



In New York, brainstorming about saving Hindi

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Conclaves about culture often lean towards self-congratulation and lamentations about insufficient interest being focused on the organizers' topic of interest. Not at the International Regional Hindi Conference, held in New York April 25-27, and organized by the Indian consulate along with the Yuva Hindi Sansthan and New York University.

The event's chief coordinator Sugandh Rajaram described what the conference hoped to work towards: The need to promote Hindi in the United States, to get the second generation to learn the language spoken by a plurality of Indians, and to marry technology with language learning to keep education current and relevant.

Dnyaneshwar Mulay, India's consul general in New York, spoke of how Hindi could be a unifying factor for the community if it was not just the government promoting it. He argued for small efforts that could lead to bigger things, saying that if people started with a Gangotri (the origin of the river Ganga) they would end up at the ocean.

Surendra Gambhir of the University of Pennsylvania used a Venn diagram to describe the overlapping fiefs of business, technology and culture, and spoke of the need for a common identity. Speaking of the need for pride, he described a failed effort by Congressman Washington McCormick in 1923 to officially change the name of the language spoken in the US to 'American' to 'supplement the political emancipation of '76 by the mental emancipation of '23.'

He said that the desire to learn was weak, with just 10 percent of parents whose native language was Hindi actively pushing for the children to learn the language of their forebears. The distilled argument of the 30 percent of parents who showed no interest in getting their children to

study Hindi apparently was: 'This is America. We have left Hindi in India.'

Gambhir said even restaurants could promote a culture, pointing out that most Chinese restaurants included a Hanzhi script on their menu, while Indian restaurants did not.

Gambhir wound up by quoting Mahatma Gandhi when he spoke of keeping his doors and windows open to let in other cultural viewpoints. But if there were no barricades on those portals to the cultural soul, one could also end up being robbed, Gambhir said.

Herman von Olphen, professor emeritus at the University of Texas, Austin, spoke of how, despite the 649,000 native speakers of the language in the US, there were only 3,000 students of Hindi, while there were 17,000 each for Italian and Japanese.

Rajaram described how the conference was an effort to bridge the long gaps between global Hindi conferences. This regional conference aimed to find out the modus operandi of the Chinese and other promoters of their own languages.

If the conference was less sentimental than others of its kind, Dr Rupert Snell, director of the Hindi Urdu Flagship Program at the University of Texas at Austin, was particularly matter of fact.

Speaking in what to the untrained ear was accentless Hindi, Snell said making Hindi a language at the United Nations was but a symbolic gesture and that international conferences could just distract from the real work involved



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Surendra Gambhir of the University of Pennsylvania at the event.

in keeping Hindi alive.

Snell spoke of how a literary figure at a conference in 1983 in India stormed out of a conference, shouting '*Hindi ka asli kaam mein karta hoon*.' ('I do the real work in Hindi').

Snell played a recording of a recitation of a poem, *Asadhya Veena*, by its writer Vatsyayan Agyey, to put forth in clear terms what rich use of language and sound could convey.

Snell also spoke of the linguistic cognates between Hindi and other languages — a connection he later said his students find particularly fascinating.

Michael Shapiro of the University of Washington described pedagogical methods in teaching Hindi, describing both how immersion in the isolated Indian culture in the 1960s forced him to learn the local language, and how he was ill-prepared to deal with teaching the language back in the US. Tracing the

history of Hindi education, he described how World War II stimulated efforts to learn Hindi (as evident in Spoken Hindustani).

One round table at the conference included one that discussed the need to promote Hindi as a heritage language for the Diaspora, another addressed pedagogical methods, and a third, the use of Hindi in mass media in India.

At a separate panel, Gambhir and others discussed the need for a Hindi center in the US.

Phil Lutgendorf of the University of Iowa also discussed ways to promote communication, entertainment and education in the language.

Seven honored for cancer research

A CORRESPONDENT

The Society of Asian American Scientists in Cancer Research last month presented awards to seven doctors for their outstanding contributions to cancer research.

The awards were presented by Dr Rajvir Dahiya, the SAASCR president, in San Diego, California, April 6.

Dahiya, a professor and director of the Urology Research Center at the University of California San Francisco School of Medicine and the San Francisco Veterans Affairs Medical Center since 1987, founded the SAASCR along with Dr Dharam Paul Chauhan in 2004. The nonprofit SAASCR has more than 5,000 scientists from Asia, mainly of Indian origin, and working in the United States and Canada in cancer research.

The scientists who were honored presented their original research work at the meeting of the American Association for Cancer Research in San Diego, April 5-9.

Dr **Sanjay Gupta** is the Carter Kissell Endowed Chair in urologic oncology, and research director, Department of Urology,



From left, Dr Sanjay Gupta, Dr Addanki Pratap Kumar, Dr Rajvir Dahiya, Dr Pinku Mukherjee, Dr Dharam Paul Chauhan, Dr Nihal Ahmad, Dr Eri Srivatsan, Dr Rajeev Kumar Agarwal, Panna Sharma and Dr Anil Kumar Jaiswal.

Case Western Reserve University, and The Urology Institute, University Hospitals Case Medical Center.

His research involves basic, translational and clinical areas of focus. In basic research his focus is to understand the risk factors

and mechanisms of prostatic and bladder diseases and develop appropriate biomarkers for early detection and prognosis. Translational research focus is to identify novel targets to monitor the efficacy of synthetic and natural agents and develop them

as chemo preventatives/ therapeutics. His clinical research interests are translation of bench research to its application in clinics.

Dr **Addanki Pratap Kumar** is professor, Department of Urology with cross appointment in the Departments of Pharmacology and Molecular Medicine, School of Medicine, University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio. He is also co-leader of the cancer prevention program of the NCI designated Cancer Therapy and Research Center, and a research health scientist at South Texas Veterans Health Care System, San Antonio, Texas.

A seminal discovery from his laboratory regarding the ability of a bark extract to prevent prostate tumor development in pre-clinical animal model led to clinical trial to test the ability of the extract to potentiate radiation and surgery regimens for prostate cancer patients. Recent research findings published in *Clinical Cancer Research* showed the ability of this extract for pancreatic cancer management.