

## Study visit to India, 1-11 December 2010

My short visit to India was kindly supported by the British Council through a small 'creative networking' grant. The initial plan was to scope out our *GO INTO!* Heritage Education Project by finalising the Indian elements of the programme and by learning more about INTACH's heritage education work in order to kick-start the wider project.

Maj Gen Gupta had warned me that it was a busy time at INTACH so it was decided to follow up other issues at the same time, including the possible development of an INTO product line and establishing a *modus operandi* with INTO's new Emeritus Vice-Chairman, Mr SK Misra. As the budget was tight, Mr Misra also very kindly arranged accommodation during my visit.

### Heritage Education and Communication Service (HECS), INTACH

My first day in Delhi was therefore spent with the [HECS](#). The figures are impressive – 1,200 heritage clubs with 30,000 members and 2,000 teachers given specialist training by INTACH – and Purnima Datt guided me expertly through the range of heritage education activities and programmes INTACH runs and facilitates at three levels – national level, chapter level and at individual schools.

An example of a national programme is INTACH's co-operation with Fox History Channel to find the unknown stories of children's cities. This year 6,000 entries were received and the team had just finished the first sift. Eventually, 5 programmes will be made based on the children's essays.

Another would be the quarterly newsletter, Young INTACH (read the latest edition [here](#)). This is issue-based with children submitting stories and other content under four rotating themes: architectural heritage; natural heritage; material heritage and intangible heritage. This process helps give structure to the Heritage Clubs and the newsletter is funded by the Ministry of Culture.

Or the *Filmit India* partnership funded by the Helen Hamlyn Trust, where schools are given a video camera and asked to make a film about their lives, schools and culture, which are then shared with *Open Futures* schools in the UK via the *Filmit* website. There are examples of these short films on the Young INTACH [website](#).

A chapter activity might be a clean-up session or a heritage walk.

There are many good tips for how to introduce heritage into the curriculum and generally how to 'do' heritage education in the INTACH publication '*Hands on Heritage*'. There is some basic advice about how to set up a Heritage Club on the INTACH website [here](#).

Citizenship and capacity building for communities are also important components of the programme and Purnima showed me examples of where children had been taught how to make necklaces out of paper beads.

HECS gets involved in some interpretation and signage and also produces guidebooks and conservation briefs for practitioners. (A list of INTACH publications can be found [here](#).)

The amount of activity and output achieved by the four HECS staff at Head Office is prodigious. Alongside all the above, they produced a calendar with pictures by children and quotes about importance of heritage, they ran a college poster project, translation into seven languages, a monthly e-newsletter, 'Adopt a Monument' (cf. NTEWNI Guardianship programme), amongst many other activities.

The path HECS aims to follow is: Awareness → Appreciation → Action and this could become the mantra for heritage education worldwide.

### **INTACH Indian Council of Conservation Institutes (ICCI)**

Whilst at 71 Lodi Estate, I took the opportunity to visit the ICCI. I was impressed by the young conservators working there. Simta Singh of the new Specialised Textile Conservation Unit is keen to develop courses in preventative conservation and it would be good to consider what we can do to encourage her and her colleagues.

### **Delhi Chapter, INTACH**

The following day was spent with Professor Krishna Menon, Convenor of the Delhi Chapter at the Indian International Centre. Interesting discussions ranging from different philosophies of conservation (to restore or not to restore), authenticity and different approaches to time (linear or cyclical) to Delhi's plans to restore Coronation Park in time for the centenary next December. (Jessica Douglas-Home is involved – is there an INTO link here perhaps? Jessica's organisation, the Mihai Iminescu Trust, is an INTO member).

Lutyens Delhi, commissioned in 1911 by the Raj, seems an oasis of calm amid the hubbub of city life. Professor Menon explained the pressures the city is under to maximise the space that currently accommodates government officials in spacious bungalows with large lawns, reached by tree-lined avenues. Something akin to the Mall in Washington, but without the large museums to give the area a more public and 'used' feeling. Incongruous and anachronistic in modern Delhi? Or a vital historical landscape and green lung? The Delhi Chapter is impressively very much at the heart of discussions about Delhi's future. Read a summary [here](#).

We discussed the need for specialist horticultural/forestry advice on tree planting along the avenues (surely INTO could help with this?).

### **"Delhi : the Heritage City", Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA)**

This interesting exhibition which aims to present Delhi's heritage in a unique and engaging way using interactive kiosks, plasma screens and audio-visuals was organised in partnership with INTACH. The central WMF/Amex sponsored report 'Delhi Heritage Route', which focuses on the creation of a network of heritage routes to highlight the city's rich history, gave a striking impression of what Delhi could look like if heritage was made integral to the cityscape. I was amazed by the amount of flora and fauna Delhi is home to, particularly in the large central forest areas of the Delhi Ridge.

### **Dinner with SK Misra and Maureen Liebl**

This was an informal gathering of friends who have an interest in INTO's work, several of whom are – or will shortly become! – INTO Amicus. There was a strong French

contingent with Francis Wacziarg, President of the Alliance Française (and owner of a string of heritage hotels, amongst other business interests), Michèle Janezic, whose company helps French businesses get established in India and who outlined an interesting new project trying to put together a milk co-operative with good eco-credentials (mind you, these are probably essential in rural areas where power and water supplies are unpredictable) and Anita Singh, an important patron of the performing arts, who is on both the Alliance Française and INTACH boards. They were all very excited about Sarkozy's forthcoming visit to India.

Other guests included the Secretary of Culture, Mr Jawhar Sircar, Mr Inder Sharma, a pioneer in the tourism industry and his wife, Aruna, a doctor, Mr Yogendra Narain, former Member Secretary of INTACH and much involved in the 2007 INTO Conference, and his wife, and Ashwin and Palka Kapoor, our newest INTO Amicus.

## Jodhpur

On Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> December, we headed up to Jodhpur. I was impressed by the proper lunch on the short flight – and proper cutlery and proper crockery to boot! First stop was the [Umaid Bhawan Palace](#), where Maureen's business partner, Amrita Singh, was busy working in the new shop extension. It all looked quite chaotic to the untrained eye, but they were pleased with progress since their last visit a few weeks ago. I loved the reproduction of the Stefan Norblin painting they used to divide the shops. (I saw what I thought was the original in the Maharani suite later [only to discover that the real original was actually in the Chokelao Mahal at the Fort being restored by Polish experts]).

I joined a guided tour of the Palace, complete with glass of champagne (!), and learned that it had been built in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century as a sort of famine relief project for the local community. We later had drinks with the Maharaja, or Bapji, as he's affectionately called. We talked about the *GO INTO!* Heritage Education Project and he said that it was the administrators we needed to educate, not the children! He was keen to set up a pilot heritage and rural development project in a local community and we talked about using INTO models. We also discussed research into the economic impact of a good quality heritage and environment and I was reminded of Don Rypkema's desire to internationalise his work in this field.

Maureen told us all about a nearby museum she had recently visited (which I have since worked out is the [Desert Museum of Rajasthan](#)), which has an exhibition of brooms. And the interesting thing is that the broom seems totally insignificant and yet it holds the world together in its capacity to clean and order space. The idea of telling the story of the different types and designs of broom, the different materials used, the broom-making industry, the way brooms are made and the future of this industry was fascinating and could be replicated in INTO member countries.

The Maharaja spoke passionately about water management restoration projects and his determination to secure water in this desert region using community-based traditional water systems to help make villages self-reliant.

We then went back to our hotel, the [Bal Samand Lake Palace](#), where I was staying in a lovely converted stable, to have dinner with the Maharani of Jodhpur. Bapji, having inherited his title at the age of four, has lived all his life as a Maharaja and is therefore perhaps slightly reserved. The Maharani however is disarmingly friendly and we had a

raucous evening of wedding gossip, laughter and stories of Muse India's various high-jinks.

## Nagaur

The next morning, I was driven along a long, straight road to Nagaur. This was to be my only real view of rural India and sadly I didn't take it all in as I was so mesmerised by the driving and honking!

We arrived at the Nagaur Fort through an inauspicious looking entrance, clearly designed to make things as difficult as possible for marauding invaders, into a slightly inhospitable looking inner yard (restoration still underway!), past the domestic animals stable to the newly finished hotel.

Then everything started looking up and I was greeted with a hot towel and led past the hotel accommodation into the main Fort compound where I met Jonathan, the General Manager, and Manwar Singh, who kindly showed me around [Ahhichatragarh](#), the 'Fort of the Hooded Cobra', which dates back to 4 AD. A simply beautiful and enchanting place with beautiful palaces (*mahals*), intricate wells (*baoris*) and water systems with fountains and cascades (*chadars*), gardens and delicate balconies (*jharokhas*) faced with latticed screens (*jalis*) to allow women to see events outside without being seen themselves.

I loved the Abha Mahal with its water channels and cascades. I loved the Hadi Rani Mahal with its paintings of women having fun bathing, dancing and picnicking. I loved the swing-seats, the Deepak Mahal with its hundreds of niches for lamps, the aqueducts, light tubes, wind-catchers ... Modern eco-architects could learn so much!

The restoration process has brought about a revival in traditional craft skills and the [Courtauld Institute](#) is undertaking a programme of restoration (wall paintings), generously funded by the Helen Hamlyn Trust. Much has been written about the intricacies of the work there so I won't repeat it but will just make 4 observations:

1. It was practically empty. Where were all the people?
2. The importance of water. Everything was designed to harvest and make the most of water, wind or a combination of the two.
3. How appealing half-finished restoration work is. In ten years time it will be a different place (as it undoubtedly was ten years ago).
4. No one knows all the answers.

After lunch I had a quick look at the hotel accommodation, arranged in 10 havelis or mansions, and then headed off to [Khimsar](#), where I had a brief nose around the fort (the largest heritage hotel in the country, apparently), before going to see the [Nila Moti Trust](#), a handicraft institute established and run by a Swiss couple to sell beautiful objects handcrafted in Rajasthan, which employs women from amongst the neediest young mothers and ploughs the profits back into the crafts centre dedicated to promoting women's activities in rural areas.

I bought a few bits and bobs for the children before driving back to Jodhpur and a tour of the Bal Samand grounds. It was great to see the horses and the tents going up for the forthcoming wedding.

## Mehrangarh Fort

And so to [Mehrangarh](#). I'd been looking forward to this visit so much, having read Fiona's account of her visit in 2007, and wasn't disappointed. I had a good conversation with Anjan Dey, the Assistant Curator, and am enormously grateful to my 'shadow' whose name I didn't catch but who found keys to locked rooms, appeared with a bottle of water when I was feeling parched, organised my lunch, took me on the ramparts and helped me negotiate the dos and don'ts of a Hindu temple. An absolute star.

(One thing Anjan would like to do more of is exhibitions and it seems to me that this is an area ripe for international co-operation.)

Visitor figures are now an impressive 800,000 (an increase of 200,000 since Fiona's visit almost exactly three years ago) and the visitor experience has been extended to include a [Flying Fox](#) aerial tour around the grounds (and Francis Wacziarg has one at [Neemrana](#) too).

I enjoyed the visit so much and I can understand why this is considered one of the best heritage sites in India. Without repeating all the published information about the site, there were a few things that struck me:

1. The number of families visiting en masse – Grannies, children, grandchildren. All dressed up and clearly having a day out together.
2. Interpretation – the audio guide is excellent although I wasn't sure many people were taking it. The alternative is a hired guide or to self-guide. School visits are generally managed by teachers but I did wonder what additional interpretation was available for those families. For me, the best bits of the audio guide are the personal testimonies of the Royal Family members. It might be interesting to record the insights of other people who lived there too and to open up 'below stairs' as the National Trust began to do in the 80s and continues today, finding different stories to tell. Many of the people working in these fine places must have ancestors who worked there too.
3. The Chokelao Garden seems a bit off the beaten track. In fact, I'm not sure I saw anyone while I was there. (Perhaps there is a separate ticket for this?)
4. The Museum Shop is excellent!

What stood out for me were the chap who had volunteered to be buried alive in the foundations to appease the gods, the handprints of the last widows to perform *sati* on their husband's funeral pyre in 1843, Bapji's recollection of his coronation and the great poise he showed, *raga* (the combination of poetry, music and painting), and the royal *palanquin* (sedan chair) taken to London in 1925 to transport the then Maharani to and from her specially curtained Rolls Royce. This strict observance of purdah of course caused a wave of curiosity and everyone wanted a photograph. The best the paparazzi could manage was a shot of her ankle, which was duly published but the outraged royal party from Jodhpur bought up every edition of the paper!

The musings of the Royal Family are also captured in a moving DVD near the end of the tour where we see the Fort being used for community, clan, religious and family occasions, and the Maharaja's social welfare role is underlined. Prince Shivraj says a heartfelt piece about his personal feelings for the Fort. One hopes this handsome and thoughtful chap has regained whatever he lost following the dreadful accident and that the family, pictured having such tremendous fun, can be happy again.

After the tour, I met Vikram S Rathore at the INTACH Conservation Labs. We talked about different approaches to restoration (he favours no retouching, which is the opposite to his Polish team!). He was not particularly impressed by government efforts in the field and understood the need to 'Bottle Bapji'. Vikram had been to the UK on a scholarship scheme, as had Anjan, and would love funding to support more placements of this sort (inward and outward).

After a very late lunch (scrumptious vegetable thali in the museum café) I had a quick romp on the ramparts before a spot of retail therapy in the wonderful shop, now expanded to more than twice its original size. Slightly different products here, given that many of the visitors are locals, but still a definite feeling of quality and distinctiveness.

## **Delhi and on to Bangalore**

Back to Delhi on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> and some long conversations with SK about his contacts in Qatar (through his friend the self-exiled artist, [Magbool Husain](#)), his forthcoming visit to Sri Lanka and what INTO might be able to offer the Trust there (training, placements, support with funding, participation in projects, exposure, conference, etc), the idea of an initial pilot 'bilateral' shop (involving the MMT and NTEWNI as the idea had already been discussed with Fiona) with the possible eventual development of an INTO product line, inviting both Bapji and Maureen to Victoria, whether INTO could help find funding and undertake awareness raising for a new rural heritage initiative in India (perhaps this is a project to take to the British Council by way of follow-up from this visit?) and about SK's INTO role.

The next day I travelled to Bangalore to meet Shukla Bose, founder and CEO of the [Parikrma Foundation](#) which seeks to transform the lives of underserved children (from slums and orphanages) so that they can have equal access to the best opportunities. This visit had been arranged as Parikrma is interested in taking part in the *GO INTO!* project. (In fact the first sensible step would be for Parikrma to connect with INTACH and I gave Shukla the INTACH book I had bought 'Hands on Heritage' as it is an excellent resource and just what she was looking for).

The first Parikrma School I visited, which was just around the corner at Sahakarangar, felt in many ways like the schools I had taught at in La Réunion. Perhaps it was the colours (pale blue and green) or the outdoorsy infrastructure? Perhaps it was the heat or the eager-faced children? Anyway, we met the mums who were cooking up a storm for the children's lunch. I met the social worker from the Community Development Service who connects with the children and their families at home, identifies new students, runs a programme where mums learn new tailoring skills (so that they can earn money) and a mother and teenage daughters group. A 'wholistic', 360° approach because education doesn't just happen at school.

We went into a few classrooms and I was introduced as 'Catherine Akka' (big sister). I was impressed by their levels of English and by some of the funny things the children said. In one class, we got talking about wealth and someone said that 'Bill Gates was a very rich man'. Another added that 'a very rich man has two BMWs'. Astonishing from a 9 year old child from a slum in Bangalore. Or perhaps we shouldn't have been surprised? A group of older children sang us the Christmas songs they were going to perform the following day – including carols in Dutch, German and Korean!

We talked to a current corporate donor about the sorts of new projects they would be interested in supporting. There was interest in a new heritage, arts and sports programme which Shukla is going to work up. I learned of Parikrma's sporting prowess – amongst the 150 schools that competed, they had won the under 8 cup (boys and girls), the under 10 cup (boys and girls) and the boys under 14 cup. And we shouldn't forget that these are kids who only saw the race track and put on spikes a week before the competition (nowhere to practise and no funds to get them to the sports field more regularly). They are clearly very determined young people.

When asked whether the parents appreciated that their children could sing or knew about the arts, Shukla admitted that they probably didn't. She said they had to maintain the myth that education was about getting a good job (otherwise parents were unlikely to send their children to school). Shukla is keen for us to help her with the 'essence of education' that is found in the liberal arts, heritage, music, dance, etc. She does not want school to just be about engineering or science and would like the children to learn about the finer things in life – as they have such a tough life the rest of the time.

2 children from Parikrma went to the [Global Youth Leadership Summit](#) in San Diego.

Family income is < \$25 per month but families often find they are earning more once their children are involved with Parikrma, as the programme touches and develops the whole family.

Shukla would like our help staging an exhibition of the children's artwork in London – a fundraiser and awareness raiser. SK and I both thought this might work in Canada next year, so will keep it in the back of our minds.

Lunch at Maiya's, a traditional South Indian eatery, then to another school in Jayanagar, where I met Vivek who is in charge of marketing (i.e. fundraising). After a look around the school, an email catch-up and a trip to Commercial Road, we went to the Bangalore Club for dinner (to which Winston Churchill still owes 13 rupees, apparently!).

Friday 10<sup>th</sup> was my last day in India and my opportunity to try teaching at the Koramangala Centre, which was great fun. I also had a tour of the school, where I also heard some of the heart-breaking and heart-warming stories of the children's difficult lives. When the children gathered for lunch, they said a prayer for me, which was very humbling. And a little girl called Kathryn gave me a card saying thank you for coming. I wept a little.

We hot-footed it across town to meet Arundhati Ghosh of the IFA ([Indian Foundation for the Arts](#)), which I had been put in touch with by Katrina Thomson, who had attended the Delhi Conference when working for the National Trust for Scotland. They were holding a [conference](#) on arts education, supported by the Goethe Insitut, which would have been right up mine and Shukla's street so I'm hoping they will send me the outcomes. I met a few participants while we had lunch and a chat.

## Conclusions

The above is an over-long summary of my meetings and visits. There is undoubtedly much that I have missed out or misunderstood so my apologies to those who know India, the sites and institutions better than me, but I hope to have captured the essence of my

visit which was fascinating, uplifting and inspirational whilst at the same time humbling and deeply thought-provoking.

In INTO terms, I hope to have made some closer connections with INTACH, a founding member of our organisation, particularly in the field of heritage education which will enable us to bring Indian expertise to our international *GO INTO!* Heritage Education Project, and that this best practice can be replicated across the world.

Having not attended the inaugural INTO Conference in 2007, I was seeing INTACH in action for the first time and could not help but be impressed. There is so much for us all to learn from many of their activities, not just heritage education, and I was struck by the way INTACH seems to be engaged at every level across the whole country.

I also made connections with other groups and individuals involved in heritage around the country and hope to build on these in the future, particularly those that expressed an interest in becoming INTO Members or Amicus!

Another important outcome is feeding in ideas and identifying speakers for the Victoria Conference (around heritage education, community involvement and heritage retail amongst others).

I think the effects of this visit will resonate with me for a long time both on a personal and professional level and I am enormously grateful to those who helped make it happen (particularly the British Council and Maureen and SK Misra) and to all the delightful, interesting and kind-hearted people I met along the way.