

International Conference on
“Global Perceptions of Indian Heritage”

A Report

-- Dr. Sudhir Lall

The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) organized a three days international conference titled “*Global Perceptions of Indian Heritage*” from 17th February to 19th February, 2017 in collaboration with Infinity Foundation India’s Swadeshi Indology Conference series, under its recently launched long term academic programme Bharat Vidya Prayojana. This programme is aimed at providing a platform to newer paradigms of viewing Indian traditional thought and looking at the discourse from Indian perspective.

For the past two centuries, the study of India (or Indology) as well as the discourse on India has largely been guided either by Western scholars or by institutions that have applied Western methods of studying Indian civilization. While this has brought several benefits, it has also suppressed our own perception and understanding towards interpreting our culture and civilization. After independence, rather than disrupting this structure and replacing it with indigenous approaches, in many ways things did not improve for betterment. Most Indian scholars have become trained to think like the Western Indologists. As a result, a large part of our intellectual apparatus has remained ‘colonized’. In fact, the dominant discourse is not promoting India; it is in many ways subverting it from the roots. The primary goal of the said conference was to produce a targeted and focused impact in a specific topic where our civilization is being undermined in a serious manner. The topics were chosen carefully so as to bring maximum impact where it is needed the most.

On 17th February the conference was inaugurated at the IGNCA auditorium in gracious presence of Sri Ravi Shankar Prasad, Hon’ble Union Cabinet minister, Law and Justice and Information Technology, Dr. Subramanian Swamy, BJP (Hon’ble Rajya Sabha MP & former Union Minister), (Retd.) General G.D. Bakshi, Sri Rajiv Malhotra, noted Public intellectual and Dr. Sachchidanand Joshi, Member-Secretary, IGNCA.

Dr. Sudhir Lall, Project Director, Bharat Vidya Prayojana, IGNC A welcomed the dignitaries. Sri Rajiv Malhotra briefly presented the concept of the conference, its relevance and importance. He also touched upon how the present conference was different from other conferences. Sri Ravi Shankar Prasad, Hon. Union Cabinet minister, Law and Justice and Information Technology delivered the Inaugural address. He offered his fond regards to his mentor Sri Ram Bahadur Rai, President, IGNC A Trust. He spoke about the richness of Indian heritage and culture and quoting from the Rigveda; he showed some pictures from the original copy of the Indian constitution depicting scenes from traditional Indian narratives as preambles to important sections of the constitution; thereby establishing that the vision and scope of the Indian constitution is quite liberal and the great respect that it shows towards Indian traditions.

Dr. Subramaniam Swamy in his Keynote address congratulated the IGNC A for organizing the conference and appreciated the work being done by Sri Rajiv Malhotra. He recounted the great contribution of Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya towards the study of Indology and presented the five stages of development of Indology.

Prof. R. Vaidyanathan, noted economist spoke about Indian history and showed how the leftist movements created a negative atmosphere for nurturing the traditional narratives. He also stated as to how the disputes in Indian history were settled by our colonizers and how they tempered our past.

Maj. Gen. (Retd.) G. D. Bakshi approached the topic from a military point of view and while mapping the history of India, he spoke at length about how nearly three centuries of colonization lead to first war of Indian independence in 1857, which most historians interpret as ‘sepo y mutiny’. He also dwelt upon how the British rulers during that era tried to create misconceptions about Indian culture and identity.

Dr. Sachchidanand Joshi presented the formal vote of thanks in which he thanked all the chief guests, scholars, special invitees and staff of IGNC A for their active involvement in the conference. He also gave a brief about various academic activities being carried out to create and explore new paradigms of study, research and dissemination of Indian perspective under the Bharat Vidya initiative of the IGNC A.

The Conference had three parallel tracks and fourteen sessions in which, thirty-nine well grounded scholars made their presentations. The themes pertained to views and interpretations regarding 'Rasa', 'Philology', 'Chronology of Sanskrit texts', 'Mīmāṃsā', 'Buddhism and its relationship with Vedic traditions', 'De-sacralization of Sanskrit' were discussed through these presentations. Also papers pertaining to themes on 'Śāstra', 'Sanskrit and Nazi ideology', "Death" of Sanskrit', 'Rāmāyaṇa as a political device' etc, were also presented during the Conference. Dr. R. Nagaswamy, Dr. Meenakshi Jain, Dr. Pappu Venugopala Rao and Dr. Lokesh Chandra gave illuminating plenary talks on related themes. Eminent scholars such as, Prof. Shashi Tiwari, Prof. Korada Subrahmanyam, Prof. Pappu Venugopala Rao, Dr. Aravinda Rao, Dr. Amarjiva Lochan, Dr. (Smt.) Sonal Mansingh, Dr. R. Nagaswamy and Dr. Shrinivas Tilak chaired various academic sessions.

The organization of special sessions of *Vakyartha Sadas* was organized on all the three days. It comprised an assembly of traditional scholars with an aim to highlight and revive the traditional oral method of rigorous debate; as part of the conference which helped in showcasing of one of the most authentic forms of Indian knowledge. It was also to encourage the engagement of traditional scholarly community to participate more actively in Indological discourse on the one hand and on the other, to create awareness about the ancient Indian tradition to the modern scholarship. Three traditional scholars of Madras Sanskrit College namely, Vidvan K. S. Maheshwaran, Vidvan C. Hariharan and Vidvan Sowjanya Kumar participated in the Sadas. They have been trained under the able guidance of Brahmasri Mahamahopadhyaya Acarya Mani Dravid Sastrigal of Chennai. These sessions were very attended by all the participants with great interest and President IGNSA Trust Sh. Ram Bahadur Rai was also present during these sessions.

A special IGNSA panel was also held on the theme **Contribution of Indian Indologists**, in which scholars made presentations about Indian scholars, who have contributed profoundly to the study and researches on Indology, but whose offerings remain least acknowledged. Dr. Shashi Tiwari, Dr. Radha Banerjee Sarkar, Dr. Sushma Jatoo and Dr. Sudhir Lall made presentations about Sri Aurobindo, Dr. P. C. Baghchi, Sri Ram Chandra Kak and Dr. S. Radhakrishnana, and Dr. R. V. Kane, respectively.

The Valedictory session of the conference was held on 19th February 2017. Prof. K. S. Kannan presented his remarks as the academic director of the conference. Dr. Sachchidanand Joshi, Hon'ble Member Secretary, IGNC A also gave his impressions on the conference. Sri Rajiv Malhotra gave his closing remarks from IFI. On behalf of IFI Dr. T. S. Mohan presented the closing remarks. Dr. K. Aravinda Rao, hon'ble trustee of IGNC A and noted Sanskrit scholar gave the formal vote of thanks.