

## IFDG Final Report:

### National Endowment for the Humanities and Community College Humanities Association *Bharata Darshan* Summer Institute 2008 Shimla (Kandaghat) and Delhi, India

I had the honor to be selected as a fellow to participate in *Bharata Darshan*, the summer institute sponsored by the NEH and the CCHA. This institute was a four-week collaboration of twenty-three other professors within the various disciplines of the humanities teaching in other US colleges and universities. The institute began with a fortnight in the north Indian state of Himachal Pradesh, and continued on to Delhi, India, with an interlude in Agra. Our group was led by Dr. Beverly Blois, professor of history at Northern Virginia Community College, Meena Nayak, novelist and professor of English at Northern Virginia Community College, and Dr. Dan Enhbom, professor of art history at the University of Virginia.

The purpose of the institute was to study the art, literature, philosophy, religion, and events of the four major aspects of Indian history: Vedic and ancient India, the Mughal era, the British Raj, and the recent years since post-Partition. My purpose in attending this institute was to contribute additional content to my online world history classes in a relevant way – generally, to underscore the importance of Southeast Asian history, and specifically, the impact of India's history on world history. We were honored and very fortunate to have preeminent Indian scholars and artists come to us in the hills of north India as well as the urban center of Delhi. These scholars included noted archaeologists Shereen Ratnagar and Romila Thapar, historians Indrani Sanyal, Ashgar Ali Engineer, Janaki Nair, and Sunil Kumar, novelists Shiva Prakesh and Swapan Chakravorty, and film director Kumar Shahani.

Lectures focused on various topics such as the art of Classical India, the creation of Indian myths, the Buddha and religious diversity in India, the Islamic tradition in India, the synthesis of Islamic and Hindu artistic traditions, Sufism and Indian spiritual experiences, the authority of the British Raj and its interaction with cultures of southern India, and modern perspectives on early Indian history. One of the most interesting presentations was the topic of the significance of music in Indian culture in conjunction with the screening of *The Bamboo Flute*, the film by director Kumar Shahani, at the India Habitat Centre.

We were also guests of honor at a reception hosted by the US Embassy at the American Center in Delhi, where we took advantage of the opportunity to exchange information and network with other Indian scholars.

In addition to the programmed lectures, we visited many cultural and religious sites from museums to temples. In Himachal Pradesh we visited the Sankat Mocha, Tara Devi, and Jakhu, temples, the Himachal Pradesh State Museum, and the Indian Institute for Advanced Studies, where we had a round table discussion and purchased books published by the IAS that were relevant to our diverse interests. We also hosted a luncheon in honor of the Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh, Prem Kumar Dhumal, and in turn were treated to a magnificent performance by the cultural minister's favorite Indian dance group. We began our stay in Delhi by visiting the Red Fort and during subsequent days, followed with visits to the Jama Masjid Mosque, the National Museum with a round table discussion with curator John Dawson, the Lotus Temple, the Gandhi Museum, and the Jawarhalal Nehru Museum. Our time in Delhi was punctuated by a side trip to Agra to visit the Fatehepur Sikri, and the highlight of the trip, the Taj Mahal.

Not only was the scholastic experience of *Bharata Darshan* beyond an humanist's or historian's wildest scholastic expectations, but the camaraderie each and every one of the twenty four fellows experienced was unparalleled. I have returned with literally hundreds of photographs, volumes of notes, and most important, ideas of how to imbue my teaching of world history courses in the future. At a later date, I would be happy to give a presentation of my experiences in India.

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