

INDIA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE **IIC** Diary

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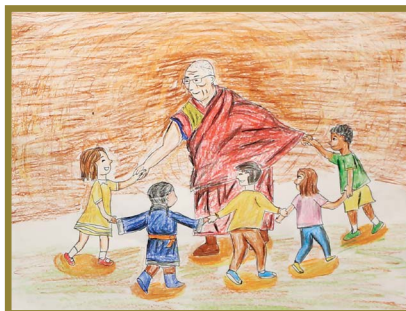
A Tribute by Young Tibetan Artists

EXHIBITION: *Dear Kundun***COLLABORATION:** *Foundation for Universal Responsibility of His Holiness the Dalai Lama; and Khadhok: Tibetan Arts' Collective***5 to 15 July 2025**

In Tibetan, 'Kundun' means 'the presence', or 'the one who is present', used reverentially within Tibetan Buddhist communities for the 14th Dalai Lama. It signifies both the physical presence of the Dalai Lama and his role as their spiritual leader.

On 6 July 2025, the 14th Dalai Lama, Jetsun Jamphel Ngawang Lobsang Yeshe Tenzin Gyatso, also known as Tenzin Gyatso or Lhamo Thondup, celebrated his 90th birthday. In recognising how the Dalai Lama has inspired others by promoting values such as trust, respect and empathy worldwide, the exhibition featured artworks and reflections by 90 Tibetan children from around the globe who shared their personal messages for him.

Over 700 children from India, Nepal, Europe, North America and Australia submitted paintings and multimedia artworks, and expressions of gratitude, hopes and reflections in response to the invitation by the Foundation for Universal Responsibility of His Holiness the Dalai



Lama and Khadhok, a Tibetan artists' collective. The creative prompt to these children was simple: 'What does His Holiness mean to you?'

A jury comprising Kailash Chandra Bauddha, Sonam Yeshi, Tenpa Darchuk, Tenzin Yeka, Tenzin Choenyi Dolma, Tenzin

Melak and Tenzin Tsepak selected 90 artworks for display. Through colours, line drawings and words, the children expressed their deep connection with Kundun's story, his life, legacy and teachings, which correlated with their stories of exile, dreams of return and the quiet strength to keep going.

The artworks ranged from images of the Dalai Lama playing with children to his engagements with different audiences, along with messages like 'in the heavenly realm of Tibet, surrounded by a chain of snowcapped mountains, the source of all happiness and help for beings is Tenzin Gyatso. May his life be secure for hundreds of Kalpas.' From Mewoen Tsuglag Petoen School in Dharamshala to Hornsby North Public School in Australia, the love and respect that each young Tibetan child displayed for the Dalai Lama showed a rare connection: invisible but enduring and deeply personal. More than a tribute, the exhibition was a collective act of remembrance, connection and imagination by a generation in exile.

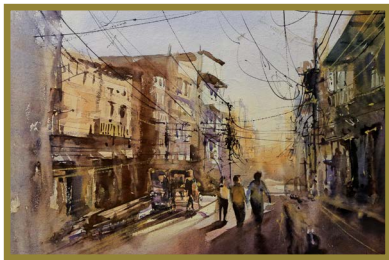
■ **RITIKA KOCHHAR**

Showcasing Old Delhi's Charm

EXHIBITION: *Galliyan se Guzarti Nazar (A Glance through the Lane)***WORKS BY:** *Mohd. Israr***25 June to 1 July 2025**

The exhibition felt like a walk through the streets and lanes of Old Delhi, filled with nostalgia and capturing its rhythms. The artist, Mohd. Israr, depicted both movements and silence with sensitivity, moving seamlessly from broad views to intricate details. He painted the lively, bustling streets of Old Delhi with dexterity, illustrating their busy, iconic lanes and evoking their rich history. His perspective was delicately tuned to the workers and shared humanity.

The exhibition was divided into three sections: watercolours, ink and charcoal, each offering a distinct character of Old Delhi. The watercolours provided a wider perspective, capturing the vibrant bazaars, lanes and streets of



Ballimaran, Chawri Bazaar and Chandni Chowk, among other areas. Vignettes of rickshaw pullers, monuments, gates, balconies and bazaars captured the pulse of Old Delhi. Israr's ink-on-

paper works stood out for their sharp lines and contrasts, which the medium enabled, offering individual close-up studies of the inanimate and structural elements of the city. The artworks were infused with vitality, with entrances

and walls exhibiting their own presence as a remembrance of a bygone era.

The charcoal-on-paper artworks drew viewers closer to the working population—the fishmongers, rickshaw pullers and others immersed in daily labour. Israr skilfully illustrated their expressions and gestures in moments of both activity and tranquillity, offering a social counterpoint to the architectural focus of the ink works. The exhibition was a remarkable progression of the gaze from vibrant surroundings to intricate details, rendered through the poetic vision of the artist, staying true to the *nazar* (perspective).

■ JYOTI KATHPALIA

A Carnival Evoking Social Change

EXHIBITION: *Playing with the Goddess: Gavri of the Mewar Bhils*

CURATED BY: Aditi Ghosh Mehta

19 July to 1 August 2025

In 1981, when Aditi Ghosh Mehta was posted at Udaipur, a peon from her team would often disappear from work. Others told her that he had gone for 'khel'—a concept she was unfamiliar with then. Later, during a work tour, she came across a carnival of dance-drama that continued for hours.



This was Gavri of Mewar's Bhil tribe, also called *sawa mahina ka khel* (the play of a month and a quarter) during the monsoon. Gavri refers to Gauri or Gorkhiya (names of Goddess Parvati), whom the Bhils consider their sister, as well as the performance during the 40-day festival. Performed for Gorkhiya Devi only by men, often dressed as women to personify Devi, the play is called *khel*, and those participating are *khelyas*. They travel from village to village, dancing and narrating the experiences of Devi in the world, at places where girls from their village resettle after marriage. The khels speak of the Bhils' cosmological

universe, contemporary histories, their interactions with other castes and practical insights on life through parodies and commentaries on those in powerful positions, subverting caste and class hierarchies.

Mehta engaged in research over three decades, resulting in *Playing with the Goddess: Gavri of the Mewar Bhils*, a

three-volume cultural memoir-cum-ethnographic work. The exhibition, based on the book, featured visuals of male performers dressed in vibrant female attire and makeup, depicting the exuberance of the dances. It depicted 40 khels, each connected to a ritual and beginning with the daily religious establishment of Gorkhiya Devi. The ritual also entails the Bhils observing strict austerities during this period. The images showed rural audiences awaiting

khels with *bhopas* (shamans) and Devis, the ceremony of *Gaba perna* (donning of ceremonial clothes) at the Devi temple, morning and evening *aarti* (a Hindu prayer ritual) at the temple during the last 10 days and scenes from khels.

Through successive iterations of this festival over generations there has been a change in the social status of the Bhils. 'While they were considered untouchable until a few generations ago, Brahmins and Rajputs touch their feet and seek their blessings during this period,' said Mehta. However, the question remains whether the khel is a vehicle for long-term social change or for the period of the carnival only.

■ SHWETA KESHRI

India's Living Reality

TALK: *Re-cast(e)ing the State Policy: Ascription, Identities and Democratic Politics*

SPEAKER: Surinder Singh Jodhka

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION: Nitya Nanda

VOTE OF THANKS: Ankita Goyal

COLLABORATION: Council for Social Development
15 July 2025

The Durgabai Deshmukh Memorial Lecture 2025 dissected caste not as a fading relic but as a living, material reality. Surinder Singh Jodhka addressed how ascriptive identities like caste continue to shape India's democracy and state policy. Anchoring his talk around two recent developments, the Supreme Court's validation of sub-categorisation within Scheduled Castes and the Union Government's

move to include caste in the next census, Jodhka argued that these moments mark a shift in how the state confronts inequality.

Central to the lecture was the concept of ascription: identities assigned at birth, such as caste, gender and race that are often treated as pre-modern but, in fact, deeply shape access to citizenship, opportunity and dignity even in modern democracies. Caste, Jodhka argued, is not simply a cultural or religious system but a relational and material process—producing durable inequalities, structuring everyday life, and entrenching disparities in education, health and mobility.

Despite post-Independence assumptions that caste would fade with urbanisation and economic progress, Jodhka demonstrated that caste has instead become more visible, especially through democratic assertion from the margins. He noted that political mobilisation, particularly by Dalit

groups, has led to both symbolic recognition and real contestations around access to state resources. However, this has also produced internal inequalities, such as elite capture within caste groups, which the current sub-classification debate attempts to address.

Jodhka warned against the myth of neutrality in state planning, highlighting how development policy in India remained caste-blind for decades despite clear empirical patterns of exclusion. Without disaggregated data, he said, even well-intentioned policies risk reinforcing privilege.

The call, then, is not for identity politics for its own sake, but for a data-driven engagement with caste as a policy variable—not to fix identity, but to challenge institutionalised deprivation.

■ PRABIR KUMAR TALUKDAR

Can Academia Regain its Autonomy?

TALK: *The Crisis of Higher Education in India: Disturbing Present and Worrisome Future*

SPEAKER: Deepak Nayyar

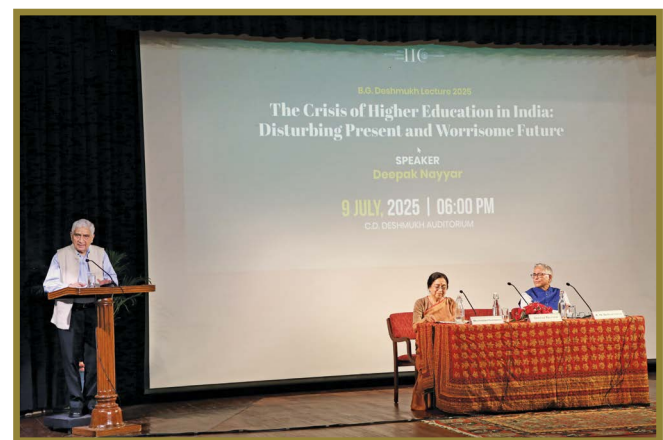
CHAIR: Meenakshi Gopinath

9 July 2025

Delivering the B. G. Deshmukh Lecture 2025, Deepak Nayyar presented a sobering assessment of the current state of India's higher education system. His reflections were not simply a lament for the past, but an indictment of the long-standing structural neglect and policy incoherence that have brought the system to its present condition. However, what has been most corrosive in recent years, he warned, is the deepening political interference, which has dismantled institutional autonomy and rendered universities incapable of fulfilling their foundational role.

While acknowledging the critical role of schools, Nayyar asserted that no nation can truly unlock its creative and intellectual potential without sustained investment in higher education. On this front, India, he said, has faltered. The large-scale exodus of Indian students to universities abroad is not just a matter of aspiration—it is a commentary on the failure to expand and strengthen our higher education institutions. Underfunding has led to diminished research output, leaving India lagging far behind in the global knowledge economy.

It is not only a question of scale, Nayyar emphasised, but of quality. A handful of IITs and IIMs, however celebrated, cannot be expected to represent the entire country. And even these institutions, he said pointedly, need rigorous scrutiny to assess whether they truly live up to their



reputations. Institutions that once held the promise of global stature—such as JNU—have been deliberately weakened over the past decade.

For any institution to be excellent, it must be anchored in capable and independent leadership, institutional autonomy and academic freedom. On all three counts, Indian higher education is failing. Much of the blame, Nayyar said, lies with the poor leadership that presides over our universities today. Political interference has always existed, he noted, but in the past decade it has reached alarming and unprecedented levels. The appointment of institutional heads is no longer guided by academic merit but by ideological loyalty.

Leadership, however, is only one side of the picture. The other is faculty—its selection, quality and integrity. A university is only as good as the teachers it appoints and retains. On this front too, Nayyar expressed his deep disappointment. He recounted how, even in once-prestigious institutions like JNU and Delhi University, faculty appointments were increasingly driven by ideological considerations, with preference being given to those aligned with the ruling dispensation. More disturbing still, he shared reports suggesting that even monetary considerations have entered into the selection process.

Nayyar dwelt at length on what he saw as the most devastating casualty of the last decade: academic freedom. The centralisation of curricula through the University Grants Commission and the growing restrictions on teachers have led to the stifling of intellectual life on campuses. The suppression of open inquiry, the discouragement of critical thinking and the throttling of independent research are deeply antithetical to any notion of quality in higher education. Worse still, a culture of self-censorship is taking root. He shared disturbing instances where faculty members were compelled to sign undertakings pledging not to criticise the government to be allowed to attend international conferences.

Private universities, he noted, were not immune either. Though ostensibly shielded from direct state control, many have internalised a culture of compliance, adopting restrictive policies to pre-empt external scrutiny or pressure. The challenge, Nayyar said, is not only to protect academic spaces from political capture, but also from the insidious influences of market logic and managerialism.

In his closing remarks, Nayyar asked the academic community to reclaim their space. Autonomy, he stated, is never handed down, it must be fought for, it must be taken.

■ APOORVANAND

Remembering a Bharat Ratna

DIALOGUE: *From Green Revolution to the Evergreen Revolution: New Technologies Reaching the Unreached*

WELCOME ADDRESS: K. N. Shrivastava

SPEAKERS: Trilochan Mohapatra; Renu Swaroop; Soumya Swaminathan; Sanjay Kumar; Ch. Srinivas Rao; K. C. Bansal; Ashwani Pareek; and Madhura Swaminathan

CHAIR: Shyam Saran

CLOSING REMARKS AND VOTE

OF THANKS: George John

17 July 2025

The inaugural 'Prof. M. S. Swaminathan Leadership Dialogue' traced a subtle through-line on how foresight, patience and painstaking institution building carried India from chronic famine to food security. In his keynote, Trilochan Mohapatra framed the journey as 'the slow, stubborn work of converting scarcity into trust'. This journey continues today with hope as India's scientists continue to confront the twin challenges of malnutrition and climate change.

Joining remotely, Soumya Swaminathan recalled the uncounted labour of rural women as the feminist graft that underwrote the Green Revolution, which was at

the core of her father M. S. Swaminathan's work. A few decades after independence, India was seen as the site of apocalyptic forecasts such as those in Paul Ehrlich and Anne Howland Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb*. This was responded to not merely by words but by actions. Among M. S. Swaminathan's many interventions were 150 one hectare demonstration plots in 1965, where Mexican wheat thrived on Punjab soil and by 1971, India declared itself grain secure. Even in triumph, M. S. Swaminathan warned against 'mindless exploitation' of water and chemicals, insisting the Green Revolution must evolve into an 'evergreen revolution', one rooted equally in ecology, economics and equity. This very tension between yield and restraint ran through every exchange. Renu Swaroop remembered M. S. Swaminathan's mantra: 'The future belongs to nations with grains, not guns,' a line that drew knowing nods from the many scientists in attendance. K. C. Bansal spoke of farmers near Cuttack mastering the cultivation of climate-resilient paddy, echoing the efforts of those first plots.



As the session wound down, the image of the unnamed farmer crouched in a wheat field, with an ear pressed to the soil before they set their plough in motion to feed our country, lingered in my mind. M. S. Swaminathan's genius was not just his sweeping vision but his reverence for this quiet, stubborn labour that turns seed to sustenance. In an age dazzled by algorithmic shortcuts, his legacy reminds us that abundance arrives inch by inch through rigorous science yoked to human values.

■ APAR GUPTA

For Greater Public Trust

TALK: *GDP Based Revision: Time to Regain Confidence*

SPEAKERS: N. K. Sharma; and Sanjay Kumar

DISCUSSANT: Amey Sapre

CHAIR: Siraj Hussain

16 June 2025

Siraj Hussain opened the session by highlighting that the Government of India is considering a GDP-based revision. He recalled that in April 2017, the Ministry of Statistics had set up a Committee on Real Sector Statistics to modernise

the real sector database and recommend improvements for GDP estimates. He stressed the importance of such revisions by citing Nigeria's 2014 experience, where a revision in GDP calculations revealed the economy was 89 per cent larger than previously reported, making it the biggest economy in Africa. India last revised its GDP series in 2015, introducing a new methodology. Following this, economist N. K. Sharma emphasised that the main purpose of GDP estimates is to track the level and changes in different sectors to understand where the economy is headed. He stated that the accuracy and usefulness of GDP assessments depend heavily on correct data and the use of accurate deflators, especially for real-term growth analysis.

Moving to sector-specific observations, the speakers noted that the agriculture GDP is likely overestimated. Similarly, growth levels in sectors like trade, health and education appear to be inflated. There is also a noticeable increase in the share of the informal sector in manufacturing and construction, calling for a review of the current methodology.

The calculation of owner-occupied dwellings is based on inter-census projections, making even tentative

conclusions difficult. A major issue in the unorganised sector is the lack of reliable data. In the formal sector, the contribution of public administration may be overestimated due to the inclusion of both types of pensions. Also, the inclusion of untraceable companies likely inflates the gross value added (GVA) of the private corporate sector.

Regarding trade and services, it was observed that the earlier estimation used turnover data from sales tax, but after the introduction of GST, this data became limited. In construction, most workers are unaccounted for, with 'wages in some states like Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand falling below ₹62 per day', the discussion underlined.

The speakers called for a comprehensive review of Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) data for statistical use, better estimation of GVA per worker in informal sectors, a revision of extrapolation methods, adoption of double deflation for production-based sectors and improved deflators to reflect quality changes. They also urged the MCA to release complete microdata to regain public trust, as most data used is not sensitive.

■ **ARYAN SINGH**

A New Era of Dominant-Party Politics

BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP: *Indian National Congress: From Dominance to Decline or Hibernation?* by M. P. Singh and Rekha Saxena

PANELLISTS: Zoya Hasan; E. Sridharan; Kiran Walia; Swapan Dasgupta; M. P. Singh; and Rekha Saxena

24 June 2025

Decoding the fluctuating fortunes of the Indian National Congress (INC) constitutes an important factor in tracing the evolution of India's democratic party politics. A thought-provoking discussion unfolded around this timely volume by M. P. Singh and Rekha Saxena.

Traversing the INC's arc from post-Emergency dominance to post-2014 marginalisation, the book sets out to critically analyse four decades of political shifts, including leadership transitions, coalition politics and ideological recalibrations. The central question of the book is thought-provoking—is Congress in terminal decline or temporary hibernation?

The discussion opened with reflections on the post-1989 coalition era, the steady erosion of Congress' vote share and the growing dominance of the BJP.

Rekha Saxena positioned Congress' decline within broader institutional and structural changes, framing its current status as a crisis of identity. She emphasised that the question of the INC's future extends beyond the concerns of a single political party and constitutes a matter of national significance and calls for more engagement with the subject.

Zoya Hasan shared a comparative perspective, linking the BJP's rise to global right-wing populist trends. While appreciating the book's empirical depth, she critiqued it for under-engaging with the ideological and cultural shifts that have redefined India's political centre. She called for a deeper analysis of the BJP's cultural project that redefines Indian nationalism and Congress' relevance post-2024. Swapan Dasgupta questioned such global parallels, asserting that the BJP's rise stems from domestic socio-political movements. He attributed this to Mandal-era caste politics and the Ayodhya dispute, unaddressed by the Congress. Mani Shankar Aiyar, present in the audience, emphasised the urgency of coalition-building and countering communal narratives, along with grassroots engagement.

The discussion culminated in a lively question-and-answer session, touching on the INC's role in shaping opposition politics and the possibilities of institutional resurgence. Sridharan concluded by situating these debates in a changing, aspirational India where middle-class shifts have reshaped political alignments. The panel underscored the urgent need for political introspection within the INC as India navigates a new era of dominant-party politics.

■ **SAURYA MISHRA**

Time to 'Take Control'

DISCUSSION: *India's Pakistan Problem post Pahalgam*

SPEAKERS: *Syed Ata Hasnain; Pankaj Saran; and Amitabh Mattoo*

CHAIR: *Y. K. Sinha*

23 June 2025

Why US President Donald Trump had lunch with a 'bad-egg' Pakistani field marshal, post Pahalgam, was food for much disquieting thought in India. It is important to understand what led to Field Marshal Asim Munir getting to Washington, DC, said Pankaj Saran, and whether it was 'a work in progress' since 20 January, when Trump was sworn in. 'What was the preparatory phase?' he asked, while wondering how Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif was 'sleeping at night' after the White House meal. 'No one has been more insulted,' he felt, while Syed Ata Hasnain agreed that India (unlike Pakistan) could not have recommended Trump for a Nobel Peace Prize. But Amitabh Mattoo wondered 'how Pakistan could have such good friends in the White House', and why 'India could not second-guess' that.

The attack on Indian civilians in Pahalgam was not a surprise, said Y. K. Sinha, as Munir's speech, days earlier, had shown 'clear intent'. With Pakistan defining India as the enemy, India must act accordingly and respond firmly to 'misadventures'. Agreeing, Hasnain argued that Pahalgam was aimed at internationalising Kashmir, an attempt to paint India as an aggressor, and for Pakistan 'to be relevant again'. It was a 'copycat' attack, similar to the one by Hamas on 7 October 2023: both interrupted festive moments. However, India's strategic communication needed improvement, and the ministries of information and broadcasting, home, defence and external affairs needed to 'take control'. Mattoo felt the 'political shockwave' interrupted the belief many had that the Pakistan problem was 'behind us', as it was not even mentioned in recent discourse, 'as if it did not exist'. For Pakistan, Pahalgam was to preserve the Pakistan army's dominance in government, he added. And what of the future, after Operation Sindoor, the four-day near-war? India may need to prepare for a more militarised Pakistan and expect cyber and space-related attacks and severe doses of narco-terrorism, warned Saran. That Pakistan wants talks on the Indus Water Treaty, which India has put in abeyance, means 'it has hit them, it will hit them', declared Sinha.

■ **SRINJOY CHOWDHURY**

A Living Moral Compass

TALK: *8th Nelson Mandela Lecture—The Legacy of Nelson Mandela*

SPEAKER: *Anand Grover*

INTRODUCTION BY: *Sedula Mamabolo*

OPENING REMARKS: *Suhas Borker*

CLOSING REMARKS: *Cedrick C. Crowley*

COLLABORATION: *South African High Commission; and Working Group on Alternative Strategies*

18 July 2025

To mark Nelson Mandela International Day 2025, the programme celebrated his legacy through a commemoration service by school choirs of Delhi NCR, followed by a discussion on his life, values and contributions. The school children performed South African freedom songs and national anthems of South Africa and India, symbolising intergenerational and cross-cultural solidarity.

Sedula Mamabolo highlighted Mandela's enduring values of justice, compassion and peace. He stated that Mandela is not only a historic figure, but a living moral compass for addressing inequality, hatred and injustice in today's conflicted world.

Suhas Borker highlighted Mandela's continued relevance to India, especially in countering hate, division and injustice. Mandela's principles of resilience, equality, empathy and forgiveness were presented as urgent lessons for Indian society.

Anand Grover delved into Mandela's life, political strategy and moral leadership. Mandela, though initially open to using violence against apartheid, was deeply inspired by Gandhi's and Martin Luther King Jr.'s strategy of transforming anger into non-violence. His resort to violence was always strategic, never indiscriminate. His statement, 'Our freedom is incomplete without the freedom

of Palestinians,' showcased his global commitment to justice, a vision echoed recently by South Africa's petition to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on Palestine.

Grover discussed Mandela's 27-year imprisonment and his unbreakable spirit, which sought justice even in the most oppressive conditions. His refusal to dehumanise his jailers, and efforts to learn Afrikaans and build bridges,



rather than seek revenge, underscored his statesmanship. The South African Constitution, shaped under Mandela's leadership, remains one of the most progressive in the world, emphasising enforceable socio-economic rights, unlike many constitutions, including that of India. However, Grover also critiqued the slow progress in realising Mandela's dream of economic equality. 'Whites still control a vast majority of South Africa's wealth', he said, and land reforms and wealth redistribution remain

inadequate. Yet, Mandela's role in access to affordable HIV medicines through global activism set a precedent for the Global South.

Cedrick C. Crowley stated that Mandela's leadership was rooted in compassion and selfless service. His ability to forgive and unite, and his belief in justice not as vengeance but transformation, remains instructive.

■ KRITIKA AGRAWAL

Capital's 'Green Lungs' Under Threat

TALK: *Delhi's Rutputty Forest—The Central Ridge*

LEAD PRESENTATION BY: Pradip Krishen

DISCUSSANTS: K. T. Ravindran; and Chetan Agarwal

MODERATOR: Anuj Srivastava

18 June 2025

Anuj Srivastava opened the evening by introducing ecological restoration practitioner Pradip Krishen.

Among the several books that Krishen has authored on flora, *Trees of Delhi: A Field Guide* highlights his expertise in the capital's ecological concerns. This was evident in his talk about the Central Ridge, part of Delhi's 'green lungs' protecting the city from the hot winds of the Rajasthan desert to its west, which borders the Presidential Estate along Mother Teresa Marg.

The chequered past and beleaguered present of this vast forest that spans 850 hectares was the focus of Krishen's discourse. Buffering the Western extremities of Lutyen's Delhi, the Central Ridge in its initial years in the 1930s was afforested with the invasive *Neltuma juliflora* or 'vilayati kikar' in common parlance, an import from South America. Planted by the colonial officers to combat desertification, they subdued and edged out the native trees of the Ridge.

The forest's expanse served the recreation needs of the colonial authorities. Horse riding and shooting wildlife, especially jackals, are recorded as prevalent activities.

While post-Independence governments did not indulge in such recreational activities, the Ridge has faced violations that have differently threatened its character. Buddha Jayanti Park, opened to the public in 1964, had been carved out of the central part of the Ridge. While physical encroachments on the Ridge may be addressed periodically, according to Krishen, the President's Bodyguard, the elite cavalry regiment of the Indian Army, often uses it as a dumping ground. He also mentioned that it is sometimes used as a burial ground for cavalry horses. The emergence of the elevated corridor of the Delhi Metro will also infringe upon the sanctity of the space.

Krishen compared the Ridge with Mangar Bani, a hill forest on the Delhi-Haryana border, considered sacred by the villagers, which has ensured its preservation. The forest is essentially covered with slow-growing yet hardy *Anogeissus Pendula* or 'Dhau', which can survive extreme weather conditions.

Chetan Agarwal spoke of contradictions in the Master Plans that were detrimental to the green cover across the nation and how they diluted its ecological repositories. K. T. Ravindran provided a historical rendering of the Aravalli that extend through this belt. Ancient paths and settlements have been traced along this region. 'There is one overwhelming reason why there's hope for the Central Ridge: it is that the soil is still alive,' said Krishen, leaving the audience with some optimism.

■ RAJESH LUTHRA

A Tribute to a Musical Mentor

CONCERT: *Beautiful Song: The Legacy of Situ Singh Buehler*

COLLABORATION: *Lyric Ensemble of Delhi*

31 July 2025

With a concert of opera arias and art songs, the Lyric Ensemble of Delhi (LED) paid tribute to the late Situ Singh Buehler, perhaps among India's first well trained

opera and art song singers and teachers. The LED was founded and nurtured by Buehler as a forum for providing opportunities to her students to perform in public. It is indeed commendable that some of her senior students have taken on the mantle of taking the LED forward, starting with this fitting tribute to her indelible contribution to Delhi's musical landscape.

The concert featured a selection of solo arias and songs performed by Buehler's students, accompanied on the piano by Svetlana Radashkevich. The evening commenced with Charles Gounod's 'O Divine Redeemer', sung by soprano Aastha Mohapatra, who was discovered and trained by Buehler in recent years. This was followed by Ruggero Leoncavallo's well-known piece 'Mattinata', alongside compositions by Vincenzo Bellini,

Franz Schubert, Johannes Brahms and, unusually for concerts in Delhi, Gustav Mahler and Roger Quilter. The only duet of the evening was 'The Keys to Heaven', arranged by H. Wright Greaves.

The singers included tenor Vikram Singh, soprano Alisha Berry, tenor Agastya Rishi Bharadwaj (the 16-year-old is the youngest of Buehler's students), mezzo-soprano Ankur Dang, tenor Keihan Sikri, soprano Meera Arora and tenor Riddhiman Dutta, among others. In an instrumental interlude, violinist Apratim Nayak joined Radashkevich to perform the first movement of a 'Violin Concerto in G major' by Antonio Vivaldi.

The second half of the concert featured arias from operas by George Frideric Handel, Giacomo Puccini, Gounod, Antonín Dvorak and Giuseppe Verdi. These were sung by the young Iraa Mantri, followed by more senior students of Buehler, including sopranos Payal John, Shruti Vashist, Sparsh Bajpai, Nilima Buch and Ashwati Parameshwar, to rousing ovations.

The encore, 'Brindisi' or 'Drinking Song' from Verdi's opera *La Traviata*, had all the singers, as well as some students of Buehler present in the audience, join in a rousing finale that would undoubtedly have delighted their mentor!

■ SUNIT TANDON

A Musical Homage

CONCERT: *A Tribute Concert in Memory of Prof. Samaresh Chatterji*

BY: *String Quartet of the Symphony Orchestra of India*

PERFORMERS: *Shynar Barlykova (violin); Prayash Biswakarma (violin); Mikhail Bulgakov (viola); and Sherali Mukhanbetkali (cello)*

COLLABORATION: *Delhi Music Society*

8 July 2025

Four members of the Symphony Orchestra of India, from Mumbai, delivered a fitting tribute to Samaresh Chatterji, who had been associated with the Delhi Music Society for many years. In his introductory remarks, Sunit Tandon described Samresh Chatterjee as a connoisseur with an eclectic taste in music.

Beginning with Franz Schubert's 'String Quartet No. 14 in D minor, D. 810 "Death and the Maiden"', the musicians masterfully conveyed the range of human emotions imbued in this piece. Composed in 1824 and featuring 'Death and the Maiden', a *lied* (a poem set to classical music), this quartet in four movements conveys the intense struggle between life and death. Schubert had been diagnosed with a life-threatening illness when he

composed it. The musicians convincingly conveyed the terror of the maiden as she confronts death in the second movement and the relentless dance of death, a tarantella, in the final movement.

After the intermission, the quartet performed several 'popular' Western classical pieces. W. A. Mozart's 'Divertimento No. 1 in D major, K. 136', known as one of three Salzburg *sinfonias*, is a charming piece in three movements. The sparkling vibrancy of the allegro, the stately elegance of the andante and the spirited conclusion of the presto were effortlessly expressed, making the audience feel as though they had been transported to Salzburg.

Two pieces by the Argentinean composer Astor Piazzolla, 'Oblivion', a melancholic and passionate melody, and 'Libertango' a faster-paced jazz-influenced piece, conveyed varied expressions of the nuevo tango style. Edward Elgar's 'Salut d'Amour' (Love's greeting), a charming melody, was tenderly performed to convey its message of romantic love.

Johannes Brahms' 'Hungarian Dance No. 1 in G minor' and 'Hungarian Dance No. 5' are evergreen classical compositions inspired by gypsy rhythms. The quartet did them justice, particularly the *rubato* (changing tempo) and the rousing finale of the latter. Vittorio Monti's 'Csárdás', also based on a Hungarian folk dance, with its lively passages, showed the musicians at their expressive best.

■ K. E. PRIYAMVADA

An Annual Sensory Treat

FILM FESTIVAL: *Summer Sonata—A Festival of Opera, Ballet and Concert Films*

CURATED AND INTRODUCED BY: *Sunit Tandon*

9 to 25 June 2025

One good reason to remain in Delhi during the dog days of summer is the Centre's annual and meticulously curated

Summer Sonata Festival, offering a breath of fresh air amidst the heat and dust of June in the capital.

This year's edition was dedicated to the memory of festival founder R. P. Jain and Samaresh Chatterji, one of its curators. Typically, the festival features six films, showcasing two ballets, two operas and two concert performances. Even for a novice to classical music like myself, there is no better way to become acquainted with the canon than by being enthralled by its wonders in the company of fellow music enthusiasts.

The festival kicked off with a bang, screening the Royal Opera's performance of Adolphe Adams's immortal two-act ballet *Giselle*. Featuring the stunning choreography of

the legendary Marius Petipa, Marianela Nunez becomes Giselle, bringing astonishing sincerity and technical virtuosity to her tragic performance. So absolute is her mastery, one's jaw drops at the pointe-work, set piece after set piece, leaving no doubt as to why she is a principal dancer with the Royal Ballet. Even the secondary performers are extraordinary, especially Itziar Mendizabal as Myrtha, vengeful queen of the Wilis and Vadim Muntagirov as Giselle's star-crossed lover. Lavishly mounted, with especially haunting production design in the second act, Adams's score comes to life under the baton of conductor Barry Wordsworth, making this a performance for the ages.

Christoph Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*, an opera based on the classic Greek myth, features mezzo-soprano Janet Baker in the titular male role. Evocatively mounted, with expressionistic art direction, I was greatly moved by Baker's embodiment of the tragic Orpheus, her performance never once resorting to sentimentality, but capturing a sense of defiant stoicism in the face of insurmountable loss. However, I could not help feeling betrayed by the ending of the opera, which deviates from the Greek myth

and succumbs to the need for a happy ending, as here Orpheus and Euridice are reunited.

Friedrich Gulda's *Mozart Concertos* were nothing short of extraordinary. Here, the acclaimed Gulda takes on two roles: as a pianist and as the conductor of the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra, performing Mozart's 'Piano Concerto No. 20 in D minor, K.466', and his 'Piano Concerto No. 26 in D major, K. 537' (the 'Coronation'). Gulda's non-conformist attire—he does not wear tails, but a mustard sweatshirt—together with his infectious energy and seemingly effortless talent are sensational and revolutionary, especially when viewed from the classical realm of concert music.

In Leo Delibes' frothy concoction, *Coppelia*, Barry Wordsworth conducts, the redoubtable Marianela Nunez headlines as Swanilda and Vadim Muntagirov plays her love interest, Franz. This was a lighter three-act ballet, where set pieces take precedence over the story. While it was an obvious crowd-pleaser, in my view, it could not hold a candle to *Giselle*.

■ **SIDHARTH SRINIVASAN**

Monsoon Ragas

CARNATIC & HINDUSTANI CLASSICAL INSTRUMENTS RECITAL BY: *Layavinyas, an Ensemble of Indian Percussion—Shankar Narayanaswamy (mridangam); Mandola Joy (shreetar); Sohoni Ghosh (tabla); Anand R. Jayaram (violin & vocal); K. G. Prasad (ghatam); and Akash Mukherji (vocal)*

DHRUPAD RECITAL BY: *Radha Govind Das from Delhi, disciple of Vidur Malik*

12 June 2025

At a time when Delhi was under red alert for extreme heat, the first day of the two-day 'IIC Summer Festival of Music' turned into a call for the monsoon by musicians who evoked ragas to herald the arrival of rain.

Layavinyas, in the opening performance of the evening, built an atmospheric edifice of rhythm and melody with three original compositions by Shankar Narayanaswamy, the ensemble's guiding force. Hamsadhwani, Vrindavani Sarang and Tilang ragas thrived in compositions that highlighted the rhythmic brilliance of Sohoni Ghosh's tabla, K. G. Prasad's ghatam and Narayanaswamy's mridangam. The ensemble presented a young vocalist, Akash Mukherji, whose renditions displayed a rare confluence of Carnatic and Hindustani styles. The symphony was enriched by the sound of the shreetar, a customised mandola crafted by Mandola Joy, whose musical partnership with Narayanaswamy has lasted over 15 years. As the ensemble



played their last composition, 'Across the Vindhya', one could feel oneself being transported to rivers flowing through the Vindhya mountains.

The Dhrupad recital by Radha Govind Das offered a tender contrast to the preceding symphony as Das took the stage to sing solo, accompanied by the tanpura and pakhawaj. Trained by his guru, the late Vidur Malik, Das presented an assortment of ragas rendered in the Darbhanga style of the Dhrupad tradition. Malik's musical lineage can be traced back to the 18th-century artists and brothers Radhakrishna and Kartaram, who started the musical tradition of this family in Mithila and gained popularity through their performance of raag Megh in the court of the Maharaja of Darbhanga, which is said to have averted a drought. Das concluded the evening with a rendition of the raag Bhairavi.

■ **AKANKSHA PADHI**

Magical Miyan ki Malhar

PERFORMANCE: Hindustani Vocal Recital

ARTIST: Brajeswar Mukherjee, disciple of Ajoy Chakrabarty

ACCOMPANISTS: Durjay Bhaumik (tabla); Sumit Mishra (harmonium); and Debjani Das (tanpura)

COLLABORATION: ITC Sangeet Research Academy, Kolkata

12 July 2025

In the inaugural performance of a new biannual series dedicated to preserving time-honoured Hindustani classical music, Brajeswar Mukherjee captivated the audience with his tribute to raag Miyan Malhar. Coming from a musical family, Mukherjee was trained under the Guru-Shishya Parampara at mentor Ajoy Chakrabarty's home, which helped him gain important life lessons alongside receiving musical *talim* (education).

Mukherjee opened the evening with an 18th-century *vilambit* (slow tempo) composition, 'Karim Naam Taro', by Sadarang and his nephew Adarang, who developed 'khyal' into its modern form. He followed this with a

drut composition by Jnan Prakash Ghosh and a Tarana by maestro Allauddin Khan. Mukherjee's recital was characterised by harmonising octaves and elongated syllables in deeper, lower notes, reminiscent of rumbling thunder. Sumit Mishra's harmonium mimicked the plaintive phrases of the compositions, while the singer's prolonged Bol Taans of rhythmic variations were echoed in Durjay Bhaumik's tabla.

In the sharp lyrics and rapid beats of 'Barsan Lagi re Badariya', the romantic longing in raag Malhar created excitement in the Antara, the second section of the composition. Mukherjee's voice modulation in the Tarana was remarkable, with a meditative quality of powerful resonance merging into textured softness. The rising and falling notes culminated in several triplicates or *tehais*, notably ending in the upper 'Sa' note in the higher octave of Indian classical music. Such an expansive Tarana is rare, and the performance explored exhilarating musical combinations.

Upon request, Mukherjee presented a 'pahadi' composition, 'Sajanwa kab Aaoge', in raag Miyan ki Todi, with its *komal* or flat notes

accentuating images of sleepless nights. He followed this with a bhajan, 'Baaje re Muraliya Baaje', popularised by Lata Mangeshkar. Recalling the divine love of Radha-Krishna, Mukherjee concluded the evening with a heartfelt 'Baje Muraliya', invoking imagery of the monsoon.

■ AJANTA DUTT

Birds as Poetic Symbols

PERFORMANCE: Udaan: The Melodic Flight of Indian Poetry

CONCERT PRESENTED BY: Chitra Srikrishna

ACCOMPANISTS: Arvind Narayanan (violin); and Vignesh Jayaraman (mridangam)

28 June 2025



Distinguished Carnatic vocalist Chitra Srikrishna unveiled a unique component of Indian poetry through her performance. Exploring how birds have served as profound literary symbols in India's multilingual poetic traditions over centuries, she rendered compositions in Sanskrit, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Hindi, Marathi and Bengali—seamlessly blending classical, devotional and folk genres. She also highlighted the literary devices, such as similes, metaphors, allegories, personifications and rhetorical questions used in the respective compositions. Full-screen photographs of the respective birds provided a perfect backdrop.

The journey began with the seminal moment in Indian literature—Valmiki's outcry 'Ma Nishad Pratishtam...', on witnessing the killing of a Krauncha bird, where his *shoka* (grief) transformed into *shloka* (verse), marking the birth of Sanskrit poetry.

Tamil poet-saint Andal's *Tiruppavai*, set in the solemn morning raga Begada, used the parrot to evoke spiritual awakening. The koel in Allama Prabhu's Kannada *Vachanas*, rendered in devotional raga Pantuvrali, became a symbol of the soul's longing for the divine.

Birds also appeared as messengers and metaphors in Jayadeva's *chakora* in *Gita Govinda*, Vedant Desika's

swan bearing Rama's message to Sita in 'Hamsa-Sandesha' and Kabir's iconic swan in 'Ud Jaayega Hans Akela', representing the soul's detachment from worldly bonds. Annamacharya's vision of Vishnu flying on Garuda, in 'Garuda Gamana'—set in raga Hindolam, created meditative stillness.

Meera Bai's 'Papiha Re Piv Ki Bani Na Bol' expressed love-longing, while Dnyaneshwar's impassioned query to a crow 'Will Vitthala not arrive?' reflected spiritual yearning. Akka Mahadevi's rhetorical address to parrots and peacocks in a vibrant Ragamalika blurred boundaries between visible birds and the invisible divine.

Tagore's 'Khaanchar Pakhi Chhilo' staged a philosophical dialogue between caged and free birds, questioning the cost of freedom. Kulasekhara Alvar's seabird in 'Perumal Tirumozhi', set in Ragamalika, symbolised the soul's

search for divine refuge, while Tyagaraja's raga Abheri composition 'Nagumomu' and Bharathiyar's 'Kakkai Siraginile' in raga Chandrakauns found sacred presence in Garuda and crow alike.

The programme culminated in the *Mundaka Upanishad's* metaphor of two birds on a tree—one enjoying the fruits, the other silently witnessing—expressing the coexistence of the experiencing and observing self.

With thoughtful raga choices and literary depth, Udaan revealed how birds in Indian poetry soar beyond nature into realms of love, freedom, divinity and transcendence—reminding us that all art, at its core, is a yearning to fly, to escape from constricting circumstances to something uplifting, from mundane to divine.

■ AMITABHA KHARE

A Doyen of Indian-English Poetry

FILM: *A Tale to Begin With*

DIRECTED BY: Bishweshwar Das

29 July 2025

This gentle and deeply moving tribute documents the life and works of Jayanta Mahapatra, a doyen of Indian-English poetry. I was first introduced to Mahapatra's works in my undergraduate programme. His poems, anchored in the simplicity and poignancy of everyday experiences, resonate deeply and widely. Cultural memory, solitude and alienation, hunger and social injustice are recurrent themes in his work. I was surprised to learn that *A Tale to Begin With* is the only documentary on the life of a poet whose literary influence has been so profound.

Bishweshwar Das approaches his subject with sensitivity and reverence, allowing Mahapatra's quiet dignity to define the tone of the film. The essence of Mahapatra's poetry is captured faithfully throughout. Scenes from the everyday life of the poet's last year are interwoven with his verses, recited and filmed across different events.

Mahapatra spent his life in his beloved hometown, Cuttack, Odisha, putting the modest city on India's literary map. The documentary portrays Mahapatra's days against the subtle rhythms of the city: silence pierced by crow calls and traffic horns, the sights and smells of local food, and the compelling simplicity of routine. It is in these ordinary details that the poet's extraordinary soul comes alive.

Beyond the literary icon, the film sensitively reveals the humble, unpretentious man behind the verse. Reflections on his unhappy childhood, the solitude of his final days, and the way he cultivated a family from friendships rather than blood relationships mollify a particularly poignant form of Indian anxiety—that of being alone during one's last moments. Mahapatra's serene acceptance of solitude enriches rather than diminishes his legacy.

The film's unassuming cinematic technique mirrors Mahapatra's modest and reflective persona. Das allows the poetry and the man to speak for themselves, creating a tribute that is strikingly intimate and sincere. *A Tale to Begin With* is a tender meditation on life, loneliness and the enduring power of poetry, offering the audience a glimpse into the heart and soul of one of India's greatest literary figures.

■ RICHA VADINI SINGH

More than Performing Arts

BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP: *Buddhist Dances: Movement and Mind* by Joseph Houseal

DISCUSSANTS: Navtej Johar; and Joseph Houseal

MODERATOR: Sharon Lowen

16 July 2025

Given the contemporary context of conversations around mindfulness and embodied being, it was fitting to have three noted exponents of dance come together for the release of Joseph Houseal's book—a blend of coffee-table aesthetics and scholarly depth—on Buddhist dance. Houseal took the audience on a fascinating journey through an Asian Buddhist landscape, spanning nations, genres and styles. Houseal's journey began as a young professional dancer in the US, attending the prestigious St. John's College, where he discovered in the modern Western tradition a split between the mind and the body—a division challenged by American-born dancer and choreographer Isadora Duncan. He recalled his early chance discovery of

Vajrayana Buddhism through Ladakhi monks, and his initial encounter with Navtej Johar. His deepening enquiries and engagements took him on a journey involving Ladakhi Buddhist monastics; Newar Charya dancers in Nepal; the fourth King of Bhutan and the problem of taxonomies of Bhutanese dance forms; Kandyan dancers in Ceylon; the Noh, Kabuki and Zen traditions of Japan; Shaolin monks of China; and Cham dances in Tibet. The audience was treated to a rich and rare photographic archive and personal anecdotes of deeply transformative encounters with legendary practitioners from diverse traditions.

Houseal's talk, framed autobiographically, explored several key debates of philosophical import—the relationship between mind and body, stillness and movement, and sound and silence—themes that Sharon Lowen and Navtej Johar also addressed. A framing device for the conversation

was the encounter between the East and the West in terms of ontological and epistemological frameworks, including the very definition of what constitutes knowledge and the inadequacy of the English term 'dance' as a descriptor for deeply meditative movement-based practices. However, the talk was also characterised by Houseal's unmistakably American energy and pragmatism, with a 'problem-solving' approach to studying these dance forms in a changing world, concerns about the challenges of taxonomical classification and preservation, innovative techniques of mapping, and questions of patronage.

The evening maintained a fine balance between the claims of the world and the otherworldly orientation of the 'dances' themselves.

■ MAYA JOSHI

Aligning Mind, Body and Soul

WORKSHOP: *Yoga Day after Day: Yogic Tools to Take Home*

FACILITATED BY: *Sanya Tyagi; and Alka Tyagi*

21 June 2025

'Yoga is not a work-out it is a work-in, and this is the point of spiritual practice to make us teachable to open up our hearts and focus our awareness so that we can know what we already know and be who we already are,' is a popular quote by Rolf Gates, a US-based yoga teacher who co-authored *Meditations from the Mat: Daily Reflections on the Path of Yoga*.

As a yoga practitioner for the last 25 years, I have learned that it subtly facilitates the tuning between mind, body, emotions and spirit, helping one realise the purpose and aspirations of life.

Sanya Tyagi and Alka Tyagi's workshop on International Day of Yoga was an introduction to incorporating its practise into our daily lives through a short capsule course.

The facilitators began the session with the 'mantra sadhana'. They stated that although it is not necessary to understand the meaning of the mantra while chanting, it is important to be aware of the vibrations it creates. The most auspicious time to practise this is in the morning in a semi-awake state. They demonstrated a few basic but important asanas—Tadasana (Mountain pose), Triyak Tadasana (Swaying Palm Tree) and the Kati Chakrasana (Standing Spinal Twist pose), along with Surya Namaskar (Sun Salutation).

Next was 'yoga nidra', which facilitates the state of deep rest and can be more restorative than a regular nap. It should be practised at the end of the day for a relaxed mind and body.

The final part of the capsule introduced meditation, demonstrating techniques to review the day, from the time of waking up to the time of practise. It involves observing each hour and moment of the day to clear the mind of clutter in preparing the body for sleep.

■ POONAM SAHI

The Journey of Wellness

TALK: *Ayurveda to Integrative Health: A Holistic Path to Well-Being*

SPEAKER: *Isaac Mathai*

COLLABORATION: *Ritinjali; SOUKYA International Holistic Health Centre, Bengaluru*

9 July 2025

In an enlightening session about health and wellness, the venue was filled to capacity, with additional participants

joining online, reflecting global interest in integrative healing methods.

Arun Kapoor introduced Isaac Mathai as a 'saviour, guide and philosopher', sharing his own recovery story from a severe neck condition and how doctors in Delhi had advised him to undergo surgical treatment. However, SOUKYA cured it within days—eliminating the need for lifelong support.

Born in Wayanad, Kerala, Mathai inherited spiritual grounding from his priest father and medical insights from his homeopathic doctor mother. Trained in London and China, he founded SOUKYA as a residential centre, combining Ayurveda, homeopathy, naturopathy, yoga and modern medicine under one roof. His philosophy: health is not merely the absence of disease but a harmonious balance of body, mind and spirit.

Drawing on over four decades of practice, Mathai stressed that chronic illness is often tied to mental and emotional factors. Healing, therefore, requires understanding a person's life experiences and traumas. He shared cases where addressing the emotional roots of ailments led to dramatic physical improvements.

Mathai urged a shift away from over-medicalisation towards prevention, early intervention and mindful living. Practical tips included turmeric with honey for immunity, *tulsi* (holy basil) as a natural defence booster, lime water for liver health, organic foods, mindful breathing and conscious eating. Small, consistent lifestyle changes, he said, can reverse years of damage and even slow ageing.

SOUKYA serves patients from 126 countries—70 per cent for serious health issues, 30 per cent for wellness and

stress management—while also running charitable clinics for 1,50,000 people across 150 villages. Additionally, Mathai mentioned that SOUKYA's research on DNA markers, in collaboration with St. John's Medical College, shows promising improvements in immune function and slowing ageing.

The evening concluded with an interactive question-and-answer session on Ayurvedic constitutions, digital addiction in youth, integrative therapies, and balancing life beyond courses and programmes. Participants left inspired, embracing Mathai's message that wellness is not a destination but a daily, conscious choice.

■ PRIYANKA MISRA

An Invitation to Reflect

WORKSHOP: *Stories from Asia—A Session for Adults to Listen Again*

STORYTELLING BY: *Neha Bansal*

INTRODUCTION BY: *Akshay Mathur*

27 June 2025

There was a quiet sense of anticipation at the venue as people from diverse backgrounds took their seats. Welcoming Neha Bansal, Akshay Mathur emphasised the importance of listening to the narratives within Asia's cultural diversity.

Neha Bansal led the evening with an engaging performance of *The Story of Kiều*, the 18th-century Vietnamese epic poem by Nguyễn Du. The story follows Thúy Kiều, a woman of incredible beauty and intelligence whose journey through betrayal, love and loss becomes a reflection of both personal and national resilience. In tracing the trajectory of Kiều's life, Bansal pointed to a more profound reflection that the story is not only an exemplary work of literature but also an integral part of Vietnamese identity.

Over the centuries, the story of Kiều has become central to Vietnam's folk religion, where storytelling and ancestor worship remain closely intertwined.

Through her remarkable narration, Bansal emphasised how Kiều becomes more than a symbol of tragedy. In moments of captivity and diplomacy, she embodies a form of cultural negotiation that historians have described as bamboo diplomacy: flexible yet rooted. Her fictional exchanges with the Ming dynasty's Jiajing Emperor suggest a subtle form of resistance and negotiation, where moral authority, not military strength, defines engagement. The story also hints at the curbing of piracy during that era, suggesting that Kiều's symbolic diplomacy had real and pragmatic consequences.

Bansal's performance was not conventionally dramatic. It was patient and deliberate, placing emphasis on voice and careful pauses to engage with the listeners. The evening asked a simple but enduring question: Have we lost our ability to listen deeply to stories, to others and the past? By placing Kiều at the centre of a renewed conversation on empathy, identity and diplomacy, the session was a reminder that stories are not just reflections but instruments of history.

■ PRABIR KUMAR TALUKDAR

Capturing Memories for Almost 200 Years

SYMPOSIUM: *Image Worlds: Approaching the Bicentennial of Photography*

COLLABORATION: *Photo SouthAsia; The Alkazi Foundation for the Arts, Maze Collective Studio; and Offset Projects*

25 and 26 July 2025

The symposium was a prelude to the upcoming bicentennial of photography in 2027. It aimed to critically reassess the

varied trajectories of image production and dissemination in an era profoundly shaped by technology and the impulse to document the complexities of our polarised world.

Central to the symposium was an exploration of how photography functions as a tool of encoding, amplifying and inscribing moments of subversion and resistance. Themes of belonging and exile, lyricism and testimony, transience and permanence, and memory and forgetting converged to deepen the conversation around the metaphysics of visual perception.

The programme brought together a dynamic selection of international photographers, curators, artists and cinematographers. The atmosphere was electric in the packed hall, with presentations that were as intellectually rigorous as they were emotionally resonant and the

active participation of the audience. Each session was thoughtfully structured to promote dialogue, with interactive panel discussions that reflected a polyphonic inquiry into creative ideologies and the cultural politics of image-making.

The diversity of presentations ensured sustained interest among the audience throughout the two-day symposium. The keynote speaker, Christopher Pinney, delivered a lecture on 'Superflat Historicity: Photography 100 Years after Paul Valéry', revisiting Valéry's seminal essay, 'Le Discours du Centenaire de la Photographie' (The Centenary of Photography), published at the end of photography's first century in 1939. This was followed by several panel discussions, including 'Sightlines: Locating Ourselves in the 21st Century', 'Seeing Through Images',

and 'Scripting Photography: Responding through Internal Landscapes'; and presentations 'Wall as Social Object', 'Looking At, Looking With', and 'Friends Keeping Watch' by artists. Among the participants were Abeer Gupta, Nimaya Harris, Subash Thebe Limbu, Yazid Anani, Vikram Divecha, Pradeep Dalal, Neelika Jayawardane, Uzma Mohsin, Saumyananda Sahi, Per Gylfe, Brendan Embser, Jyoti Dhar, Rajyashri Goody, Latika Gupta, and other experts in the field.

For emerging photographers, it was a rare and valuable opportunity to engage directly with leading voices in the domain. Every presentation offered unique insights, making it impossible to miss even a single session.

■ POONAM SAHI

Illuminating the History of Optics

WORKSHOP: *Familiarisation with Quantum Science and Technology*

COLLABORATION: *Zaheer Science Foundation*
26 June 2025



The programme marked UNESCO's International Day of Light 2025 and International Year of Quantum Science and Technology. K. N. Shrivastava delivered the welcome address online, highlighting the workshop's importance in introducing quantum science to non-specialists. Tabassum Jamal welcomed participants and urged the audience to understand the significance of quantum science and its transformative applications. Shailaja Donempudi underlined the importance of quantum-enabled R&D in accelerating scientific solutions such as drug discovery.

Zahid H. Khan stated that the workshop sought to raise public awareness of quantum science as a driver of technological innovation and societal progress, aligning with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

John Dudley delivered the keynote address on 'Quantum Light: Celebrating the International Year of Light and the International Year of Quantum Science & Technology'. He revisited UNESCO's International Year of Light in 2015, which included the participation of 147 countries in over 13,000 events. This led to a declaration of 16 May as the annual International Day of Light, marking Ted Maiman's first laser demonstration in 1960. Tracing the history of quantum optics, he highlighted 18th-century experiments by scientists Thomas Young and Joseph Ritter von Fraunhofer which proved the wave nature of light, and Gustav Kirchhoff and Robert Bunsen's line spectra observations. He pointed to other discoveries, such as Johann Balmer's formula in 1885, which predicted the wavelengths of the visible spectral lines of hydrogen; Max Planck's 1900 quantum hypothesis, explaining black-body radiation; Einstein's explanation of the photoelectric effect; and Niels Bohr's 1913 atomic model, which combined classical and quantum ideas.

Dudley noted the long durations between key discoveries, stressing that science demands patience and long-term support. He recounted Einstein's 1916 laser theory, Louis De Broglie's wave-particle duality, the Compton effect proving the photon nature of light and Satyendra Nath Bose's 1924 letter to Einstein, leading to quantum statistics. Quantum Mechanics emerged in Göttingen around 1925, spearheaded by Max Born, Werner Heisenberg and Pascual Jordan, while Erwin Schrödinger developed wave mechanics in 1926. Dudley concluded by stating that quantum mechanics underpins modern technology, emphasising the value of teaching the history of quantum optics, inspiring youth, supporting fundamental research and recognising science as an international endeavour.

■

Departures

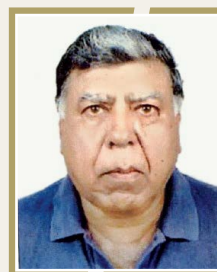
We are deeply saddened by the passing away of the following Members of the IIC family, and convey our heartfelt sympathy to the bereaved families.



**SHRI RATAN THIAM
A-2486**



**DR. MANGALA
TELANG | A-2998**



**SHRI RATAN SEHGAL
A-5004**



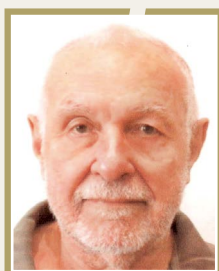
**MRS. GEETA
SAKSENA | A-7105**



**DR. BARBARA KAPUR
A-7153**



**DR. (SMT.) UJJWALA
TIWARI | A-7312**



**DR. JAMES COSMAS
MASSELOS | M-2094**



**SMT. SHUBHA SINGH
M-4524**

And the following Member (photograph not available):

SMT. RAJNI MAHAJAN (A-2955)



Director's Note

To honour Durgabai Deshmukh, freedom fighter, one of the architects of India's Constitution, and a pioneer in social and educational reforms, Shyam Saran, President, IIC, inaugurated the renaming of the Library on 9 July. The IIC Library is now called the Durgabai Deshmukh Library.

To showcase old Delhi's Mughlai food, a special dinner, 'Dilli ki Galiyon Se', was curated on 10 July for Members who relished the spread, which included Gola Kabab, Vegetable Shami Kabab, Mutton Pasanda, Khade Masale ka Chicken, Kesar-e-Paneer, Mutton Biryani, Kesari Pulao and Jalebi with Rabri. Weekly special cuisines are also being served in the Annexe dining room.

As part of the ongoing renovations at the Centre, work on the kitchen in the Kamaladevi Complex has started. This is the first of the five phases of the project and is expected to be completed by the end of October.

In the first of the six phases of the renovation of Hostel Rooms, nine rooms have been completed and are in use; nine more rooms are expected to be completed by the end of August.

New lockers with more storage space have been installed in the Library for Members. To store IIC publications, Library books, and Membership and Catering records, metal compactors are being installed in the basement of the Kamaladevi Complex.

The work on the installation of a sewage treatment plant (STP) at the Annexe has been completed. The equipment has been tested, and the plant is expected to be operational in August.

Delhi falls in Zone IV—a high-risk earthquake-prone area—of the revised seismic zone map of India. As a precautionary measure, Gopalkrishna Gandhi, Life Trustee, IIC, suggested that the Centre should have a seismic survey conducted of the premises. We approached the National Geophysical Research Institute (NGRI), Hyderabad, and the Central Building Research Institute (CBRI), Roorkee, for this purpose. The CBRI would conduct the survey and the NGRI would install equipment to monitor seismic movements and gather data.

To generate awareness about the laws relating to the safety of women employees in the workplace, a gender sensitisation training session for IIC staff was conducted in June by advocate Apoorva Thakur.

A firefighting workshop was conducted in July, where the IIC staff was trained to operate equipment as part of the drill. Members were also invited to attend the training session. Two programmes on health and wellness, curated by Ashwani Kumar (M-4070), were organised: 'Obstructive Sleep Apnea: Disorder You Should Not Sleep On!' by Anant Mohan, Head, Department of Pulmonary, Critical Care and Sleep Medicine, AIIMS; and 'Optimising Personal Communication—Listening and Speaking' by Rakesh Kumar, Department of Otorhinolaryngology, AIIMS.

IIC's website is being redesigned for enhanced user interface and easy navigation. New features will include programme highlights, real-time updates, digital archives and member login portal. The design is expected to be completed by September.

A new Time and Attendance System has been introduced to streamline attendance and leave management of employees. Biometric machines (face recognition devices) have been installed to store data digitally. Staff can log into their accounts to monitor their daily attendance and apply for leave. The system also includes the application of duty rosters for the departments with shift-based or rotational work schedules.

IIC-IRD has collaborated with the Centre for Traditional Indian Knowledge Systems and Skills, IIT-Mumbai, for an exhibition and conference on South Asia's manuscript traditions and mathematical sciences. The Minister for External Affairs, S. Jaishankar, has been invited to inaugurate the exhibition (4-14 September), and Fields Medallist Manjul Bhargava will deliver the keynote address at the conference (4-5 September). An MoU has been signed with Bharat ki Soch Foundation for a research programme on studying pre-modern texts to examine their application in contemporary policymaking and practice.

For those seeking IIC membership, applications for Short Term Associate Membership (STAM) have been invited since 15 July. The application forms can be downloaded from our website (<http://stam.iicdelhi.in>) on a payment of ₹500/- + GST (18%). The sale of application forms will close on 31 August, and the last date for submission is 30 September.

Programmes at the Centre are conceived keeping in mind the varied interests of our Members. We request Members to attend as many programmes as possible. Members are also advised to maintain the necessary code of conduct at the programme and catering venues.

Finally, Members are requested to block their calendars from 9 to 15 October for the annual 'IIC Experience: A Festival of the Arts' to enjoy an assortment of programmes, including films, exhibitions, talks, performances and, of course, food. The theme of this year's Festival is: 'Sā-Vanītā: Thus, She Speaks'.

K. N. SHRIVASTAVA

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