

SPIRITUAL MISSION:
Pujya Muniji addresses
the conference

Three-pronged effort to save the Himalayas

A THREE-DAY conference focusing on saving the Himalayas through science and spirituality took place last week.

Organised by the Save the Himalayas Foundation (SHF), the programme was opened by SHF executive board member Dr John Mobley.

He shared SHF's three-pronged mission – to promote water conservation, renewable energy and solar power and sustainable and responsible tourism.

Ven Bhikkhu Sanghasena, founder of

the Mahabodhi International Meditation Centre, headed the organisation of the conference in Ladakh. He said he was grateful to spiritual leader HH Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji (Pujya Muniji), "who has been a lover and supporter of all things environment, education and world peace".

"The presence of so many eminent leaders here illustrate that the Himalayas is important for everyone, from spiritual leaders, scholars, scientists, to everyone,"

he said. "I am certain that together we can do our part to abate the challenges and hardships this region faces. The challenges ... not only impact the natives but also truly impact the world because the Himalayas are the carbon sink and water towers of the world."

During the conference, there was a call to make Himalaya Day an International day by the UN and commitments by several local organisations to carry out efforts to support the mission.

Empire play wins award

TANIKA GUPTA'S 'ROUSING WORK' BASED ON LETTERS FROM IMPRISONED UNCLE

by AMIT ROY

LONDON-BASED Tanika Gupta has been named winner of the £10,000 James Tait Black Prize for Drama for her play, *Lions and Tigers*, based on letters written by her great-uncle from prison.

Dinesh Gupta was hanged in 1931 in Calcutta for his part in the assassination of a senior officer of the Raj, but wrote several political letters from his prison cell in the weeks preceding his execution.

These came down through the family and ended up with Tanika, who used them as source material for her prize-winning play.

There were three other plays on the shortlist, and it was announced that she had won the prestigious prize in Edinburgh last Monday (20). The chairman of the judging panel, Greg Walker, Regius professor of rhetoric and English literature at Edinburgh University said: "Tanika Gupta's epic drama pushes the boundaries of verbatim theatre, telling an important story in a fresh and authentic way never seen on stage before. It is a rousing piece of work that was a worthy winner for this year's James Tait Black Prize for Drama."

At the prize-giving ceremony at Edinburgh's Traverse Theatre, Fiona Sturgeon Shea, one of the other judges and creative director of the Playwrights' Studio, Scotland, said: "Tanika Gupta's play, *Lions and Tigers*, brings vividly to life a fascinating historical period with a warmth and power that is extraordinarily moving."

The judging panel featured students and academics from Edinburgh University, representatives from the Traverse Theatre, Playwrights' Studio, Scotland, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Schaubühne Theatre, Berlin, and a freelance theatre director.

The drama award was launched in 2012, when Britain's oldest literary awards – the James Tait Black Prizes dating back to 1919 for fiction and for biography – were extended to include a category to celebrate innovative playwriting.

Tanika was born steeped in the arts. Her mother, Gairika Gupta, and her late husband, Tapan Gupta, set up the Tagoreans, a society aimed at spreading the best of Bengali culture after the couple arrived in London from Calcutta (now Kolkata) in 1961.

Born in Chiswick, west London, in 1963, Tanika read modern history at Oxford and eventually became a playwright. She found rich material in her great-uncle's life as a freedom fighter.

Dinesh Chandra Gupta, the youngest brother of Tanika's paternal grandfather, Dr Prithvi Gupta, was only 19 when he went to the gallows at Alipore Central Jail on July 7, 1931, for the assassination of Colonel NS Simpson, the inspector-general of prisons, inside the Writers' Building in Calcutta.

He was born on December 6, 1911, in the village of Josholong in Munshiganj district, now in Bangladesh. While he was studying in Dhaka College, Dinesh joined the Bengal Volunteers, a group set up by Subhas Chandra Bose in 1928 at the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress.

Soon the Bengal Volunteers transformed itself to a more active revolutionary association and planned to kill British officers known to have tortured Indian prisoners.



DRAMA IN REAL LIFE: (From left) Edinburgh University principal Prof Peter Mathieson, Tanika Gupta, and TV and radio host Shreen Nanjiani; and (below) a scene from *Lions and Tigers*

High on the hit list, said Tanika, was a man called "Tegart, who was the chief commissioner of police".

On December 8, 1930, Dinesh, accompanied by two associates, Benoy Basu and Badal Gupta, slipped into the Writers' Building dressed in European clothes. But the man they shot was Colonel Simpson.

"It was the wrong man – he was a reformer," said Tanika. "It was a botched job." Cornered by police, the three were determined not to be taken alive.

Badal swallowed potassium cyanide, while Benoy and Dinesh shot themselves with their own revolvers. Benoy was taken to the hospital and died five days later.

Dinesh, however, survived, was put on trial and sentenced to death for anti-government activities and murder. Following independence, Dalhousie Square in Calcutta was eventually renamed BBD Bagh after the Benoy-Badal-Dinesh trio.

While awaiting execution, Dinesh wrote "beautifully eloquent letters to his family" from his prison cell on the heroism of the revolutionaries and his belief in the greatness of self-sacrifice.

Her play premiered in August 2017 at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, as part of Shakespeare's Globe's Festival of Independence.

"My family is proud of him," said Tanika.



THRILL: Meera Syal

Meera: In praise of family values

GOODNESS GRACIOUS ME star Meera Syal has revealed that her parents have moved in with her.

Surendra and Surrinder, who are in their 80s, live at the home she shares with actor husband Sanjeev Bhaskar.

The actress, 57, said: "It's built into our DNA, really. When you're looking for a house you say to yourself, 'which room are the parents going to live in?'"

"That's the way we were brought up and increasingly I'm finding many English friends are living that way too. I'm not saying it's easy, but there are wonderful advantages."

"For my kids to have continual access to their grandparents is lovely. And it gives you freedom," Syal added.

"We've not had to worry about babysitting. You can say, 'I fancy seeing a film tonight' and you can. It's amazing."

Great cause for North Run

A STUDENT is taking on the Great North Run next weekend to raise funds for cancer research in memory of his grandmother.

Ashok Choudhary, who is studying media communications in global development at the University of East London, will be running the half marathon next Sunday (9) to raise money for the Institute of Cancer Research (ICR) in London.

Choudhary said: "When visiting my cousin at work, a radio-oncologist in India, I saw the pain cancer causes. We have felt it in our family too, with my grandmother."

"I wanted to raise money for cancer research as my contribution to improving lives for cancer patients."

"It is hard for anyone to see their loved ones suffering. The money I raise will help the ICR to do more research for a cure and find better treatments for patients."

■ Visit www.justgiving.com/fundraising/ashokchoudhary to donate.