

# Compromise and continuity is the essence of Indian culture: Jawhar Sircar

By **Shobhan Saxena** - March 1, 2016

To an outsider, India is a puzzle. At least that's how it looks like. So many languages, so many religions and so many gods and goddesses. It's not easy to make to make sense of the multiplicity that India offers in terms of culture. What makes it more intriguing is the fact that this culture has continued to exist for more than 5,000 years. How can a people – and culture – that is so diverse can remain in existence for such a long time? That's one question often asked about India.

Even in Brazil, which itself is quite diverse in racial and cultural terms, they look at India with a mix of fascination and amazement. A large number of ordinary Brazilians got a glimpse of India through a popular telenovela *Caminho das Índias* (Passage to India), which was telecast a few years ago. A mix of a melodramatic story and some stereotypical characters set in India and Brazil, the soap opera brought Indian culture, music and dance to the Brazilian living rooms. Though it generated a lot of curiosity about India, the soap didn't answer all the questions. The India lovers in Brazil have continued to look for answers to their questions, especially about diversity in India.

Last week, a large number of Brazilians gathered in the auditorium of the Indian Cultural Centre in Sao Paulo in the hope of getting answers to their queries. The occasion was a talk on "The continuity of Indian culture for more than 5000 years" by Jawhar Sircar, CEO of Prasar Bharti or the public broadcasting commission of India that runs all public radio and TV channels. A civil servant with background in social anthropology and culture, Sircar started his lecture by taking the audience back to 5,000 years ago – days of the Indus Valley Civilization – the first urban civilization in the world which had planned cities, roads, drainage system, big public baths and granaries. Then he raised a pertinent question: what's the link between the "people who lived in that civilization" and the inhabitants of present-day India?

It's a question that has puzzled historians and linguists for decades. But that was not the objective of the talk. "There are enough evidence in terms of language, artefacts and architecture that show a link between Indus Valley Civilization and us," said Sircar, connecting the dots between the past and present.

To make the link between the times gone by and the present days, Sircar took the audience, by now gripped with his lecture, on a journey that started in the Indus Valley and then moved on to the arrival of the Aryan-speaking people to India, followed by the Vedic Age and Buddhism, Mauryan period and finally the arrival of Islam, Christianity and the British. "India has been a coveted land. Since ancient times, people have come here through invitation, invasion or migration," said Sircar, pointing



out how people from different linguistic groups and cultural practices made India their home throughout the history of the country.

This synthesis of languages and cultures, said Sircar, became possible because of one running thread in India: compromise. "Instead of conflicting with each other or fighting over small things, they realized that there was room for everyone. 'You exist and I exist as well' became the philosophy of the people who learned to live together," said Sircar, explaining. "It's because of this compromise that the Indian culture has continued for such a long time," said Sircar, juxtaposing India with China, which is much more homogeneous in terms of its ethnic composition, languages and religion. "In India, when Emperor Ashoka was spreading his message in many languages some 300 years BC, his Chinese counterpart was working on creating a homogeneous country," said the CEO of Prasar Bharti.

With his lecture, peppered with stories, anecdotes, witty quotes and literary remarks, the Indian cultural czar explained to the audience, a mix of Brazilians and members of Indian community, the essence of Indian culture and the reasons for its continuity.



With a thunderstorm blowing over the city, the talk ended with a huge applause for Sircar. As the audience moved from the auditorium to another hall, the discussion about Indian culture



continued over cocktails as small groups of persons surrounded Sircar to ask more questions about his talk.

Earlier in the evening the Indian Consul General in Sao

Paulo Abhilasha Joshi welcomed Sircar at the ICC. After the talk, the ICC director Minakshi Mishra thanked the Prasar Bharti CEO for his lecture.

Photos (from top):

1. Jawhar Sircar, the Prasar Bharti CEO, speaking at the ICC in Sao Paulo
2. Sircar being welcomed by Abhilaha Joshi (right) and Minakshi Mishra at the ICC.
3. Minakshi Mishra with members of the audience
4. Sircar and Abhilasha Joshi with members of Indian community, diplomats and Brazilian scholars.