

Tracing the Story of Numbers

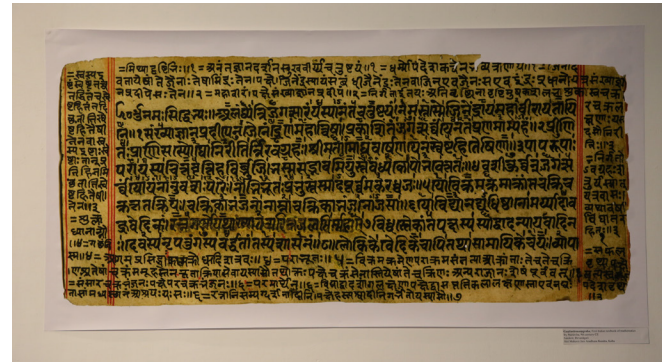
EXHIBITION: *The Mathematical Sciences: South Asia's Contribution*

COLLABORATION: Centre for Traditional Indian Knowledge Systems and Skills (CTIKS), IIT Bombay

4 to 14 September 2025

The exhibition, supported by the Ministry of External Affairs, was inaugurated by S. Jaishankar, who urged the audience to learn about our traditions and appreciate the historical achievements of our subcontinent. At the centre, a curvilinear display highlighted the timeline of South Asia's contributions, from the decimal system of the Rigvedic period (1500–1000 BCE) to the 18th-century Jantar Mantar, stone-built astronomical instruments constructed by Raja Sawai Jai Singh in five cities. It featured many significant mathematical discoveries, such as an early statement of the Pythagorean theorem compiled in Baudhāyana Śulvasūtra in the 8th century BCE, a Cambodian inscription from 683 CE where the symbol for '0' has been used, 12th-century Indian polymath Bhaskara II's contributions to arithmetic, advancements in algebra and geometry in the 12th century and the Kerala school of astronomy and mathematics, which flourished between the 14th and 16th centuries, laying the foundations of modern calculus.

Replicas of some original manuscripts on palm leaves, along with photographs of the original pages provided by the Samskriti Foundation, Karnataka, were displayed. The



Ganitāsārasaṅgraha: First Indian textbook of mathematics by Mahāvīra (9th century CE)

Bakhshali manuscript, considered the oldest surviving Indian mathematical manuscript and approximately dated between the 9th and 11th centuries, was discovered in 1881 in the village of Bakhshali (present-day Pakistan). The original manuscript is housed in the Bodleian Library at Oxford University. The original works that no longer exist could be reconstructed from writings and manuscripts from later periods, which are themselves several centuries old. The exhibits offered an insight into what the original manuscripts might have looked like. While primarily written in Sanskrit, several scripts were used, including Grantha (closely linked to Tamil), Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam, Devanagari and Prachalit (Nepalese).

Panels comprising explanatory text and supporting facsimiles of manuscripts were divided into seven thematic sections. 'Inceptions' traced the origins of numbers and number systems, geometric thinking and the concept of *shunya* or zero; 'Breakthroughs' highlighted the astronomical advancements from Aryabhata (5th to 6th century) to Bhaskara II (12th century), and the historical development of calculus; 'Form and Pattern' showcased the use of mathematical techniques in sculpture, architecture and music; 'Diffusions' exhibited the spread of mathematical ideas to East and West Asia; 'Crystallization of Regional Traditions' highlighted regional contributions, such as astronomy from Kerala; 'Renewals' focussed on the engagement between Sanskrit manuscripts, scholars and their Arabic and Persian counterparts; and 'Applications' displayed manuals and teaching systems that supported practical applications of mathematics in accounting, measurement and record-keeping, among other areas, emphasising the significance of mathematics in daily life.

■ GEETHA VENKATARAMAN



‘Zero’—From India to the World

CONFERENCE: *South Asia's Manuscript Traditions and Mathematical Contributions*

COLLABORATION: CTIKS, IIT Bombay

4 to 5 September 2025

The conference began with the keynote address, ‘A Survey of Bharatiya Contributions to Global Mathematics,’ by Fields Medallist Manjul Bhargava, whose research spans algebraic number theory and algebraic geometry. He was introduced to Sanskrit and the history of mathematics in India at a young age by his maternal grandfather, who was a Sanskrit scholar interested in ancient Indian history.

Bhargava's talk highlighted 10 seminal ‘non-zero’ Indian contributions to mathematics. In addition to inventing the concept of zero, referred to as *shunya*, India also introduced a symbol to represent it. This symbol was not only used numerically as a placeholder but also in the decimal system to the present day. Incidentally, the 10 numerals, ‘0’ to ‘9’, used for counting and in the decimal system, also originate from India, according to Bhargava, who cited their presence in the Bakhshali manuscript (799–1102 CE). However, he pointed out that these Indian numerals reached Europe via Arab mathematicians in the 12th century, which is why they are called Arabic numerals. Bhargava also mentioned that the binary system, which uses only ‘0’ and ‘1’ and is fundamental to modern-day computers, first appeared in Pingala's Chhanda Shastra, around the 3rd century BCE.

The 10 seminal ‘non-zero’ contributions listed by Bhargava included the Baudhayana theorem of the 8th century BCE



(before Pythagoras' theorem in the 6th century BCE), the mathematics of language, the sine function in trigonometry, negative numbers, solutions to quadratic equations, binomial coefficients, the Virahanka sequence of the 2nd century BCE (also known as the Fibonacci sequence of the 13th century), error-detecting or correcting codes and the first exact formula for Pi as an infinite series given by Madhava of Sangamagrama (1340–1425), around 300 years before Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz.

Other sessions featured detailed presentations by professional historians of mathematics from both India and overseas. Several talks focussed on how the sine function was defined, understood and calculated across periods from Aryabhata (6th century), Bhaskara II (12th century), Thakkura Pheru (14th century) and Nityananda (17th century).

Deepak Paramashivan, delivered a lecture demonstration, ‘Sarangi and Vocal’, at the end of the first day and also concluded the second day with the presentation ‘From Raga to Rhythm: Mathematical Structures in Indian Folk and Classical Music’.

■ GEETHA VENKATARAMAN

Repositories of Wisdom

TALK: *Buddhist Sanskrit Manuscripts of Nepal: Continuity of Ancient Indian Textual Traditions in the Himalayas*

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: Shanker Thapa

CHAIR: Shyam Saran

13 September 2025

The 15th lecture in the series, ‘Kriti- SAMHITA: The Plurality of Indian Knowledge Systems’, supported by the Ministry of External Affairs, was delivered by Nepalese historian Shanker Thapa. He has been digitising Sanskrit manuscripts for the British Library's Endangered Archives Programme since 2010. With over 40 years of experience as an academic in



several countries, including Japan and South Korea, he has authored 18 books and more than 100 research articles on Buddhism worldwide. In his introductory remarks, Shyam Saran noted that Thapa's ‘work is remarkable for its range and his output’, while highlighting that Nepal may be one of the richest repositories of manuscripts.

'Nepal's history of manuscripts cannot be separated from Buddhist literature in India,' said Thapa, indicating that it encompasses a wide range of subjects, including Buddhism, literature, Ayurveda, Hinduism, *tantra* (yogic tradition), *sutra* (aphorism) and *shastra* (treatise). Until the 12th century, scholars from the subcontinent travelled to Nepal to study Buddhism, and Nepalese monks trained at Nalanda and Vikramshila monasteries produced a vast collection of Buddhist texts. 'Nepal has played a role of immense significance in the development of Buddhist Sanskrit literature and preserved the tradition that went to Nepal from India,' he said.

However, over time, Buddhism's ritualistic aspects overshadowed scholarship. Thapa mentioned that the scholastic tradition 'gradually degraded', and while the manuscripts 'vanished' into private collections, they remain an important record of Indian textual traditions in the Himalayas.

Numerous manuscripts found their way to European libraries and institutions, including the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Oxford University, the British Museum, and collections

in Norway, Denmark and India. Thapa cited several European and Asian Indologists who studied Nepali manuscripts, such as the 19th-century French scholar Eugene Burnouf, who received many Sanskrit texts from Brian Houghton Hodgson, a resident officer in the Nepalese court. Indian scholars, such as Rajendralal Mitra and Hara Prasad Shastri, made detailed inventories and catalogues of Nepalese manuscript collections.

Thapa showed slides of Nepali manuscripts decorated with colourful images of deities and tantric hand gestures, alongside the inscribed text. 'The detailed iconographic decoration of Nepali manuscripts began in the Pala dynasty and has continued by Nepali scribes to this day,' he said. He explained that Nepali scribes copied Indian texts, transcribing them into local scripts such as Newari. However, even as families gathered their own collections, they seldom used manuscripts as sources of knowledge. 'Manuscripts are no longer just repositories of wisdom but have become important symbols of religious and spiritual faith,' Thapa concluded.

■ HAMESHA CHAUDHURI

Eighty Years after the Bombs

TALK: *Remembering Hiroshima–Nagasaki: Rising Peril of Nuclear Weapons in the 21st Century—A World in Denial*

SPEAKER: *Gopalkrishna Gandhi*

OPENING REMARKS: *Shyam Saran*

CHAIR: *Rakesh Sood*

6 August 2025

After US President Donald Trump, rattling his sabres, pushed two nuclear-powered submarines towards Russian waters, Gopalkrishna Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, and former governor of West Bengal, felt that nuclear weapons were not a necessary evil, as opposed to what Cold Warriors first said, but more evil than necessary. All submarines carrying these weapons must be port-bound to reduce tensions, and the warheads must be kept away from their launchers. There was a 'fearsome possibility' of nuclear weapons being used in the future, he warned. 'The world has been lulled into a false sense of security. As long as they exist, they will, one day, be used.' And every country must adopt a no-first-use policy, as India has, but not Pakistan.

It has been 80 years since the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Lakhs perished immediately and shortly thereafter, and Shyam Saran pointed out that the threat of more mushroom clouds stands 'enhanced by technology', particularly artificial intelligence (AI). He emphasised 'terrorist dimensions'—the possibility of Al Qaeda or ISIS acquiring a



'dirty bomb'. Rakesh Sood acknowledged that the nuclear weapons count is down from an eye-watering 65,000 to a still formidable 20,000, but many, he feared, are 'more usable'.

Gandhi's message about the baptismal skills of the nuclear warriors was enlightening: the bombs dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki were called Little Boy and Fat Man, respectively. How unthreatening can you get? The plane that dropped Little Boy was named Enola Gay, after the pilot's mother, but as Harry Truman, then US President, declared, a 'rain of ruin from the air' would happen. And J. Robert Oppenheimer, the father of the atomic bomb, had remembered a line from the Bhagavad Gita: 'Now I become Death, the destroyer of worlds'. Gandhi said, the world's 'nuclear strategists', who theorise that weapons of mass destruction have kept the peace, and 'peaceniks', must find common ground. They could remember Albert Einstein and Bertrand Russell's message: using nuclear weapons is suicide.

■ SRINJOY CHOWDHURY

In Pursuit of Disarmament

EXHIBITION: *Remembering Hiroshima–Nagasaki*

8 to 14 August 2025



The devastation caused by the most formidable military scientific experiment of the 20th century in Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 and 8 August 1945, respectively, reshaped humanity's conscience. Eighty years later, curated to revisit the fateful days after the atomic bombings, the exhibition was inaugurated by Ono Keiichi, Japan's ambassador to India. It reflected on memory, suffering and the ongoing pursuit of disarmament.

Keiichi recalled India's solidarity in the aftermath of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, highlighting the enduring ties between the

two countries. The exhibition, featuring archival material, introduced the students present in the audience to the history and humanitarian dimensions of nuclear warfare.

The exhibition opened with the cause, casualties and suffering of the bombings. A panel quoted J. Robert Oppenheimer's rendering from the Bhagavad Gita, 'Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds', as he witnessed the first nuclear detonation. Contemporary clippings from *The Times of India*, stark before-and-after images of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and survivors' belongings such as a charred lunchbox, a tricycle and scorched clothing vividly captured the devastation. Several photographs, including those of a soldier with leukaemia and a woman with keloid scars, emphasised the long-term human cost of radiation.

The second section focussed on disarmament treaties and India's evolving positions. It recalled Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's 1957 visit to Hiroshima and his 1963 message at the 9th World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs. Highlights included Indira Gandhi's 1983 UN address, Rajiv Gandhi's 1988 proposal for a nuclear-free world and later developments such as the 1998 Pokhran tests and Atal Bihari Vajpayee's statements. The section concluded with a photograph of Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiling the bust of Mahatma Gandhi in Hiroshima during the 2023 G7 Summit, where he emphasised global peace, sustainability and development.

The exhibition culminated with an acknowledgement of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, the Embassy of Japan, the Japan Foundation and several archival institutions whose contributions enriched the display. Accompanied by a lecture by Rakesh Sood, the exhibition not only documented history but also invited the youth to reflect on the ethical, political and humanitarian dimensions of nuclear weapons.

■ **KAJAL JENA**

Forgotten Stories of the Independence Movement

EXHIBITION: *Hamaara Itihaas Archives of Freedom Fighters*

CURATOR: *Sagari Chhabra*

9 to 23 August 2025

Hamaara Itihaas Archives of Freedom Fighters (HIAFF) took root in 1995 when Sagari Chhabra began tracing the forgotten stories of women who stood shoulder to shoulder in India's freedom struggle. One such episode, when women prisoners in Lahore jail stitched a flag from scraps of clothing and raised it during the Quit India Movement, had never been recorded. Even their families were unaware of such courage. That silence became the seed of a lifelong effort to recover

and preserve memories of men and women whose sacrifices had slipped from history's pages. Steadily, Chhabra's work expanded into an archive where forgotten voices found breath again. As the exhibition unfolded, the hall, filled with the slow hush of evening light, wrapped the stories in a tender melancholy.

Visitors first encountered a world map dotted with sites that shaped the struggle, leading into the heart of the archive's mission: recording oral testimonies of surviving freedom fighters across India, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and Myanmar. Lesser-known figures emerged through photographs and documents—the seal of the Provisional Government in Kabul, its 1914 delegation to Russia, a letter from Lala Har Dayal, Bhikaji Cama's newspaper *Bande Mataram* and news clippings from London, including the murder of Curzon Wyllie in 1909. Images of more well-known freedom fighters, such as Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev, carried the resonance of sacrifice.

Another section was dedicated to the Indian National Army (INA) and the Rani of Jhansi Regiment, one of the earliest women's military wings in the world, formed in Singapore in 1943 under the aegis of Subhash Chandra Bose. Photographs



of training, letters and portraits of Lakshmi Sahgal and Janaki Athi Nahappan, who led as commanders of this Regiment, testified to their resolve, while personal encounters with surviving members in Calcutta and Malaysia, decades later, tied memory to the present.

The INA's presence across Southeast Asia came alive through rare photographs, letters and fragile press cuttings. The exhibition closed with a screening of *Asli Azaadi*, a documentary on women freedom fighters, where a haunting juxtaposition—images of Hiroshima and Nagasaki framed against the words of those who had fought—left a critical question hanging in the air: in times of war, can non-violence endure, and without it, can the future endure?

■ PRABIR KUMAR TALUKDAR

Rhapsody in Blue

EXHIBITION: *Memories in Blue & White: Explorations in Cyanotype*

ARTWORKS BY: Nova Bronstein Kak

23 to 29 August 2025

To the uninitiated, cyanotype is a photographic printing process that uses chemicals and sunlight, discovered in 1842. It involves applying a solution of two iron salts to paper or fabric. When exposed to ultraviolet light and then rinsed in water to halt the reaction, a striking Prussian blue image is produced. The earliest cyanotypes were used to create architectural blueprints.

Nova Bronstein Kak is a New York-based artist with deep roots in India. Through the alchemy of cyanotype, she conjures dreamlike imagery—fleeting and surreal. She presented an 'elegy of blues' through a body of 30 works blending photography, painting and printmaking into a seamless visual symphony. Rendered in rich monochrome, the pieces evoked a sense of vintage nostalgia while remaining firmly anchored in the present.

Kak is a proclaimed artist who has collaborated commercially with leading American designers across metal, textiles



and visual arts. She was a resident artist and teacher at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York. Her signature style features washes of textile-like visual textures, creating a distinctive aesthetic. Through careful placement of physical objects and the interplay of shadow and silhouette, Kak produces evocative compositions that shift with the sun's movement—drawing viewers into a moment that feels suspended in time.

These fleeting exposures echo the elusive nature of memory, oscillating between revelation and concealment, and prompting deeper reflection on place and moment.

■ POONAM SAHI

A Master Visual Storyteller

BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP: *Raghu Rai: Waiting for the Divine* by Rachna Singh

DISCUSSANTS: Roobina Karode; and Rachna Singh

MODERATOR: Mandira Nayar

1 September 2025

Rachna Singh first saw the renowned photographer and photojournalist Raghu Rai's work on the cover of *India Today* magazine when she was 16 years old. She was deeply moved by the image, 'Burial of an Unknown Child', which became a visual symbol of the Bhopal gas tragedy in 1984. Rai became an indispensable part of her personal gallery of influential figures who inspired her and taught her the value of human life. Thirty-eight years later, she had the opportunity to interview him, and 40 years on, her biography, filled with anecdotes about Rai's relationships with leaders and humanitarians like the Dalai Lama and Mother Teresa, has been published.

Roobina Karode presented snippets from an exhibition she curated last year on Rai's work, displaying his oeuvre. Among

the many anecdotes, the stories of enduring relationships Rai shared with Mother Teresa, the Dalai Lama and Indira Gandhi stood out. He first met Mother Teresa in 1970 in a small room in Kolkata. While waiting, he caught sight of three sisters on the first floor, reading their prayer books. Rai's keen eye compelled him to crouch for the perfect shot. Mother Teresa was outraged by his impropriety and scolded him. Despite this rocky start, Rai shadowed her for years, even publishing several books about her. Karode showed how she arranged his photographs of Mother Teresa in the shape of a cross in the exhibition.

Rai's connection with the 14th Dalai Lama began in 1976 when political journalist Tavleen Singh and he travelled to Ladakh to cover the Kalachakra ceremony conducted by the

spiritual leader. Rai continued to have unrestricted access to the Dalai Lama, who regarded him as a treasured friend. Rai believes that an offering from the Dalai Lama kept him healthy for a long time.

His relationship with Indira Gandhi was less close, but he followed her political career, including her tenure as Prime Minister and during the Emergency period. He even convinced his editor to publish photographs capturing her moments of vulnerability after her defeat in the 1977 elections.

The book, filled with timeless images and candid anecdotes, captures Rai's philosophy and insights, offering an intimate, engaging glimpse into the life of an iconic photographer.

■ **RITIKA KOCHHAR**

A Spiritual Diplomat

FILM: *Kushok Bakula: The Extraordinary Life of an Extraordinary Monk*

DIRECTED BY: *Hindol Sengupta*

27 August 2025

It is rare to see someone straddle the worlds of spirituality, statesmanship and diplomacy with as much unassuming calm as did the monk-diplomat from Ladakh, Ngawang Lobzang Thupstan Chognor, commonly known as the 19th Kushok Bakula Rinpoche. In his opening address, Ganbold Dambajav, Mongolia's ambassador to India, underscored the veneration that Rinpoche enjoyed in his country, where he served as India's ambassador for an unusually long term of 10 years. However, as Nambaryn Enkhbayar, the former President of Mongolia, stated in the film, Rinpoche outgrew that role to become a widely revered figure credited with the resurgence of Buddhism in Mongolia.

Recognised early as an incarnation of the previous Arhat Bakula, Rinpoche received his Geshe degree at Drepung Monastery, Lhasa, and returned to his monastery, Spituk Gumpa in Ladakh. However, he found himself propelled into Ladakh's political arena to ensure the economic and social resurgence of a 'very neglected region', as testified by Lama Lobzang and other Ladakhi leaders from across the religious spectrum in the documentary. Highly regarded by India's Prime Ministers across party lines—from Jawaharlal Nehru to Atal Bihari Vajpayee—Rinpoche astutely recognised the strategic importance of Ladakh as a buffer zone for India and oversaw the birth of the Ladakh Scouts as a force. However, beyond sects and labels, he embodied the idea of soft power.

The impact of Rinpoche's multi-faceted life can be seen in Mongolia. A silver stupa of Rinpoche at the Pethub Monastery in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, was made as a tribute to him by Lama Purevbat, who was sent to India to study thangka painting as part of many efforts supported by Rinpoche. The film brings many of these layers to life.

■ **MAYA JOSHI**

Retrieving Sacred Artefacts

TALK: *Stolen Gods: The Afterlife of Empire in British Museum*

SPEAKER: *Shyam Bhatia*

CHAIR: *B. R. Mani*

13 August 2025

Shyam Bhatia is an Indian-born British journalist, writer and war reporter based in London. He has reported from conflict zones such as the Middle East, Afghanistan and Sudan, and has published several books based on his war reporting.

In his talk, Bhatia highlighted British institutions such as the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Pitt Rivers Museum, the Horniman Museum, the Birmingham



Museum, Clarence House and the Clive Museum in Powis Castle, Wales, which are filled with colonial plunder of India's sacred artefacts. He began by mentioning the ongoing exhibition, 'Ancient India: Living Traditions', at the British Museum, which offers a multi-sensory journey through the sacred art of Hindu, Buddhist and Jain religions and features over 180 objects, including 2,000-year-old sculptures.

Bhatia pointed out that these sculptures originate from Indian religious sites. For example, the Amarāvati Marbles in the British Museum were taken by British civil servant Walter Elliot in the 1840s from the Amarāvati Stupa in Andhra Pradesh, built in phases between the 3rd century BCE and 250 CE. Similarly, the Mughal miniature of Emperor Jahangir weighing Prince Khurram (later Shah Jahan) in gold is also in the British Museum. The Clive Museum holds treasures like Tipu Sultan's tent and tiger finials from his throne.

Bhatia also spoke about efforts made towards the repatriation of objects by other countries. The 'Benin Bronzes', made of brass and bronze, are a group of several thousand metal plates and sculptures created from the 14th century onwards in the African Kingdom of Benin, now Edo State, Nigeria. They were taken by the British forces during the Benin Expedition

of 1897. On 28 November 2022, London's Horniman Museum held a ceremony to transfer ownership of 72 Benin Bronzes back to Nigeria, and on 21 June 2025, the government of the Netherlands handed 119 bronzes to the Nigerian government.

However, Bhatia's presentation failed to address the complexities of retrieving stolen gods. Many recently acquired stolen sculptures from the USA, Australia, Singapore, Germany, Canada and England have been placed by the government in the 'Gallery of Confiscated and Retrieved Antiquities', inaugurated in August 2019, at the Purana Qila Museum, New Delhi. It has been argued that these artefacts should be exhibited at the site museums for the communities that worshipped them, indicating that greater efforts are needed to preserve the dignity of these stolen gods.

■ RITIKA KOCHHAR

A Revolutionary Couple

FILM: *Phule*

DIRECTOR: *Ananth Mahadevan*

COLLABORATION: *Maharashtra Sanskritik ani Rannaniti Adhyayan Samiti*

29 August 2025

Phule is a poignant and reverent biopic that honours the lives of India's pioneering social reformers, Jyotirao and Savitribai Phule, who fought caste and gender discrimination in 19th-century Maharashtra. Actors Pratik Gandhi and Patralekha shine in the lead roles, portraying a wonderful and deeply human partnership rooted in love, mutual respect and shared conviction.

One of the film's greatest strengths is the authentic portrayal of the couple's personal bond. Intimate, tender moments between the couple are carefully woven into the historical narrative, perhaps drawing attention to the idea that their revolution took shape as much because of their personal alignment as their shared political conviction. One of the final scenes of the film, featuring the setting sun against the

backdrop of open fields, visually captures the enduring power of their camaraderie and ideals.

Despite its heart, the film's pace slows in the second half. There is a noticeable lack of sustained tension, and many conflicts reach overly neat resolutions, softening the historical complexity of the struggle. Through the depiction of various conflicts and obstacles, both personal and political, the breadth of the Phules' mission from 1838 to the late 1800s is acknowledged. However, because the film attempts to cover such a wide ground, it compromises with emotional intensity for narrative economy.

Although the film is made with sincerity and offers educational value, the distinction between the caste and gender struggles of the 19th century and those of today appears to be lacking. The challenges depicted in the film often feel contemporary, suggesting that the filmmakers may have failed to carefully consider the extensive historical changes that occurred over the past century and a half. In this sense, the story might have been more impactful as a documentary rather than as a dramatic feature.

Yet, *Phule* works as a moving historical tribute that inspires. Although it falls short of delivering a fully immersive cinematic experience, it remains a valuable testament to two visionaries whose legacy continues to shape modern Indian society.

■ RICHA VADINI SINGH

Comforting Konkani Cinema

FESTIVAL: *Goa Film Festival*

COLLABORATION: *Goenkarancho Ekvot*

21 to 23 August 2025

The festival featured three films from Goa, all in the Konkani language, subtitled in English. *Pedru Poder*, directed by Jojo D'Souza, is about a traditional baker (*poder*) who bakes

delicious bread in a mud oven fed by a coal fire. The knowledge of baking acquired from a loving father brings appreciation, but only a modest living. After his father's sudden death, Pedru resolves to acquire wealth and status—ideas that take shape when he falls in love with Daisy, the daughter of an affluent local man. The couple gets married, but Pedru's wife turns out to be an idealist who cares more about his good-heartedness and talent.

In a temporary reversal of values, Pedru tries to become a go-getter, which leads to a misunderstanding between him and Daisy. However, all ends well in this romantic comedy, which roots for traditional values of humanity and fellow feeling. The atmosphere of Goan village life is evoked with gentle poetry.

The second film, *Mogacho Korar* (Love's Promise), was overworked, therefore unsatisfactory. It is about family relationships, highlighting the one between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Family conflicts that end peacefully may form a good film plot, provided they are not stretched. Director Silverio Cardoza's story, despite pleasant music, nice locations and plausible acting, does not keep the viewer engaged.

The third film, *#Mog!*, also by D'Souza, depicts an NRI chef, Lionel, who returns to Goa to sell his deceased father's café. His relationship with his father was complicated. It also features Lionel's love story with Celina, a spirited baker's daughter. The story has its usual share of misunderstandings

that get sorted out resulting in a happy conclusion. The music is catchy and the semi-rural, green locations pretty. D'Souza's treatment of the subject is predictable but pleasant.

The most enjoyable quality of these three films is their belief in love and harmony in society and in the lives of individuals who are part of it. At a time when an overwhelming majority of mainstream Indian films are swamped by sex, violence and jingoism, it is heartening to see films that deal with the quest for happiness, peace, decency and the need for each other amongst men and women. These desires, despite being naïve, must be valued and respected.

■ PARTHA CHATTERJEE

Bangladesh's Traumatic Birth

FILM: *Chronicles of a Forgotten Genocide*

DIRECTOR: Ramesh Sharma

28 August 2025

Producer and filmmaker Ramesh Sharma's documentary *Chronicles of a Forgotten Genocide* played to a packed audience. The film is an eye-opening, candid account of the 1971 Bangladesh genocide and explores this often-overlooked historical massacre to tell a broader, ambitious tale. It questions Nobel Peace Prize winner Henry Kissinger's American foreign policy, drawing scepticism about its support for democratic principles and human rights.

Although essentially a talking-heads documentary, the film is propulsively paced and plays like a thriller, leaving viewers amazed at the astonishing and horrifying details presented rapidly. What starts as a familiar (yet not untrue in this case) critique of Pakistan, illustrating the 1971 Bangladesh genocide, aided and abetted by Kissinger, develops into something even more unsettling—a scathing assessment of American exceptionalism and its devastating impact on the world—

with echoes that are disturbingly still felt today in Gaza, Ukraine and potentially even in Venezuela. While the film's beating heart is undeniably strong, the excessive reliance on AI-generated audio and visual content leaves much to be desired artistically. The film even features AI-created songs (with lyrics written by the filmmaker) that interrupt the narrative, reducing it to maudlin sentimentality. At least the production could have engaged an actual playback singer! One might question the contradiction in using AI imagery and audio interviews while attempting to craft a revelatory 'documentary'. While more extensive use of archival footage and stills would undoubtedly have been more impactful and persuasive, after the screening of his film, Sharma mentioned that much of the archival footage from the Bangladesh Liberation War was erased after Mujibur Rahman's death. 'We had to depend on AI for some of the scenes,' he said.

Quibbles aside, the film leaves the viewer in no doubt about the culpability of Kissinger's foreign policy in the events in Bangladesh in 1971, as well as in other genocides, including the Vietnam War, the bombing of Cambodia and the Chilean regime change. Sharma's film serves as a poignant reminder of American exceptionalism and its influence on its foreign policy, which continues to cast a long shadow worldwide. The geopolitical and ethical questions it raises linger long after the end credits roll.

■ SIDHARTH SRINIVASAN

A Pragmatic Approach

DISCUSSION: *Are We Prepared for the Bangladesh Elections?*

DISCUSSANTS: Harsh V. Shringla; Sreeradha Datta; and Rishi Gupta

CHAIR: Jawhar Sircar

11 September 2025

The discussion analysed the volatile political situation in Bangladesh leading up to the elections scheduled for early 2026. It began by assessing the aftermath of the January 2024 polls, which were boycotted by major opposition

parties, thereby raising questions about the government's legitimacy. The subsequent collapse of law-and-order institutions, coupled with widespread student-led protests and the departure of the ruling leadership has fostered significant instability. This has left an interim administration in place whose constitutional basis remains uncertain.

The panel underlined that Bangladesh's political landscape is experiencing a profound transformation. The exclusion of key political figures has fundamentally altered the balance of power, while student organisations and campus protests have emerged as influential new forces. The discussion also highlighted how unresolved bilateral issues, particularly the Teesta water-sharing agreement, continue to generate mistrust. This has created an opportunity for external powers to increase their influence, adding a new layer of complexity to an already sensitive regional relationship.

A recurring theme was the rise of Islamist groups and their efforts to rebrand themselves. Despite a history of limited electoral success, these forces are equipped to exert influence disproportionate to their numbers by leveraging street power, international networks and ideological appeal. Compounding this challenge is the fragmentation within established political parties and the limited grassroots reach of newer political formations, both of which contribute to significant uncertainty in the electoral outcome.

From a regional perspective, speakers stressed that India has invested heavily in infrastructure, connectivity and energy cooperation with Bangladesh over the past 15 years. These long-term investments were designed to build enduring linkages that could withstand changes in political leadership, with initiatives in trade, transport and cultural

exchange deepening the bilateral engagement. However, this progress is now jeopardised by a more uncertain context, characterised by a rise in anti-India sentiment and resentment over perceived political alignments within various sections of Bangladeshi society. Furthermore, historical undercurrents—including the legacy of the 1971 Liberation War and contested narratives of national identity—continue to shape contemporary political alignments.

The panellists agreed that India's direct involvement or interference would be counterproductive. Instead, they emphasised that India must stay cautious and pragmatic, preparing for multiple scenarios while focussing on its long-term strategic interests.

■ D. P. K. PILLAY

Dissecting the 12-Day Conflict

TALK: *Israel–Iran War*

SPEAKERS: *K. P. Fabian; and Praful Bakshi*

18 August 2025

Amidst West Asia's ongoing conflicts and uncertain future, the 12-day Israel–Iran war further threatened to destabilise the troubled region. Seasoned diplomat K. P. Fabian and Praful Bakshi, a defence expert, discussed the war, controversies surrounding it and the air power of the two nations.

Fabian set the tone by stating that prolonged conflict between the two countries could have a drastic spinoff for Indians in the Gulf region.

Bakshi discussed the power dynamics in the Israel–Iran war. He highlighted that while Israel had military and air superiority, Iran's artillery was stronger. The war intensified when Israeli Air Force fighter jets targeted more than 100 nuclear and military facilities across Iran, resulting in deaths of several

nuclear scientists, military commanders and hundreds of civilians. Iran responded with over 500 ballistic missiles and more than 1,000 suicide drones, attacking civilian centres, a hospital and several military, energy and government sites. The US allied with Israel in strikes on Iran's three nuclear facilities. Finally, a US-brokered ceasefire was announced.

Fabian provided insights into the realpolitik behind the war. Israel claimed the attack was 'preventive', meant to counter Iran's ability to develop a nuclear bomb. There was very little evidence supporting this claim. The US Intelligence Community (IC) reported that Iran was not actively developing a nuclear weapon. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has established a monitoring and verification system to ensure Iran's nuclear activities remain for peaceful purposes.

Israel's real intention appeared to be to assert itself in the West Asia region to prevent Iran from becoming too powerful, especially if ongoing talks with the US were successful and economic sanctions against Iran were lifted.

The discussants noted that while India maintains a friendly relationship with both Israel and Iran, it will have to perform a delicate balancing act.

■ KAVITA CHARANJI

Aspiring for Geopolitical 'Balance'

DISCUSSION: *Asia Economic Dialogue—Navigating Complexity: The Future of Economic Multilateralism*

OPENING REMARKS: *Gautam Bambawale*

WELCOME REMARKS: *Shyam Saran*

KEYNOTE ADDRESS: *Sudhakar Dalela*

COLLABORATION: *Pune International Centre*

19 September 2025

What is India's worldview? Sudhakar Dalela believes India's vision is 'representative, resilient and responsive'. It really is about 'balance', a difficult enough aspiration, when the world is a routinely turbulent place: the US President Donald Trump's decisions on economic restructuring being one overwhelming factor. Not that there are no other 'complexities' to 'navigate'. Dalela declared it is about multilateralism, and not about choosing one group over another. It is the skill at 'leveraging the complementarity of platforms, be it G20, BRICS (which includes Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa and Iran, among other countries), Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), a grouping of the US, Japan, India and Australia, or IBSA (India–Brazil–South Africa)'. This was a reminder in the wake of recent Trump statements about losing India (and Russia) to China. After Shyam Saran's suggestion that India's interests would be 'better served' as a member of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), considering



'you will be dealing with China along with other partners', came the familiar dark shadow of tariffs. Or, whether there would be a new throw of the dice tomorrow.

There could be legal challenges to the tariffs as the issue could reach the Supreme Court, said economist Ajit Ranade,

and a mid-term poll setback was entirely possible. South African diplomat Cedrick Crowley underlined the 'uncertainty' the tariffs brought, adding that they were 'an immense geopolitical challenge' and could 'undermine the foundations of global order'. Both Crowley and J. S. Deepak, a former ambassador, pinned their hopes on BRICS, with the latter adding that imposing tariffs was really 'arm-twisting' and even at 25 per cent (it is 50 per cent now) this 'blunt instrument' would leave India 'between a rock and a hard place'. After urging reform in the World Trade Organization (Deepak regretted it was paralysed), Amita Batra mentioned that even without Trump's tariff tripwire, India would have had to reduce import tariffs to compete against, say, Vietnam. Meanwhile, in a fireside chat with former diplomat Gautam Bambawale, Atul Sobti, looking at a world in considerable disorder, spoke of the need for self-reliance, balanced regional development and employment generation.

■ SRINJOY CHOWDHURY

Complexity or Convenient Truth?

TALK: *The Present Colonises our Past: The Future Forsaken?*

SPEAKER: Romila Thapar

OPENING REMARKS: Suhas Borker

CLOSING REMARKS: Aditya Malik

CHAIR: Meenakshi Gopinath

COLLABORATION: Kapila Vatsyayan Memorial Committee

16 September 2025

The third Kapila Vatsyayan Memorial Lecture, an annual series honouring a lifelong advocate of cultural dialogue, offered more than just remembrance. It suggested a reflection on how we recall history and how power shapes that memory.

Romila Thapar began by tracing the very idea of history in the subcontinent. She reminded the audience that India's past was never a straightforward story but a mosaic of sources: inscriptions, oral traditions, regional chronicles and folk epics. These, she argued, resist the neat nation-state narrative that present-day politics tries to impose on us. When the present 'colonises' the past, she said, it signifies more than mere reinterpretation. It is the active recasting of history to align with today's ideology, i.e., replacing complexity with a single, convenient truth.

She offered vivid examples, including selective readings of ancient texts, the renaming of cities, and the framing of school curricula that privilege one faith or dynasty over the layered record of exchange and migration. Such moves,



Thapar warned, are not harmless acts of pride; they narrow the space for debate and foreclose a shared future. The past becomes a weapon, and the future, diverse and open-ended, stands abandoned.

Thapar insisted that history is a discipline of questioning, not of certitude. The answer lies in critical engagement, teaching students to examine evidence, value multiple voices and recognise how memory and myth intertwine. Only then can a society safeguard the freedom to imagine futures beyond the dictates of the present.

Thapar concluded by broadening the perspective on how climate change and artificial intelligence, which will transform how humans live and think, will introduce new uncertainties to political and cultural life. The choice, she insists, is ours: whether to continue resisting pretend histories and protect spaces for free thought, or to accept a monolithic past that limits the future. Democracy, pluralism and intellectual freedom are fragile creations. Each generation must recreate and defend them.

■ PRABIR KUMAR TALUKDAR

The Resilience of Democracy

BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP: *Democracy's Heartland: Inside the Battle for Power in South Asia* by S. Y. Quraishi

DISCUSSANTS: Shivshankar Menon; Kavita Sharma; and S. Y. Quraishi

CHAIR: Shyam Saran

MODERATOR: Pushpesh Pant

15 September 2025

Marking the International Day of Democracy, amidst the democratic turmoil in Nepal, the launch of the book drew a full house, underlining the timeliness of the discussion.

The panellists collectively underscored that the South Asian democratic experience cannot be confined to an electoral exercise alone but must be situated within the broader interplay of institutions, civic participation and regional complexities.

Shyam Saran argued that while leadership across the region has often faltered in meeting democratic aspirations, the instinct for democracy remains resilient. These struggles, despite being regional, carry implications for global democratic practice.

Shivshankar Menon discussed the structural complexities confronting South Asian democracies, highlighting the artificial boundaries, heterogeneous ethnic identities and unresolved conflicts. Recurrent authoritarian experiments in the region have consistently provoked popular democratic resurgence as well; however, the nationalism in these countries is often articulated in opposition to neighbours. Sharma reflected on her experiences at the South Asian University, where students carried paradoxes of conflict and democratic aspiration, reinforcing the imperative for cultivating a shared regional democratic ethos.

S. Y. Quraishi situated the origins of the book in his fellowship at King's College, London, where he was struck by how South Asia—despite being home to 40 per cent of the world's democratic population—is often reduced to India in global discourse. He shared insights from his engagements with democratic processes in Nepal and Sri Lanka, both of which witnessed cycles of regression and renewal. He also reflected critically on institutional design, particularly contrasting the partisan appointment of Election Commissioners in India with Nepal's more credible model. Highlighting the systemic distortions created by opaque political financing, he reiterated the urgent need for reform, especially through state funding of parties, as practised globally.

A lively interaction with the audience touched upon the role of youth, social media, dynastic politics and institutional resilience in South Asia. Concluding the session, Saran lauded the book's timely contribution and thanked the audience for their active participation.

■ SAURYA MISHRA

Seeking Transformation

12TH CREATIVE THEORY COLLOQUIUM: *Indian Political Theory: Possibilities and Challenges*

COLLABORATION: Association of Creative Theory & Foundation for Creative Social Research; International Herbert Marcuse Society, USA; The Raza Foundation; and Shanti Sahyog

5 to 7 September 2025

The proceedings of the colloquium began with a welcome that acknowledged the presence of three generations of scholars and participants. Savita Singh reflected on its journey over the past 12 years, and underlined the careful design of its sessions. Ashok Vajpeyi emphasised the ongoing relevance of engaging with Indian political theory.

Andrew T. Lamas, joining from the USA, recalled the words of German-American philosopher Herbert Marcuse, who stated that freedom is not only the goal of liberation but also begins with liberation itself and must be practised in daily life. Lamas stressed that political theory from India should

be understood as critical, creative, anti-colonial and anti-imperial. He underlined the enduring contributions of Gandhi and Ambedkar while urging intellectuals, scholars, artists and activists to uphold the commitment to radical universalism that rejects racial and national essentialism, colonialism and imperialism.

Rajeev Bhargava began the inaugural panel discussion, 'Debating Indian Political Theory: Political Theory in India', by echoing Lamas' view that one should think in terms of political theory from India rather than of India. He identified three dimensions of such a theory: the conceptual, which is perceptive and broad; the contemplative, which reflects on the human condition; and the normative, which evaluates the current situation from ethical and moral perspectives. He also expressed concern over the decline of public reasoning and meaningful debate in contemporary India.

Yogendra Yadav observed that poets and satirists have responded to current crises more effectively than political theorists. He outlined three stages of Indian political theory. The first was the exposition of Western political thought under the rubric of Indian political thought, followed by a second stage characterised by objections to Western frameworks. The third, he argued, must involve a constructive engagement that distils India's historical experience into broader theoretical insights, just as Western political theory arose from Europe's own context.

Gurpreet Mahajan added a historical perspective, recalling how political thinkers between the 16th and 19th centuries were engaged in struggles for transformation, justice and equality rather than systematic theorising. She highlighted the richness of India's political literature and emphasised that

political theory flourishes when both 'political' and 'theory' are conceived expansively.

The discussion concluded with an interactive question-and-answer session moderated by Manoranjan Mohanty.

■ KAJAL JENA

Dangers of Disciplinary 'Silos'

SYMPOSIUM: *Humanities Matter*

PROGRAMME COMMITTEE: *Sukrita Paul Kumar; Swati Pal; and Asani Bhaduri*

24 September 2025

The symposium emphasised that integrating humanistic values is essential for societal well-being, addressing the profound crisis arising from academic fragmentation and global materialism. Divided into three sessions—'Conceptualising Humanities', 'Humanities and Sciences: An Interface' and 'Humanities as Bedrock of Knowledge'—the discussion highlighted the dangers of disciplinary 'silos' and the resulting erosion of ethical frameworks.

K. N. Shrivastava highlighted the global slide into materialism and societal degeneration, emphasising that the humanities must be integral to all engineering and technical curricula to foster ethical conduct.

Ram Ramaswamy advocated for comprehensive education and radical flexibility in curricula. He proposed cross-disciplinary courses like 'Physics for Poets' and invoked mathematician D. D. Kosambi's pioneering use of 'combined methods' to integrate mathematics into history. Manindra Nath Thakur urged a move towards 'phenomenon-oriented research' to overcome the duality that isolates knowledge, suggesting that the humanities offer meaning while the sciences offer means. Saradindu Bhaduri raised questions regarding the rigidity of scientific protocols, debating whether

methodologies are 'written in stone'. Shovana Narayan offered an embodied critique, demonstrating the inherent mathematical basis of performing arts and stressing that they inculcate crucial human skills and life skills.

Vivek Suneja called for 'rehumanising economics and management', arguing that textbooks rely on an 'impoverished view of human nature'. He referenced Goddess Saraswati, who holds the book and the veena, symbolising the need for compassionate wisdom alongside academic knowledge. Pulin B. Nayak supported this by contrasting maximising economics with political economist John Stuart Mill's focus on a 'stationary state' that prioritises quality of life over growth.

The practical value of humanistic skills was affirmed by Debashree Mukherjee, who noted that the humanities provide critical life skills, such as navigating human ambiguities and interpreting texts to decipher meanings. Vandana Madan emphasised the importance of empathy, self-introspection and self-discovery through humanities in classrooms.

Avishek Parui cited neuroscience, identifying anxiety—the price the brain pays to anticipate the future—as an essential human capacity that AI cannot replicate. He concluded that the human brain requires only 17 watts of energy to experience deep emotion, highlighting the unique efficiency of human consciousness, while the energy requirements for AI are 'just untenable'.

Mridula Garg noted that literature instils empathy and anxiety, countering subliminal censorship. Rimina Mohapatra showed how cultural commentary, such as the series *Squid Game*, serves as a humanistic text to decode social crises. The speakers agreed that integrated, critical and empathetic knowledge is the only safeguard against future disintegration.

■ AMITABHA KHARE

Remembering a Vigyan Ratna

BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP: *Life and Works of Dr Jayant Narlikar: A Talk*

DISCUSSANTS: *Somak Raychaudhury; and K. P. Fabian*

28 August 2025

In his opening remarks, K. P. Fabian said that the room held 'a concentration of curiosity' about both the astrophysicist Jayant Vishnu Narlikar, as well as the universe in which

human life is embedded. Fabian described Narlikar as 'a Renaissance man'.

Somak Raychaudhury said that Narlikar (1938–2025), who had recently passed away, was one of those rare scientists who was 'easily approachable to the common person'. Raychaudhury mentioned that he had received Narlikar's book *The Structure of the Universe* as a prize at school. This inspired him to pursue a career in science, and that meeting Narlikar was the most encouraging moment of his undergraduate days.

Carl Sagan's television series *Cosmos*, broadcast on Doordarshan in the 1980s, was introduced by Narlikar, who also answered scientific questions sent by the audience. This established Narlikar as a household name across India, as did his books popularising science. Raychaudhury also

commended Narlikar's technique of writing first in Marathi and then translating his books into English to reach his intended audience.

Narlikar worked in the field of the general theory of relativity, proposed by Albert Einstein. Showing photographs of Narlikar's parents, Raychaudhury mentioned that the astrophysicist's father had studied under Arthur Stanley Eddington. Narlikar was a Senior Wrangler at Cambridge, where his father had also been a Wrangler, and afterwards, the son went on to study under Fred Hoyle.

Raychaudhury explained the differences between the Big Bang and the steady-state models of the universe. Hoyle and Narlikar were proponents of the latter. However, the discovery of cosmic microwave background (CMB) radiation in 1965 substantiated the Big Bang theory.

Raychaudhury's talk was structured like Narlikar's autobiography, covering four cities and phases of his life in

Banaras, Cambridge, Mumbai and Pune. In 1988, Narlikar became the first director of the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA) in Pune. Images of IUCAA displayed Narlikar's vision of wanting to 'show science in all its glory', through its architecture, sculptures and science park. It even had an apple tree grown from a cutting from Newton's garden! Raychaudhury, who worked with Narlikar at IUCAA for 12 years, described it as 'a temple of science'. Narlikar asked Raychaudhury to develop the school programme, which resulted in 200 schools being associated with the institution and inspired many children to pursue careers in science.

Raychaudhury said that Narlikar's legacy is his published works as well as his steadfast dedication to the steady-state theory, which exemplifies the scientific method of debating different viewpoints.

■ K. E. PRIYAMVADA

A Musical Tribute

REMEMBRANCE: *Artistry and Legacy of Gyanacharya Pandit Narayanrao Vyas*

CHIEF GUEST: *Sandhya Purecha*

GUEST OF HONOUR: *Sachchidanand Joshi*

WELCOME SPEECH: *Vidyadhar Vyas*

PERFORMANCES BY: *Vidyadhar Vyas and his Disciples, accompanied by Shailendra Mishra (tabla); and Vinay Mishra (harmonium)*

COLLABORATION: *The Vyas Academy of Indian Music*

25 September 2025

The programme celebrated the life and musical legacy of Narayanrao Vyas (1902–1984), a distinguished vocalist of the Gwalior gharana. The occasion also marked the launch of *Gyanacharya Pandit Narayanrao Vyas Smriti Granth*, a collection of essays and interviews written by various musicians, critics, associates and family members, compiled and edited by Suneera Kasliwal Vyas.

Through an audio-visual presentation, Vidyadhar Vyas traced the journey of his father and guru Narayanrao Vyas, from becoming Vishnu Digambar Paluskar's disciple at the age of nine, to his efforts to bring social recognition to Indian classical musicians.

Narayanrao Vyas' pioneering association with the Gramophone Company of India (HMV) in 1929 was highlighted through rare audio clippings of his recordings. To make

Hindustani classical music accessible to a general audience, he recorded several 78 RPM discs of classical and devotional music, such as '*Neer Bharan Main Chali Jaat Hun*' in raga Malkauns, '*Balmaa Bahaar Aayii*' in Gaud Malhar and '*Ugich ka Kanta*', a popular Marathi Natya Sangeet (musical theatre) in raga Kafi. He meticulously prepared to fit complete musical structures into the three-and-a-half-minute recording format.

Narayanrao Vyas' extensive repertoire—raga Malkauns, Bhupali, Durga, Bihag, Basant, Bahar, and more—demonstrated both his musical brilliance and linguistic mastery. His compositions included devotional songs, thumris, patriotic pieces like '*Bharat Hamara Desh Hai*', and theatre music. His *jugalbandis* (vocal duets) with Vinayakrao Patwardhan, such as '*Ban Mein Charavat Gaiya*' in raga Malgunji, were also highly popular. In 1930, he organised a ticketed concert at Pune's Kirloskar Theatre, with the most expensive tickets priced at ₹10 and the cheapest at 9 annas, reflecting his audience appeal.

Sachchidanand Joshi remarked that Narayanrao Vyas' recordings, made 75 years ago, remain technically unmatched even today. Sandhya Purecha emphasised the illustriousness of the *guru-shishya* tradition, the rigour of Vyas' practice and the courage exemplified by him.

The programme continued with musical tributes led by Vidyadhar Vyas and his disciples, including Vineet Goswami, Anand Oak, Richa Verma, Sanika Goregaonkar and Gatikrishna Nayak, who presented renditions in raga Multani, Gunji Kanada, Sohini, Patdeep and Bhavani.

A group performance of '*Racha Prabhu Tune yeh Brahmand Sara*', composed by Narayanrao Vyas' guru Vishnu Digambar Paluskar in raga Bhairavi, fittingly concluded the evening.

■ KRITIKA AGRAWAL

Preserving a Cultural Identity

TALK: *Sounds of Mesopotamia: An Introduction to Kurdish Music*

ILLUSTRATED LECTURE BY: *Hakan Çifçi*

26 September 2025

The First World War resulted in the territorial division of Kurdistan among four states—Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. While the Kurds have long yearned for a homeland, along with a culture and a way of life that can be traced to the Mesopotamian civilisation, they have adjusted to current political realities and now seek some degree of autonomy and self-rule in Kurdish-dominant areas.

'We want to live as a vibrant minority in all these four states', said Hakan Çifçi, a member of the Kurdish National Congress (KNK). He hastened to add that the KNK is not a political party but a platform to unite all Kurdish nationals, including the diaspora, to celebrate Kurdish history, culture, literature and music. The audience was given a glimpse into the rich traditions of Kurdish music and dance.

Before the advent of a written language, oral narrations by Kurdish *Dengbejs* were passed down through generations. With time, these have been rendered into songs that tell stories from history, literature and social experience. Çifçi treated a rapt audience to an evening of *Dengbej* and a traditional Kurdish dance called *govend*. This dance included several singers, both young and old, men and women.

A few instruments accompanied the performance—the tembur or tanbur, a stringed instrument; the kaval, a flute open at both ends; the long flute, oboe; and the drum. Historically, there are records of cultural exchanges, including music, between the Ottoman Empire and India.

While many Kurds are Sunni Muslims, the Kurdish population is ethnically and religiously diverse, including Shia Muslims, Zoroastrians, Christians and Jews. The Kurds celebrate Newroz, the arrival of spring and the new year in their culture, on 21 March. This festival also serves as a poignant reminder of the struggle against oppression and injustice in maintaining their Kurdish identity. The most moving dance performed by women was '*Jin, Jiyan, Azadi*' (Woman, Life, Freedom). This slogan became a rallying cry for justice following the death of a woman activist, Jina Mahsa Amini, in 2022. The slogan was previously used by several women's rights movements, including during gatherings held to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on 25 November 2015 in various European countries.

■ SRIDHAR BALAN

When Krishna Dances

PERFORMANCE: *The Flute and the Form*

THEATRICAL DANCE BY: *Jyotsna Shourie Dance Centre*

ACCOMPANISTS: *O. S. Arun; and Sudha Raghuraman (vocalists on recorded music)*

8 August 2025



The life of Krishna has inspired many artistic interpretations—whether his birth in a prison in Mathura, followed by his miraculous escape, his love for butter and the many mischievous escapades in Gokul as a child, or his romantic playfulness with Radha and her friends and, later, revelations of his power and profound wisdom. These events have

been creatively expressed through various forms of Indian classical dance. Jyotsna Shourie, a veteran Bharatanatyam dancer whose students presented a dance-drama at the Centre, choreographed couplets from the 'Krishna Chalisa' while weaving in traditional Bharatanatyam dance steps accompanied by Carnatic music. The only time the performance veered away from Bharatanatyam was during the sequence depicting Draupadi's *vastraharan* (disrobing), where the Kauravas attempt to dishonour her and Krishna protects her from humiliation. This was presented in a more theatrical style by fusing contemporary, Chhau and Kathak dance forms.

While conceptually intriguing, the performance did not meet expectations. Dance-dramas allow for artistic liberties with lighting, music and costumes. All three elements play a significant role in enhancing the presentation. Aside from the music, which uplifted the performance, both the lighting and costume design could have been more creative. Although the traditional Bharatanatyam costumes were colourful, simple additions such as a peacock feather in the headgear of the female dancer portraying Krishna or slight modifications to the attire to distinguish dancers portraying different characters, such as Meera Bai, from earlier sequences featuring them as group dancers, would have added value.

Despite being a collaborative production featuring contemporary, Chhau and Kathak dancers, only Draupadi's *vastraharan* sequence incorporated these styles. If these styles had been integrated with Bharatanatyam throughout the dance-drama, it would have been far more captivating.

■ SWAPNA MAJUMDAR

A Classical Evening

PERFORMANCE: IIC Monsoon Festival of Dance

BHARATANATYAM RECITAL BY: Sujatha Ramanathan from Mumbai, disciple of Adayar K. Lakshman, Lata Raman and Sujatha Mohan

KATHAK RECITAL BY: Shipra Joshi from Delhi, disciple of Prerana Shrimali

19 August 2025

Dashavatara or the 10 avatars (manifestations) of Lord Vishnu, to defeat evil forces on earth, is a popular theme for Indian classical dancers. Bharatanatyam danseuse Sujatha Ramanathan chose to focus only on Ram, the seventh incarnation of Lord Vishnu, in her presentation 'Ram Amritam', at the opening of the annual monsoon festival of dance. Ramanathan began with an invocatory piece featuring Garuda, the eagle and mount of Lord Vishnu followed by a prelude featuring a conversation between Lord Shiva and Parvati on Ram and their admiration of his divinity even as a child. Ramanathan selected verses from Tulsidas' *Ramcharitmanas*, including the famous bhajan 'Thumak Chalat Ramchandra', to highlight Ram's aura even as a toddler.



Ramanathan's dancing and abhinaya skills captivated the audience with her depiction of Ram as the warrior prince. While the sequence of Ram killing Bali, the monkey king, to end his reign of injustice and cruelty was well articulated, it was her creative interpretation of the courageous fight by Jatayu, the bird king, who tried to save Sita from being abducted by Ravana, as described in the Ramayana, that stole the show. Recorded music accompanied the performance, featuring D. V. Prasanna Kumar on nattuvangam, Satish Krishnamurthy on mridangam and kanjira, Prashanth Rudrapatna on veena, and Raghuram Rajangopalan as vocalist.

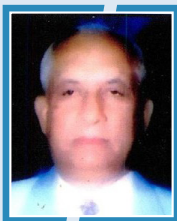
The second performer, Kathak dancer Shipra Joshi, dazzled with her intricate footwork and graceful presentation. Joshi, a senior student of Prerana Shrimali of the Jaipur gharana of Kathak, used the monsoon as her leitmotif in her first piece based on a shloka from 'Ritusamhara', a Sanskrit poem on seasons presumably written by Kalidasa. In this piece, Joshi described the rain and compared the movement of the clouds with the graceful movements of an elephant. Her concluding presentation was based on the legendary love story of Prince Dhola and Princess Maru from Rajasthan. Using hand movements and fast rhythmic footwork coupled with Kathak's hallmark *chakkars* or spins, Joshi

displayed both her *nritya* (expressive dance) and *nritta* (pure dance) prowess to convey the story. Accompanying Joshi were Parminder Singh on tabla, Fateh Ali Khan on sitar and Vijay Parihar on vocals and harmonium, while Karan Gangani provided the paran.

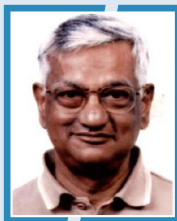
■ SWAPNA MAJUMDAR

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 K. S. LUTHRA
A-0769



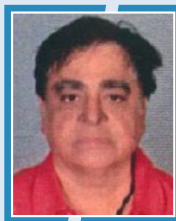
SHRI DILIP LAHIRI
A-3222



SHRI GOPAL
CHATURVEDI | A-3376



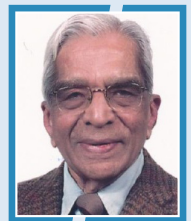
SMT. RITA GOMBU
MARWAH | A-4230



SHRI PREM SAGAR
CHOPRA | A-5319



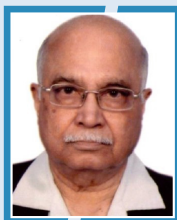
DR. SWATI DASGUPTA
A-7391



SHRI N. R. SRINIVASAN
M-1560



SHRI BRIJI MOHAN
SHARMA | M-1805



PROF. R. RAJARAMAN
M-3270



DR. M. J. ZARABI
M-3502



SHRI SUMIT
CHAKRAVARTTY
M-3874



SMT. RAMA RANJAN
M-4091



SHRI SHEKHAR DUTT
M-4128



DR. (MS.) PRATIPAL
BHATIA | M-4389



Director's Note

Amidst a prolonged monsoon in Delhi this year, the past two months marked the beginning of the festive season. The Centre celebrated the season by presenting special cuisines. Members were treated to a 'Maharashtrian Vegetarian Dinner' on 29 August, featuring a spread from the royal kitchens of the Rajwadas of Konkan, which included Dalithoy, Masoor Amti, Tendli Upkari, Varan, Thalipeet, Patholi and Puran Poli, among other specialties. A 'Chettinad Dinner' was served at the Annexe Dining Hall on 21 August, and Navratri special dishes were catered from 22 September to 1 October.

In terms of GST 2.0 announced by the Central Government, on most food items served at our catering venues, GST has been removed, and on the remaining, significantly reduced. As part of the periodic training, a session on 'Service Cycle' was conducted for the catering staff in September, focussing on the complete event process, from client consultation and menu planning to food preparation, service and post-event follow-up. In the first of the five phases of renovation of the Centre's kitchens, the Kamaladevi Block's kitchen on the ground floor and its associated facilities in basements 1 and 2 are expected to be completed in October.

As part of the ongoing Hostel renovation project, 21 rooms in the Main Hostel have been renovated in the first of six phases. Apart from the civil works, the renovation also included upgrading furniture and fittings, replacing windows with energy-efficient double-glazed panes, renovating toilets and installing energy-efficient lighting systems.

The Annexe Lecture Room 1 has been redesigned and refurbished to facilitate the conduct of corporate meetings, events, book launches and other private and public programmes. Its audio-visual system has been upgraded for film screening. The refurbished venue is now available for booking.

Following a security audit of the Centre, the boundary wall of the Centre's premises is being redesigned and redeveloped to make it more secure. The redevelopment of the boundary wall on the side of Joseph Stein Lane is currently in progress. The Architectural Design and Advisory Committee (ADAC) has redesigned the boundary wall. The entire work is expected to be completed in about six months.

To address the growing need for additional storage space for Library books, IIC publications and Membership and Catering records, space-efficient compactors have been installed in basement 2 of the Kamaladevi Block. Space for the storage of about 15,000 books has been created. Adequate storage space has been provided for the Publication department. The old records of the Catering and Membership departments, which were previously unsystematically stored, are now properly secured in the compactors.

At the international conference, 'South Asia's Manuscript Traditions and Mathematical Contributions' (4-5 September 2025), hosted by IIC-IRD, participants presented notable papers on India's progress in mathematical astronomy, algebra, calculus and the applications of mathematics in music. In his valedictory address, theoretical physicist Prof. M. D. Srinivas highlighted the challenges ahead in studying mathematical manuscripts. In addition to delivering the keynote address, Fields Medallist Prof. Manjul Bhargava conducted a tour of the exhibition, 'The Mathematical Sciences: South Asia's Contributions'.

Buddhist historian Prof. Shanker Thapa presented a collection of 1,200 manuscripts, catalogued and digitised by him from private collections in Nepal, for the project SAMHiTA (South Asian Manuscript Histories and Textual Archive). Two research fellows have been appointed for a project jointly being implemented by IIC-IRD and Bharat ki Soch, an NGO promoted by ITC. In the first year, it will focus on textual sources on education, health, nutrition and wellbeing.

The Centre has now started enriching the compost manure which it produces by using kitchen, garden and other solid wastes, through vermiculture processing. The enriched manure will be available for sale to Members. About 10 to 12 varieties of seedlings nurtured by the IIC will also be available for sale very soon.

Continuing our efforts towards zero waste production, the installation of the sewage treatment plant (STP), funded by the Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency Limited (IREDA), has been completed. It was inaugurated by Ambassador Shyam Saran, President, IIC. Using the latest Membrane Bioreactor (MBR) technology, the facility is designed to process 25 kilolitres of sewage per day. The treated water produced by the plant meets the norms of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and is being utilised for cooling towers, washing and gardening. Additionally, the surplus treated water has been offered to NDMC for Lodhi Gardens.

K. N. SHRIVASTAVA