



SEEING DIFFERENTLY
MENAKA GURUSWAMY

Dr. Menaka Guruswamy practices law at the Supreme Court of India. She is also B. R. Ambedkar Research Scholar and Lecturer at Columbia Law School. In her law practice she has litigated cases ensuring access of disadvantaged children to elite schools, ensuring large scale bureaucratic reform in the country, challenging the colonial era sodomy law and ensuring prosecution for extra judicial executions. She has advised the United Nations Development Fund, New York and the United Nations Children’s Fund, New York on various aspects of International Human Rights Law. She was a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University, a Gammon Fellow at Harvard Law School, and a gold medalist from the National Law School of India. She has law degrees from all three schools, with a Doctor of Philosophy in Law (D.Phil.) from Oxford University. She has been a Visiting Faculty Member at Yale Law School and New York University School of Law. Her most recent publications include essays on constitution-making in South Asia, in *Handbook on Comparative Constitutional Law* (Edward Elgar, forthcoming 2018), and “Crafting Constitutional Values: An Examination of the Supreme Court of India.” In *An Inquiry into the Existence of Global Values* (Hart Publishing/Bloombury, 2015). She is admitted to the Bar in New York and in Delhi. – Address: D 1007 New Friends Colony, New Delhi 110065. E-mail: menaka@post.harvard.edu.

I almost couldn’t bring myself to write the Wiko year-end report – for how does one describe such a life-altering experience adequately? As I sit and write amid the bustle of Manhattan, I remember the gently swaying trees of the Grunewald, the solitude offered

by my Wiko home, and the jovial but ever thoughtful weekday lunches (and the Thursday dinners!) with my fellow Fellows and the members of the Kolleg.

It was a different life from my usual one – the frantic pace and uninterrupted demands of a busy litigation career in New Delhi – where my time was everyone’s but my own. What I had craved before was the ability to enjoy a quiet solitude – to read and write and to learn about fields that were not my own. All of that is possible at the Wiko. From painting to music, my daily conversations spanned worlds that were otherwise reserved for only weekend readings, if at all. These multi-disciplinary conversations alter the lens that one applies “to see”. I now seek out other disciplines and crafts more than I would before the Wiko. And that is a wonderful gift to take as we left as Fellows – to more widely appreciate the world around us.

Life at the Wiko was gentle by design – it reflected the enormous efforts of the staff and members of the Kolleg – so that all Fellows need to do is focus on their chosen projects. The extraordinary care, the grace that all the staff and members of the Wiko typify, was singularly revelatory to me. The friendships offered, the care delivered, and the home that was created for us Fellows will always stay with me. The Rector, Thorsten, Daniel, Vera (both!), Dunia, Dennis – I cannot capture all of those who made it such a special year for me. Thank you, Wiko for your “grace”.

For me, I wrote more than I have ever written, but I also learned to see in ways that I have not seen before. Leaves, poetry, long quiet walks, and wondrous bike rides (that I had not experienced since college). While it is very lonely if one comes without one’s partner (and this I would not do again!), Berlin affords one much engagement, given how cosmopolitan it is. But, a better way to truly experience the Wiko is to come with your loved ones.

A special treat for me – was ping-pong a.k.a. table tennis. Be warned, new Fellows, the Wiko holds within it ferociously talented and competitive players – and they know the table better than every incoming class. My game (I am a rather competent player) – also improved dramatically! Imagine my surprise when a table tennis buddy from the Wiko was in today’s New York Times discussing his other life – that of a radical literary critic. © That is the Wiko for you!

In my own discipline of constitutional law, I truly appreciated the opportunity to organize and host a conference on “What Accounts for Enduring Democratic Constitutionalism” with over 15 scholars and practitioners in June 2017. That the Wiko will support such initiatives that are crucial to one’s own disciplines is yet another privilege of being a Fellow. I particularly enjoyed preparing for both my Evening Lecture and the Fellows’

Colloquium. Both offered the challenge of presenting a lecture and one's ongoing work to a predominantly non-legal audience. To present one's work to an accomplished and discerning audience(s) truly improves the way one communicates. The feedback that I received is also rather different from what I get when presenting to colleagues within the discipline (or to judges in a courtroom!).

However, even at the Wiko there is some scope to push further the reach of the Institute and the worlds that it engages. I would have liked a wider range of disciplines covered by the Fellows represented – especially in “new knowledge”, fields like artificial intelligence, contemporary economics, political analysis, contemporary art, etc. I write this with great respect for the arts and the classics. But, if we must better appreciate the world around us, we must also have access to those engaged in unpacking the present and predicting the future.

While lessons from the past are hugely consequential to our future, I found my class of Fellows skewed mostly toward those appreciating only what has gone by. This is the nature of much academic scholarship, but there are promising critics, scholars, and activists of our contemporary times whom the Wiko must consider reaching out to. Traditional academia, while invaluable, offers partial views of the world. Given our times of muscular populism, repudiation of science and intellectuals, denial of climate change amid greater environmental devastation, and ever widening inequalities – those who afford ways of making sense of these current and future challenges must be nurtured. I can think of no better environment for that than the Wiko!

Publications written and/or published while at Wiko:

- “The Irrelevance of Liberal Constitutionalists: Germany, India and the United States.” Int'l J. Const. L. Blog, Jan. 25, 2017, at: <http://www.iconnectblog.com/2017/01/the-irrelevance-of-liberal-constitutionalists-germany-india-and-the-united-states-i-connect-column>.
- “The Constitutional Burden of the Global Imagination.” Int'l J. Const. L. Blog, Mar. 29, 2017, at: <http://www.iconnectblog.com/2017/03/the-constitutional-burden-of-the-global-imagination-i-connect-column/>.
- “A Secular Theocratic Constitutional Court?” Int'l J. Const. L. Blog, May 31, 2017, at: <http://www.iconnectblog.com/2017/05/a-secular-theocratic-constitutional-court-i-connect-column/>. This piece was also cross-posted in <http://verfassungsblog.de/triple-talaq-before-the-indian-supreme-court/>.

“Giving Life Back to Liberty in India: Unique Identification and Beyond.” Int’l J. Const. L. Blog, Jul. 26, 2017, at: <http://www.iconnectblog.com/2017/07/giving-life-back-to-liberty-in-india-unique-identification-and-beyond-i-connect-column/>.

All these pieces also were published on *scroll.in*, the leading online news space in India.

Work in progress: Draft of book on South Asian Constitutionalism, written substantially at the Wiko, which I hope to finish by the end of this year.