

## Memories while Zooming in to CIMA India 13-18 October 2023

The meeting truly brought together East and West over the future of museums and other ‘places’ – in the mind and heart – dedicated to understanding agricultures, past, present and future, with much emphasis on the well-being of farming communities around the world. First, though, a reminder that this connection is based on a long friendship between a “Grande Dame” of Indian ethnology, Lotika Varadarajan, and the historian of agriculture, François Sigaut, who was a pivotal partner in relaunching the AIMA in the 21st century. It was thanks to Lotika that Surajit Sarkar was able to join us in Marseille for the 2014 CIMA and worked with his co-organizers to bring the AIMA to India. Our Indian hosts paid homage to their own “linage” and their debt to Monkombu Swaminathan, all the while endeavouring to move forward “beyond green”.

The speakers had wide-ranging interests, from safeguarding traditional practical wisdom to digital technologies aimed at promoting recognition of farmers and the efforts to ensure their communities have a decent standard of living in the face of some present-day practices that are simply predatory, with no thought towards our common future. There was a wealth of information on how museums of quite different kinds could both preserve knowledge and lead the way towards fruitful development, be it in water management, seed diversity, resilience to climate change and adaptation to constantly evolving societies.



Day 3 9 (part of group photo taken at Shoolini University, Solan, Himachal Pradesh, India)

The presenters highlighted key concepts such as “optimize not maximize” production and shared in lively discussions with the audience on the topics of animal rights and welfare, sanctuaries for threatened plants or animals, plant-based innovation, creating meaningful jobs, re-establishing societal trust, introducing more sustainable agricultures incrementally, staving off the marginalisation and minoritisation of farmers, even linking food production with wiser architectural expression. They dealt with specific cases from urban

gardening to re-adoption of millet, sheep-dipping pollution to audiovisual heritage preservation, international networks for knowledge-sharing, building new narratives that underwrite the sense of community, above all, examining the role museums can play in public understanding of farmers and farming in the broadest sense. Among this treasure trove of offerings, let me choose two, simply as examples, one devoted to animals, the other to food.

Among the tough questions that arise in open-air museum and living history sites is the treatment and fate of animals, in both work and food production. Veterinarian Barb Corson explained how to distinguish welfare and rights, dominance and partnership, provided a scientific basis for evaluating well-being and encouraged us to see interpretation as an ethical process. Kurush Dalal pointed out that, alas, no one “teaches food”. He brings archaeology into today by curating food experiences from periods in the past to create a “foodscape”, emphasizing the scientific methods of culinary anthropology that can help us understand profound changes in diet that affect even religious belief, the health dangers of close animal-human contact, as well as their great advantages (the consumption of dairy products), the impact of the Columbian Exchange that took the tomato around the world and, above all, our responsibility to seek balance in present-day food systems that preserve the livelihood of farmers and the health of the land.

Cozette Griffin-Kremer

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