

## Shastri News - December 2008

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### **FICCI Summit Reveals Need for National Strategy**

On November 25-26, over 50 high-profile delegates from Canadian government and academia joined with their peers from around the world in Delhi for the "Higher Education Summit" held by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI). Canada was honored as India's partner country for the summit. This was a rare opportunity to openly discuss and exchange information on the current state of higher education in both countries and to seek opportunities for cooperation. The summit highlighted India's need for new comprehensive education legislation and, Canada's need for a national strategy for international education initiatives.

The title of the summit, "Education at a Crossroads," speaks to India's current situation dealing with challenges of quality, access and equity in higher education. In his opening address Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission Government of India, set the tone for the summit by explaining these challenges and the new mindset required to move the education system forward. Canadians were privileged to be involved in this conversation and found that they could relate given Canada's longstanding history of educational reform.

Paul Evans, Senior Advisor to the Board of the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, used a cricket analogy to depict Canada's current situation. "Indian institutions are already on the pitch in a sweaty and sweet interaction with well-financed, well-organized and aggressive teams from the UK, Australia, the United States and the EU...Meanwhile, it's hard not to feel that the Canadians are still in the dressing room, peering out the window and trying to figure out what jerseys to wear. Strong individuals, strong competitors the Canadians, but far from a team," were his comments.

James Liebenberg, Executive Director of the Shastri Institute, presented the important role the Institute has played over the past 40 years in strengthening relationships between India and Canada. He also stressed the Institute's continual commitment to those relationships. We are honored by the recognition that the Institute received throughout the summit, and would like to encourage all parties to continue to work towards long term mutually beneficial partnerships.

The Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) took the opportunity to launch its "[Imagine Canada](#)" campaign at the summit. This is the first national initiative to attract Indian students to Canadian schools. We can and should build on this initiative to promote two-way

recruitment and facilitate mobility of advanced graduate and post doctoral students between India and Canada.

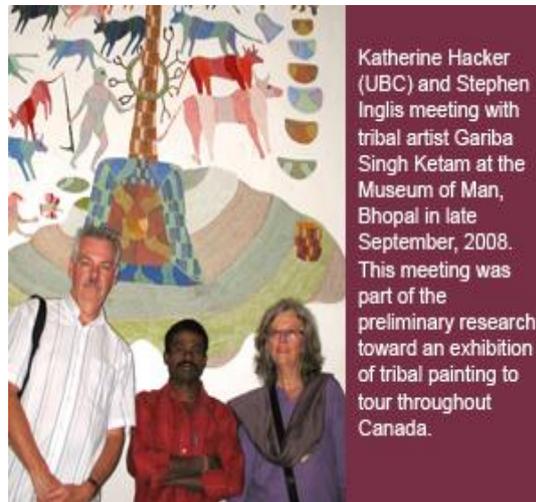
### More on this topic...

The Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada recently released two reports pertaining to the Canada-India academic relationship. To view electronic versions of these reports, please see the December 5th [APF bulletin](#).

### How Volunteers Shape our Work

A profile of Dr. Stephen Inglis and his Shastri Institute involvement to date

Few non-profit organizations could operate without a strong foundation of dedicated volunteers; the Shastri Institute is no exception, which is why we are so grateful for the involvement of individuals like Stephen Inglis. Acting as Chair of our 40th anniversary celebration committee this year, Stephen has been busy in both India and Canada sharing his knowledge and building excitement about our work. The experience, he says, was a pleasure thanks to an active committee of people and dedicated staff who all did their part.



Currently Stephen Inglis is the Senior Curator of the Canadian Museum of Civilization. His job provides many opportunities to promote Indian cultural studies in Canada – a passion he has developed through a lifetime of learning. Shastri grants facilitated Stephen’s instruction in the Tamil language and provided him the opportunity to gain an MA from the University of Calcutta. He followed up those experiences with a Ph.D. at the University of British Columbia and with ongoing participation in Shastri Institute projects.

Stephen’s volunteer work with the Institute has included directing a summer program for students in India, chairing our India Studies committee, serving on the Executive, and co-chairing the committee that spearheaded our evolution into a bi-national organization in the late 1990s. For Stephen, it felt



natural to help lead our 40th anniversary celebrations because his years of involvement have allowed him to feel the impact of this milestone. In the future, he sees the Shastri Institute using its strengths and experience to continue to evolve and dovetail its traditional work with new initiatives. According to Stephen, promoting Indian cultural studies in Canada “is a continuous effort and a job that must be done

devotedly.” As long as there are opportunities to foster better understanding of India in Canada, we can count on Stephen to do his part.



Hundreds of Indians and Canadians were able to take part in the festivities that surrounded our 40th anniversary this year. Their participation would not be possible without the countless hours of volunteer work that went into planning the events. As 2008 winds down, we would like to show our sincere gratitude to everyone who has contributed to these celebrations. Thank you to Stephen Inglis, to our committee, to our member representatives who held local celebrations, and to all those who took the time to celebrate with us.

[Click here](#) for a list of celebrations held at universities across Canada.

### **Celebrating with the Royal Ontario Museum**

On November 14 the Shastri Institute hosted a joint reception with the Royal Ontario Museum’s Friends of South Asia Committee to commemorate the Institute’s 40th Anniversary and the opening of the Sir Christopher Ondaatje South Asian Gallery. Over 100 guests were in attendance for this exciting event held at the ROM. A keynote lecture was delivered by Dr. Stephen Inglis, Senior Curator at the Canadian Museum of Civilization entitled “Darshan and Distribution: Popular Art in South Asia”.



The lecture dealt with the importance and influence of printed forms of art such as framed prints, calendars, magazine illustrations, package labels and cinema posters in the recent history of India. Guests were then invited to tour the South Asian Gallery, which features religious objects and sculpture, decorative arts, arms and armour, miniature paintings and textiles spanning over 5,000 years and originating from countries including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Tibet.

### **Nouveau séminaire offert sur le terrain dans l’Himalaya indien**

*(English to follow)*

Le Département des sciences des religions de l’Université du Québec à Montréal offrira trois séminaires (9 crédits – deuxième cycle), dont le dernier sera offert sur le terrain, en Inde.

À l'automne 2009, l'UQÀM offrira une série de séminaires sur la culture et la religiosité indiennes. Lors de la troisième session, en mai 2010, le dernier séminaire sera offert lors d'une session intensive sur le terrain en Inde. Le groupe remontera alors une ancienne route de pèlerinage – de Delhi à Gomukh, la source du Gange, située à près de 4500 mètres d'altitude dans l'Himalaya indien.

Pour plus d'information, veuillez vous présenter à l'activité de présentation le 12 février 2009 à 17h30 au local W-3235, 455 est, boul. René-Lévesque, Montréal.

<http://www.international.uqam.ca/etudiants-quebécois-inde.html>

Pour toute information ultérieure au 12 février, contacter le professeur Boisvert au 514 987-3000, poste 6909 ou à [boisvert.mathieu@uqam.ca](mailto:boisvert.mathieu@uqam.ca).

### **New Seminar Field Study in Indian Himalaya**

*The Department of Religious Studies of the University of Quebec at Montreal offers new seminar series (9 credits – graduate level) concluding with a field study in India.*

*Beginning in the fall of 2009, UQAM will be offering a series of three graduate seminars on Indian religion and culture. The third session in May 2010 will be an intensive field study climbing a historic pilgrimage trail from Delhi to Gomukh – the source of the Ganges, situated at an altitude of 4500 meters within the Indian Himalaya.*

*For more information, please attend an informational presentation on February 12, 2009 at 5:30 p.m. at W-3235 – 455 East Boulevard René-Lévesque.*

<http://www.international.uqam.ca/etudiants-quebécois-inde.html>

*For information not covered on February 12, please contact Professor Boisvert at 514-987-3000 x.6909 or at [boisvert.mathieu@uqam.ca](mailto:boisvert.mathieu@uqam.ca)*

### **Shastri Interns in Action -- In Chennai**

As part of the Elderly Health and Well-Being in Chennai project, administered by the Shastri Institute and CIDA, and coordinated through Dr. Shanthi Johnson at the University of Regina;SICI intern, Amenda Kumar has been exploring the perceptions of students training in health care professions in Chennai to understand their perspectives on healthy ageing and how their education/training shapes their professional practices and views on elderly health. As an international intern in India, Amenda has built many community partnerships, facilitated discussions with scholars about research strategies and cross-cultural awareness, and continues to gain



Amenda Kumar with children in Chennai

knowledge not only through academic inquiry but also by immersing herself in the richness of Indian culture. Amenda won the first prize in the University of Regina's International Education Week Photo Contest. She called her prize winning picture Kids at Tirumala: No matter where you are in the world, the innocence of children is universal.

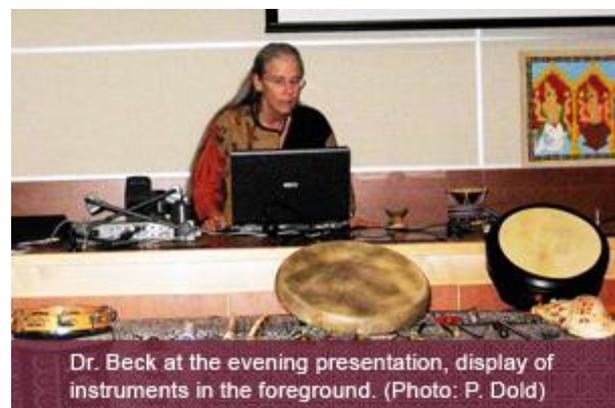
Robin is an intern, under the supervision of Dr. Shanthi Johnson, with the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute and the University of Regina and funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) . One of the major challenges to health policy in India is the magnitude of India's population as well as the large diversity of health needs of each of the states and is reflected in the different position of the states along the health transition model, characterized by different rates in fertility and mortality rates. Robin is in India, researching and building the India Healthy Life Expectancy model which calculates and projects Life Expectancy and Healthy Life Expectancy into the future, using World Health Organization Life Tables and 2001 India Census data on age specific disability prevalence. This information is useful in assessing how a country's population is ageing; is the population suffering from increasing rates of chronic disease or is the population vibrant and independent? Also, this type of population level data is useful in determining allocation of resources for health promotion and an improved understanding of the determinants of health and can be used to predict the future needs of populations, to inform policy from the planning of health and social services and used to identify trends and inequalities present in the population. Without economic models, the status quo remains persistent and unquestioned, leading to long term problems and complications.



Report by: Dr. Shanthi Johnson, University of Regina, Amenda Kumar and Robin Lau

### The Power of Performance

Dr. Brenda Beck and her colleague, Steafan Hannigan have a clear understanding of the power of performance . They recently shared their passion for "performance" with audiences at Memorial University of Newfoundland during Memorial's celebration of the Shastri Institute's 40th Anniversary. "The Legend of Ponnivala" is a 26 episode series under production by Dr. Beck and her team of Indian and Canadian artists and experts. This series (re-)animates and thus helps preserve an Indian oral epic, which Dr. Beck



recorded nearly 40 years ago from a traditional bard's performance in a village in the Kongu region of Tamil Nadu.

The epic tells of the trials, triumphs, and tribulations of three generations of a ruling family. It features divine interventions and rescues, curses and miracles, adventures and austerities, journeys and dreams, and, of course, heroes and heroines. Elements of medieval south Indian village life, social structure, gender roles, political institutions, and religious traditions find expression throughout. The Legend of Ponnivala clearly has potential as an instructional aid for courses in Religious Studies but also in Folklore, Anthropology, Ethnomusicology, to name a few.

The complexities of this epic tradition are best appreciated in performance and while there is no experience equivalent to that of a traditional bard, Beck and Hannigan deliver a most satisfying alternative. Their evening presentation to an audience of academics, students, and members of the St. John's Hindu community combined an oral and visual introduction to the epic, its performance tradition, and its re-animation as "The Legend of Ponnivala." Using photographs from Beck's original fieldwork in the region, samples of the south Indian paintings that serve as a basis for the animated images, and a display of several folk instruments used in the composition of the musical score, Beck and Hannigan introduced the epic and their project.



Steafan Hannigan at the evening lecture. Nov. 26, 2008  
(Photo: Eric Harris, technical advisor, Legend of Ponnivala)

A Canadian premier screening of one half-hour episode from the "Legend of Ponnivala" gave the audience a highly entertaining taste of the production. The animation and score are unmistakably Indian yet they resonate with folk music and oral literatures from other parts of the world. The animation, fashioned from the richly colorful South Indian artistic style, is gorgeous. Using his knowledge of Indian musical traditions as well as folk music from around the globe, Steafan Hannigan composes a score that blends into the original folk songs recorded in the 1965 performance. The storytelling is infinitely more engaging than any written presentation could be in part because the audience experiences the story within the context of its own visual and musical arts.

Bringing "The Legend of Ponnivala" to Memorial proved an excellent opportunity to engage diverse audiences in a project that exemplifies the Shastri Institute's mission. Our audiences included students in Folklore, World Music, and Religious Studies, academics from a variety of disciplines, and members of the local Hindu community. All appreciated the opportunity to experience, in a new medium and context, a South Indian oral performance tradition.

Patricia Dold  
Department of Religious Studies  
Memorial University of Newfoundland

## "Living Gandhi and King Today"

On October 4th, McMaster University marked the 60th anniversary of the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi and the 40th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, by observing a special Gandhi- King Day as part of the Annual Mahatma Gandhi Peace Festival and McMaster's MAC Peace Week. The day included a commemorative dinner event attended by 450 people at Hamilton Convention Centre. The Rev. Samuel Billy Kyles, who was with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr when he was shot, was the keynote speaker. The week included a Write for Peace contest for high school students, cultural programs, peace literature displays, a peace walk, free Indian vegetarian food and live music.

Narayan Desai, Chancellor of Gujarat Vedyapith (India) and a prominent Gandhian Scholar and Social activist, delivered the eleventh Annual Mahatma Gandhi Lecture on Nonviolence and spoke on "Understanding Gandhi Comprehensively." The sixteenth Annual Gandhi Peace Festival keynote speaker was Dr. David Adams, former Chair of UNICEF Culture of Peace Committee.

## For all who love the holidays...

Around one million people celebrate Diwali in Canada every year. The warmth of this festival of lights is particularly welcomed since it usually arrives at the same time as the snow. We at the Shastri Institute have chosen this time between Diwali, Eid, Christmas and Hanukkah to wish the peoples of Canada and India a happy holiday season.



*Guests at Simon Fraser University's Diwali Gala 2008 enjoy the festivities at the Bollywood Banquet Hall on October 27. The event attracted more than 400 people and raised over \$45,000 to help grow and sustain SFU's India programs and initiatives. ([click here](#) for more photos)*