

## IACLALS Report

Our 2007 Annual Conference held on January 11-13 at the Banaras Hindu University with the central theme of “1857 and After: Colonialism, Violence and Literature” was probably the first event in the year-long national celebration and reassessment to mark the 150th anniversary of the First War of Indian Independence / the Mutiny of 1857. The momentous subject was explored from many approaches, as was the concept of (post)colonial violence in general. Papers looked at cinematic renderings of the freedom movement as well as plays written during the period, and at other literary texts that either dealt with or were written in the shadow of 1857. There were presentations on violence during the Partition of the nation that marked our independence and on the various kinds of violence that still mark our country. There were papers on Africa, and even more specially, a panel of paper-readers in Hindi, as well as a plenary lecture by a local historian on the insurrections and resistance in and around the city of Banaras through the 19th century. Because of the significant international participation we also had the benefit of looking at non-Indian perceptions of 1857.

It was perhaps as much a tribute to the location of the conference, Banaras (now officially back to its ancient name Varanasi), that participants congregated in such large numbers from around the world - not to speak of all over the country. With about half a dozen participants from outside India and over sixty papers read in three days, it was a conference that was dense with debate and intellectual stimulation. Coinciding with the celebration of the Ardh-Kumbha (a Hindu bathing festival which, alternating with the Kumbha, occurs once in six years), the conference inspired many participants, including non-Hindus, to make visits to the Vishwanath Mandir, the most hallowed temple in this city which is reputedly the oldest living city in India, as well as to Sarnath, only a few miles away, where the Buddha preached his first sermon. On the second evening, the hosts took us on a twilight boat-ride on the Ganga/Ganges during which we watched the visually and aurally spectacular evening worship conducted on the steps of the most prominent of the bathing ghats. For many regulars for whom our conferences too are a kind of annual secular pilgrimage, the experience thus had a double resonance.

The second CDN IACLALS Prize, for the Best Paper presented at the conference, turned out to be not one but two prizes, as after two rounds of evaluation, the five judges failed to separate the top two paper-readers, Dhruvajyoti Banerjee and Simran Chaddha. Our congratulations to both.

The year also saw our other usual activities – the punctual publication of two issues of our six-monthly Newsletter (also accessible on our website) as well as vigorous discussions on various topical issues in cyberspace through our yahoo chat group. The year witnessed a substantial increase in our membership, with 94 new memberships and renewals.

At our 2008 Annual Conference held on 28-30 January at Udaipur, Harish Trivedi was re-elected Chairperson, Subhendu Mund was elected Vice-Chair, and GJV Prasad and Brinda Bose were re-elected Secretary and Treasurer respectively, for a term of three years. The Executive Committee also includes for the first time a representative of our overseas members, Evelyne Hanquart of the University of Paris XIII.

GJV Prasad

IACLALS Secretary