

Tonight!

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India plans cultural centre here

BRENDA KALI

The Indian government is to set up a non-racial cultural centre in South Africa in April.

In an historical move by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, the Director General of the Council, Niranjan Desai and the Indian High Commissioner stationed in Botswana, Stri Pal, are currently on a whirlwind visit to this country to reconnoitre the situation.

Big staff

"The centre will be used not only for cultural purposes but also for education and as resource centre" Desai said yesterday. "It will be based in central Johannesburg and will be manned by a director, a service officer and a staff of eight or nine people from India. It's basic function is to establish contact with various cultural organisations and to promote education, disseminate information and run workshops. The centre will also be equipped with a library".

When asked why the ICCR chose South Africa, Desai said that it was the function of his organisation to reach out to the people and governments all over

the globe.

"We have centres in Moscow, Berlin, London, Jakarta, Georgetown and Cairo but the centre in South Africa is particularly special for it marks the resumption of the Indian presence in this country after 40 years".

He emphatically states that the centre will not be established to service the Indian community exclusively. "It will be there for all those, regardless of race or colour, who need to use it", he said. "We also intend to send out dance, music and language teachers should there be a demand. It's mutual, we would like to know more about South Africa and in turn South Africans can learn more about India."

Festival?

But the establishment of the centre is only the beginning. Desai does not rule out the possibility that South Africa could be a venue for the *Festival of India* which has been held in Moscow, the UK, US and Japan.

Despite the boycott, hundreds of South African students have been given bursaries by the ICCR to study in India for several years now, but subject to the approval of the ANC, which has an office in Delhi.

Jack Heath Gallery

INSTITUUT VIR EIETDSE GESKIEDENIS

Die Universiteit van die Oranje-Vrystaat



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Speaking of life and beauty

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Story by David Robbins

Natal's First Potters, an exhibition of pottery made by Natal's early Iron Age black farmers, opened at the Jack Heath Gallery this week. It runs until May 30.

"Were they farmers, rather than Stone Age hunter gatherers, even then?" I asked.

Dr Maggs nodded. "We call them agro-pastoralists. They lived in large settled villages, and their economy was based on planting and reaping and the possession of livestock."

"How do you know?"

"Look at this map. These are the known Iron Age settlements in Natal and Kwa-Zulu. We excavated several of them; particularly valuable to us are the refuse pits which have preserved remains in very good condition. We learn, from bones and carbonised plant remains, the nature of their diet. And something of how they lived. A lot of the pots you see here were used for the preparation of food, and for grain storage. We have also found, by a process known as flotation, the seeds they planted."

In one glass case, I saw a rusted piece of metal, and a strange clay object in the shape of a tube with a distended opening.

"What are they?"

"The metal is a hoe, the basic tilling implement of the Iron Age. The clay object is a bellows nozzle, either for a

HE pottery made by these communities was not only functional, some of it also seems to have had a symbolic, even religious, significance," Dr Tim Maggs said.

I had asked him about the remains of a clay representation, highly stylised, of a human head which was recently dug up at one of the scores of Iron Age sites in Natal/KwaZulu. Much of the head has been lost, but the remaining sections have been pieced together to create something which is remarkably similar to the famous heads found in the early 1960s near Lydenburg in the Transvaal. I had asked Dr Maggs, the archaeologist at the Natal Museum who has been responsible for much of the research into the pottery, if the heads had to do with some religious ritual.

"We don't know for certain," he replied. "But they definitely served some cosmological function."

I asked what cosmological meant.

"It's how a community perceives itself in relation to the universe, both the physical universe and the spiritual."

It is above all this sense of the usefulness of everything, an echo of earthy agmatism, which pervades this warm and beautiful exhibition. Yet coupled to a satisfying, even comfortable, sense is the sharpness of the realisation of the value of the artefacts on show. The pieces are, according to carbon dating, over 1 200 years old. The earliest pieces are even older, having been made as long as AD 250.