



# NEWSLETTER



## Editorial

### Celebrating India's Independence

In May 2002 we began a tradition of putting on one major concert by classical Indian artistes to celebrate South Asian heritage Month, and each year produced a variety of cultural shows highlighting the music and dance of India presented by some of the best-known artistes of India and Canada. For various unforeseen reasons, we had to forego our May concert and instead supported the activities of other groups in the GTA. This is a telling reflection on the fragility of Indian solidarity in the Hamilton area, where ambivalence and regionalism continue to divide the population into discrete groups rather like the tribal groups from which we all sprang so many millennia ago. The divisive genes die hard.

That each man is an island is even more true of us today than of the Englishmen to whom the original observer referred. We persevered however and this year switched focus to India's 62<sup>nd</sup> anniversary after independence and presented on August 15 at the Hamilton Convention Centre an attractive programme for the bargain price of \$55.00 which included a nice dinner. (My non-Indian friends marvel at how cheaply we could do such an event.) Well, it's simple: we depend on volunteers, sponsors, ticket sales and our own capacity to subsidise shortfalls which we will continue to do so, until the idea of networking and its advantages eventually impress our brethren and bring them on-side.

The evening started at 5:30 pm with an introductory hour featuring a pictorial presentation of Indian history, delicious hors d'oeuvres inviting many "seconds" and a few "thirds", and the customary cocktails. We welcomed Mayor and Mrs Fred Eisenberg and MP David Sweet. The artistic session began at 6:30 pm with skilful renditions of Indian classical vocals by Vinayak Pathak, followed by two dancers from the Nrutha Kala Kendra and a Bollywood number by?. After a traditional Indian Dinner we were treated to a scintillating performance by Vineet Vyas and Snehasish Mazumdar, on mandolin and tabla. I don't know of anyone who had thought that such music could emanate from a mandolin. The evening concluded with audience dancing to the music of the popular DJ-Samtastic of Toronto.



#### *Freedom at Midnight:*

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru being sworn in as Prime Minister August 14-15, 1947

*"Long years ago, we made a tryst with destiny and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge... At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom." (Nehru)*

Someone asked on August 15<sup>th</sup>, "Why should we celebrate India's independence? We're Canadians."

My answer: "have you looked in a mirror lately?"

To show we are not alone, there were so many sites observing the occasion in the GTA, from Pickering to Brampton, that the Indian Consulate could not spare anyone to attend our function. So busy they were. Here is a short list of festivities in the USA, a far more

nationalistic nation than Canada; all were better attended than ours:

**Saturday, August 15, 2009**

Chicago India Independence Day Parade  
LA Indiafest 2009 Social Hollywood

**Sunday, August 16, 2009**

New York India Day Parade and Festival  
Boston India Day, Hatch Memorial Shell

I see many Indians, from India more so than from the Diaspora, who behave as if ashamed of their country. A colleague wrote 8 years ago, having noted the cultural education of Jews, Muslims, Christians and other religious and national groups, lamented the inadequacy and almost apologetic stance of Indians, adding, *“When it comes to education about Indian culture, the religions of Indians, training for our priests, and educating the Canadian population about ourselves, we are batting fairly close to zero.”*

My hypothesis is simple: Indians—urban more than rural -- have been for two hundred years brainwashed by British propaganda into believing that their history, religions, their culture, dress, even cuisine are “heathen” and contemptible. (Never mind that Indian culture has been long admired in the West, from its philosophies to curries, saris, sitars, tablas and a million other things that Britain grabbed in India to enrich itself, on the backs of kowtowing Indians whom they had fooled with their very effective education plan to create a loyal bunch of coconuts, omitting to tell them in their classes that the things denigrated were the very things—first the spices and silks, then the rest—that had lured them to this faraway land and encouraged them to perfect schemes to subdue the people and seize their property and valuables)

In the West, India tends to be seen as Bollywood portrays it, but India is not Bollywood, and Bollywood is not India. When Bollywood embraced western cinematic liberties in expressing sex and violence it did not adopt modernity, as claimed; it adopted pornography and discarded morals and high-mindedness, both poorly represented in American films. For years some Indians, other Asians and Europeans have made great films without touting either sex or gratuitous violence; they still do while the Americans sink deeper into the fleshy morass; when would they make a film like the *Iron Road*, a Canada-China production?

We should note India’s behaviour and progress, give praise openly where due and condemn what should be. The Indian government’s inclusion of all overseas Indian peoples under the Ministry of Home Affairs, *vice* Foreign Affairs as previously, shows thought and is a move in the right direction. It would then be a duty for all to respect and celebrate her milestones.

## Dr B. Pathak wins the 2009 Stockholm Water Prize



*Dr Bindeshwar Pathak (left), receives the Stockholm Water prize from Swedish Prince Carl Philip at the Town Hall in Stockholm, on August 20. Bindeshwar is the founder of the Sulabh Sanitation Movement in India.*

I reproduce below excerpts from an August 2009 *IC World* (Toronto) article on Dr Bindeshwar Pathak who has become a giant in the world of sanitation, pure water, environmental restoration and social reform especially of the rejected and neglected lowest layers of Indian society, struggling to cope with the widening gap between rich and poor.

“As a fitting accompaniment to India’s 62nd anniversary celebration Dr Pathak received on August 20<sup>th</sup> the prestigious \$150,000 Stockholm Water Prize (a Nobel equivalent) from Sweden’s Prince Carl Philip. In its April 2009 citation the nominating committee had enthused: *“The results of Dr. Pathak’s endeavours constitute one of the most amazing examples of how one person can affect the well being of millions...Dr. Pathak’s leadership in attaining these remarkable socio-environmental results has been universally recognized, and not least by those who have secured the freedom of human dignity as a consequence of his efforts.”*

On the occasion of the award in August the citation read partly: *“His accomplishments span the fields of sanitation technology, social enterprise and healthcare education for millions of people...a model for NGO agencies and public health initiatives around the world.”* High praise indeed

In accepting, Dr Pathak said, *“If water is honoured by the Prize...sanitation, its sibling, cannot be left far behind. The two*

*complement rather than compete with each other...Provision of sanitation provides dignity and safety, especially to women, and reduction of child mortality...safe water and sanitation go hand in hand for improvement of community health...Today more than 2.6 billion people in the world lack access to sanitation and 1.1 billion lack access to safe drinking water."*

Noting that the practice of defaecation in the open is still an issue in many places, he said, "*Nobody should go outside for defecation and every house in India should have a toilet."*

"At no time has this been more apt than today when despite the best intentions of leaders the lack of sanitation has become more burdensome as industrial practices contribute increasingly to the nation's waste.

In his Independence speech PM Manmohansingh made many promises touching all sectors of Indian life including assuring the prosperity, security, dignity and respect of all citizens, '*restoring our growth rate to nine percent*', road and rail construction, rural development, minority rights to education, housing etc; he appealed to '*businessmen and industrialists to join in effort to tackle difficult situation and fulfill their social obligation*' and promote '*a new culture of energy conservation*'. His promises however are a daunting challenge to a fragile social and environmental structure and his Government's resolve.

"India's development has outpaced its capacity to control or safely handle waste, especially human and industrial, and the toll in cost and lives lost is high. But even as India's cities drown in their own waste and pollutants the plight of small towns and villages that copy big city development ideas multiply, and worsen as suburban and rural farms get gobbled up by avaricious businessmen repeating the worst errors of American property and agribusiness developers. Indeed, many Indian companies are linked with Americans or use their expertise e.g. in the schismatic building of anti-human and ecologically destructive mega-malls that are slowly dying out in North America but mesmerise modern Indians. In all this India's half billion economic and social underclass seems irrelevant.

"Pollution is intense in India's rivers. In 2008 Government allocated \$1.2 billion to clean them up, half to the worst, the Yamuna-Ganga system, which supplies some 450 million people and absorbs their excreta, 85 % of which is unprocessed (and could be rendered useful following Pathak's methods of treating converting it to biogas and 'clean' fertiliser). The raw sewage produces life-threatening contamination; at India's holiest place, Varanasi, coliform bacterial counts, an index of faecal contamination, have reached 150,000/ml vs. an acceptable <5. Over 50,000 people per day perform ritual immersion here and most drink a mouthful of the holy water, about 10-20 ml. Illnesses and deaths often follow.

"The *Kumbh Méla*, held every 12 years at Prayag where the Yamuna joins the Ganga, attracts millions daily for 45 days of the pilgrimage and collects germs from all over India and the world. Pollution increases. The river becomes an open sewer. Despite the stressful conditions-- over-crowding, noise, dust, smells etc.— people report feelings of harmony and serenity, not stress. Disorder and major anti-social behaviour such as crime and rioting are almost unknown. Call it the power of spirituality and belief; it's real, but the biology is also real and as population increases and industry adds its mess to the stew, India's challenge intensifies. Dr Pathak's inventions and processes can help enormously to reduce the burden of pollution and safeguard communities. But it falls to PM Manmohansingh to get the wealthy to share their fortune and return much more than they do to both environment and their fellow men.

*Mohan Ragbeer © August 23, 2009"*

### **How did Dr Pathak do all this?**

**Dr. Pathak, 66**, was born into a Brahmin family, raised in Bihar, attended Patna University where he earned an M.A.(Sociology), a second M.A.in English, a Ph.D. in "*Liberation of scavengers through low cost sanitation*" and a D.Litt. in "*Eradication of scavenging, and environmental sanitation in India: a sociological study.*"

His studies and experiments led to the design, four decades ago, of a simple twin-pit, pour-flush toilet known as *the Sulabh*, that uses a pair of tanks to store waste matter for a period appropriate to the size of the unit; the design eliminates smell or soil pollution, pending recycling in a second stage to convert it to a fertiliser. The system requires only 1.0 to 1.5 litres to flush instead of up to 10 litres and saves trillions of litres of water each year. Dr Pathak's *Sulabh Sanitation Movement* has equipped more than 1.2 million households with these eco-friendly toilets and has installed larger versions in public places totalling 7,500 or more across India. Yet almost three out of four Indians, or around 700 million people, still have no access to basic sanitation. This leads to up to half a million deaths each year. The *Sulabh* system has been supported by UN agencies and has earned Dr Pathak forty or so recognition awards from countries including India, the Vatican and now this very prestigious one, by Sweden. Perhaps his achievements might help India and the world now using his invention to counter the waste and profligacy and apparent unconcern for the downtrodden shown by India's wealthy.

## **Unity -- an elusive phantom?**

We are still struggling with divisions in our community, and financial support for major activities lags behind obvious interest. The cut and thrust of daily

living and management of competing social and personal interests necessarily consume time and energies and may play a part in this, hence our attention to timing of events to avoid serious clashes. The enthusiasm of the founders gave momentum to early activities; most of those have handed over to new people who may not be fully aware of the situations and arguments that led to past decisions. The very structure of organisations, especially yearly change of officers, and changing agendas contribute to overlooking or postponing “non-pressing external issues” or those that are safely in the hands of able representatives. This is on the down-side of management by volunteers, but it should not obstruct or preclude commitment to a meritorious idea.

The South Asian community numbers just over 14,000 in Hamilton and although it is the largest minority group it is not large enough to sustain division or isolation, no matter how prestigious its individuals might feel in his/her sphere of work—a factor that could separate them from their fellows and cloud their appreciation of the wider community. Generally in time people who mean well help them see past the veil and discover the need for networking among their peers.

I have participated in the movement that brought us this far. I support individualism and regionalism in Indian affairs and they can be exploited for the collective good and to exemplify the various pieces of the cultural mosaic. But I am disappointed that the spirit of cooperation has been lagging these past few years and organisations have not carried out their part of the constitutional bargain and seem mired in fluctuating short term (annual in most cases) objectives.

We now look to fresh minds, young or not so young, to add their insights and experience, and hope that they would reflect on Council’s Objectives (see above) and consider working actively with it to advance them or else modify them as seems fit. (*M Ragbeer1/09*)

## Gandhi Peace Festival- *Swadeshi*

As in previous years this festival, the 17<sup>th</sup>, will be held to commemorate the work of **Mahatma Gandhi** in promoting a non-violent approach to serious protest, copied famously by Martin Luther King. The programme covers several days with the theme event occurring on **Saturday October 3<sup>rd</sup> 2009** at McMaster University’s Downtown Centre, 50 Main Street East, Hamilton. The festival will also mark the International Day of Non-Violence (October 2) as declared by the United Nations in 2007

In celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Gandhi’s seminal book “Hind Swaraj (Home Rule)”, the theme

of this year’s festival is “*Swadeshi: Gandhi’s Economics of Self Reliance.*” A special panel discussion will be held on **Tuesday, September 29, 2009** at the St. Paul’s Anglican Church at 1140 King St West, Hamilton.

### Festival Activities:

**Friday, October 2, 2009;** Keynote speaker **Rajmohan Gandhi**, historian, scholar and Gandhi’s grandson will deliver the twelfth Annual Gandhi Lecture at McMaster University Medical Centre, 1200 Main Street West, Room 1A1 from 7:00-9:00 pm. He “will provide valuable insight into living in harmony with local produce and environmental sustainability” according to the promotional notice (see also previous article on Dr B. Pathak, no connection).

**Saturday October 3, 2009:** Location, McMaster Univ. Downtown Centre, 50 Main Street West, Hamilton)

10:00am-11:00am - Peace and Justice Fair of Community Organizations

11:00am-12:00pm - Welcome and Greetings - Mayor Eisenberger;

**Speaker** – Rajmohan Gandhi

12:00pm-1:00pm - Peace Walk Downtown Hamilton

1:00pm-3:00pm - Free hot lunch (Indian Food), and Entertainment

**Sunday, October 4, 2009**

3:30-4:30 pm **Gandhi Donors Appreciation Day**

at the Hindu Samaj Temple Community Hall , 6297 Twenty Road, Hamilton. The function will include welcome of Rajmohan Gandhi, prayers, recitals, an award ceremony, and an open forum of questions-answers with Rajmohan Gandhi. Admission to this event is free. All are welcome.

Note too that Mr Gandhi will speak on Monday Oct 5<sup>th</sup>, noon-1pm at the University of Toronto

For more information, please contact the Gandhi Peace Festival planner at [Gandhi.peace.festival@gmail.com](mailto:Gandhi.peace.festival@gmail.com) or visit <http://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/gandhi>

**ICNCHS**

I’ve been asked recently to explain our approach to networking since it had seemed to my questioner that we have not achieved much in six years after an auspicious start. The Council was formed in January 2003 to provide a forum for coordination of activities among Indian organisations in Hamilton and surrounding areas where frequent duplications and clashes prevented groups from meeting and getting to know one another or to advocate from common ground. A list then in circulation counted no less than twenty separate groups, some no larger than a few individuals or a family. This understandably mystified local officials who did not know whom to contact for an “Indian input” on community matters and clearly found it problematic to correspond with twenty unknowns.

Forced to choose from volunteers or friends of city workers they admitted that they could not tell whether that voice represented all Indians. Some confessed not knowing that Indo-Canadians hailed from over fifteen countries and distinctive regions of India, with differing perspectives and religions, and quite heterogeneous.

Representatives from ten groups approved the constitution and the six largest active organisations at that time formally established the Council with two representatives each: **Burlington Arya Samaj (ASB): Canadian Indo-Caribbean Association (CICA): Hamilton Goan Association (HGA), Hindu Samaj (HS), Malayalee Samajam (MS) and Sagar Pare (SP).** The other four supporters were the Gujarati group, the India Canada Society, McMaster Indian Students Society, and South Asian Women's Group. Sagar Pare withdrew when that organisation disbanded. Thus today the Council has ten full and three individual members. Its Board of Directors is made up of the Presidents of the member organisations.

The following is an extract from the Constitution:

The **Mission and Objectives** of the Council are as follows:

### **1. Mission**

To promote and serve the interests of Indian communities at all levels of social, economic, cultural and political activity in Hamilton, Ontario and its surroundings.

### **2. Objectives**

2.1 To foster unity among Indian organisations while maintaining the cultural, social and other values of the various groups that make up the Indian mosaic.

2.2 To devise means to develop and transmit awareness of each other's culture and values so as to promote and achieve understanding and cooperation among Indian communities.

2.3 To educate the membership and the wider community on Indian culture and heritage as expressed and explained in art, music, literature, science, religion, architecture, medicine, sport, leisure and other activities and pursuits.

2.4 To develop ways in which language barriers and other obstacles to communication among different Indian communities can be avoided, minimised or eliminated.

2.5 To develop advocacy and support groups in matters concerning human rights, equity, immigration, refugees and minorities.

2.6 To provide a forum for addressing matters of common concern and be a resource, advocate and lobby to the wider community on all matters that may relate to or affect people of Indian origin.

2.7 To network with other organisations within or outside the region that would aid achievement of these objectives.

2.8 To identify and remove obstacles to the achievement of these objectives.

2.9 To carry out any other functions needed to promote the interests of its members

### **Membership of the Council**

1. **Full members** shall consist of non-profit or charitable Indian organisations located in Hamilton and surroundings, and registered in Ontario that endorse the Mission and Objectives of the Council, and have fully paid the applicable dues. Each Full Member shall be represented by **two** nominees.

2. **Associate members** shall consist of non-registered non-profit or charitable Indian organisations located in Hamilton and surroundings that endorse the Mission and Objectives of the Council, and have paid the applicable dues. Each Associate Member shall be represented by **one** nominee.

3. **Other Members** may be admitted as individuals or from organisations or interests that wish to collaborate with the Council; their terms of admission shall be determined by the Council on an individual basis, by invitation or application, and upon payment of the applicable dues.

4. **Observers** shall be those individuals or organisations, registered or unregistered, that are interested in the Council's activities and are considering membership, or do not qualify for any of the above categories of membership. Their terms of admission shall be determined by the Council on an individual basis, by invitation or application.

## **COUNCIL ACTIVITIES**

### **Members**

**Thomas Williams President**

**Mohan Ragbeer Past President**

**Anita Kudiyate Secretary**

**Eileen Noronha treasurer**

**Kamal Shankardass Chair Events**

**Ganesh Parma, Herb Parma, Geeta Maini**

### **Meetings**

Regular monthly meetings were held throughout the year so far and covered many issues, the outstanding one relating to Seniors (see below). The executive will change this fall as Thomas's term of office ends. We celebrated India's independence on August 15<sup>th</sup> (see p.1).

## Seniors Issues

A focus on Seniors' issues in collaboration with research and civic groups representing different ethnicities took the place of our traditional May SAHM concert; this culminated in an open session where a collation of ideas and plans occurred. The discussions occupied several meetings. There is a perception that South Asian seniors have unmet needs in Hamilton, especially those who do not have family to take care of them in the expected traditional way. At some time we expect that the Ministry of Health's regional organisation -- grandly named the Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) -- and given an ample budget to run the medical affairs of Hamilton, Burlington, Brant and Greater Niagara, will deal definitively with the issue of promoting seniors' care at home and in community facilities. I won't expect much; so far the Ministry has approached long term care in much the same way as it has eHealth -- a project that started nearly 10 years ago consumed almost \$700M and has nothing to show for it! LTC is placed in the hands of one Shirlee Sharkey, CEO of St Elizabeth Healthcare Corporation to develop and implement an LTC plan (conflict of interest?). CUPE and other groups have condemned this patronage and have withdrawn from the implementation group. Minister Kaplan has been silent.

## Other Events

### 1. Health Seminars

We have not had one in the recent past as interest seems low and attendance at previous ones had been poor. However this activity remains on our agenda. These seminars will continue as needed.

2. Council supports the activities of member organisations e.g. picnics, dances, religious festivals etc. **Nauratri** was observed in September by the Hindu Samaj. CICA will celebrate **Divali** at the **Ancaster Old Town Hall** on Oct. 18<sup>th</sup> and the annual dance on Dec 5<sup>th</sup> at the **Empire Banquet Hall**, Brampton

## JOTTINGS

**On Sept 24, India's moon rocket Chandrayana finds water in large quantities on the moon surface**

During the 14-year period from its IPO in 1993 to 2007, the price of an Infosys share increased three thousand-fold. This excludes the dividends that the company has paid out in that period.

Council member Herb Parma has joined in a charitable climb of the CN tower. Best wishes

"I understand your point when you say that we cannot do anything about the past; however, I have come to realise that our past is our greatest learning field. It is from our past that we learn not to repeat our mistakes."  
Anon

## Controversy over zoo statue



The **Calgary zoo** installed a sculpted Ganesha style elephant figure at the entrance to the Indian elephant enclosure. People love it but a conservative Christian organisation objected calling it a religious symbol, even though the sculpture has none of the appurtenances of the Hindu *murti*. Seems that the objectors did not know the difference between an Indian and African elephant. They're just like the people. Check the belly!

Apropos of this Police in Fairfax Virginia USA reported that 16 Indian homes have been burglarised, identified by a Ganesha figure outside the homes!

**"Simple people love symbols" ancient anon.**

India's **Tata Foundation** last year granted **USA's Cornell University** \$50m, the largest gift of its kind, half to fund 25 scholarships annually to Cornell, **Ratan Tata's** alma mater. \$50,000 per year can educate 50,000 *dalits* in India!

The proportion of Americans who are cremated has grown six fold in the past three decades and nearly one-third of all bodies are cremated, according to the Cremation Association of North America.

**India talks cautiously with Pakistan as she remembers Mumbai attacks and Pakistan declines a request for extradition but invites India to view trials.**

**Council invites all Indian/South Asian organisations interested in the objectives of the Council to join and participate in whatever capacity suits them best. Note that the role of observer is open to all community organisations, not only Indians/South Asians.**

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