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# CONTENTS

VOLUME 42 NUMBER 1  
SUMMER 2015

**v: Editorial**

**OMITA GOYAL**

## ARTICLES

**1: Media Pluralism:  
Not Just a Question of Numbers**

**AMMU JOSEPH**

**12: Disability and Social Movements:  
A Reflection**

**ANITA GHAI**

**26: Unparalleled Journeys**

**RAHUL SHARAD DRAVID**

**34: Between the Natural and Social Sciences:  
Medical Science in the Trishanku World**

**SUNDAR SARUKKAI**

**44: Childcare in Indian Indigenous Health Systems**

**MALAVIKA KAPUR**

**58: The Vedic People and Harappans: Same People?**

**PRADIP N. KHANDWALLA**

**67: Sanskrit: The Divine Language**

**KARAN SINGH**

## PHOTO ESSAY

**72: Coal India Limited**

**SRINIVAS KURUGANTI**

ARTICLES

**109:** Authenticating the Craft: Geographical Indication  
as the New History of the Telangana Scroll

**CHANDAN BOSE**

IN CONVERSATION

**123:** Arvindar Singh with

**WILLIAM MARK TULLY**

BOOK REVIEWS

**138:** *The Girl Who Stood Up for Education  
and Changed the World*

**TAISHA ABRAHAM**

**142:** *The Struggle for Pakistan:  
A Muslim Homeland and Global Politics*

**PARTHA GHOSH**

**146:** *Shifting Ground: People, Animals,  
and Mobility in India's Environmental History*

**AMITA BAVISKAR**

**151:** *Picture Abhi Baaki Hai:  
Bollywood as a Guide to Modern India*

**MEENAKSHI BHARAT**

**155: CONTRIBUTORS**

# EDITORIAL

**T**he previous issue was a thematic one dedicated to 30 years since the establishment of SAARC. It was launched by a more than eminent panel comprising Dr. Karan Singh, their Excellencies the High Commissioners of Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, and co-editor Rajiv Kumar. I believe it is worthwhile to highlight some extremely important comments made on regional cooperation. There are several potential areas for regional cooperation, as pointed out by Dr. Karan Singh: easier movement of goods with advantages for the poor; environmental protection of the shared Himalayan range; and language—sharing as we do, Bengali with Bangladesh, Hindi with Nepal, Tamil with Sri Lanka, and Urdu and Punjabi with Pakistan. As if to reinforce this, I was recently invited to the Bangladesh High Commission to attend a cultural programme celebrating the stalwarts of Bengali literature: Rabindranath Tagore and national poet of Bangladesh, Kazi Nazrul Islam.

Bangladesh, as the High Commissioner pointed out, first mooted the idea of the institution of SAARC and encountered mixed reactions from the concerned countries. It took five years of convincing, and while progress might have been slow, and still is, the recent signing of the land boundary agreement gives hope for progress. As does the amendment to the Nepal–India Treaty of Transit. But, as Rajiv Kumar put it very eloquently, nothing will really move until SAARC is brought out from official corridors.

The Pakistan High Commissioner was clear that rather than getting embroiled in country-bashing, it would be more fruitful to concentrate on issues of development. In this, he was looking forward to hosting the next Summit in Islamabad.

The Sri Lankan High Commissioner showed very convincingly how a holistic understanding of heritage can go a long way in connecting people. What is necessary is to recognise the importance of

looking at the past in the present and the present in the past. We must appreciate the commonalities in all spheres, especially heritage—can we speak of Buddhist heritage without looking at Hindu heritage? No. Further, there is also ‘religious tourism’, as Dr. Karan Singh went on; while this could be read as controversial by some, it cannot be overlooked that all the major religions have flourished in the SAARC countries.

Despite reservations about SAARC, can we perhaps say that regional cooperation is progressing at a faster rate than internal cooperation? International Yoga Day is the current fodder for those who see dark anti-secular forces at work. As someone who came to Yoga after 50, I can vouch for its benefits, but not its sociology. I do know, however, that more than the posture you adopt, what is most essential is proper breathing, and breath is both secular and universal. Some of our indigenous health practices, as Malavika Kapur says in this issue, can in fact be traced to Greek and Chinese traditions.

These are engaging and busy months. Newspapers make for confusing reading and television news is getting even more shrill. The promise of our having seen the last of corruption has been belied; it has in fact raised its head with interesting, sometimes laughable, twists and turns. Whistle-blowers there are many, but the definition is unclear; who is blowing the whistle at whom! We have seen many political shannigans, sometimes reminiscent of children fighting for space on a playing field.

Moving on, we have for you a general issue with, as usual, something for everyone. Enjoy reading it.



OMITA GOYAL