

INTERVIEW Before landing in the Embassy of India in Madrid in November, 2018, he had been Chief of Protocol of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of India, Ambassador in Ethiopia and Consul General in Dubai, among others.

**SANJAY
VERMA**

AMBASSADOR OF INDIA
IN SPAIN

I.L.H. / BURGOS

The Ambassador of India closely examined the exhibition about Magallanes hosted by the Forum during a 45-minute private tour.

The curator, Adelaida Sagarra, explained the content of the exhibition, for which he had expressed particular interest. He also showed interest for the Cathedral of Burgos, who the painter and sculptor Cristóbal Gabarrón, with whom he has collaborated in several artistic projects linked to Casa de la India in Valladolid, had told him about. While the interview was going on in the Fórum, just before 5 p.m., some twenty people were queuing up to see the exhibition, to learn about the role that Burgos and its people played in the first trip around the world. This did not surprise Ambassador Sanjay Verma, who pointed out the interest that this exhibition raises.

What is the reason for your visit to Burgos?

I have been in this country for 11 months and during this time I have had the opportunity to visit many cities. In each of them I have been comparing the cathedrals, to discover which one is the most beautiful one. I have been in Toledo and it was really good, and the one in Barcelona was excellent. But a friend of mine, Cristóbal Gabarrón, told me that best cathedral in all of Spain and one of the best in all the world was the one in Burgos. So I could not help coming to see it.

You have just visited the exhibition Burgos legua 0 del viaje de Magallanes-Elcano. What did you think of it?

Even though I was born in Mumbai I studied in Goa, a city that is linked to the Spanish and the Portuguese of the 16th Century, when they were trying to control the spice trade. That is why I knew the story of this trip quite well. However, both the visit to the exhibition and the explanations of Professor Sagarra have opened my mind, showing me what the vision of the Europeans was by wanting to go there. *(The exhibition has a piece from Goa, a chest made of silver and tortoiseshell of 1580 that belongs to the Monastery of Santa Clara de Medina de Pomar).* For example, I find the drawing with the 9 citizens of Burgos who participated in this expedition fascinating, as you can clearly see the connection it has with India.

“If Burgos were interested in Gandhi’s exhibition there would be no problem in hosting it here”



Verma points at the species that come from the Indies, in the exhibition on Magallanes’ trip.

“Here there are major automobile companies and I see links, as well as with tourism.”

What links can currently be established between Burgos and India? Are there any specific plans?

I know that in this area there are major companies linked to the automobile industry. In this regard, I think it would be viable to establish new links. The same can be said from the point of view of tourism.

Talking about tourism, 190,000 Indians visited Spain last year, figures which are constantly growing. What do you think the reason is? And what image is there of Spain?

There are several reasons, but the main one is a Bollywood film *Zindagi na Milegi Dobara* that was translated as *You only live once*. It was filmed in Spain in 2002 and tells the story about three friends who visit the

country days before the wedding of one of them. The film was a success in India and ever since, Spain has been all the rage.

There is also a link and interest for Spain due to the tomb of the saint Francisco Javier de Pamplona, who is buried in Goa.

Apart from this, has there been any political action to promote this rapprochement?

Historically there has always been a very good relationship between the Spanish Crown and India, but in the last few years it has been strengthened. The Prime Minister came to Madrid two years ago, and we are awaiting the inverse visit, which has been postponed due to the political situation.

This year marks the 150-birth anniversary of Gandhi, and to celebrate this you have organised activities in Madrid and Valladolid. Are there any celebrations left or is there a possibility to show the exhibition here?

We have hosted the fabulous exhibition in Madrid, Valladolid and El Escorial, which showcases photographs, letters and documents that explore Gandhi’s life. If Burgos were interested in the exhibition, we would be delighted to host it here.

What is the message of the exhibition?

It is called *Gandhi: My life is my message*, and it goes through his biography by showcasing very interesting things, such as the letter he wrote to Hitler to ask for calm and containment, another to Tolstoy or to Tagore, his bicycle or showing how he manufactured his clothes.

Is Gandhi’s message still relevant today or does his philosophy not fit in with today’s rhythms?

Of course. His message is peace, and that should always be valid. It was so in South Africa, in the First and Second World War, in the Independence of India... And it should still be in force today.

The other day we heard that Gabarrón was going to create a piece of art for this anniversary, when and where will it be exhibited?

More than a commission it has been his own proposal. It is a painting that Gabarrón is giving away as an act of love and generosity. For now, it will be exhibited in New Delhi; after that we will see. Many leaders are giving out gifts to celebrate this anniversary, and Gabarrón represents Spain with this painting.