

## Report on The 12<sup>th</sup> ITIHAAS Annual Summit

“चलो चलें” *Learning as we travel*”

**Date: January 29th, 2020**

**Venue: C.D. Deshmukh Auditorium,  
India International Centre, New Delhi.**

The 12<sup>th</sup> Annual ITIHAAS Summit was a success in the broadest sense of the term. It was one of the many events organized by the ITIHAAS to celebrate 15 years of its active contribution in the realm of heritage education and associated skill development.

The Summit began with a wonderful opening address by **Mr. Prashant Gautam**, who also moderated the



first panel. Mr. Prashant is an **Erasmus-Mundus** scholar and an ITIHAAS student. He spoke briefly about ITIHAAS's idea of Annual Summit, which is marked by a different theme that takes it ahead each year. He then went on to talk about “**Vasant Panchami**” which was being celebrated across the country on the day of the event and the colour yellow which is associated with the festival to mark the onset of Spring. He further said that, **ITIHAAS thrives on the collective spirit which is represented by all our stakeholders**; an idea that ITIHAAS embodies by taking heritage education beyond the confines of classrooms to the spaces where our shared culture and traditions thrive.

**Mr. Prashant** then moved ahead and introduced our panellists for the first session. The panel comprised of **Ms. Sadhana Bhalla** ( Principal, Mira Model High School, Janakpuri), **Ms. Veena Goel** (Principal, Apeejay School, Pitampura) and **Ms. Sonia Shamihoke**, who is the headmistress of The Srijan School's Junior Wing. The panel also included **Mr. R. Srinivasan**, who is one of the members of ITIHAAS' Board.

The first session commenced with two students from the Prudence school, Ashok Vihar, namely **Ishaan Gupta** (Grade 8) and **Manya Munjal** (Grade 7), who shared their experiences of the ITIHAAS Learning Modules (ILMs). Ishaan talked about how the ILMs created in him an urge to know more about our shared history. Apart from that, Ishaan with many other students learnt how to respect and honour our rich culture and diverse traditions. Manya talked about how ITIHAAS Walks inculcated in her the secular instincts of accommodating the diverse religious ethos of our country, which she demonstrated by bringing out the commonality of purpose served by a Temple and a Mosque, that is, to pray. She called her experience with ITIHAAS a beautiful one; an amalgamation of all subjects blending into one.



The first amongst the panellists from the first session to talk was **Ms. Veena Goel**, who is the principal of **Apeejay School, Pitampura and an ITIHAAS friend**. She went in retrospect and shared the experience of her first encounter with ITIHAAS. She said that what enchanted her was our idea of learning through excursions as a ‘**unique experience**’.

By comparing the conventional idea of excursions with our idea of ILMs, she called it ‘**a truly experiential learning**’ which the existing curriculum does not pay much heed to. A great form of learning, she called it, that brought every how and why about the heritage sites alive.

Thanking **Ms. Smita Vats** (the founder-director) of ITIHAAS, she further deliberated upon how these walks transformed herself into an **'avid traveller'**. She also talked about how ITIHAAS Modules shaped students' perception of heritage and learning and has a lot more to offer than the redundant rote learning.

Next to speak was **Ms. Sadhana Bhalla, who is an eminent educationist and the principal of Mira Model School, Janakpuri**. She started with a brief story of her childhood experience as a traveller with her mother who was also a teacher. She continued and went on to say that being a History graduate, she learned more history with ITIHAAS than anybody else because there was a connection that filled up the missing dots of the classroom-confined academic history. She also said that, **"learning happens only with unfamiliar and uncomfortable spaces"** and that **"we stop seeing things the way we need to when we become complacent"**. She further emphasized on the importance of



**"Heritage Quotient"** along with the Emotional Quotient and stressed on the need to envision a space within the school premises where we move beyond the strictures of books towards a more experiential learning .

Ms. Sadhana Bhalla passed on the microphone to **Ms. Sonia Shamihoke, who is the headmistress of the Junior Wing at The Srijan School**. Ms. Shamihoke began by saying that "I am envious of these children because when I was a school kid we did not have any ITIHAAS Walks". She emphasized on the **emotional connect children develop with the monument** when they go on ILMs (ITIHAAS Learning Modules) and how they tend to remember every detail of a certain walk, informative or otherwise. **The ILMs bring to life the history of monuments to the students**, added the speaker.

The first session was concluded with the rich and insightful thoughts of **Mr. R. Srinivasan, who is the co-founder of Career Launcher and currently one of the members of the ITIHAAS' Board**. Mr. Srinivasan

began by asking a question that, "what percentage of your learning that you are applying in your life has been from within the classroom and what percentage is from outside the classroom?" "The greatest school in the world is travel" added Mr. Srinivasan, quoting an author.

**The session ended on a good note with a tea break which was followed by the felicitation of the Mira Model School, the Apeejay School, the Srijan School, Prudence School (Ashok Vihar), and the Shikshantar School, with the certificates of partnership. We also screened a short film right before the commencement of the second session.**

The second session commenced with **Anya Aggarwal (Grade 5)** and **Rizwan (Grade 5)** of the Shikshantar School sharing their experience of the ILMs. Anya spoke briefly and yet beautifully about the history of Agra city and the monuments it has. Anya's favourite monument from Agra remains the Tomb of Itmad-ud-Daulah primarily because it exhibits 'feminine power' as it was built by Nur Jahan to bury her parents.

**The second panel took the discussion forward from the earlier panel into the realm of responsible and sustainable tourism and skill development amongst young people.**

The second session was moderated by **Ms. Smita Vats, who is the Founder-Director of ITIHAAS**. Before leaving the panel open for discussion, Ms. Vats spoke about the inseparability of travel and education. She said that it is the children who drive most of the parental decisions and the need



to have more sensitized, responsible and more aware young travellers who will educate the adults as well. Not denying the travel sensibilities of adults but emphasizing on the fact that children drive those choices. She further added that, **'we are hoping that the kind of heritage sensitization that schools are doing with ITIHAAS or without is creating an ecosystem where young people are becoming informed'**.

From amongst the panellists of the second session, the first to speak was **Mr. Gaurav Gogoi, who is the Member of Paliament (Lok Sabha) from Kaliabor, Assam.**

Appreciating the work that ITIHAAS is doing with the schools, Mr. Gogoi said that one's travel sensibilities are guided by one's family **but in a school trip one gets exposed to a different kind of travel experience; which apart from being recreational is also informative and experiential and those are the key attributes one could develop as a young traveller.** Further he added that when in future these young travellers become decision-makers it will have a huge impact as far as the dynamics of travel-education is concerned.

Ms. Smita Vats spoke briefly about how the word **'guide'** has come to acquire negative connotations over the years and suggested a new and emancipatory euphemism for them as 'heritage ambassadors'. She further said **that these guides either comprise of the scholars who are not good story-tellers or story-tellers with inadequate knowledge. Knowledge, she added, is tied up with the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to their 'fantastic Ph.Ds' and the need to cull out that information to make it relevant to the public.**

Next to speak was **Mr. Arunkumar Pillai, who is currently the Chief Strategy Officer at the NSDC.** Mr. Pillai opened up his narrative with a brief discussion about the NSDC and its association with ITIHAAS. He spoke about the **"Competency-based Short Term Skill Training"** where the NSDC enables the candidates to earn their livelihood. He also talked about **N.E.E.T (Not in Education, Employment or Training)**, a segment of NSDC that adds up around 7 million people to the stock of 250 million annually to train them on short term basis through a set framework called **National Skills Qualification Framework.** He also talked about the NSDC's association with ITIHAAS.

Next to share his experience with us was **Mr. Deep Kalra, who is the Founder and Group CEO of MakeMyTrip Limited.** Mr. Kalra started with a question by asking "how many of us learnt something new when the young Rizwan and Anya were speaking about Agra?" He saw it as a proof that the way **young minds absorb information while travelling is like a sponge** in contrast to the adult minds which tend to lose the track because of various tensions we get caught up in as we grow up. This makes clear the fact that we can make a huge impact if we get more and more young minds to learn through travel, added the speaker. He further said that he couldn't agree more with ITIHAAS's core idea that **'change is going to come through only with the youth'.**

He added that the change is happen at two levels; one being the young tourists and their encounters with 'heritage and history' and the resultant absorption and recounting of stories they discover. Another level witnessing the change is that of the **'tourist guides'**, added Mr. Kalra. Calling it a **'dying art'**, he said that, **"it is only in India where the word guide is not given the importance it actually deserves"**. He also said that what ITIHAAS does in collaboration with NSDC is going to shift the narrative and the way people tell these stories.

*The day long Summit concluded with a brilliant musical performance by Ms. Saba Azad, who is a professional singer from Bombay.*

The first song she sang is written by the 13<sup>th</sup> century poet **Amir Khusrao** which describes the **'bloom of Basant'**, as Saba put it. Another song that followed is written by the 15<sup>th</sup> century poet Kabir Das called **'Saadhu Dekho Jag Baurana'**. The last song she sang is a very famous poem by 20<sup>th</sup> century poet from Pakistan named **Faiz Ahmad Faiz** titled **'Wa Yabqa Wajh'u Rabbuk'** commonly known as **'Hum Dekhenge'**. With her soulful and rejuvenating voice Ms. Saba brought the Summit to a beautiful conclusion.

