



01 January 2024

## **Blog Special: Know the Pioneers – I: An Ode to the Origin and the Knowledge Tradition: The SIS Faculty Wall of Honour**



**By Prof. (Dr.) Bharat H. Desai**

On December 27, 2023, the School of International Studies (SIS) of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) witnessed the [unveiling of the 'Wall of Honour'](#) as an ode to all the former faculty members. The SIS alumna and JNU V-C, Santishree D. Pandit and the SIS Dean, Srikant Kondapalli, joined the faculty on this historic moment. Resembling an 'art gallery', the Wall of Honor comprises photo portraits (arranged superannuation year wise) of some 120 faculty members who build the edifice of ISIS (Indian School of International Studies) and its successor – SIS – as the pioneering institution for International Studies in India. It became a touching moment to look back at the past journey of SIS from its ISIS days to look ahead into the future. The ISIS was established as a registered society on October 03, 1955 by the [Indian Council of World Affairs](#) (ICWA). In the wake of the 68 years long journey, the School has shifted base from Sapru House (1955-1968) to 35 Firozshah Road (1968-1970) to JNU Old Campus (1970-1989) and, finally, to the current location (since 1989) in JNU New Campus.



**THE ORIGIN**

Indian School of International Studies: Sapru House, New Delhi; 03 October 1955

## The Wall of Honour: Mandate and Motivation

On the basis of the proposal mooted by this author on April 19, 2023, the School's Committee of Advanced Study (CASR) gave him a mandate to design and install the *SIS Faculty Wall of Honour*. It was reaffirmed in CASR decision of August 25, 2023 thus: "the Committee requested Prof. Bharat H Desai to take lead in the matter and authorized him...for establishment of 'Wall of Honour' in physical mode".

As indicated in this author's concept note (August 25, 2023), the *rai-son d'être* for the Faculty Wall of Honour is to: "collectively help the School to have a *Wall of Honour* to memorialise all the past faculty members whose contributions have made the SIS. In fact, all of us stand on the shoulders of those who sow the seeds and did the groundwork to the best of their abilities. By honouring these past SIS faculty members, the School would honour itself. As a pioneer of international studies in India, we need to continue the legacy of resolute scholarship, consistent traditions and empathy".

In the course of my interactions, several colleagues sought 'exclusion' of some from the Wall of Honour on the ground that "so and so did this" (in appointments, promotions, refusal to permit leave, not allowing foreign visits, use of false inquiries or use of students as targets etc.). This author has also personally suffered deep scars caused by some of the SIS colleagues. Notwithstanding all, since we can't undo the past, the author reasoned that such people were only humans (not infallible). It matters that one survives and is still able to make scholarly contribution. It's a professional hazard faced by all the teachers especially those who do not take vocation as a mundane job (to earn money). In a pioneering institution for International Studies in India, it made great sense to put into place an institutionalized positivity, a source of inspiration and a healing process. Hence, it was a fitting tribute to have the 'living' scholarly gallery that displays a photo, duration (years of joining and leaving) and one-line specialization of *every* former faculty member of SIS (and some from the ISIS) to be on the *Wall of Honour*. Due to lack of tradition to keep complete faculty records, this author faced a big challenge to procure even a photo and duration of many of the former faculty members.

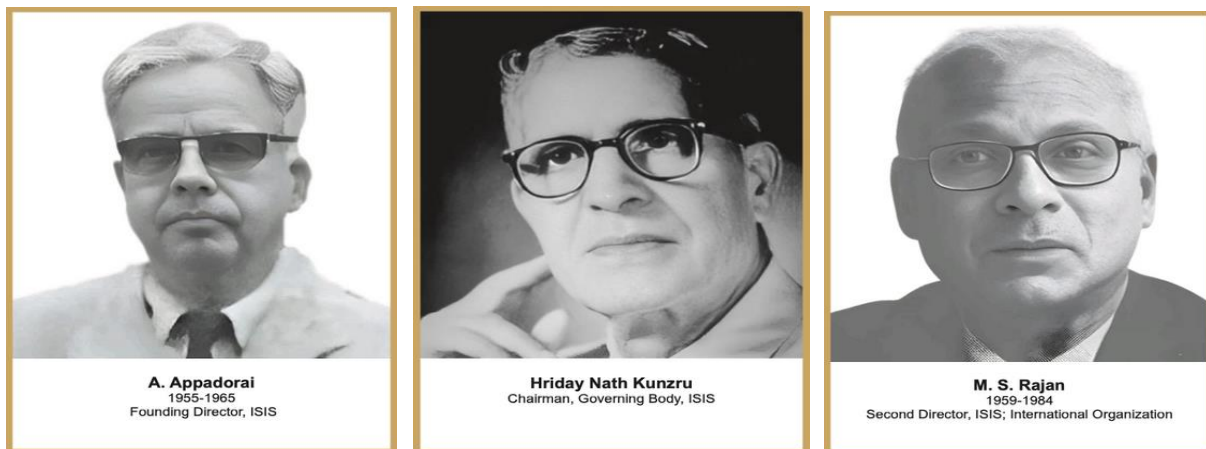


A Glimpse of a Section of the SIS Faculty Wall of Honour: 27<sup>th</sup> December 2023

In a similar ideational initiative, the author was engaged in SIS ‘visibility’ initiative during 2008-2013. It comprised an arduous process that gave shape to the idea by curating 46 monthly faculty meetings over a period of full 5 years – [Making SIS Visible \(2008-2013\)](#). Hence, after a gap of 10 years (2013-2023), it made great sense to once again conceive and design the [SIS Faculty Wall of Honour](#). It is a sequel and in the footsteps of the spirit of [Making SIS Visible](#). Hopefully, the Wall of Honour would sensitise the SIS community about the pioneering foundational objectives, impeccable credentials, legacy and contribution made by a galaxy of scholars over a period of 68 years. As this author explained in his remarks (on December 27, 2023 unveiling), the *SIS Wall of Honour* is a result of that powerful logic and ‘audacity of hope’ for a bright future for the author’s own home turf – the SIS. In effect, it became an ode to the land - भूमि; भूः - of SIS.

### From ISIS to SIS: Merger with JNU

In the wake of the pioneering experiment for the “objective study of international affairs in India”, it was proposed in 1951 to start a School of International Studies (SIS) for post-graduate research. A committee comprising Pandit Hriday Nath Kunzru, G.S. Mahajani, D.R. Gadgil, N.V.Gadgil, K.M.Panikkar, B.C. Ghose and A. Appadorai was set up to examine the proposal. The Committee’s recommendations were considered by the ICWA’s executive committee.



They were duly processed by the University of Delhi (DU), Ministry of Education and University Grants Commission. It was approved by DU in March 1955 and “admitted the School to the privileges of the University for the purpose of preparing students for the Ph.D. degree”. As a corollary, the pioneering effort for the ISIS became a reality upon its registration as a “society” (under the Societies Registration Act of 1860). The idea, the process and the vehicle used were unique at the time. The then Vice-President of India, S. Radhakrishnan inaugurated the ISIS on October 3, 1955. In September 1961, the Union Government granted ISIS the status of a “deemed to be a University” under the UGC Act 1956. Once again, the status of the School changed when it had to merge, in 1970, with the newly established JNU.

A futuristic approach could be seen in the rigorously designed original structure that enabled the ISIS to generate outstanding pioneers. Some contours of it can be visible even today in the successor SIS. In a three-year Ph.D. program, the students were to be given instruction in the first year in courses as follows: (1) International Organization (2) International Law (3) History and institutions of one of the regions: East Asia; Southeast Asia; South Asia; West

Asia; United States (4) One language of the selected region for study (5 & 6) Two of the following: Geography; International Economics, International Relations (20th century at the time); Modern Indian History. In the second year, it was followed by preliminary work on the subject selected for thesis. Finally, the third year was to be devoted for completion of the Ph.D. thesis. Apart from study of the language specific to an area study, a field trip was an integral part of the doctoral program. This ISIS tradition for a field trip was carried forward for decades by SIS (when ISIS merged with JNU in 1970) till the funding support dried up. This author vividly recalls the story told by his supervisor (Rahmatullah Khan who joined ISIS in 1965) about (Khan's) voyage on board a ship (duly facilitated by Khan's doctoral supervisor Nagendra Singh, ISIS visiting professor and then Director-General of Shipping) to New York for a field trip to the UN headquarters.

Since, as an academic discipline, International Studies was new in India and due to paucity of expertise to teach the subjects, ISIS reached out to the best scholars abroad by inviting them for short durations as much as possible. This author learned from his second teacher R.P. Anand (who joined the ISIS as Reader in International Law on October 14, 1965) that the School approached the Ford Foundation (FF) to procure a grant for various purposes including sponsoring the experts for teaching ISIS courses. In July 1955, the FF provided to ISIS an initial four-year grant of US \$ 200, 000. Initially, it comprised International Law and then expanded to cover other areas of the ISIS. Therefore, some of the early expert visits (1959-60) comprised International Law scholars such as Quincy Wright (Chicago); Percy Corbett (Princeton); Myres MacDougal (Yale); Julius Stone (Sydney) as well as J.D.B. Miller (Leicester); Morris-Jones (Durham); D.F. Fleming (Vanderbilt); Max Lerner (Brandeis) etc. As one of the lasting legacies of these scholarly visits to ISIS, the visit of Julius Stone (Sydney) led to introduction of the course on: *Legal Controls of International Conflict*. For many years, this author has been teaching the said MA (IS 455 N) Core Course that draws exact title from Julius Stone's 1959 classic text: *Legal Controls of International Conflict* (London: Stevens & Sons). After a year-long (2023) effort, this author has obtained a copy of the famous Quincy Wright report comprising a blueprint for the expansion of ISIS. It will be addressed in the subsequent Blog Special article.

### **SIS: A Unique Knowledge Tradition**

In this SIS Blog Special article, the author has sought to provide a bird's eye-view of the early pioneering effort in the launch of ISIS. From its origin (the *Gangotri*) at Sapru House, the ISIS and its successor SIS have continued the unique tradition that has generated scores of outstanding scholars and institutionalized the knowledge architecture to address the challenges of international affairs for India and the world at large (especially through an Indian lens). The imprint of SIS (since 1970 merger with JNU) can be seen in numerous scholars who now head and run International Law and International Relations programs both in the public and private Indian Universities. It provides the best example as to how this least-cost efficient SIS scholarly tradition has produced, among others, scholars, diplomats, civil servants, strategic experts and the decision-makers in government (including the current External Affairs Minister and a former MoS for External Affairs). The *Wall of Honour*, in effect, celebrates this unique Indian knowledge tradition in International Studies.





*The Celebration Moment: Unveiling Day of the SIS Faculty Wall of Honour*

The said quest for knowledge propelled this author to undertake an audacious mission to give effect to the adage 'charity begins at home' as well as for walking-the-talk (the *Sabarmati Effect* on whose banks he grew up). It seeks to translate into action – at least on the home front of SIS – the essence and spirit of Sanskrit adage: विद्वान् सर्वत्र पूज्यते (learned are worshipped, everywhere). This author ensured that 'lighting the lamp' of knowledge at the unveiling ceremony on December 27, 2023 is done by women (Santishree Pandit, the VC as SIS alumna as well as an assistant professor, a student and a staff member).



*JNU V-C Santishree D. Pandit with the author at the unveiling ceremony on 27th Dec. 2023*

It also gave a powerful symbolic effect to JNU's new (2023) motto: तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय (darkness unto light). The very idea has resuscitated the life-time contributions of scholars of yesteryears by invoked their spirit, energy and legacy. The existing corpus of SIS faculty members sit on the shoulders of those early torchbearers. The onus is now on the present generation of SIS faculty members to build upon that legacy for the future generations. It is indeed a humbling experience as well as a challenge to step into the shoes of the pioneering SIS teacher-scholars. Let me end this preliminary reflection with the morale and powerful inspirational story of Pandit Hriday Nath Kunzru, Chairman of the ISIS Governing Body.

One of the members of the ISIS Governing Body, Zakir Hussain, became the 3rd President of India. The Secretary to President, Nagendra Singh (future President of the World Court), visited Pandit Kunzru on January 25, 1968 to persuade him to give consent for acceptance of the 'Bharat Ratna'. It was to be announced on the Republic Day (next day). Panditji firmly declined the offer on the ground that it was he, as a member of the Constituent Assembly, who opposed the conferment of such awards in the new Republic of India. When Nagendra Singh persisted with the request and argued that: "Panditji, nobody remembers that you had opposed the institution of awards in the Assembly". To this the feisty Panditji replied: "I remember it, and that is enough" [[47 ISQ \(2-4\) 2010 at 100](#)]. In the wake of questions by some colleagues as regards "why create such a Wall of Honour that no one else would imagine to do", this author has recalled and drawn inspiration from the above-mentioned powerful message of Pandit Kunzru. Thus, the SIS *Wall of Honour* is a very modest offering of the author at the altar of SIS as his '*karma-bhoomi*'. That is enough. Time will decide the rest.

[#SIS #WallofHonour #KnowThePioneers](#)

*This Article is an Original Contribution to the SIS Blog and is a part of the Author's New SIS Blog Series on 'Know the Pioneers'.*

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