

Restoration of historic Oont Kadal



The restoration of the historic bridge, built in the 17th Century AD in the famous Dal Lake, was taken up in Oct 2018. The project is supported by the Embassy of Federal Republic of Germany, New Delhi. Despite the challenges of harsh winter and other attendant difficulties, the work is being carried on the site within the lake, strictly adhering to the principles of conservation. The camel-hump shaped bridge has been in dilapidated condition for a long time, and was about to collapse. The timely intervention, later supported by the State Government also, saves the bridge and restores this iconic piece of heritage at the commanding location amidst the Lake.

Oont Kadal is stone masonry bridge, was part of the erstwhile Chaudhri Soth (also called Soth-i-Chodri) that started at the end of the Naidyar Bridge in Kralyar (Rainawari) in the old city and opened up across the Lake at Ishber, Nishat. It was built during Mughal rule around the later part of 1670s to facilitate the visit to the ancient Hindu temple at Ishber. It is believed that the causeway was supplemented with a series of bridges, some of timber and some of masonry, most of which were lost over the years.

Naidyar Bridge marked the starting point of the causeway and the date of construction inscribed on a plaque on the Naidyar Bridge indicates in Persian that it was built in 1676 AD by Chaudhri Mahesh Das and two other plaques (also inscribed in Persian) installed on either side of the Oont Kadal archway indicate that Oont Kadal was significantly repaired by Pandit Mahesh Das Chaudhri. The nearest approach to the Oont Kadal archway is via a boat from the *ghat* at the Nishat Bagh. The Oont Kadal structure lies in the midst of the Dal Lake as an isolated feature as of today as the causeway has been dismantled to allow for free circulation of Dal waters. However, archival images (from 1890s to 1960s) depict the structure as part of the causeway with a series of poplar trees lining both edges of the causeway. This unique frame created a picturesque setting which was generously taken advantage of by many international photographers of the time.

The Oont Kadal forms an important part of the public realm that constitutes the combined environ of the Dal Lake, the Zabarwan Mountain range and the potential World Heritage Site of NishatBagh. Over the decades, lack of attention as also difficulties in accessing the structure has resulted in its severe deterioration. If immediate attention was not given to conserve this significant historical structure, it was a matter of few years or less that the structure would have succumbed to external agents of erosion or even pilfering of building material. Besides this, a vast majority of public is concerned about the long term sustenance of this structure as they feel a connection with it. A large number of tourists also take a boat trip up to the Oont Kadal for taking pictures. Oont Kadal has always been part of the Mughal landscape of the historic gardens and as such figures in historic references to the Dal Lake as well as the Mughal Gardens



In 2010, the Nishat Bagh, along with six other Mughal Gardens was placed on the UNESCO’s Tentative List of World Heritage Sites and as such the Kadal is considered an integral visual component of the Nishat Bagh and is delineated as part of the potential World heritage property of Nishat Bagh. INTACH has been working with the Cultural Division of the Embassy of Germany in New Delhi for the last few years, during which time the Embassy has provided financial support for restoration of papier mache ceilings at the Black Pavilion of the Mughal garden Shalimar Bagh in the year 2015.

Based on the high degree of professionalism displayed by INTACH, Kashmir Chapter in implementing the project, the German Embassy, New Delhi, desired that further proposals for funding by the Embassy in India for restoration of other significant cultural properties could be considered by them.

Subsequently, considering the high historic and contextual value of the Oont Kadal, an elaborate conservation plan prepared by INTACH was sent to the German Embassy, New Delhi for its restoration. After INTACH’s request for considering funding for restoration of Oont Kadal, Mr. Arno Kirchhop, Political Minister Counselor, Embassy of FRG in India visited Srinagar for spot inspection of the feasibility and potential of proposed project. The then Vice Chairman and other officials from the LAWDA, along with INTACH personnel accompanied the German team. INTACH, Kashmir Chapter received a confirmation from the Embassy that the funding for the restoration of this significant cultural property is approved. Dr. Jasper Wieck, Deputy Ambassador and Mr. Thomas Schmidt Cultural Officer signed the agreement with INTACH on 1st Oct 2018 in Srinagar. The project will be completed by March 2019.

Workshop on Preventive Conservation of Manuscripts



A 5-day workshop on ‘Preventive Conservation of Manuscripts’ was organized in Srinagar, to sensitize the custodians of precious and old collection of manuscripts. The workshop was organized by INTACH Kashmir in collaboration with Department of Archives, Archaeology, and Museums J&K, and with the support of Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, (IGNCA) New Delhi. The participation for the workshop was drawn from Research and Oriental Library, College libraries, Department of Archives, SPS Museum and private collectors from the City of Srinagar.

Kashmir has through ages continued with the tradition of producing manuscripts and written records on Religion, Mathematics, Medicines and other branches of traditional knowledge. The State Archives have registered about 45,000 manuscripts out of which around 20,000 are in private possession. In the last two years INTACH held exhibitions on calligraphy and manuscripts which attracted huge media and public attention.

Such a huge knowledge and cultural treasure obviously needs preservation and conservation in order for them to remain safe and secure with both private collectors and institutions. However, in absence of even the basic facility of conservation or proper guidance for storing, and preventive measures essential for conservation of the manuscripts, these collections are deteriorating.

The workshop received tremendous response from the students, collectors and government agencies possessing the manuscript collections. The workshop was attended by 30 participants that included staff of SPS Museum, Department of Libraries, State Gazetteers, Education Department, University of Kashmir and 4 Owners of Private Collections. The workshop started with lectures followed by practical demonstration by art conservators, experts from IGNCA and this enabled participants to pick up basic skills on the actual conservation work, storage of manuscripts, cleaning and restoration. The workshop was first of its kind held in Kashmir and therefore it received appreciation from the concerned institutions.

Interactive session with Weavers of Samba



INTACH Jammu Chapter in collaboration with Handloom Development Department Jammu organized an interactive session with the weavers of District Samba, for revival of Handloom products in the region. Ms. Narmita Dogra, Joint Director, Handloom Department chaired the session. During the session, different aspects and issues were deliberated upon for the revival of handloom industry and suggestions were sought from the weavers of how to make this craft flourish again.

After hearing grievances, the Joint Director Handloom assured the craftsmen of immediate redress of issues which hurdles the craft to thrive within the region.

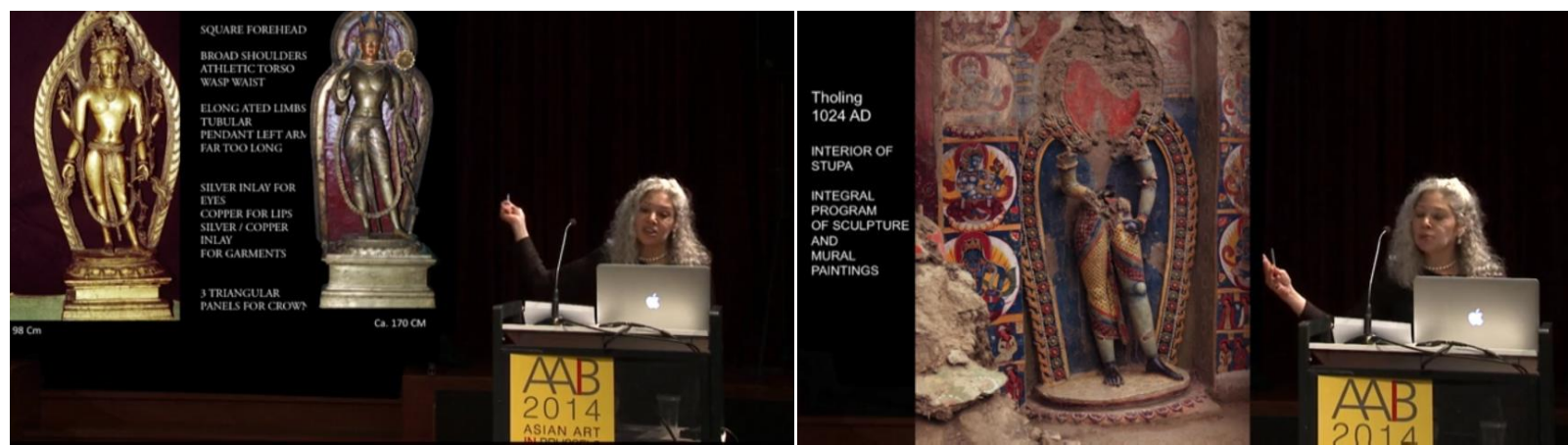
A Visit to Handmade Paper Unit in Shama Chak, Jammu



A visit to handmade paper unit for students was organized by Jammu chapter, to give them an on-site introduction about the art of paper-making. The participants, mostly students, were taken to a paper-making unit of Shri Gandhi Sewa Sadan located in Shama Chak Jammu, and were briefed about stage-wise process of paper-making. Expressing their eagerness to know about the craft, the participants were well involved throughout the entire activity.

The Sculptures of Western Tibet in the 11th to 13th Centuries and their artistic debt to Kashmir

A detailed presentation given by Dr. Amy Heller, a renowned art historian, at 2014 Asian Art held in Brussels



The presentation, made by Dr. Amy Heller, was focused on the artistic finesse of Kashmiri sculptures, the distinctiveness in their making, designing and modeling, the use of inlay art and the best of their finishing in the 11th to 13th centuries. Dr. Heller provided a detailed account of that significant period of time wherein Kashmir was considered an important place of art, architecture and literature. The scholar comprehensively projected the multi-layered history of Kashmiri art and architecture and its prominence especially in the Western Tibet.

Dr. Heller says that in the year 1076 AD a Buddhist council was set-up which brought together translators, sculptors from Kashmir, North India, North-east India, Nepal as well as Tibets. In that period there was a tremendous production of illuminated manuscripts and sculptures of exceptionally well designed and modeled. 1083 AD is the year of death of the King who convened the Buddhist council and in 1092 the capital was moved from Tholing to Dongkar closer to the Indus River which marked an important chronological phase of change in the Gu-ge kingdom.

The Impact of Kashmiri Sculptures

There was a slow trickle of Kashmiri teachers going towards Tibet during the 10th Century where there was revival of Buddhism under the king Ye-Che and the first among them was a Kashmiri Pandita named Smriti who went there in 970 AD. In 976 AD Rinchen Zengpo came to study in Kashmir and spent almost seven years working with Sraddakaravarman and many other Kashmiri pandits. In 988 AD a Royal Edict was promulgated by the enlightened king Ye-Che to encourage aesthetic perfection and production of local workshops for the creation of Buddhist Art which led to the invitation of many Kashmiri artists as well as the creation by local artists for the embellishment of the newly founded monasteries. In 990 AD Rinchen Zengpo's visited Kashmir and North-east India again and after spending 13-17 years in travel he returned back to his native place with a cohort of at least 30 Kashmiri artists which stayed in the capital of his empire, Tholing.

In 995 Rinchen's father died in Tholing but he could not returned prior to his father's death as he was in Kashmir at that time. According to his biography, he realizes that he should make in Kashmir an exceptional memorial for his father. He asked an image maker or sculptor named Bhidhaka to make an image of Avalokitesvara to his father's size. The sculptor, with a size of 170 cm, was made and later installed at his family chapel in Khatse. There is a detailed work done on the sculptor, with the copper and silver inlay art its appearance is still astonishing even after so many centuries passed. The face of the sculptor has been re-consecrated with a new coat of gold while as the tip of the ring-finger which was broken while travelling, as it is also mentioned in Rinchen's biography, is still in that state.

There is a sculpture of 53 cm in size found besides the one made by Bhidhaka having the same distinctive iconography of Avalokitesvara resembling exemplary art forms of that period of time. Another sculpture is of Padmapani probably inspired by Bhidhaka with gorgeous art of inlay but with less-finished back. It has been identified by some scholars as perhaps characteristics of the sculptures produced in western Tibet following the Kashmiri aesthetics model.

To listen to the full lecture given by Dr. Amy Heller and to find out more interesting facts about the golden era of Kashmir, click on the link here:

<https://vimeo.com/119928674?fbclid=IwAR3xtL9I5kqJaMYm4p4tVWqsjxKkmnqho6KNgxFsr8iGgOpdagnVCJr5dhc>

Part of my job as historian is sifting rhetoric from reality: Audrey Truschke

Venky Vembu (The Hindu)
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Audrey Truschke feels her prior training in philology and religious studies has made her a resourceful historian today

Beyond the ‘bland’ established facts about the past — such as the names of kings and the dates of battles — history is work-in-progress, which strives to piece together disparate bits of information, says Audrey Truschke, Assistant Professor of South Asian history at Rutgers University, Newark. The author of two books, *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court*, and, more recently, *Aurangzeb: The Life and Legacy of India’s Most Controversial King*, Truschke will be at Lit for Life 2019 as part of a panel discussion on the transformation of Indian historical narratives into an ideological battleground. Excerpts from an e-mail interview:

You have said that it was your knowledge of Sanskrit and Persian that drew you to the study of South Asian history. But what drew you to Sanskrit and Persian in the first place?

As a first-year undergraduate student at the University of Chicago, I took a class on Hinduism, specifically on the *Mahabharata*. I was amazed and bewildered by the stories I encountered therein, and I wanted to know more about the *Mahabharata* specifically and the culture and tradition associated with this epic. To that end, I began studying Sanskrit and was quickly enraptured by the vast and understudied literature available in pre-modern Sanskrit texts. Things sort of snowballed from there. I learned Persian a bit later, largely as a graduate student, in order to access materials relevant to Indo-Islamic rule.

How did your learnings in the two languages lead you to your current core work — as a tutor of South Asian history at an American university?

In 2004, I graduated with a B.A. degree from the University of Chicago in Religious Studies with a focus on Hinduism and with four years of Sanskrit under my belt. The most obvious next steps were to attend graduate school, receive a Ph.D., and become a professor. My Ph.D. was in area studies, and I was trained, primarily, by a philologist. I always worked on historical topics, but my turn to history as a disciplinary home occurred in my postdoctoral years. I found the tools and language of historical method useful for the sorts of questions I was already asking about the Indian past. I think that I am a better, more resourceful historian today because of my prior training in philology and religious studies.

What would you say are the non-negotiable characteristics that any student of history needs to bring to the table? What ethical and moral values do you bring to the pursuit of history?

Historians need to be well-versed in historical method, including ethical considerations. Historical method helps us recover the past, use a wide range of texts responsibly, ask good question, and so forth. Historical method and scholarly guidelines more broadly also have ethical angles. For me, some of the key ethical guidelines of my work are honestly pursuing all relevant evidence, including evidence potentially contradictory to my own arguments, and being open to changing my mind. In the public sphere, people sometimes misunderstand how scholars work with historical sources and think that a single new piece of evidence can wipe away all prior knowledge on a given subject. History is, in large part, a work of synthesis as we strive to piece together disparate bits of information.

Do you consider yourself open to criticism of your ideas?

I welcome challenges to my work, and I am always open to further nuancing my views on a given historical topic. History is always a work-in-progress. I certainly hope that, say, 20 years from now; there is a lot of new scholarship on the Mughal Empire that has altered my views of this pre-modern polity.

Given that your area of work is centred around South Asian history, what would you say are modern-day political impulses that render South Asian (medieval) history particularly contentious?

In Modi's India, the leading political party bases its authority on a fictional, bastardised version of the past. That house of cards trembles in the slightest breeze, and, in this analogy, serious historical work is closer to a cyclone. Hindu nationalists increasingly attack scholarly work, the academy, and individual scholars, in large part, because we offer a far more grounded analysis of the past.

You've suggested in the past that historians tend to sift through history and filter out elements. You've said: "The goal is to accurately reconstruct the past to the extent possible given the available sources. Sometimes the goal is also to understand why certain authors wrote as they did, complete with mistruths and biases." How do you respond to those who would suggest that such an approach is problematic insofar as it filters real-time historical narratives through the prism of post-facto perspectives (some would say 'biases')?

Part of my job as a historian is sifting rhetoric from reality and then making appropriate claims using each type of evidence. Rhetoric still matters a great deal, but it tells us different things about the past. Historians use a robust set of critical thinking tools to parse texts and other sorts of historical evidence, including reading against the grain, comparing sources to one another, and so forth. In so doing, historians strive to reconstruct and analyse the past as accurately as possible, rather than dooming ourselves to repeating the biases and even the propaganda of our sources.

A broader philosophical question: Is there no such thing as settled history? Is all history susceptible to review and reinterpretation? What are the risks (if any) of a ceaseless reinterpretation of the past?

There are set facts about the past, but they are largely limited to bland names and dates, such as the year of a specific battle or a given king's regional title. The modern practice of history is all the words between the names and dates. History is the narrative of the past, and it is an ongoing project. That the work of historians is never finished is an exciting promise that we can continually ask new and different questions and pursue better ways of understanding the past.

You've on many occasions stepped outside of the academic 'ivory tower' (so to speak) and waded into the Twitter trenches. What impels you to do that? Are such interactions capable of persuading critics? Do you think you have persuaded anyone?

Part of the academic project is to share scholarship with a broad audience, and I take that seriously. In the current Indian context, I engage with the public for those who are thirsty for knowledge but are not quite sure where to find a more grounded glimpse of Indian history.

In other words, I do not write for those who have already made up their mind, especially right-wingers. Ultranationalists have no use for calm, reasoned history. But there is a largely silent middle-ground still in India that can be persuaded perhaps by Hindutva ideology but is not yet completely convinced. I write popular pieces, in large part, to give such folks a set of rudimentary tools with which they might think critically about the past and the present.

What is the most reasoned (even if non-academic) criticism of your work that you have encountered (on Twitter or on other platforms) that you would, in the interest of openness, like to engage with and respond to?

I encounter criticisms of my work with some regularity from other scholars, and I generally find the feedback productive and helpful. I have not found social media to be the best forum for this.

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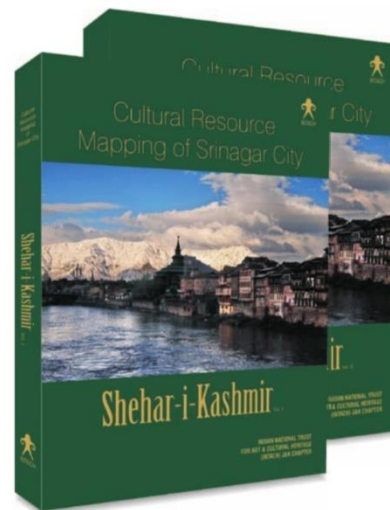
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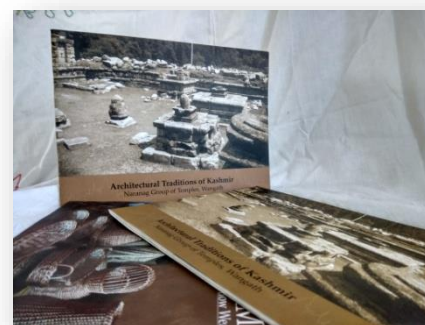
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