

India Platform UGent - Newsletter 1 January 2010

This newsletter gives an overview of the activities of the first year of the India Platform UGent and also mentions some of the future prospects. The information has been kept very concise. In case you are interested in one of the projects, you can find more information through the internet links that are provided.

Launch event: In October 2008, the India Platform UGent was launched in the presence of more than 150 international academic, administrative and business representatives. A panel consisting of *Baron Ajit Shetty* (Janssen Pharmaceutica, Johnson & Johnson); *Dr. Shankara Prasad* (Inkroma e-Business Solutions) and *Prof. Dr. S.N. Balagangadhara* (Director, India Platform UGent) inaugurated the Platform with a debate titled: "Collaboration between Europe and India: Is Cultural Difference a Barrier?" During the launch event, we also explained the objectives of the India Platform and presented the existing Ghent University collaborations with Indian partners.



*UGent Rector Prof. Van
Cauwenberge and Gulbarga
University Vice-Chancellor Mulimani*

State visit to India: A month later, during the Belgian state visit of King Albert II to India, the India Platform organized the signing of Memoranda of Understanding with five Indian universities. The result was the expansion of an existing consortium of universities in Karnataka and Europe, which provides the foundation for an innovative collaborative project in India: the Academy of Social Sciences and Humanities (ĀSHA).

Academy of Social Sciences and Humanities (ĀSHA): The aim of the Academy is threefold: (1) it will renew the social sciences and humanities curricula in Karnataka by training teachers and students in cutting-edge research and education including the most recent debates in different disciplines, by creating new syllabi and by involving prominent international scholars in the development of new curricula; (2) it will introduce social science modules in the engineering colleges of Karnataka; and (3) it will replicate the same steps in other states of India. ĀSHA was officially inaugurated in August 2008 by the Karnataka Chief Minister and will now develop further with the support of the Government of Karnataka and the Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR). To acquire the necessary structural support on a national level, the first steps have been taken in negotiations with the Government of India (for more information on ĀSHA, see www.asha-academy.org).



*Karnataka Chief Minister
Yedyurappa and Kuvempu
University Vice-Chancellor Prof.
Sherigara*

Rethinking Religion in India: In the domain of the study of culture and religion, the India Platform is one of the organizers of the five-year conference cluster “Rethinking Religion in India,” which aims at introducing contemporary theoretical debates on the study of Indian culture and religion into the Indian academic world. The second edition, entitled “Rethinking Secularism,” took place in Delhi in January



Rethinking Religion in India

2009. With about 200 participants from all over the world, the three-day conference initiated important debates on the viability of secularism in India (for more information on the conference cluster: see www.rethinkingreligion.org). In January 2010, Routledge published an edited volume resulting from the first conference: *Rethinking Religion in India: the Colonial Construction of Hinduism* (see <http://www.routledge.com/books/Rethinking-Religion-in-India-isbn9780415548908>).



UGent Prof. Bultinck at IIT Kharagpur

Development of India Policy: One of the tasks of the India Platform is the development of a new India Policy for Ghent University and other European universities. This policy should answer the question how Europe and the European academic world can successfully relate to India in the 21st century. What kind of stance should European institutions take, now that the colonial relationship or the “development cooperation” of the past are no longer viable? The first set of answers to this question took the form of a Policy Note (see <http://www.india-platform.org/download/India%20Policy%20Note%200906.pdf>). Within the framework of this policy, the Platform is promoting collaboration with Indian institutions as research partners par excellence. More than ten agreements with Indian institutes of higher education have been signed since the beginning of the Platform and several more are pending. Several newspaper articles related to these aspects of the Platform have been published in Belgium and India, in some of the main newspapers such as *Times of India* (see www.india-platform.org, under “press”).

Collaboration with the business community: An India Platform team is developing training modules for European managers and organizations working in India and Indian managers working in Europe. The modules aim to help participants gain insight into the cultural differences that Europeans experience when they are confronted with Indian modes of management, leadership and organization and vice versa. Currently in the early stages of development, the training modules consist of realistic and recognizable situations, in which the available research results on the relationship between culture and management are operationalised and tested.

Prospects: In 2010, the India Platform will involve more partners in Flanders, Belgium and Europe in its activities and projects. One of the long-term objectives of the Platform is to act as a hub of expertise on India in Europe, and this objective can only be achieved by bringing together the expertise present in several institutions in Europe. Therefore, we are currently preparing the following projects:

- The International Masters programme in the “Comparative Study of Cultures,” which will focus on the cultural differences between contemporary Europe and India. The Masters programme will involve partners from the Czech Republic (the University of Pardubice), the UK (Queen Mary University of London), Estonia (University of Tartu) and India (Kuvempu University) and will apply for funding under the Erasmus Mundus scheme of the European Union.
- A large-scale research project involving the same partners – *Europe, India and the Comparative Science of Cultures* – is currently in the stage of applying for funding.
- With support of the European Union, a vision document is also being developed on the nature of Higher Education in the 21st century, in relation to the current state of universities in Europe and India.



University of Pardubice

For all information on the activities and projects related to the India Platform, please visit the portal site: <http://www.cultuurwetenschap.be>. We hope you enjoyed this newsletter and look forward to providing news on our future activities.

The India Platform Coordinating Team.