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Boon, Bane or in Between?

CONCLAVE: *Authorless Horizons: AI, Authorship and the Emerging Creative Ecosystem*

CHIEF GUEST: *Gajendra Singh Shekhawat*

OPENING REMARKS: *Shyam Saran*

KEYNOTE ADDRESS: *Girish Nath Jha*

CONCLUDING REMARKS: *K. N. Shrivastava*

COLLABORATION: *Sahitya Akademi; and Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India*

2 to 3 June 2026

The two-day conclave featured reflections on the transformative impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) across literary, technological, philosophical and legal dimensions.

Usha Mujoo Munshi contextualised the theme and situated the questions posed by the intersection of machine-generated expression and human creativity within contemporary intellectual endeavours. Union Minister of Culture and Tourism, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, stressed that technology is a tool without consciousness, incapable of replacing human creativity, and that it must be trained efficiently. Shyam Saran emphasised that AI should be seen as a processor and warned that over-reliance on technology-induced cognition would lead to 'atrophy of the mind'. Girish Nath Jha underlined AI's linguistic and data challenges and advocated data sovereignty and indigenous language models. K. N. Shrivastava noted the changes that AI has brought to the field of intellectual production.

The first session, 'Writing in the Age of AI: Redefining Creativity and Human Expression', highlighted AI's reshaping of writing, raising questions about originality, voice and the evolving relationship between human imagination and machine assistance. Ashok Chakradhar insisted that, as users, humans must retain their agency, while Rekha Sethi underscored that AI can imitate but not inhabit creativity. Chandra Sekhar drew parallels with past technological disruptions, insisting on the need to exercise ethics to avoid the temptations of quantity.

In 'Co-Creation or Automation? AI's Role in Shaping Literary Works', discussants examined the extent to which AI—a possible 'Frankenstein'—functions as a creative tool, highlighting its derivative and regenerative nature. Ujjawal Jana argued that AI must be seen as an automated aggregator of human expression rather than a creator, while Manoj Kumar Pandey advocated cautious human oversight.

'Finding, Filtering, Creating: AI in Information Discovery for Writers and Researchers' focussed on new AI-driven discovery tools and their impact on research and reading practices. Jagdish Arora illustrated the transformative potential of a futuristic library that could offer hyper-personalised recommendations, accessibility, adaptability and interactivity. N. V. Sathyanarayana underlined the current absence of copyright attribution for AI-digested data, which ensures that 'authorless horizons' is not an impending reality.

The panel discussion, 'From Information to Insight: AI, Scholarship and the Future of Knowledge Creation', addressed AI's utility in law, research and cultural heritage while cautioning against over-dependence, bias amplification and the illusion of knowledge.

In 'Reimagining Publishing: Literary Dissemination in the AI Ecosystem', Ravi Singh, while acknowledging AI's utility, contended that it lacks the agency to become either an author or a publisher, and that, if not used judiciously, it would exacerbate ethical ambiguities and socio-cultural marginalisation. Manish Khurana expressed doubts about AI's ability to replace the editor, despite its potential in social media marketing and typesetting.

Malashri Lal, in 'The Writer's Perspective: Engaging with AI in Creative Practice', described this as an 'Oppenheimer moment' and argued for recognising human agency. Vivek Sachdeva and Sutapa Dutta agreed that AI can serve as a smart research assistant, but noted that it cannot replace

traditional archival scholarship and emphasised the need to redefine the fluid author—reader relationship.

Pressing issues of intellectual property, privacy and ethical liability in AI-generated content were discussed in 'Authorship, Ownership and Ethics: Legal Challenges in the Age of AI'. Jay Cheema proposed a legislative blueprint to prepare India for the challenges AI might pose and emphasised the importance of such a framework in helping India become a creator in the global AI ecosystem.

In the last session, 'Language Technologies and Literary Expression: Tools Shaping the Written Word', Buddha Chandrasekhar showcased innovations like 'Anuvadini AI' for real-time multilingual translation, underscoring AI's potential to preserve linguistic diversity.

In the valedictory session, D. P. Singh reaffirmed that while technology can be a powerful ally, it cannot achieve true authorship. The conclave concluded by emphasising the need for ongoing interdisciplinary dialogue to harmonise human creativity with AI's capabilities.

■ **BHAVYANSH MATHUR**

Dissecting Electoral Vigour

TALK: *Still Exceptional? India's Democracy in Comparative and Historical Perspective*

SPEAKER: *Ashutosh Varshney*

MODERATOR: *Yamini Aiyar*

13 July 2026

The lecture addressed the growing conflict between India's historically vibrant electoral democracy and the slow erosion of its liberal-democratic foundations. Drawing on mainstream democratic theory, Ashutosh Varshney analysed India's position as a 'deviant case' that continued to defy statistical predictions by safeguarding democratic structures despite its low-income levels and immense diversity and scale. He argued that this historical 'exceptionalism' was primarily centred on its electoral democracy, which has now become increasingly at odds with the ongoing decline in India's liberal democracy and the essential protections of speech, association and minority rights between elections.

The recent democratic backsliding can be attributed to the prevailing ideology of 'those in power', which prioritises communitarian loyalty over individual liberal rights and seeks to establish a religious hierarchy through a narrative of historical grievance, Varshney said. This project has been realised through legal shifts, including the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, and the revocation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status, alongside new societal phenomena such as incidents of 'bulldozing of minority homes and businesses' treated as illegal constructions by local authorities.

Varshney and, later, Yamini Aiyar warned that the polity is moving beyond liberal regression into a new phase of electoral erosion, pointing specifically to the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls—with its 'logical discrepancies' flagged by mysterious algorithms—as a modern mechanism of voter suppression. He asserted that by shifting the onus of voter registration onto people, the state risks 'disenfranchising a very large number of citizens' from vulnerable communities, a development he likened to the late 19th- to mid-20th-century Jim Crow era in the US.

The talk was followed by a robust exchange with the audience, moderated by Aiyar. She observed that the mechanisms of electoral democracy are now being deployed in service of an ideological project, while audience members debated the failure of 'liberals' to forge communities and create local, inclusive spaces for dialogues on constitutional values, outside urban circles, and the significance of the 2024 election as an 'exogenous shock' to the current establishment.

The conversation reiterated that while the health of India's democracy is 'deeply wounded', the future remains a contest between strategic institutional redesigns, such as 'One Nation, One Election', and the resilient democratic sentiments of Indian citizens that surfaced during the last general elections.

■ **SAURYA MISHRA**

The Teenage Years of AI

TALK: *Governance in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*

SPEAKER: *Prabhat Kumar*

CHAIR: *Gopalkrishna Gandhi*

9 July 2026

Delivering the B. G. Deshmukh Lecture 2026, Prabhat Kumar explored the evolving role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in public administration and the institutional responsibility to embrace technological advancement without forsaking ethics and human oversight.

Gopalkrishna Gandhi opened with disarming candour, admitting he had no credentials on the subject, as in his experience 'AI' meant Air India and 'IT' was Income Tax. The ensuing laughter soon gave way to gravity. Gandhi emphasised the need for AI safety and regulation, and said that India's per capita freshwater availability had fallen from 5,177 cubic metres in 1951 to 'scarcely 1,341 cubic metres in 2025', according to statistics shared with him by renowned journalist P. Sainath. His question hung in the air: Will AI help us find water?

Kumar invoked Sardar Patel's address to the first batch of Indian civil services probationers on 21 April 1947, then went further back to Aristotle, asserting that the function of

governance is to organise a society for collective decision-making. Yet the governed are dissatisfied. He observed that the fundamental concern relating to governance today is a 'decline in public trust in democratic and institutional governance'.

Into this landscape has arrived AI, a supercharger of efficiency. Routine administration will soon be delegated, while traffic will move along paths chosen by machines. Kumar admitted that 'this will reduce the implementation time of governance decisions from months to seconds'.

However, there are also harder questions. Will AI begin to determine policy? How will Parliament retain the power to reject an algorithm's recommendation? The speaker's deepest anxiety was the erosion of due process. Natural justice demands reasons, and an AI cannot explain why a person is branded 'anti-national' or denied a ration card. Kumar warned that AI's growing role in policymaking could gradually weaken democratic institutions if leaders began surrendering to algorithmic recommendations. He concluded that India's story will depend not on the models we build but on how we apply them.

The thought-provoking deliberations made one think of this as AI's teenage years. The technology has form without maturity, and is changing shape as we describe it. Governance must now parent an adolescent, keeping human judgement, ethics and accountability intact as everything around them transforms. Above all, it must demonstrate a watchful patience to discover the true nature of its offspring.

■ **APAR GUPTA**

Decoding the Indian Voter

DISCUSSION: *Democracy and Recent State Assembly Elections in India: Trends, Challenges and Implications*

INAUGURAL ADDRESS: *K. N. Shrivastava*

DISCUSSANTS: *Varghese K. George; Sanjay Kumar; and Manisha Priyam*

CHAIR: *Rekha Saxena*

COLLABORATION: *Political Science Society*

6 July 2026

The recent State Assembly elections in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, among others, had their share of controversies, as K. N. Shrivastava acknowledged in his opening remarks to a packed hall. Referring to the Special Intensive Revision (SIR), an exercise undertaken by the Election Commission of India (ECI) to verify electoral rolls in poll-bound states, he said that 'the methodology of conducting SIR created questions' and that the timing and scope of this 'routine' procedure must be transparent. He further asserted that it was 'certainly not within ECI's mandate to verify citizenry'. These elections, according to Shrivastava, were a testament to the 'independent' choices of women and the youth, beyond the influences of husbands, caste or community.

Rekha Saxena affirmed that elections are 'more than instruments of changing governments', but have a deeper democratic significance—'it is at once a constitutional, political and social exercise'. Discussing the growing presence of social media, grassroots organisations and leadership narratives in election campaigns, Saxena raised a larger question: What kind of democracy are these elections producing? Additionally, are State Assembly elections still secondary or have they become the 'principal laboratories for negotiation of Indian democracy'? She contended that democracy cannot be measured solely by statistics, and successful elections do not automatically imply a healthy democracy.

Highlighting several state-wise statistics, Manisha Priyam questioned why the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had participated in the SIR exercise in Bengal, with its '90 lakh deletions and 27 lakh discrepancies', if it was going to win in any case. She also reminded the audience that the framers of the Indian Constitution had categorically rejected separate electorates based on religion or caste. Unveiling another layer of the pervasive 'woman vote' question, Priyam wondered why no corresponding women leaders had emerged.

Sanjay Kumar used available data from ECI and private surveys to show that women do not vote en bloc in most elections, with differences emerging along financial lines. Addressing the role of welfare politics, he observed that 'non-beneficiaries vote for the Opposition, while beneficiaries go for the ruling parties'.

Varghese K. George argued that the emerging nationalisation preceded these elections, citing continued tensions between regional and national powers over the years. With the possibility of the delimitation exercise moving beyond Assam, he said that bipolar politics could emerge in Kerala. Regarding the influence of freebies and financial incentives, he observed that no political party has offered jobs 'since 2014'.

■ **SHALINI SINGH**

Forging an Equitable Force

SEMINAR: *Presence of Women Workforce in Police Organisations at Subordinate Ranks in India*

SPEAKERS: *G. K. Pillai; Amod Kanth; Nuzhat Hassan; Sudeep Jain; and Rashmi Anand*

CHAIR: *Sudhir Pratap Singh*

COLLABORATION: *Indian Police Foundation*

16 June 2026

A comprehensive dialogue was held on the institutional and societal transformations required to increase female representation in the Indian police workforce. The conversation began with an address by Sudhir Pratap Singh, who stressed the need to move beyond the current 'snail's pace' of women's recruitment, which has risen from less than 1 per cent in the early 1980s to approximately 12 per cent today, towards a truly representative 50 per cent of the workforce. He identified the primary systemic barriers that make the profession unappealing to young women—the lack of 'pink toilets', childcare support and fair career progression.

G. K. Pillai offered a blunt administrative perspective on government accountability. He argued that the proposed 33 per cent, or even 50 per cent, representation will remain a 'wish list' without statutory backing, as was the case with the successful mandatory quotas in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Pillai, invoking the example of Kiran Bedi, the first Indian woman to join the officer ranks of the Indian Police Service (IPS) in 1972, recalled how the absence of basic facilities for women was used to discourage her from joining the police—facilities that are not concessions but mandatory requirements that the government has historically failed to provide. He outlined how the patriarchal mindset that hinders women's professional engagement needs to be dismantled at its roots—within the school curriculum and household dynamics, long before a recruit dons a uniform.

The seminar also featured retired officers Nuzhat Hassan, who cautioned against 'compartmentalising' women into specialised cells of the workforce, and Amod Kanth, who outlined the unique role women play as legal guardians in Special Juvenile Police Units. The two speakers emphasised the need for institutionalised milestones and professional training that move beyond gendered stereotypes towards quality-of-output standards. The lack of 'leave reserves' for maternity and childcare and the persistent 'muscle power' myth were raised as concerns warranting greater structural attention, alongside the deep-seated cultural friction within the forces.

The seminar's focus remained primarily on institutional accountability and narrative shifts, with propositions for a national campaign titled 'Women Protect' to reposition women officers as defenders of society.

▪ **SAURYA MISHRA**

For a Greener, Healthier Future

DISCUSSION: *Smart & Sustainable Mobility Through Cycling*

DISCUSSANTS: *K. N. Shrivastava; Mayank Srivastava; Rohina Gupta; Graham Watson; Laurianne Krid; and A. K. Jain*

CHAIR: *D. V. Manohar*

COLLABORATION: *World Cycling Alliance; SmartBike; and Fit India*

3 June 2026

In his inaugural address, K. N. Shrivastava underscored the pressing need for sustainability amid rapid urbanisation in India, which has put enormous pressure on the transport system. He said incorporating cycling as a viable means of transportation in Indian cities would require sympathetic urban planning, similar to that in several Western nations.

D. V. Manohar elaborated on the draft National Cycling Policy presented to the Prime Minister, arguing that India requires a coordinated national strategy rather than isolated city-level initiatives. With as many as two crore vehicles added to Indian roads every year, cycling as a mode of mobility is essential for reducing automotive emissions. Its viability, however, depends on supportive policies, dedicated infrastructure and initiatives such as 'car-free zones' and 'Fit India Sundays on Cycle'. He cited the cities of Bogotá, Copenhagen, Montréal and Barcelona as role models in this regard.

Mayank Srivastava highlighted the health benefits of active commuting. He observed that cycling addresses both environmental concerns and lifestyle-related diseases. Incorporating incentive systems such as cash rewards and encashable carbon credits, he suggested, would encourage cycling as a mainstream mode of transport.

Rohina Gupta and A. K. Jain reiterated the need to restructure the automobile-centred urban design, with Jain invoking the National Urban Transport Policy 2006. According to the speakers, the cycle as a means of mass mobility can gain wider acceptance and understanding if discouraging factors, such as social status and commuter comfort, are also addressed.

Laurianne Krid and Graham Watson provided an international viewpoint. European cities, they noted, generate significant economic and health benefits through sustained investment in cycling infrastructure. Their presentations emphasised government spending and policies in this regard. Cycle tourism in numerous European countries is a reality, with regular 'car-free Sundays' a common feature in many places. The safety of the cycle rider, unfortunately neglected in India, is a priority in Europe. Krid concluded by referring to a question earlier posed by Gupta: Did we build cities for people or cars?

▪ **RAJESH LUTHRA**

Settling the Dust

DISCUSSION: *Addressing Sources of Air Pollution: Tackling Re-suspended Dust from Roads and Construction Sites*

DISCUSSANTS: *Dilkhush Meena; Anumita Roychowdhury; and Sumit Sharma*

MODERATOR: *Nidhi Madan*

CHAIR: *S. D. Attri*

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

19 June 2026

Gathered as part of the Clean Air Dialogues, the panel agreed that dust appears deceptively benign, which is why it remains an unresolved issue. Constituting nearly a quarter of Delhi's summer fine particulate matter (PM2.5) and roughly 15 per cent of its annual particulate load, dust is less a single pollutant than a symptom of fragmented urban planning.

S. D. Attri began by breaking down the city's pollution problem into two main parts—vehicular and industrial emissions on one side, and road dust on the other—declaring that their regulation will solve nearly '75 per cent' of Delhi's air pollution problems. Since its establishment, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) has been expanding its air quality monitoring network and has rolled out the first digitised, publicly accessible city action plans across Delhi–NCR's municipalities.

Dilkhush Meena steered the discussion towards street-level application, explaining a newly instated standard operating protocol that coordinates mechanical sweeping, manual dust removal and sanitation work. He described the process of clearing decades-old dust build-up ('legacy garbage'), particularly along Karol Bagh's railway tracks, which served as a reminder that Delhi's dust problem is not limited to new pollution, but also old neglect finally being cleaned up.

Anumita Roychowdhury noted that the toxicity of everyday dust stems primarily from the build-up of road grime, tyre wear, brake dust and combustion residue. She reframed the discussion, asserting that dust cannot be regulated like point-source pollution. It must instead be managed at the root through circularity in construction and demolition (C&D) waste, higher targets for the use of recycled or processed C&D waste than the modest 5 per cent national minimum in 2026–27, and more thoughtful design mandates. Under the Environment (Construction and Demolition) Waste Management Rules, 2025, the minimum use of recycled or processed C&D waste is set to increase to 25 per cent for construction and reconstruction projects, and 15 per cent for road projects by 2030–31.

Sumit Sharma warned that a warming, drier climate would only intensify dust re-suspension, making regional greening and soil retention extremely urgent. Dust pollution, he added, affects not just our lungs but also the cardiovascular system, leading to difficulties with blood circulation, among other health problems.

As the conversation concluded, one thing was clear: until road design, waste recycling and reuse, and rule enforcement improve and work together, Delhi's dust problem is going to persist.

■ **THERES THOMAS**

Balancing the Tides

TALK: *Calm Waters, Rising Tide: Stability as the Foundation for Indian Ocean Growth*

SPEAKER: *Mahishini Colonne*

CHAIR: *Ashok Behuria*

COLLABORATION: *Centre for Peace Studies*

10 July 2026

Amid evolving geopolitical tensions and growing strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific region, a new series, 'Peace Dialogue: Shared Risks to Shared Futures', was launched. In the keynote address, Mahishini Colonne examined the indispensable role of the Indian Ocean in shaping regional peace, economic resilience and shared prosperity from the perspective of a maritime nation whose history and future remain deeply intertwined with the ocean.

Colonne situated the Indian Ocean not merely as a strategic maritime space, but as a historical bridge of commerce, cultural exchange and civilisational linkages connecting India, Sri Lanka and the wider world. Drawing on examples ranging from ancient trade networks to the spread of Buddhism, she argued that trust, openness and cooperation have historically sustained the region's prosperity. The Palk Strait, Colonne asserted, 'is some twenty-two miles wide at its narrowest. It has never been wide enough to separate what two thousand years have woven together'. She contrasted this legacy with contemporary challenges arising from disruptions to global shipping lanes, instability in the Strait of Hormuz and the Red Sea, and the growing vulnerability of interconnected supply chains and energy markets.

The speaker highlighted the importance of strengthening regional institutions and practical mechanisms for maritime governance rooted in international law, rather than declaratory frameworks. Emphasising initiatives such as Maritime Heads for Active Security and Growth for All in the Region (MAHASAGAR), the Colombo Security Conclave (CSC), the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Colonne underscored India's pivotal role in fostering a cooperative regional architecture capable of balancing security, economic integration and sustainable development. She also examined emerging concerns, including digital infrastructure security, climate change and the blue economy, arguing that environmental sustainability and maritime stability are mutually reinforcing objectives.

Reflecting on Sri Lanka's recent economic recovery, the speaker acknowledged India's timely support during the island nation's financial crisis and highlighted growing cooperation across trade, port development, energy connectivity and digital infrastructure. Concluding with a call for confidence-building among neighbouring states, Colonne reaffirmed that lasting peace in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) depends upon trust, reliable partnerships and sustained regional cooperation, ensuring the ocean remains a shared space of stability, prosperity and collective growth for future generations.

■ **KAJAL KIRAN**

The Price of Conflict

DISCUSSION: *Iran War and the Global Economy*

DISCUSSANTS: *Dammu Ravi; and Gulshan Dietl*

CHAIR: *K. P. Fabian*

8 June 2026

The ongoing conflict in the Gulf since 28 February, with a rickety ceasefire, has hurt 'almost every nation', as Dammu Ravi regretted, stating that oil-dependent countries like Japan, South Korea, China and, of course, India 'are going to be affected for a long time to come'. The damage to New Delhi is serious and not short-term. The lives of 10 million Indians in the Gulf are at risk, their remittances may drop, and for India, which received over 2 million barrels of crude oil a day through tankers crossing the Strait of Hormuz, and 90 per cent of its liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) from the region, the war is potentially catastrophic. India's estimated growth rate will drop by a percentage, Ravi calculated, as foreign institutional investors (FIIs) flee, inflation rises, the rupee weakens and foreign direct investment (FDI) remains uncertain. At the time of this discussion, he said, India's available stocks were about 60 days' worth of crude oil and less for LPG, indicating borderline insecurity for a billion-plus people. As for geopolitics, a ceasefire could benefit Iran and, indirectly, China; conversely, a comprehensive American victory would mean a more assertive, hegemonic Trump administration, looking for fights with Cuba and even Panama.

'Ceasefires will come,' argued Gulshan Dietl, 'and ceasefires will go', but fighting will be intermittent. Speaking of the Strait of Hormuz, she acknowledged that 'Iran is well positioned to control' the waterway, while its war is 'sophisticated', with 'not much muscle, but a lot of brain power'. Both the US and Israel wanted a regime change in Tehran and the stripping of its nuclear assets, but Donald Trump is a 'riddle', as 'he keeps changing his position all the time'. Dietl observed a gradual decline of the US, currently the sole superpower, and the future rise of a multipolar world, with China and its petroyuan, and Europe also holding importance.

K. P. Fabian recalled how a single call in 1982 from then US President Ronald Reagan to Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin had ended a war, but current geopolitics has complex, diffuse centres of influence. Invoking Henry Kissinger, once US Secretary of State, he described this as a war that 'both sides could lose'.

■ **SRINJOY CHOWDHURY**

A Scientific Breakthrough

TALK: *Emergent Quantum Matter: New Paths to Future Technology*

SPEAKER: *Jainendra K. Jain*

CHAIR: *Shailesh Nayak*

20 July 2026

Renowned condensed matter physicist Jainendra K. Jain delivered a compelling lecture on emergent quantum matter and its implications for future technology, tracing a fascinating journey from classical physics through quantum mechanics to his groundbreaking work on composite fermions. He began by reiterating the value of curiosity-driven research, arguing that while scientists cannot predict which discoveries will prove useful, future technologies inevitably build on past understanding. He illustrated this with the smartphone, a device that relies on quantum mechanics discovered a century ago, when physicists had no inkling of its eventual applications.

The talk's central focus was the quantum Hall effect. Jain began with the classical Hall effect, noting Edwin Hall's 1879 discovery that applying a magnetic field to a current-carrying conductor produces a voltage perpendicular to the current. Initially a simple observation, the phenomenon became profoundly mysterious when experimenters in the 1980s confined electrons to two-dimensional systems and discovered the quantised Hall resistance, which is an effect that only takes discrete values. While Klaus von Klitzing's discovery of the integer quantum Hall effect received the 1985 Nobel Prize in Physics, an even deeper puzzle emerged: fractional quantum Hall effect, in which the resistance corresponds to fractional rather than integer values. This seemed impossible, since electrons cannot be fractional. Jain's crucial proposal was that electrons in strong magnetic fields bind with magnetic flux quanta to form new composite particles known as 'composite fermions'. These emergent particles, not present in the original problem but arising in its solution, experience a reduced magnetic field. When composite fermions fill integer levels of this reduced field, they produce the observed fractional Hall effects of electrons. This elegant framework unified both phenomena and explained the precise experimental fractions observed.

The speaker emphasised that theoretical physics is fundamentally about 'asking the right question at the right time'. His work exemplifies this principle: by recognising that fractional and integer effects appeared qualitatively identical, he posited that they might be fundamentally related, leading to a breakthrough understanding.

The lecture concluded with emerging applications, including topological quantum computing using quasiparticles called 'anyons', which Microsoft is exploring using materials inspired by fractional quantum Hall physics. Jain's work demonstrates how such discoveries often harbour unexpected practical value, validating decades of curiosity-driven research.

■ **MRITTUNJOY GUHA MAJUMDAR**

Portraits of Sacred Peaks

EXHIBITION: *Glacial Mothers: The Numinous Realms of Annapurna and Nanda Devi*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY: *Vaibhav Kaul*

7 to 14 June 2026

The exhibition explored the sacred and cultural marvels surrounding the Himalayan massifs of Annapurna and Nanda Devi. Through years of mountain photography, as a dedicated and passionate 'camera eye', Vaibhav Kaul presented a selection of 108 photographs reflecting on glaciers, geometries, legends, divinities and traditional knowledge systems that have shaped Himalayan communities and their relationship with the surrounding topography.

Kaul's large-format mountain landscapes, accompanied by images of local fauna, underscored the enduring relationship between landscapes and local belief systems, in which mountains are often regarded as sacred by communities and integral to their cultural identities. Mount Annapurna, in Nepal, is revered as an embodiment of universal abundance, named after the Hindu Goddess Annapurna—the 'giver of food and nourishment'—for the evergreen rivers that originate from its glaciers and sustain vegetation on the lower plains year-round. Meanwhile, Nanda Devi, meaning 'Bliss-Giving Goddess', is regarded as the patron deity of the Garhwal and Kumaon regions of the Himalayas.

The mainstay of the photo artist's series was light, textured landscapes and formally balanced, compactly cut frames. The light illuminating his subjects seemed to travel slowly down and across, spreading over the rugged surfaces of the mountains and playing on the very layers that held Kaul's pictorial scheme together. The display was supplemented by his own observations in a running narrative alongside the visuals, marking his intimacy with and attachment to these two vast Himalayan ranges.

Also included in the programme were illustrated talks by art historian, curator and museologist Vladimir Zaitsev—tracing the centuries-long history of visual artists' engagements with the mountainous regions of northern India, Nepal and Tibet—and by the exhibiting artist, who explored the aesthetic, emotional and contemplative dimensions of geographic field research in remote mountain landscapes. Zaitsev discussed the life and works of Russian artist Nicholas Roerich (1874–1947), accompanied by a slideshow of the artist's Himalayan paintings. The lectures were followed by a screening of *Mountain, Priest, Son* (2018), a short documentary co-directed by Kaul and filmmaker John Seddon, which explores a traditional society's understanding of its vulnerability and resilience in the face of socio-environmental change.

■ **ARUNA BHOWMICK**

Through the Regional Lens

FILM FESTIVAL: *Windows into the Northeast*

COLLABORATION: *Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER)*

8 to 29 June 2026

Screenings of five remarkable films from Northeast India were organised over the course of a month.

Joseph's Son (2023), set in strife-ridden Manipur, is a model of restraint, perception and sensitivity. Haobam Paban Kumar presents the story of Joseph, a popular folk singer, who is informed by his wife that their teenage son has not been home for two days. Joseph tries to shrug it off, thinking the boy may be with his fellow footballer friend, but his wife's persistence sends him on a search for their son. Through small, everyday details, Kumar conveys the anxiety and fear of a common man caught in escalating violence

between the government and armed militants. As Joseph, shot from behind, walks down the corridors of an Imphal hospital towards the morgue that may hold his son's body, it is his gradually sagging shoulders that poignantly tell it all.

Mi Bo (Missing Person) (2024), set in Mizoram and directed by Raymond Colney, is a sensitive tale of a brother and sister from a lower-middle-class family. The loving but somewhat unthinking younger sibling, Muani, keeps making demands on her elder brother, Remlala. Diagnosed with terminal cancer—a fact he deliberately hides from Muani—Remlala works himself to the bone and manages to gift his sister a smartphone for her birthday, before his sudden yet inevitable death. The film is a composite portrait of a society struggling against material values, despite being distant from capitalist cities and governance.

Set within the socio-cultural landscape of Arunachal Pradesh, *Karken* (2024) is directed by Nending Loder. It follows a rural medical officer, secretly an aspiring actor, as he prepares to audition for a gay character's role in a film. When his application for leave to attend his audition in another town is denied, he abruptly abandons his professional duties to pursue his passion. This decision jeopardises both his and his patients' lives in the hospital. Shot in a small flat and following the protagonist over 24 hours, the film is a gripping technical exercise.

Kangbo Aloti (The Lost Path) (2025), directed by Khanjan Kishore Nath, unfolds in a remote village in Assam's Karbi Anglong district, where a young insurgent, Longsing, arrives on a secret recruitment mission. The pacifist village schoolmaster, realising his motives, persuades him that education, rather than armed violence, is the way out of material want. The conflicts in Longsing's mind culminate in an act that spells his own end. Set against the backdrop of the Karbi movement of the early 2000s, it is a taut, well-written script that captures the conflicts of an individual caught in a tussle with his conscience and the duty imposed on him by his militant group.

Pradip Kurbah's *Ha Lyngkha Bneng* (The Elysian Field) (2025) is set in the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya. The subtle choice of setting it in 2047, amidst dilapidated dwellings in lush green surroundings, with people of limited means sharing what they have, suggests they have been bypassed by the government, which administers them from a seemingly insurmountable distance. Only six inhabitants remain after urban migration empties their village, and despite the uncertainty, they share moments of joy, grief and hope amid fading traditions. A quiet, dystopian meditation on community, the film is a celebration of resilience and human connection in a rapidly changing world.

■ **PARTHA CHATTERJEE**

From Folklore to Fine Art

EXHIBITION: *Gond Pradhans of Patangarh: A Dynamic New Art Taking Roots*

COLLABORATION: *The Raza Foundation*

13 to 26 June 2026

Walking into the exhibition, one seemed to enter a world with a sophisticated visual language through which memory, mythology and ecology continue to evolve.

Central Indian states, including Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Odisha, are home to the Pradhans, a subgroup of the Gond population who are storytellers, musicians and custodians of oral histories. Traditionally, their tales were painted—mostly by women—on the walls of homes, transforming them into spaces of ritual and memory. However, it was only introduced to the contemporary art world in the 1980s when a young artist from Madhya Pradesh's Patangarh village, Jangarh Singh Shyam, was discovered by the team of Jagdish Swaminathan, then Director of Bharat Bhavan Museum, Bhopal. His move from mud walls to paper and canvas led to a style that is now known as 'Jangarh Kalam'.

Twenty-one artists from Patangarh were featured in this exhibition, which distinguished itself not merely by the transition from mud walls to acrylic paint but also by a shift in subject matter. While forests, animals and ancestral myths remained central, human figures, environmental anxieties and changing social realities were increasingly incorporated. In its signature form, the figures were filled with motifs including dots, dashes, fine or curved lines, fish scales and geometric shapes, among others, arranged in repetitive patterns. Artists used these in precise clusters to build texture, volume and gradients within a subject. Each piece showcased the style's rich vibrancy of colours, traditionally made by creating natural pigments from plants and soil.

A beautiful painting depicted the mythological 'tree of life' emerging from the intertwined antlers of two identical deer, symbolising divine connections. The mahua blossoms adorning its branches recalled the Gond belief that the first Gond, Koya Pen, was born beneath this sacred tree. Its depiction of trees, birds and animals together emphasised coexistence and the inseparable bond among all living beings.

Sunil Shyam's three women rising from bamboo transformed a linguistic coincidence into a visual philosophy. Bamboo—known as *kanya* (maiden) in some traditions—becomes inseparable from womanhood. Since bamboo accompanies every stage of life, from cradle to funeral pyre, the painting portrayed women as custodians of continuity itself. Another painting by Tamsiram Paraste

depicted peacocks with female faces, with trees as their tail feathers, trotting through a garden flanked by elephant-like creatures with *barasingha* (swamp deer) horns.

The exhibition brought together the sacred and the modern in an enchanting idiom. Forests remained a source of life and wisdom, but the artists also addressed ecological fragility, shifting gender roles and contemporary life.

■ **RITIKA KOCHHAR**

The Many Faces of Justice

PLAY: *Fandi: Experience the Truth Unfold*

WRITTEN BY: *Shankar Shesh*

DIRECTED BY: *Vishaal Vashishtha*

ACTORS ON STAGE: *Vishaal Vashishtha; Akbar; and Dinesh Sharma*

13 June 2026

Shankar Shesh's theatrical offering was essentially a two-hander courtroom drama that explored the weighty theme of mercy killing and the tension between natural and legal justice that shapes societal norms.

Assuaging any worries about heavy-handedness, if not didacticism, in the direction, the ambitiously structured legal drama proved a pleasant surprise. Brought to life by two committed performances—Akbar as the wretched truck driver Fandi, accused of killing his own cancer-stricken father, and Vishaal Vashishtha as his lawyer—*Fandi* made for memorable theatre.

The play's strength lay not in its 'done-to-death' story but in its onstage telling, where Vashishtha and Akbar were also tasked with embodying the other dramatis personae, from key witnesses to the presiding judge. This multiple role-playing structure proved a masterstroke and was effectively exploited through the possibilities afforded by the dramatic form. Its success, of course, was entirely dependent on the actors' virtuosity, and the two thespians were more than up to the challenge.

The story is as old as the hills. Fandi, a poor man buffeted by fate, is forced to take on heavy debts to care for his beloved father, who is suffering from terminal throat cancer. At the end of his tether and unable to procure morphine injections, Fandi finally succumbs to his father's agonising pleas to put him out of his misery. Arrested and resigned to his fate, Fandi is assigned a lawyer who, miraculously, believes in his innocence. Unfortunately, the lawyer's litigation skills leave much to be desired, and, to make matters worse, witnesses turn hostile.

As Fandi and his lawyer recreated the day-to-day courtroom battle, negotiating strategy and brainstorming their options, viewers witnessed the clinical and often heartless nature of societally sanctioned principles amid a loved one's pain, in each act. The play expectedly ended on an open note, not without hope yet fully aware of the limitations of Indian law regarding euthanasia. The auditorium's design allowed for an immersive experience, and one hopes that the Centre will host more theatre performances in future.

■ **SIDHARTH SRINIVASAN**

Reimagining Kathak

PERFORMANCE: *Blue Pulse*

PERFORMERS: *Vaishali Trivedi; Salomi Shah; Kalrav Dave; Vaishali Shah; Anar Jaikrishna; Vaama Patel; Khevna Patel; Anushka Shah; and Priyanshi Jain*

COLLABORATION: *Sangati Centre for Performing Arts*

27 June 2026

The choreographic presentation by Vaishali Trivedi, an accomplished Kathak dancer and student of the renowned danseuse Kumudini Lakhia, opened with 'Intimate Foe', an engaging piece addressing plastic pollution. Trivedi made creative use of plastic sheets as props, weaving them seamlessly into traditional Kathak and contemporary dance movements to draw attention to the severity of the global plastic crisis and the impact of expanding landfills on the ecosystem. She was well accompanied by eight of her talented students.

The second piece, *'Kamal Nayan Waro'*, was based on a popular bhajan originally composed and performed by the eminent vocalist Ashwini Bhide-Deshpande. Trivedi, a gifted singer herself, not only sang this ode to the *'kamal nayan'* (lotus-eyed) Lord Krishna but also showcased her *nritta* (pure, rhythmic dance) and *abhinaya* (gestural expression) skills in this solo performance, portraying a devotee surrendering herself to the Lord and his divinity.

The next presentation was the traditional Kathak *tarana* (a vibrant dance piece set to rhythmic compositions characterised by fast-paced syllables), combining *chakkars* (fast pirouettes) with intricate footwork. Presented by Trivedi's students, the performance was enthralling, with flowing chakkars, rhythmic footwork and a joyful, synchronised visual interpretation of raga Jog. Despite the pieces being performed to recorded music, it was admirable that none of the performers missed a beat, especially in the tarana, which relies on precise synchronisation with the tabla.

The last two pieces, 'Half Circle' and 'Urban Sufi', performed by Trivedi and her pupils, reflected the former's experiments pairing Kathak with dance styles such as contemporary, hip-hop and flamenco. While 'Half Circle' combined these dance forms to express how a movement is born from an emotion, 'Urban Sufi' articulated the conflict between the materialistic urban world and the inner spiritual longing.

While one may have wondered why the dancers did not wear the traditional *ghungroos* (musical anklets) in the pieces that used collaborative styles, with Kathak at their core, each performance was graceful and strong in technique, choreography and presentation, including the costumes, lighting and music.

■ **SWAPNA MAJUMDAR**

In Search of 'the One'

PERFORMANCE: *Twamaham Vande*

CONCEPT, DIRECTION AND PERFORMANCE BY: *Jalsa Chandra*

ACCOMPANYING ARTISTES: *Pallabi Chatterjee; Adrija Mondal; and Agnimita Das*

31 July 2026

Framed as a journey towards the realisation of 'the one', the production drew on the tenets of Advaita Vedanta doctrine and the relationship between *jivatma* (embodied soul) and *Paramatma* (Supreme Soul), bringing together texts and devotional traditions from across India. Rather than presenting them as isolated episodes, the performance gradually connected these traditions through a sustained enquiry into existence and impermanence, and devotion and liberation.

The presentation began with *'Nasadiya Sukta'*, the ancient 'Hymn of Creation' in the Rigveda, which explores the origins of existence. The movement vocabulary and atmosphere evoked a world emerging from an undefined beginning, allowing the dancers to approach the question of creation through both abstraction and embodied expression. This was followed by a Kathak number based on the works of the mystic-poet Kabir, whose verses contemplate the transience of life and the inevitability of departure.

A Bharatanatyam solo subsequently turned towards the illusory nature of worldly existence, extending the production's meditation on the distinction between what appears permanent and what ultimately passes. The shift between Kathak and Bharatanatyam was handled organically, with each form retaining its own vocabulary while contributing to the broader philosophical narrative.

The production then moved into the Bengali devotional tradition through Lalon Fakir (c. 1772–1890), whose poetry questions the nature of the human body and the apparent solidity of material existence. The inclusion of *'Jo tum todo piya, main nahi todu re'*, a hymn by the 16th-century poet-saint Mirabai, introduced an element of unconditional devotion.

The journey continued southwards with a Bharatanatyam interpretation of a Thevaram hymn by the 7th-century Tamil poet-saint Thirunavukkarasar, invoking Lord Shiva and the sacred landscape of Tiruvannamalai. This was followed by a 17th-century Marathi *abhang* (devotional composition) by the poet-saint Tukaram, extending the devotional vocabulary into the Varkari tradition.

Finally, *moksham* (the concluding piece) wove together the philosophical strands introduced throughout the evening. Drawing from the Bhagavad Gita and the *Mandukya Upanishad*, the performance moved towards the recognition of the Divine within and beyond the individual. The recurring metaphor of rivers merging into the ocean, together with the inseparability of flame and fire, provided a fitting culmination to the search for unity.

Twamaham Vande, meaning 'You, I worship', succeeded in creating a coherent spiritual journey across diverse literary and musical traditions. Its strength lay not in spectacle but in sustained engagement with the idea that the search for the Divine ultimately leads inward, where the distinction between the seeker and the sought begins to dissolve.

■ **AROHI MUNSHI**

A Literary Nostalgia

FILM: *Khoyi Hui Aawazein – Saptak*

COLLABORATION: *The Raza Foundation*

6 July 2026

A remarkable screening of poetry readings by seven now deceased poets of Hindi literature illuminated the evening. These brilliant wordsmiths wrote verses on a myriad of themes: from the idea of home and the planet Mars as a possible new abode, to women, rivers and closed doors, and to their love for the lush hills to which they belonged. Their *aawazein* (voices), now lost or *'khoyi hui'*, were retrieved in the auditorium, as the seven notes in Indian classical music.

Ashok Vajpeyi informed the audience that these recordings were made 27 years ago, in 1999, when he was the Vice-Chancellor of the Mahatma Gandhi International Hindi University, Wardha.

On screen, Kirti Chaudhary (1934–2008), a multifaceted poet known for her *nazms, shayaris* and ghazals—all forms of Urdu poetry—recited her famous poem, *'Baraste hain megh jhar jhar'*, as the July rains outside the premises echoed. She was followed by Shriram Verma (1935–*n.d.*), associated with the prominent Hindi literary movement *Nayi Kavita* (New Poetry) and first published in the *'Pehchan'* (identity) series, who read several poems in his sonorous voice.

Noted Sahitya Akademi awardee, whose work reflected his deep connection with rural milieu and political angst, Chandrakant Deotale (1936–2017) shared the memorable line *'Ek aurat waqt ki nadi mei'* ('A woman in the river of time') from his remarkable poem *'Aurat'*. Bhagwat Rawat (1939–2012), known for his *dohe* (couplets) and *geet* (songs), also recited some of his poems.

Jyotsna Milan (1941–2014) recited *'Aurat'*, *'Ghar'* and *'Lagatar'*. In her poem *'Darwaza'*, she expressed the era's uncertainty about whether to keep the door open or closed to step outside the traditional walls, reflected in the line *'Darwaza khula rakhna chahiye ya band'*, and wondered which side of the door she stood on, as in the line *'Darwaze ke iss taraf hoon ya uss taraf'*.

Vinod Kumar Shukla (1937–2025), tackling the contemporary theme of depression, recited his poem *'Hataasha se ek vyakti baith gaya tha'*, which touched the audience's hearts. The last poet in the film, Mangalesh Dabral (1948–2020), evoked a longing for his home in the hills, where the *dhol* (traditional drum) is still played. He expressed both grief and remorse in his poem as a tribute to Keshav Das Anuragi, a folk musician, researcher and master of the *dhol sagar* tradition from Uttarakhand, who, as a practitioner, faced systemic caste prejudice in the hill society.

■ **MANDIRA GHOSH**

From Stone to Stage

BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP: *Speaking Sculptures: Karanas in Kathak by Shovana Narayan*

DISCUSSANTS: *Sandhya Purecha; Sachchidanand Joshi; Bharat Gupt; and Shovana Narayan*

MODERATOR: *K. N. Shrivastava*

25 July 2026

The programme brought together an eminent constellation of scholars and practitioners, fostering a space for the exchange of ideas across textual knowledge, visual culture and performance tradition.

At the intellectual heart of the conversation was a provocative, richly interdisciplinary proposition that India's sculptural heritage may be read not merely as static articulations but as repositories of choreographic memory. Drawing on temple iconography, archaeology, art history, Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* (c. 1st century BCE–3rd century CE), and the living vocabulary of Kathak, Shovana Narayan's *Speaking Sculptures* investigates the continuity between the 108 *karanas* (codified movement units in Indian classical dance) described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and their possible resonances within the sculptural and performative traditions of northern and central India.

The book moves from embodied histories and the conceptual foundations of karanas to their representation in sculptures, then to the transition from sculpture to stage, tracing their historical trajectories from the Indus Valley Civilisation (3300–1300 BCE) to the 17th century, thereby constructing an expansive continuum of movement, memory and cultural transmission. Its engagement with instrumental accompaniment, costume and movement vocabulary further extends the enquiry beyond conventional dance historiography.

A particularly evocative idea in the discussion was the reciprocity between sculpture and dance: 'Indian iconography may be understood as "frozen dance", while dance becomes "living sculpture"'. In this formulation, stone is no longer inert matter; it becomes an archive of movement, rhythm, gesture and aesthetic thought. Kathak, correspondingly, emerges not simply as a performing art but as a dynamic continuation of a much older civilisational

vocabulary in which text, image and movement remain deeply interconnected.

The evening thus transcended the conventional format of a book discussion. It demonstrated how scholarship can recover movement from stone, how performance can illuminate historical knowledge and how India's classical traditions can be understood as living systems of transmission rather than musealised inheritances. In bringing *śāstra* (scriptures) into dialogue with *prayoga* (practice), Narayan's book compellingly reaffirms that cultural memory survives not only in manuscripts and monuments, but also in the disciplined intelligence of the body. The evening concluded with a beautiful dance performance by her disciples, enabling the audience to explore the volume's theoretical concepts through artistic expression.

■ **USHA MUJOO MUNSHI**

A Timeless Voice

TALK: *Asha Bhosle: Voice, Performance and Musical Legacy*

SPEAKER: *Shikha Jhingan*

CHAIR: *Ashwini Deshpande*

24 July 2026

The illustrated presentation offered an engaging reappraisal of Asha Bhosle's oeuvre, enriched by insights from cinema and sound studies. Drawing on her research into female playback singing, Shikha Jhingan examined how the late artiste transformed playback into a performative art that continually negotiated the relationship among voice, body and screen.

Ashwini Deshpande observed that Bhosle fashioned a distinctive musical identity despite beginning her career in the formidable shadow of her elder sister, Lata Mangeshkar. Popularly known for her seductive cabaret numbers, Bhosle was equally accomplished in classical compositions, ghazals, bhajans, rock, pop and jazz-inspired songs, and she constantly reinvented herself. Her musical idiom, spanning several languages, defied characterisation.

Introducing the conceptual framework of 'close listening', Jhingan argued that playback performance hinges on the actor first internalising and then re-embodying the singer's voice through lip-syncing. This intimate voice–body relationship explains the remarkable performativity of Bhosle's singing. In *'Aaiye meherbaan'*, the teasing elongation of a syllable appears inseparable from Madhubala's expressive gestures. At the same time, *'Jhumka gira re'* demonstrates Bhosle's imaginative use of hums, whispers and playful laughter—what the speaker described as the continuum between musical and non-musical vocality—to enrich dramatic expression.

Jhingan traced Bhosle's evolution from singing children's songs, qawwalis and songs for marginal characters in the early to mid-1950s to becoming the voice of mainstream Hindi cinema. The singer's extraordinary adaptability enabled her to undertake comic situations, cross-dressing performances and sensuous *mujra* (a dance form that emerged during the Mughal era) sequences with equal conviction. Demonstrating the sheer flexibility of Bhosle's vocal persona, Jhingan referred to songs such as *'Kajra mohabbat wala'* and *'Chhuk chhuk chhak chhak'*, in which the performer's voice effortlessly negotiated shifting gender identities on screen.

Bhosle's celebrated collaborations with singer-songwriter O. P. Nayyar and music director R. D. Burman in the 1960s and 1970s revealed new dimensions of her artistry. Songs such as *'Piya tu ab to aaja'*, *'Dum maro dum'*, *'Khaali haath shaam aayi hai'* and the National Award-winning *'Dil cheez kya hai'* exemplified her impressive range. Jhingan also delighted the audience with the story of Bhosle's relentless rehearsal of the iconic 'Aa-ha, Aa-ja' phrases for *'Aaja aaja main hoon pyar tera'*—so persistent that her worried driver once asked whether she needed medical attention.

In her concluding remarks, Deshpande reaffirmed Bhosle's resilience, versatility and enduring relevance. Combining rigorous scholarship with memorable musical illustrations, Jhingan's presentation offered fresh insights into the artistry of a singer whose inventive voice not only animated countless performances but also fundamentally reshaped the expressive possibilities of playback singing in Indian cinema.

■ **AMITABHA KHARE**

Resonance and Raga

PERFORMANCE: *IIC Summer Festival of Music and Dance*

VIOLIN RECITAL BY: *Santosh Nahar*

ACCOMPANIST: *Durjay Bhaumik (tabla)*

HINDUSTANI VOCAL RECITAL BY: *Nila Sinha Roy*

ACCOMPANISTS: *Durjay Bhaumik (tabla); and Murad Ali Khan (sarangi)*

11 June 2026

Santosh Nahar opened the festival with the late-evening raga Kirwani in *teental* (a 16-beat rhythmic cycle). Trained by family elders in Bhagalpur's Mishra Gharana, Nahar's *alap* (improvised prologue) featured plaintive, mid-scale phrases, enhanced by *sargam*-type movements with rising and falling notes. His *gat* (fixed instrumental composition) started on the higher notes 'Dha' and 'Ni' and developed into devotional *vistar*—brief elaborations of the raga—reverberating with tabla *bols* (spoken syllables). Quivering *gamakas* (embellishments on a note or between two notes), well-spaced and highly nuanced, moved through several sequences of ascent before returning to the lower 'Sa'. Quick, alternating phrases dipped periodically into low-speed *taans* (fast, improvised melodic passages), where the virtuoso wove a conversation between his violin strings and Durjay Bhaumik's tabla beats.

Nahar's circular notations came to an episodic halt on *Panchama*, or the 'Pa' note, spelt out with plural frequency. He created a plaintive atmosphere in which the instruments' soft, clear cadences merged into a rising crescendo of *sargam* (the seven basic musical notes) taans, rather than a verse, ending the *vilambit* gat (slow composition) with a flourish. The following *drut* gat (fast composition) initiated simultaneous elaborations across all octaves, while Nahar's bow gently drew upon *meends* (glides between two notes), echoing beautifully. The final *tihai*, a triad of the seven notes, took the raga into its unified crescendo. Nahar's concluding *dhun* (light instrumental piece) featured many *komal* (flat) notes with heartfelt dedication.

Nila Sinha Roy followed with a presentation of the serene raga Rageshree. Sweet and sedate in this late-evening raga, her elaborations reached higher notes with tonal huskiness. While slow to build, her composition offered smooth *aakar* taans (fast, melodic runs using the vowel 'Aa'), with the komal *Nishad* ('Ni') in prominent focus. Roy moved quickly from vilambit *khayal* (slow-tempo introductory composition) to drut *laya* (fast tempo) in *'Begun ko gunvanta daata'*. Her raga *vistar* (expansion), interlaced with musical pauses, allowed her musicians to interact with each other, individually. The sarangi strings introduced *'Bairan koyelia na bol'*, and the artiste sang melodiously of the songbird welcoming spring. She concluded with another short and sweet *thumri* (a semi-classical composition exploring romantic or devotional themes) in raga Bhairavi, leaving the audience spellbound.

■ **AJANTA DUTT**

Monsoon Melodies

PERFORMANCE: *An Evening of Indian Classical Music*

ARTIST: *Shreya Chatterjee*

ACCOMPANISTS: *Durjay Bhaumik (tabla); and Vinay Mishra (harmonium)*

COLLABORATION: *ITC Sangeet Research Academy, Kolkata*

11 July 2026

Shreya Chatterjee, a disciple of Ajoy Chakrabarty and Brajeswar Mukherjee, began her recital with the majestic monsoon raga Megh, performing *'Badra barse'*, a *vilambit bandish* (slow-tempo melodic composition) in *ektaal* (12-beat rhythmic cycle). Her unhurried *badhat* (elaboration) allowed the raga's brooding, cloud-laden character to unfold gradually before opening into swifter passages. The vilambit rendition was interspersed with fast-paced *taans* (improvised melodic phrases), offering a glimpse of her *gayaki* (style of singing).

This bandish was followed by another in *drut teentaal* (a 16-beat rhythmic cycle in fast tempo). The phrases, *'Gagan garaj damkat damini'*, *'chalat pawan sananan'*, *'boondan barse'* and *'umad ghumad ghir aayi badariya'*, in the bandish were deeply evocative of a monsoon day.

Staying in the spirit of the season, Chatterjee then turned to raga Gaud Malhar with a *madhya laya* (medium tempo) teentaal composition, followed by a drut teentaal bandish. The lyrics provided insight into human emotions and relationships during the *saawan* (monsoon) season. *'Jhuk aayi badariya saawan ki'* spoke of the joy brought by the monsoon and the feelings of a woman seeking her beloved's return.

The performance concluded with a delightful *jhoola*, a seasonal semi-classical song form associated with Lord Krishna. With its imagery of romance unfolding on swings as saawan arrives, the mellifluous *'Aayi saawan ki bahaar'* brought the evening to a joyous, evocative close.

Fittingly timed with the first rains of July, the recital unfolded as a seamless monsoon offering, moving from the grandeur of Megh to the lilt of Gaud Malhar and the folk-inflected charm of the jhoola. In doing so, it reaffirmed the intimate bond between Hindustani classical music and the rhythms of India's seasons, one that is kept alive by young artistes nurtured in the *parampara* (tradition).

■ **KRITIKA AGRAWAL**

The Worlds of Beethoven and Chopin

SOLO PIANO RECITAL BY: *Vikram Rajan*

COLLABORATION: *Delhi Music Society; and Austrian Cultural Forum, Austrian Embassy*

14 July 2026

Vienna-based Vikram Rajan's recital was unusual in that it featured works of only two composers: Ludwig van Beethoven and Frédéric Chopin. A gifted pianist of Indian origin, Rajan received his training in classical piano largely in New York City and Vienna and has performed in renowned venues across the US and western Europe.

The recital commenced on a gentle note with the well-loved *Nocturne in D flat major*, Op. 27, No. 2 by Chopin, handled with suitable elegance and control. The major single work in the programme was Beethoven's wonderful, late *Piano Sonata No. 30 in E major,* Op. 109. This was an enjoyable performance, with the exquisite variations of the third movement in particular shaped with loving care.

The second half of the programme was devoted to the entire set of Chopin's 12 *Études*, Op. 25 (1837). Performing either of the two substantial sets of this legendary Polish composer's *Études*, Op. 10 and Op. 25, in full is not an undertaking for the faint-hearted, given their overt technical challenges as 'studies' in different aspects of virtuoso piano technique. Rajan, however, scaled this summit most creditably. While the first two, the appropriately nicknamed

'Aeolian Harp' and 'The Bees', were a bit tentative—as suited their character—'The Horseman' (No. 3) was more spirited and 'Paganini' (No. 4) was nicely articulated. By then, the pianist had hit his stride and the subsequent Études were characterised effectively, including the delicate touch for 'Double Thirds', (No. 6), the gentle, *lento* (slow) tempo of 'Cello' (No. 7), the rapid, *vivace* (lively) of the 'Double Sixths' (No. 8) and the delightful playfulness of the ninth—the famous 'Butterfly' Étude. The last three pieces built an exciting virtuoso arc, with 'Octaves' (No. 10), the well-known 'Winter Wind' (No. 11) and the brilliant 'Ocean' (No. 12), providing a satisfying conclusion to the recital.

■ **SUNIT TANDON**

A Touch of 'Carpe Diem'

PERFORMANCE: *Love is... A Musical Clown Show!*

DIRECTED BY: *Tamar Keane*

PERFORMERS: *Caitríona Ní Threasaigh; and Aching Shaiza*

19 June 2026

The unconventional act began with a seemingly simple premise: Mary is a cleaner who also happens to be a clown. As she sets off to work, a strange little tune lodges itself in her head ('Love is a stranger to me...'). From this modest start, the show opened up a rich theatrical world in which the repetitive routine of cleaning became a space for play, memory, longing and discovery.

At the heart of the performance was the creative possibility hidden within the ordinary. Mary's life as a cleaner had been shaped by repetition: the mess was cleared, only to return; the task was completed, only to be undone again. However, the act refused to treat this cycle as dull or mechanical. Through clowning, music, costume and props, Caitríona Ní Threasaigh transformed banality into imagination—a mop, a rag or a bucket became an invitation to wonder. The everyday, in all its ordinariness, was re-enchanted.

The musical element was one of the production's great strengths. Aching Shaiza's exquisite piano accompaniment lent emotional depth and structure to the protagonist's journey. The selection of songs and poems recited by Mary broadened the meaning of love beyond the traditionally romantic, allowing the performance to reflect on friendship, familial bonds, loneliness, self-love and the longing to be seen. These choices kept the show from becoming sentimental and, in fact, made it curious, playful and wonderfully philosophical.

The clowning went beyond laughter or slapstick humour, though it was peppered with mischief throughout. It

prioritised vulnerability and a willingness to engage openly with the audience. Mary's unabashed clowning invited the viewers to recognise the absurdity of their own routines and the possibilities hidden beneath them. The audience's impromptu participation added a special liveliness to the evening, transforming the solitary act into a shared experience.

Love is... A Musical Clown Show! was a charming, musically resonant exploration of love in its many forms and a reminder that it need not always be a grand revelation. It can, in fact, be found in the ordinary acts, relationships and choices of everyday life.

■ **RICHA VADINI SINGH**

On 15 July 2026, IIC President Shyam Saran and Director K. N. Shrivastava called upon the Honourable Vice President of India, C. P. Radhakrishnan, to offer him Honorary Membership of the IIC.

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 B. BABULAL
TODI | M-0968

DR. M. P. SHARMA
M-3125

DR. MANGALA GOWRI NANDA
A-5332

SHRI KRISHAN CHOPRA | A-7530

Reg. No. 28936/77

Director's Note

As Delhi eagerly awaited this year's delayed monsoon, the Centre marked a significant occasion. On 15 July 2026, President Shyam Saran and Director K. N. Shrivastava called on the Honourable Vice President of India, C. P. Radhakrishnan, and invited him to the Centre to confer its Honorary Membership on him in a solemn ceremony. The Vice President graciously accepted the invitation and assured that he would visit the IIC soon. He has already given his consent to be an Honorary Member of the Centre. Such membership is conferred in accordance with Rule 4A(a) of the Rules and Regulations of IIC.

Connected Histories, Shared Present: Cross-Cultural Experiences between Latin America, Caribbean and India (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2026), an edited volume featuring 23 essays drawn from a conference organised by the IIC–IRD in 2023, was published in June 2026. Edited by Sonya Surabhi Gupta, the volume examines India's historical interactions with these regions, their mutual influences in intellectual and artistic spheres and their common strategic concerns.

The IIC–IRD, aligned with its work on Buddhism and Ayurveda within the SAMHiTA (South Asian Manuscript Histories and Textual Archive) and the Bharat Ki Soch (BKS) project, has signed an MoU with Gautam Buddha University to strengthen manuscript studies, digital archiving and interdisciplinary research. Another MoU under the SAMHiTA project has been signed with Gangaramaya Temple, Colombo, to catalogue and digitise 100 palm-leaf manuscripts from its repository. As part of the SAMHiTA–BKS lecture series, yoga expert and academic Dr. Sunil Sharma delivered the talk 'Traditional Yoga and Hatha Yoga: Bridging Ancient Wisdom with Modern Health Practices' on 19 June to mark International Yoga Day 2026.

The Centre's Durgabai Deshmukh Library is being equipped with Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology to streamline operations, enabling faster circulation, improved inventory tracking and management, and enhanced anti-theft protection for its books and reading materials. This reflects IIC's continued efforts to use technological solutions to support research and scholarship.

As part of the Centre's ongoing digitalisation initiative to transform operational processes across departments, four new ERP software modules are being developed. These are: Kitchen Display System (KDS) for order routing, Vendor Ranking for supplier evaluation, Project Milestone Monitoring to track goals, and Management Information System (MIS) reports for point-of-sale (POS) analytics and recipe-based kitchen inventory consumption. This initiative will streamline operations, strengthen monitoring and reporting, support informed decision-making and enhance overall efficiency.

The renovation of 39 single rooms at the Main Centre began in April 2026. Work on 15 ground-floor rooms is complete, and they are now available for booking. The remaining 24 rooms will be completed in August. Ceiling fans have been installed in all renovated rooms at both the Main Centre and the Annexe, and a purchase order for throw carpets for the hostel rooms has been issued.

In the third phase of the kitchen renovation project, which began in May 2026, work in the Main Kitchen is in progress and is expected to be completed by the end of August 2026.

The redevelopment of the boundary walls, which began in January 2026 following recommendations from security experts, is in its final phase. This will cover the section from Gate No. 2 to the boundary wall of Lodhi Garden along Max Mueller Marg. The work is expected to be completed within four months.

Following the receipt of NDMC's approval, installation of a new passenger lift in the Programme Block is underway. The lift is expected to be operational by October 2026. The Centre had also applied to the NDMC for revisions to its Ground Coverage (GC) and Floor Area Ratio (FAR) entitlements in accordance with the new building bye-laws, which have been approved. This exercise was carried out in relation to the Centre's revised construction drawings.

The Centre is committed to efficient energy utilisation, use of renewable energy, conversion of waste to energy through compost and zero waste discharge. Several initiatives have been undertaken to implement environment-friendly projects, including Solar Power Plants, a Biogas Plant, a Sewage Treatment Plant and an Organic Waste Composter, among others. As advised by the President, IIC, we have initiated the process to obtain Green Building Certification for the Centre's precincts. In this connection, the Indian Green Building Council (IGBC), one of India's premier certification agencies, has been engaged.

With Delhi falling in Zone IV—a high-risk earthquake-prone area—in the revised seismic zone map of India, Gopalkrishna Gandhi, Life Trustee, IIC, suggested that the Centre should get a seismic survey done of its premises, as a precautionary measure. The Central Building Research Institute (CBRI), Roorkee, and the National Geophysical Research Institute (NGRI), Hyderabad, were consulted in this connection. The CBRI has been engaged to conduct a Condition Assessment and Structural Stability (CASS) audit of the Centre's buildings.

Ending on a high note, Members are requested to block their calendars from 29 October to 3 November 2026 for the annual 'IIC Experience: A Festival of the Arts' to enjoy a variety of programmes, including exhibitions, talks, films, performances and, of course, specially curated dinners. The theme of this year's festival is: 'Prakriti: Ecology and Existence'.

K. N. SHRIVASTAVA

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