'Your Honour, the accused is innocent - he votes for the same party as you do.' This sounds familiar in our present-day political scenario. Elsewhere, two politicians converse, 'You think

price rise will dominate this winter session?' and the reply, 'Yes, price of MLAs.'

One remembers Abu fondly even as an early cartoon shows a father chiding his son for refusing to go to school, 'Who said you don't have to go to school in a classless society?' Abraham bid goodbye to the world on 1 December 2002.

Ancillary to the exhibition were walk-throughs by E. P. Unny, Christel Devadawson, Uma Chakravarti and Manoranjan Mohanty.

• ARUNA BHOWMICK

Viva Communication!

EXHIBITION: *The Written Canvas: Letters to Keshav Malik from Artists and Thinkers*

CURATED BY: *Gaurav Kumar*

COLLABORATION: *Art Konsult*

5 to 9 November 2024

In a time where the spirit and practice of sharp and healthy criticism are waning, the exhibition highlighted the era when criticality and intellectual camaraderie were still possible. It presented a selection from a collection of over 300 letters belonging to the eminent artist and art critic Keshav Malik. Organised to celebrate his birth centenary, these letters displayed correspondences between Malik and some of the most influential national and international artists, poets and intellectuals like Jehangir Sabavala, M. F. Husain, Agyeya, Khushwant Singh, Kathleen Raine and Harivansh Rai Bachchan, among others.

On the one hand, the exhibition was a testament to the multifarious and intimate connections that Malik built over his life through his warmth, generosity and encouraging intellectual curiosity. The artist F. N. Souza wrote in an irreverent letter about how he was waiting for Malik's review of his exhibition. On the other hand, as Usha Malik, his wife, said at the inauguration, these correspondences also serve as a 'source of social and cultural history' and 'a reflection of the values, depth of understanding and biases of the individuals concerned'. For instance, a letter from Prithvi Nandy from 1971 addressed his difficulties in publishing Malik's new collection of poems while also briefly mentioning the emerging poet, Jayanta Mahapatra. Later, a letter by



Mahapatra himself from 1979—then the editor of the journal *Chandrabhaga*—relayed the challenges in publishing art criticism due to the cost of reproducing images. These letters gave a sense of the various literary and art journals that Malik was associated with both as an editor and a contributor, and can be of immense value to researchers looking at print culture in India.

Reading these letters, one may have been compelled to think seriously of Bejan Daruwalla's words to Malik many decades ago: 'Viva Communication! It is the only real freedom left to us. The ripples of contact is the only real motion.'

• DIGVIJAY NIKAM

Celebrating the Man behind the Uniform

EXHIBITION: *Zest for Life: Remembering General Sethna*

25 to 29 November 2024

To commemorate General Adi Sethna's 100th birth anniversary on 11 November 2024, his four daughters curated an exhibition that celebrated his legacy and love for life as well as his contributions to the armed forces, the Parsi community and society. It was attended by friends, family and his fraternity, some of whom came from different cities in India and overseas.

Ambassador of Lithuania Diana Mickevičienė, who inaugurated the exhibition, spoke about the historical connection between the Parsis and Lithuania, noting that Jivanji Jamshedji Modi was the first Indian to visit Lithuania. Dr Karan Singh joined virtually to share fond memories of his Doon School classmate, calling Sethna 'a man of zest, dedication and excellence'.

Shernaz Cama reflected on her father's incredible journey from witnessing B. R. Ambedkar sign the Indian Constitution to establishing the Indian Spinal Injuries Centre for ex-servicemen.



Affectionately called 'Zinoo', Sethna developed a love for Indian classical music and patriotism early on. Inspired by peers, he joined the army, where he learned jungle warfare from Jim Corbett and participated in World War II. Rising through the ranks, he played a pivotal role in planning the strategy for the Bangladesh War, eventually retiring as Vice Chief of Army Staff in 1982.

The exhibition featured Sethna's personal belongings, such as his meticulously detailed diary entries, his peaked caps, a much-admired typewriter (a star attraction), his wedding chairs and his cherished clock, each with its own fascinating tale. Each panel provided a glimpse into his thoughts and experiences. Visitors were particularly intrigued by the *kris* (an Indonesian dagger). His medals, awards and musical instrument—the enchanting *dilruba* (a bowed string instrument)—symbolised his diverse talents. Adding a personal touch were photographs of his grandparents, alongside his uniform hat, ties, gun and sword, all of which painted a picture of the remarkable man behind the uniform.

Sethna had a lasting bond with the IIC. Under his guidance, the first-ever exhibition showcasing Parsi culture at the Centre was organised in the 1980s.

• FRENY DARUWALLA

Restored to Former Glory

EXHIBITION: *Qutb Shahi Heritage Park: Conserving the Royal Necropolis*

COLLABORATION: Agha Khan Trust for Culture; and InterGlobe Foundation/IndiGo Reach

1 to 11 October 2024

The Qutb Shahi dynasty ruled the Sultanate of Golconda, in present-day Telangana, from 1518 to 1687 CE. Sultan Quli Qutb-ul-Mulk founded the city of Hyderabad in 1591. The Qutb Shahi Heritage Park, at the foot of Golconda Fort in Hyderabad, spreads over 106 acres. The necropolis, comprising mausoleums built by Qutb Shahi rulers and their families in their own lifetimes, was highly venerated during their rule.

The site has 100 structures encompassing 40 mausoleums, 23 mosques, six *baolis* or stepwells, a hammam, grave platforms, garden structures and enclosure walls. The six remarkable *baolis* from the 16th and 17th centuries, strategically placed to capture rainwater, were built to irrigate the garden orchards surrounding the mausoleums. Many of these rival the great Mughal structures of northern India in grandeur.

The Agha Khan Trust for Culture initiated the restoration and conservation programme of this tentative UNESCO World Heritage Site over a decade ago, prioritising structures in an advanced stage of deterioration.



After extensive research and the use of traditional materials, the stepwells and associated aqueducts have been revived to continue irrigating the surrounding orchards and forestry, including over 10,000 native trees, with the aim to restore the ecological balance at this historic site. Additionally, conservation efforts have included grading the earth to optimise rainwater collection and support a thriving fish population that attracts water-loving birds. Of particular interest were the 'before' and 'after' restoration images of the monuments.

Part of the conservation was also to undo 20th-century restoration attempts with cement plaster. The removal of cement plaster on the dome of Muhammad Qutb Shah's mausoleum uncovered traces of glazed tiles on the dome, *minars*, columns and cornices with discernible original patterns. With the tilework now restored, the mausoleum once again displays its original emerald sheen.

As part of the exhibition, a talk, 'Cultural Practices of the Qutb Shahis' by Sajjad Shahid, and an illustrated lecture, 'Qutb Shahi Heritage Park: Conservation and Landscape Restoration' by Ratish Nanda, were organised.

▪ ARUNA BHOWMICK



Memories of a Historic City

TALK: *Life and Loss in Shahjahanabad*

LEAD PRESENTATION BY: Ashok Mathur

DISCUSSANTS: Anuradha Chaturvedi; Shama Mitra Chenoy; and Anil Verma

COORDINATOR AND MODERATOR: Anisha Shekhar Mukherji

29 November 2024

Ashok Mathur dwelt on changes in the life and urban landscape of Shahjahanabad over recent centuries. He spoke of the demographic break-up of the walled city, illustrating the populace's delineation, and allowing an insight into its cultural and architectural bearings.

Through a rendering of the streets, chowks, thresholds and courtyards he brought alive the neighbourhoods of Shahjahanabad, showing the genesis of the city's cultural milieu. Each aspect of the built environment contributed to the richness of everyday life. This was reflected in

neighbourly relationships, vendor movements and the celebration of festive occasions among the various communities. Courtyards would reverberate with families coming together during festivities and the elaborate thresholds, balconies and terraces would be decorated to enhance these spaces.

Residential buildings were interspersed with *dharamshalas* (resthouses), hospitals, libraries and orphanages giving identity to *mohallas* (neighbourhoods). The river Yamuna, currently physically and psychologically distanced, fringed the Red Fort and was once accessible and part of the city's everyday life.

Mathur lamented the loss of the way of life that existed until the mid-20th century and identified Partition as the first harbinger of change in the social ethos of the area. Over time, changes in the demographic and economic structure had ramifications on both tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

Shama Mitra Chenoy and Anil Verma elaborated on aspects of a bygone life. Anuradha Chaturvedi held out hope for Shahjahanabad, and highlighted the concerns that Delhi's current Master Plan addressed in recognising the area as a heritage zone.

▪ RAJESH LUTHRA

Honouring an Eminent Historian and Educationist

BOOK RELEASE: *Cities, Citizens, Classrooms and Beyond: Essays on Narayani Gupta*

RECITATIONS BY: Saif Mahmood

PANELLISTS: Indivar Kamtekar; Shiny Varghese; Beeba Sobti; Ratish Nanda; Lokesh Ohri, Swapna Liddle; and Amar Farooqui

21 November 2024



The programme held in honour of Narayani Gupta commemorated her contributions and achievements over the decades and was marked by the release of the

festchrift, edited by Partho Dutta, Mukul Kesavan and Kumkum Roy. The panellists apprised the audience of Gupta's exceptional work; significant accomplishments; role as a visionary, activist, mentor and teacher; engagement with the visual archive; and contribution to history textbooks for children.

Amar Farooqui mentioned that for Gupta, teaching history to children was foremost about communicating values integral to her worldview: compassion and respect for diversity. He further pointed out that only a political movement could reform textbooks from becoming vehicles for propaganda.

Gupta's idea of 'shared ownership of heritage' inspired Lokesh Ohri to preserve Dehradun's natural landscape amidst rapid urbanisation threatening its heritage. He also drew attention to the absence of history of smaller towns and tier-two cities in textbooks, and the need to teach history starting from the local and then moving on to the global.

Ratish Nanda highlighted the disparity between India's and other countries' efforts in preserving heritage sites and spoke of the need to understand that heritage can contribute to sustainable development if conservation is done well. Swapna Liddle expressed the need to conserve a city's history in a very real way—by preserving names.

Gupta stated that those concerned about the future must move out of seminar rooms and archives. Historians can be part-time activists and those who work on the ground could be part-time learners of history. In her words: 'Rejoice in the city, it is here to stay. Delhi is not going to go away. Don't get your feet bogged down in the slush of anger, criticism and dissatisfaction. Get down to finding your own suggestions for improving things, and find your own sources of delight.'

■ SUSAN VERMA MISHRA

Dialogues on India's Religious Pluralism

SEMINAR: *The Syncretic Traditions in the Subcontinent over the Ages: Contemporary Challenges*

COLLABORATION: Dara Shikoh Centre for the Arts; The Gnostic Centre; and Urvashi Rana

25 to 26 November 2024

In his welcome address, K. N. Shrivastava said that religious convergence in India is characterised by sacred and spiritual experiences, encouraging the confluence of faiths.

In his keynote address, 'Living Among Many Times and Cultures', Gulam Mohammad Sheikh gave a visual presentation of his negotiations with the tensions and syncretism of faiths. He referenced the practice of Pattachitra painter Jukho Sham, whose single Pata narrates the story of Satyanarayan as well as Satya Pir, evoking sentiments of both Hindu and Muslim audiences.

In Session I, Richard H. Duncan Lyngdoh's 'Syncretism in Contemporary Religion and Culture of the Khasi-Pnar' discussed how the Khasi-Pnar faith of Meghalaya interacted with external influences. 'Syncretism in the Nepali Himalaya' by Amish Raj Mulmi focussed on the Himalayan region of Mustang.

In Session II, on architectural syncretism, Annapurna Garimella's 'The 1000 Pillars Idea' highlighted the hierarchical nature of spaces. In 'Synthesis and Continuity: Sacred Architecture of Kashmir, 16th to the 19th Centuries', Hakim Sameer Hamdani explored the syncretism of times and spaces exemplified in epigraphs at the shrines and temples of Kashmir.

In Session III, Ira Mukhoty's 'Comparing the Creative Inclusivity of Great Mughals and the Nawabs of Awadh' focussed on spaces for creativity in the Mughal courts and the Awadhi Nawabs who celebrated Hindu festivals and employed cultural patronage. Yogesh Snehi's 'Making Sense of Visual Culture at Sufi Saint Shrines in East Punjab' discussed the worship of Sufi saints in places with a limited Muslim population.

In Session IV, Mohinder Singh in 'Nanak Shah Fakir' talked about Nanak who transcended boundaries. Using Nanak's

'Milk and the Jasmine Flower' story, he underlined the ideas of peaceful coexistence. Sanchit Toor explored Kabir's legacy in 'Walking with the Word: Translation, Equivalents, and the Afterlives of Kabir in Texts and Traditions'. In 'The Unitive Vision in Hinduism', Pavan K. Varma analysed Hinduism's inherently syncretic nature, drawn from his extensive research.

On the second day, Rajeev Mehrotra spoke on 'The Dalai Lama's Syncretic Approach to Embracing and Celebrating Diversity', highlighting the Dalai Lama's philosophy of not diluting identities but enriching them.

In Session V, Rana Safvi's 'Echoes of the Divine: Understanding the Essence of Qawwali' highlighted the importance of *samaa* which holds people in a shared space, and *girha* which implies connecting with the audience. Salil Misra, through 'Syncretic Potentials in Urdu Poetry', explored how Urdu did not originate from any specific community or environment.

In Session VI, Jonathan Koshy Varghese's 'Interimperial Minorities and Oceanic Dialogue' explored the complexities of identity in colonial Kerala. In 'Gods with Many Faces: Muslim Devotees, Sultans and Khans in South Indian Hinduism', Anirudh Kanisetti's presentation on 'lower-caste' community rituals and festivals shifted the syncretic question to the contestation of elite versus 'lower-caste' communities.

In Session VII, Rita Kothari's 'Marui: Home, Self and Neither' explored politics through Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai's *Shah Jo Risalo*. Shampa Shah's 'Tribal Practices and Contemporary



Realities' discussed beliefs of tribal communities of Madhya Pradesh.

In Session VIII, Uma Chakravarti's 'Buddhism, Secular Humanism and Another Way of Being: Some Thoughts on Ambedkar's Conversion in 1956' emphasised the need to protect secular humanism. Ameeta Mehra, in 'A Syncretic Initiative in Modern India', explored Aurobindo's concept of divine life and body.

Shyam Saran in his valedictory address underscored the importance of reflecting on the traditions and legacies of the Indian subcontinent. He concluded by quoting from Jawaharlal Nehru's *Discovery of India* to summarise the idea of syncretism.

• RIDHI CHATURVEDI

Fighting for a Community in Exile

TALK: *The Indian Himalayas and Tibet*

ILLUSTRATED LECTURE BY: Tenzin Tsundue

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

9 October 2024

Activist and poet Tenzin Tsundue now prefers employing narrative skills to rupture ingrained thought patterns over his trademark *dharnas*. His lecture hurtled through four Indian Himalayan states that border Tibet, with photographs showing both sides of the border, interesting persons he had met, palaces and monasteries, as well as flora and geographical features. His narration was sprinkled with interesting anecdotes and snippets of information on many topics, such as changes in permafrost as water levels rise and fall, the flower Brahma Kamal that blooms for 12 days every September, and a passing reference to his youthful venture into Tibet, where he was caught and taken prisoner. Beaten and tortured, he escaped while being shifted to a prison in Lhasa.

It is not surprising that Tsundue has a cult-like following, given his courage, perseverance, skill with words and contagious sense of personal freedom. He has visited 25 countries to hoist the Tibetan flag in places where few dare to go. He may be the only Tibetan who has made the reverse trip from India to Tibet. He has been imprisoned 16 times. His views on freedom for Tibet are not the official stand, yet the compassion and democratic values of the Dalai Lama support the expression of divergent views if they lie within the matrix of Buddhist doctrine.

The question and answer session revealed how important it is to break the mindset that those who live at India's borders are marginal. While cultures are often shared across national borders, people of every tribe have as much claim to their geography, language, tradition and dignity as those living in central regions.

Tsundue shared interesting details on how trade is conducted using fossil ammonites that fit perfectly to verify stakeholders; how light from an opening above and oil lamps below make the carved idols in an ancient temple appear to float; how rock paintings with calligraphic markings push the origin of the Tibetan script to many centuries earlier than thought. Learning about those who live in border areas helps build understanding and respect.

• BHARATI MIRCHANDANI

Precepts of a Buddhist Master

TALK: *The Meditation of Buddha and Kobo Daishi*

SPEAKER: *Myosen Sato*

CHAIR: *Ranjana Mukhopadhyaya*

14 November 2024

This lecture–presentation centred on the life and meditation practices of 9th-century Japanese monk Kobo Daishi Kukai who attained nirvana on Mount Koya and introduced the Shingo School of Buddhism into Japan. Kobo Daishi traced Buddha's meditation practices, including three movements from precepts to contemplation to wisdom. These steps echo the Vedantic precepts of Shrivana (listening to the teachings), Manana (contemplation) and Nididhyasana (assimilation of wisdom).

Myosen Sato drew parallels between Kobo Daishi Kukai rituals and Indian practices, citing examples from her own life as a monk.

The teachings of Kobo Daishi Kukai involved purification rites for the elements of earth, water and fire. The water

purification rite includes the trainee monk sitting and meditating under a waterfall. About the ritual, Sato said, 'In Japanese, there is the phrase "mizu ni naga" (to wash away the dirt), which means "to let go of grudges in human relationships and become close again", or in other words, "to forgive".' She compared the custom to the Hindu ritual of purification by bathing in a holy river before beginning any spiritual or auspicious journey.

Another similarity between the two practices is the homa or goma ritual of consecrated fire which has its roots in Vedic traditions. She said that this ritual 'deepens the meditation in a short amount of time'.



Talking about the universal benefits of meditation, Sato said, 'When we enter meditation at the centre, there is no self-interest, only altruism. You will see that a wonderful world is opening up before you.'

Sato concluded her lecture expressing high regard for India: 'I like India's zest for life. It is something that

cannot be found in Japan. Every life that is born wants to live to the fullest. I pray every day for the realisation of a society where children all over the world can live vibrantly, demonstrating their innate individuality and abilities. I pray for the well-being of both Indian and Japanese children.'

■ **ALKA TYAGI**

Beyond Defence and Foreign Policy

SYMPOSIUM: *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on China: New Research and Methods*

COLLABORATION: *NYU Shanghai; and Ashoka University*

4 and 5 October 2024



DAY 1

Experts and emerging scholars in Chinese studies convened at this two-day symposium to discuss and explore historical narratives and the contemporary significance of lesser-studied aspects of Chinese society, particularly its literature and media. They explored the potential for comparative studies between India and China, offering a broader framework for understanding the two nations. Projit Bihari Mukharji, who chaired the sessions on 'Chinese Fiction Writing' and 'The Sinophone World' on the first day, underscored the importance of such insightful and extensive discussions.

Mengdie Zhao's presentation on 'Forbidden Romance: Love and the Law in Early Chinese Detective Fiction' highlighted the intersection of legal culture and literary experimentation in early modern China. Zhao provided a historical context of consecutive military defeats and legal reforms initiated in 1902 to reclaim extraterritoriality. Judicial infrastructure was transformed and codes and regulations were compiled to standardise legal practices. She explored various other dimensions, including the characteristics of traditional law codes, early original detective fiction, literary developments, readership and audience engagement. The talk demonstrated how detective fiction offered alternative visions of justice while highlighting the deep-rooted Confucian ideologies and patriarchy reflected in legal practices.

Yushu Geng spoke on 'Obscene Publications and "Immoral" Modernities in Shanghai and Colonial Singapore, 1920s–1930s', discussing the role of race in the regulation of nude images in colonial Singapore. Using data and evidence from newspapers and magazines, Geng drew comparisons between colonial nakedness and artistic nudes, underlining the state's obscenity regulations and the roles of various agents, such as the police, post office and the Chinese Protectorate, as well as the issue of audience consumption of such content. Geng highlighted how, since the 1920s in China, Western nudes were viewed as symbols of Western civilisation and modernity. The emphasis on how race factored into obscenity regulations prompted further discussion among the audience about transnational Chinese practices and their implications for the study of modern China.

▪ **KAJAL KIRAN JENA**

DAY 2

Strained bilateral ties apart, the Galwan clash along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in 2020 has hurt the academic community, said retired diplomat Ashok Kantha. It meant 'structural difficulties' with no signs of immediate improvement, language training being restricted to Taiwan, access to data bases 'difficult' and field studies, 'impossible'. Yet, Indian academics must understand China, just as supreme leader President Xi Jinping is talking about 5,000 years of continuous civilisation and 'rehabilitating

Confucius'. One option, he added, was academic institutions pooling their resources.

Shyam Saran also expressed the necessity of understanding China 'in a broader cultural, historical context beyond defence and foreign policy'. Young Indians must know how China is 'changing', and what their counterparts are thinking, he said.

This is why this symposium, with participants including Nayan Chanda, Tansen Sen, Upinder Singh, P. B. Mukharji, Mengdie Zhao, Sayantani Mukherjee, Yushu Geng and Eloise Wright, was a much-needed beginning. The issues discussed were, rightly, about subjects as diverse as the People's Republic of China's foreign policy to 'Discovering "Traditional" Borders in Late-Qing Frontier Management'.

It wasn't just India–China either. Bhagya Senaratne spoke of China's predatory diplomacy in Sri Lanka, about loans at commercial and not concessional rates, a collapsing power plant and the debt trap that is Hambantota port, with China having taken control of it and 15,000 acres of land close to it for 99 years. Indian scholars must know about all this and the other faces of China, an economic superpower with potentially enormous politico–military ambitions. Perhaps, the beginnings of a thaw in bilateral ties, with the resumption of patrolling along the LAC, will have a 'peace dividend' for academia.

▪ **SRINJOY CHOWDHURY**

Technology to Revolutionise Warfare

TALK: *Future Wars and Indian Armed Forces*

SPEAKER: *Anil Chauhan*

CONVERSATION WITH: *N. N. Vohra*

CHAIR: *Shyam Saran*

20 November 2024

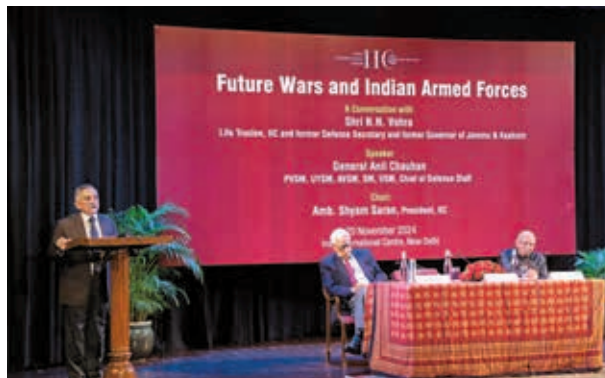
While the Agnipath Scheme, a recruitment plan for youth to serve in the Indian armed forces for a period of four years, has led to heated discussions all over the country, there has been 'no debate' about it in the armed forces themselves, Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) Anil Chauhan said. He added that before any decision regarding possible changes to the scheme, the opinions of the people directly involved—the 'Agniveers' themselves and their commanding officers—may be sought in the future. The CDS mentioned that the Indian Air Force's shortage of fighters was 'high on the agenda' and

a decision (regarding the acquisition of more warplanes), keeping in mind missile development and air-defence requirements, was being taken.

Asked about the absence of a national security policy by N. N. Vohra, the CDS noted that the operational structure to deal with crises was already in place. But efforts to have one have begun. Speaking about integrating the armed forces, he spoke of future plans beginning with 'jointness', and then, integration of the three services, leading to the creation of theatre commands. The next round of reform would begin after that and could involve closer cooperation with the coast guard and central police forces. But a 'culture of jointness is necessary' and the army, navy and air force, which often think differently, will have to have a 'joint culture'. In place are 180 new initiatives towards integration, with the CDS speaking of structural transition till 2027, 'consolidation' for a decade after that, and then turning the

armed forces into an 'area of excellence' by 2047, the year India aims to become a developed country. For that, another revolution would be necessary and also close collaboration with academia, R&D agencies and defence public sector units.

Cyber security and space have priority and new technologies like artificial



intelligence, quantum computing, hypersonic and stealth technologies, and robotics and unmanned systems are the future. The armed forces, also learning lessons from current conflicts in Ukraine and West Asia, where drones have been used extensively for surveillance and strikes, were moving

quickly towards using them. Future wars could be very different, where humans will battle machines, and perhaps, machines will fight machines, he added. For 'technology will revolutionise warfare'.

▪ **SRINJOY CHOWDHURY**

Enchanting the Audience the Second Time Around!

CONCERT: *Peace Notes*

PERFORMANCE BY: *South Asian Symphony Orchestra*

CONDUCTOR: *Alvin Arumugam*

PIANIST: *Pallavi Mahidhara*

22 November 2024



Shyam Saran, in his opening remarks, commended the turnout at the packed venue, despite the pollution. Music upholds this 'wonderful manifestation' of assembling people, he said. For conductor Alvin Arumugam and musicians from 14 countries, dressed in black with orange 'angavastram-scarves', it was their fifth major concert, the second time at the IIC, in six years. Their last performance at the Centre in March 2023, marking the conclusion of the IIC Diamond Jubilee, had been interrupted by rain, forcing the Orchestra to move from the Fountain Lawn to the Auditorium where they enthralled the audience with equal spirit.

Nirupama Rao, who established the South Asian Symphony Foundation, spoke passionately on 'war, uncertainty and unpredictability', and their attempt to transcend geopolitical barriers through music. She lauded the concert as a 'second coming', hoping the weather gods would remain happy.

The Singaporean conductor affirmed this exhilarating journey where simple acts of listening promoted unity and kinship. The opening piece '*Maithreem Bhajata*', composed in Ragamalika by Vasant Desai, was also M. S. Subbulakshmi's choice of performance on United Nations Day 1966, leaving a historic mark. The next in line was '*Chandrayaan*', composed by 23-year-old Aryaman Joshi to celebrate ISRO's successful moon landing.

French composer of the Romantic era, Saint Saens' '*Piano Concerto No. 2*' featured the virtuoso technique of Indian-American pianist Pallavi Mahidhara as she played as a soloist with the Orchestra. Saens had composed the piece 17 days before Concert Populaire in the Salle Pleyel, Paris in 1868. Mahidhara layered the French composer's experimental piece with a skillful vibrancy that gathered into a harmonic storm.

Before playing the next composition, Arumugam narrated an anecdote about Beethoven's '*Eroica* Symphony No. 3'. Beethoven had intended to dedicate the piece to Napoleon but reconsidered when Napoleon abandoned the idealism of the French Revolution and became Emperor in 1804. Beethoven's '*Symphony No. 2*' (1802), played at the concert, reflects optimism despite his continued hearing loss while composing the piece. It was a precursor to loftier compositions while Europe prepared for war. Short and cheerful, the piece had every musician, including the conductor, giving an exhilarating performance.

The enchanting evening concluded with several encores, including a familiar, invigorating tune from 3 *Idiots*—'*Zoobi Doobi*'. The conductor graciously invited online feedback and support for the Orchestra.

▪ **AJANTA DUTT**

The Best is Yet to Come

PERFORMANCE: *Jazz Concert*

PERFORMED BY: *Jazzkia—Saskia Laroo Jazz Quartet with Saskia Laroo (trumpet, sax, vocals); Warren Byrd (piano, vocals); Maarten Russchen (bass, guitar); and Willem Smid (drums)*

PRESENTED BY: *Ila Singh, Cultural Impresario*

COLLABORATION: *The Netherlands Funds for Culture and Arts; Cultmix Foundation; and Embassy of the Netherlands, New Delhi*

3 October 2024

Saskia Laroo is no stranger to India. This was evident in the way she quickly established a rapport with the audience. The group, fresh from concerts at Ahmedabad and the Ziro Music Festival 2024 at Itanagar in Arunachal Pradesh, soon had the rapturous audience on its feet.

Welcoming everyone to the 'Jazz Party' and clicking a selfie, Laroo promised, 'the best is yet to come'. She began the concert with tributes. A tribute to IIC soon moved on to jazz legends like Herbie Hancock, John Coltrane and Roy Hargrove. The quartet's homage to Coltrane 'Talkin about John Coltrane' was a lovely accolade to the iconic saxophonist. But the more emotional piece was 'Groovin' Hard', dedicated to the memory of Roy Hargrove, the trumpeter who died at 41 years of age.

Each member of the Jazzkia Quartet was a talented performer, and Laroo gave them the space for solo performances. Warren Byrd, Laroo's husband, great at both the piano and vocals, sang the blues song 'Move this Madness' with lyrics similar to 'Nowhere Man' by the Beatles. The song is about a man who hangs around the station the whole day but 'he ain't going to catch no train' and isn't he a bit like you and me? While Laroo and Byrd performed a duet 'Brighter Day', the group came together to sing 'Down by the River'. Maarten Russchen, the bass



guitarist, was superb in singing 'Blue Flash', a phenomenon observed in the morning and evening when the sun just reaches or crosses the horizon. Willem Smid, whom Laroo introduced as 'Will Smith', was on his first-ever visit to India and gave excellent support on the drums. 'Living in Hartford' was a tribute to the city in Connecticut, where she now lives with Byrd.

▪ SRIDHAR BALAN

The Mahabharata in Song

PERFORMANCE: *Pandavani Folk Songs from Chhattisgarh*

PRESENTED BY: *Sampriya Pooja and Accompanying Artists*

COLLABORATION: *NCZCC, Prayagraj, Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India*

13 November 2024

Sampriya Pooja followed the Kapalika style of singing and movement, inspired by the folk singer Teejan Bai, and presented the 17th and 18th days of the Mahabharata war. Her dialogue with the musicians invoked Lord Krishna and described Kurukshetra's battlefield. Clad in orange with heavy silver jewellery, Pooja's *ektara* (a single-stringed traditional instrument) decorated with flowers and feathers represented both mace and bow. She introduced the Pandavas, led by Krishna, and mentioned the warriors they would soon kill. The performance echoed the loud exchanges on the battlefield while acknowledging that all was preordained. A rhythmic song dedicated to Goddess Durga resonated with her names Sati, Jagat Maiya and Bhawani.

Traditionally, Bhima is the focus, reminding audiences that Draupadi's flowing hair indicated Dushasana's insult in the packed Kaurava court.



Pooja's voice faltered when speaking of Draupadi's public shame. Krishna appeared as God, a participant in the battle and a family member, especially when he addressed Kunti as *bua*. This folk version of the epic had Gandhari accepting the guilt of not guiding her sons towards righteousness. When Bhima tore open Dushasana's chest, Draupadi called him the greatest warrior but spared some compassion for the slain too. Krishna's name ascertained '*pratishod*', or revenge and '*Dharma-Yuddha*', or war of justice, while his presence in battle symbolised both progress and calamity as his creations.

Pandavani artists use everyday idioms in their songs. For instance, Karna insisted he would not disown Duryodhana and be called a '*namak-haram*'. Pooja sympathised with the tragic wives of the clan suffering similar fates and yet worshipping Krishna. As she described the horrors, the male vocalist joined her with painful cries. She referenced the Bhagavad Gita and stressed '*kiske ghamand*' (futility of arrogance) when Duryodhana faced Karna's ignominious death.

The performance concluded with a victory ode to Krishna, reinforcing the thought that love must overpower revenge. Through heart-rending moments, Pooja emphasised the destruction of the house of Hastinapur.

Her performance reminded one of '*Nathabati Anathabat*' by the late Shaoli Mitra whose interpretation of Draupadi's sorrows and Bhima's heroism is still remembered in Bengali theatre.

▪ AJANTA DUTT

Bharatanatyam for Gender Justice

PERFORMANCE-DIALOGUE: *Our Voice*

ARTIST: Geeta Chandran

COLLABORATION: *Women in Security Conflict Management and Peace*

4 October 2024

Conflicts impact women the most. History is a testament to the turmoil—physical and emotional—that women have endured during wars, whether internecine or external, natural disasters and the vortex of patriarchal violence in different settings. However, their inner strength has kept them standing, time and again. This was creatively articulated in the dance-theatre production to celebrate 25 years of Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP). Conceptualised and presented by Bharatanatyam danseuse Geeta Chandran and her students at the Natya Vriksha Dance Collective, it highlighted the various ways women have been bound by societal norms to ensure they are rarely seen and never heard.

The presentation used the metaphor of water to show that although women can be temporarily subdued and quietened by patriarchy, their feisty spirit can never be permanently fettered. The theatrical act of physically breaking an earthen



pitcher followed by rhythmic and graceful Bharatanatyam dance movements, interpreting the release of water swirling out joyfully to make its own path, symbolised the resilience and agency women have within that needs just one act of determination to break free of constraints.

The performance was inspired by 'Her Voice', a dance piece presented by Chandran 25 years ago to interpret Draupadi's personal and political losses due to war and familial conflict in the Mahabharata. It moved forward from voicing the inner emotional struggle of one woman in the original presentation to encompassing the universal oppression and invisible labour forced upon multitudes of women. It also demonstrated the physical act of suppression they face when they try to seek an individual identity. Despite all their tribulations, women never lose hope, and as 'Our Voices' underlined, they find ways to become harbingers of peace and gender justice.

■ SWAPNA MAJUMDAR

An Exceptional Art Form

TALK: *Reading Schopenhauer—From Kesarbai through Nine Other Musicians*

SPEAKER: S. Gopalakrishnan

COLLABORATION: *The Raza Foundation*

10 October 2024

The talk highlighted S. Gopalakrishnan's analysis of Hindustani and Carnatic music influenced by 19th-century German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. It was interspersed with short musical excerpts by many well-known musicians. While the anecdotes narrated by him before each musical excerpt had no connection with the music, the references carried the listeners to a different world.

Schopenhauer, known for his work *The World as Will and Representation*, considered music the purest form of art as it is not based on objectivity and embodies the 'will' itself. He deemed music as timeless, an art that spoke a universal language, comparing it with unconscious and aimless endeavours, being outside of space and time and free from complexities.

Gopalakrishnan focussed on Book 3 of *The World as Will and Representation* which addresses Schopenhauer's

account of the subjective and objective sides of aesthetic experience, his hierarchical perspective of the arts with rationale, his view of artistic genius, his consideration of music to be exceptional among other fine arts, etc. He identified music as the 'thing-in-itself' and the inner essence of everything.

Schopenhauer's point of view shares similarities with Indian aesthetics where Rasa theory describes music as an abstract form of art. It also postulates that during an aesthetic experience, one loses one's sense of self, time and place, and is elevated from mundane agonies to a higher spiritual plane.

Schopenhauer was among the first Western thinkers to have noted fundamental agreements between Platonism, ancient Indian Vedas and Upanishads, and his philosophy. To support his understanding of Schopenhauer's philosophy, Gopalakrishnan chose ten renderings of northern and southern classical music forms like Dhrupad, *khayal*, *thumri*, *ghazal*, Natya Sangeet, Rabindra Sangeet and *kriti*. These short recordings featured prominent musicians like Kesarbai Kerkar. Gopalakrishnan stated that while listening to music one tends to lose oneself, with 'will' becoming the vibrating string or the vocal cord. He, however, did not include instrumental music, which is also a form of abstract art, for reasons best known to him.

■ SUNEERA KASLIWAL VYAS

Ballads Celebrating a Folk Deity

TALK: *Creating a Language Map through the Performance of the Tejaji Gatha of Rajasthan*

ILLUSTRATED LECTURE BY: Madan Meena

CHAIR: Shubha Chaudhuri

COLLABORATION: Archives and Research Center for Ethnomusicology, American Institute of Indian Studies

28 October 2024

The Tejaji *gatha* is an oral narrative, sung as a ballad, for protecting humans and animals bitten by snakes. Worshipped as a folk deity born in 1074 in Khadnal, Rajasthan, legend has it that Tejaji died in 1103. As narrated by artist and researcher Madan Meena, Tejaji visited his bride against his family's wish due to their dispute with his in-laws. On the way, he saw two snakes in a forest fire and managed to save one. The other snake refused to live without its mate and warned Tejaji that it would bite him as punishment. Tejaji promised the snake he would return to it after visiting his bride. On reaching his bride's house, his in-laws, who did not recognise him, cursed him for disturbing their cows. Tejaji left in anger but was stopped by his

bride Pemal and her friend Lachha Gujar. While Gujar was guarding Tejaji and Pemal at night, Meena dacoits stole his cows. Tejaji fought 350 dacoits to rescue the cows and was badly wounded. When he returned to the snake, there was no unwounded place on his body. He, therefore, offered his tongue to the snake to bite. The snake used Tejaji's horse to climb up and bite his tongue with a promise that no person or animal would die from a snakebite if they sought the blessings of Teja.

Madan Meena has recorded over 26 variations of the *gatha* from various parts of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh over the past 10 years. He found that across Rajasthan the ballads are sung at hypaethral shrines with life-size sculptures of Tejaji seated on a horse. The priests or *bhopas* call musicians who help them fall into a trance to save the bitten person or animal. The musicians are usually non-professionals from rural and tribal communities irrespective of caste, religion or social hierarchy. The priests are also from within the communities. The ballads and bhajans are performed during the night or when emergencies arise. Some of these *gathas* take 26 hours to sing.

This typical Rajasthani ballad is now affected as most musicians have died or been replaced by commercial singers with little training in this tradition. At the shrines youngsters play loud music and dance, preventing traditional musicians from singing. Additionally, regional and political disputes have endangered local languages.

▪ RITIKA KOCHHAR

Keeping Craft Traditions Alive

AWARDS: Kamaladevi Puraskar 2024

CHIEF GUEST: Amrit Raj

COLLABORATION: Delhi Crafts Council

23 November 2024

A serene wintry afternoon witnessed the bestowing of the 'Kamaladevi Puraskar 2024' to seven young craftspersons from different regions of the country. Instituted by the Delhi Crafts Council in 1986 in memory of its renowned patron and founder, the late Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, these annual awards honour talented young craftspersons between the ages of 14 and 21 to encourage them to continue their craft as a means of livelihood.

The award covers a range of crafts including pottery, embroidery, kalamkari, stone and wood carving, etc. This year's winners represented an impressive array of crafts. For

instance, two from Gujarat—Sneha Jadhav and Jayshree Bhati—received the award for Tangaliya weaving and Soof embroidery, both requiring immense finesse and work hours.

Other crafts included Dhokra, Moonj, Nakkashi on *lota* (a round water pot, typically made of brass), Purulia Chhau mask and Pashmina Kani shawl weaving. The programme included brief introductions to the winners, relaying their backgrounds and aspirations. Most of them belong to families that practise the craft and while most of them aim to continue, some also seek other avenues. Bhati, for example, is already growing into an entrepreneur by involving other women from her village in Soof embroidery. Kalyani Behera (the winner for Dhokra craft) wishes to direct her creative energies to become an event manager. Others try to manage their education along with the craft. Amrit Raj from the Ministry of Textiles lauded the dedication and skill of the winners and the efforts of the Delhi Crafts Council. She spoke about the necessity of upholding the craft traditions of our country by training the youth. The programme also included the display and sale of handcrafted products made by the awardees.

▪ DIGVIJAY NIKAM

Magical Reinventions in Art

DISCUSSION: *Alchemy: Contemporary Indian Painting and Miniature Traditions*

INTRODUCTION: Waswo X. Waswo

CONVERSATION BETWEEN: Giles Tillotson and Geeti Sen

COLLABORATION: Mapin Publishing

27 November 2024

The discussion on Geeti Sen's book *Alchemy: Contemporary Indian Painting and Miniature Traditions* introduced the work of five artists, influenced by miniature painting traditions in India. The book also explains the aesthetic principles, colour values and content, composition, or techniques they have incorporated in their work, along with their experiments with different perspectives and methods.

The book starts with Abanindranath Tagore (1871–1951) who founded the Bengal School of Art, which was associated with Indian nationalism and the Swadeshi movement. It also combined Japanese and Chinese wash techniques with Indian painting traditions, imagery and indigenous materials. He rejected his academic training in European art for the indigenous technique used in miniature painting. His paintings like *Abhisarika* and *The Passing of Shah Jahan* gave a new twist to ancient techniques and paintings. However, it was his *Bharat Mata* that became an icon for all eras of contemporary India.



Manjit Bawa (1941–2008) reimagined mythology and deities like Krishna, Durga, Kali and Hanuman from religious scriptures. He introduced colours in bold contrast with the background being as significant as the image. His pale pink Hanuman streaks through the turquoise sky and sea. Shiva with snakes is depicted against hot orange, perhaps warning of apocalyptic futures.

While there have been limited reinterpretations of mythology in contemporary art, the ingenious use of space and story exists in 17th-century Pahari paintings.

American artist Waswo X. Waswo collaborated with Udaipur miniature artist R. Vijay for 17 years to create paintings with Waswo appearing in each painting. R. Vijay's vocabulary in these paintings includes Mughal and Rajput landscapes and characters with the unusual, and at times eccentric, behaviour of Waswo. In *I See Myself as Laxmi* (2007), they experimented with the iconic painting of Raja Ravi Varma with Waswo painted in place of the Goddess. This remarkable collaboration came to an end in February 2023.

The last artist in the book is Nilima Sheikh, who imbibed miniature painting techniques from a master of Pichwai painting in Nathdwara. Her work is layered with contemporary concerns such as women's voices, Partition, and the Kashmir conflict. Her narrative on the life and death of Champa, for instance, is a tribute to a young girl she knew who was killed by her husband a year after their marriage. As was customary to miniature painting, Nilima uses texts and verses to 'illuminate' her narratives. Her hanging scrolls depicting traditions and literature from across the world are a reminder of the violence and politics of everyday life.

▪ RITIKA KOCHHAR

Japanese Pop Culture of Cuteness

TALK: *Kinetic Kawaii Kulture*

ILLUSTRATED LECTURE BY: Anu Jindal

CHAIR: Amarendra Khatua

7 October 2024

Amarendra Khatua, while introducing the session, traced *kawaii* to an 11th-century novel *The Tale of Genji* by Murasaki Shikibu, where it was referred to as 'something that invites pity', in contrast to current connotations of cuteness, innocence and positivity that has its roots in the 1970s. Today, the *kawaii* aesthetic finds its presence in cute characters in manga, anime, video games and merchandise such as Hello Kitty.

Anu Jindal presented extensive documentation of *kawaii*, which over centuries has evolved both in meaning and style. After WWII, the thirst for new nationalist icons led to the creation of a Japanese version of Disney's Mickey Mouse. The *kawaii* momentum built up with the creation of new cute characters in the 1970s. Round faces and round eyes are characteristic of the *kawaii* style, naturally, as everyone loves babies. These features are highlighted not just in how children are depicted, but in the very popular cats, fish and other sea creatures, and imaginative inanimate objects like Catbus (a multi-legged bus with a cat face) and Gudetama (a lazy egg yolk), transforming them into loveable characters, appealing across gender and age-groups.

A lot of money, time and talent goes into creating new characters. The commercial benefit justifies each yen spent. Over time, not only has the meaning of *kawaii* expanded, but the colour range has leapt beyond soft pastels, with pink as the dominant colour, to black and dark colours. Kumamon, a black, white and red teddy, is the mascot for the police of Kumamoto Prefecture. Rilakkuma, a cute brown teddy, is one of Japan's tourism mascots.

Redevelopment after WWII required everyone to work relentlessly in Japan. This continuing trend has been sustained with periodic opportunities to relax. Abandoning formal dress and behaviour on Sundays, crowds dress creatively, often becoming living works of art, and throng to see and be seen in districts like Harajuku, a popular area

for youth to hang out in Tokyo. Kawaii fashion has become an acceptable way to unwind. However, it is also essential to explore how the kawaii culture challenges traditional gender equations.

• BHARATI MIRCHANDANI

Making a Difference through Filmmaking

TALK: *The Green Warrior*

CONVERSATION BETWEEN: *Mike Pandey; Sujata Prasad; and Oroon Das*

COLLABORATION: *Ahad Anhad*

27 November 2024

The programme spotlighted Mike Pandey and celebrated his contributions to environmental awareness and conservation through filmmaking.

The evening began with a screening of Pandey's award-winning documentary *Shores of Silence: Whale Sharks in India*. This landmark film has received 11 international accolades, including the Wildscreen Panda Award, often called the 'Green Oscar'. It is a powerful visual narrative about the hunting of whale sharks in Indian waters, primarily by impoverished coastal communities.

The documentary's influence extended far beyond its cinematic success. In India, it played a pivotal role in legislative reforms. The government banned the fishing of whale sharks and recognised them as an endangered species under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. This legislative milestone granted them the same level of protection as tigers and rhinoceroses. Internationally, the film contributed significantly to whale sharks being listed under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), securing their protection worldwide.

In the interactive session that followed, Pandey shared his journey as a filmmaker and environmentalist. Born and raised in Kenya near the Nairobi National Park, Pandey developed a profound connection with wildlife from an early age. These formative experiences ignited his passion for conservation, which later found expression in his filmmaking.

Pandey recounted his professional evolution, including a stint in Bollywood before fully committing to wildlife documentaries. His work has since transformed the genre of environmental filmmaking with films including *Broken Wings*, *The Last Migration* and *The Timeless Traveler*, which have highlighted critical environmental issues and endangered species such as vultures, elephants and horseshoe crabs. His ability to blend storytelling with factual advocacy has earned him over 300 national and international awards.

During the discussion, Pandey emphasised the challenges and responsibilities of using film as a medium for change. He spoke about the tireless effort it takes to bring environmental issues to the forefront and inspire both public and policy-level action. He underscored the urgency of collective responsibility in combating ecological crises and encouraged individuals to contribute to conservation in any capacity.

The programme concluded by reaffirming the power of storytelling in driving meaningful change. Pandey's work exemplifies how visual media can amplify environmental advocacy and inspire a global audience. The evening was also a call to action for all attendees to embrace their role in protecting the planet.

• MANOHAR KHUSHALANI

A Need for Structural Reforms

SEMINAR: *Mid-Year Review of Indian Economy 2024–25*

LEAD PRESENTATION BY: *Chetan Gbate*

DISCUSSANTS: *Rajeswari Sengupta; and Shishir Gupta*

CHAIR: *Ashok Kumar Bhattacharya*

COLLABORATION: *Malcolm & Elizabeth Adiseshiah Trust, Chennai*

26 November 2024



The seminar comprehensively analysed India's economic trajectory, focussing on growth patterns, sectoral performance, fiscal challenges and policy needs.

Looking back on the performance of the Indian economy, the presentation went into detail on the post-pandemic

and sector-specific trends. The ensuing discussion offered projections for what we can expect from the economy going forward. Chetan Ghate highlighted that GDP growth for FY 2024–25 has moderated to 6.5–7 per cent, which is lower than earlier estimates. While the economy's post-pandemic recovery saw strong growth, recent trends indicate a slowdown, possibly driven by weaker private consumption and investment. Employment remains dominated by self-employment, particularly in informal sectors, raising concerns about job quality and social safety nets.

The sectoral analysis revealed mixed outcomes. Agriculture saw improved rainfall distribution benefiting some crops, but overall growth rates declined. Industrial output showed a slowdown, with weaker trends in manufacturing. However, the services sector demonstrated resilience, led by robust exports in IT and financial services.

Fiscal challenges include high public debt, necessitating sustained economic growth for fiscal consolidation. The current account deficit is stable, but declining foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows present risks. Also, the global

energy price fluctuations and reduced export demand have affected trade dynamics. Inflation remains elevated but is expected to moderate. Core inflation trends suggest weak demand, with potential slack in the economy despite the official closure of the output gap.

The discussion that followed underscored several policy recommendations. Ghate emphasised the need for structural reforms to boost productivity in high-potential sectors like manufacturing and technology. He also called for revised FDI policies to address declining inflows. Rajeswari Sengupta stressed the importance of data transparency and aligning policymakers' and economists' strategies. Sengupta advocated for subnational reforms to enhance inclusive growth and address governance inefficiencies.

While the panellists expressed cautious optimism about India's resilience, they warned of external risks, such as changes in US trade policies. They emphasised the need for urgent structural reforms to ensure sustainable, long-term economic growth.

▪ AVI SINGH MAJITHIA

For Convergence of Technology and Grassroots Innovations

FESTIVAL: *People's Festival of Innovation 2024—Affordable, Inclusive and Accessible Innovations impacting Society: Addressing Local and Global Challenges*

COLLABORATION: C-CAMP, Bengaluru; and GIAN, Ahmedabad

25 to 29 November 2024

The five-day festival brought together innovators, startups, industry leaders, entrepreneurs, domain professionals, academicians, investors and policymakers enabling the convergence of deep technology and innovations emerging at the grassroots level. It showcased the stories of 20 eminent innovators in an attempt to connect them with suitable financiers. It saw active participation from government ministries, rural and urban innovators, and financiers.

Taslimarif Saiyed, Swati Basu, K. N. Shrivastava, Anil Gupta, Renu Swarup, Sanjay Kumar, Vinod K. Paul and Bhavisha Wala, representing the government and private sectors, spoke in the inaugural session. They highlighted the success stories and future trends to address local and global challenges.



The critical role of biotechnology, grafting and seed selection in productivity in higher vegetable and fruit crop yields, improvement in water conservation, and waste management were some of the areas discussed with regard to innovation.

The speakers underlined the need to document successful innovations as case studies while appreciating the Stanford University innovation fellowship programme.

The festival included five sessions: 'An Enabling Policy Framework for Promoting Innovations', 'Promoting Product Innovation', 'Commercialising Products, Penetrating Markets', 'Masterclass on IP and Technology Management', and 'Scaling Innovations—Technology Deployment in States and Different Locations'.

▪ MEKHALA SENGUPTA

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.



PROF. BIBEK DEBROY
M-3762



DR. ANINDITA NIYOGI
BALSLEV | M-4303



SHRI SHEHZAD MOHD.
KHAN | M-4689



DR. GEETA KINRA
A-4492



DR. (MS.) KRISHNA
YADAV | A-4641



MRS. SUVERNA ASHOK
DESAI | A-7492



BRIG. ASHOK KUMAR
BHUTANI | AT2263

And the following Member (photograph not available):

SHRI S. KRISHNA MOORTHY (A-1183)



Director's Note

The past two months were very eventful, beginning with 'The IIC Experience: A Festival of the Arts'. This year, the theme of the Festival was 'Kalpavriksha: The Nationalist Movement—Freedom and Identity'. The idea was to recall India's nationalist movement which was characterised by shared political consciousness, cultural resurgence and development of national identity. Apart from the customary cultural evenings, exhibitions, film and food festivals, this year talks were also included to support the theme.

Continuing the celebration into November, the Centre played host to 'Peace Notes', a concert by the South Asian Symphony Orchestra. The Orchestra, in its second performance at the Centre within two years, received a good turnout despite Delhi's hazardous pollution. The Centre also welcomed Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan who delivered a talk on 'Future Wars and Indian Armed Forces'.

A new edition of *Trees of IIC*, with detailed botanical information, in both English and Hindi, and colour photographs of 51 species of trees in the IIC's gardens, has been published. It can also be accessed online through the DigiLib platform.

In the fourth phase of digitisation, internal communications and resources of each department have been integrated into the DigiLib Portal with advanced search tools. For safety, this will be accessible to selected IIC officials.

A professional agency was engaged to conduct a geophysical survey of the Gandhi-King Plaza. Based on its report, corrective measures to improve the soil condition will be undertaken soon. The air-conditioning systems (HVAC) of the Main Centre and Annexe were audited. Based on the observations, necessary action is being taken. This action will result in a saving of over 2 lakh units of electricity annually.

The renovation of three sample rooms of the Main Hostel—one each in single, double and suite categories—was started in May this year. Two rooms were completed and opened for sale in October. The third room, which required the replacement of the aluminium frames of glass windows and doors, was completed a month later. A double glazed unit (DGU) has been installed in this room for better sound and thermal insulation.

At the Centre's request, NDMC has granted permission for the construction of an additional staircase from the Terrace Pergola as a second fire-safety escape route. The work has started and is expected to be completed in three months. The Architectural and Design Advisory Committee has approved a design for the boundary wall from Gate No. 2 to Gate No. 3. The work has been awarded and its execution will begin soon.

A new Member's Portal has been developed that will allow Members to view their profiles, book a venue, reserve a Hostel room, recharge their Smart Card, order food for takeaway, and provide feedback remotely. The Portal is undergoing Vulnerability Assessment and Penetration Testing (VAPT) by CERT-In (Indian Computer Emergency Response Team) for cybersecurity.

IIC-IRD held meetings with the National Archives of India and the National Mission for Manuscripts on potential avenues of collaboration on project SAMHiTA. As part of the series 'Kriti-SAMHiTA: The Plurality of Indian Knowledge Systems', Sivan Goren-Arzony delivered the first lecture in October, speaking on the evolution of Malayalam as an independent language based on the 14th-century Sanskrit language treatise on grammar, *Līlātilakam*.

Following the response from Members to the sale of indoor plants in pots by the IIC Garden Department, it has been decided to arrange a sale of enriched compost manure generated by the Centre to the Members from February 2025.

As the year ends, we are happy to announce the addition of 260 new Short-Term Associate Members (STAM) to the IIC family.

To leave Members with something to look forward to in the New Year, UN Secretary General's Envoy on Technology Amandeep Singh Gill will deliver a talk on 'Global Governance of Artificial Intelligence' on 10 January. Amitav Ghosh has been invited to deliver the C. D. Deshmukh Memorial Lecture 2025 on 14 January. He will speak on 'Time of Monsters, Time of Possibilities: Reflections on an Interstitial Era'. Additionally, Advaita Crescendo Quintet will present a concert on the Centre's Annual Day 2025 on 22 January.

K. N. SHRIVASTAVA