

INDIA  
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# IIIC Diary

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## Contemporary Reflections from Nepal

**EXHIBITION:** *Echoes of the Mandala*

**CURATED BY:** *Swosti R. Kayastha*

**COLLABORATION:** *Nepal Embassy;  
B. P. Koirala India–Nepal Foundation, India; and  
Everest Chamber of Commerce and Industry*

**14 to 22 February 2026**

The exhibition brought together 78 works by 37 artists to explore shared cultural and religious art from Nepal and India. Beginning as an investigation into ‘ancient connections’ between the two countries’ civilisations, the endeavour quickly developed into an assessment of their shared ethnography, anthropology and culture, with these commonalities serving as the exhibition’s dominant theme.

Opening with a painting of Shrinathji (a manifestation of Krishna) by a Nepali artist whose family had lived in Banaras for at least two generations, a few exhibits depicted Krishna and Balram dancing in the struts of temples in Nepal. Sacred iconographies of shared religious figures like Vishnu, Krishna, Tara, Chakrasamvara and Ardhanarishvara appeared in the exhibition in deeply personal and contemporary forms. Traditional Paubhā paintings and Newari idioms appeared alongside printmaking, abstraction and conceptual art, dissolving the rigid distinctions between the ‘traditional’ and the ‘modern’. Many works drew on Nepal’s symbolic Vajracharya



priest’s crown, now housed in institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and grappled with urbanisation, ecological loss and the politics of silence.

Several artists returned, in different ways, to the question of presence. Fragmented bodies, layered surfaces and incomplete forms suggested a state of being perpetually elsewhere—of inhabiting multiple roles, thoughts and anxieties at once, and therefore never fully arriving in the moment. A state that felt uncannily familiar.

Elsewhere, memory took on a more tangible form. The story of a stolen Paubhā painting of Chintāmani Lokeśvara from the Itumbaha monastery in Kathmandu, smuggled abroad and recently repatriated, attests that artefacts have not only been taken from India as sacred and returned as stone.

What the exhibition ultimately offered was not a resolution but a way of seeing and thinking. That tradition was neither preserved nor discarded; it was reworked, questioned and lived. The mandala itself became a metaphor—not a closed diagram, but an expanding field in which memory and meaning are shared across time and space.

■ RITIKA KOCHHAR



# The Seen and the Unseen

**EXHIBITION:** *Zikr*

**WORKS BY:** *Shikha Sheoran*

**11 to 17 February 2026**

To what extent can an ordinary pencil allow an artist to express their world? What should be the subject of art? And what should be the relationship between the medium of art and its subject? The exhibition prompted viewers to reflect on these questions. Comprising works in pencil and charcoal by Shikha Sheoran, the display featured a splendid set of portraits executed in a realistic idiom. At the centre of each portrait was an ordinary subject—sweeper, balloon seller, rural workers and farmers, among others. Through her technical precision, Sheoran brought out the emotional intensity, vulnerability and humanity of these often-overlooked figures.

The artist captured her subjects in moments of solitude to reveal their unseen lives and unspoken emotions. In the 'Artist Note', she wrote: 'I sketch not to recreate appearances alone, but to explore what lies beneath



them...My drawings hold space for reflection rather than resolution. They are not meant to explain, but to acknowledge—to make visible what often remains unseen in everyday life.' To realise this aspiration, she consciously turned to pencil and charcoal—'humble, unadorned materials' meant to 'mirror the people they portray'. Her monochrome palette further reduced distraction, allowing the underlying emotion to surface.

At first glance, the spectator may have been bewildered by the technical finesse of the images. While the portraits did not exhibit photographic realism, many of them had a sculptural quality. The bodies, faces and expressions of her figures lacked the texture of flesh and appeared to have been carved from stone. For instance,

the figure's forehead in the work titled *Aslam* resembled the surface of a crumbling wall. This only demonstrated the artist's command of the medium. In addition to the portraits, mundane objects like a kettle, a burner and a steam iron were placed in the exhibition space. Ultimately, Sheoran's portraits and objects reminded one of the overlooked dimensions of everyday life and how a contemplative pencil might lead to an encounter with them.

■ DIGVIJAY NIKAM

# Reimagining an Artistic Tradition

**TALK:** *Hidden in Plain Sight: Clay Sculpture in South Asia*

**SPEAKER:** *Susan Bean*

**CHAIR:** *Naman P. Ahuja*

**COLLABORATION:** *American Institute of Indian Studies, Center for Art and Archaeology*

**12 February 2026**

The lecture offered a significant reorientation of sculptural historiography in the subcontinent. In presenting her recent book *Clay Works: Earthen Sculpture in South Asia*, Susan Bean argued that polychrome *terracruda*—air-dried clay—should be recognised as central to South Asian sculptural practice. Rather than treating it as a craft, a supplement or a secondary finish, she positioned it as a primary medium with its own aesthetic and conceptual integrity.

Bean's discussion of the 'Buddhas of Bamiyan'—two 6th-century CE Buddhist reliefs in the Bamiyan Valley of Afghanistan—was foundational to this claim. Commonly described as stone colossi finished with plaster, these monumental figures were, as she demonstrated,

extensively modelled in clay over rock cores. The cliff face functioned as structural support, while the visible surfaces were shaped in terracruda and finished with pigment. The persistent mischaracterisation of these works reflects a disciplinary preference for durable materials and a reluctance to foreground clay as a sculptural medium.

Bean traced this material history across regions and periods, from Gandhara to Central Tibet and the western Himalayas, including the Tabo Monastery in the Spiti Valley, where early clay sculptures remain in situ. The conceptual parallel between body and image—armature as skeletal structure, clay as flesh, pigment as surface—suggested a sculptural process oriented towards animation and embodiment.

A key intervention of the lecture lay in its implications for stylistic interpretation. Much of South Asian sculpture has been classified using stone examples, abstracted from their original surfaces. Reconsidering the prevalence of clay coatings and pigments, and foregrounding terracruda, complicates established stylistic categories—thereby destabilising long-standing assumptions about formal qualities and periodisation. The speaker also addressed questions of verisimilitude. The plasticity of clay permits refined modelling and responsiveness to patronage, as evident in 19th-century Bengali portrait figures, Bhutanese devotional statues and contemporary festival images of Lord Ganesha.

Situating clay within South Asian cosmological frameworks, Bean emphasised its capacity to dissolve and re-enter cycles of regeneration. Immersion rituals materialise this ontology, aligning sculptural practice with processes of return and renewal. Ultimately, the lecture proposed a

methodological shift: foregrounding clay as a primary medium enables a redefinition of the parameters of sculpture in South Asia and advances a materially grounded art history attentive to process, community and belief.

■ SINDHURI APARNA

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## Making of the 'City Beautiful'

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**TALK:** *Chandigarh—A World View*

**SPEAKER:** *Peter Sanders*

**MODERATOR:** *Rajesh Luthra*

**16 February 2026**

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Was Le Corbusier lucky to get India, or India lucky to get Le Corbusier? This question opened the floor to a fascinating, multi-layered discussion on Chandigarh, its architecture and its philosophies, beginning with Australian architect Peter Sanders' account of his experiences working on the city in the office of Pierre Jeanneret, Le Corbusier's cousin and collaborator on various projects, including the urban planning of Chandigarh, in the 1950s. While Chandigarh has been studied, archived and researched extensively over the decades, this personal account brought it to life through the lived experience of the then-young architect grappling with its splendour as well as its oddities.

Drawing parallels and contrasts with other capital city projects of the time—including Islamabad and Brasília—

and connecting the dots with its core historical precedents in the Bauhaus movement (1919–1933) and Le Corbusier's philosophies that equated buildings to machines, Sanders wove the story of Chandigarh through hindsight and a lifetime of introspection on architecture and city planning. However, what really stood out was the human angle of the talk. He described Jeanneret as amiable and witty, dealing with on-site issues and payment delays from the Indian government, and Le Corbusier as tall, imposing and disciplined, often referring to Sanders as 'Monsieur Australian'. The lecture also underscored the struggles of this international office as it worked with construction teams in India, who, at the time (and probably still), used rudimentary methods and skills, and as it negotiated with local architects and the project's chief engineer. This endearing familiarity with work culture between Jeanneret's office and the current architects' offices made the talk relatable and warm.

The discussion that followed was greatly enhanced by Rajesh Luthra's nuanced understanding of Chandigarh and its many shades. Traversing ideas on climate, context, society, spatial hierarchy and democracy, the conversation brought forth the critical question: Does Chandigarh still survive as it was once envisioned?

■ SUPARNA GHOSH

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## Through the Glass Ceiling

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**TALK:** *Architecture and Environment*

**SPEAKER:** *Kazuyo Sejima*

**INAUGURAL REMARKS:** *K. N. Shrivastava*

**MODERATOR:** *K. T. Ravindran*

**COLLABORATION:** *International House of Japan; Shahani Associates; and Japan Foundation, New Delhi*

**17 March 2026**

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The evening began with a nostalgia-tinged acknowledgement of the historic relationship between the Centre and the International House of Japan, Tokyo.

Kazuyo Sejima's presentation was a chronology of her long and celebrated professional practice—initially undertaken alone and, since 1995, as part of the Sejima and Nishizawa and Associates (SANAA) studio, in partnership with Ryue Nishizawa. She spoke with equal passion about her early small residential works and her newer, larger projects, which progressively won her global recognition and,



eventually, the Pritzker Prize in 2010 and the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Gold Medal in 2025, both awarded jointly with Nishizawa.

Her work highlights the relationship between the interior and exterior of buildings rendered through material and spatial considerations in a minimalist idiom. The layout plans are often open and reflect an ease of continuity with the surroundings. An experimental approach

towards the relationship of spaces is strikingly evident, whether in the Saishunkan Seiyaku Women's Dormitory in Kumamoto (1990–1991) or in the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art in Kanazawa (2004), both of which are her relatively early works in Japan. At the De Kunstlinie Theatre and Cultural Centre in Almere, Netherlands, completed in 2007, the building draws its identity from the surrounding water, while the fluid form of the Rolex Learning Center at École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, designed and constructed between 2005 and 2009, merges with the enveloping Swiss mountains. In consonance with her concerns, the Sydney Modern

Project—one of her most recent endeavours—reflects the relationship between a diversity of functions at various levels, with a series of interlocking pavilions descending towards Sydney Harbour.

Sejima's works represent a shift from the earlier focus on technology in architecture to a more human-centred built environment in recent years. Simultaneously, the recognition accorded to her as the second woman to receive architecture's equivalent of the Nobel Prize, the Pritzker, is indicative of a breaking of the glass ceiling.

■ RAJESH LUTHRA

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## Unlocking Muted Discourses

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**TALK:** *The Female Voice: Reinstating Life*

**SPEAKER:** Veena Das

**CHAIR:** K. N. Shrivastava

**COLLABORATION:** *Council for Social Development; and Sage India*

**5 February 2026**

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Veena Das opened the 8th *Social Change* Annual Lecture, the flagship programme of the Council for Social Development's prestigious journal, with a tribute to her colleague André Béteille, who had passed away two days before she took the stage.

The lecture began with a complex critique of theorists whose work is marked by exclusion—of those outside Europe, of those not 'normal', and most of all, of women. The philosophies of Emmanuel Levinas and Michel Foucault were among those discussed as examples of this long-standing exclusionary practice. Das, quoting from her own thesis, argued that life must be reimagined in the context of the recovery of women's suffocated voices: 'My claim is that a response to the violence secreted in everyday life

demands that life be reinstated, but that project leads us to a radical redefinition of the place of the woman, not as an abstract figure of thought but through singularity of life as encountered in individual men and women.' This marked a shift to the domain of the ordinary, to lived experience, in contrast to theory. Das evocatively described how life is lived: a stitch unravelling, then stitched again.

The speaker went on to share the experiences of the late Krishna Sobti (1925–2019), an accomplished Hindi fiction writer and a post-Partition Punjabi refugee. This was the very social ground from which Das' family had emerged. The text presented by the speaker was Sobti's *Hum Hashmat* (1977), in which Hashmat, a male persona, speaks through a woman's writing. While Sobti herself chose to write in Hindi despite her Punjabi roots, she leaves Hashmat free to adopt both Punjabi and its accent. Hashmat allows a foray into remembered worlds of Punjab, for instance, through a meeting with a poet from Lahore. The conversation is evidently in Punjabi; Sobti does not elaborate on its particular flavour, but the reader can close her eyes and hear it in Punjabi, if she so wishes.

The talk concluded with a lively interaction with the audience on Cartesianism, the confessional mode of writing, the female voice, Das' work, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (2006), and the silences of women victims of violence.

■ SUCHETA MAHAJAN

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## Through Her Lens

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**FILM FESTIVAL:** *21st IAWRT Asian Women's Film Festival*

**COLLABORATION:** *India Chapter of the International Association of Women in Radio and Television (IAWRT); NFDC; Ministry of Information and Broadcasting; French Institute in India; French Embassy in India; Goethe-Institut; and Japan Foundation*

**13 to 15 March 2026**

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The IAWRT Asian Women's Film Festival, an annual staple of Delhi's film calendar, is impeccably curated by cinema veteran Bina Paul and her team, drawing in film enthusiasts

to experience cinema culture through a female lens. Not only does the festival celebrate women in film, but it also empowers young filmmakers by providing them with a valuable platform for networking and pedagogy.

Consciously focussing on the 'lesser-known' titles alongside the more prominent films proved valuable in getting a sense of the festival's curation. It is not possible to put together this many high-calibre films without being extremely dedicated to the festival's mandate, as well as being open-minded while curating a multitude of feature and short films to promote young women filmmakers.

*Oasis* (2022), by Japanese editor-filmmaker Keiko Okawa, is a celebration of minimalism. Commissioned ostensibly to document a Meiji-era (1868–1912) ward of Tokyo, the film, in Okawa's delicate hands, becomes a documentary portrait of a couple who spend their spare time photographing the city they call home. They cycle from place to place to

capture fleeting images, and, in the case of the woman, sublimate them into inspiration for her art. The film quietly settles into the rhythmic ritual of the couple's life, spent together and apart, and focusses on the very notion of how a woman 'creates' a work of art.

Dipanjali Khakhlary's *Even the Fire Knows* (2025) is the portrait of a Dalit woman who runs an electric crematorium in rural Bengal, having inherited the role from her father, who died prematurely after ensuring his daughter was educated. Despite the compromises and responsibilities, including cutting short her nursing studies, giving up the possibility of married family life, and supporting her widowed mother and a sister fleeing an abusive home, the film's protagonist remains cheerful. This attitude earns her respect and the grudging loyalty of the men who work under her at the crematorium. It is a rare life, documented with feeling.

Aditti Padmanabhan's 2025 short film *Bavita* depicts the life of a young migrant worker, Bavita, who has an infant

son and must contend with the hardships of a hand-to-mouth existence. With unfiltered sincerity, the film follows her as she navigates gender-based harassment, negotiates online culture and raises her son amid deprivation. Her fears are real, as is her resolve not to give in to subjugation.

Rare among the many shorts was a work of fiction by Taruna Khatri titled *Aapkarmi* (The Unfated) (2025). Featuring wonderfully natural performances by the child actors, the film speaks of the mundane yet insidious domestic forces of ritualism and patriarchy, and of a young girl's resistance to them. The film is centred on the celebration of Teej in a middle-class Rajasthani household and captures the first stirrings of adulthood in the girl's life amid her evolving relationships with her traditional mother and innocent younger sister, all in the quest for agency. The short was also notable for the director's creative decision to have the drama unfold without any on-screen male presence.

■ SIDHARTH SRINIVASAN

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## Holding on to Hope

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**FILM:** *Nomads Under the Stars*

**DIRECTED BY:** *Stanzin Dorjai Gya*

**COLLABORATION:** *Jungwa Foundation; and Korzok Monastery*

**9 March 2026**

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Stanzin Dorjai Gya's *Nomads Under the Stars* (2026) is a visually stunning evocation of a dwindling way of life. Deep in Changthang in southeastern Ladakh, the Changpa, a semi-nomadic community of Tibetan people, have lived for centuries in consonance with nature, guided by ancient customs and wisdom passed down through generations. However, their precious way of life is now being adversely affected by climate change and the youth's shifting priorities for earning a livelihood.

Focussing on one group of Changpas, the documentary captures the rituals and rites of passage of the tribal

people, depicting how global warming is shrinking the crystal-clear lakes, drying the pasturelands and irrevocably altering the seasonal weather patterns to which their sheep are accustomed. Although resilient in the face of adversity, the older members of the tribe lament that their traditional pastoral lifestyle is under threat. Given a choice, they admit to preferring a life of hardship in the lap of nature, the way their people have lived for ages. Amid this paradigm shift in their lives, the Korzok Monastery in Changthang offers them spiritual sustenance, perfectly symbolising the intangible heritage of this threatened cultural landscape.

Dorjai's film is the result of many hours of shooting and actual time spent with the Changpa people, lovingly documenting their way of life, their beloved sheep and the breathtaking region they call home. The film may end on a bittersweet note, but it is not without hope for a more sustainable future. The packed screening was followed by a talk from the chief guest, Tim Curtis, and a vibrant audience interaction with Dorjai, Tara Sharma of the Jungwa Foundation and Jigmet Norbu of the Korzok Monastery.

■ SIDHARTH SRINIVASAN

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## Exchange Beyond Remittances

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**DISCUSSION:** *Understanding Gulf Migration Through Fiction, Cinema and Cultural Networks*

**DISCUSSANTS:** *Md. Shafeeq Karinkurayil; Ratheesh Radhakrishnan; Ratheesh Kumar; and Sebastian Thejus Cherian*

**MODERATOR:** *Vijayalakshmi Rao*

**COLLABORATION:** *ICSSR Northern Regional Centre*

**16 March 2026**

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The discussion examined migration from Kerala to the Gulf region from multiple perspectives, with the panellists viewing migration as a cultural process that has shaped social life and ways of thinking in Kerala. Drawing on ideas from literature, visual culture and sociology, the conversation addressed questions of representation, gender, language and broader cultural change.

Md. Shafeeq Karinkurayil argued that migration needs to be understood primarily as a cultural experience. He said that in Kerala, the Gulf is seen not just as a place, but as an idea shaped by stories, films, photographs and other media. Karinkurayil, however, also noted that migrants' real experiences often differ from how migration is portrayed in the media and popular stories.

Ratheesh Kumar situated the Cochin Kalabhavan, a centre for learning performing arts in Kochi, within this broader context. He noted that its growth coincided with rising migration from Kerala. Through mimicry and stage performances, the Kalabhavan translated migrant experiences into forms that audiences could easily connect with. In doing so, it helped preserve nostalgia and influenced media practices and shared cultural identities.

Ratheesh Radhakrishnan turned to Malayalam cinema to show how it has engaged with the effects of Gulf migration over time. Looking at films from the 1970s to the early 2000s, he noted that they portray both the aspirations and the concerns people associated with going to the Gulf. These films suggest that the 'Gulf Dream' became an important way through which people in Kerala understood ideas of progress and development.

Sebastian Thejus Cherian spoke about the period when VHS and VCR technologies became widely available in the Gulf. Migrants brought these technologies to Kerala, changing how films and media were consumed—people would gather to watch movies together in the returnee's house, turning these homes into spaces for community interaction and shared moments. Kerala became home to VCR libraries, while Malayalam films were widely relished in the Gulf.

Under the skilful moderation of Vijayalakshmi Rao, the discussion concluded by emphasising how cultural networks shape migration and link Kerala to broader global flows and exchanges.

■ MITALI TEWARI

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## Footprints of 1947

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**DISCUSSION:** *Recalibrating Partition*

**DISCUSSANTS:** *Yogesh Snehi; Debjani Sengupta; and Anindita Ghoshal*

**CHAIR:** *Shashank Shekhar Sinha*

**COLLABORATION:** *@Crossroads*

**17 March 2026**

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The discussion began with Shashank Shekhar Sinha highlighting how the past and present constantly intersect, with different historical layers and events occurring simultaneously and influencing one another. A major example is the partition of India in 1947, which led to massive rehabilitation programmes. It was accompanied by immense suffering, including large-scale displacement, violence and heinous incidents of sexual assault.

Yogesh Snehi focussed particularly on the experiences of the Punjab region during and after the Partition, highlighting those of smaller towns that rarely appear in mainstream narratives. He illustrated how ethical choices and empathy co-existed with post-Partition violence and displacement, recounting a personal story about his grandfather, who hid a Muslim boy for over 20 days in his house and ensured his safe migration to Pakistan. Snehi's account also underlined how deeply communal tensions shaped local societies and disrupted long-standing neighbourly relationships.

Debjani Sengupta examined the Partition with a focus on Bengal. She argued that the division of the country was largely the result of decisions made by the political class, who viewed it as a solution to communal conflict. However, the redrawing of South Asia's map led to one of the largest migrations in human history.

Sengupta also categorised migrants into three groups: the well-off, who managed to relocate independently; those who depended on government assistance and were temporarily accommodated in army barracks; and the poorest refugees, who were later rehabilitated in refugee colonies. Many migrants in Bengal belonged to lower-caste communities, highlighting the social inequalities within migration experiences.

Anindita Ghoshal discussed the impact of Partition on India's Northeast region. Initially, refugees were recognised as displaced persons, but later many of them were labelled illegal immigrants, reflecting changing political and social attitudes. In this region, minority identities were defined not only by religion but also by language and ethnicity. Her interviews with tribal communities in Tripura revealed their deep resentment towards large-scale migration that altered local demographics and affected their way of life and control over land. They summarised their experience with the powerful statement: 'We did not cross the border; the border crossed us'.

■ ARYAN SINGH

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## Tracing a Legendary Life

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**IN CONVERSATION:** *Karan Singh; Shashi Tharoor; and Malvika Singh*

**COLLABORATION:** *Karan Singh Foundation*

**6 March 2026**

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The story of post-independence India is uniquely captured in the journey of Karan Singh, whose life represents the transition from the hereditary traditions of the Dogra dynasty to a democratic and pluralistic India. It was a fitting tribute to this personality that the launch of his biography, *A Statesman and a Seeker: The Extraordinary Life and Legacy of Dr Karan Singh* by Harbans Singh, was marked by an audience that overflowed into the aisles. It served a profound exploration of a man, rightly described

by his daughter Jyotsna Singh as a 'renaissance man', who seamlessly bridged the worlds of politics of the day and deep spirituality.

Shashi Tharoor, along with Malvika Singh, moderated the conversation and made Singh's 'many lives'—his transition from feudal heritage to the democratic, 'exciting adventure' of post-independence India—the central theme of the discussion. Singh reflected on his decision to align with the vision of the first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, whom he called his mentor, despite his affection for his father, Maharaja Hari Singh (1895–1961), the last ruler of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. This democratic commitment was reinforced by his voluntary relinquishment of the Privy Purse in 1969, before its constitutional abolition in 1971. The panel highlighted his legacy as a Union Minister, including modernising civil aviation, conceptualising the precursor to the 'Incredible

India' campaign, conservation efforts and advocacy for adopting the tiger as the national animal.

Singh responded to the complexities of the Emergency era (1975–77) with a calibrated perspective, noting that although he had set reasonable health targets under the National Population Policy, subsequent excesses in the Northern states were politically driven. The conversation illuminated his public existence beyond statecraft and highlighted his lifelong journey as a 'seeker' within the Vedanta school of Hindu philosophy. He spoke of a faith anchored in inclusivity, reflecting on the ancient Vedic idea that the 'truth is one; the wise call it by many names', and gently distinguished this spiritual pluralism from narrower political interpretations of religion. Harbans Singh's biography, thus, stands as a testament to a statesman who balanced public duty with a lifelong pursuit of wisdom.

■ SAURYA MISHRA

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## A Country Charting its Destiny

**BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP:** *India and Her Futures* by Gopalkrishna Gandhi

**DISCUSSANTS:** John Brittas; and Gopalkrishna Gandhi

**CHAIR:** Kamal Haasan

**MODERATOR:** Mrinal Pande

14 March 2026

Fresh copies of Gopalkrishna Gandhi's collection of essays lined the table outside the hall as a packed audience gathered, filling the room with quiet anticipation. Chairing the evening, Kamal Haasan described the book as a signpost for a nation at a crossroads. At a time when far-right ethnonationalism is gaining ground across the world, he reflected on Gandhi's coining of the striking term, 'hatriotism', which he contrasted with patriotism. While patriotism can elevate a nation, he said, hatriotism, rooted in fear and exclusion, diminishes it. For Haasan, the book reads almost like a guide to navigating a politically confused moment, urging India to remain faithful to the ethical imagination that shaped the republic.

Gandhi situated the discussion within what he described as a deeply troubled global moment. Borrowing from the Shakespearean phrase 'Beware the Ides of March', he suggested that societies today stand close to dangerous

tipping points created by suspicion and division. Yet the responsibility for shaping the present, he argued, rests not with history's heroes but with ordinary citizens. Invoking his grandfather, Mahatma Gandhi, he remarked that the task now was for each generation to act according to its own intelligence and conscience.

Moderating the conversation, Mrinal Pande reflected on how the short documentary on Mahatma Gandhi's assassination, *Lead on Gandhi*, screened before the discussion, stirred difficult memories of violence and conflict, prompting questions about whether societies truly learn from history. She noted that history rarely unfolds in a neat, linear pattern and asked whether India's future must be understood as plural rather than as a single destiny.

Gandhi embraced the plural in the book's title, arguing that a plurality of Indias shapes the country's past and future. Echoing debates in the Constituent Assembly over the phrase 'India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States', he suggested that the republic's strength lies in balancing unity and diversity.

John Brittas argued that migration is a civilisational force that has long shaped Indian society, drawing on Kerala's history of mobility and cultural exchange. Gandhi later returned to the theme of governance, recalling Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's defence of the civil services and describing bureaucracy as a necessary medicine, whose careful balance remains essential to the health of the republic.

■ PRABIR KUMAR TALUKDAR

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## Double Trouble

**TALK:** *Trump's Challenge to the Global Order*

**SPEAKER:** Yan Xuetong

**CHAIR:** Shyam Saran

24 February 2026

Wherever he goes, Yan Xuetong said, he hears about what the world will inherit. Technology, particularly AI, will matter, as will a certain President Donald Trump. 'How powerful Trump is! One person has as much power as AI.'

Unpredictability aside, Trump, a counter-globalisation or neo-nationalist icon, is burning America's best card: immigration policy. Indians head US tech firms and 'the

American Chinese are beating China's Chinese', argued Yan, as America's strength is based on international talent. But when Trump 'closed the door and made the intellectuals and scientists concerned leave', he 'undermined the root or base of America's strength'. The decline in immigration will lead to America's demise, warned Yan, adding that if Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney is talking about a middle-powers meeting or visiting the Middle Kingdom, it is evident that Ottawa and Washington, DC are distant neighbours. Once, the US-Canada was 'open', and the strategic-economic relationship was important, 'but now?', asked Yan.

Europe, Yan's 'rest of the West', cannot protect itself amid Trump-induced uncertainty. Yan said the European economy is weak and growth rates are falling, and that 'the total GDP and military capability of Europe cannot be maintained'. He added: 'Why have we never heard European policymakers say they have a [security] responsibility?...[They feel] it's not their work. It's America's problem. America should undertake to be responsible for Europe's security.'

Trumpian decisions aside, there's insecurity about AI. Cyberspace (as opposed to geospace) has heft, as the Ukraine-Russia war shows. Yan continued: 'If we could compare the military capability of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and Russia in Ukraine alone, the Russians are hugely superior. But the war is being fought in both geospace and cyberspace, and NATO has directly joined the war, but only in cyberspace.'



So, it becomes a balance between the two sides.' Unequivocal about the dangers of AI, Yan said: 'AI is capable of proliferating false information....And now... you're surrounded by most of the false information.' Equally dystopian is the efficiency AI will bring. Overproduction in 'dark factories' without workers of 'clothes, food, cars, missiles, aeroplanes' means 'human beings have no capability to consume what we produce. Meanwhile, AI produces more and more'. And it is not just 'material things', but 'movies, series, talk shows and millions and millions of programmes, services'. And overproduction will make 'unemployment worse and worse', leading to more protectionism, isolationism and maybe, instability. And 'no government dares to ignore...regime security'.

■ SRINJOY CHOWDHURY

## Remembering India's 'Lok Nayak'

**TALK:** *The Right to Dream: JP's Life and Legacy*

**IN CONVERSATION:** *Yogendra Yadav; Anand Kumar; Sujata Prasad; and Ashutosh Bhardwaj*

**COLLABORATION:** *Ahad Anhad*

**23 February 2026**

The discussion was an intellectually rigorous reflection on dissent, memory and the moral imagination of politics in contemporary India. Framed around the life and ideas of Jayaprakash Narayan (JP) (1902-1979), one of India's most prominent political thinkers and activists of the 20th century, it resisted hagiography and treated JP as a complex, often contradictory figure whose relevance lies precisely in that complexity.

The conversation opened by foregrounding the 'right to dream' as a political and ethical claim. In an age marked by the criminalisation of dissent and the shrinking of democratic space, the panel argued that even imagining equality and freedom has become suspect. JP's life was presented as embodying a refusal to accept political

certitudes, a rejection of power and a sustained attempt to bring ethics back into politics.

Moving beyond the familiar narrative that reduces JP to his role during the Emergency (1975-77), the speakers traced his broader political journey. From his early Marxist commitments and leadership in the Congress Socialist Party, through his underground revolutionary phase during the Quit India Movement (1942-44), to his later embrace of Gandhian Sarvodaya, or the 'Progress of All', and his 1974 call for 'Total Revolution' or *Sampoorna Kranti*, emphasising the decentralisation of power, JP's trajectory defies easy categorisation. His journey was described as a set of enduring political, intellectual and personal puzzles, illustrating how JP's decisions shaped not only his own path but also the course of Indian democracy.

The session also sought to reclaim JP as a major political thinker rather than merely a moral symbol. The panellists challenged stereotypes about Indian socialism, arguing that it represented one of the most creative socialist traditions of the 20th century. The closing discussion turned to the present, raising questions about the decline of ethical exemplars in politics, the fate of socialism after liberalisation, and the need for what was called a 'protest against forgetting'. Democracy, the panel suggested, cannot survive without dissent, memory and the courage to imagine alternatives.

■ RICHA VADINI SINGH

# Beyond the Binary

**TALK:** *Multilateralism and the Future of AI*

**SPEAKER:** *Amandeep Singh Gill*

**CHAIR:** *Shyam Saran*

**16 February 2026**

The 'India AI Impact Summit 2026', held from 16 to 21 February, brought a flurry of technological optimism to Delhi. Yet the most urgent, nuanced conversations often occur on the sidelines of such platforms. Thus began this vital dialogue on the shifting sands of global technology governance, with Shyam Saran setting a sobering stage. He noted the steep decline in traditional multilateralism, with critical agreements now frequently negotiated outside the UN, and domains like outer space becoming increasingly ungoverned, as evidenced by the expiration of pivotal US–Russia treaties and the fraying of institutional safeguards that once anchored international relations.

Against this backdrop, Amandeep Singh Gill's ongoing work on the UN Global Digital Compact emerges as a crucial effort to reclaim democratic oversight. When the speaker took the floor, he provided a necessary corrective to the prevailing public discourse. Crucially, Gill went beyond the exhausted binary of AI utopias and dystopias to engage with the rich complexity of the future of social change and the possibilities of innovation. Rather than treating AI as an inscrutable, magical force, he grounded it as a socially created 'human artefact' driven by statistical probabilities. Yet he acknowledged that this wave is structurally different. The rise of AI agents capable of executing multi-step tasks over weeks without human



intervention demands novel governance frameworks, drawing on lessons from earlier technological revolutions.

Gill outlined a pressing 'AI Policy Trilemma'. According to him, the world is confronting an escalating 'AI divide' driven by unequal access to raw computing power, pervasive reality distortion fuelled by bias and misinformation, and a massive, unchecked shift in geopolitical power away from nation-states to the private sector.

The session concluded with a resonant reflection on American naturalist Edward O. Wilson's (1929–2021) warning about the widening gap between our rapid technological advancements and our lagging institutional and personal capacities. For AI to have multiple, equitable futures, raw technological power must be tempered by multilateralism. Ensuring human agency in the algorithmic age is not merely a technical challenge but a shared imperative that requires nation-states to work together.

■ APAR GUPTA

# Dialogues Alongside the Main Stage

**DISCUSSION:** *Roundtable on Data Visitation for Health Sciences*

**INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** *K. N. Shrivastava*

**COLLABORATION:** *OpenMined Foundation*

**17 February 2026**

The policy meeting, organised as a side event to the 'India AI Impact Summit 2026', brought together 55 AI experts (33 in-person and 22 virtually) from genomics, public health, law, ethics, data governance and emerging technology across the nations. The deliberations were anchored in advancing the Human Genome Project II (HGP2) agenda, with a particular focus on operationalising a data visitation implementation framework.

Guided by a policy-first, technology-informed approach, the discussions emphasised data sovereignty, public

trust, technology neutrality, alignment with digital public infrastructure principles, and the pursuit of practical, near-term impact. A central theme was the paradigm shift from conventional cross-border data-sharing to data visitation—where algorithms move to secure data environments while data remains within sovereign boundaries. Participants examined how this model could reconcile collaborative genomic research with data-protection imperatives. At the same time, the need for domestic computational capacity, robust audit mechanisms and clearly defined intellectual property regimes was strongly underscored to prevent asymmetrical dependencies.

India's expanding genomic landscape, including the Genome India Project (GIP), was discussed as a foundational pillar of sovereign AI-enabled health systems. References were also made to the Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023, with recognition that sector-specific safeguards and governance design mechanisms are essential for sensitive genomic and health data.

Key cross-cutting issues that emerged included data standardisation, skilled manpower shortages, clarity of governance, auditability of AI systems, patient awareness

of data ownership and embedding equity and inclusivity from the design phase. The discussants stressed that ethical oversight must evolve in tandem with technological advancement and that AI accountability frameworks are indispensable for sustaining trust.

The deliberations concluded with a clear recognition that data visitation must be regarded not merely as a technical modality but as a foundational governance architecture shaping the future contours of sovereignty, collaboration and public trust. It was agreed that subsequent discussions would proceed under the theme 'India, Data Visitation &

Beyond: A Broad Perspective', integrating ethical, social and legal dimensions as core design principles rather than peripheral considerations. This expanded framework is intended to inform future policy articulation and implementation pathways, anchoring technical progress within a coherent normative order and ensuring that India's emerging data visitation model evolves in a manner that safeguards sovereignty, strengthens institutional trust, and upholds equity and accountability over the long term.

■ USHA MUJOO MUNSHI

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## The Holy Grail of Power

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**TALK:** *Fusion on Earth: The Challenge of a Plentiful Clean Energy Source—A Physicist's Perspective*

**SPEAKER:** Swadesh Mahajan

**CHAIR:** Rupamanjari Ghosh

9 February 2026

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Revisiting the subject he discussed at the Centre 45 years ago and speaking in a language stripped of jargon, Swadesh Mahajan shared his perspective on the evolving story of nuclear fusion—both as a physicist and as an entrepreneur intent on making it successful and profitable. He reflected on the dual thrill and frustration of this highly challenging pursuit, confessing that although recent advances have brought scientists to the threshold of success, 'if you ask me today, when will fusion be able to light your bulbs, I would not [be able to] tell you'.

Nuclear fusion is the process in which two light nuclei combine to form a heavier nucleus, releasing energy. This is the opposite of fission, in which heavy nuclei fragment into lighter ones, producing energy. 'Stars, like our Sun,' Mahajan continued, 'are the biggest [fusion] energy-producing factories in the universe', and they have been converting the latent energy within nuclei into heat and light for billions of years. 'Bringing [the] heavens to the Earth defines the quest of a fusion scientist.' Few scientific missions could be so grand—and so daunting.

Fission technology has been generating electricity since the mid-1950s and contributes to about 9 per cent of the

global supply today. Because fusion requires extreme temperatures, far higher than those needed to produce energy from fossil fuels or fission, it cannot be exploited. Mahajan outlined the many formidable scientific and technological challenges that must be overcome to realise the dream of energy from fusion. Nuclear fusion, he explained, requires deuterium and tritium nuclei—the currently preferred fuel—to be brought close together so they can interact, which is difficult because of electrostatic repulsion and the enormous energy required to achieve this.

Stars are perpetual fusion factories because they are massive, and their immense gravity keeps nuclei together for longer. To make them shine, a temperature of at least 10 to 15 million degrees is required, at which the system is actually a plasma—an assembly of positively charged particles (ions) and electrons. On Earth, a fusion machine's size has to be limited to metres. When heated, materials expand and the particles do not remain close, so there will be no fusion. To achieve fusion on Earth, very high density, very high temperature and adequate particle confinement are required to enable interaction, which is challenging. Nevertheless, the growing partnership between government laboratories and fusion companies today is encouraging, with over 40 large companies pursuing fusion research.

Mahajan concluded by acknowledging the 'fatal attraction' of reaching the holy grail of fusion power, reaffirming his firm belief that, above all, 'this awe and wonder will inspire folks to pursue fusion to its very successful end'.

■ RAMASESHAN RAMACHANDRAN

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## A Unified Aesthetic

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**DISCUSSION:** *The Symbiosis of Music and Dance: Placing Music in Indian Classical Dance*

**ILLUSTRATED PRESENTATION BY:** Madhavi Mudgal

27 March 2026

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The 150th edition of the Music Appreciation Promotion series began with Madhavi Mudgal discussing the intrinsic

relationship between music and Indian classical dance. She emphasised that dance cannot exist independently of music, describing their relationship as symbiotic, as reflected in ancient texts that treat music, dance and rhythm as a unified entity—*sangeet*. Mudgal demonstrated the meditative mantra '*Dhyan Shlok*' in raga Jaijivanti to showcase her perception of a raga, which is unique to every artist, through *nritta* (pure dance).

By reframing the theme from 'placing music in dance' to 'placing dance in music', she underscored that music forms the structural and emotional foundation of dance.

The artiste explained two core aspects of classical dance: *nritta* and *abhinaya* (expressive storytelling). *Nritta* involves abstract, non-narrative movement rooted in rhythm and technique, while *abhinaya* uses gesture, expression and emotion to convey meaning and evoke *rasa* (aesthetic experience) in the audience. Both aspects depend deeply on musical elements such as *raga*, *taal* (rhythmic cycle), and *laya* (tempo). Through examples from Odissi dance, she illustrated how rhythmic cycles with varying beats and tempo influence the structure and mood of compositions, and how dancers interpret them through movement.

She also discussed the evolution of the Odissi repertoire, noting that many compositions, such as *pallavi* (pure, abstract dance pieces) were developed in the mid-20th century. The creative process involved selecting appropriate ragas and taals to suit the emotional and thematic content. In *abhinaya*, music is especially crucial in shaping the mood and enhancing the expressive narrative, as seen in pieces depicting themes from the story of Radha-Krishna.



The lecture concluded with live demonstrations and video excerpts from choreographed works, showing how musical phrases, rhythms and structures translate into dance. Overall, the session highlighted the inseparable, dynamic interplay between music and dance within Indian classical traditions.

■ KRITIKA AGRAWAL

## Culinary Wisdom Through Time

**COLLOQUIUM:** *Paka and Ahara: Everyday Stories of Food and Nutrition*

**SPEAKERS:** *Kalyan Sekhar Chakraborty; Ishita Dey; and Neha Vermani*

**CHAIR:** *Gurmeet Singh*

**CURATORIAL NOTE:** *Kiranmayi Bhushi*

**25 March 2026**

The food we consume primarily for nourishment encompasses facets of culture, memory, rituals, traditions, improvisations and history. The 'SAMHiTA-Bharat ki Soch Colloquium on Food, Wellbeing and Nutrition' provided insights into many of these aspects, recognising that food practices and choices affect not only health but also livelihoods, the economy and the environment. Thus, understanding how and why we eat the way we do becomes relevant.

The conversation traced how food practices in South Asia have shaped ideas of health, well-being and nutrition. A diverse panel of scholars examined food through the lenses of history, sociology, archaeology and food science.

The evening began with a curatorial address that deconstructed the menu for the dinner planned after the discussion, drawing on Ayurvedic and Unani frameworks and featuring seasonal ingredients. By choosing the right ingredients, or *ahara*, and the appropriate method of cooking, i.e., *paka*, a balanced meal was ensured in every sense. Dishes included millets, pineapple *rasam* (a South

Indian soup-like dish), *khamiri roti* (fermented flatbread) and *panakam* (a South Indian beverage), among other preparations.

The archaeological perspective identifies food as the foundation of human civilisation, shaping settlement patterns, social structures and cultural identity. Evidence from ancient diets, based on a study covering the period 2500 to 100 BCE, revealed both regional similarities and diversity. While goat and sheep meat, poultry and pork were common across Northwest, South and Northeast India, dairy was predominant in the Northwest, cattle meat in both the Northwest and South, and fish was present only in the Northeastern diet. These patterns continue to influence dietary habits and genetic traits today.

The panel explored the cultural significance of *mishti* (sweets) in Bengal, closely tied to regional identity, ritual practices and caste-based craftsmanship. The rise of cookbook culture and its politics was also discussed, alongside historical domestic manuals and periodicals that disseminated food knowledge through print.

Mughal culinary traditions embodied a refined philosophy of eating in which taste, texture, aroma and ingredient balance served both pleasure and health. In the medieval period, the intersection of Ayurvedic and Unani humoral theories created a synthesis in which food was regarded as a means of maintaining bodily balance while cultivating refined taste.

Overall, the session underscored the relevance of traditional food knowledge while highlighting contemporary health and nutrition challenges. A key takeaway was that the food people eat today is shaped by tradition, medical texts and systems of knowledge that are being rediscovered, reimaged, and continue to evolve.

■ NEELANJANA SINGH

# Melodic Lineages

**PERFORMANCE:** *Swarantar: A Journey Through Indian Classical Music*

**PERFORMERS:** *Abhay Rustum Sopori; and Ojesh Pratap Singh*

**COLLABORATION:** *AntarHriday Connect*  
**20 February 2026**

'Swarantar', an initiative of AntarHriday Connect, is dedicated to safeguarding the sanctity of *parampara* (tradition) in Indian classical music and to affirming a broader commitment to meaningful cultural dialogue. With an artistic vision to bridge scholarship and stage performance, the initiative seeks to nurture both aesthetic refinement and intellectual engagement within the classical arts.

The evening's musical presentations reflected both lineage and innovation. Santoor maestro Abhay Rustum Sopori, grandson of Shambhoo Nath Sopori and son of Bhajan Sopori, represented a 300-year-old musical family from Jammu and Kashmir and showcased his distinctive artistry. Carrying forward the 'Sopori Baaj' style created by his father, Sopori has emerged as a 'cultural icon' of Jammu and Kashmir and has been instrumental in introducing music as a subject in colleges and universities across various districts of the state. His music is marked by *madhur vaadan* (melodious playing), *teevra gati* (swift passages) and his unique style of singing alongside his instrumental performance.

Accompanied by pakhawaj exponent Rishi Shankar Upadhyay, a 13th-generation musician, and tanpura artist Poushali Dutta, Sopori presented raga Kaushik Ranjani. He eloquently explained its proximity to raga Kirwani and noted that omitting the note 'Re' transforms it into raga



Chandrakauns. He remarked, 'Unless the music touches the soul, it is just melody. Once it touches the soul, it becomes music.'

The vocal segment featured Ojesh Pratap Singh, an exponent of the Gwalior, Jaipur and Agra Gharanas, and a scholar and author of *Hindustani Sangeet mein Sahitya* (2004). Known for his acute sense of aesthetic embellishment and his engagement with literary depth in raga exposition, he began with the evening raga Kamod, presenting a *vilambit khayal* (slow-tempo composition) '*Mati Malaniya*', followed by a faster *bandish* (fixed, melodic composition) '*Kaare Jaane Na Doongi*'. He concluded with the *shabad* (hymn) from Guru Granth Sahib, '*Jo Nar Dukh Mein Dukh Nahi Maane*'. He was accompanied by tabla artist Ujith Udayakumar, harmonium player Ashique Kumar—who is also a trained Hindustani classical vocalist of the Gwalior Gharana—and tanpura artists Anshuman Bhattacharya and Abhimanyu Sharma.

The programme also included the AntarHriday Excellence Award being conferred on Sumitra Guha in recognition of her immense contribution to Hindustani classical music.

■ KRITIKA AGRAWAL

# Celebrating Regional Rhythms

**PERFORMANCE:** *Lok Yatra: A Folk Music Journey*

**PERFORMER:** *Runki Goswami*

**ACCOMPANISTS:** *Virender Singh (tabla and rhythms); Saif Ali Khan (keyboard); Hemant Juyal (guitar); and Yogesh Solanki (dholak and percussions)*

**COLLABORATION:** *NCZCC, Prayagraj, Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India*

**25 February 2026**

As part of the Folk Music and Dance series, Runki Goswami performed a repertoire of pan-Indian folk songs in 20



languages, inhabiting each as if it were her own. She described rural scenes and domestic issues, including a new bride's interactions with her in-laws. During the segment on Assamese Rongali Bihu, she presented '*Assom Deshor*

*Bagichare*, which depicts the harvest in the tea gardens from a girl's perspective. Goswami's voice modulation echoed the villagers calling to each other. Subtle shifts in pronunciation occurred when she began performing folk songs from Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh. Yet the wedding songs she presented served as a cultural bridge to these regions. A Bhojpuri melody traced a married girl's growing years from ages 12 to 50. With a repeated plea to '*saiyan*', an endearment for the beloved, the romance unfolded in the question-answer format popular in folk songs. A blend of Thumri-Hori-Chaiti compositions, in which a bride misses her *saajan*, or beloved, presented the irony of a married woman no longer feeling at home in her parents' abode. A seamless blending of sensitivities across states emphasised shared human conditions. Goswami's lilting melodies from the Jharkhand of her childhood had a distinctive rhythm, although the musical phonetics sounded markedly different.

Musicians playing the sarangi and guitar lent poignancy to painful paradoxes from Chamba, where everyone

enjoys beauty despite their bruised and aching limbs. The performer's Baul song '*Tomay Hrid Majhare Rakhbo*' from Bengal evoked heartfelt worship of the innermost spiritual being set against loud, passionate, higher notes and quavering, soulful, descending ones. In a Manbhum harvest song, Goswami wove in popular lyrics in which a young girl married to an elderly husband converses flirtatiously with her *devar* (brother-in-law) during the monsoon season. In a composition from Telangana, a scolding mother-in-law demands milk for her son: 'Why have you made it all into curd?' In the Odia '*Rangabati, Rangabati*' from the Sambalpur region, the husband is a shining light for his wife, who has no further demands for gifts, including jewels. Conversely, in a Marathi *lavani*, the wife wants sarees, jewellery and more. Goswami's multifaceted performance was capped off with Punjabi folk music from Delhi, leaving many in the audience wishing for more from their own states.

■ AJANTA DUTT

## The Sound of Peace

**PERFORMANCE:** *Soulful Journey - Dan Zhu World Recital Tour 2026*

**PERFORMERS:** *Dan Zhu (violin); and Jean-Frédéric Neuburger (piano)*

**28 March 2026**

Music enthusiasts were treated to a scintillating classical recital, a 'jugalbandi' between the violin and the piano, by two artists who have performed with the world's major symphonies. Luckily for Delhi, Dan Zhu's world recital tour made a pit stop during its ongoing performances, which included concerts in Paris, Brittany, Pune and Mumbai. It was Zhu's first visit to the city, and he was greeted by an appreciative audience. A native of Beijing, Zhu made his debut at the age of nine, performing Mendelssohn's violin concerto with the China Youth Chamber Orchestra, and is now one of the world's most accomplished violinists.

Jean-Frédéric Neuburger's repertoire speciality is Bach, and in his rendition of 'Sonata No. 3 in G minor, BWV 1029', the pianist showcased his remarkable dexterity on the instrument. The sonata has three distinct arrangements: fast-slow-fast.

Zhu played the violin effortlessly, and during Franz Schubert's 'Fantasie in F minor', he left the listeners enthralled. At times, he closed his eyes to be at one with the music, only opening them to pluck at the strings with his left forefinger. Zhu and Neuburger played seven arrangements by this 19th-century Austrian composer. The



Schubert 'Fantasie in F minor' was the cornerstone of the classical recital and offered a glimpse of what Schubert could still have achieved had he not died so young.

After a brief intermission, Zhu and Neuburger returned to perform 'Violin Sonata No. 2 in E minor' by the Italian composer Ferruccio Busoni, an outstanding pianist and teacher of music. Though his 'Piano Concerto in C major' was a monumental work, Busoni was chiefly known for his transcriptions of Bach's work, now published as the Bach-Busoni Editions.

It was inevitable that a performance of this calibre would prompt Zhu and Neuburger to be invited back for an encore, despite the former feeling that an encore after Schubert would be anticlimactic. Ultimately, Zhu and Neuburger wanted their music to speak, to inspire and to soothe in these troubled times.

■ SRIDHAR BALAN

# Rasa and Duende

**PERFORMANCE:** *Mudras. Tejiendo hilos invisibles*

**PERFORMERS:** *Mónica de la Fuente; and Nazaré de la Fuente*

**COLLABORATION:** *Embassy of Spain in India*

**18 February 2026**

It is not often that one gets to witness a duet between the Indian classical dance form of Bharatanatyam and Spain's fiery Flamenco. But what gave this cultural collaboration another twist was that instead of an Indian dancer performing Bharatanatyam with a Spanish Flamenco dancer, the duet was presented by two Spanish contemporary dancers, a mother-daughter duo. While Mónica de la Fuente performed Bharatanatyam, her daughter, Nazaré de la Fuente, performed Flamenco.

The piece, translated as 'Mudras: Weaving Invisible Threads', was choreographed by Mónica to a fusion of Indian and Spanish music. It was a graceful confluence of two dance forms, showcasing their similarities—precise footwork and expressive use of the eyes and hands for storytelling. However, to the audience's dismay, as it was later explained, this short duet was only an introductory piece to the screening of the documentary film of the same name about the dancing duo.

# Tales of the Bodhisattva

**PERFORMANCE:** *Dastan-e-Irfan-e-Buddh*

**WRITTEN BY:** *Poonam Girdhani*

**PERFORMED BY:** *Rajesh Kumar; and Poonam Girdhani*

**DIRECTED BY:** *Mahmood Farooqui*

**PRODUCED BY:** *Anusha Rizvi*

**COLLABORATION:** *Foundation for Universal Responsibility of His Holiness the Dalai Lama*

**6 February 2026**

Dastangoi is the art of oral storytelling within the Urdu literary tradition, which peaked across northern India between the 16th and 19th centuries. The early *dastangos* (storytellers) told tales of magic, war and adventure, especially focussing on the legendary tales of Amir Hamza, an uncle of the Prophet Muhammad. This art form waned in the 20th century as Victorian literature was embraced for its realist and moralistic values, in contrast to Dastangoi's free-flowing narrative spiced with magic and fantastical characters. The arrival of modern forms of entertainment, such as print media and cinema, also shifted interest. In 2005, Dastangoi was revived by writer, performer and director Mahmood Farooqui, along with Urdu poet and critic Shamsur Rahman Faruqi. Aided by scholars and theatre enthusiasts, the form is now increasingly popular in

The film, the first co-production between Spanish and Indian filmmakers, explores the relationship between mother and daughter through their shared love of dance. It chronicles how Mónica's fascination with Indian classical dance, particularly Bharatanatyam and Kathakali, led her to spend seven years in India in the study of these two forms. Thirty years later, her daughter Nazaré set out on the same journey with her mother, in search of her own identity in dance.

In the film, Mónica reflects on the impact of a Bharatanatyam recital by danseuse Alarmel Valli. While visiting India as a 19-year-old tourist, Mónica was so mesmerised by Valli's performance that she boarded a train to Chennai to become her student. Valli suggested that Mónica learn Bharatanatyam at Chennai's Kalakshetra Foundation. Thus began Mónica's journey with Bharatanatyam and, later, Kathakali. Interestingly, the film demonstrates life coming full circle when her daughter Nazaré sets out on the same path. Together, they retrace Mónica's footsteps—the same train journeys, learning the intricacies of dance, and even recreating a performance together on a beach in Chennai, weaving the invisible threads that shaped their connections with dance.

■ SWAPNA MAJUMDAR

a new format: blending two voices that seamlessly switch the narrative back and forth in a rapid-fire style, using both scholarship and imagination to bring epic stories to life. Another important innovation is the expansion of the range of themes, encompassing mythological and contemporary events to introduce a sense of urgency and relevance, essential to energising any performance in this age of digitally minimised attention spans.

The performance was based on the life, philosophy and worldview of the *Tathāgata*, literally meaning 'one who has thus gone' or 'one who has thus arrived', referring to the Buddha. It followed the widely known story of the Buddha, with regional and dialect variations, ensuring each retelling came alive. Poonam Girdhani's script emphasised *karuna* (compassion), central to the Buddha's teachings, and highlighted biographical details, woven into poetry from different traditions and languages, with enough philosophy to be meaningfully uplifting. Smooth transitions between Girdhani's higher pitch and Rajesh Kumar's warm, masculine tone reflected their artistry. Girdhani looked out into space, barely changing expression, as she addressed a higher realm, while Kumar often smiled and looked directly at the audience, creating a rhythm of connection and leading them away.

The audience was captivated by the dastangos' intensity, reminiscent of the first revival performance in 2005, which also took place at the Centre.

■ BHARATI MIRCHANDANI

# 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.*



**DR. SUROOPA  
MUKHERJEE | A-3846**



**SHRI MADHUSUDAN  
ANAND | A-5099**



**DR. RANBIR VOHRA  
M-1253**



**SHRI ERIC GONSALVES  
M-1950**



**SHRI H. K. DUA  
M-2128**



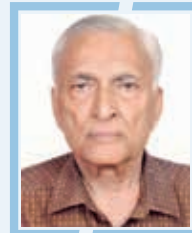
**SMT. OTIMA BORDIA  
M-2165**



**SHRI K. P. UNNIKRISHNAN  
M-2339**



**PROF. T. K. OOMMEN  
M-2363**



**MAJ. GEN. VINOD  
SAIGHAL (RETD.) | M-2639**



**JUSTICE VIJENDER JAIN  
M-2772**



**DR. M. P. SHARMA  
M-3125**



**MRS. VIDHU GANJOOR  
M-3830**



**MR. M. MAROOF RAZA  
M-4353**



## Director's Note

While Delhi experienced a shorter-than-usual spring this year, the Centre's gardens were nevertheless in full bloom. With the rapid onset of warmer weather, summer special food and drinks have been introduced earlier this year across all the Catering venues. These include *aam panna*, buttermilk, fresh watermelon juice, gazpacho, and cold soups of cucumber and leek and potato. A special Navratri menu was added to both the Main and Annexe dining halls from 19 to 26 March. The Centre has waived the 2 per cent surcharge on catering invoices for payments made through RuPay debit or credit cards or any other digital payment modes that uses UPI payment gateway.

As part of the second phase of the Centre's kitchen renovation project, which began in December 2025, work in the Kamaladevi Block Basement-I to create kitchen-support facilities, the Butchery and the Annexe Lounge Kitchen and its Bar has been completed. Work on the Main Kitchen will begin in May 2026 and is expected to be completed within three months. New service stations at the Main Lounge have been installed, replacing the old units.

The renovation of 16 rooms at Annexe Hostel began in three phases in October 2025. Twelve rooms have been renovated in two phases. The renovation of four rooms in the third phase is currently underway and is expected to be completed by the end of May 2026. The renovation of 39 single rooms at the Main Centre is also in progress and is expected to be completed by the end of July 2026.

The redevelopment of the boundary walls along Joseph Stein Lane and Max Mueller Marg, as per the recommendations from security experts, began in January 2026. Work along Joseph Stein Lane has been completed, and that along Max Mueller Marg is in progress and is expected to conclude by the third week of May 2026.

To regulate movement, alleviate congestion on Max Mueller Marg and improve pedestrian safety, Gate No. 2, the Centre's main entry and exit point, has been redeveloped.

The Centre has applied to NDMC for permission to install a new passenger lift in the Programme Block, which is expected to be received shortly. The relocation of basement services has commenced. Construction drawings and plans are being prepared, and civil work is scheduled to start in mid-May.

To comply with the parameters set by the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) to mitigate air pollution, an emission control device—a Dual-Fuel Kit—was installed on the 750 KVA DG Set at the Main Centre in 2024. The remaining two DG Sets (500 KVA at the Main Centre and 380 KVA at the Annexe) have also been replaced with new sets equipped with such emission control devices.

To enable access to the stage at the Multipurpose Hall for *divyang* persons, a permanent ramp has been installed. Two health and wellness dialogues—'Cancer: Risk, Reality and the Road to Freedom' and 'Alcohol Related Health Risk Assessment, and Lifestyle and Liver Disease'—were organised under the leadership of senior doctors from All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in February and March.

The production of compost manure from kitchen, garden and other solid wastes through vermiculture is in progress. All summer plantations for the Centre's gardens have been completed.

The IIC-IRD organised two discussions, 'Diurnal Medicine: The *Rajballabhiya Drabyaguna* and the Making of a Regional Medical Tradition in Bengal, 18th to 20th Centuries' and '*Paka* and *Ahara*: Everyday Stories of Food and Nutrition', as part of the 'Bharat ki Soch' project. The latter was followed by a dinner featuring traditional recipes made with seasonal ingredients and a balanced blend of flavours.

The Centre's Durgabai Deshmukh Library introduced an orientation programme in February 2026 to support Members in the effective use of digital resources. Sessions are held on the fourth Saturday of each month. So far, three sessions have been held, each for a small group of about five Members, providing personalised guidance and skills for navigating digital databases, e-resources and online academic tools.

The Annual Subscription Fee (ASF) 2026-27 was due for payment on 1 April 2026. Members who have not paid their ASF so far are advised to do so by 31 May 2026 to avoid a penalty and the deactivation of their membership.

**K. N. SHRIVASTAVA**