



A Unique Cultural Exchange

An interview by Jeong ju (Esther) Go, Administrator of Korean Consulate in Mumbai, who is in charge of Public Diplomacy and the Economic sector. She works as a correspondent for the Indian region for the Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (KOFICE)



Dr Rathi Jafer,
Director , InKo Centre

1. Can you introduce your self and about InKo Centre a bit ?

My name is Rathi Jafer and I have been working in the field of Arts and Culture for close to 25 years. My educational background includes a Masters in English Literature from Stella Maris College, Madras University, India and a Ph.D in English Literature from the University of Glasgow, U.K. I have an abiding interest in examining the manner in which arts and cultural exchange facilitate transformation of hearts and minds while ensuring that intercultural dialogue and as a result, goodwill

and understanding, are extended and deepened in a sustainable and meaningful manner.

After a 10 year stint with British Council working to promote projects and strengthen artistic networks in the field of language, literature, Arts and Culture between India and the UK, I took up my current assignment in 2006 as Director of InKo Centre, the Indo-Korean Cultural and Information Centre, to initiate a sustained intercultural dialogue between artistic and cultural networks and stakeholders in India and Korea.

InKo Centre aims to initiate and sustain a robust intercultural dialogue through the access points of the performing and visual arts, language, literature, wellness traditions and through information provision, examining both the local characteristics and the global dimensions that underpin such exchange. For approximately 14 years now, we have initiated various programmes that celebrate the similarities and differences and indeed the unique and shared histories between India and Korea, both ancient yet modern civilisations. InKo Centre was set up in 2006 as a unique enterprise with corporate support for Arts and Cultural exchange. InKo Centre is a registered, non-profit Society, supported primarily by TVS Motor Company, the third largest autobike company in India and Hyundai Motor India Limited, along with a host of Indian and Korean small and medium companies based in India.

We work in close co-operation with the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in New Delhi the Office of the Consulate General in Chennai and Mumbai and the Office of the Honorary Consulate General in Hyderabad. All our programmes are presented with support and in association with relevant local, regional and national partners in India and in Korea.

The Certificate of Merit, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, was awarded to Dr Rathi Jafer on 27 February 2020 by Mr Young Seup Kwon, (right), Consul General of the Republic of Korea in Chennai. Mr Venu Srinivasan (left) is the Goodwill Envoy for Culture and Diplomacy of the Republic of Korea, Chairman TVS Motor Company and Chairman, InKo Centre.



Through InKo Services Pvt. Ltd, we present a range of paid services that include Korean Language teaching, calligraphy, Taekwondo, yoga as well as structured programmes focusing on history, culinary arts, fitness, curated outdoor experiences as well as popular forms of cultural expression such as K-pop and B-boy clubs and Korean Cine clubs. Under the aegis of the King Sejong Institute Foundation and in association with Sangmyung University, Korea, we are a certified Centre that offers the Korean language courses as developed by the the King Sejong Institute Foundation and delivered by native

Korean tutors selected by Sangmyung University, Korea. We are also an appointed Centre to conduct the TOPIK examinations developed by the Ministry of Education, Government of Korea and administered as directed by the Embassy of the Republic of Korea, New Delhi.

For a comprehensive overview of our programmes and services, please visit www.inkocentre.org

2. As an Indian, I wonder how did you come to have interest on Korea. What brought you to work in this specific field ?

Up until 2006, I did not have any opportunity to connect with or discover Korea in an in-depth manner. My professional and academic experience was until then almost wholly preoccupied with exploring potential links between India and the UK. I received a call in 2006 about plans to set up an Indo-Korean Cultural and Information Centre and this led me to introspect on just how much I knew about Korea. I realised that while in school in India, we learn very little about Korean history and despite valuable ancient connections and the more recent burgeoning economic and commercial ties, there were very few manifestations of cultural connections between our two countries. I thought that setting up and sustaining InKo Centre would be a fantastic opportunity to meaningfully and respectfully

discover, engage and connect with Korea with an aim to promote and deepen ties of goodwill, understanding and friendship between India and Korea.

3. What type of projects are you planning for promoting cultural exchange between Korea and India in future ? If you have some lovely planned projects, Please share with us bit.

For 2020-21, we have projects planned across the performing and visual arts planned- Children's Theatre; Music tours; Indo-Korean collaborative projects in Dance; residencies in Literature, Ceramics and Painting; small and large-scale visual art exhibitions across a range of visual art forms, to name just a few.

With the current situation due to the global pandemic, we will introduce a virtual connect wherever possible. This will include e-learning platforms such as online Korean language classes developed by The King Sejong Institute Foundation, presented in association with Sangmyung University, Korea. We are also in the process of planning masterclasses, regular infotainment postings as well as virtual cultural collaborations using relevant digital platforms including social media handles. The current evolving situation will certainly mean finding innovative and inventive ways of working with partners in India and Korea to continue connecting,

even if virtually for a while before we resume work balancing physical tours with virtual excursions!



4. As your perspective, What kinds of things do we need to have for an interactive exchanges between Korea and India? Feel free to share your opinion on it. (Attitude, Government support etc)

We need to more fully and efficiently explore the power of partnership.

This includes the following:

- **Public and private support:** Support funding from government agencies to shore up the cultural sector as a key sector to raise

national well-being and international goodwill and from corporate agencies as a vital corporate social responsibility.

- **Co-operation between Cultural Organisations:** To facilitate effective viable pathways for enhanced co-operation between cultural organisations in both countries whereby plans and strategies could be discussed and shared in a strategic manner in order to enable sharing of resources, including allocation of staff time and budgets for artistic networks in both countries to be strengthened and projects pursued, within an agreed time-bound framework, as effectively as possible.
- **Accurate and regular Information Provision:** Effective and sustained sharing of information in order to stay up to date with the current cultural scenario so that best practices can be celebrated and shared with relevant audiences in both countries. Information will provide impetus to also commission new projects by building on the research or experience that is already available or has been developed in the field.
- **Sustained media coverage:** To provide steady, accurate information to the print, broadcast and online media so that Indo-Korean relations remain proactively visible on a regular basis.