



INDIA CANADA FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE

...forging close ties among Canadians with an interest in India

**ICFC announces its 5th lecture event in its
Diversity and Inclusion Series:**

***“Peace With All
- From Temples and Palaces to the Taj Mahal ”
(A lecture about India’s Syncretic Wonders)***

**on Wednesday, 23rd February 2022
19:00 – 21:00 EST (on Zoom)**

To receive Zoom details, please register at the following link: <https://icfc.ws/register/>

RSVPs required by February 20th, 2022

Presented by:



Dr. Catherine Asher
University of Minnesota



Dr. Karim H. Karim
Carleton University



Dr. Supriya Gandhi
Yale University

Synopsis of Lecture:

At a time when Islamophobia seems to be sweeping through the internet and finding its way into political and social discourse, sparking massive protests and even fatal attacks on the ground, we have seen that neither Canada nor India is immune to these negative influences. Extremism and intolerance exist on either side of this equation. This lecture will attempt to look at alternative models in history, particularly drawing on past examples from one of today’s most culturally diverse countries in the world, India, to see what we may learn about a time when kings and philosophers were able to harness their devotion to learning and build on the strength of unity in diversity. How did they achieve mutual tolerance and understanding of religious and cultural differences?

Dr. Asher will speak about syncretic influences during the Mughal period in Indian history, specifically Akbar's policy of “sulh-i kul”, that is an acceptance of religious diversity. This presentation will show how depiction of Hindu epics in the Muslim Mughal court and the construction of temples helped promote this policy. Akbar was the third Mughal Emperor of India who reigned 1556-1605. His policy was followed by his son Jahangir and grandson Shah Jahan.

Dr. Gandhi will discuss Dara Shikoh's Persian translation of the Sanskrit epics “Upanishads” as another example of India’s syncretic expressions. Dara Shikoh was Akbar’s great-grandson and grew up enlightened by sulh-i kul. Dr. Gandhi will discuss tensions experienced at that time with these expressions and relate them to the present-day circumstances of India, where the idea of a mutual influence of religious traditions and cultures is under significant duress.

Moderated by: Dr. Karim H. Karim, Carleton University, Canada

Further Background: The official groundwork for peaceful and harmonious cooperation among various religious and social groups was established by Akbar under his policy known as “sulh-i kul” (translated as “peace with all”). Akbar’s successors, Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Dara Shikoh, followed this policy as well. Architecturally, Shah Jahan’s palaces, largely made of white marble, also followed and used a post and lintel form of building that is associated with both Indic and Islamic building forms. Most of us are more familiar with the Taj Mahal as one of the famous wonders of the world still standing today – and built by Shah Jahan. This tribute to his beloved wife itself adheres to a building tradition established under the Timurids in Central Asia. Links of the Taj to the Mughal policy of the acceptance of religious diversity is not as direct, but elements such as the use of white marble, associated in Indic traditions with the highest caste, Brahmins, is an element of fusion.

About the Speakers:

Catherine Asher, Professor Emerita at the University of Minnesota, is a specialist in Islamic art, focusing on the interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims, for example, examining Hindu temples built in the reign of Muslim kings and sometimes with royal patronage or shrines whose worshipers include Muslims, Hindus, Jains, Sikhs and Christians. She has served as President of the Historians of Islamic Art, Vice President of the College Art Association and Chair of the CAA International Committee as well as Chair of the CAA Publications Committee. Her other service includes Treasurer of the American Council for Southern Asian Art and Chair of the American Institute of Indian Studies Center for Art and Archaeology. Her publications include *Delhi’s Qutb Complex: The Minar, Mosque and Mehrauli*, (2017); *India before Europe*, with Cynthia Talbot (2006); *The Architecture of Mughal India* (1992, with several reprints); *Perceptions of South Asia’s Visual Past*, co-edited with Thomas Metcalf (1994) and a great many articles. The primary focus of her current work examines the architecture of Jaipur’s diverse religious communities and temples built during periods of Muslim political domination.

Supriya Gandhi teaches at Yale University and works on the interface of Islam and Indic traditions in South Asia. She completed her doctorate at Harvard University, and has also studied in Delhi, Tehran, London and Damascus. Before coming to Yale, she taught at the University of Pennsylvania and Haverford College. She is the author of *The Emperor Who Never Was: Dara Shukoh in Mughal India* (Harvard University Press, 2020). Her current book project explores the role of the Persianate cultural and intellectual ecumene in the making of modern Hinduism.

Moderator: Karim H. Karim, Chancellor’s Professor at Carleton University, has served as the director of several academic institutions in Canada and the UK. He has been a visiting professor at Harvard, Simon Fraser, and Aga Khan universities and has delivered distinguished lectures around the world. Dr. Karim is also an award-winning author whose writings have been translated into several languages. His major publications include the critically acclaimed *Islamic Peril: Media and Global Violence* (2000; 2003); *The Media of Diaspora* (2003), which is an international reference work; *Re-imagining the Other* (2014); *Engaging the Other* (2014); and *Diaspora and Media in Europe* (2018). Professor Karim’s most widely-read article is the co-authored “Clash of Ignorance” (2012), which critiques the clash of civilizations thesis. His current research and publications examine religious intersections, particularly in Indic-Islamic contexts.

About India Canada Friendship Circle

India Canada Friendship Circle (ICFC), a non-profit Canadian organization, operating in Ottawa since 2004 and conducting lectures by prominent speakers, encourages dialogue on India and Canada in a non-religious, non-partisan and harmonious environment. The words “friendship” and “circle” in its name, convey an explicit desire to forge and maintain close ties among Canadians with an interest in India.

ICFC’s mission is to promote learning and an intercultural relationship between India and Canada in the areas of philosophy, history, literature, economy, diplomacy, the arts and sciences through prominent speakers.

Please visit our website: <http://icfc.ws>