

INDIA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE **IIC** Diary

Volume XXXIX No. 5

October – November 2025

Messenger of Compassion

SEMINAR: *Guru Conference: Life and Legacy of Atiśa Dīpamkara Śrījñāna*

CHIEF GUEST: *Gajendra Singh Shekhawat*

WELCOME ADDRESS: *Shyam Saran*

KEYNOTE ADDRESS: *Dasho Karma Ura*

VOTE OF THANKS: *K. N. Shrivastava*

COLLABORATION: *Centre for Escalation of Peace; Library of Tibetan Works and Archives; Ritinjali; and Pallavan Learning Centre*

21 to 22 November 2025

An extraordinary two-day international conference exploring the multifaceted figure of Atiśa Dīpamkara Śrījñāna was organised by the IIC's International Research Division (IRD) and several organisations engaged in research on and the practice of Buddhism.

Born in what is now Bangladesh, Atiśa was an 11th-century Buddhist monk, scholar, traveller and reformer revered across lineages for his service to Buddha Dharma. After his welcome remarks, Shyam Saran read out a special message from His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama paying tribute to Atiśa, especially vis-à-vis Tibetan Buddhist traditions. Gajendra Singh Shekhawat acknowledged Atiśa's life of service and sacrifice, underscoring his significance to India's civilisational outreach. He highlighted the contemporary relevance of wisdom and compassion, and evoked Atiśa's seminal work, *Bodhipathapradīpa* (A Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment) as a guiding light for global spiritual discourse.

The conference featured sessions on themes such as the life, deeds and travels of Atiśa, as well as *Bodhicitta* (the awakening mind), *Vinaya* (monastic discipline) and the guru-shishya relationship. Each day ended with an hour-long guided meditation on Bodhicitta by Geshe Lhakdor, thus coalescing the academic with the experiential—a synthesis that Atiśa's life embodied.



Atiśa's synthesis of strict monasticism with the Tantric yogi path was emphasised by Bhutan's Dasho Karma Ura's erudite keynote address that highlighted the ongoing vibrant research on Atiśa's legacy beyond traditional hagiography, and Bhutan's role as an active centre for these dynamic exchanges.

Subsequent sessions featured talks in hybrid mode with scholars and practitioners sharing their research on Atiśa, the prince who renounced his privilege to become a scholar, traveller, and reformer bringing doctrinal clarity to Tibetan Buddhism. Khensur Jangchup Choeden Rinpoche and several notable Buddhist scholars expounded on Atiśa's contributions, especially to monastic discipline and creating connections across sects.

Pooja Dabral highlighted the ongoing international initiatives of Nalanda University. Kaveri Gill spoke of Atiśa's travels and sacrifice, while Madhumita Chattopadhyay

and Pradeep Gokhale expounded on some core Buddhist philosophical concepts in a comparative light. Nazneen Haque Mimi shared visuals of archaeological findings at Atiśa's birthplace, Bikrampur, in Bangladesh, and of her role in designing a museum there. A French scholar based in Indonesia, Elizabeth Inandiak, explored the multi-layered Indonesian resonances of Atiśa's life, while Andrea Acri's lecture opened pathways for further archaeological and epigraphic investigations.

At the concluding session, Arun Kapur hoped that the conference would provide an opening for further joyous collaborations with *kalyanamitras* (admirable friends), while K. N. Shrivastava delivered an inclusive vote of thanks.

The conference was followed by the screening of *Unearthing Muarajambi Temples*, a documentary exploring the historical and cultural significance of this temple complex, a Buddhist learning centre of the early medieval period in Jambi, Indonesia. Atiśa spent over a decade there studying Mahayana and Tantrayana Buddhism, which he later taught in Tibet.

The conference served as a reminder that Atiśa's message of compassion remains as relevant as ever in a world facing numerous conflicts and environmental crises.

■ MAYA JOSHI

An Enlightened Soul

EXHIBITION: *Life and Legacy of Atiśa Dīpamkara Śrījñāna*

INAUGURATED BY: Gajendra Singh Shekhawat

COLLABORATION: Centre for Escalation of Peace; Library of Tibetan Works and Archives; Ritinjali; and Pallavan Learning Centre

21 to 30 November 2025

The central space in the art gallery was transformed into a Buddhist shrine with oil lamps and floral offerings to Atiśa Dīpamkara Śrījñāna. Curated by Shashibala of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, this exhibition accompanied the conference on the Buddhist teacher.

The exhibition opened with a lamp-lighting ceremony and auspicious chanting by Buddhist monks from the Dzongkar Choede Monastery, Hunsur, Karnataka.

The highlights of this exceptional display were some rare artefacts, including a thangka painting preserved in the



Beijing Museum that was handed over to the Bangladesh Bauddha Kristi Prachar Sangha in 1978. Each figure in the painting is identified by a line in Ranjana script below it, dating the thangka to the 10–11th century.

Other precious artefacts included a hand-printed clay stupa surrounded by letter inscriptions in a script resembling Pali. It was Atiśa's practice to make these clay tablets after his midday meal, we learnt. This artefact was brought to India in 1959 by monks from the Dzongkar Choede Monastery. Also on display were miniature votive tablets depicting Goddess Tara and a clay stupa, as well as precious *sutras* (aphoristic texts) related to Atiśa.

The walls of the gallery took the visitor on a photographic journey across diverse landscapes and geographies associated with Atiśa—from Bishnupur in Bangladesh, through Indonesia, to several monasteries in Tibet. Notable among the images were exquisite images of his personal deity, Tara, from monasteries such as Reting in Lhasa, as well as a remarkable, serene statue of Atiśa sculpted by himself and installed at Nyethang Drolma Monastery in Tibet.

The exhibition provided evidence of the deep civilisational exchanges across Asia that have shaped our shared Buddhist pasts, of which Atiśa was an integral part, and offered a rare opportunity to immerse oneself in this vibrant tradition and trace its roots and routes. Transporting the visitor to the 21st century, an animated film on the practical aspects of Buddhist teachings played alongside, attesting to their contemporary relevance.

■ MAYA JOSHI



When Art Meets Literature

EXHIBITION: *Weaving Water: Feminine Countercultures in Paint and Print*

CURATED BY: Jyoti A. Kathpalia

31 October to 9 November 2025

Punjabi writer Ajeet Cour's work has fuelled the creative and political imagination of generations of readers, writers and artists. The exhibition paid tribute to the enriching legacy of this pioneering feminist writer. It not only took its name from the title of the English translation of Cour's autobiography but also drew thematic inspiration from the book. The curatorial note indicated that the exhibition was an exploration of the 'weaving of art and text', in which 15 women artists—whose works centred on gender and oppression—responded to different elements of Cour's autobiography through their artworks.

Expressing an eclectic engagement with the subject and executed across multiple media, the artworks embodied the critical spirit of Cour's sensibility, which has consistently questioned the culture of gendered violence in familial and social networks while also reflecting the counterculture of feminine resilience that Cour has emphasised. Two paintings from Gogi Saroj Pal's 'Nirbhaya' series expressed this dual imperative most effectively. In one, a naked female figure stood with a sickle turned towards her body, while in another, the same figure held the sickle as a weapon, turned towards the other.



Nitasha Jaini's 'Khanabadosh' installation series took the trunk as its central motif, presenting it as both suggestive of movement and a site of recollection and memory. Bula Bhattacharya's 'Role Playing' series on silkscreen questioned the notion of gendered roles, while Durga Kainthola's works in acrylic, digital print and silkscreen in the 'Autobiographical' series offered the most inventive interpretation of Cour's ideas—for instance, she superimposed a copy of a page from the manuscript of Cour with an image of the Goddess Kali.

The introductory note for each artist began with quotes from Cour, which seemed to inform and explain, quite obliquely, the artist's unique artistic engagement with Cour's autobiography. One moved through the exhibition not only reading and seeing Cour's words and the visual responses to them but also being aurally immersed in her sagacious voice playing in the background.

■ DIGVIJAY NIKAM

Between Presence and Absence

EXHIBITION: *In Plain Sight*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY: Iman Sengupta

9 to 15 November 2025

Iman Sengupta's deep engagement with art and design informs his approach to photography. A sharp eye enables him to capture distinctive moments with alacrity. Within the strict vocabulary of black and white, he presented frozen moments, distancing himself from conventional image-making by extracting colours from our usual interactions with the world. Theatrical binaries and dramatic highlights prevented the exhibition from descending into bleak, pessimistic noir.



The photographs captured the quiet spectacle of everyday life, seeking meaning in what often goes unnoticed. Sengupta explored how themes such as memory and perception collide, transforming ordinary moments into sites of wonder, beauty and reflection. His work demonstrated that the act

of seeing is not passive but involves an intimate negotiation between presence and absence, between what is visible and what lingers just beyond.

Sengupta's juxtaposed reflections within real landscapes, unusual compositions and play with sharp and mellow contrasts combined to create a sense of poetry and fantasy. The photographs drew the spectator into the drama, compelling them to move from centre to edges and back, actively engaging with his unusual vision of the world. The satin matte lamination over images offered a warm, friendly finish to what he referred to as 'a reminder of the fragility of perception and the loneliness of noticing'.

Sengupta succeeded in making viewers notice and be puzzled by the extraordinary moments hidden within the mundane, everyday scenes. His infectious enthusiasm was delightful when he explained that a striking shot of square tiled flooring included a person seated there. We shared the 'aha moment' that caught the photographer's eye.

The exhibition opened to coincide with the artist's father's birthday. Sengupta, along with his family and friends, arrived dressed in black and white. As they walked through the space, they added yet another layer of visual engagement.

■ BHARATI MIRCHANDANI

Remembering an Artist

PANEL DISCUSSION: *Life and Work of Anjum Singh*

PANELLISTS: Meera Menezes; Manisha Parekh; Manisha Gera Baswani; and Ella Datta

COLLABORATION: *The Raza Foundation*

6 October 2025

The programme, part of the 'Art Matters CIV' series, featured the launch and discussion of a richly illustrated book on artist Anjum Singh (1967–2020), with an essay by art critic and curator Ella Datta. In his opening remarks, Ashok Vajpeyi set the tone by reflecting on art as a metaphor for life and emphasised the importance of celebrating and documenting an artist's journey.

The book *Anjum Singh* documents the artist's work from 2014 to 2020, the year she succumbed to cancer. Datta spoke movingly of the years of the artist's illness, noting

how her practice adopted a different tone and style—one that expressed a sense of universal suffering without self-pity. The lines in Anjum Singh's later works, Datta observed, became a visual language of her endurance.

Meera Menezes discussed the artist's techniques and her thematics, situating them within the urban realities she so keenly observed. Menezes traced the evolution of Anjum Singh as an artist from her earliest experiments to her final works, where the reds and pinks evoked blood and cells, conveying the fragility of the body and its mortality, which had become her reality during these years.

Manisha Parekh shared memories of her long friendship and interaction with Anjum Singh. Daughter of the artists Arpita and Paramjit Singh, Anjum often accompanied her parents to various art events and camps. Manisha Gera Baswani presented a slideshow of photographs, offering glimpses into Anjum Singh, the artist and individual.

The programme concluded with the launch of the book by art historian Geeta Kapur. She spoke about the artist during the final phase of her life, a period marked by love, passion, grief and valour, when her art became inseparable from life and its impending end.

■ JYOTI A. KATHPALIA

Rediscovering an Artistic Treasure

TALK: *Bundi—The Earliest Surviving Royal Murals of Rajasthan*

SPEAKER: Joachim K. Bautze

30 October 2025

Art lovers, scholars and students gathered for an evening steeped in history and rediscovery. Joachim K. Bautze, a distinguished art historian and curator whose engagement with Indian art spans nearly five decades, was introduced by Jyotindra Jain as 'a rare scholar whose eye for art is matched by a fieldworker's curiosity'. What followed was an evening where rigorous scholarship met the subtle drama of discovery.

Bautze began with what unfolded like an art historical detective tale—the search for the Badal Mahal, Bundi's long-forgotten 'Palace of Clouds'. Drawing upon miniature paintings, early 20th-century photographs, and eventually, the satellite precision of Google Earth, he meticulously retraced the palace's location. It felt less like an academic reconstruction and more like an act of resurrection—bringing a lost monument back into the fold of art history.

He then turned to the palace's patrons, the father-son duo Rao Surjan Singh and Rao Bhoj Singh, whose political negotiations with the Deccan and Mughal courts profoundly influenced Bundi's artistic landscape. Referencing his seminal essay 'Early Painting at Bundi' (2000), published in *Marg*, Bautze revealed how these exchanges produced murals that were neither wholly Mughal nor entirely Rajput, but a luminous synthesis of both. 'The Bundi murals', he observed, 'mark the first confident expression of a Rajput visual voice'.

Through evocative slides from his 1980s field documentation, the murals came alive—the celestial *Ras Lila*, royal hunts

and processional scenes unfolding with rhythm and vitality. Although time permitted only brief glimpses, the talk momentarily reconjured Bundi's royal and artistic world.

As the evening drew to a close, warm applause filled the room. For one night, Bundi, which is often a footnote in Rajasthan's art history, stood radiant at its centre.

■ SINDHURI APARNA

The Warp and Weft of a Life

SEMINAR:

Conversations Around Textiles: In Honour of Jasleen Dhamija

8 November 2025

The seminar was a tribute to the life and work of a textile revivalist who spent her lifetime working with and promoting craft traditions within textiles.

The conversations began with a session dedicated to craftspeople. Lajwanti Chhabra, a Phulkari embroidery artist, spoke fervently about how she has preserved the traditional repertoire of motifs. Niranjana Jonnalagadda, a Kalamkari artist, runs an educational institution within his workshop, where traditional Kalamkari teaching is open to all. Naseem Ahmed, a master artisan from the Varanasi *jala* (a special loom) weaving tradition, spoke about the times when his family wove using the *jala* technique.

All the artists displayed some of their breathtaking works, which they had brought to the conference. It would have been a great opportunity for a small exhibition, but alas, that did not happen. Apart from the artists, three additional panels featured designers and domain experts from organisations such as the Delhi Crafts Council, Devi Art Foundation and Dastkar. Discussions addressed Jasleen Dhamija's scholarly works and potential policy changes stemming from her efforts. Dhamija's involvement in policymaking and collaboration with the government at the highest levels produced changes that continue to have a lasting impact.



Speakers also discussed the organisations, design houses and the works they represented, emphasising their strong influence on Indian textile traditions. The lack of documentation—even in contemporary craft traditions and their integration into modern Indian design—was raised as a topic but warranted greater attention at such a conference. Sensitive issues like artists' ownership, voice, and industry stakes in Indian textile and handicraft traditions were touched upon, although only one of the four panels featured the artists themselves.

The seminar's focus remained primarily on Dhamija, as every speaker shared memories of their interactions with her and how she encouraged them to pursue the less trodden path of Indian textile traditions.

Made possible through the support of various institutions and people close to Dhamija, the seminar, led by her son Himman, remained more centred on her personality and efforts rather than the crafts she so ardently loved all her life.

■ KANIKA GUPTA

An Evening of Transcendence

PERFORMANCE: *Qawwali Mehfil Traditions and Experiments*

COLLABORATION: *Ganga Jamuna Culture Foundation*

1 November 2025

Delhi was treated to a *qawwali* (Sufi devotional music) and Kathak performance on a pleasant winter evening. The performances unfolded in three parts, as *qawwal* (musician) Danish Hussain Badayuni's ensemble from Badaun, Uttar Pradesh, opened the evening with their rendition of '*Sakal Ban*'. The audience was captivated by Manjari Chaturvedi and her troupe, who accompanied Badayuni's *qawwali* with a Kathak performance. The duo continued to enchant the audience with '*Saiyan Sajile Tore Naina Rasile*', a composition dedicated to the Hindu deity Krishna, showcasing the fluid and multifaceted themes that range from sacred to profane in the *qawwali* tradition.

The next performance was a tribute by Delhi qawwals Sibtain Nizami and Saqlain Nizami to the late Meraj Ahmed Nizami of Qawwal Bacchon Ka Gharana. They recreated the exchange of poetic *sawaal-jawaab* (question-answer), believed to have taken place between 13th-century Braj scholar and poet Gopal Naik and Mian Samat bin Ibrahim, Amir Khusrau's primary disciple, in Alauddin Khilji's court. It is believed that Gopal's composition comprised 28,000 sentences, and he challenged the Sultan that no one could produce a befitting reply. The verses presented in Arabic by Ibrahim were thus a *jawaab* to Gopal's verses. Even though the two qawwals performed without any instruments, they effectively captured and recreated the essence of the musical dialogue eloquently in Arabic and Braj languages. Their elocution added a rhythmic tune to the bilingual performance.

The final performance of the evening, 'Qaul - Khanqahi Qawwali', which literally means speech or speaking, by Hyderabad's Hussaini Brothers, was dedicated to qawwal Ahsan Hussain Khan Bandanawazi. Adil Hussain Khan Warsi, Fazil Hussain Khan Quadri and Kaamil Hussain Khan presented some iconic pieces, beginning with '*Man Kunto Maula*', '*Khabar-e-Tahayyur-e-Ishq*' and '*Chhaap Tilak*', among others. They transported the audience to a mystical realm with their music, exploring many perspectives from which poetry could be heard, sung, performed and enjoyed by poets, artists and the audience alike, binding all of them to the musical notes of qawwalis and their many renditions.

■ **NITIKA SHARMA**

A Timeless Sufi Tradition

SYMPOSIUM: *The Qawwali Project: Understanding Qawwali*

WELCOME REMARKS BY: Manjari Chaturvedi

INAUGURATION BY: K. N. Shrivastava

COLLABORATION: Ganga Jamuna Culture Foundation

1 November 2025

The seventh edition of the series on 'Understanding Qawwali', conceptualised in 2011 by Kathak dancer Manjari Chaturvedi, brought together renowned scholars, artists, filmmakers and enthusiasts. The day-long symposium explored many dimensions of the Sufi musical tradition of qawwali, fostering a space where academic research and practice converged in dialogue. In her welcome address, Chaturvedi foregrounded Delhi as a historic site for mysticism and music, where qawwali continues to evolve as a living tradition while preserving its spiritual essence. K. N. Shrivastava traced its origins to Amir Khusrau and the Sufi saints of Delhi, emphasising the importance of viewing qawwali not just as entertainment but also as a rich philosophical and literary tradition.

The first session, '*Aah Se Wah Tak—Khanqahi Qawwali to Commercial Qawwali—Understanding the Journey of Qawwali*', featured Salil Mishra, Affan Yesvi and Suman

Mishra in conversation with Chaturvedi. The discussants reflected upon the evolution of qawwali over seven centuries and explored the nature of transformations and continuities in the tradition. Yesvi, who described qawwali as 'food for the soul' and 'a medium to meditate', invoked the sanctity of traditional performances in Sufi *khanqahs* (spiritual centres). Mishra traced the journey of qawwali from Sufi *dargahs* (shrines), *khanqahs* and *urs* (death anniversary of a Sufi saint) to cinema, clubs and social media.

In a session on 'Qawwali in Bombay Cinema', cinema critic Shantanu Ray Chaudhuri highlighted the presence of various genres within qawwali—secular, patriotic and romantic songs as well as devotional ones. The discussion was followed by a conversation between Chaturvedi and filmmaker Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, who emphasised the role played by qawwali in narrative progression in films such as *Delhi-6* and *Rockstar*, which also resonated with the younger generation. The regional variations of qawwali across Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Hyderabad, as well as the gendered aspects of performance, were also reflected upon by the speakers.

The symposium concluded with the launch of *Qawwali: The Call of Hearts in Love*, edited by Chaturvedi, by Shyam Saran, Ashis Nandy and Prahlad Kakkar.

A photo exhibition titled 'I am A Qawwal', held alongside the symposium, showcased performers from Kakori, Malerkotla, Rampur and Hyderabad. It served as a powerful visual and anthropological record, capturing them in their natural environment and highlighting their distinctive personalities as they uphold and carry forward a 700-year-old legacy.

■ **NOBLE SHRIVASTAVA**

Celebrating Two Auteurs

FILM CLUB: *Two Masters, One Century: Remembering Ritwik Ghatak and Raj Khosla*

10 to 21 November 2025

During the centenary celebration of Raj Khosla and Ritwik Ghatak, four classics were screened, including Khosla's *Bombai ka Babu* (1960) and *Do Raaste* (1969); along with Ghatak's *Subarnarekha* (The Golden Thread; 1965) and *Titash Ekti Nadir Naam* (A River Called Titas; 1973).

Khosla inherited a penchant for mature plotting, deep compassion for his characters and a keen ear for music from his mentor Guru Dutt. In a supremely understated performance in *Bombai ka Babu*, Dev Anand plays Babu, an orphan buffeted by fate. Personifying William Blake's

immortal line, 'Some are born to endless night', Babu frequently finds himself on the wrong side of the law. Fleeing from the Mumbai police, he ends up in the sylvan foothills of Himachal, but even here, his murky past catches up with him. Arm-twisted into impersonating the long-lost son of a wealthy merchant with a view to robbing his household, Babu finds himself blindsided by his newfound 'family's' acceptance and the decidedly non-fraternal feelings his younger sister arouses in him. Inspired by the (uncredited) O. Henry short story 'A Double-Dyed Deceiver', the film features a classic folk soundtrack by S. D. Burman, breathtaking location camerawork and a truly stunning, rare Hindi-cinema turn by Suchitra Sen, who plays Babu's younger 'sister'.

Far from the mainstream Hindi cinema scene, Ghatak's monumental *Titash Ekti Nadir Naam*, based on Advaita Mallabharman's novel, is arguably his most ambitious work. A love-letter to the land of his birth, Bangladesh, the film

is memorable for its fractured narrative arcs, multiple characters, surreal flashes and sudden tonal shifts, all reflecting the master's lifelong artistic concerns—the uprooting and displacement of the Bengali people caused by Partition, the Mother Goddess as both nurturer and destroyer and the epic approach. Foreshadowing what later became known as hyperlink cinema, the film was way ahead of its time in its reimagining of the narrative form in world cinema, featuring an array of intertwined characters and their destinies, all the while using melodrama as a means to question social customs and subvert audience expectations. Criminally underappreciated during his own lifetime, it is heartening to witness the overwhelming outpouring of critical reappraisal and admiration for Ghatak's work, after all these years.

■ **SIDHARTH SRINIVASAN**

Tribute to a Cinematic Maestro

FILM: *Mani Kaul and that Thing Called the Actor*

DIRECTED BY: Mita Vashisht

4 November 2025

This 96-minute film is a tribute to Mani Kaul (1944–2011) by Mita Vashisht, a distinguished actress from India's Parallel Cinema. She is best known for her collaborations with Kaul and Kumar Shahani, two of the most compelling directors of the post-Satyajit Ray–Ritwik Ghatak era. She received widespread acclaim for her performance in *Siddheshwari*, Kaul's contemplation on the life of Siddheshwari Devi, one of the greatest thumri singers of the 20th century.

This documentary is Vashisht's spirited attempt to examine the lessons she absorbed from Kaul while shooting the film in Banaras, where Siddheshwari grew up under economic hardships and learnt the secrets of classical genres such as thumri, dadra, chaiti and baramasa from her aunt, Rajeshwari Devi, a prominent *tawaif* or courtesan of Banaras. Kaul's film is not a biopic; instead, it examines Siddheshwari's

singing and how it influenced his own artistic vision. Seeing Vashisht's documentary, one realises how the role might have challenged her as an actress.

Vashisht's directorial approach is experimental. She strikes a delicate balance between respecting Kaul's visual style in *Siddheshwari* and creating her own vision of the man and his aesthetic approach, and how it shaped her growth as an artiste. Her outstanding team—Omar Adam Khan and Ajay David (cinematographers); late A. M. Padmanabhan and the filmmaker herself (sound designers); Madhu Apsara (sound mixer); Santosh Mandal, Swabha Pal and Sidrah Fatma (editors); and Lapdiang Artimai Syiem and Armaan Dehlvi (actors)—made a significant contribution to the film. Vashisht wrote the script and dialogue, designed the production, and directed and produced it.

The film is slow but consistently engaging. The intercutting of shots from Kaul's film and her own interpretation of him in that context is visually stimulating. Some may find the use of words excessive, but Vashisht, the director and the actress who played Siddheshwari, are continually trying to understand each other. Photographs of Kaul punctuate the storytelling. The film reflects Vashisht's dedication to the avant-garde filmmaker, as she spent 10 years of her life crafting this production.

■ **PARTHA CHATTERJEE**

A Lens into Space Trash

FILM: *The Dirty Sky*

DIRECTOR: O. P. Srivastava

29 October 2025

In *The Dirty Sky*, O. P. Srivastava points his camera upward—not to celebrate space exploration, but to expose the debris it has left behind. This science documentary examines the growing crisis of orbital junk: defunct satellites, rocket fragments and metallic shards that circle Earth endlessly, posing a mounting threat to communication, navigation and observation systems. From a distance, space may appear serene, but Srivastava reveals it as a congested and chaotic zone.

The film frames this issue as both an environmental and ethical emergency demanding global regulation. It explains

how supposedly infinite outer space has been constrained by crowded orbital lanes and the danger of cascading collisions—the dreaded Kessler Syndrome, in which one impact triggers a chain reaction of debris. Srivastava asks the unsettling question: Who will clean up this mess when both governments and private industries seem unwilling to take responsibility? The film underlines the absence of a viable business model or a coordinated global framework for clean-up, exposing the gap between commercial ambition and collective responsibility. Scholars of space law point out that existing treaties are outdated, vague or routinely ignored.

Visually, the documentary is compelling. It combines archival launch footage, expert interviews, simulation graphics and scenes of real debris-tracking operations to convey a chilling sense of scale and speed. The viewer becomes aware of how fast these fragments—of steel, aluminium and composites—zip around the planet and how a single collision

could disable an active satellite or plunge unpredictably towards Earth. Through this imagery, the film makes its central argument clear: our careless behaviour in orbit is beginning to resemble pollution on Earth, only less visible and far harder to remedy.

If the film has a shortcoming, it is that it offers more warning than solution. Though it surveys experimental technologies such as robotic arms, lasers, space tugs and nets, Srivastava remains sceptical about their scale and feasibility. The viewer is left with a deep sense of urgency but few clear pathways forward—a limitation that may reflect the real-world complexity of the issue.

Yet *The Dirty Sky* remains accessible and visually powerful. The film is a timely wake-up call. Srivastava compels us to look beyond the romantic vision of space as the ‘final frontier’ and confront the junkyard that it is becoming.

■ MANOHAR KHUSHALANI

The Capital's Multi-Layered History

DISCUSSION: *Delhi and its Textured Pasts*

INAUGURAL REMARKS: K. N. Shrivastava

PANELLISTS: Amar Farooqui; Sohail Hashmi; and Shubham Mishra

MODERATOR: Shashank Shekhar Sinha

COLLABORATION: @Crossroads

3 November 2025

Amid Delhi's hazardous AQI levels, the discussion sparked a rediscovery of the city's transitions, its landscapes, rivers, people and memories.

Sohail Hashmi initiated the discussion by questioning the relevance of the River Yamuna in the early settlements of Delhi. The quartzite bedrock of the city contained silica, making the water unsuitable for human consumption. Water was diverted to the city via a canal from Haryana. Since the city lacks an effective sewage treatment system, the river's water remains undrinkable.

Shubham Mishra continued Hashmi's discussion on the region's terrain. He emphasised the significance of local waterbodies across Delhi's seven historical cities and their influence on the naming of various places. Locations such as Daryaganj, Barapullah and Dhaula Kuan derive their names from this penchant.

In recent decades, urban development has interfered with the natural terrain of the city—*nullahs* (streams) have been covered; elevated roads have been constructed over channels; and neighbourhoods have been created ‘thoughtlessly’ on the riverbed. The seasonal flooding that now occurs with disturbing regularity is a consequence of this ‘insensitive’ urbanisation.

Amar Farooqui focussed on Delhi's political landscape from the late 18th to the mid-19th century. Through his vivid descriptions of various notable events during this period, the River Yamuna and its surrounding terrain were brought to life. For nearly half of the 18th century, Delhi was governed by the Marathas, specifically the Scindias, and after the Battle of Patparganj in 1803, by the British East India Company. The Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar was reduced to a figurehead during these years. His symbolism, nonetheless, was highlighted in the march of the rebel soldiers from Meerut to Delhi during the Revolt of 1857.

The Delhi of that period came alive through these invigorating descriptions.

■ RAJESH LUTHRA

A Modern Look at Ancient Myths

IN CONVERSATION: Sonia Singh with Amish Tripathi

27 October 2025

Sonia Singh described Amish Tripathi, or Amish, as he prefers to be known, as ‘the storyteller of our times’. This seemed apt for a writer whose printed books have become bestsellers in the digital age. With 12 books published in 15 years, Amish's creative endeavour extends beyond literature into documentaries, films, and, more recently, the realm of video games. His work across all mediums remains united by a single thread: a mission to reclaim and reinterpret the Indian narrative at the intersection of history, mythology and spirituality.

Following the release of his latest book, *The Chola Tigers: Avengers of Somnath*, this fireside chat explored the inspirations, research and philosophical underpinnings that shape Amish's storytelling. The discussion revolved around the author's spiritual reflections on divinity and morality, and his reframing of Indian history as a saga of resilience.

Amish explained that his philosophical framework rests on the conviction that 'Truth is one', and that all faiths are essentially diverse pathways towards the same goal. However, he cautioned against oversimplifying this idea, emphasising the complexity of existence and the moral dilemmas embedded within it. Central to his narratives is the concept of *dharma*, not as 'religion', as it is commonly translated, but as that which sustains and serves the greater good. His portrayal of Lord Shiva as the Mahadev, a figure

forged through struggle and moral action, underscored that virtue is earned through deeds rather than inherited by birthright. Strength, he suggested, lies in standing for what is right, even in solitude.

Turning to history, Amish urged a reimagining of India's past not as a succession of invasions and defeats, but as the world's most enduring culture with the longest story of continuous resistance. He contended that India's fragility stemmed from disunity, not cowardice, and called for a renewed sense of cultural and civilisational pride. Blending mythology and historical reflection, Amish emerged from the conversation as a committed interpreter of India's enduring spirit.

■ **RICHA VADINI SINGH**

The State of the Nation

TALK: *Annual Sardar Patel Lecture on Governance*

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: *Ajit Doval*

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS: *Harivansh*

VOTE OF THANKS: *Shanti Narain*

COLLABORATION: *IC Centre for Governance*

31 October 2025

There is a 'crisis of intention' within the Indian political establishment, said Ajit Doval, not a 'crisis of knowledge'. Senior politicians were going abroad and 'raising doubts about the credibility of the electoral system', which has worked well since India gained Independence. Dismissing these politicians as 'irresponsible elements', he regretted that some people were 'running down the country'. While brave 'people were dying for the country', others were making 'casual statements about aircraft being downed', he said, referring to the post-Operation Sindoor fracas.

Doval stated that the positives for India in the last decade included the elimination of terrorism in the 'hinterland', though it persists in Jammu and Kashmir; the weakening of left-wing insurgency following development initiatives and the provision of infrastructure such as roads and essential services like schools and hospitals in the troubled areas, as

well as more employment opportunities being created there; and a happier, largely insurgency-free North East, apart from the recent bloodletting in Manipur caused by the rift between two tribes.

Commenting on India's neighbourhood, Doval said China was 'an area of concern', as there were disputes along the border, but the Special Representative mechanism (of which he is the Indian point of contact) is addressing it and bilateral trade is continuing. As for Pakistan and terror, the government, he said, can protect people regardless of where the threat comes from.

Doval expressed anxiety about India's criminal justice system. Yes, the mafias were things of the past, but crimes against women were worrying. The laws were there, but 'our implementation capabilities are short of what is needed', he acknowledged. New technologies were important, as were 'greater capacity building' and 'perception management'.

'How does the world see India?' Doval asked the audience. Not as an 'egalitarian society', with surveys giving India low grades when it came to corruption, governance, rule of law and press freedom. Some criticism was unfair, he felt, considering institutions such as India's independent judiciary, the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) and the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG). In conclusion, 'introspection and self-criticism' were necessary, and, crucially, the credibility of institutions needed protection.

■ **SRINJOY CHOWDHURY**

Speaking Up

DISCUSSION: *How Free is Free Speech in India*

SPEAKER: *Rekha Sharma*

DISCUSSANTS: *Jatinder Jay Cheema; and Santosh Sneh Mann*

18 October 2025

This evocatively titled programme offered a compelling and sobering exploration of the constitutional, legal and moral

dimensions of free speech in India. The discussion opened with Rekha Sharma reflecting on the paradox of being able to gather and speak freely about free speech while also recognising a growing sense of uncertainty about how long such openness will last. Her perspective was grounded in constitutional history—freedom of speech was born from India's struggle against colonial rule and was intended to guarantee the right to freely express one's thoughts, subject to narrowly-defined, reasonable restrictions. Much of her critique focussed on how these restrictions are increasingly stretched beyond their original intent. Sharma highlighted the expanding use of laws such as the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) against dissenting voices, pointing

to data from global indices and India's escalating record of internet shutdowns. Particularly striking was her concern over judicial reluctance to rigorously scrutinise executive action. She referenced several high-profile cases where prolonged detentions and inconsistent bail standards raised questions about the judiciary's constitutional vigilance. She urged courts to zealously guard fundamental rights, so that free speech continues to remain a constitutional guarantee.

Jatinder Jay Cheema urged a more balanced lens—one that considers responsibilities alongside rights. He emphasised the unique challenges of the digital age, where misinformation, online harassment and incendiary content can be spread rapidly. In this context, he argued, judicial references to duties are not ideological overreach but necessary guardrails. He also noted that many democracies impose similar limits on harmful speech and that India's jurisprudence has evolved meaningfully over time.

Santosh Snehi Mann brought emotional depth to the discussion by revisiting her early encounters with constitutional debates as a student and by contextualising free speech not only as a constitutional ideal but also as an often-contested lived experience shaped by social hierarchies.

Overall, the discussion organised by IIC's Sectoral Policy Group on Law and Justice presented two thoughtful constitutional visions—one warning of shrinking freedoms and weakened judicial oversight, the other advocating a calibrated balance between liberty and collective security. Together, the speakers illuminated the complexity of safeguarding free speech in a diverse, digitally connected democracy.

■ RITWIK SHARMA

The Persistence of Social Hierarchy

TALK: *Caste Lasts: The Anatomy of a Resilient Hegemony*

SPEAKER: Arjun Appadurai

CHAIR: Rita Brara

COLLABORATION: *Contributions to Indian Sociology; and Institute of Economic Growth*

1 November 2025

In her opening remarks, Rita Brara, Editor of *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, welcomed Arjun Appadurai and the audience to the fifth lecture in the 'Contributions to Indian Sociology' series. She outlined the journal's six-decade history of nurturing critical and diverse scholarship on Indian society, emphasising its commitment to dialogue and non-discrimination. Introducing Appadurai, she outlined his wide-ranging academic career and recalled his earlier writings that questioned the French anthropologist, Louis Dumont's hierarchy-centred view of Indian society.

In his lecture, Appadurai revisited caste as a system that has survived reform and modernity through what

he called 'resilient hegemony'—forms of coercion and humiliation that reproduce themselves over time. Drawing on B. R. Ambedkar's writings, he identified endogamy as the central mechanism sustaining caste, describing it as an active process of regulating female sexuality and policing social reproduction. He argued that the intertwined logics of purity and pollution—embodied respectively in the control of women and the exclusion of Dalits—form the deep structure of caste. Linking historical practices of hypergamy and hypogamy to the proliferation of thousands of jatis (cohesive groups of people usually associated with specific occupations), he noted how the obsession with purity persists even in contemporary idioms of hygiene and cleanliness, including state-sponsored campaigns such as *Swachh Bharat* (Clean India).

Caste's resilience, Appadurai said, lies in everyday acts of compliance and deference—the small gestures that renew hierarchy in face-to-face life. He proposed that the ultimate 'horror' within caste is the Brahminical aversion to the senses and the body, displaced onto women and Dalits, with asceticism serving as both escape and reinforcement of the structures of power.

In her concluding comments, Brara revisited Ambedkar's call for a threefold challenge—dismantling endogamy, rejecting religious and moral justifications, and urging Brahmin intellectuals to lead reform—while inviting continued discussion on the persistence of caste in contemporary India.

■ PRABIR KUMAR TALUKDAR

Remembering a Literary Icon

TALK: *Modernism and the Sri Lankan Mind: The Life and Work of Martin Wickramasinghe (1890–1976)*

SPEAKER: Uditha Devapriya

20 November 2025

Martin Wickramasinghe remains one of Sri Lanka's most influential intellectuals—an extraordinary novelist and public intellectual, whose work has reshaped the island's understanding of modernity, culture and identity. Educated across Buddhist, Christian and Western traditions, Wickramasinghe developed a uniquely bilingual and bicultural sensibility. This allowed him to inhabit the worlds of both the anglicised elite and the Sinhala-speaking majority, positioning him as a rare bridge between indigenous knowledge and contemporary thought.

Uditha Devapriya analysed Wickramasinghe's oeuvre spanning six decades of writing, including fiction, memoir,

literary criticism and cultural commentary. Wickramasinghe engaged deeply with questions of tradition, rationality and social change. His early novel *Leela* (1914) caused a stir for its unflinching critique of religious orthodoxy, signalling the contrarian boldness that would define his career. His final work, *Bhavatara* (1973), a radical reimagining of the Buddha's life, provoked fierce debate yet reaffirmed his belief in culture as a dynamic, evolving force rather than a sacred and immutable inheritance, Devapriya said.

Wickramasinghe's contributions extended beyond literature. His first article in *Dinamina*, a leading Sinhalese newspaper, was on reincarnation. He introduced Sinhala readers to global thinkers, from Darwin and Mill to Russian realists and European rationalists. Equally, he challenged colonial scholarship by asserting the distinctiveness of Sinhala and Sri Lankan artistic traditions within the broader South Asian sphere, countering the homogenising assumptions of early Western critics.

Wickramasinghe's celebrated trilogy—*Gamperaliya* (1944), *Yuganthaya* (1949) and *Kaliyugaya* (1957)—remains one of the most ambitious portraits of Sri Lankan society in transition, mapping the rise and decline of social classes. A fierce advocate of reason, dialogue and cultural self-reflection, he also spoke out against chauvinism, supporting parity for Sinhala and Tamil communities in the 1950s.

Today, although the Martin Wickramasinghe Trust preserves his archives, Devapriya regretted that much of Wickramasinghe's oeuvre remains untranslated and understudied. He reminded the audience that Wickramasinghe's work offers an invaluable framework: critical yet rooted, rational yet empathetic and always committed to expanding the possibilities of thought.

■ RITIKA KOCHHAR

Calling Upon the Goddesses

PERFORMANCE: *Raga Soirée*

ARTIST: Nirali Kartik

ACCOMPANISTS: Zaheen Khan (*tabla*); and Lalit Sisodiya (*harmonium*)

8 November 2025

Nirali Kartik's first performance after matrescence paid homage to the Goddesses of learning and strength. Her rendition of the slow *bandish* (composition) 'Shyamala Vistara' in raga Purvi repeated the name of Goddess Saraswati in four flat or 'komal' notes as she traversed the scales with rapid *taans*. Smooth and skilful, 'Mata Mori' reached high, prayerful climaxes, with quavering notes in descent. Eyes closed, she seemed rapt in meditative melody, asking for the Goddess' blessings as the piece continued with the phrase 'Kripa Karo'. For *drut laya* (fast tempo), she sang 'Durge Bhavani Dayani', a seamless flow of music, rising and falling from a crescendo, accompanied by synchronised phrases from the tabla and harmonium.



Kartik's excellence in *bol taans* (fast melodic improvisation using words) and *aakar* (the use of only the open vowel sound 'aa') brought out the exquisiteness of the middle octave. Her mastery of scales with effortless grace gave her voice unending beauty. Her next piece, 'Sakhi Mori', demonstrated raga Durga in *jhaptal* (a 10-beat pattern), highlighting the innocent, restless and feminine characteristics of Goddess Durga. Describing the rainstorm as a deterrent to fetching water for her household, the Goddess echoed Radha. In a musical pause, the tabla's *chakradhar tihai*, played thrice consecutively, created a sense of atmospheric thunder in the auditorium. Kartik moved into a tarana composition brimming with fast-paced *taans*.

Kartik concluded on a mystical note with three compositions. Raga Behag's plaintive 'Sab Sakhiya Chalo Prabhu ke Darsan' echoed the sweetness of an invitation, with gentle pleas suggesting the disciple does not wish to go alone to worship Krishna. Kabir's bhajan, 'Mana Lago Mero Yaar Fakiri Mein', with lines such as 'Prem Nagar Mein Rahani Hamari', wove harmony into a desire for divinity. Her 'Krishnaji mriganayani' celebrated the wonder of music itself. Repeating selected musical notes, she guided the audience into the song, truly surprising for a khayal performance. Kartik's forceful ornamentation of the composition with *gamak taan* flowed into the flourish of a *chakradhar tihai*, leaving the audience in a blissful mood for the evening.

■ AJANTA DUTT

Need for Better Regulation

BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP: *Reimagining India's Economy: The Road to a More Equitable Society* by Arun Maira

PANELLISTS: V. Anantha Nageswaran; Sunil Kant Munjal; and Arun Maira

MODERATOR: Shereen Bhan

27 October 2025

The discussion began with critical questions about the role of institutions managing capital, the effects of the Trump era on global economic policies and the place of the free market in contemporary economies. The conversation explored the broader meaning of growth, the importance of regulation and the balance between market freedom and social welfare.

Arun Maira opened the discussion by emphasising that public policy should be viewed through the lens of philosophy and poetry, not merely economics. He argued that the economy is deeply dependent on natural resources, and therefore, maintaining the health of all systems—economic, social and environmental—is vital. Maira challenged the obsession with GDP growth, asserting that economic progress must also account for environmental sustainability and social well-being, not just numbers.

V. Anantha Nageswaran furthered the discussion by describing human cooperation and competition as the twin engines of progress. He emphasised that GDP alone is not a sufficient indicator; rather, the growth of per capita income—currently around US\$2,700 in India—is a more accurate reflection of development. Nageswaran highlighted that the economy should be 'pro-market, not pro-business', meaning that it must enable fair competition and innovation instead of favouring large corporations. He also emphasised the importance of financial inclusion and welfare-focussed growth, as economic expansion is a prerequisite for enhancing living standards.

Maira then pointed out the contrasting paths of developed and developing nations, arguing that simply distributing money is ineffective without enabling people to participate productively in the economy. He called for better regulation to ensure fair play and accountability in markets.

Sunil Kant Munjal added that education, health and happiness should be included as key indicators alongside GDP. He emphasised the need to build skills and institutional ecosystems to support enterprise growth.

When asked about the kind of regulation needed, Nageswaran stated that India needs 'better regulation, not more regulation', cautioning that excessive rules could harm Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Maira concluded by stressing the importance of inclusive planning, income enhancement for the poor and learning from China's successful growth model, which has raised its per capita income much faster than India has.

■ **ARYAN SINGH**

India's Ethical Outlook

BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP: *Echoes of the Past: Deep Threads of Indian Diplomacy* by Lakhan Mehrotra

DISCUSSANTS: Amit Kapoor; Harsh Vardhan Shringla; and Lakhan Mehrotra

CHAIR: Karan Singh

25 October 2025

The world is experiencing a changing order in which India's relationships with the USA, UK, EU, and other nations are developing amid competing national interests and weakening multilateral agreements. Given the current global situation, the discussion of Lakhan Mehrotra's book was both timely and thought-provoking.

One theme that cut across the speakers' points was the continuity between India's civilisational heritage and its modern-day diplomatic practice. Drawing inspiration from the Vedas, the Puranas, the teachings of Buddha and the ideals of Vivekananda, among others, the book situates Indian foreign policy within a long arc of moral and cultural synthesis. The amalgamation, the panel noted, has historically anchored India's worldview, one that acknowledges, respects and celebrates diversity, ethical

engagement and the principle of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the world is one family). Starting from ancient republics and pre-modern statecraft to Jawaharlal Nehru's articulation of post-Independence diplomacy, India's global outlook has been marked by the intertwining of ethics with pragmatism and culture with statecraft.

The speakers highlighted the contemporary relevance of these ideals. Harsh Vardhan Shringla outlined India's civilisational ethos, which continues to inform its diplomatic choices, citing India's 2022 G20 Presidency, where it had 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' as its guiding theme. He also highlighted the advocacy of 'human-centric globalisation' and sustainable lifestyles at international fora, stating that this form of moral orientation offers a stabilising vision amidst international crises and the shifting global order.

India's internal challenges, economic inequality, institutional deficits and democratic functioning were also discussed. These factors play a critical role in shaping the nation's external projection and perception, Amit Kapoor said, adding that these concerns were situated within the broader question of what kind of future India envisions for itself.

Mehrotra's book is not just a historical narrative but also a reflection on India's evolving moral compass in the art of diplomacy, a synthesis of ancient wisdom and modern realism that continues to define India's outlook to the world.

■ **SAURYA MISHRA**

War and Peace?

BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP: *The Thousand Years War: Russia and the West* by Achala Moulik

DISCUSSANTS: Denis Alipov; Archana Upadhyay; Dipanjan Roy Chaudhuri; and Achala Moulik

CHAIR: K. N. Shrivastava

10 November 2025

Russia's war with the West didn't begin in 2022, when it invaded Ukraine, argued author Achala Moulik; there has been intermittent fighting for about a thousand years. The Teutonic Knights charged into Russia in 1241, Charles XII's Swedes attacked Peter the Great's nascent empire in the early 18th century, and there was terrible bloodletting when the war machines of Napoleon Bonaparte and Nazi Germany targeted Moscow in 1812 and 1941, respectively.

A million casualties (Russian and Ukrainian, killed and wounded) later, the war continues. Russian diplomat Denis Alipov said North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) personnel were involved in the fighting, operating Patriot air defence systems and long-range missiles. 'Do you think we are fighting Ukraine?' he asked. 'To believe that would be a 100 per cent mistake.'

How, then, can the war end? It can end tomorrow, Alipov insisted, if Europe and NATO, which is headed by the United States, decide not to fight to the last Ukrainian. Peace talks between US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin, haven't made much headway as the 'cheerleader team' (European leaders) speak out when attempts to find a solution are made.

Moulik spoke of close Indo-Russian ties over centuries, beginning with Russian scholars visiting India during the reign of Peter the Great, criticism by Russia of the East India Company's barbarism during the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and Rabindranath Tagore's 'rapturous account' of the Soviet Union after his visit in 1930. The end of the Soviet Union, she said, wasn't a Western triumph, but a 'demise' after internal problems and the weakening caused by its Afghanistan campaign.

Archana Upadhyay said Moulik's book was 'nuanced and an in-depth exploration', dedicated to civilisation's triumph over barbarism; Dipanjan Roy Chaudhuri described it as 'timely' and a 'confidence-building measure', while Alipov praised it for its 'balance and depth'.

In his concluding remarks, K. N. Shrivastava called Russia 'India's most trusted friend' and recalled the support from Moscow post India's independence. He pointed out that former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had tellingly spoken of how the West had 'underestimated Russia'.

■ SRINJOY CHOWDHURY

Intercultural Connections

SEMINAR: *Conference on Indo-Portuguese Historical Relations*

WELCOME REMARKS: João Ribeiro

INAUGURATED BY: João Ribeiro de Almeida

KEYNOTE ADDRESS: Lakshmi Subramanian

COLLABORATION: Embassy of Portugal, Cultural Centre

17 to 18 November 2025



An international conference commemorating the 50th anniversary of the restoration of diplomatic relations between India and Portugal (1975–2025) brought together leading historians from both countries to explore their long and multifaceted history.

In his inaugural remarks, João Ribeiro de Almeida, Ambassador of Portugal, observed that 'our relations span far beyond the modern diplomatic era'.

The keynote address by Lakshmi Subramanian traced the evolution of scholarship on the Portuguese presence in India.

Starting with K. M. Panikkar's 1929 study, she explained how earlier interpretations were shaped by colonial ideas that compared Portuguese 'medievalism' with British 'modernity'. She highlighted how recent research has moved beyond such reductive claims and emphasised the importance of re-examining Luso-Indian relations to understand the past and present.

Day two featured a special lecture, titled 'The International Seminar on Indo-Portuguese History and its Impact on World Historiography', by João Paulo Oliveira e Costa and Ernestine Carreira. The speakers offered an insightful overview of the

International Seminar on Indo-Portuguese History (ISIPH), tracing its evolution and enduring contributions to global historiography. They reflected on the Seminar's origins in 1978 and its pioneering role in shaping contemporary Indo-Portuguese academic engagement. The lecture also paid homage to its founders.

The third session, featuring talks by Najaf Haider and Farhat Hasan, focussed on the relationship between the Mughals and the Portuguese. Haider's research traced the trajectory of Mughal-Portuguese interactions, particularly in the interconnected domains of trade, politics and religion. He showed how the Portuguese presence shaped aspects of

Mughal administration, expansion and cultural curiosity, including the court's engagement with Christianity. Hasan argued that relations between the two powers did not follow a fixed pattern but shifted according to political and cultural contexts. He examined Mughal interpretations of Portuguese religious and cultural practices, uncovering a complex landscape of intercultural interactions.

The seminar inspired participants to further explore the rich and layered history of Indo-Portuguese relations.

■ MITALI TEWARI

Elegant Explorations

PERFORMANCE: *Beyond Grace: A Journey of Dance, Peace, Voice and Womanhood*

PERFORMED BY: Vijayalakshmi

COLLABORATION: *The Raza Foundation; and Women in Security, Conflict Management & Peace (WISCOMP)*

28 November 2025



It is not very often that a 12-year-old girl reflects on the cycle of birth and death and the attainment of *moksha* (freedom from the cycle of transmigration of the soul). This spiritual bent of mind at a very young age helped Vijayalakshmi, an award-winning Mohiniyattam dancer, not only cope with the traumatic experiences in her life but also to channelise her

inner conflict into creative, joyful dance choreographies. Her performance showcased some innovatively choreographed pieces celebrating her journey of women's empowerment. Vijayalakshmi also honoured the artistic legacy of her mother and guru, the renowned Mohiniyattam dancer Bharati Shivaji, through her dance and narratives of lived experiences.

Vijayalakshmi began with 'Jiva', a piece choreographed by Shivaji, articulating the merging of the soul with the Absolute. The dancer's slow and pointed toe-gliding movements, articulating the path to spiritual awakening, were very graceful. Her next presentation drew inspiration

from a book of poetry titled *Rain*. Set to Rabindranath Tagore's paean to nature, '*Mon Mor Megher Songi*', Vijayalakshmi effectively used music arranged by Mac Quayle, an Emmy award-winning composer, to express joy at the heavens releasing refreshing monsoon showers.

The dancer's desire to explore uncharted territory manifested in the next piece, 'Paryapti'. Drawing on spiritual and musical traditions from Bengal, the presentation incorporated the free-flowing rhythmic movements seen in *dhunuchi naach*, a dance traditionally performed by devotees during Durga Puja to the beat of a *dhak* (large drum) while holding an incense burner (*dhunuchi*) in their hands.

Vijayalakshmi shared how her decision to move away from traditional content in Mohiniyattam portraying women as diminished characters dependent on men led to a production based on the story of Unniyarcha, a feisty woman who lived in Kerala during the 16th

century. Her concluding piece, an excerpt from this path-breaking production, beautifully integrated Kalaripayattu, the ancient martial art form of Kerala, with the elegant movements of Mohiniyattam, and conveyed both inner strength and exterior grace.

■ 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.



MS. DEEPAK DAWAR
A-2067



MS. USHA BHATNAGAR
A-3999



SMT. SHEILA LAL
A-7661



SHRI N. K. SWAIKA
M-1526



JUSTICE KULDIP SINGH
(RETD.) | M-2380



SHRI MATIUL ISLAM
M-2399



DR. (SMT.) KUSUM
KRISHNA | M-3025

And the following Member (photograph not available):

MRS. USHA RATHORE (A-7780)



A compactor unit in the second basement of Kamaladevi Block, providing clean and efficient storage, was inaugurated by Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath, Life Trustee, IIC, on 1 November 2025



The renovated ground-floor kitchen in Kamaladevi Block was inaugurated by IIC Trustee Dr. Mahesh Verma on 26 November 2025



Director's Note

With the onset of autumn, the Centre celebrated its annual 'The IIC Experience: A Festival of the Arts', from 9 to 14 October, inviting people to participate in a variety of programmes during Delhi's pleasant weather. This year, the Festival's theme was 'Sā Vanitā: Thus She Speaks', emphasising women's voices, their multifaceted growth, and women-led initiatives across various fields through talks, discussions, exhibitions, films and cultural performances. Among the highlights was also the food festival by the women of 'We The Chefs', who presented a delightful selection of cuisines for gastronomes.

Building on the momentum, the IIC-IRD, in collaboration with the Centre for Escalation of Peace, the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Ritinjali, and Pallavan Learning Centre, organised a conference (21-22 November) and an exhibition (21-30 November) on the 10th-century Buddhist teacher and leader Atīśa Dīpamkara Śrījñāna. The conference was inaugurated by the Minister of Culture, Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat. Eighteen scholars and practitioners from India, Indonesia, Tibet and France presented their work on the cosmopolitan legacy of Atīśa.

In connection with the project SAMHiTA (South Asian Manuscript Histories and Textual Archive), a team from the Centre visited Kathmandu in October to strengthen partnerships with various institutions for digitising the manuscripts lying in their repositories. To explore the contribution of ancient Indians to medical science and India's healing traditions, a research project has been initiated by IIC-IRD in partnership with Bharat Ki Soch, an NGO promoted by ITC. To accommodate its expanding team, the IIC-IRD office at the Annexe has been renovated to provide additional workstations.

The Library has introduced a new alerting service to keep Members informed about themes and ideas explored in recent edited volumes and publications across various disciplines. In ongoing efforts to optimise the storage space for Library materials, IIC Publications and Membership and Catering records, new compactors have been installed in the second basement of Kamaladevi Block. The compactor unit provides a clean and efficient storage solution. It was inaugurated by Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath, Life Trustee, IIC, on 1 November.

The Kamaladevi Block's kitchen on the ground floor has been renovated and commissioned. It marks the completion of the first of the five phases of the Centre's kitchen renovation project. It was inaugurated by IIC Trustee Dr. Mahesh Verma on 26 November.

The layouts of the buffet counters at banquets have been redesigned for greater efficiency. Internal rotation of catering staff has been introduced to train them in multi-skilling. The guest fee at all Catering venues has been revised and implemented from 1 November. Special gift hampers were curated for sale during Deepawali.

The renovation of Annexe Hostel rooms began in October. It will be carried out in three phases to minimise inconvenience to Members and their guests. The work is expected to be completed within six months.

The boundary wall along Joseph Stein Lane has been redeveloped following the recommendation of security experts. A new gate for the differently-abled persons (Divyang) has been installed on the same lane, opposite the Library. The work on Max Mueller Marg is in progress.

The sewage treatment plant (STP) at the Annexe, inaugurated in September this year, produces approximately 25 kilolitres of treated water daily. During summer, the treated water can be fully utilised for various purposes, including cooling towers, washing and gardening. To supply surplus treated water during winter to Lodhi Gardens, it is proposed to sign an agreement with NDMC.

With the completion of all winter plantations, we can look forward to colourful blooms in the IIC lawns in the coming months. The sale of seasonal flower seedlings in pots began on 20 November.

The Centre has discontinued the use of a few earlier email addresses and has now transitioned to ZOHO Mail, an India-based service provider, for more efficient communication. More details can be found on the IIC website at iicdelhi.in. Members are requested to update their records and use the new email IDs for all future correspondence.

K. N. SHRIVASTAVA