

INDIA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE **IIC** **Diary**

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Woven Narratives

EXHIBITION: *Threaded Heritage: Symbolism, Ritual and Memory in North East Textiles*

CURATED BY: Sentila T. Yanger

COLLABORATION: Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER); and Tribal Weave

3 to 12 April 2026

The exhibition invited viewers to see textiles not merely as crafted objects, but as carriers of lived meaning. The narrative of the exhibits moved beyond the idea of cloth as surface or ornament, suggesting instead that textiles hold ways of remembering, believing and relating to the world.

The display brought together garments and fabrics from several communities across northeast India. What stood out was the way these works were presented, not under a single regional identity but within specific communities, thereby positioning each textile as rooted in a particular way of life.

The section on symbolism revealed how deeply meaning is woven into form. Motifs drawn from the natural world, cosmology and everyday life appeared throughout the textiles on display. Alongside symbolism, local narratives lent the exhibition a quiet depth. Patterns inspired by the pointed teeth of the serpent-dragon deity Pakhangba in Manipuri mythology evoked systems of thought in which nature and the sacred are



closely linked, while motifs of a tiger with fangs in Tsungkotepsu shawls signified the courage and strength of Ao Naga warrior men.

Folklore added another important layer to the exhibition. A story from Manipur speaks of the daughter of Pu Lienthang, who befriends a snake and persuades it to reveal its colours. As the snake stretches itself, she observes its patterns and later recreates them on her loom. When seen alongside the exhibits, such narratives made the act of weaving feel less like production and more like translation—of experience, memory and imagination.

The section on ritual highlighted how textiles are used in specific moments of life. Many of the garments on display are worn during ceremonies, rites of passage or community gatherings. The Youhnyi shawl of the Konyak Naga community,

for instance, is gifted at the time of death to individuals of high social standing and placed beside the deceased as a final tribute.

The curatorial approach supported this experience through restraint: it did not overwhelm with information, instead allowing space to look, pause and make connections slowly. Live demonstrations by weavers from the region further enhanced engagement. What remains after viewing is not a single image, but a certain attentiveness that prompts one to notice textiles differently—their weight, patterns and presence in everyday life.

■ KANIK GUPTA

A Tale of Two Worlds

EXHIBITION: *Rooted Together: An Exploration of Life and Form*

WORKS BY: Anamika

6 to 19 May 2026

The solo exhibition featured acrylic and watercolour canvases with penwork, charcoal sketches, photographs

and printmaking. At its core, the collection offered a quiet meditation on ecology, symbiosis, human behaviour and trust, reflecting on how people and nature remain intertwined. Anamika's artworks were inspired by diverse spaces, from the quiet ponds of Muzaffarpur to the bustling energy of city life. Through lines, textures and woodcut-inspired forms, her work interweaves the rhythms of human patterns with nature's shifting moods.

Having grown up in Muzaffarpur and Chitrakoot before moving to Delhi, Anamika blended two distinct universes in her work.



One was fast-paced and self-reliant, characterised by the enduring loneliness of remote metropolitan life; the other tranquil and serene, nourished by family values and traditions.

She explored the relationship between the intricacies of human psychology and the cycles of nature.

The artist presented three series in the exhibition: 'Life in Nature', 'Togetherness' and 'Lost and Found'. Collectively, they formed an intimate meditation on balance and togetherness in nature—a theme that is not addressed in contemporary art as much as it should be. The curatorial note stated that Anamika used 'sustained engagement with nature as similes for this struggle between belonging and growth'. Her fish, waves and roots reflected the 'ups and downs of relationships and collective emotions'. It further noted that the waves and textures marking the surface represented 'honesty within relationships' while the roots branched out as a 'stamp of ancestry and strength of cultural bonds'.

By positioning her artistic voice at the intersection of the two defining spaces—familial and solitary—of her life, Anamika portrayed a world in which ties, identity and culture are interwoven and continually renegotiated. The exhibition served as a subdued yet potent reminder that art can convey both environment and emotion within a single frame.

■ **RITIKA KOCHHAR**

Artistic Visions of 'High Asia'

EXHIBITION: *Himalayan Encounters—Hidden Views from 170 Years Ago: The Schlagintweit Drawings in India*

COLLABORATION: *People's Association for Himalaya Area Research (PAHAR); and Freie Universität Berlin (Free University of Berlin)*

22 to 29 April 2026

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) is believed to never have left his hometown, yet he wrote about places as distant as Mongolia and Africa. But not all Germans worked in such seclusion. The exhibition displayed the work of three German geologists—brothers Adolph, Hermann and Robert Schlagintweit—who were hired in 1854 by the East India Company to complete the magnetic survey of the Indian subcontinent across the terrain they dubbed 'High Asia'.

Featuring 77 works by the Schlagintweits, the exhibition, for the first time in India, presented high-quality prints of paintings and photographs from their survey expedition in the upper Himalayan region between 1854 and 1858. Rendered in a realist idiom and primarily in watercolour over pencil on paper, these images were among the earliest documentations of the Himalayan environment, including the landscape, mountains, rivers, bridges and rural settlements in areas such as Nainital, Kedarnath, Srinagar and Chaukori.

Such journeys in the Himalayas were arduous and often dangerous. Therefore, the brothers relied immensely on the linguistic and territorial expertise of their local assistants, especially cousins Nain Singh Rawat and Mani Singh. During the talk preceding the exhibition, co-curator Hermann



Kreutzmann spoke of the Schlagintweit brothers and the context in which they had conducted their research, arguing that such seemingly benign geographical efforts emerged from the colonial project of knowledge gathering, particularly to map these colonised territories to facilitate movement and to gain an understanding of the global mountain systems. This explained the exhibition's division into sections such as 'Housing and Settlements', 'Places of Worship', 'Bridges' and locations like 'Assam and Khasi Hills', 'Nainital and its Mountains' and 'Trans-Himalaya'.

Shekhar Pathak of the PAHAR organisation added that the Schlagintweits were 'the first Europeans to use the camera in their surveys in India, and also made paintings over very low-resolution prints of their photographs'. Despite their colonial provenance, these images are a testament to genuine geographical curiosity and a precious aesthetic record of the Himalayas.

■ **DIGVIJAY NIKAM**

History Beyond the Frontlines

EXHIBITION: *Guardians of Neutrality: India's Korean Mission*

PHOTO EXHIBITION CURATED BY: Divakaran Padma Kumar Pillay

21 to 30 April 2026

At a time when the Korean Peninsula became the epicentre of one of the Cold War's most dangerous confrontations, India adopted a path of neutrality, diplomacy and humanitarian service. Revisiting this lesser-known chapter of history, the exhibition brought together rare archival photographs, military records, diplomatic papers and personal accounts that highlighted India's role in the Korean War (1950–53).

It traced India's involvement beyond the celebrated mission of the 60th Parachute Field Ambulance, foregrounding its critical diplomatic interventions and humanitarian contributions amid escalating tensions among the US, China and the UN forces. It also situated these engagements within the broader civilisational ties between India and Korea, spanning from the approximately 2,000-year-old legend of the Korean queen Heo Hwang-ok—who may have travelled from Ayodhya to South Korea and married a local king—to modern peacekeeping initiatives.

A significant section did focus on the deployment of the 60th Parachute Field Ambulance, a medical unit for soldiers requiring treatment, led by Lieutenant Colonel Arcot G. Rangaraj, India's first paratrooper. Arriving in Pusan (now Busan) on 20 November 1950, the unit was immediately thrust into combat conditions. Despite being trapped in Pyongyang during advancing Chinese and North Korean offensives,



the unit refused to abandon its patients, exemplifying extraordinary courage and humanitarian commitment.

Also on display were honours and awards associated with India's Korean mission, including the 'Statue of Brothers' memento, a 'Korea Trophy' and a '70th Anniversary Korean Medal' awarded to the 3 Mahar Regiment for their deputation in the Custodian Force of India (CFI), commanded by Major General S. P. P. Thorat. The CFI was assigned to hold custody of Prisoners of War (POWs) of various nationalities and to facilitate their repatriation. Documents such as *Experiment in Neutrality*, a memoir by Lieutenant General K. S. Thimayya, who was the Chairman of the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission (NNRC), which oversaw the CFI; the NNRC's *Final Report on the Documentary History of Custodian Force of India*; and Thimayya's 1953 papers on POW negotiations illustrated India's diplomatic role in breaking the Korean stalemate.

The concluding section reflected on the work of the Korean War-memorial Organization, emphasising South Korea's enduring remembrance of the soldiers from 21 nations who made sacrifices during the war. The exhibition underscored how India's commitment to neutrality, compassion and peacebuilding continues to shape contemporary India-Korea relations.

■ KAJAL JENA

The Power of Balance

BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP: *India's Strategic Autonomy: A Special Feature*, edited by Pankaj Saran; and Raj Kumar Sharma

IN CONVERSATION: Shyam Saran; and Pankaj Saran

DISCUSSANTS: Jawed Ashraf; Shamika Ravi; S. J. Singh; and Suhasini Haidar

CONCLUDING ADDRESS: M. J. Akbar

COLLABORATION: NatStrat

28 April 2026

In the current global order, amid conflicts, NatStrat's (Centre for Research on Strategic and Security Issues) compilation of essays on India's foreign policy of 'strategic autonomy', featuring contributions from policymakers, scholars and senior officers, is more relevant than ever.

Contextualising the areas discussed in the volume, Pankaj Saran noted that in recent years, considerable attention

had been paid to Indian foreign policy, not only because of India's position on the Ukraine conflict but also because of its stance on other intractable conflicts in West Asia and the Gulf. Governments and commentators have analysed India's choices, objectives and priorities, with views ranging from criticism to misrepresentation.

M. J. Akbar, in a presentation based on his essay 'Challenges before India: Strategic Autonomy and the Power of Balance', traced the roots of India's quest for strategic autonomy to the Partition, which led to a sharp divergence between India and the US following the latter's continued support for Pakistan. Akbar emphasised that India has come a long way, from practising 'balance of power' to exhibiting the 'power of balance'.

In his conversation with Pankaj Saran, Shyam Saran recalled that the concept of strategic autonomy was introduced during India's negotiations with the US for the Civil Nuclear Agreement to convey that the proposed nuclear deal did not, in any way, limit India's foreign policy options. 'India now has greater agency and the ability to play a larger role in shaping a new international order,' he stated.

Sahasini Haider noted that major geopolitical shifts in the past five years had reinforced the message that 'India must continue to follow the original, albeit lonely, path that the founders of the Republic decided on'. Strategic autonomy, the former diplomat Jawed Ashraf observed, reflected a combination of internal decisions and external strategy that best advanced a country's national interests without allowing external actors to dictate that choice.

The discussion left the audience with a question: Is strategic autonomy the new doctrine for today's world? Nations seem to be hedging not only against one another but also against an unpredictable future.

■ VICHITRA SHARMA

Defence Dilemmas

DISCUSSION: *Civil-Military Relations and National Security: An Exploration of the Changing Dynamics of Civil-Military Relations in a Transformed National Security Environment*

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: N. N. Vohra

DISCUSSANTS: Sanjay Mitra; Arun Prakash; and D. S. Hooda

CHAIR: Shyam Saran

22 May 2026

A review of civil-military relations by experts highlighted issues such as the lack of a national security policy, delays in acquiring weapons and the 'politicisation' of the armed forces. A national security policy, N. N. Vohra said, is necessary to 'identify priorities', provide financial support, ensure accountability and facilitate smoother Centre-State dealings on terror-related issues. The Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)'s responsibilities, he added, incomprehensibly include endless paperwork, and he wondered whether the CDS is allowed any 'time to focus on high-profile work'.

Arun Prakash concurred, saying that a strategy, which even the Parliament has not yet demanded, would provide guidance and help avoid conflicts over 'whether we should buy aircraft carriers or nuclear submarines or fighter squadrons'. Sanjay Mitra, however, argued that 'nothing comes out of having a written-

down document', and that Israel, 'the most embattled nation on Earth', does not have one, nor does China—an assertion disputed by Shyam Saran.

'Decisions related to military hardware acquisitions', Prakash regretted, 'go through a labyrinth of bureaucracy through the MoD (Ministry of Defence) and the finance division and finally they'll end up with the government, and it could take anything up to 25 years'. The armed forces, D. S. Hooda added, look at capability building for a decade, but funding comes annually. So, 'greater involvement of the Ministry of Finance officials' and their presence at operational briefings would be helpful. Agreeing with Prakash about acquisition delays, Mitra noted that the armed forces should buy the weapons they need.

Hooda spoke about 'ensuring that the image of the military is not politicised' as it 'leads to loss of professionalism'. Not that military officers are today 'openly advocating' for any particular party or ideology, but that the government and the Opposition should not 'drag in military into political issues'. Mitra argued that politicisation is inevitable in the current circumstances and that it was 'happening in all big militaries of the world'.

Does the system work? Mitra, the defence secretary during the 2017 Doklam standoff between India and China as well as the 2019 Balakot situation with Pakistan, asserted that the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC) works very well and that it 'gave the right kind of advice'.

■ SRINJOY CHOWDHURY

Nurturing Intercultural Ties

DISCUSSION: *India and the Kurdish People: Re-Starting a Civilisational Dialogue*

DISCUSSANTS: Arif Rhein; and Miloon Kothari

MODERATOR: Kallol Bhattacharjee

CHAIR: K. N. Shrivastava

7 May 2026

What do two ancient civilisations in adjacent geographical regions of West Asia and South Asia have in common? In answering this question, the talk explored similarities in values, belief systems and ways of life between the Indian and Kurdish communities and stressed the need for continued interactions to promote cross-cultural exchange. K. N. Shrivastava opened the session by emphasising the varied

civilisational parallels in their linguistic and cultural traditions, from ancient pastoral customs, fire rituals and epic storytelling to medieval philosophical and religious exchanges, and modern-day intellectual and academic interest in India in the Kurdish struggle.

Highlighting the lack of awareness of this cultural proximity, Arif Rhein reflected on Kurdish identity, its current role in West Asia and Kurdish relations with other cultures in the 21st century. Deeply influenced by the region's geography, Kurdish culture is marked by deep connections to nature, resilience, the centrality of women and cultural plurality. Rhein noted how their present-day political demands stem from the denial of their cultural existence and the pressures to assimilate over the past century. They now demand recognised status, guaranteed by appropriate legal provisions, and call for democratic integration through equal citizenship, political participation and the official recognition of their language and culture in the education system and public life. The Kurdish people see themselves as salient actors in West Asia, advocating for democracy, secularism and stability. Internationally, the

Kurdish diaspora, particularly in Europe since the 1960s, has been engaged in economic, cultural, social and political collaboration through institutional cooperation, cultural exchanges and countless personal friendships. Rhein remarked on the need for a similar outreach to Asia.

The Indian experience of resistance and democracy offers significant insights for the Kurds. Miloon Kothari drew parallels between Mahatma Gandhi and Abdullah Öcalan, a founding member of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, a militant political organisation established in 1978. Öcalan's ideas of

'democratic confederalism', the coexistence of differences, women's liberation and equality and ecology as a crucial pillar of democratic modernity resonate with Gandhian values expressed in the principles of *ahimsa* (non-violence), *satyagraha* (insistence on truth), *sarvodaya* (universal upliftment), *swaraj* (self-rule) and trusteeship. The discussion emphasised the role Indians can play in facilitating a global recognition of the Kurdish people.

■ YASHI BARANWAL

Strengthening Global South Cooperation

SEMINAR: *India-Africa Partnership: The Way Forward*

INAUGURAL ADDRESS: *N. N. Vohra*

KEYNOTE ADDRESS: *Sudhakar Dalela*

MODERATOR: *Suhas Borker*

SPEAKERS: *Gurjit Singh; Mohamed Malki; Anisa Kapfi Mbega; Cedrick Charles Crowley; and Ruchita Beri*

COLLABORATION: *Working Group on Alternative Strategies*

19 May 2026

Following tradition, the seminar was scheduled to precede the Fourth India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS-IV), which was set for May but postponed due to the Ebola outbreak across various parts of Africa. Similar seminars had taken place before the IAFS-II in May 2011 and IAFS-III in October 2015—the last gathering before the disruption caused by COVID-19.

Undoubtedly, IAFS offers a vital opportunity to redefine and elevate the India-Africa partnership in a rapidly evolving global geopolitical landscape. India remains firmly committed to working with Africa—rooted in the continent's own priorities that strategically guide it towards transformation through the Agenda 2063 of the African Union (AU)—not merely as a partner, but as a fellow architect of a more equitable,

multipolar world order. By championing the AU's permanent membership in the Group of 20 (G20) forum during its Presidency in 2023, India brought Africa to the fore of global economic governance, demonstrating its commitment to reforming multilateral institutions and amplifying the voice of the Global South.

The seminar addressed the challenges and complexities of the way forward for the India-Africa association. Apart from further leveraging technical and economic cooperation programmes, lines of credit and grant assistance, strictly adhering to project implementation timelines was deemed critical. Key domains for close partnership were identified: health security through the development of an anti-Ebola vaccine; the clean energy transition through the International Solar Alliance, co-founded by India in 2015; tackling the digital divide and unlocking Africa's potential in the digital economy; and launching a strategic 'space bridge' of dedicated satellites tailored to African needs, while gaining a first-mover advantage by replicating India's successful South Asian space diplomacy model in Africa.

Discussants noted that this strategic partnership could be further strengthened by establishing a permanent AU Office in New Delhi. Additionally, the annual AU-India dialogue must be elevated to the level of the Foreign Ministers. This would provide sustained high-level political momentum and enable timely responses to emerging priorities, rather than relying solely on the Summit, which was initiated in 2008 with the intention of meeting every three years.

■ SUHAS BORKER

Decoding Election Outcomes

DISCUSSION: *Assembly Poll Results and the Politics Ahead*

PANELLISTS: *Ajay Gudavarthy; Madhavan Narayanan; Seshadri Chari; Jayanta Roy Chowdhury; and Jigeesh A. M.*

MODERATOR: *Bharat Bhushan*

COLLABORATION: *The Media Foundation*

9 May 2026

The recent assembly elections in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Assam and Puducherry provided several critical insights into the political road ahead. Drawing on the outcomes, the discussion examined India's current and future political landscape.

Seshadri Chari opened by noting that the West Bengal result was not surprising to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which had been preparing for this election for the past five years. According to him, this outcome signals multiple shifts in the country's political landscape, particularly the BJP's expansion beyond its traditional geography and its impact on the North-South divide. C. Joseph Vijay, whose party, Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK), won in Tamil Nadu, promised an alternative to regional powerhouses, rather than a development narrative. Regarding the recent performances of the Indian National Congress (INC), Chari said they were down but not out.

Jayanta Roy Chowdhury added that there was a surprisingly significant Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) cadre even in the Sundarbans. He underscored Bengal's history of realignment of social, political and cultural institutions and considered the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) and its leader, Mamata Banerjee, still capable of a resurgence.

Madhavan Narayanan highlighted the changing 'peoplescape' in Tamil Nadu, where a new generation of voters is asking parties what they are doing for the common people rather than relying on ideological alignment. Delving into the future of the 'Dravidian spirit' in Tamil Nadu's politics, he categorised Vijay as 'neo-Dravidian'.

Jigeesh A. M. referred to the 1940s freedom struggle, when the Left parties, with several leaders from Kerala, played a

central role. He emphasised that the Left will have to address the structural issues that began in 2024 with the weakening of trade unions and the decline of traditional industries in the wake of neoliberal policies.

Ajay Gudavarthy questioned whether the Congress could transform. He stated that common people can see the conflict between regional and national parties, which is sidelining their concerns. Indian voters are rejecting rather than selecting. Voter behaviour has become transactional, with service delivery, or 'transactional welfarism', mattering more than ideology. He opined that, in the longer term, the Opposition should work to unite the people.

■ SHALINI SINGH

A Breath of Change

DISCUSSION: *NCR's Road to Clean Air: Progress, Obstacles and What Lies Ahead*

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS: *Tarun Kumar Pithode*

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: *Rajesh Verma*

PANELLISTS: *Nidhi Madan; Virinder Sharma; and S. D. Attri*

MODERATOR: *Sarika Panda Bhatt*

COLLABORATION: *Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM); and Raahgiri Foundation*

15 May 2026

In the discussion held as part of Clean Air Dialogues, Tarun Kumar Pithode highlighted recent efforts by the Commission for Air Quality Management's (CAQM) Resource Lab, established in collaboration with Raahgiri Foundation, to control air pollution and its contribution to the Electric Vehicle Policy 2026. Identifying sources and mapping the geographical distribution of air pollution across the National Capital Region (NCR) and its neighbouring states has long been CAQM's speciality.

Rajesh Verma delved into the details of these causes and elaborated on both the emission and dispersion of particulate matter. Among the major contributing factors identified were transport, industry, dust from various sources, biomass burning and secondary particles. Of these, vehicular emissions

contribute 23 per cent in winters and 18 per cent in summers to the total pollution levels. Extreme adverse weather conditions, as witnessed in winters, necessitated the formulation of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) stipulations, which are designed to enforce measures to control air pollution. Odd-even number-based vehicle movements and curbs on construction activities were among other guidelines. Mandates for a phased transition, including the registration of only electric autorickshaws in all districts of Delhi-NCR by January 2029 and Pollution Under Control (PUC) certification for fuel purchases by October 2026, were part of recommendations to the government under the Electric Vehicle Policy. Another measure included was the monitoring of industrial activity, with the installation of Air Pollution Control Devices (APCD) at the source, alongside continuous monitoring of pollution generation via Online Continuous Emission Monitoring Systems (OCEMS). More mechanised road-sweeping machines have also been added throughout the region, especially in Delhi, coupled with mist dispensers to minimise airborne dust.

In the discussion that followed, the panellists addressed questions from the audience. Virinder Sharma emphasised the role of electric mobility in addressing the air pollution crisis, while asserting that non-motorised transport and pedestrianisation must play a concurrent part. S. D. Attri stressed the importance of cross-sectoral work and the integration of public health. Nidhi Madan highlighted governance focus areas, including construction, demolition and biomass burning, that need to be mainstreamed. The speakers underscored the importance of collective responsibility in the fight for cleaner air.

■ RAJESH LUTHRA

A Pluralistic Legacy

RELEASE OF THE IIC QUARTERLY (WINTER 2025-SPRING 2026): *Syncretic Traditions of the Indian Subcontinent: Varied Voices* by Dr. Karan Singh

EDITED BY: *Jyotsna Singh; and K. E. Priyamvada*

PANELLISTS: *Uma Chakravarti; Anirudh Kanisetti; and Jonathan Koshy Varghese*

26 May 2026

The annual programme marking the release of the thematic issue of the Centre's flagship journal, *IIC Quarterly*, took place before an eager audience in a packed hall.

Introducing the latest volume, K. E. Priyamvada highlighted its interdisciplinary character and acknowledged the contributions of her predecessor, Omita Goyal, in laying the groundwork, and of the guest editor, Jyotsna Singh, in bringing it to publication. In his welcome address, K. N. Shrivastava emphasised the theme's contemporary relevance in an increasingly polarised world. With reference to Dr. Karan Singh's article, 'Five Sutras for a Global Society', he noted that

the collection examines a wide range of traditions, from Bhakti and Sufism to Buddhism, Sikhism and Christianity, as well as sacred architecture, tribal myths and the idea of religious fluidity or 'polytropy'.

After formally unveiling the volume, Karan Singh reflected on India's remarkable diversity and argued that the country's strength lies not merely in coexistence but in centuries of interaction across religions and cultures. Drawing on the example of Kashmir's Rishi Sufi traditions, he emphasised the need to preserve dialogue, compassion and shared humanity amid growing social and global divisions.

Jyotsna Singh described the thematic issue as the outcome of a sustained editorial effort that transformed presentations from the 2024 conference, 'The Syncretic Traditions in the Subcontinent over the Ages: Contemporary Challenges', into scholarly essays. She also outlined plans to broaden conversations on syncretism through future seminar editions, with discussions on architecture, textiles, cuisines and lesser-known archives.

The panellists reflected on the themes of their essays. Uma Chakravarti drew on her engagement with Buddhism and B. R. Ambedkar's religious conversion to argue that compassion remains a vital ethical value underpinning secular humanism in an increasingly fractured world. Jonathan Koshy Varghese examined the history of Kerala's Syrian Christian communities through diplomatic correspondence, judicial archives and church architecture, revealing long-standing



connections between Travancore and the Ottoman world. Anirudh Kanisetti explored the concept of polytropy and the fluidity of religious identities in South India, arguing that a more nuanced understanding of the past offers an important response to contemporary attempts to portray religious communities as timeless and mutually exclusive.

The programme concluded with an interactive session with the audience, but conversations continued. As debates on identity, religion and nationalism gain prominence globally, this *Quarterly* volume revisits cross-cultural interactions through the lens of India's inherent syncretism.

■ PRABIR KUMAR TALUKDAR

Remembering a Cultural Matriarch

BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP: *Kapilā Jñānagarbhā: Knowledge Unfolding Wisdom—Offerings in the Memory of Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan*, edited by Advaitavadini Kaul

DISCUSSANTS: N. N. Vohra; Shyam Saran; Radhavallabha Tripathi; Bettina Sharda Bäumer; Shashi Prabha Kumar; Aditya Malik; and Advaitavadini Kaul

21 May 2026

Eminent scholars, diplomats, administrators and members of the academic community gathered to reflect on the life, work and lasting intellectual legacy of one of India's foremost cultural thinkers, Kapila Vatsyayan. The programme began with the release of the commemorative volume by N. N. Vohra and Shyam Saran. Introducing the book, Advaitavadini Kaul described it as a collective scholarly tribute to a thinker whose work transformed the understanding of Indian culture, art and knowledge traditions. She highlighted Vatsyayan's efforts to bridge theory and practice and to present India's cultural heritage as an interconnected, living tradition.

Vohra shared that Vatsyayan was devoted to preserving the pluralistic and spiritual basis of Indian culture while remaining

open to modern thinking and change. Saran recalled her contributions to promoting cultural dialogue among nations and her conviction that culture could be a powerful medium for advancing international understanding. Radhavallabha Tripathi spoke about Vatsyayan's engagement with Indian knowledge systems, aesthetics and performance traditions, describing her as a scholar deeply embedded in India's civilisational ethos. Bettina Sharda Bäumer reflected on her long association with Vatsyayan and discussed the latter's vision of the interconnectedness of art, philosophy, spirituality and culture.

Drawing on personal and scholarly knowledge, Shashi Prabha Kumar underlined the philosophical basis of Vatsyayan's work, especially her focus on complementarity and unity in Indian philosophy. Aditya Malik expressed gratitude on behalf of Vatsyayan's family and resolved to carry forward her values of dignity, empathy, compassion and the ability to remain wondrously open to reflection.

The discussion concluded with a shared recognition that Vatsyayan's scholarship continues to inspire new generations of researchers, artists and cultural practitioners. The programme was a tribute not only to her remarkable achievements but also to the reaffirmation of the significance of her vision for understanding India's cultural and intellectual traditions, as well as her enduring relevance in an age of intellectual fragmentation.

■ MITALI TEWARI

Lessons from a Luminary

DISCUSSION: *Remembering Prof. André Bêteille: Life, Scholarship and Legacy*

SPEAKERS: *Romila Thapar; Nandini Sundar; Virginius Xaxa; Surinder S. Jodhka; Deepak Nayyar; Amita Baviskar; Patricia Uberoi; Deepak Mehta; and Gopa Sabharwal*

CHAIR: *Dipankar Gupta*

4 April 2026

The hall was filled with a quiet blend of melancholy and attentiveness as some of India's finest minds remembered André Bêteille (1934–2026), renowned for his transformative contributions to Indian sociology.

Opening the evening, Romila Thapar situated Bêteille within the intellectual ferment of 1960s Delhi University. She recalled how conversations across disciplines over tea helped reshape the study of history into a more socially grounded, interdisciplinary inquiry. Virginius Xaxa reflected on Bêteille as a quiet yet decisive mentor. Teaching, he asserted, was not just a profession but a calling for Bêteille. Surinder S. Jodhka emphasised the 'purposefulness' of Bêteille's sociology, characterised by a comparative method and a refusal to treat Indian society as exceptional.

For Deepak Nayyar, Bêteille represented the liberal intellectual tradition, committed to openness and principled disagreement, even when it exacted a personal cost. He remembered Bêteille

as being sparing with words yet always precise, and remaining attentive to the broader decline in academic standards. Amita Baviskar recalled him as a transformative teacher whose clarity of thought and insistence on engaging with diverse traditions helped students move beyond ideological certainties and dogma.

Deepak Mehta drew attention to Bêteille's later concerns about institutions, civil society and the gradual erosion of public universities, underscoring his belief in the centrality of trust and social obligation. Patricia Uberoi located his legacy in the lived spaces of Delhi University and its vibrant seminar culture, while noting how his work revealed unexpected sites of inequality, particularly within the family. Gopa Sabharwal offered a deeply personal account of his rigour as a teacher and supervisor, characterised by discipline, clarity and intellectual generosity.

In a note read on her behalf by Anjali Bhatia, Nandini Sundar highlighted Bêteille's enduring contributions to the study of stratification, inequality and institutions, as well as his commitment to a comparative, globally engaged sociology rooted in India. Bringing the proceedings full circle, Dipankar Gupta reflected on Bêteille's intellectual courage, his engagement with Weberian thought—founded by German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920)—and his warmth as a colleague and friend.

The evening concluded with a quiet acknowledgement as all present rose for a two-minute silence, holding together shared memory, respect and loss.

■ PRABIR KUMAR TALUKDAR

A Golden Discovery

TALK: *Nishka, The Earliest Indian Gold Coin*

SPEAKER: *Buddha Rashmi Mani*

CHAIR: *K. N. Shrivastava*

21 April 2026

In a lecture as part of the Indian Archaeology series, veteran archaeologist and numismatist Buddha Rashmi Mani presented a striking reinterpretation of early Indian economic and cultural history. His research, based on a Harappan treasure trove discovered in Mandi village, Uttar Pradesh, in May 2000, challenges the long-held belief that the widespread use and circulation of gold coins in India began during the Kushan period (1st–3rd century CE). It situates the origins of gold-based exchange in the 3rd millennium BCE, deep within the Harappan and Vedic worlds and suggests a far more sophisticated and continuous tradition than previously recognised.

Drawing on references in the Rigveda, Atharvaveda and Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī* (c. 6th–4th century BCE), the speaker underscored the importance of the term 'Nishka', once considered only jewellery, as a unit embodying wealth, exchange and ritual value. Far from being merely ornamental, Nishkas emerge in these texts as objects of transaction, symbols of status and ritual offerings embedded in social and religious life.

At the core of Mani's argument is a re-evaluation of disc-shaped gold 'beads' with a central perforation, matching the description of Nishka in the aforementioned texts. Thousands of these were earlier recovered from key Harappan sites, including Lothal (Gujarat), Mohenjo-daro (Sindh, Pakistan) and Rakhigarhi (Haryana), indicating a widespread and organised system of use.

Equally compelling was the discovery of a vast gold hoard in Mandi, in Uttar Pradesh's Muzaffarnagar district. Estimated to weigh about 40 kilograms, the collection was largely looted, with only 10–12 kilograms recovered by the authorities. These remnants were divided among the Archaeological Survey of India's Central Antiquity Collection at Purana Qila, the State Museum in Lucknow and, later, the National Museum in Delhi, where they now form a substantial part of the Harappan Gallery.

Mani's conclusions are based on a detailed study of 40 of the 1,547 pieces from the Mandi collection held in the National Museum. The artefacts, previously classified as decorative beads, have been reinterpreted as standardised monetary units. His work proposes a significant continuity between Harappan material culture and Vedic textual traditions, insinuating that Nishkas represent not only India's earliest gold coinage but potentially the world's earliest standardised monetary system.

■ SUSAN VERMA MISRA

Human Body Through a Holistic Lens

TALK: *Health, Wellness and Nutrition: An Ayurveda Perspective*

SPEAKER: G. G. Gangadharan

CHAIR: Manoj Nesari

6 May 2026

The talk, part of the SAMHiTA-Bharat ki Soch Public Lecture Series organised by IIC's International Research Division (IRD), highlighted Ayurveda's continuing relevance, grounded in its strong internal logic and holistic understanding of the human body.

G. G. Gangadharan argued that nutrition cannot be understood only through modern categories such as carbohydrates, proteins, fats and micronutrients. Food is not merely a substance that enters the body mechanically—its effects depend on preparation, digestion, assimilation and transformation into body tissues. In Ayurveda, *ahara* (food) is therefore both the basis of health and disease. Properly metabolised food nourishes the body, while improper metabolism contributes to illness.

A major theme of the lecture was *agni*—digestive and metabolic fire. Nutrition, Gangadharan explained, is a continuous process extending from ingestion to absorption, metabolism and tissue-level transformation. When *agni*

is weak, proper *rasa* (nutritive fluid) formation does not occur, preventing adequate nourishment of the tissues. This results in the formation of *ama*, or incompletely metabolised intermediates, which obstruct the body's channels and become the starting point of disease.

The speaker also discussed the Ayurvedic concept of *srotas*, the interconnected channels through which nutrients flow. Disease arises from obstruction, distorted flow or improper transformation. Consequently, the same food may nourish one individual while harming another—influenced by factors such as digestive strength, constitution, season, place, quantity, preparation methods and food compatibility. He noted that *viruddha ahara*, or incompatible food combinations, can disrupt metabolism and contribute to chronic disorders.

The lecture further explored the food-medicine continuum in Ayurveda. Food is primarily *rasa pradhana*, centred on taste and nourishment, while medicine is *virya pradhana*—centred on therapeutic action—though the two may overlap depending on context. Explaining *ahara kalpanah*, or food processing, Gangadharan used rice as an example, showing how preparation methods can alter whether it becomes heavy or light to digest.

While answering questions from the audience, the speaker emphasised that dietary advice must be tailored to an individual's *prakriti* (constitution), digestive strength, age, health condition and lifestyle. The talk presented Ayurveda as a system that understands food and nutrition within a broader ecosystem shaped by digestion, constitution, environment, compatibility and mental state.

■ NEELANJANA SINGH

Stories of Strength

FILMS: *Punishing the Professor; and Bollywood Calling Lal Singh...*

DIRECTED BY: Aayna

COLLABORATION: *People's Archive of Rural India (PARI Network)*

30 May 2026

The first of two perceptive documentaries by Aayna, a Tamil Nadu-based filmmaker, *Punishing the Professor* (2025) follows P. Senrayaperumal, a folk artiste and academic who continues to fight caste prejudice in southern India. Forced to drop out of school to play his part in Tamil Nadu's caste-bound folk theatre, Raja Rani Attam, Senrayaperumal spent his childhood performing female roles and enduring constant humiliation and attacks from inebriated upper-caste patrons. He works against impossible odds, saving money on unbelievably low wages, to reclaim his education. His determination culminates in a position as an assistant professor at Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tamil Nadu. For Senrayaperumal, this rise is a personal triumph and a sign of potential social mobility for Dalit scholars.

However, his unconventional success is threatened by an unjust dismissal—believed to be rooted in his Scheduled Caste

background. Although the High Court rules in his favour, the university refuses to reinstate him, revealing how deeply entrenched caste prejudice can sabotage even the hardest-earned victories. Aayna directs her subject with respect, care and compassion.

Bollywood Calling Lal Singh... (2026) also explores an individual's struggle for dignity and selfhood on the path to a long-held dream. The titular Lal Singh, from Bihar's Darbhanga district, has been living in Mumbai—the heart of the Hindi film and television industry. He works as a cook in several households. Singh previously worked in a production office, where he met writers and creatives—an experience that awakened in him a desire to write and act. Over the course of a decade, he taught himself scriptwriting through his encounters in the entertainment world. By his own admission, Singh has five scripts ready, which he pitches to production houses and individuals within the industry. Some are polite; others distant.

But Singh is persistent. He follows his relentless routine: cooking for five families, writing scripts, rehearsing in front of a mirror for a potential acting role and making his daily rounds to prospective employers. He may come across as a Quixotic figure to some, while others may see him as pursuing a futile dream, but Aayna gives Lal Singh a purity of purpose in his quest for self-expression. The screenings were followed by a discussion with PARI's founder, P. Sainath, and the director.

■ PARTHA CHATTERJEE

Choosing Death over Suffering

DISCUSSION: *Law and Ethics of Right to Live, Right to Die with Dignity: A Step Towards Dignified End-of-Life Care*

SPEAKERS: *Rajinder K. Dhamija; R. K. Mani; and Dhvani Mehta*

CHAIR: *K. N. Shrivastava*

CO-CHAIR: *N. Subramaniam*

6 April 2026

Few issues test the intersection of law, medicine and ethics as profoundly as the question of end-of-life care. This deeply reflective discussion examined these concerns in the light of the Supreme Court's recent judgment in *Harish Rana v Union of India* (2026), in which the court allowed passive euthanasia for a patient who had been in a persistent vegetative state (PVS) for over 13 years. Bringing together distinguished medical practitioners and legal experts, the conversation explored the ethical and legal challenges surrounding the right to a dignified death, while drawing attention to the complexities of balancing it with medical intervention and patient autonomy.

A recurring theme throughout the discussion was the distinction between prolonging life and prolonging suffering. The speakers emphasised that, despite its technological advancements, modern medicine must remain rooted in compassion and humane care. N. Subramaniam explored the considerations and fears surrounding passive euthanasia and

living wills, as well as the emotional and financial impacts on patients' families.

R. K. Mani reflected on how critical care medicine often risks reducing patients to clinical entities rather than treating them as persons with emotional, social and spiritual needs. His critique of the practice of LAMA (Leave Against Medical Advice) and the tendency towards disproportionate treatment underscored the ethical dilemmas frequently faced in hospitals.

Rajinder K. Dhamija broadened the scope of the discussion by highlighting the severe lack of palliative care infrastructure and public awareness of advance medical directives (living wills) in India. Citing surveys on end-of-life preferences, he observed that most individuals wish to spend their final moments at home, surrounded by loved ones, rather than in intensive care units connected to machines and tubes.

Dhvani Mehta's legal analysis added significant depth to the dialogue by tracing the evolution of constitutional principles concerning dignity, autonomy and informed consent. Particularly striking was her explanation of the Supreme Court's 'best interests' standard in the *Harish Rana* case. She explained that end-of-life decisions, including withdrawal or withholding of treatment, cannot be reduced to purely clinical assessments, but must also account for the patient's values, relationships and sense of dignity through clear, ongoing conversations among doctors, caregivers and family members.

Subramaniam concluded the discussion with a simple yet profound thought: while death is the one certainty none of us can escape, every human being hopes for a peaceful and dignified end.

■ RITWIK SHARMA

Less is More

FILM: *Minimalism: A Documentary About the Important Things*

DIRECTED BY: *Matt D'Avella*

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

15 April 2026

This 2015 film explores the philosophy of living with less in a culture that equates success with material possessions. It follows the journey of 'The Minimalists', a simple-living collective co-founded by Joshua Fields Millburn and Ryan Nicodemus, as they travel across the United States to promote their book, *Everything that Remains: A Memoir by the Minimalists* (2014), which advocates a lifestyle centred on intentional living rather than material accumulation. Through personal stories, interviews and expert commentary from a range of minimalists—families, entrepreneurs, architects, artists, journalists, scientists and even a former Wall Street broker—the documentary questions whether the pursuit of 'more' truly leads to happiness.

The film is a personal narrative that is woven into a broader critique of consumer culture. Millburn and Nicodemus recount their experiences working in high-paying corporate

jobs while living what many would consider the 'American Dream'—high income, a large house, an expensive car. Despite these outward markers of success, both describe feeling deeply dissatisfied. Personal crises eventually pushed them to reassess their priorities, leading them to significantly reduce their possessions to focus on personal growth and relationships.

In addition to exploring the environmental implications of overconsumption, the film offers perspectives from psychologists, sociologists and neuroscientists, who discuss the societal and psychological consequences of rampant consumerism. The documentary argues that modern advertising and media continually reinforce the idea that happiness can be bought, encouraging people to seek fulfilment through what it calls 'compulsory consumption'. Yet this pursuit often leads to debt and clutter rather than genuine satisfaction.

A central theme throughout the documentary is intentional living. Minimalism is not presented as a form of deprivation, as it is often mistaken for, but rather a framework for evaluating what truly adds value to one's life. The aim is not to own as little as possible, but to be deliberate about what one allows into one's space. By removing unnecessary possessions and distractions, individuals may create space for more meaningful experiences and deeper relationships.

While the film celebrates the personal benefits of minimalism, it also prompts viewers to reflect on the broader cultural systems that drive consumer behaviour. It ends poignantly with a catchphrase used at the end of every episode of *The*

Minimalists Podcast, inspired by American prelate Fulton J. Sheen: 'Love people and use things because the opposite never works'.

■ RICHA VADINI SINGH

In the Mind of an Innovator

FILM: *The Thinking Game*

DIRECTED BY: Greg Kohs

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

15 May 2026

Greg Kohs' 2024 documentary offers intriguing insights into the 'thinking' of Google DeepMind's Demis Hassabis and his team as they strive to solve the 'grand challenge' of biology—the protein folding problem—using the AI system AlphaFold.

Hassabis, a child chess prodigy, was asked by Cambridge University to wait a year for admission owing to his young age. As a 17-year-old, he used this time to co-create one of the world's most popular computer games, *Theme Park*. Hassabis went on to finish his PhD in cognitive neuroscience from UCL Queen Square Institute of Neurology, where he branched into neuroscience with a desire to enter the field of artificial intelligence, not merely to create another AI platform, but to build a highly autonomous machine capable of mimicking and

exceeding human thinking across all conceivable intellectual fields—artificial general intelligence (AGI). Hassabis co-founded the technology start-up DeepMind in 2010, which was acquired by Google for £400 million in 2014.

The documentary suggests that Hassabis' desire to remain in London rather than make the obvious shift to Silicon Valley, his reliance on public transport and his insistence on harnessing AI for altruistic purposes are what sets him apart from other tech entrepreneurs. DeepMind has already altered the course of human history by making giant strides in a 50-year-old biological challenge—a potentially game-changing scientific breakthrough with far-reaching implications—for which the innovator was co-awarded the 2024 Nobel Prize in Chemistry.

Affording a rare peek into the workings of DeepMind, Kohs' film is fascinating, given how ubiquitous AI has become in the two years since its release. Kohs uses animation and other video-editing tools to make the science comprehensible to a general audience. Although not hagiographic, the film needed to explore Hassabis' fears regarding AI in greater depth—its military-industrial use, its potential for job losses and the need for guardrails to harness it—particularly in the light of his own comparison between the Manhattan Project and the ramifications of DeepMind.

■ SIDHARTH SRINIVASAN

An Enchanting Evening

PERFORMANCE: *Piano Recital*

ARTIST: Balázs Fülei

COLLABORATION: *Delhi Music Society*

29 May 2026

Noted Hungarian pianist and professor Balázs Fülei presented a memorable recital before a packed audience in his third appearance in India over the past decade.

He opened with masterful renditions of the well-known *Two Legends*, S. 175 (1863), by the Hungarian pianist-composer Franz Liszt: 'St. Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds' and 'St. Francis of Paola Walking on the Waves', revelling in the picturesque effects, the gradual build-up to sonorous climaxes and the virtuosity of the writing. Throughout the recital, and particularly in these opening pieces of musical scene-painting, Fülei's engaging introductory remarks made the audience more receptive to the unfolding music.

If the Liszt *Legends* are relatively familiar in the piano repertoire, Fülei's chosen excerpts from Edvard Grieg's 17-piece composition, *Norwegian Peasant Dances*, Op. 72 (1902–03) are rarities in concert programmes. The first of the several appealing pieces played was the 'Bridal March from Telemark, Op. 72, No. 3', with an amusing rhythmic feature



reminiscent of the 'Scotch snap'—a syncopated musical rhythm in which a short, accented note is followed by a longer one—which perhaps served to recall not only the geographical proximity of Norway to Scotland, but also the composer's great-grandfather, who was from Aberdeenshire, Scotland. The second, one of Grieg's 'Springdances', was almost uncannily prescient in having a discernible affinity with Béla Bartók's familiar six-piece piano suite, *Romanian Folk Dances*, Sz. 56, BB. 68 (1915–17), written over a decade later. This was followed by 'Halling from the Fairy Hill, Op. 72, No. 4' and 'Mylarguten's Gangar, Op. 72, No. 6', the latter with a very enjoyable rhythmic quirkiness, performed with great flair by Fülei.

A complete change of tone and texture followed, articulated beautifully in the intricate tracteries of Maurice Ravel's 'Une barque sur l'océan, No. 3' (A Boat on the Ocean) from the five-movement piano suite, *Miroirs* (Mirrors) (1904–05). Alberto Ginastera's three *Danzas Argentinas*, Op. 2 (1937) were also wonderfully characterised: the first angular ('Dance of the Old Herdsman'), the second flowing and romantic ('Dance of the Graceful Girl') and the third a virtuoso riot ('Dance of the Outlaw Cowboy').

The recital concluded, as it began, with the music of a Hungarian composer; in this case, Zoltán Kodály's 1927 piano number, 'Dances of Marosszék'. This virtuoso piece in rondo style, based on folk melodies, built to a rousing and satisfying climax that justifiably brought the delighted audience to its feet.

■ SUNIT TANDON

The Many Faces of Ragas

PERFORMANCE: *Nritya Nāda: An Illustrative Essence in Swara and Tāla*

PERFORMERS: Sucharita Khanna; Aparnika Sahu; Tarini Chandrashekhar; Harshit Singh; Karuna Solomon; Anyesha Kheria; Vandita Bhandari; and Shivanshi Agarwal

CONCEPTUALISED AND DIRECTED BY: Sucharita Khanna

CHOREOGRAPHER: Chitra C. Dasarathy

COMPOSER: Praveen D. Rao

VOCALIST: Veena Pani Shukla

COLLABORATION: Kalanidhi—Centre for Performing Arts, Kanpur

7 April 2026

Are ragas merely *swaras* (musical notes) set to certain *talas* (rhythmic cycles), or do they have a deeper meaning? An interesting interpretation of ragas, inspired by the historical Ragamala paintings that personify them as divine or human figures with distinct identities and personalities, was presented in this Bharatanatyam dance ballet.

The performance was based on the traditional ragas associated with the five facets of the *Panchmukhi* (five-headed) form of Lord Shiva and the divinity of Goddess Parvati, and showcased six ragas in the Bharatanatyam style to bring out their specific moods and characteristics.

Traditionally, ragas are performed at specific times of day in accordance with their individual emotions, including serenity, valour, devotion and romance. The ballet thus began with raga Bhairav, devoted to Lord Shiva and performed at dawn. This was followed by raga Todi, usually sung after sunrise, depicting



the musical note as a beautiful *nayika* (heroine) standing in the forest, holding a veena and playfully interacting with a deer. The choreography set to *ektaal* (12-beat cycle) brought out the rhythmic swaying of the trees and the graceful frolicking of the deer attracted by the *nayika*'s music. To portray raga Asavari, sung in the late morning, a Bharatanatyam *tarana*—adapting the dance form with a composition consisting only of rhythmic syllables—set to 16 beats was used, and its identity was manifested as a snake-charming woman wearing a skirt made of peacock feathers.

Transitioning from dawn to dusk compositions, the stage was set for raga Malkauns. The visual representation of this raga was a man wearing a garland of human skulls, symbolising the courage to overcome one's enemies. This was followed by raga Hindol, sung closer to dawn and was depicted as a celebration of *shringara rasa* (the mood that expresses love, beauty and sensuality). The evening concluded with raga Bhairavi, with the dancers expressing their devotion and spiritual surrender to Lord Shiva. While all the dancers held promise, the performance was elevated by the brilliant music.

■ SWAPNA MAJUMDAR

Remembrance and Reverence

PERFORMANCE: *Kamalini Samārāadhanam*

PERFORMERS: Sharon Lowen; Hemanta Kumar Kalita; Divya Goswami; and S. Vasudevan

COLLABORATION: Manasa—Art Without Frontiers

27 April 2026

The programme, marking the first anniversary of Kamalini Nagarajan Dutt's passing, opened with archival footage of her performances and interview excerpts, offering the audience a glimpse into Dutt's artistic philosophy and deep engagement with India's cultural heritage. A renowned dancer, choreographer, scholar, television producer and key figure behind Doordarshan's Central Archives, Dutt's contribution to preserving India's performing arts formed the thematic core of the evening.

The visual documentation served as both an introduction and a reminder of her multifaceted legacy as a performer, mentor and archivist. Sharon Lowen opened the evening with

a heartfelt presentation that served as the commemorative centrepiece. Through a carefully curated selection of works, Lowen revisited choreographies that reflected Dutt's interest in literature, experimentation and dance for the camera. Particularly memorable was 'Omkarakarini', developed following Dutt's suggestion to collaborate with the legendary Carnatic musician M. Balamuralikrishna (1930–2016). Excerpts from Kālidāsa's *Mālavikāgnimitram* and *Kumārasambhava* demonstrated the seamless integration of classical Sanskrit literature with the Odissi movement vocabulary. The portrayal of Shiva and Parvati—from the intimacy of their wedding night to the gentle awakening of the following morning—showcased refined *abhinaya* (gestural expression) and understated emotional depth.

While presenting choreographies mentored by Dutt, the performers shared personal recollections of the late artiste, creating an atmosphere of warmth. Hemanta Kumar Kalita's Kathak composition 'Shivoham' invoked the many manifestations of Shiva through energetic footwork, rhythmic precision and powerful stage presence. Divya Goswami's

Dhrupad-based Kathak interpretation of Shiva, supported by evocative vocals, offered a contrasting mood through measured movement and expressive subtlety to explore the deity's ascetic and cosmic dimensions.

S. Vasudevan's Bharatanatyam rendition of '*Bhāvayāmi Gopāla Bālam*' brought a devotional and lyrical interlude to the evening, which concluded with an Odissi *moksha* (dance climax connoting the soul's salvation and spiritual release)—an ensemble performed by Lowen's students. Graceful and uplifting, the presentation embodied spiritual liberation while affirming the continuity of artistic traditions nurtured through the *guru-shishya parampara* (teacher-student lineage).

More than a memorial, the evening celebrated a life devoted to artistic excellence and cultural preservation. Through dance, music, memory and personal testimony, the programme illuminated Dutt's enduring influence on generations of performers and scholars.

■ AROHI MUNSHI

Spring Sentiments

PERFORMANCE: *Basant Sandhya*

PERFORMER: *Mukul Kulkarni*

ACCOMPANISTS: *Vedang Kshirsagar (tabla); and Rishit Honnavarker (harmonium)*

23 April 2026

Mukul Kulkarni's khayal programme commenced with raga Puriya, a peaceful evening raga, unfolding slow, mellifluous introductory phrases of *alap* (improvised prologue) in recurring sequences. Trained in the Agra and Gwalior Gharanas, he presented a *vistar* or melodic expansion and improvisation of the raga, through the traditional *bandish* (fixed, melodic composition), '*Jab pyare de gare laage*' in *vilambit* mode (slow tempo), followed by '*Sapne mei aayi*' in *teentaal* (16-beat rhythmic cycle). Alternating between the *aakar gamak* sequences (melodic oscillations using the vowel 'Aa') with well-structured precision, he refrained from *bol taans*, where notes are named in each movement. This smooth, even journey displayed the raga perfectly before melting into *madhya laya* (medium tempo). Faster renderings of *aakar taans* (fast, melodic runs using the vowel 'Aa') were enthusiastically supported by the accompanists with a refined clarity. The vocalist moved seamlessly into a *tarana* (fast-paced composition using rhythmic syllables) in *teentaal*, again with rhythmic exhilaration.

Kulkarni's khayal composition embraced raga Kamod with '*Tore darbar aayo Nizamuddin*', a romantic appreciation of spring, featuring melodious and dramatic *taans* (fast, improvised phrases) that merged into the time-keeping *tabla*. He repeated rhythmic words from the lyrics, poignantly evoking spring. This matched the expressive emphasis in '*Jane na dungi*'—a phrase meaning 'refusing to let go'. The



accompanying *tabla* beats reverberated alongside the artist in a final, collaborative *tehai*—a three-pronged, circular climax.

Kulkarni continued with the *bandish* '*Aayi basant*' in a fusion of the ragas Rageshree and Bahar. It was a veritable blend that harmonised the two ragas, with the lower notes remaining sombre as the lyrics reflected a cuckoo's anticipation of lovers meeting. Seasonal sentiments lingered in '*Sajana ghana phuliya*', a romantic celebration set to swift *teentaal*. Further springtime descriptions combined lyrics in the *ragamala* (composition with every line set to a different raga) format. One such couplet captured the merriment of sisters-in-law conversing outdoors while waiting for their husbands to return.

Kulkarni concluded with a *tappa* (a genre rooted in Punjabi folk music), '*Mani ve basant yaar ve*', in raga Bhairavi. He sang with devotional intensity, hardly pausing during the two melodious hours of the performance.

■ AJANTA DUTT

A Jugalbandi of Traditions

PERFORMANCE: *Veena Recital*

ARTISTS: *Bahauddin Dagar (Rudra veena); and Saraswati Rajagopalan (Saraswati veena)*

COLLABORATION: *Sunad – Nadam Brahmanandam Sabha*

10 April 2026

A rare dialogue between two deeply internalised traditions of veena—Hindustani Dhrupad on the Rudra veena and Carnatic classicism on the Saraswati veena—unfolded as a carefully graded aesthetic arc in the hands of the two performers.

Bahauddin Dagar's elaboration of raga Tilak Kamod progressed in a quintessential Dhrupad idiom, marked by an unhurried, architectonic *alap* (improvised prologue) that adhered to the Dagarvani tradition's *swara shuddhi* (purity of notes), microtonal inflections and continuity. His emphasis on a *mandra sthayi* (lower octave) exploration established a sonorous canvas in which the characteristic glide from notes 'Ma' to 'Ga' and the nuanced handling of 'Ni' were rendered with exceptional restraint. His elongated *meends* (glides between two notes) articulated the raga's delicate oscillation around 'Ni' and achieved a near-vocal elasticity. A seamless transition into the *jod* (transitional) section subtly introduced rhythmic pulsation without compromising the contemplative mood.

Saraswati Rajagopalan followed it with the well-known composition by singer, veena player and composer

Muthuswami Dikshitar (1776–1835), '*Vatapi Ganapatim*', in raga Hamsadhwani. Unlike the contemplative repose of Tilak Kamod, her exposition and structured improvisation prioritised immediacy and melodic clarity. The raga's inherent auspiciousness was accentuated in her *alapana* (melodic elaboration of a raga) through brisk *kampita gamakas* (gentle oscillation of a note around its centre pitch) and smooth progressions from *mandra* to *tara sthayi* (upper octave).

A crucial aesthetic pivot emerged in Rajagopalan's rendering of '*Hiranmayim Lakshmim*', another composition by Dikshitar, set to raga Lalitha and *rupaka taal* (a seven-beat rhythmic cycle). She handled the raga's inward gravitas with notable restraint, thereby creating an understated bridge to the Dhrupad aesthetic.

The *jugalbandi* (musical duet) in raga Malkauns was the intellectual high point of the performance. Dagar's grave, sustained delineation established the raga's austere canvas, upon which Rajagopalan adapted her idiom, tempering the density of *gamakas* (embellishments on a note or between two notes) to align with its meditative ethos. The exchange evolved into a genuine dialogue: Dhrupad phrases were echoed and re-accented with Carnatic gamakas, creating a layered reinterpretation rather than mere alternation.

The concert exemplified dialogic classicism without dilution, rooted in tradition yet exploratory in intent. Dagar reaffirmed the Rudra veena's introspective depth, while Rajagopalan demonstrated adaptive virtuosity across traditions.

■ AMITABHA KHARE

Celebrating A Musical Heritage

FESTIVAL: *Panorama of Bengal Arts—Folk Songs: Facets of Bengal*

PRESENTED BY: *Mihir Basu; and Bishakha Basu*

CONCEPT BY: *Mihir Basu*

ACCOMPANISTS: *Pankaj Misra (flute); Amaresh Chakravorty (octopad); Nilanjan Sengupta (tabla); and Mintal Gazi (ektara)*

COLLABORATION: *Impresario India*

23 May 2026

The two eminent performers presented 18 songs in local dialects from across Bengal, capturing the region's folk essence. '*Ei Padma ei Meghna*' echoed the pain-drenched pleasures of undivided Bengal. In popular *lok sangeet* (folk music), where dialects change every few kilometres, the fishermen's *Bhatiyali* form is especially renowned. Mihir's voice in '*Majhi re*' carried a full-throated longing for home. Using charming anecdotes, Bishakha described dawns at her grandmother's house, when she was routinely awakened by a folk singer seeking alms. Bishakha sang his song '*Rai jago go*', asking Radha to rise, reaching high notes with plaintive urgency.

The duo showcased romance in '*Tomra gele ki aasiben*', in which a woman in love with a *mahout* (an elephant trainer or keeper) wonders whether he will return to marry her. In *Alkap Gaan*, a blend of music, dance and satirical theatre, boys dress as girls for a dance performance that weaves singing and acting; songs are drawn from mythological tales and the dialogue addresses contemporary socio-political concerns. Mihir's mealtime song satirising *ghorar dim* (a horse's egg) recalled this form and Sukumar Ray's 'nonsense verses' in *Abol Tabol*. *Baul Gaan*, with its Sufi-Vaishnava confluence, was explored in Mihir's devotional rendering of '*Khachar bitor ochin pakhi*', which symbolises life caged within the human body.

Mihir moved on to *Gambhira Gaan* from Malda, presenting a Shiva *stuti* (hymn) in praise of the deity, depicting Shiva dancing and smoking his pipe. The style was reminiscent of *Agamani-Vijaya* songs celebrating Parvati's homecoming during Durga Puja. Bishakha's voice was husky and rustic while Mihir sounded more refined, yet his pulsating voice retained local sentiments. The two evoked a spiritual syncretism through the folklore of the tiger spirit Dakshin Rai and the forest guardian Bonbibi of the Sundarbans, where both Hindu and Muslim communities pray to them for protection against man-eating tigers before entering the mangrove forest.

Mihir concluded with '*Sohag chand badani dhani*', inviting the audience to join him in the ever-popular regional song.

■ AJANTA DUTT

Sonic World of an Auteur

TALK: *Music in the Cinema of Ritwik Ghatak*

ILLUSTRATED PRESENTATION BY: *Partha Chatterjee*

28 May 2026

The music in the films of visionary filmmaker Ritwik Ghatak (1925–1976) is not highlighted enough, making this talk a welcome addition for his admirers. The lecture was supported by significant clips from seven of Ghatak's films, downloaded and compiled from various platforms, albeit with mixed results.

Partha Chatterjee shared invaluable insights into the hurdles that confronted Ghatak during his filmmaking process, largely driven by ideological disagreements, reluctant financiers and, more often than not, box-office failures. The last, one may well state, far from being indicative of the quality of his craft, was almost solely due to an audience yet unprepared for the cinema of this radical thinker. Cinema for Ghatak was not just a medium of storytelling but the most powerful way to reach the masses. To this end, he used music as a powerful, instinctual narrative device rather than merely filling gaps in silences or enlivening the ambience. Chatterjee's selected clips illustrated

Ghatak's careful use of sound to infuse seemingly simple images with layers of nuance and meaning, supporting the development of his themes.

Ghatak was also known for his eclectic use of diverse kinds of music, both Indian and global, as well as from the rich folk and tribal traditions of India. His mastery of sound and atmosphere lay in his purposeful blending of contrasting scores from various sources. While the speaker mentioned this, what was missing were discourses on specific instances of such deployment, their intent and effects. This alone might have fulfilled, to a great extent, the expectations of the attendees.

Similarly missing were discussions of Ghatak's blending of Indian and Western classical music, which serves as an expression of the trauma and uprootedness in the Partition trilogy; the eternal rhythm of the Titash river conveyed through the exhilarating flute melody in *Titash Ekti Nadir Naam* (1973); and the folk roots in the sarod composition by maestro Ali Akbar Khan in *Ajantrik* (1958), among others.

However, it must be acknowledged that any good subject has many facets, and this talk may well pave the way for more such conversations on Ghatak and other auteurs.

■ ARUNA BHOWMIK

Departures

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



SHRI K. K. KOCHHAR
M-1201



DR. IAN BAKER
M-1784



SMT. VIJAYA RAJAN
M-1961



SHRI DHANENDRA
KUMAR | M-4228



SHRI AHMAD RASHID
SHERVANI | M-4247



SMT. SHAKUNTALA
NATH | A-0686



SHRI EDGAR FRANCIS
RIBEIRO | A-1651



MS. JANET MARY RIZVI
A-1908



SHRI ALEXIS GILANI
A-6835



DR. (SMT.) LEILA
MEHRA | A-7027



SMT. KIRAN KAPOOR
A-7856



SHRI DINANATH
SHARAN SHRIVASTAVA
AT2097



Director's Note

Along with the early arrival of summer this year, the Centre has introduced several new initiatives. Members will be pleased to know that the IIC website, accessible at <https://iicdelhi.in>, has undergone an extensive redesign to enhance the user interface, simplify navigation and present a contemporary visual aesthetic. New features include programme highlights, real-time updates, digital archives and a Members' portal. The redeveloped website, launched in May 2026, presents information about the history and management of the Centre, as well as its Programmes, Publications, Library resources, International Research Division (IRD), Membership, Hostel, Venues and other initiatives in a visually engaging way.

As part of IIC-IRD's SAMHiTA (South Asian Manuscript Histories and Textual Archive) project, supported by the Ministry of External Affairs, two exhibitions, 'The Mathematical Sciences: South Asia's Contribution' and 'Shunya: The Power of Zero', were held at the Centre in September and October 2025, respectively. A multimedia version of these exhibitions, titled 'From Shunya to Ananta—Zero to Infinity—The Indian Civilisation's Contribution to Mathematics', was presented at the UN Headquarters, New York, from 11 to 15 May 2026. Dr. S. Jaishankar, Minister of External Affairs, inaugurated the exhibition and emphasised the need to pluralise global intellectual history.

A five-day workshop on 'Palaeography and Manuscriptology' was held under the SAMHiTA project from 6 to 11 April 2026, during which experts discussed the development of ancient scripts and the processes of manuscript decipherment and editing. In May, an IIC team visited Bhutan to review ongoing institutional collaborations under SAMHiTA and to explore future possibilities.

Members were treated to flavours from Punjab at a curated dinner, 'Baisakhi Da Pind Feast', held on 14 April at the Rose Garden. The lavish spread featured *kulhad wali meethi lassi*, *tandoori kukkad*, *bhutte de kabab*, *rara gosht* and *lesooni palak*, among other dishes. Lotus Lounge, with a new food and bar menu, opened to Members on 22 May.

In 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 and the Butchery has been completed, as also the Annexe Lounge Kitchen and its Bar. These kitchens are now fully operational and the renovated Annexe Lounge and its Bar, with new flooring and tiling, have been opened to Members from 11 April 2026. The third phase of the project, which began in May 2026, involves renovating the Main Kitchen and is expected to be completed by the end of July 2026. A temporary kitchen to cater for various dining venues at the Main Centre has been set up.

In October 2025, the renovation of 16 rooms at the Annexe Hostel began in three phases and was completed in May 2026. Work on 39 single rooms at the Main Centre is in progress and is expected to be completed by the end of July. The carpet in Lecture Room I has been replaced.

Following recommendations from security experts, the redevelopment of the boundary walls along Joseph Stein Lane and Max Mueller Marg, which began in January 2026, has now been completed. The changes include increased wall height, a consistent design, a new entrance gate to the Gandhi-King Plaza and the removal of bamboo *jafri*. In the next phase, redevelopment work will be carried out from Gate No. 2 to the boundary wall at the other end of Max Mueller Marg.

The Centre has received NDMC's approval to install a new passenger lift in the Programme Block. Construction work has begun, and the lift is expected to be operational by October 2026.

The Centre's water storage and supply system is largely decentralised, with independent sources providing water for firefighting, domestic use and drinking. It has been decided to install a centralised freshwater storage and supply system to ensure a very high quality of water. A concept design has been prepared in consultation with the Centre's Architectural Design and Advisory Committee (ADAC). The Centre will soon approach the NDMC for design approval.

All summer plantations for the Centre's gardens have been completed, along with grass work, weeding and gap-filling at Fountain Lawn, Rose Garden, Main Verandah and the Main Lawn between Gate Nos. 1 and 2. The production of compost manure from kitchen, garden and other solid wastes through vermiculture is in progress and will be available for sale to Members in September 2026.

K. N. SHRIVASTAVA