



Jñāna Pravāha 25 Sterling Years

Conceptualized, Curated and Authored by
Supriya Newar



Jñāna Pravāha
25 Sterling Years



Page 6

The Holy Trinity
Shiva, Ganga & Kashi

Page 16

Jnana Pravaha
Introduction, Inception,
Invocation, Aims & Objectives

Page 28

Parivesh – The Environment
Away from the hubbub of the city, the
spacious environs of Jnana Pravaha are
no less than an island of tranquility...

Page 38

Kalamandapa – The Museum

It was in the mind of a young,
impressionable Suresh Neotia who was
in his student days that this seed of art...

Page 56

Yajnasala

Located at the Northern end of the
precincts towards one end of the ample
lawns, surrounded by tall trees and...

Page 70

Shilpasala – The Atelier

Summers in Banaras can be very hot and
any household would want its fans and
other cooling devices to be well tuned and...

Page 84

Atithisala – Guest House

Comfortable rooms. Warm hospitality.
Home cooked, farm fresh food.
Expansive greenery. Bountiful trees...

Page 94

Pathsala – Samskara and Anushthan
Kendra

Negotiating and navigating the narrow lanes
and narrower by-lanes near Meer Ghat that are
typically overrun by pedestrians and shops...

Page 108

Pustakalay – Library

It is only natural for an institute that strives
to promote knowledge and learning to have a
robust collection of books in its repository...



Contents

Page 114

Prerna Pravaha – Inspiring the next generation

1st November 2001 proved to be a milestone for Jnana Pravaha in more ways than one. Firstly, the Centre got Pratichi...

Page 128

Puratatva – Unearthing Varanasi

What is the antiquity of Banaras?
How old is the city really?
Why did Banaras live that long?

Page 136

Seminars. Lectures. Workshops.
Courses. - *Sangoshti. Vyakhyan. Karyasala. Pathyakram.*

As a mark of respect to Dr. R C Sharma, its former Acharya, the academic sessions at Jnana Pravaha begin every year on 1st August...

Page 148

Vasantiki

Almost across the country, the onset of Spring or Basant *Ritu* is traditionally heralded by the calling of the *koyal*...

Page 156

Jnana Pravaha Mumbai Chapter

Housed in a heritage building in the charming Fort neighbourhood, the Mumbai Chapter of Jnana Pravaha that commenced in 2007...

Page 160

Esteemed visitors over the years - *Agantukon ka silsila*

Page 174

Awards – *Samman*

Bimla Poddar, Managing Trustee, Jnana Pravaha, was awarded the Padma Shri for her distinguished service by..

Page 182

Afterword

With gratitude, by Harshavardhan Neotia - Chairman Trustee, Jnana Pravaha

Page 184

Author's Note

When people think of Banaras as it stands today, they instantly think of its *galis*...

Page 186

Jnana-Pravaha Bodies



The Holy Trinity
Shiva, Ganga & Kashi



Are there not many holy places on this earth?
Yet, which of them would equal in the balance one speck of Kashi's dust?

Are there not many rivers running to the sea?
Yet, which one of them is like the River of Heaven in Kashi?

Are there not many fields of liberation on earth?
Yet, not one equals the smallest part of the city never forsaken by Shiva.

The Ganges, Shiva and Kashi: Where this Trinity is watchful,
No wonder here is found the grace that leads one on to perfect bliss.

- Kashi Khand – 35.7-10

“Banaras is older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend and looks twice as old as all of them put together.”

Mark Twain

“In Banaras, there is a sacred place at every step.”

City of Light by Diana L. Eck



Kashi is the permanent home of Shiva.
The city attracts pilgrims, seekers,
students and sages; it attracts both the
grihastha – the householder as well as the
sanyasin – the renouncer.



“Twenty-five centuries ago, at the least, it was famous. When Babylon was struggling with Nineveh for supremacy, when Athens was growing in strength, before Rome had become known or Greece had contended with Persia – She had already risen to greatness, if not to glory!”

Reverend M A Sherring,
Mid 19th Century missionary



Kankar kankar mein hae Shankar



Shmashanas or cremation grounds are generally to be found in the outskirts of any city. Yet, in Kashi, Manikarnika Ghat, the most prominent cremation ground is the most auspicious of places.

Raakh jahan ki paras hae, us sheher ka naam Banaras hae!





Inspired by this Holy Trinity, Jnana Pravaha, a Centre for Cultural Studies and Research, was founded in 1997 by Bimla Poddar, Managing Trustee, and Padma Bhushan Late Shri Suresh Neotia, and nurtured by its former Director, Late Professor Ramesh Chandra Sharma who retired as the Director General of the National Museum and Vice Chairman of the National Museum Institute, New Delhi.





*“Jnana Pravaha ko na hum
ne khada kiya hae
Na hum chala rahein hain
Sab Baba Vishwanath aur
Ma Ganga kar rahein hain.”*

Smt. Bimla Poddar
Managing Trustee, Jnana Pravaha



BIMLA PODDAR
MANAGING TRUSTEE





So where did it all begin?

Bimla Poddar, now an Octogenarian, came to Calcutta at the age of 13 when her nuptial knot was tied with Bimal Poddar of the Neotia – Poddar family. Soon after her marriage, she got busy discharging her duties as a young *bahu* in a large joint family of three brothers under the watchful eye of her father-in-law, Late Janki Prasad Poddar whom she fondly refers to as *kakaji*. Culturally inclined, thanks to her traditional upbringing in a large Marwari home in Rajasthan, a young Bimla blossomed further in an

atmosphere that was steeped in art, music and learning.

However, by the time she had turned 60 and had dealt with some harsh blows including the untimely demise of her husband and later, the passing away of her beloved *kakaji*, she was seized by a certain calling.

She desired to spend her *Uttar Jeevan*, that is life after 60, close to the river Ganga. “To be honest with you, it was not as much a Kashi calling as it was the call of *Maa Ganga*,” she reveals. But the question that posed itself was where and how could that

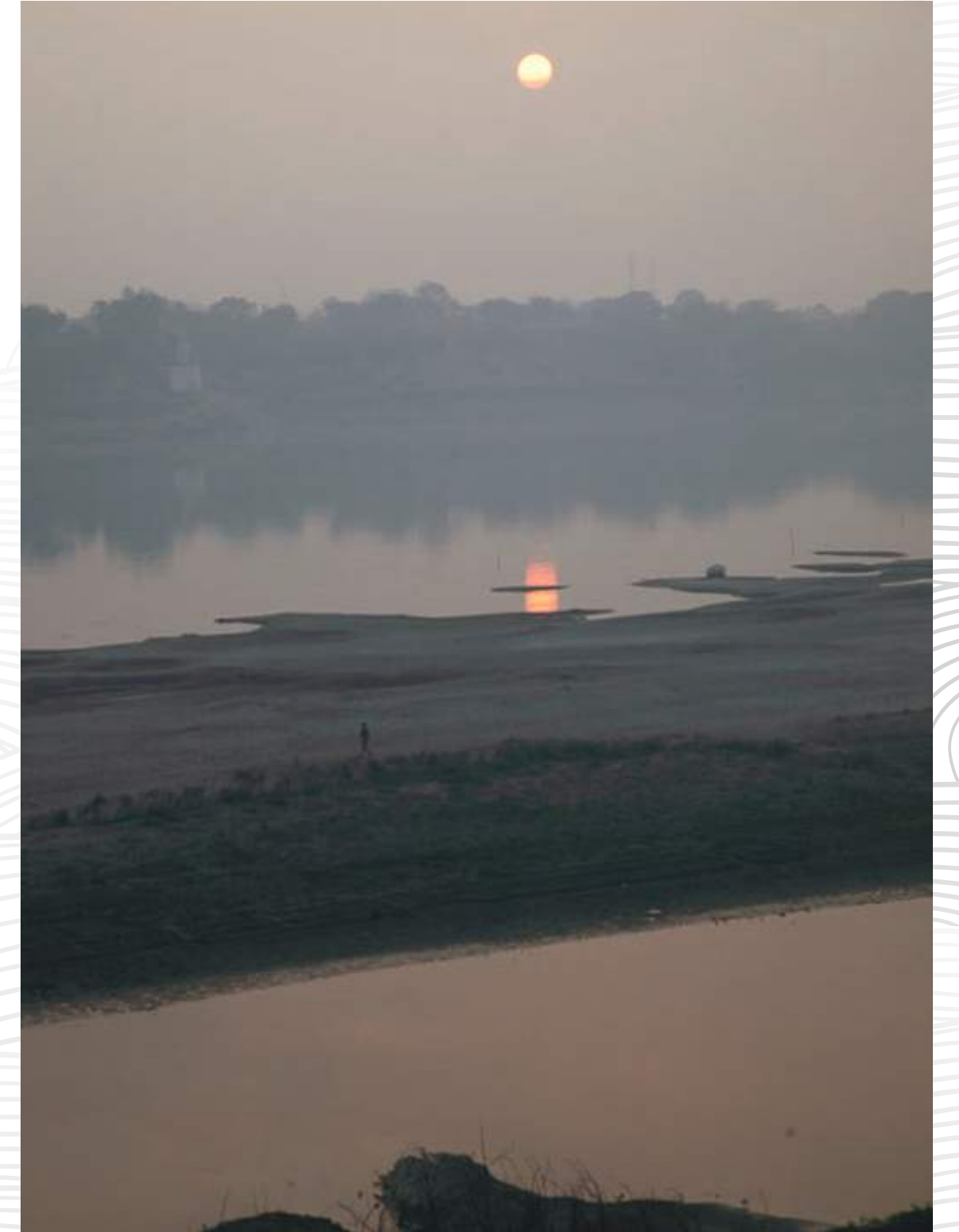
be possible? In terms of destinations, there were only a few options - Haridwar-Rishikesh, Allahabad-Prayag or Banaras-Kashi. Bimla *ji* opted for Banaras as she was drawn to its civilizational heritage. “At one point of time, every third household of Kashi had a *gurukul*; a seat of learning. Even today, it is believed that if you breathe your last in Kashi, you attain *moksha*, salvation. So, Kashi it was.” The family too had some business interest in Banaras which gave them a good foothold.

Eventually, a sizeable plot of land that stood right opposite Ramnagar Kila was found on *Samne Ghat*. It offered a panoramic view of the Ganges upon which the family got down to building a *kothi*, a home for her. The construction site was arduous and tricky and the blueprint complicated, but once the home was complete, Bimla Poddar was all set to sit back and soak it all in.

Fate though, had different plans.

It may be noted that Ganga changes its course in Kashi and becomes *Uttarvahini*, i.e. it starts flowing Northward.

Bimla Poddar’s life course too changed entirely once she came to Kashi. “*Kadi se kadi judti gayi*” or one thing led to another is how she simply sums it up.





Catalysts, Collaborations and Connections

As Bimla Poddar began mingling with various learned men and women of the Banaras society, it became more and more evident, that sitting back passively was not going to be the pattern of her life. Ideas started pouring in from various quarters. Meetings were held with men of letters to explore collaborations. She recalls how she too wanted to be meaningfully engaged and so did her brother-in-law, Late Suresh Neotia, who was firmly against her getting into any sort of a “vegetative state!”

1996 saw the formal inauguration of the *kothi* on the propitious day of

Sharad Purnima. A part of the premise was reserved for quasi-academic activities that started in a small way in the form of preliminary discussions with experts on subjects related to art and music. These discussions would be both well attended and delivered and a scope for institutionalising them was felt by all.

Soon after, in April, 1997 on the auspicious day of *Ram Navami* Jnana Pravaha, a Centre for Cultural Studies and Research was formally born. A discourse on *The Ramayana* was held by Pandurang Rao to mark

the occasion. The family’s collection of books and later even Bimla *ji*’s musical instruments found a place in the newly constituted premise.

Even though she was the Founder, she is quick to shrug off any credit. “Jnana Pravaha owes much of its inception, conception and success to Suresh. *Uska bhaari yogdaan tha,*” she asserts.

She explains that the sole other person who was really the heart, soul and the pillar behind Jnana Pravaha was Dr R C Sharma, its Honorary Director and *Acharya*. “Once I started living in Banaras, we had become acquainted with each other because of our interest in art and so on. He had come home for some programs and I had visited him at his residence where he would serve me *adrak wali chai,*” she fondly reminisces.

So, though the Centre was constituted in ’97 under the charge of Professor K N Mishra, it was only in 1999, when Dr R C Sharma took over as Honorary Director or *Acharya* that it really picked up momentum and progressed rapidly. “*Unke kaaran gaadi chal padi, ache log judte gaye.* Besides being so learned, he was also a man of strict discipline and principles,” she notes.

‘Jnana Ganga Punatu Va’ which became the motto of the Centre was also coined by Sharma *ji*. It simply meant, that knowledge should flow like the Ganga and continue to bless all.

It was soon obvious that Jnana Pravaha needed a separate premise and could no longer be run out of an earmarked area within the *kothi*. It was with this idea in mind, that none other than the architect–visionary, Padma Bhushan Balkrishna Doshi was entrusted with the job of planning and erecting a whole new building that would house Jnana Pravaha.

Finally, in 2001, *Pratichi – The Hub*, the focal point of the Centre came into being.



Architect Visionary, Balkrishna Doshi inspecting the construction of Kalamandapa, the Jnana Pravaha museum.





Invocation

प्रसादाद्विश्वनाथस्य कस्यां भागीरथीतटे ।
वृद्धिज्ञानप्रवाहे स्यात् संस्कृतेश्चानु शीलने ॥

Nourished with the Grace of Lord Vishwanath,
Jnana Pravaha rests on the banks of the Ganga in Kashi
for the furtherance of the pursuit and flow of knowledge
and enrichment of culture.



Aims & Objectives

'Jnana Ganga Punatu Va'

It is in keeping with this motto that Jnana Pravaha has laid down the following aims and objectives for itself:

- Bring together scholars of various nationalities on a common platform of cultural expression.
- Foster in-depth study of ancient epigraphy and obscure Indian scripts.
 - Encourage and support advance research in Indian art, culture, archaeology and metaphysics.
- Organise seminars, lectures, advance study courses and workshops.
- Promote Indian artistic traditions, the visual and performing arts.
- Support artisans to preserve their hereditary skills of handicrafts.
- Nurture cultural values among young generation through camps, quizzes and workshops.
- Train novitiates for learned priesthood to cater to the needs of society.
- Revive the performance of Sanskrit theatre and Vedic *Yajna*.
- Explore, excavate and document heritage sites and ancient ruins of historical value.



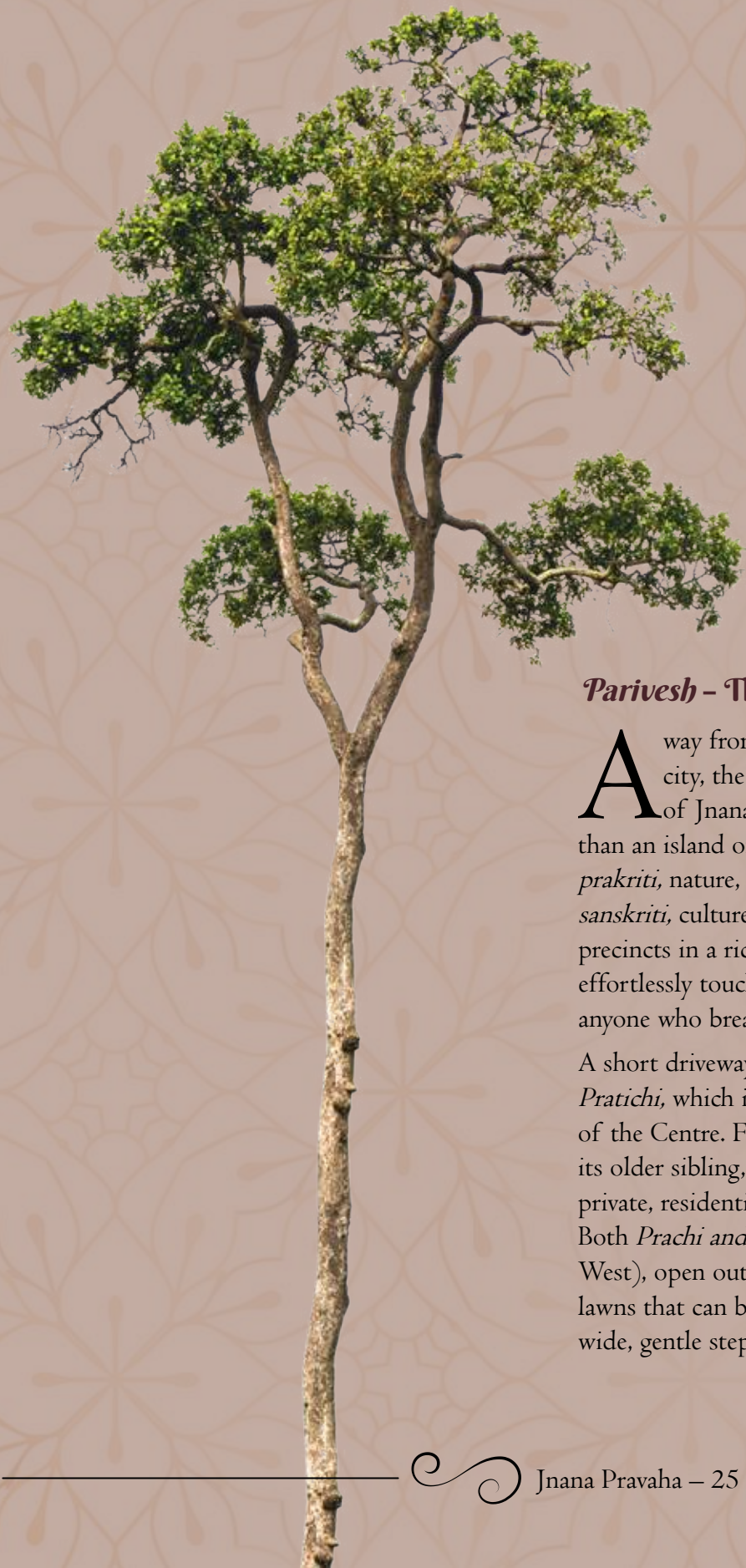


Parivesh - The Environment

सामने घाट के तट पर
संस्था यह स्थापित है
अपार बहती गंगा के हो दर्शन
कुछ ऐसे यह परिकल्पित है

ओजस है आज भी उस पार
रामनगर का प्राचीन किला
सनातन सोच से ओत प्रीत परिवेश में
आया जो भी उसका मन खिला





Parivesh - The Environment

A way from the hubbub of the city, the spacious environs of Jnana Pravaha are no less than an island of tranquility, where *prakriti*, nature, is designed to meet *sanskriti*, culture, to envelope the precincts in a rich harmony that effortlessly touches and inspires anyone who breathes it.

A short driveway brings you up to *Pratichi*, which is the focal point of the Centre. Further down, lies its older sibling, *Prachi*, the more private, residential end of the site. Both *Prachi* and *Pratichi* (East and West), open out into sprawling lawns that can be easily accessed via wide, gentle steps.

All along the periphery stand tall, bountiful trees that provide fruit and shade and nest to their many feathered friends.

And all of this is encircled by the majestic sweep of the *Uttarmukhi*, the northward bound Ganga, that flows no farther away than at arm's length, in all its glory and wonder.

Senior Indologist, Shri K D Tripathi *ji*, summarizes it evocatively when he says, "*Sansthayein ban jaayein, lekin Ganga tat mil jaaye! Yeh to asambhav hae! Ganga tat par yeh kriti saakar ho paayi... woh kaun si aankh hae jisne isko dekha, parikalpit kiya!*"





Green fingers

Early mornings, as the Ganga stirs and awakens, so do the birds whose chirp and chatter fill the air. Faraway temple bells come ringing in. A boatman or two pass by, their oars carving gentle ripples on the river. Some have a song on their lips, undecipherable but fragrant. Even the imposing Ramnagar Kila seems to be stretching and breaking out of its slumber to greet a new day.

As the world around Jnana Pravaha rouses, so does the Centre.

The first lot of people to get into action are the *malis*, the gardeners who keep it all beautifully manicured and lush green. Leading them, is Naba Kishore Nayak, who has clocked over twenty years at the Centre.

With great pride, he takes all guests around, showing off the trees and carrying on his narration in heavily Oriya accented Hindi - his taller than usual *Nolinas*, his legendary *Sita-Ashok*, his delicately flowering *Parijat*, his ample Mangos, his auspicious *Shami*, *Rudraksh* and *Bel*. I learn that the bark and wood of *Bel*, *Aam* and *Shami* are also used during *havans* and *yajnas*.

He stops to point out some medicinal plants - *Kanak Chaya*, *Muchakunda*

and Aloe Vera along with herbs such as *Tej Patta* and *Darchini* or Cinnamon, even crushing a few of the latter's leaves for its heady aroma to be sensed.

If the undulating lush lawns are well manicured, the garden at the rear end is copious with vegetables. Vegetables such as *bhindi*, *lauki*, *tori*, *kumra*, *karela*, *kundri*, *parwal*, *gobi* to leafy ones such as *palak*, *dhaniya* and *mirch* (ladyfinger, gourds, cauliflower, spinach and coriander) can all be found growing in abundance, along with fruits such as *amla*, *bel*, a variety of *aam* and *bijora*. Meals are therefore truly farm fresh to fork.





Ecology

As a mark of respect to the life-giving river, Jnana Pravaha offer prayers and conducts a small *puja* every single day, in the mornings and evenings. “We are also very careful of waste disposal and ensure that no dirty water or garbage enters the Ganga from our Centre. In fact, during get-togethers, we do not use crockery of any kind. Our plates are made of well bound straw, *palash* and banana leaves,” explains Niraj Pandey, Assistant Director – Jnana Pravaha.

River's roar

Sitting next to a swelling Ganga has not come without its trials and tribulations. There have been times when the river has overflowed into the campus. But even in those difficult times, the *prajwalit agni* or the constantly lit flame has not been allowed to diffuse; it has quickly been taken to a dry, secure spot only to be brought back safely to the *Yajnasala* when the waters have receded. Moreover, the flooding is looked at as the campus being cleansed by Maa Ganga, a blessing rather than a bother!

Dispensary

Jnana Pravaha has also been running a homeopathic dispensary from its premises that provides free medicines to nearby families, including women and children. The dispensary remains open on all working days and is a great resource for the neighbourhood. Currently run by Dr. Jaiprakash Pandey, the dispensary was set up by the Late Dr. Purnendu Chakravarty.





Kalamandapa - The Museum

बड़े शौक से संजोया हुआ
यह संग्रहालय है
देश के अद्भुत कला कृतियों का
अनूठा विद्यालय है

बोल उठती है यहां
मूर्तियां पत्थर की
बारीकियां एहसास दिलाती हैं
कला, कौशल और हुनर की

गर्व होता है इस सभ्यता
इस संस्कृति पर
जहां युगों से तराशे गए
अनगिनत कारीगर





“The seed of art either effuses of its own or is sown in association of art lovers. The love for art is gradually transformed into passion and one is often haunted by the aspiration of possessing the artefacts.”

– Late R C Sharma, Honorary Director – Jnana Pravaha

The genesis

It was in the mind of a young, impressionable Suresh Neotia who was in his student days that this seed of art was sown. He would frequently visit his *mamaji*, Gopi Krishna Kanoria’s residence in Calcutta and catch him involved with art, either pouring through books or looking at paintings. His uncle would also take the trouble to explain the lyricism of miniatures to the then novice. This would be one of his earliest exposures to Indian art, one that began to pique his curiosity substantially.

His interest was furthered by an introduction to sculptures which were in abundance at the home of another uncle, H P Poddar who possessed a keen, aesthetic eye. Long conversations on the subject with

Akhilesh Mittal of Burmah Shell too proved rewarding.

The interest deepens

It was not long before Suresh Neotia’s eyes too started acquiring a discerning sensibility and his personal interactions with dealers of antiquity grew. He was introduced to B K Nahar, a dealer from Jaipur who helped him acquire some noteworthy art.

“Suresh started travelling in search of art. He would often comb the narrow by-lanes of Jaipur and stumble upon beautiful paintings. His purchases were guided foremost by his own taste, his eye. He also visited numerous art galleries and museums both in India and abroad.

“Suresh ka haath khula tha; use pehchan ho gayi thi aur yeh sab karte karte mujhe bhi thodi thodi cheezein samajh mein aane lagi thi,” shares Bimla Poddar with a smile who was also entrusted with the onerous task of safe-keeping each of the acquired pieces - from paintings to carpets, from shawls to miniatures, terracotta and sculptures.

Indeed, it was the combined efforts of collector and connoisseur Suresh Neotia and custodian Bimla Poddar that Jnana Pravaha got its Kalamandapa, its museum.

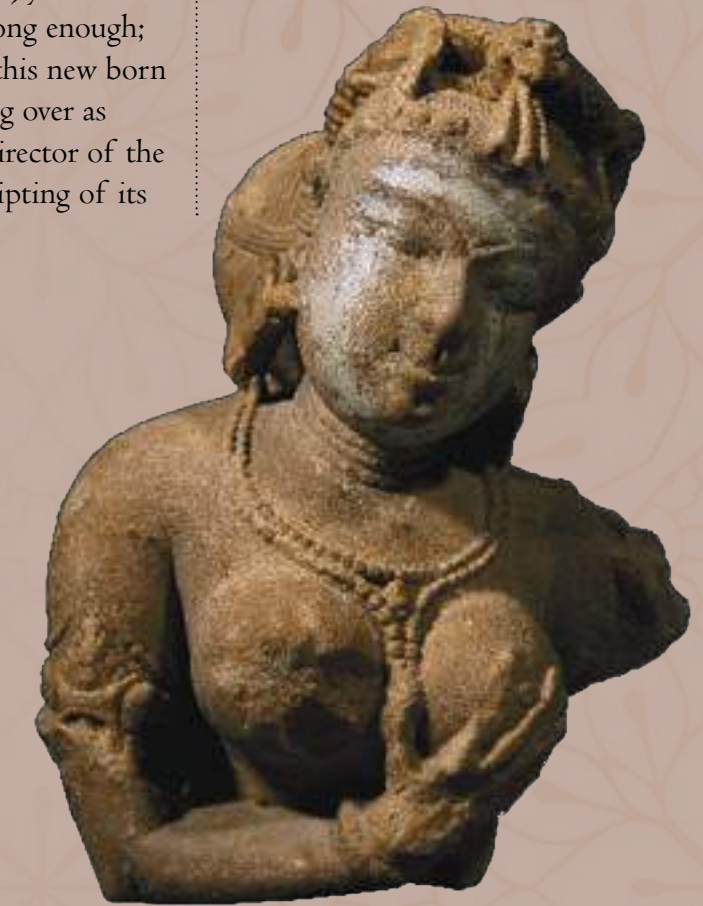
Suresh would often prod his uncle, GK Kanoria, to house his worthwhile art collection in a gallery or a museum. Although that never happened, Suresh remained convinced of the idea of creating a sanctuary for a painstakingly acquired collection.

Therefore, when Jnana Pravaha opened its doors in 1997, Suresh Neotia gladly handed over a large part of his prized art collection. It is a collection that has been meticulously catalogued, documented, displayed and appreciated by scholars, art

enthusiasts, students and other visitors from across the world.

“We would not have a museum had it not been for R C Sharma,” states Bimla ji.

She goes on to share how Suresh Neotia went to meet Professor R C Sharma who was retiring as Director Bharat Kala Bhawan, Banaras Hindu University (BHU) and requested him to take charge of Jnana Pravaha. Suresh’s exact words were, “*Apne bahut din sarkar ki sewa kar li; ab is navjat sishu ko sambhal lijiye!*” You’ve served the government long enough; now please take care of this new born child! R C Sharma taking over as Acharya or Honorary Director of the institution led to the scripting of its glorious innings.





Smt. Bimla Poddar, Shri Suresh Neotia, Dr. Karan Singh, Smt. Kapila Vatsyayan and Shri L M Singhvi – releasing the compendium 'Indian Art Treasures' in 2006.

“Suresh Neotia’s collection forms an integral part of the institution’s activities. It is a useful tool as a study collection for researchers and an attraction for lay visitors.”
 – Padma Vibhushan, Late Smt. Kapila Vatsyayan.

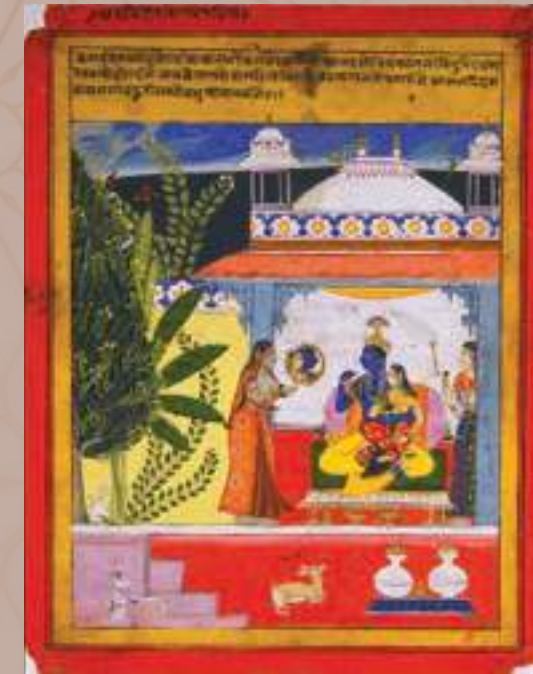
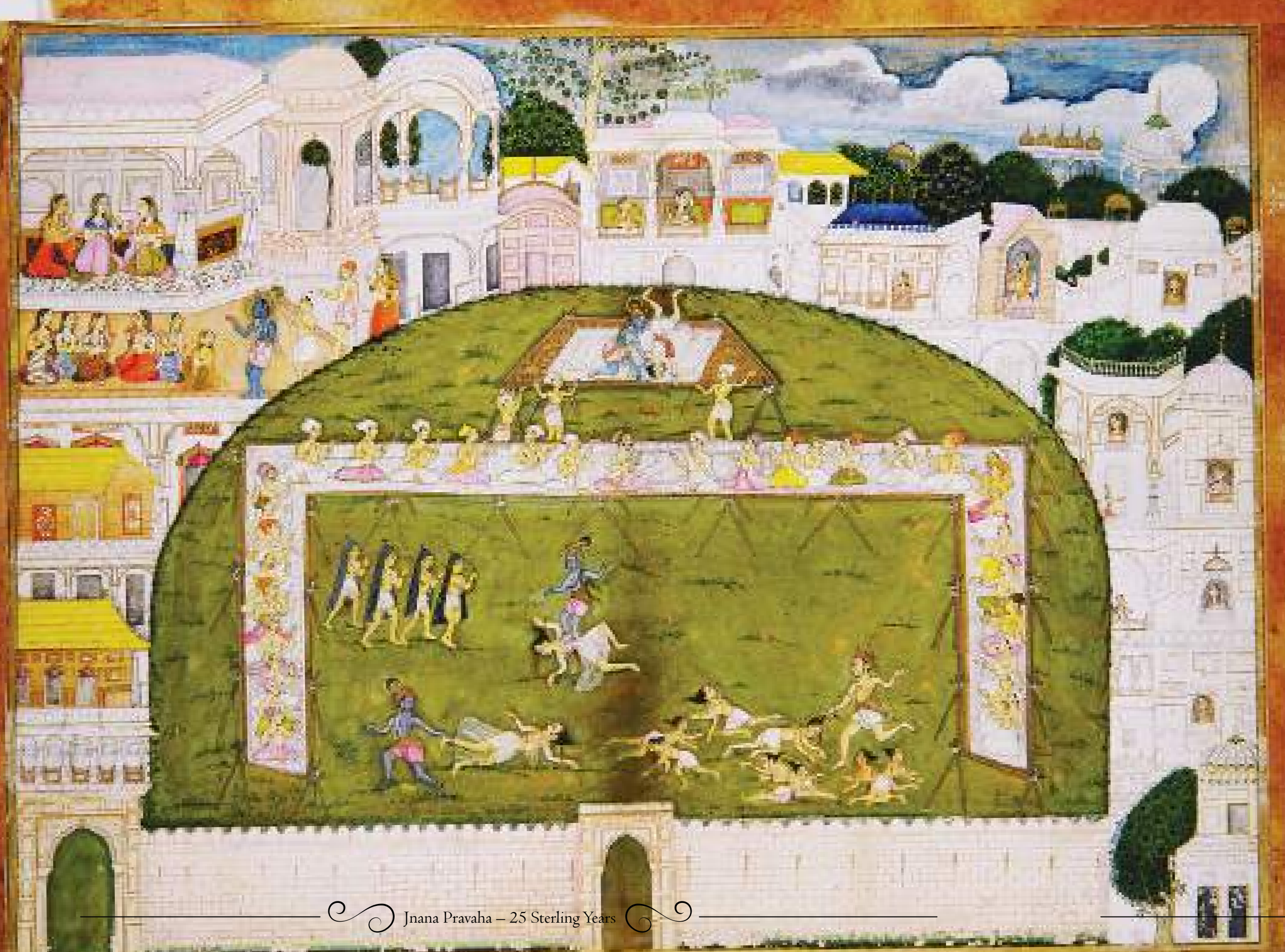
1999 में स्थापित कलामण्डप में लघुचित्रों एवं वस्त्रशिल्प, पाषाण एवं मृत्तुर्तियों, सिक्कों एवं अलंकरण वस्तुओं का संग्रह है। अधिकांश प्रदर्शित शिल्पाकृतियाँ श्री सुरेश नेवटिया, संस्थापक अध्यक्ष, ज्ञान प्रवाह के संग्रह से हैं।



Established in 1999, Kalamandapa has on display Indian miniatures, Tibetan and Nepali palm-leaf manuscripts & painted hangings, textiles, stone sculptures, terracottas, coins & decorative art. Majority of the artefacts are from the Collection of Sri Suresh Neotia, Founder Chairman, Jnana-Pravaha

Over the years, Suresh Neotia had added to every facet of his art collection. Bimla Poddar too gradually developed an eye for textiles and picked up extraordinary pieces of work from various parts of the country.





“Professor Sharma came to our residence in Calcutta to sift through Suresh’s collection,” recalls Bimla Poddar. She elaborates on how he looked through each piece for authenticity and value and carefully chose the ones appropriate for housing at the conceived museum at Jnana Pravaha. Since there were no direct flights to Varanasi, the invaluable collection had to be transported in trunks via a train route. “We booked ourselves in AC Ist Class and had police escort for security. After all, we were bringing across his most treasured pieces,” she adds.





Serendipity

R C Sharma always believed that a museum is not complete without coins, an aspect that the museum at Jnana Pravaha had till then not fulfilled.

A most unexpected incident changed that fact. One fine evening, Bimla ji was visiting a jewellery shop in *Assi Ghat* to pick up some tiny pieces of everyday jewellery for her children. After showing some available items, the shop keeper also showed her a collection of coins, which he suggested could be crafted into earrings or buttons. Even in one glance Poddar could sense that the coins looked old and valuable. "Though I didn't know much about coins, I noted that they were all punch-marked. The shopkeeper was set on melting them all the next day and I had to take a decision immediately. Besides, I was not carrying enough money."

As luck would have it, he agreed to hand over the coins on credit if the money was sent over the next day. Those 100 odd silver punch-marked coins of varying shapes, sizes and antiquity, came to enrich the collection and the museum through sheer serendipity.



The Museum at a glance



Paintings: The museum has a rich collection of miniature paintings on palm leaves, paper, cloth, wood and even ivory. The collection is particularly rich in Bikaner miniatures. The themes range from religion to social activities such as hunting, ceremonies, battle scenes and celebrations. The collection also gives a broad view of several major schools of Indian paintings such as Nepalese, Tibetan, Jain, Mughal, Jodhpur, Nathdwara, Pichwai, Pahari and Deccani.



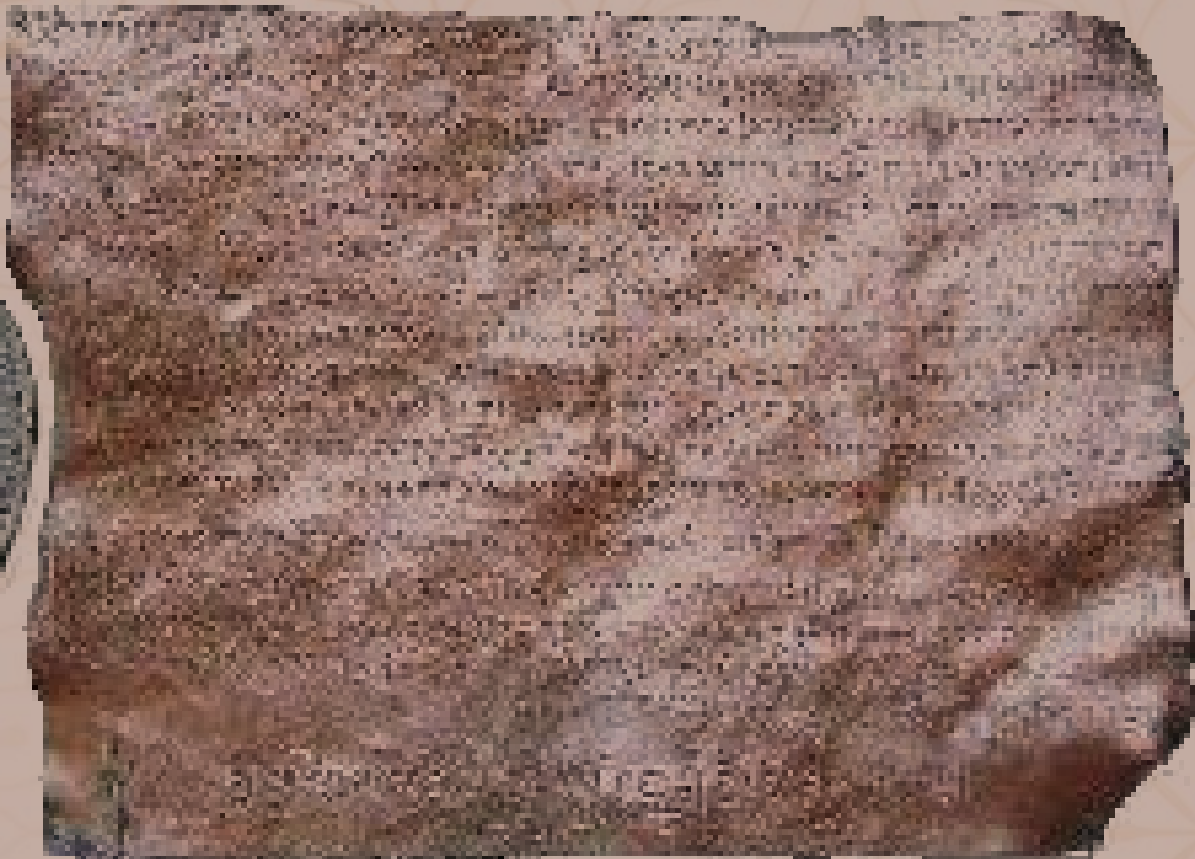


Textiles: The display of textiles is a stunning one, showcasing *saris* from various parts of India: *Baluchari*, *Kantha* and *Jamdani* from Bengal, *Paithani* from Maharashtra, *Asavari* from Gujarat, *Phulkari* from Punjab, *Paithani* from Maharashtra, *Kalamkaris* from South India and ornate brocades from Banaras. There are loom-woven woollen shawls from Kashmir as well as delicate *Kantha* embroidery work from Bengal. Beside these, the early 16th century woven-silk, *Samit* from Eastern India (the earliest specimen in the Indian collection) and 17th century Persian brocades are of great charm.



Sculptures: This art form reached its absolute zenith in the classical Gupta period between 4th - 6th centuries. The Museum houses sculptures in stone, metal and ivory. Noteworthy are statues of Lord Kubera, Shiva, Ganesh, Buddha, Mahishasurmardini Durga and Brahma. The Neotia terracotta collection dates back to three significant historical eras – Mauryan, Sunga and Gupta.





Stunners: Some other impressive pieces include a 12th Century inscription of *Kailadas's Abhijan Shakuntalam*; a 20 odd feet *Kalamkari* which has been carefully framed and placed at one extreme end; a Varanasi Copperplate of *Govindachandra* of the *Gahadawal* dynasty and a *Gara sari* and a decorative *toran* with Parsi embroidery.

The cynosure of Kalamandapa - King Harshvardhana's Copper Plate

Approximately 1400 years old, King Harshvardhana's Copper Plate is one of the most remarkable artefacts of the Museum at Jnana Pravaha. Copperplates were generally issued by kings to authorise a person for the possession of land which was gifted

by the reigning king to a learned scholar. This plate too records the gifting of a village called *Agrahara* to a *Brahmachari*. The plate and the seal, record the genealogy of the Vardhana dynasty from Naravardhana to Harsha. The

seal is surmounted by a bull and the plate bears the signature of the king in his own calligraphy. *It is the only daan patra in the world of its kind on display.*



Yajnasala

लुप्त हो रहे वैदिक परंपराओं के
संरक्षण का यह शाला है

हर पल जलती ज्योत जहां
ऐसा अद्भुत शिवाला है

नतमस्तक हम अग्नि के आगे
देते आहुति सवेरे शाम हैं

करते यज्ञ शिवरात्रि के दिन
अग्निहोत्री जिनका नाम है





Located at the Northern end of the precincts towards one end of the ample lawns, surrounded by tall trees and overlooking the mighty Ganga, lies the Yajnasala, perhaps the most sacred space of the institute.

The idea of creating a Yajnasala germinated from several informal discussions held amongst the office bearers and custodians of Jnana Pravaha and stemmed from the worry that Vedic Yajnas as practised in North India were becoming increasingly rare. In keeping with one of its primary objectives of preserving and upholding our cultural heritage, Jnana Pravaha set up its Yajnasala in the year 2000.





Professor Yugal Kishor Mishra, Honorary Acharya, Jnana Pravaha explains that the apparently simple looking space, built out of mud holds tremendous importance and its design and structure is exactly as prescribed in our *shastras* with five fire pits or *kunds*. He goes on to elaborate man's time-honoured equation with fire.

“Other than Zoroastrians who worship the fire, we have also had a practice since Vedic times of both worshipping as well as keeping *agni* alive in our households. Why is that? Our *devi-devtas* are *adrishya*; we cannot see our Gods and Goddesses. They remain invisible to our eye. We can see the Sun God, *Surya Dev* and *Chandrama*, the moon, but they are very far. It is therefore, only *agni* or a burning flame that we can have amidst us to bow to as a source of energy. We need *Agni* for every bit of our existence,” he explains. He also adds that Agni acts like a bridge between *Dev lok* and *Prithvi lok*; between mankind and the celestial bodies and it is through an *ahuti* or an offering that we may send a message to the Gods.

Broadly speaking, Yajnas are of three types:

The Vedic or *Shraut Yajna* which finds mention in the Vedas and is called *Nigam*

The *Agnik* that comes from the Tantric system or methodology

And third which is somewhat of a fusion of the two.

Jnana Pravaha conducts the *Shraut Yajna Mitravindeshti* or a *Vedic Yajna* on the day of *Mahashivratri*, around February or March every year. The *Yajna* takes up to 4 hours and

is conducted in its most authentic form, in keeping with the ritualistic practices prescribed in the Vedas. The Yajna is followed by a three-day seminar called *Akhil Bharatiya Ved Sammelan* or All Indian Vedic Conference.

Professor Mishra points out that *Shraut Yajna Mitravindeshti* can only be conducted by *Agnihotri*

purohitis. “*Agnihotris* too are an increasingly vanishing breed and are very hard to come by. It is difficult to find them even in a place like Banaras. This *Yajna* can only be performed by an *Agnihotri* couple. The others are allowed to witness the Yajna and take *prasad*,” he specifies. Jnana Pravaha has been inviting *Agnihotris* from Pune and Buldhana in Maharashtra for many years.

The *Shraut Yajna* holds tremendous value for both *vyashti* and *samashti* - for the individual and the collective well-being, including the purification of the environment. It is also a golden opportunity for students studying the *Vedas* from different universities to witness an actual *Yajna* being performed as opposed to learning about it through text books.





Jnana Pravaha also conducts the *Rudrabhishek* for Lord Shiva, meant to bestow prosperity and happiness and remove negative energies. This ritual is performed annually at the beginning of a new academic session in August.



There was always a tradition of keeping a *Prajwalit agni* or a constant flame, alive at home, during the ancient times. This had multiple benefits. At a very practical level, this flame would be used for cooking and other day-to-day jobs. At a more spiritual level, this was to observe and offer a continuous obeisance to the power of *Agni*. And finally, at a familial level, this *agni* would remind a couple of the vows they had exchanged during the time of being unified as a couple, with *Agni* as their *sakshi* or witness.

Jnana Pravaha has a *Prajwalit Agni* or a lit sacred flame that has been burning unabated since 2000. This flame has been kept secure even during floods and inclement weather conditions. An *ahuti* or offering is conducted both in the mornings and evenings, to *Surya*, *Prajapati* and *Agni*.





Shilpasala - The Atelier

दूर हो रहे थे कारीगर सभी
अपनी अपनी शिल्पकलाओं से
खतरे में थी ऐतिहासिक धरोहर
पाई जाती थी जो गली चौराहों में

शुरू की गई तब शिल्पशाला
ज्ञान प्रवाह के प्रांगण में
हाथों से गढ़ी अष्टधातु की मूर्तियां
पुनर्जीवित हों उठी आंगन में





The revelation and birth

Summers in Banaras can be very hot and any household would want its fans and other cooling devices to be well tuned and serviced to tackle the heat. In the advent of one such summer more than 15 years ago, a 30-year-old mistri by the name of Nandu landed in Jnana Pravaha to overhaul the fans. In the midst of the ongoing work, a conversation ensued which brought out the fact that Nandu hailed from Kashipura, a neighbourhood that was best known for *dhatu shilpkala* or metal artwork and produced beautiful *bartans*, *murtis* and so on. The question that posed itself was, why was he greasing fans, when he was in fact a craftsman? Nandu revealed that though he knew the craft, fewer homes now wanted *ashtadhatu bartans* as most had switched to steel. He confirmed

that there were several craftsmen like him who had thrown away precious moulds and given up the artwork to sell vegetables, ride autorickshaws and do other odd jobs to make their ends meet.

Suresh Neotia who was visiting Jnana Pravaha caught wind of this episode and probed further. When it was confirmed that Nandu was indeed a craftsman and that an age-old craft could soon be endangered, he discussed the issue with N. P. Joshi who was then the *Acharya* of the institute. After some deliberation, they felt that such artistry ought to be preserved and revived by reaching out to traditional *Banarasi* artisans and setting up an atelier.



The *Shilpasala* opened its doors on 1st June, 2008. Since then, the *Shilpasala* or Atelier has produced hundreds of handcrafted *Ashtadhatu* object d' art, ranging from decorative items such as bowls and plates, small pieces of jewellery such as finger rings and bracelets and figures of Gods and Goddesses and has acquired a stellar reputation for fine craftsmanship and purity of metals.





Ashtadhatu and the Lost Wax Process (Madhucchista Vidhana)

Pramod Giri who looks after the Atelier, explains that all the pieces that get crafted at the Atelier are made of eight metals or *Ashtadhatu*. These are gold, silver, copper, tin, lead, zinc, iron and antimony or mercury. When mixed in the right proportion, the final

product is one that is strong and exudes a unique colour and lustre. Some objects like bells resonate deeply when rung. Interestingly, each of the eight metals corresponds with some planet. For example: copper and gold with Sun (*Surya*), Mars (*Mangal*) and Jupiter (*Guru*); silver with Moon (*Chandra*) and Venus (*Shukra*) and iron with Saturn (*Shani*). Thus, an object made of *Ashtadhatu* is meant to be highly auspicious.





1

The traditional technique of metal casting is known as *Madhucchista Vidhana* or the Lost Wax Process. It is a technique that is fast waning and requires extremely trained hands. The entire process is carried out, step-by-step, as follows:

1. First, a nude bee wax model is prepared with two perforations – one at the top and the other at the bottom and is coated with clay.
2. The model is then tightly bound by thin iron wire and left to dry in the sun.



2

3. Once completely dry, it hardens and is put to burn in a pre-heated oven where the wax melts casting its impressions on the dried clay.
4. The model is then baked in a 1000c furnace till it burns red.



3



4

5. With great care, the model is then pulled out using a pair of tongs with molten metal poured immediately through the top hole and released from the bottom one.
6. The clay then comes loose, leaving the raw metallic model intact.
7. The model thereafter undergoes detailing by hand which includes chiselling, embellishment, engraving and polishing till it is show room ready.



5



6



7



As we speak, Pramod Giri and his artists are busy preparing murtis of Ganesh-Lakshmi for Diwali which is just round the corner. The artisans at *Shilpasala* also craft idols of *Hanuman, Durga, Ganga, Ladoo Gopal, Radha Krishna* and *Ganesh*, all of which are much sought after for their fine craftsmanship that comes with intricate detailing and the assurance of pure *ashtadhatu*. Once complete, every piece is stamped with the JP trademark and assigned a code number for identification.





Repousse

A French word, Repousse literally means to push back and is largely done using copper though sometimes brass is also used. This traditional technique that requires extremely skilled hands has been part of *Banarasi* art from time immemorial.

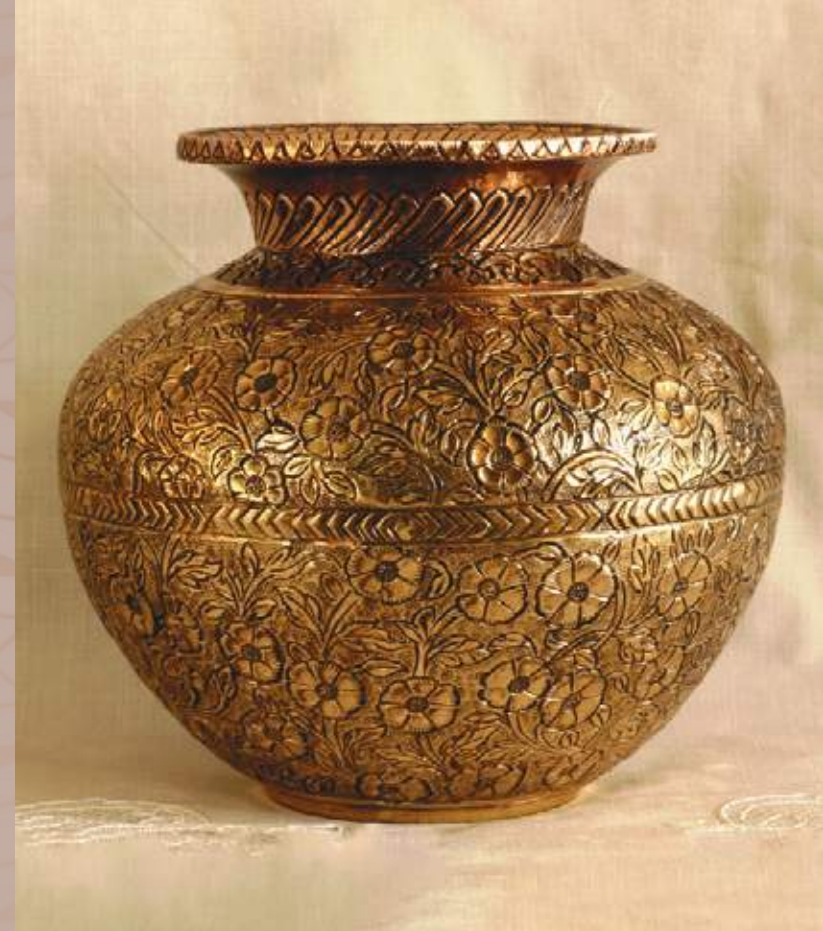
“Earlier, royal thrones were made using this art form. Many decorative items including *puja patra* too had Repousse work,” reveals Giri.



However, over time, the finer nuances and detailing in the work, the *maheen kaam*, started ebbing out.

He goes on to explain that when a malleable metal sheet is hammered from the reverse side, it creates a raised design on the front. At the same time, the metal is also ‘Chased’ or pushed down from the front. This dual effort results in the embossing or *ubharna* of the metal. The stretch and pull and pressure however, have to be perfect or else the *nakkashi*, or the carving may not be possible. “The process is tedious and requires patience,” adds Giri.

Jnana Pravaha’s Atelier offers a stunning range of several Repousse work that includes bowls, plates, jars and other decorative items, each with elaborate carving and detailing. Besides *Ashtadhatu* and metal Repousse, the Atelier has also revived clay and folk art.





Atithisala - Guest House

चारों तरफ फैली हरियाली के बीच
आमंत्रण पर रुकने की व्यवस्था है
अतिथि को लगे बिल्कुल घर जैसा
ऐसा परिवेश, ऐसी चेष्टा है

अध्ययन - अध्यापन के लिए
आते रहे हैं विद्वान् यहां
सुबह - बनारस जैसी आखिर
प्रेरणा होगी और कहां



The stay

Comfortable rooms. Warm hospitality. Home cooked, farm fresh food. Expansive greenery. Bountiful trees. Bird Call. Unending views of Ganga.

No wonder then, that the Guest Book of Jnana Pravaha is filled with complimentary feedback from visitors and guests who come not only from various walks of life but often, from various parts of the country and even the world.

Guests at Jnana Pravaha include scholars, researchers and academicians. Some guests stay only for a day or two whereas many others such as researchers, particularly foreigners, need to stay for longer.



The instrument collection

Besides comfortable guest rooms, the *Atithisala* has a common lounge and dining area, one end of which is occupied by cabinets and rows of Indian instruments which have been collected over many years.

These are chiefly divided into percussion, string, and wind. The string collection includes *tanpuras*, *sitars*, *sarods* and *sarangis* and even some rarer Indian instruments such as *ravanhatta*, *veena*, *vichitra veena*, *surbahar*, *dilruba*, *rabab* and so on. The percussion instruments include a set of *tablas*, *pakhawaj* and a small *duggi* and *nagada*. And how can a musical instrument collection in Banaras be complete without a *shehnai* along with other wind instruments including a *bansuri*.





Acquired over many years, a prized collection such as this adds to the mood and atmosphere of the stay besides giving the guests an idea of India's rich musical heritage.





Pathsala – Samskara and Anushthan Kendra

२०० वर्ष पुराने इस भवन में
पाठशाला अद्वितीय एक कार्यरत है
पढ़ाई होती है यहां वेद - पुराणों की
संकल्प इसका सांस्कृतिक है

विशेष ध्यान देते हैं गुरुजन
शुद्ध हो ताकी मंत्र उच्चारण
पारंपरिक भारतीय वातावरण में
होते हैं तैयार पुरोहित उत्तम





Centre for ancient sacraments and rites

Negotiating and navigating the narrow lanes and narrower by-lanes near *Meer Ghat* that are typically overrun by pedestrians and shops, by two-wheelers and the odd *Nandi* standing guard, one reaches a heavy wooden door where the address reads *D3/I, Meer Ghat*.

Upon opening the door and entering this *kothi* that stands between *Dasawamedh* and *Manikarnika Ghat*, the atmosphere changes

noticeably. Chaos is substituted by order; cacophony by the echo of chants and narrow lanes by two ample courtyards.

It is in this more than 200-year-old ancestral *Badi Kothi* that Jnana Pravaha's *Pathsala* or *Kendra* is housed. The *Kendra* is Jnana Pravaha's initiative to train purohits not only in the right manner but also in the right environment.



Purohits and a peeve

There was a common peeve amongst all the experienced and learned folk who were running the institute. They could see the decline in the knowledge of *purohits* or priests who came to perform *pujas* or any other rituals. This deterioration bothered Suresh Neotia considerably who suggested that Jnana Pravaha take on the onus of starting a course that would yield properly inducted and trained purohits who would be well versed with every aspect required for conducting of sacraments and ceremonies. Recalls Yugal Kishor ji, *“Suresh babu ko laga ki samaaj ko iski zaroorat hae. We all mulled over the idea and agreed wholeheartedly.”*





Commencement of the Kendra

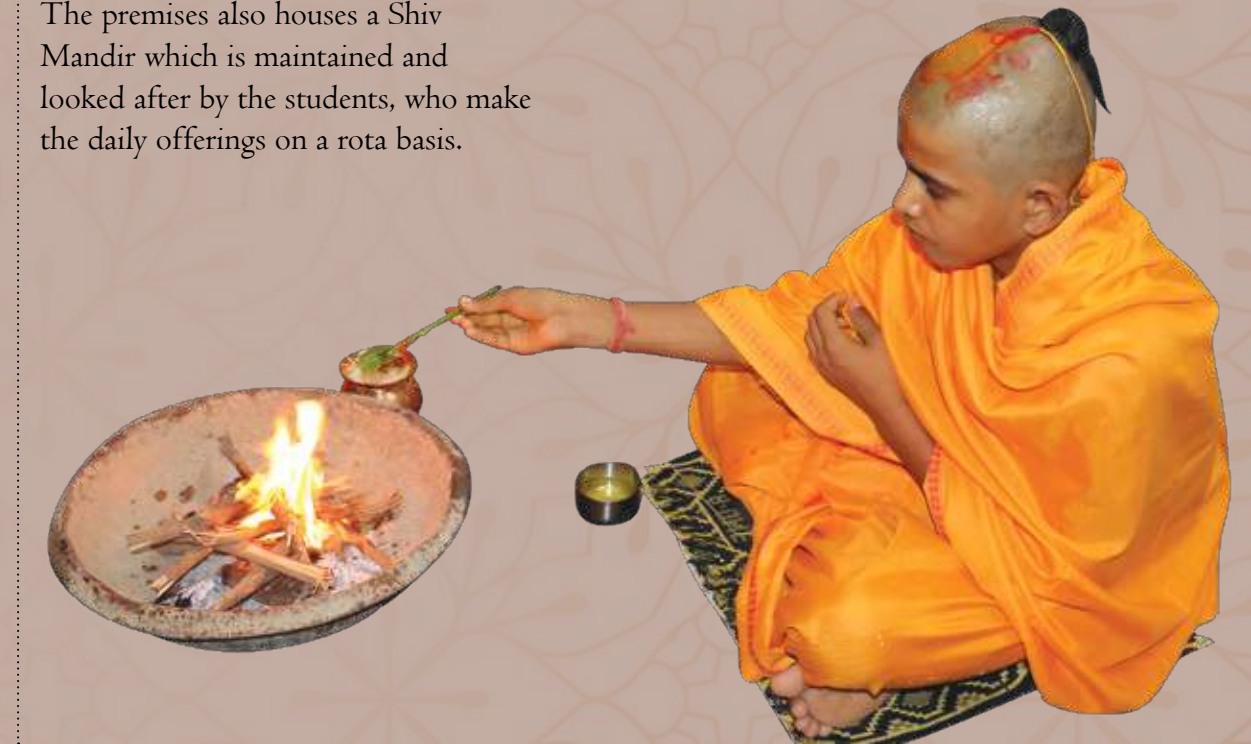
The *Samskara* and *Anushthan Kendra* started modestly on 15th July 2003 with a handful of young boys with a clear vision of imparting them with the knowledge of this civilization's ancient scriptures and texts. Great pains were taken to create a *karmkand* or a course structure as well as induct the students into an extensive study and routine that would help infuse *samskaras* and discipline in them.

Expanding on the three year long course structure, Yugal Mishra *ji* says that the course lays great emphasis on *Shudh Sanskrit uchharan*, *Shudh Ved uchharan*, committing both to memory i.e. having it *kanthast* and finally having a good knowledge of Sanskrit grammar or *vyakaran*. He explains that when young, the boys have a better ability to memorize difficult *shlokas* and *mantras*. "Their vocal chords and timbre too are adaptable and flexible at that age. Once the intonations are registered precisely in the correct diction, they stay that way for life," he explains.

The course also includes *jyotish vidya* i.e. astrology so that a *purohit* learns how to read the *panchang* and figure out auspicious dates, timings and *muhurats*. They are also taught basic Mathematics, English and Hindi so that they can carry out their day-to-day activities with ease.

Whilst there is a warden to look after the boys in this three-year residential program, there are *Gurus* or *Acharyas* who are chosen very carefully by Jnana Pravaha, to impart the training and knowledge to the students. Currently, the Acharyas are Pt. Shrinivas Upasani, Dr. Kishor Jha, Shri Yogesh Brahmachari and Shri Adarsh Mishra.

The premises also houses a Shiv Mandir which is maintained and looked after by the students, who make the daily offerings on a rota basis.



Leaving a mark

Over the last 20 years, the *Kendra* has earned a considerable distinction, such that purohits who are awarded with a certificate of completion of the course, immediately find acceptance and work and are absorbed by society. “Most of these boys come from deprived backgrounds and therefore to be able to earn a respectful living is a matter of considerable pride for them and their families,” shares Bimla ji. The *Kendra* has had students from many parts of the country including Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Bengal, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh. Some of these students go on to pursue further studies at BHU and other universities. Some of them have also gone on to add to their distinction by being awarded Gold Medals by Banaras Hindu University.





Oath of service

Upon successfully concluding the three-year course, the students sit for an examination called *Purva Madhyama*. Finally, after clearing that, they are awarded their certificates at the *Dikshant Samaroh* where every student takes an oath of service as prescribed in the *Taitriya Upanishad*.



LIBRARY

पुस्तकालय

Pustakalay - Library

क्रम से सजी हुई
१२ हजार पुस्तकों का
है यह खज़ाना
लगा रहता है अक्सर
विद्यार्थियों का
यहां आना जाना

शांत इस माहौल में
पूरी होती है
शोध की खोज - वीन
विशाल इस संग्रह में
मिल जाते हैं तथ्य
महीन से महीन



The Collection

It is only natural for an institute that strives to promote knowledge and learning to have a robust collection of books in its repository.

Housed on the 1st floor of the institute's premises, Jnana Pravaha has a reference library that consists of more than 12,000 books and 600 rare manuscripts. The spacious library that was set up in 1999 offers a view of the campus greens and the flowing *Ganga*, making it quite a favourite spot for bibliophiles.

Occupying a lion's share of the collection are books on various aspects of Indology, such as Indian art, culture, philosophy, religion, history, epigraphy, archaeology, numismatics and even Sanskrit.

Bimla Poddar's personal collection of many years along with Suresh Neotia's collection of tomes on Indian art and heritage are now all part of the library. It even stocks almost all publications by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) as well as the MARG series – *Silpa Sahatra Dal* on Brahminical iconography. The library was further enriched when Late Shri N P Joshi as well as Shri R C Sharma ji donated some of their books to Jnana Pravaha.

Explains the librarian, Shri A K Ghanekar, "Our library is enriched continuously by way of donations as well as judicious acquisition. For example, we acquired the rich collection of Late Dr. Motichand ji, a senior art historian, that added valuable titles in that genre. Students and research scholars are attracted to the library both for its collection as well as for its quiet and serene environment."





Prerna Pravaha – Inspiring the next generation

वंचित न रह जाए आने वाली पीढ़ी
संस्कृत भाषा के अपार धरोहर से
शुरू किए गए कुछ ऐसे कार्यक्रम
इसी चिंतन, सोच और विचार से

अभिज्ञान शकुंतलम का हुआ प्रथम मंचन
तालियों के गड़गड़ाहट से मिली प्रोत्साहन
प्राचीन प्रथा बनारस की पुनः हुई प्रवर्तन

संस्कृत नाटक प्रस्तुति के अतिरिक्त
खेली गई संस्कृत में अंताक्षरी
प्रश्नोत्तरी से और भी मज़बूत हुई
प्रेरणा प्रवाह की यह कड़ी

Pratichi and Sanskrit theatre

1st November 2001 proved to be a milestone for Jnana Pravaha in more ways than one. Firstly, the Centre got *Pratichi*, the focal point of the institution that would house a museum, a library, conference rooms, a seminar hall and the administrative block amongst other facilities.

However, it was the inauguration of *Pratichi*, that was marked by the staging of the epic Sanskrit play, *Abhijanasakuntalam*, that left the august audience entirely spellbound and proved to be a most unexpected turning point.

The trio of Professor Kamlesh Dutt Tripathi, Professor Yugal Kishor Mishra and Dr. Chandra Kanta Rai get together to recall the red-letter day and its significance.

“Kalidas is not just a Sanskrit *kavi*. He is an exceptional playwright of this country, one who should be counted amongst the top playwrights of the world. The very *sanskriti*,

the culture of this land can be understood better via his works,” opines Tripathi *ji* passionately.

Yugal *ji* shares how *Sanskrit* theatre, though an age-old tradition of Kashi was gradually facing decline and Jnana Pravaha not only took note of that fact, but also wanted to take humble steps in order to reverse the downturn. “Through our various deliberations, we felt that perhaps we may attempt the staging of a Sanskrit play, that would not only help revive a tradition but also allow college and university students to utilize their knowledge of Sanskrit and enact a stellar epic on stage. I had been associated with Sanskrit theatre in my college days and Tripathi *ji* had a rich experience of setting up Kalidas Academy in Ujjain. So we all felt it was worth a try.”

Adds Dr. Rai, “Our proposal received the good wishes and blessings of both Dr. Sharma and Bimla *ji* and we got down to work. Students

of Banaras Hindu University, Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth and Sampurnananda University were contacted and they responded enthusiastically. Participation initially came from students of Sanskrit, but later, the word spread and students from other streams also came forward and joined.”

Such was the quality and rarity of the staged Sanskrit play

that the Governor of Uttar Pradesh, Dr. Vishnukant Shastri, who was present for the inauguration but was supposed to leave in forty minutes, stayed on for the entire two-hour show. The play was an enormous hit with the distinguished audience that included names like

Padma Vibhushan Smt. Girija Devi, Padma Vibhushan Pt. Kishan Maharaj, Padma Shri Professor and Parliamentarian, Vidyanibas Mishra, Padma Shri Professor Balwant Rai Bhatt, amongst others who had gathered on the lawns of the precincts.





After its first staging at Jnana Pravaha, *Abhijanasakuntalam* went on to be performed in Sanskrit twice more; first at Kalidas Akademi in Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh on the occasion of Mahakavi Kalidas's birth anniversary and then at Banaras Hindu University in Varanasi in 2002.

As incredible as it sounds, the lead character of *Shankuntala* was once performed by a 19-year-old Polish girl who happened to be studying in Banaras. "Her parents had come to teach and were here on a five-year deputation. After seeing our first Sanskrit theatre, she expressed a great desire to take part. We appreciated her enthusiasm and trained her rigorously so that her intonations were perfect. She too worked hard to learn

Sanskrit. By the end of her training and preparation, nobody could have guessed she was a foreigner! Her younger brother played *Bhim*," recalls Yugal ji with satisfaction.

The continued presentation and performance of Sanskrit theatre has helped achieve several things: the revival of these tremendous works of literature; a renewed interest in the Sanskrit language and an opportunity for Sanskrit scholars to enjoy the effect of the language in drama versus learning it only in classrooms via lectures.



Ever since staging its first Sanskrit theatre in 2001, Jnana Pravaha has been steadily presenting at least one Sanskrit play every year, not just in different parts of Banaras but also in various noted parts of the country such as Bhopal, Ujjain, Guwahati and New Delhi. In 2015 Jnana Pravaha was invited by the Ministry

of Culture, Government of India, to present 'Karnabharam' at the World Sanskrit Conference in Bangkok, Thailand.

After an interruption caused by the pandemic, Jnana Pravaha is all set to stage the celebrated playwright Bhaas's Karnabharam in February 2023.



Some of the most noted playwrights whose celebrated works have been performed are, Kalidas, Bhaas, Bhattanarayan and Shudrak.

The plays include *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, *Vikramorvasiyam*, *Malvikagnimitram*, *Pancaratanam*, *Charudattam*, *Madhyamavyayoga*, *Purvarang*, *Venisamharam* and *Karnabharam*.



Sanskrit *Antakshari*

When trying to find ways and means of gently inducting students in a participative way into Sanskrit as well as Srimad Bhagvad Gita, Professor R C Sharma innovatively chose to deploy the entertaining group game of *Antakshari* that has survived and thrived even in times of rapidly changing lifestyle choices and technology.

Every winter, since 2000, several schools from in and around Banaras take part in a unique '*Gita Anthakshari*', where different school teams ace each other out as they recite shlokas from the Gita.

"Every year we have about 9-10 schools that participate. Every team has four members and we also have a lively audience. What is noteworthy is that these schools are a mixed

bag, from the modern and private run to the public schools as well as *pathshalas*. We give them a prior notice and they come well prepared," explains Associate Director, Niraj Pandey.

A senior *Acharya* from Banaras Hindu University is invited to conduct the program. The *Acharya* picks up a *shloka* and the trail begins. The *Antakshari* is conducted keeping in mind the spirit of participation rather than competition with each school receiving a memento and every student, a certificate of participation from Jnana Pravaha.

Such has been the acceptance of the *Gita Anthakshari* that the Centre also conducts the same based on *Mahakavi Kalidasa's* literature.





Prashnotri - Cultural Quiz

Amidst loud cheering and much merriment, Jnana Pravaha holds an annual *Prashnotri* or a Quiz competition for students. Cultural in nature, the quiz is based on themes ranging from the holy city of Banaras to India's literature, culture, fairs and festivals and even its fight for Independence. The whole idea once again is to impart knowledge to participants and attending students in a way that is fun, yet inculcates a sense of pride and belonging.

Former Director Professor Kamal Giri, Professor Maruti Nandan Tiwari, Dr. Chandraneel Sharma and Dr Niraj Pandey have been helming this popular activity. Sometimes, experts from Banaras Hindu University are also invited to conduct the event.

Once again, all participating students go home with Jnana Pravaha Certificates whereas schools and teachers are honoured with mementos.

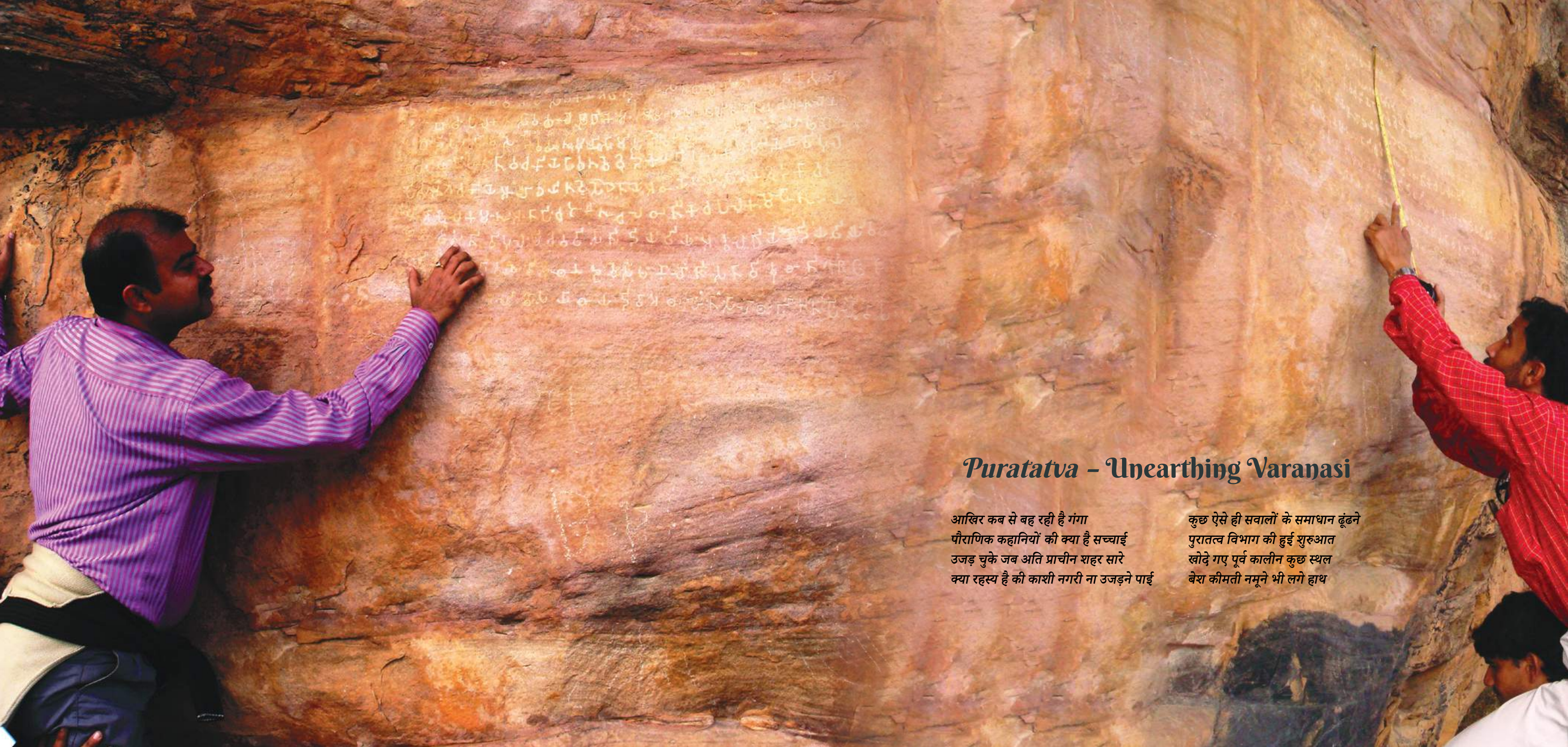
Student interactions and visits

In its bid to share and indeed pass on the cultural heritage of this civilization to the next generation, Jnana Pravaha encourages visits of school and college students to its campus. Over the years, all prominent schools of Banaras have paid multiple visits to Jnana Pravaha in large groups. After an initial welcome and a fairly informal interaction with the senior office bearers of Jnana Pravaha, the students spend time exploring the museum, the atelier as well as the library. In the winter months, they also freely roam around the campus, taking in its sights and sounds. Barring the museum, photography is allowed everywhere else. School students are accompanied by their teachers.



Whilst school groups can be as large as 100-150 students at a time, college groups are relatively smaller. Students from noted colleges such as National School of Drama (NSD) and National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), have been periodically paying a visit. College students pursuing architecture, design, visual arts, languages and social sciences are particularly drawn to the Centre and its many activities. Over the years, Jnana Pravaha has opened its doors to college students from Banaras as well as from Mumbai, Delhi and Ahmedabad.





Puratatva - Unearthing Varanasi

आखिर कब से बह रही है गंगा
पौराणिक कहानियों की क्या है सच्चाई
उजड़ चुके जब अति प्राचीन शहर सारे
क्या रहस्य है की काशी नगरी ना उजड़ने पाई

कुछ ऐसे ही सवालों के समाधान ढूंढने
पुरातत्व विभाग की हुई शुरुआत
खोदे गए पूर्व कालीन कुछ स्थल
बेश कीमती नमूने भी लगे हाथ



Key Questions

What is the antiquity of Banaras?

How old is the city really?

Why did Banaras live that long?

Why did it not die out like other ancient cities?

Was there a pre-Ganga stage in Banaras?

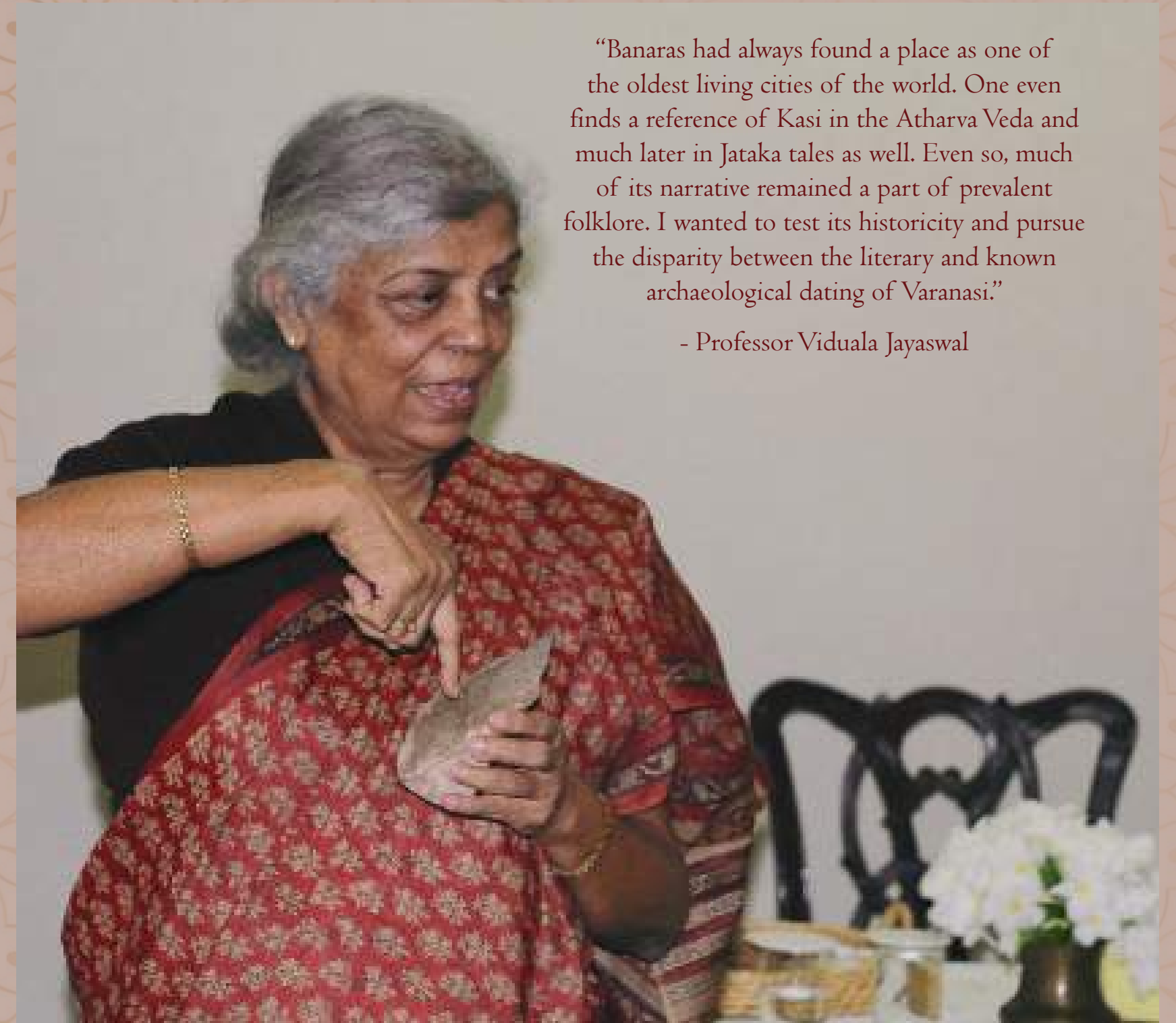
These were some of the key questions plaguing the mind of Professor Vidula Jayaswal when she started her 'digging' in Banaras. She has spent most of her lifetime answering these questions through archaeological findings and has published more than a dozen valuable books and several reports in that quest.

Professor Vidula Jayaswal, who retired from Banaras Hindu University

(BHU) after having taught Pre-historic or Stone Age archaeology, is also a scholar of distinction and repute and has been the Fellow of the R C Sharma Chair, which was eponymously constituted by Jnana Pravaha as a mark of respect and deference to its Former *Acharya*.

Welcoming the Fellow

"The absence of red tapeism coupled with the assurance and respect accorded by both Suresh *ji* and Bimla *ji* made me feel that this was a place, where one would carry out research and work freely. Hence, I accepted the Fellowship. In fact, when I had agreed to come on board, Bimla *ji* very enthusiastically called me and asked, *Kamre ka kaun sa rang karwa dein*, to check if I had any colour preferences, since she was getting my office painted," she recalls with a smile.



"Banaras had always found a place as one of the oldest living cities of the world. One even finds a reference of Kasi in the Atharva Veda and much later in Jataka tales as well. Even so, much of its narrative remained a part of prevalent folklore. I wanted to test its historicity and pursue the disparity between the literary and known archaeological dating of Varanasi."

- Professor Vidula Jayaswal



The excavations

There have been nine key sites that have been excavated in Banaras of which barring Sarnath, Prof. Jayaswal has excavated the other eight.

The eight sites are Ramnagar Shooltankeshwar, Saraswati Udyan, Rajghat, Kotwa, Ashapur, Tilmapur and Akhta.





The key findings

Whilst each site presented its own challenges and opportunities during excavations, in the course of her work, Prof. Jayaswal along with her mentees, students and team, could arrive upon some significant conclusions that have been well documented in her noteworthy reports.

- The findings at Akhta, near Sarnath, were particularly rewarding. The findings suggested that Akhta was one of the earliest rural habitations of Varanasi and the simplicity of articles found, suggested that rishis or learned pilgrims were only halting there for a brief period en route their travel to various places in the Uttarpatha in Northern India.
- Excavations at both Rajghat (with B R Mani) and Akhta helped conclude that Varanasi had always had a shifting settlement with Akhta near the valley of Varuna, away from the Ganga, being the first stage; Rajghat at the confluence of Ganga - Varuna being the second and the expansion of the settlement on the left bank of the Ganges, the one that was more towards the modern Varanasi city, being the third.

- The shifting settlements also helped conclude that Varanasi was not a fortified city behind the walls of which people lived and carried on with their lives. It was in fact a city of various localities and a diverse cultural fabric whose nucleus kept changing and thus it acquired the character of a melting pot. Varanasi was also not a city that bore the stamp of one king or dynasty and hence stayed culturally open. All this and more gave it its longevity whilst other cities of that time have faded into oblivion.

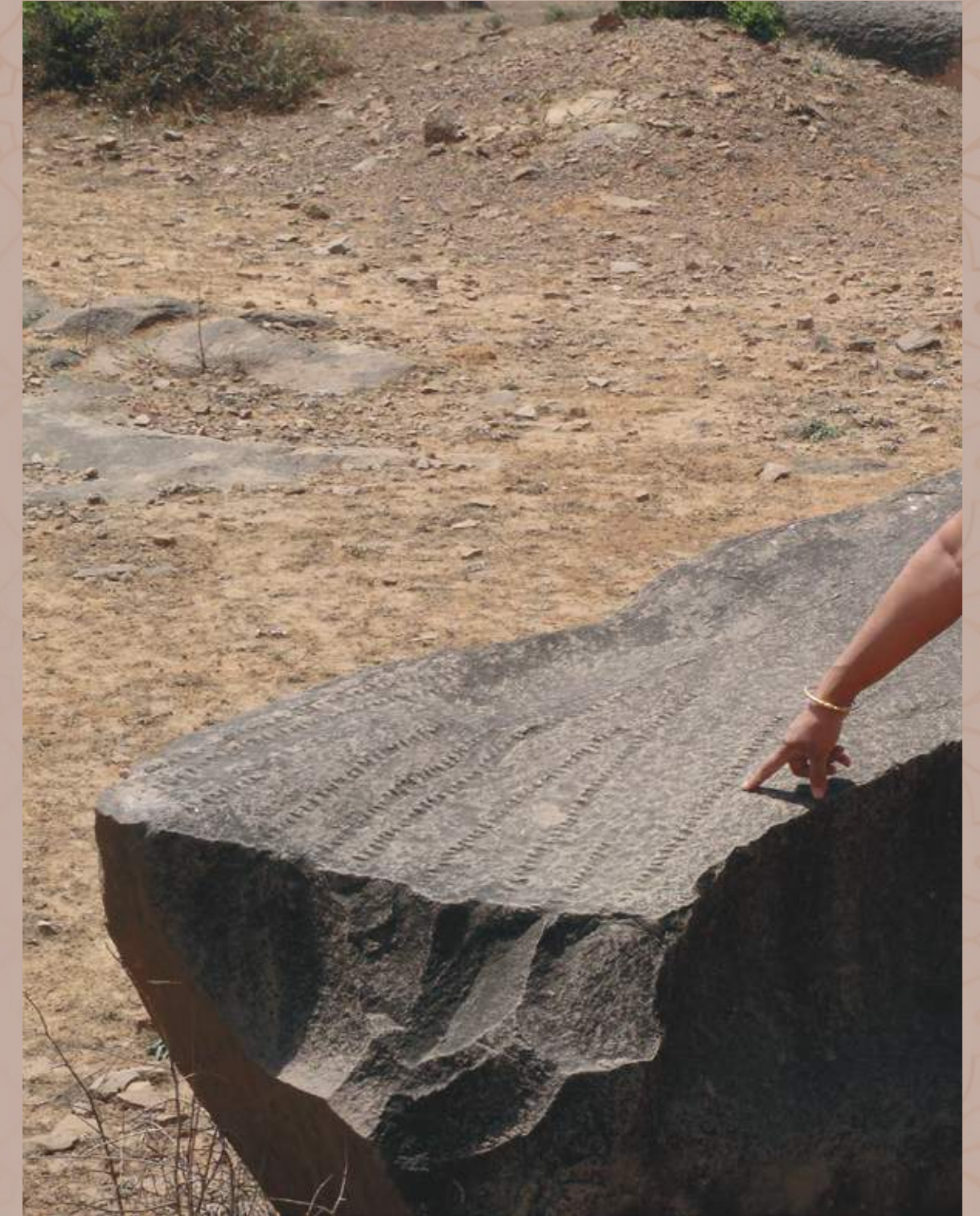
- It was perhaps due to these factors also that Varanasi always attracted scholarly people including someone as enlightened as Buddha who came to Sarnath to deliver his first sermon.

- Excavations at Ramnagar conducted with geologist U K Shukla, helped determine the fact that the river Ganga kept changing its course. In fact, this very important excavation made it possible to ascertain that the Ganga in Varanasi region started flowing in around 40,000BP. So, whilst mythologically, one hears of numerous folklores, the excavations helped establish datelines and timelines, scientifically and archeologically.

An odd finding!

Some years ago, whilst trying to excavate a park in the heart of Banaras, the Jnana Pravaha team faced some resistance from the locals though they had all necessary permissions. The local concern was, once dug up, who would help them re-build the park?

To everybody's amazement, it was soon discovered that the municipality park which needed to be dug up, was once built by none other than Radha Krishna Bimal Kumar (RKBK), the trading arm of the family! Once that fact came to the fore, the locals were assured that there would be no problem in re-building the park and the excavation was carried out smoothly.





**Seminars. Lectures. Workshops. Courses.
Sangoshti. Vyakhyan. Karyasala. Pathyakram.**

अलग अलग रूप में
सीखने सिखाने का प्रयास है यह
बांटने से बढ़ता है ज्ञान
हमारा अटल विश्वास है यह



As a mark of respect to Dr. R C Sharma, its former Acharya, the academic sessions at Jnana Pravaha begin every year on 1st August, as that was the day, he joined the Centre. Once the academic year commences, the Centre swings into action with a spate of multi-dimensional activities that dot the calendar throughout the year.

Seminars

Since 2000, the Institute holds seminars every year that cover a range of topics. The international seminars are held in collaboration with foreign scholars or universities and see noted speakers from both India and abroad.

Some of the prominent international seminars held to date have been:

- Didriksha: An International Congress on Culture, Travel and Tourism, 1999
- Philosophy of Yogavasishtha, 1999
- Buddhism and Gandhara Art, 2001
- Fundamental Questions and issues in Indian Philosophy, 2002
- Interaction Between Brahmanical and Buddhist Art, 2003
- India's Perception Through Chinese travellers, 2004
- Buddhism in Asia - Challenges and Prospects, 2006

- Fauna Imagery in Medieval Indian Sculptural Art (7th to 13th Century CE), 2010
- Benares, Bayly and the making of Indian History, 2015
- Awakening the Light of Dharma: How to Uphold Dharma in the World Today, 2015
- Re-discovering Mata Sita and her Relevance Today, 2019

Some of the prominent national seminars held to date have been:

- Bhagavad Gita, 1997
- The Concept of Myth, 1997
- Samskara (Sacrament), 1998
- Dhvani (Sound), 1999
- Raghuvamsham, 1999
- Ganga - Our Lifeline, 1999

- James Prinsep, 1999
- Pilgrimage and Tourism, 1999
- Studies in Shilpa Texts, 2000
- Jaina Contribution to Varanasi, 2000
- Shaiva Concept in Vayu Purana, 2000
- Pratibha Vimarsha: The Philosophy of Abhinavagupta and Kashmir Shaivism





- Pratibha Vimarsha: The Philosophy of Abhinavagupta and Kashmir Shaivism, 2000
- Chhandogya Upanishad, 2000
- Meghadutam, 2000
- Cultural gleanings from Kurma Purana, 2001
- Vaishnava contribution to Kashi, 2001



- Interaction between Nigama and Agama, 2001
- Ishavasya Upanishad, 2001
- Reflection of Vedas in Sanskrit Literature, 2002
- Cultural glimpses from the Agni Purana, 2002
- Shakta contribution to Kashi, 2002
- Museums and peoples' aspiration, 2002



- Metallurgy in early India, 2002
- Kathopanishad, 2002
- Relevance of Shilpashastra, 2003
- Reflection of Vedas on Hindi Literature, 2003
- Cultural glimpses of Vishnu Purana, 2003
- Fairs and festivals of Kashi, 2003
- Radha, 2003

- Brihadaranyaka-Upanishad, 2003
- Middle Ganga plain through the ages, 2003
- Ganga in Sanskrit Literature, 2003
- Vastuvijnana (Science of Architecture) in Vedas, 2004
- Cultural glimpses in the Matsya Purana, 2004
- Cultural glimpses of Varaha Purana, 2004
- Tulsi's contribution to Kashi, 2005
- Vachika - Shastra Prayoga aur Parampara, 2005
- Cultural glimpses of Vamana Purana, 2006
- Buddhist contribution to Varanasi, 2006
- Celebrating Kashi - The Eternal City, 2007
- All India Veda Sangoshti, 2007
- Cultural glimpses from Brahma Purana, 2007
- Vedantasutra-Bhashya Parampara, 2007
- Fauna imagery in early Indian art, 2008
- Veda Mein Sahitya Saundarya evam Vedangachchanda, 2008

- Cultural glimpses from the Shiva Purana, 2008
- Art & Archaeology of Kashi (Earliest Time to 12th Century CE), 2008
- Vaidika Darshanika Prasthanam evam Vedanta Sutra, 2008
- Vedon mein Adhibhautika Tattva evam Vedanga Jyotisha, 2009
- Cultural glimpses from the Brahmanda Purana, 2009
- Architecture in Kashi, 2009
- Narratives in Indian Art, 2009
- Akhila Bharatiya Veda Sangoshti, 2010
- Gandharvaveda Upaveda evam Sangeetashastra, 2011
- Concept of Natya Veda, 2012
- Metal handicraft of Varanasi, 2012
- Purvaranga: Based on Natyashastra of Bharata Muni, 2012
- Upaveda Sthapatyaveda and concept of Shilpashastra, 2013
- Deva Vighraha Yatras of Kashi, 2013
- Buddhism: Art & Philosophy, 2013
- Yogavasishta, 2014
- Veda-Vidya: All India Seminar on Arthashastra-Upaveda, 2014

- Veda-Vidya: All India Seminar on Vedopanga Dharmashastram, 2015
- Ananda Mimamsa, 2016
- Veda-Vidya: All India Seminar on Upaveda Ayurvedaha Chikitsashastrancha, 2016
- Textile Treasures: Indian Collections, 2017
- Jala-tirtha of Varanasi, 2017
- Significance of Ganga in Indian Culture, 2017
- Studio Varanasi: Water Urbanism, 2018
- Shiva images & Shiva temples in Kashi, 2018
- Kashi Ke Kimkhab evam Jamdani Vastra, 2019
- Veda-Vidya: Nyaya, 2020





Memorial Lectures:

Jnana Pravaha conducts four Memorial Lectures in the names of James Prinsep (since 2006), Prof. R.C.Sharma (since 2007), Prof. V.Venkatachalam and Suresh Neotia (since 2015). These lectures are attended by scholars and students alike.

Whilst Prof. Sharma and Suresh Neotia were pillars and guiding forces for Jnana Pravaha, Prof. Venkatachalam served as the Vice Chancellor of Sampurnanand Sanskrit University, Varanasi, and James Prinsep, who was affectionately called *Banarasi Prinsep*, spent more than ten years in the city and had an invaluable contribution towards the city including modernising its sewerage system.

Some of the key memorial lectures delivered to date have been:

James Prinsep Memorial Lectures

- Cries and Crises as gleaned from Epigraphic Records in India by Dr. Shyamal Kanti Chakravarti, Former Director, Indian Museum, Kolkata in 2006.
- The Indus Valley Civilization and Dholavira by Dr. R.S. Bisht in 2006.

- Tribal coins and Mahabharata by Prof. Devendra Handa in 2007.

- Kashi: History through coins by Dr. Sanjay Garg, Assistant Director, Archives, New Delhi in 2008.

- Contribution of James Prinsep in the Field of Epigraphy Delivered by Prof. G.K. Mane, Amaravati University, in 2009.

- Planning of temples and development of religious institutions at Garh, District Alwar, Rajasthan: By Dr. C. Margabandhu, Former Director, Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi in 2010.

- Indian Historical Archaeology: by Dr. B. R. Mani, Additional Director General, Archaeological Survey of India New Delhi in 2011.

- Religious inspiration and artistic activities as reflected in the Terracotta Art of Buddhist Stupa at Mirpurkhas by Dr. Sabyasachi Mukherjee, Director General, CSMVS, Mumbai, in 2012.

- A Queen's Memorial: The Rani-Ki-Vav at Patan by Dr. Kirit Mankodi, An eminent Indologist in 2013.

- Sir William Jones and the beginning of the Indological Studies in India by Dr. Om Prakash Kejriwal in 2014.

- Varanasi in the light of Copperplates from Kamauli by Dr. V.N. Srivastava, Lucknow, in 2015.

- Prinsep and the Subsequent Rewriting of India's History by Shri Jawhar Sircar, IAS, Former Culture Secretary, in 2016.

- Heritage: A challenge to modernism by Dr. S.S. Biswas, in 2017.

- Stupa and Chaityagriha: Concept and development in Buddhist Art by Prof. A.P. Jamkhedkar, Chairman, ICHR, in 2019.

- Gandharan and related Coinage: The Legacy of James Prinsep by Dr. Shailendra Bhandare, Assistant Keeper, Ashmolean Museum, UK, in 2019.

Prof. R.C. Sharma Memorial Lectures

- Some pioneering scholars of Sculptural Art by Prof. Pramod Chandra, George P. Bickford Professor, Harvard University, USA in 2007.

- Surasundaris in temple architecture and their purpose & emergence of the ultimate in iconography by Prof. G.B. Deglurkar, Chancellor, Deccan University Pune, in 2008.

- Content, Context and Concept: Design and programme in the Art of ancient Indian coins by Dr. Shailendra Bhandare, Assistant Keeper, South Asian Numismatics, Ashmolean Museum & Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford, UK, in 2009.

- A pantheon rediscovered? New research on terracotta, ivories and wooden images from early India by Dr. Naman P. Ahuja, Associate Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, in 2010.

- Musical instruments on early Indian coins by Prof. Samresh Bandyopadhyay, eminent numismatist, Calcutta University, in 2012.

- Masterpieces of Indian bronze sculptures by Dr. T. K. Biswas, Director, Birla Academy of Art & Culture, Kolkata, in 2013.

- The Wall as canvas: Notes on Mughal wall paintings by Dr. Asok Kumar Das, eminent art historian, Shantiniketan, in 2014.

- Recent trends in Rock Art research in India by Prof. V.H. Sonawane, Eminent scholar of Indology, Vadodara, in 2014.





• Do ideas have wings or Did stone travel? The enigma of Mathura sculptures in early historic India by Prof. Himanshu Prabha Ray, New Delhi, in 2015.

• Tracing the lost River Sarasvati in the epic Land of Kurukshetra: by Dr. Rajesh Purohit, Director, Allahabad Museum, Prayagraj, in 2016.

• Colonial archaeologists and the discovery of Indian heritage by Dr. Muhammed K.K., eminent archaeologist, Calicut, in 2017.

• Museums, Collections & Communities - Dr. Sabyasachi Mukherjee, Director, CSMVS, Mumbai, in 2018.

• Origin and development of Indian Knowledge System: by Prof. Vasant Shinde, Vice Chancellor, Deccan College, Pune, in 2019.

• Ramkatha in Indian sculptures by Prof. Kamal Giri, Former Director, Jnana-Pravaha, in 2022.



Suresh Neotia Memorial Lectures

• A matter of detail: Looking closely at Indian Paintings by Prof. B.N.Goswamy, Chandigarh, in 2015.

• Praise, Prestige and Prowess: The image of the King on Gupta gold coins & legacy of Gupta coinage: by

Dr. Shailendra Bhandare, Assistant Keeper, Ashmolean Museum, UK, in 2017.

• Silk for the gods: Weaving in Banaras by Dr. Monisha Ahmed, Mumbai, 2017.

• Shravana-Belagola as a pilgrimage place: by Dr. Saryu V. Doshi, Mumbai, in 2018.

• Mughal Chronicles: Words, images and gaps in between by Prof. Kavita Singh, JNU, in 2019.

• Taste of Faithfulness: Salt production, trade and consumption in early India by Prof. Susmita Basu Majumdar, Kolkata, in 2022.

Prof. V.Venkatachalam Memorial Lectures

• Changing attitude to the Veda and the Vedic literature by Prof. P.K. Mukhopadhyay, Formerly at Jadavpur University, Kolkata in 2013.

• Kashi evam Shri Kashi Vishveshvara Ke Svarupa by Prof. Sudhanshu Shekhar Shastri, Varanasi in 2016.

• Shankarabhashya Pratipadita Adhyasa by Prof. Sudhanshu Shekhar Shastri, Varanasi, in 2018.

• Vedanta Ki drishti mein jagata by Prof. Narendra Nath Pandey, Varanasi, in 2019.

Workshops and Courses

Jnana Pravaha conducts at least two to three workshops by experts in the chosen field that are open to all, every year. The workshops are typically from the realm of Indian Art and are availed by both UG/PG students of visual arts as well as art enthusiasts. In recent years, in-depth workshops have been held on Nathadwara, Madhubani and Pahadi Paintings.

Jnana Pravaha also conducts eight to ten days long, advanced study courses on subjects related to Indian art such as Mughal paintings, terracotta art, bronze art and so on. Each of these courses are conducted by renowned experts via visual lectures and demonstrations and are open to all.



Some of the prominent workshops and courses held to date have been:

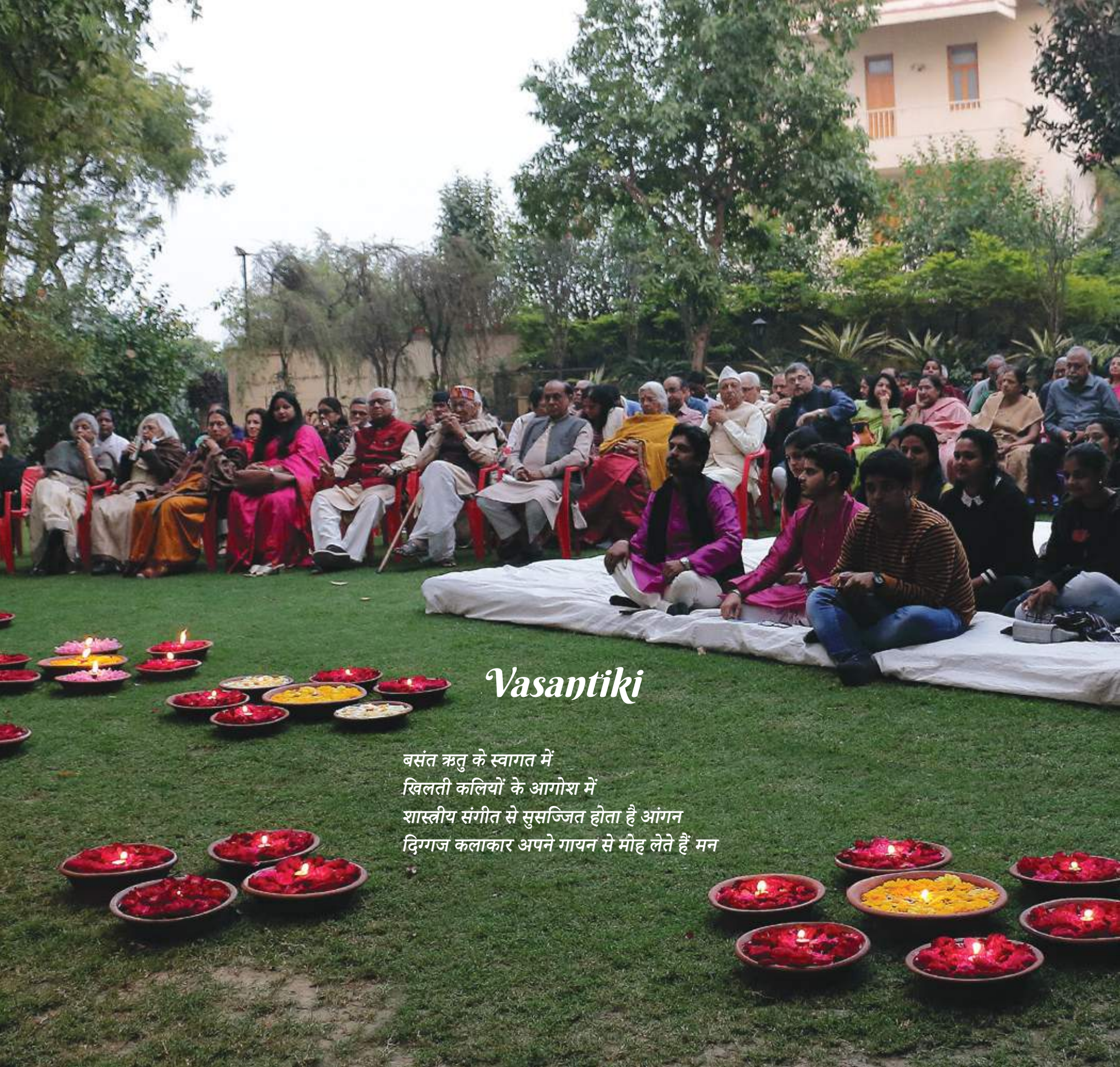
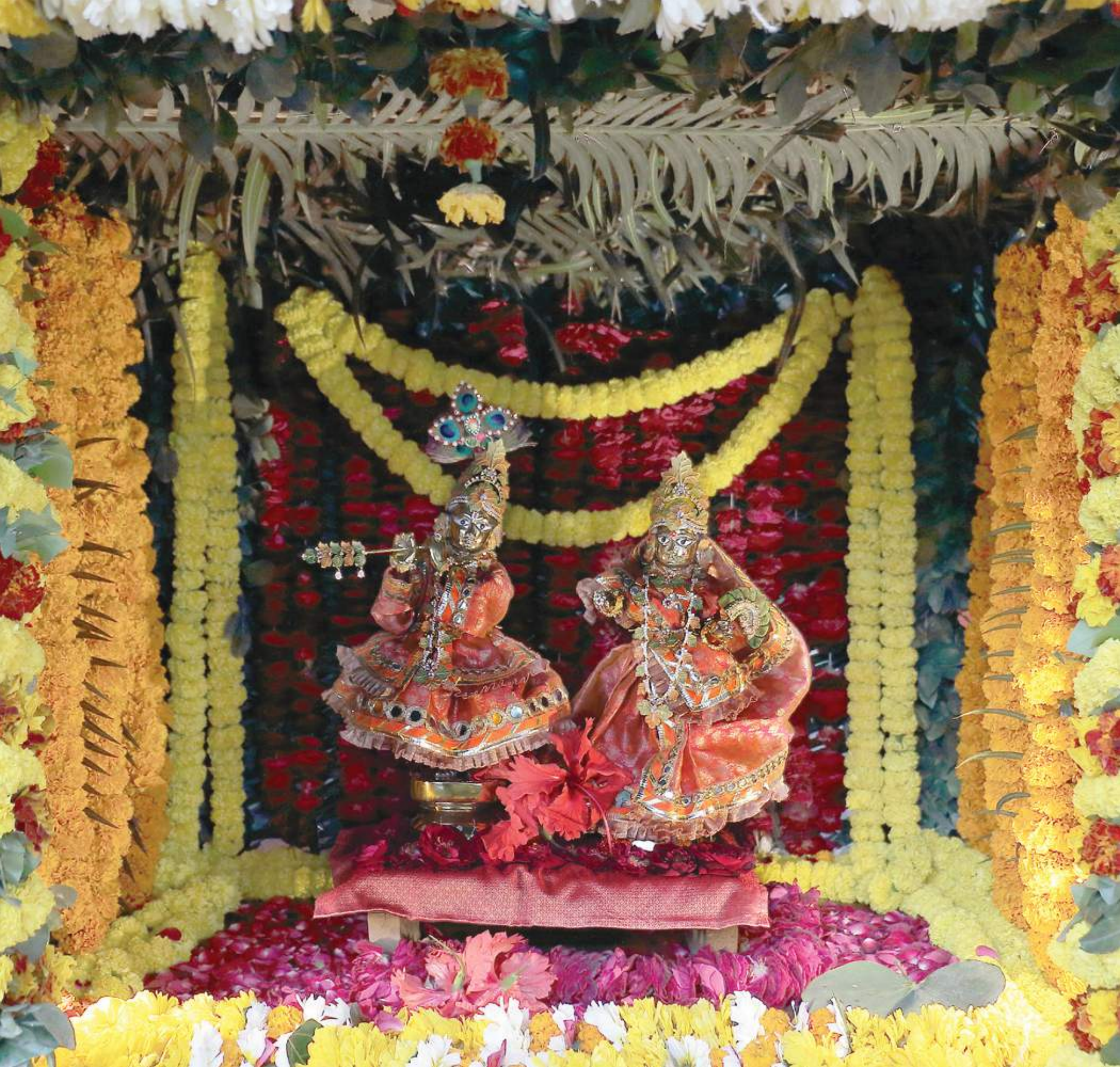
- Early Mughal Paintings
- Mathura Art and Iconography
- Rajasthani Paintings
- Buddhism and Gandhara Art
- Nathadwara Painting & Pigment Making
- Indian Terracottas
- Early Indian Coins
- Sanskrit / Brahmi Scripts





- Western Indian Cave Architecture
- Banaras Woven Silk
- Jain Art
- Prakrit / Sanskrit Language of Early Epigraphs
- Pahari Painting
- Brahmi and Its Derivates
- History of Metal Sculptures
- Indus Valley Civilization
- Kalamkari Painting
- Art of Khajuraho
- Epigraphy & Palaeography
- Mauryan inscriptions
- Kushan Inscriptions
- Gupta Inscriptions
- Indian Stone Age
- Mughal Painting
- Ancient Stone Quarrying & Carving in Chunar-Varanasi
- Buddhist Landscape of Sarnath
- Stone Age - Men, Tools & Cultures
- Kashmir Shaivism
- Early Indian Architecture
- Metal Casting of Chamba
- Conservation & Treatment of Manuscripts
- History of Metal Sculptures





Vasantiki

बसंत ऋतु के स्वागत में
खिलती कलियों के आगोश में
शास्त्रीय संगीत से सुसज्जित होता है आंगन
दिग्गज कलाकार अपने गायन से मोह लेते हैं मन

Heralding Spring

Almost across the country, the onset of Spring or *Basant Ritu* is traditionally heralded by the calling of the *koyal*, the cuckoo bird. At Jnana Pravaha, year after year, highly celebrated artists take the stage to render their song and mark the onset of *Basant Ritu* with a recital aptly titled, Vasantiki.

Generally held on Sunday afternoons, Vasantiki not only marks and celebrates the change of season, but also goes a long way in presenting the rich heritage of Indian classical music and culture. Started in 2008, the first recital was by thumri exponent, Vidushi Savita Devi, daughter of the legendary Siddheshwari Devi of the Banaras Gharana.

Over the years, Vasantiki has been graced by highly eminent artists such

as Smt. Girija Devi, Smt. Shanno Khurana, Smt. Aarti Ankalikar, Smt. Ashwini Bhide, Smt. Manjusha Kulkarni Patil, Smt. Kausiki Desikan, Shri Ulhas Kashalkar, Gundecha *Bandhu*, Shri Uday Bhawalkar, Shri Ritwik Sanyal and many others.

The entire campus comes alive with the scent of fresh roses, the gentle radiance of hundreds of diyas and the profusion of myriad musical expressions in the form of *Dhrupad, Khayal, Thumri, Chaiti, Dadra, Holi, Tappa and more. Ever since its inception, Vasantiki* has been a much-awaited calendar event of the city, bringing together music and culture enthusiasts, students, scholars and many other friends and well-wishers of the Jnana Pravaha family.



Savita Devi



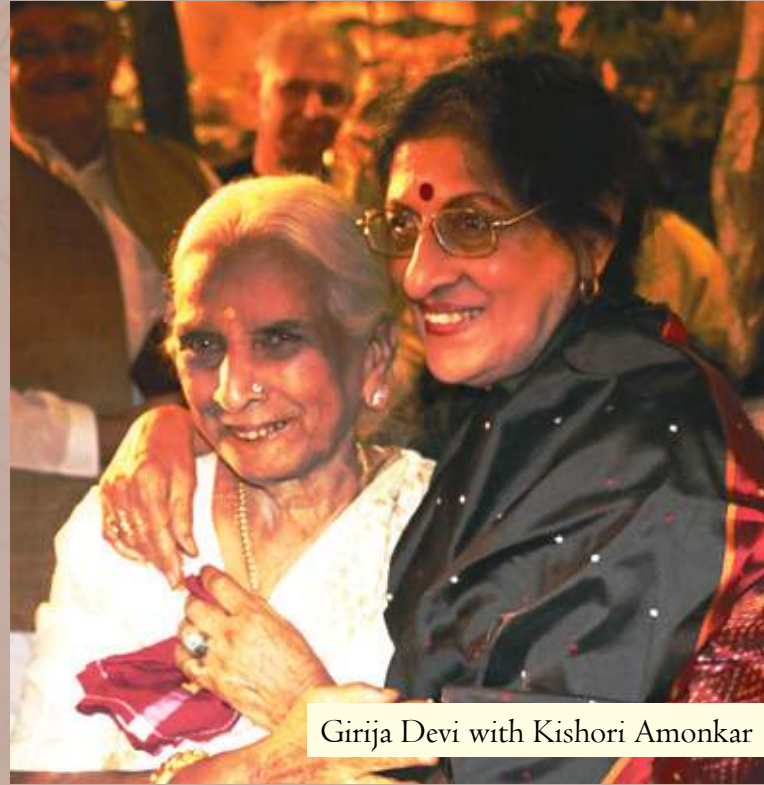
Ulhas Kashalkar



Shanno Khurana



Girija Devi



Girija Devi with Kishori Amonkar



An august audience



Shubhra Guha



Uday Bhawalkar



Shruti Sadolikar



Gundecha bandhu



Kaushiki Chakraborty



Channulal Mishra



Sunanda Sharma



Ritwik Sanyal



Jnana Pravaha Mumbai Chapter

Housed in a heritage building in the charming Fort neighbourhood, the Mumbai Chapter of Jnana Pravaha that commenced in 2007 seeks to facilitate critical thinking in the arts. Through courses, lectures, seminars, conversations and performances, Jnana Pravaha Mumbai offers a platform to engage with works and a window to the current worlds of both theory and practice.

The institute brings scholars at the cutting edge of their fields, from

India and abroad, to teach students and the public and to develop and share new work in conferences and workshops. Jnana Pravaha Mumbai remains committed to offering Mumbai a space for rigorous pedagogy, research, reading, and writing.

The Centre's activities are structured under three programming initiatives: Indian Aesthetics, Criticism & Theory and Community Engagement.



The Mumbai Chapter is guided by its Director, Dr. Rashmi Poddar under whom the centre has presented more than 225 public programs over a range of subjects such as Art history, Aesthetics, Archaeology, Architecture, Anthropology, Literature and Philosophy.

Explains Smriti Morarka, Trustee – Jnana Pravaha, “Intrinsically, the Mumbai Chapter remains kindled by the Centre in Varanasi but has attuned itself to the needs and calling of a metropolis like Mumbai.”

Jnana Pravaha Mumbai - Partners

Deccan Heritage Foundation
South Asia Institute, Columbia University, New York and the Columbia
Global Center, Mumbai
The School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London

Courses offered by Jnana Pravaha Mumbai

Theoretical Foundations
Buddhist Aesthetics
Islamic Aesthetics
Southeast Asian Art & Architecture
South Asian Painting
Indian Aesthetics
Yoga & Tantra
Aesthetics, Criticism & Theory (ACT)



Esteemed visitors over the years *Agantukon ka silsila*

अपनी सुरभी बिखेरने
अपना आशीर्वाद देने
अलग अलग क्षेत्र से
आते रहें हैं आगंतुक अनेक
गणमान्य सभी

सभी एक से बढ़कर एक
हैं कृतज्ञ हम
तहे दिल से देते हैं आभार
चलता रहे यूंही यह सिलसिला
मिलता रहे यूंही आपका प्यार





Shri Narendra Modi during his visit in May 2016

Comments

વિભિન્નતા એ જાતે
 કોયે મિત્રતા
 એના એ સંસ્કૃતિ
 કેવું છે.
 ગાંધીજીની એ
 વિદ્યાલય
 ડો, લોકેશ, દર્શિ
 એકે ગુણને
 ઓગણતરે વધી
 ની શિક્ષ, એકે
 ની શિક્ષ.
 કોઈ એ એકે
 ગોળી એ ગોળી
 એ ગુણ મિત્રતા
 એકે ઉત્તમ
 એકે જીવન એકે
 કેવું. પ્રાણ એ
 એકે ગોળી એકે
 એકે એકે એકે

"The diversity of this place acquaints one with the grandeur of India. The journey of the development of human culture and achievements in life can be estimated and understood through art, literature, etc. At the doorstep of Kashi and in the lap of Ganga, this Institution acts as a perfect ambassador of India. For tourists, this place is just like a training centre.

Greetings!"
 Narendra Modi



Shri Amit Shah,
Hon'ble Home Minister, Govt. of India

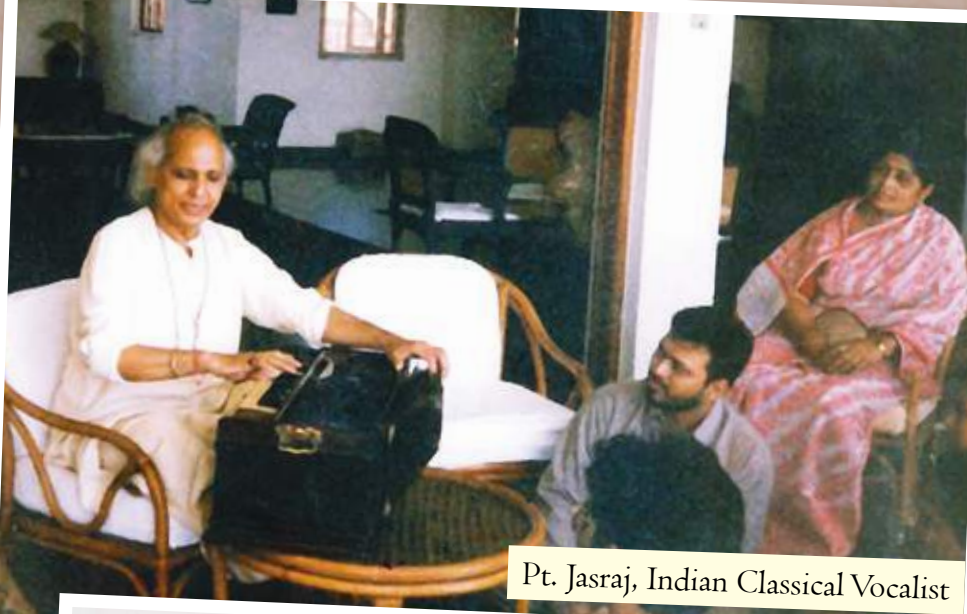


Shri Yogi Adityanath,
Hon'ble Chief Minister, Uttar Pradesh

Shri Arjun Ram Meghwal,
Hon'ble Minister of Culture

Shri Keshav Prasad Maurya,
Deputy Chief Minister, Uttar Pradesh





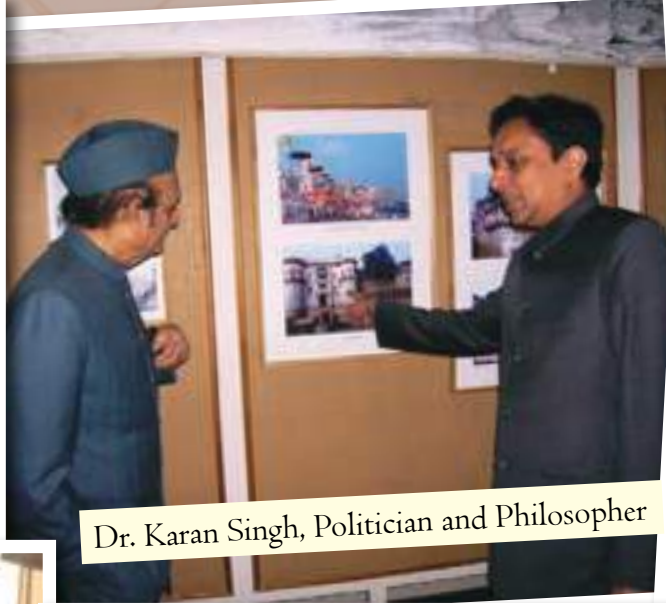
Pt. Jasraj, Indian Classical Vocalist



Jawhar Sircar, IAS



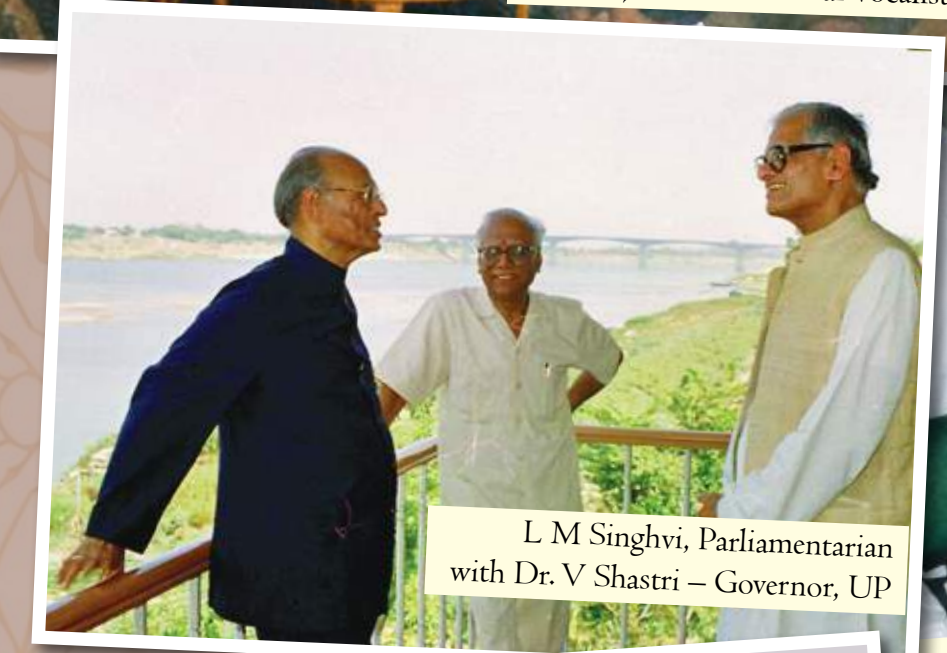
Ashok Vajpei, Hindi poet



Dr. Karan Singh, Politician and Philosopher



Ambassador of Belgium



L M Singhvi, Parliamentarian with Dr. V Shastri – Governor, UP



Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi, Politician



B L Joshi – Governor, Uttar Pradesh



Jayendra Saraswathi, Indian spiritual leader



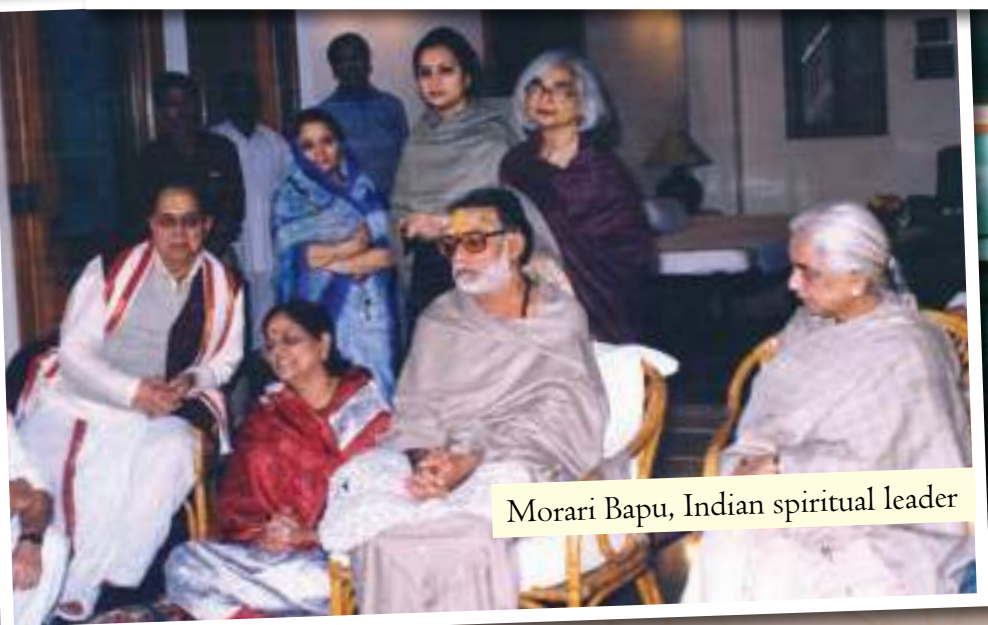
C Rangarajan – Governor, RBI



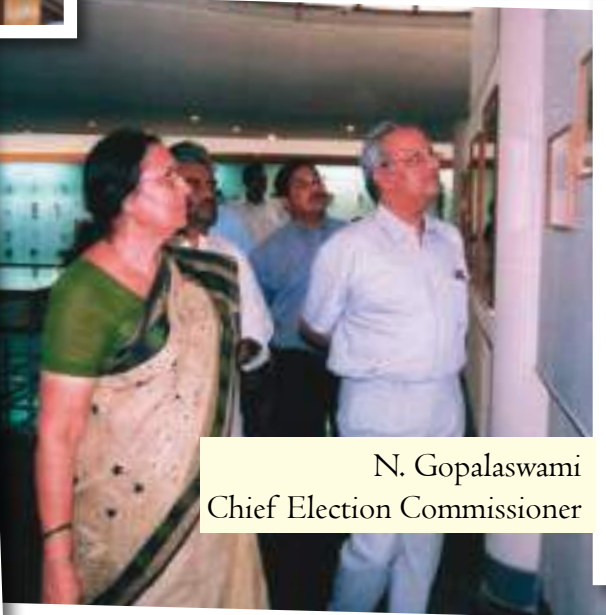
Kelucharan Mohapatra – Indian Classical dancer



Director General, ASI



Morari Babu, Indian spiritual leader



N. Gopalswami Chief Election Commissioner



Shyam Benegal, Film director



Ambassador of Portugal



Himmat Bahadur Singh Baroda Raj Gharana



Baba Ramdev, Yoga guru



Jatin Das, Indian painter



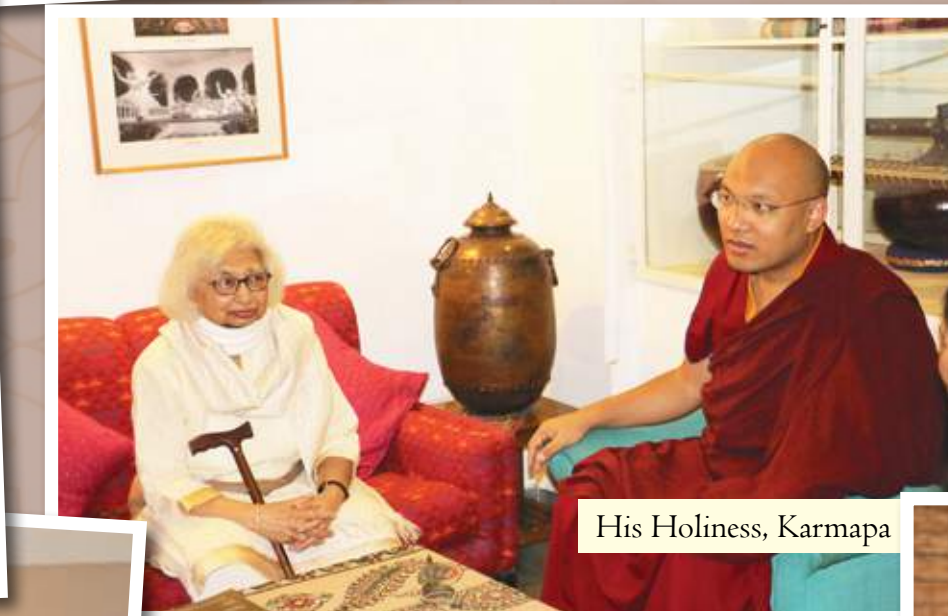
Neil McGregor, Director, British Museum



UNESCO visit



Rakhi Sarkar, Art Collector



His Holiness, Karmapa



Nirmala Birla



Sanjeev Sanyal, Indian economist



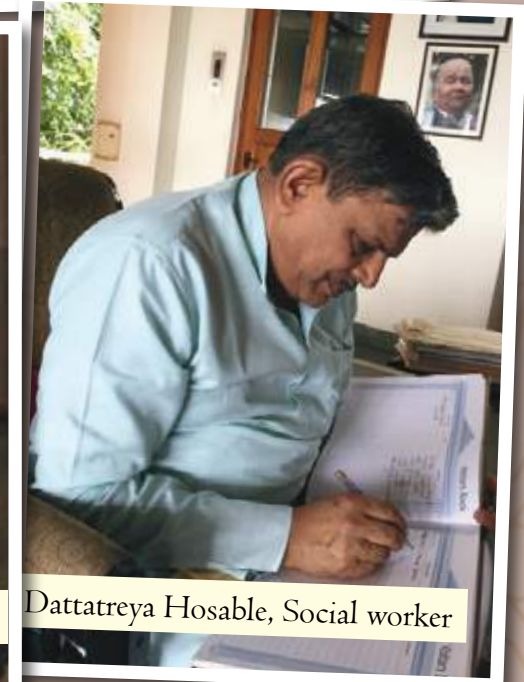
Rudrangshu Mukherjee, Indian historian



Prema Pandurang, Preacher



Ambassador of France



Dattatreya Hosable, Social worker

Comments and Feedback

Name & Address
 2017 'What a visual treat' To see this collection was a privilege! Congratulations to all of you. The Jachhai family Ahmedabad

Jaishree Lalbhai

Jnana Pravaha is a truly inspiring place. About the learning environment. Please you were curious and have you wanting to know more. Dilip

Dilip Da Cuntta

In its typical 'Banaras name', devoid of projections and self-puffery, 'Jnana Pravaha' has kept the light of Banaras Art & Culture burning in its rightful position. - A true epitome of one of the oldest living (continuous) city of the world symbolised in the depths of the unforgettable river, that river Ganga has one to be known for! Congratulations for this splendour and all the best in further such endeavours. Gaurang

Gaurang Rathi

Gyan Pravaha is a great heavenly institution. A great place for pursuit of learning and promotion of Indian Culture and art. It is making a great contribution towards still development and ~~evolution~~ helping artisans. I wish it a grand success in all its promotional activities. B.B. Tondon

B.B. Tondon

Comments and Feedback

Name & Address	Phone	Comments
		for the exceptional reception, both from a scholars point of view and also as a demonstration of friendship. Andre A.C. de laage, Ambassador of Brazil to India

Ambassador of Brazil

What a great collection of artifacts and textiles. It is so required to take care of art objects & craft processes. Gyan Pravaha has done a fantastic work in this field. Totally delightful & well. So lovingly maintained. Kamayani

Kamayani Jalan

Comments
 Thank you for the delightful visit. The collection is outstanding, showing so many different aspects, the textiles, the paintings, collected with a superb eye and taste. Many congratulations. Hugo

Hugo

This is a hidden treasure house of amazing artifacts, scriptures, textiles, musical instrument. Really shocked (pleasantly) to see the collection. Will come back soon. Deepak

Deepak Agrawal

This is an absolutely wonderful effort to preserve the memories and crafts of Indian civilization. I am especially impressed by the scholarship and open-mindedness of the scholars and staff here, who have done some excellent work in collecting material as well as exploring the archaeological sites around Varanasi. Sanjeev

Sanjeev Sanyal

An island of tranquility, Gyan Pravaha, reflects the perdurable quality of Banaras and its civilization. Artifacts, library, museum, have been so painstakingly curated. My very best wishes and warmest greetings. Raghuvendra Singh

Raghuvendra Singh

THE CONTRIBUTION OF JNANA PRAVAH TO THE SCHOLARLY DISCOURSE ON BANARAS & THE REGION IS OUTSTANDING. WE ARE SO PROUD TO PARTNER WITH YOU!! Geeta

Geeta Mehta

A beautiful and impressive centre - I wish more would follow this example and dedicate resources and space to preserve the arts. Puja

Puja Kapoor

Comments
 It was a wonderful experience visiting this new temple of knowledge in ancient Kashi. It will be our pleasure to work together to understand and revive Indian history, culture, art, science, technology and entrepreneurship. Thank you so much. Prof. Parth P. Chakraverty

Prof. Parth P. Chakraverty

We are so blessed by this visit and by the fantastic welcome. It is with infinite pleasure and hospitality that we are introduced to this fantastic collection. Many thanks and all my regards. Pierre-A. Coeur Nolle - France. Ambassador of France

Ambassador of France

IT IS A REAL PLEASURE TO FIND AN INSTITUTION OF GREAT SCHOLARLY INTEGRITY, EXEMPLIFYING THE BEST OF INDIAN LEARNING AND RESISTING WESTERN MODELS OF THE ACADEMY. THIS PLACE OF KNOWLEDGE, UNITED WITH AN EXCELLENT GURU KUNTA IS A LIGHT IN A CITY OF LIGHT. Saunik

Saunik Rishi Das

The effort to create this private museum is indeed very laudable. The building, the space and above all the collection is very impressive. It is a place to reflect and think of the heritage we have inherited and to feel proud of it. The museum is complemented well with a library, activities round the year, and the effort to keep the local art alive. The subtle beauty of being located on the banks of Ganga and the peace of mind it evokes only adds to the richness of experience. I can only suggest and hope for better visibility and communication. Ravi Kant

Ravi Kant

Comments
 शुद्धि शक्ति की इस संतुलित विचारों की शक्ति को देखकर हमें बहुत ही प्रेरणा मिलती है। हमें आशा है कि इस संस्थान को और भी अधिक प्रगति मिलेगी। 24/12/19 Umakant

Umakant Ramakant Gundecha

Comments and Feedback

अत्यन्त प्रभावशाली। प्रभुद्वारा ही इतिहास को रूप देने का काम है। अत्यन्त ही शांति के तट पर। लक्ष्मण राम प्रसाद का यह आश्रम। यहाँ का प्रभाव। प्रभुद्वारा ही इतिहास को अलग रूप का रूप देना। प्रभुद्वारा ही यहाँ शांति है।
 92.8.2001

Dr. Vishnu Kant Shastri

A tranquil, deeply peaceful place which provides a capsule of ancient heritage and spirituality and some idea of the meaning and place of Bharata in consciousness.

Bachi Karkaria

I am overwhelmed by your hospitality and quality of your projects that keep alive the traditions of India. Thank you

Martin Frank

- extremely auspicious habitat. 0054 It has, and, in fact, all the signals of becoming one of the great cultural centres in Bharat, UP, India. BSh

Balkrishna Doshi

The Jnana-Pravaha Institute is a paradise for scholars. I enjoyed my recent visit of this academic truth again very much and wish all of you a bright future.

Prof. Albert J. Gail

Jnana Pravaha is a place where east meets west. I am very much impressed to see the fascinating activities of the institution. Vedic ritual and chanting, art museum, seminar and conferences, artists working on their own works, lessons on epigraphy, all these activities have created a wonderful phenomenon, which is difficult to find anywhere in the world. I highly appreciate Mrs. Bimla Poddar's vision and Prof. Gopi's contribution. G.V.

Gautam Vajracharya

The architecture, the edifice, the surroundings, the reception and the ambience of Jnana Pravaha are truly special and touch one's soul. I have no doubt that it will become a landmark of Bharat in the years to come. And Congratulations to all those associated with Jnana Pravaha.

Prof. P. Ramchandra Rao

Jnana Pravaha has been a perennial source of inspiration to the scholars of South Asia. Its ideal situation on the bank of Ganges, with the strategic arrangement of a library, a museum and proper accommodation, has no parallel in India. I look forward to Jnana Pravaha agreeing to hold collaborative conference in Bangladesh. Jnana Pravaha with its resources and expertise, can surely contribute more effectively in developing the study of ancient and medieval arts in South Asia.

I remember Dr. R.C. Sharma, the guiding light of the Jnana Pravaha in its initial days. His message today owes a lot to the departed savant. My homage to Dr. Sharma.

Jnana Pravaha
 [Enamul Haque]
 07-03-2010

Prof. Enamul Haque

आशा है कि आपका आश्रम ही हमारे भारतीय इतिहास का सच्चा आधार बन सके। यहाँ का प्रभाव ही हमारे इतिहास को अलग रूप का रूप देना। प्रभुद्वारा ही यहाँ शांति है।

Prof. Vishnu Murthy Shastri

warming. A most joyous learning of our culture and Chachji's hard work that makes my heart swell with pride.

Prof. Anuradha Lohia

We have had a most enjoyable and uplifting visit to Jnana Pravaha, which gave us an opportunity to reflect on the history and tremendous cultural heritage of this most ancient of Indian cities. Our thanks to the founders of this institution and all those working with it. It is truly a contribution towards preserving our culture.

Montek Singh Ahluwalia

Comments and Feedback

यहाँ आकर ही हमें सच ही पता चला है कि जगत ही यहाँ का जगत है।
 (An Experience of a life time indeed)

Dr. Radhika Chopra

ज्ञानप्रवाह में प्राचीन भारतीय संस्कृति को गहराई से संरक्षित करने का गम्भीर और शार्थक प्रयास किया जा रहा है। संस्कृत भाषा, भारतीय संस्कृति, इतिहास, तथा भारतीय कला के विविध रूपों के संरक्षण तथा प्रोत्साहन हेतु यहाँ संस्था सर्वोत्तम समर्पित है। यह सब देखकर तथा अनुभव करके मन आह्लाद से भर गया है। अब मैं भारतीय संस्कृति के भविष्य के प्रति कुछ अधिक आशावादी हो गया हूँ।

Prof. Ashok Kumar Kalia

What a fine building with a wonderful view. The art collection is an unexpected bonus. I wish you institution and the work it's doing true very best.

Kiran Nagarkar

It was an unbelievable evening of "GULAB BARI" - Beautiful ambient, lovely weather, perfect hospitality, & the vicinity of the GANGA GHATS - Thank you for a memorable experience!!

Ashwini Bhide Deshpande

Between 2008 and 2014 - our first and the second visit to JP, we could witness both, continuity & change. Continuity of selfless dedication of all concerned to promote the noble ideals of JP under the able stewardship of Binlaji; and change with regard to new additions - addition of artisans, Handicrafts shop and extended display of cultural artifacts - has added new charm to this ever-inviting source of knowledge. Our heartfelt felicitations.

Dr. Sanjay Garg

अत्यन्त महानपूर्ण कार्य का क्षेत्र। अति सुप्रभावपूर्ण।

Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi

Very enjoyable premises; in spite of lack of air conditioning, we could enjoy our stay. The visit to museum is indeed very interesting. The paintings are wonderful and so too the other items. The road to our place is in bad shape; a little help up with District Administration may help. Visit to the Ghat and the temple thereafter is rewarding. I wish I were the Commissioner so that I could have transformed the oldest city in the world to that of a pleasant and healthy city to live. The bearers Ramchander and Yad were really helpful and cordial. Encouraging the artisans is a great help indeed. We wish the Jnana Pravaha the best in Bharat for spreading Indian G.

K.S.R. Murthy

I am very impressed with the museum and the good work being done by the organization. My best wishes to everyone and I want that everyone involved continues this excellent effort. The collection in the museum is excellent.

Dr. Randeep Gulera

I am happy to visit this beautiful temple of art, learning and culture - so fondly nourished by Bhai and his team. May mother Ganga's prasad make Jnana pravaha flow in endlessly with progress.

Prema Pandurang

This was a voyage to Atlantis - designed by the Cosmos. I owe you a big one Bimh.

Rajah Banerjee

Fascinating!

Rakhi Sarkar

I am not a visitor and consider myself a part of Jnana Pravaha. Yet coming to Bharat and going through the various activities of the institute made me realize what Bharat's contribution to the world is, particularly Binlaji's. I call him his name to society. One can only admire him and pray that God may grant him long life and strength to complete all his dreams to make this institution the only one of its kind in the country. The Museum is a treasurehouse of knowledge, art and heritage. Reading it creates only inspiration and gratitude. We must not believe that the roots of our culture, philosophy, and traditions have disappeared. They are so precious and strong that without forsaking them, our economic growth will have no meaning. The entire family Binlaji's right up to his household management is full of dedication, discipline and love. It has been a marvelous experience. Vijay Kichlu

Vijay Kichlu



Awards – *Samman*

सभी के योगदान
का है यह परिणाम
स्वीकारते हैं नतमस्तक
करते हुए अपने धरोहर को
शत शत प्रणाम

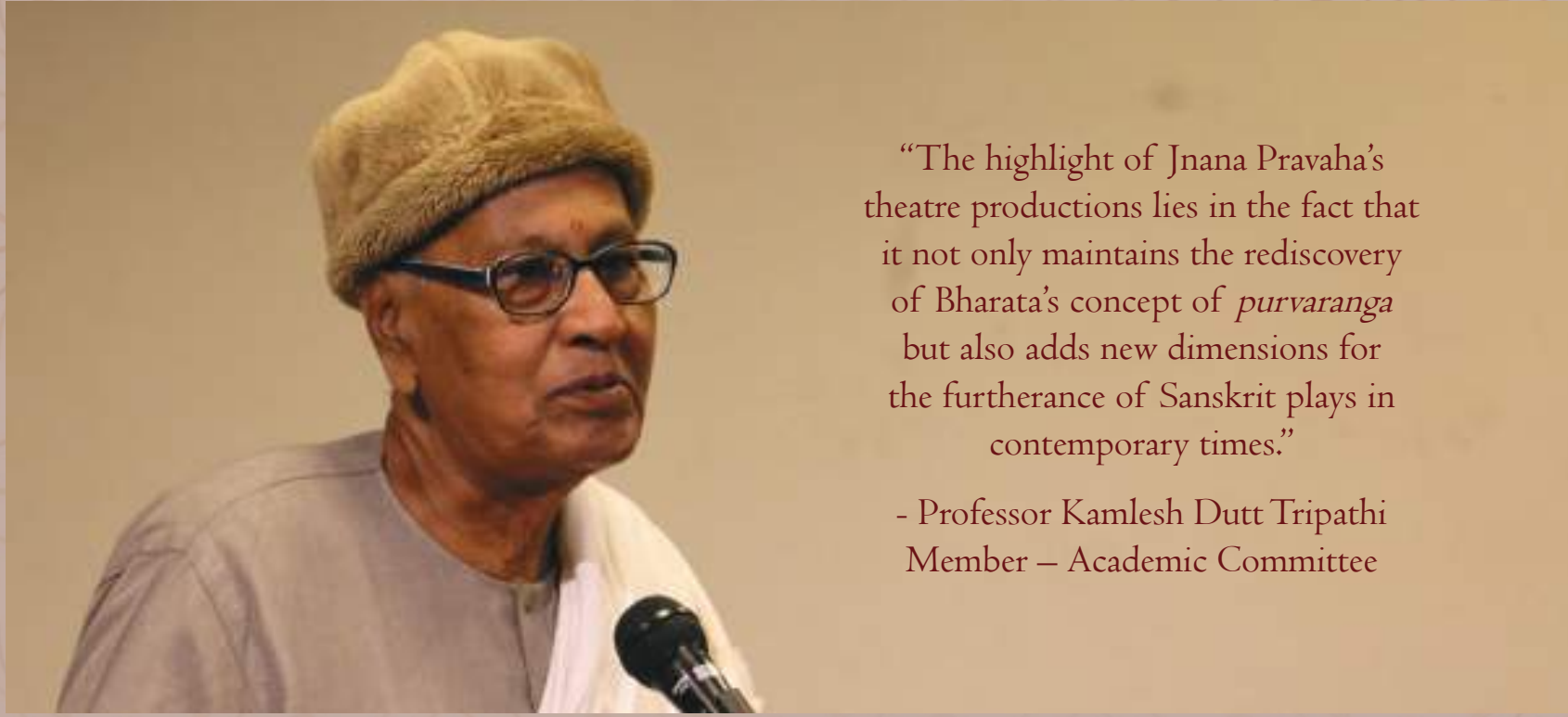


Bimla Poddar, Managing Trustee, Jnana Pravaha, was awarded the **Padma Shri** for her distinguished service by Hon'ble President of India, Dr. Pranab Mukherjee in 2015.

She was also awarded the **Doctor of Letters (D.Litt)** for her efforts towards preserving the cultural heritage of India by Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth, Varanasi. The award was handed over by Smt. Anandiben Patel, Hon'ble Governor, Uttar Pradesh in January 2022.

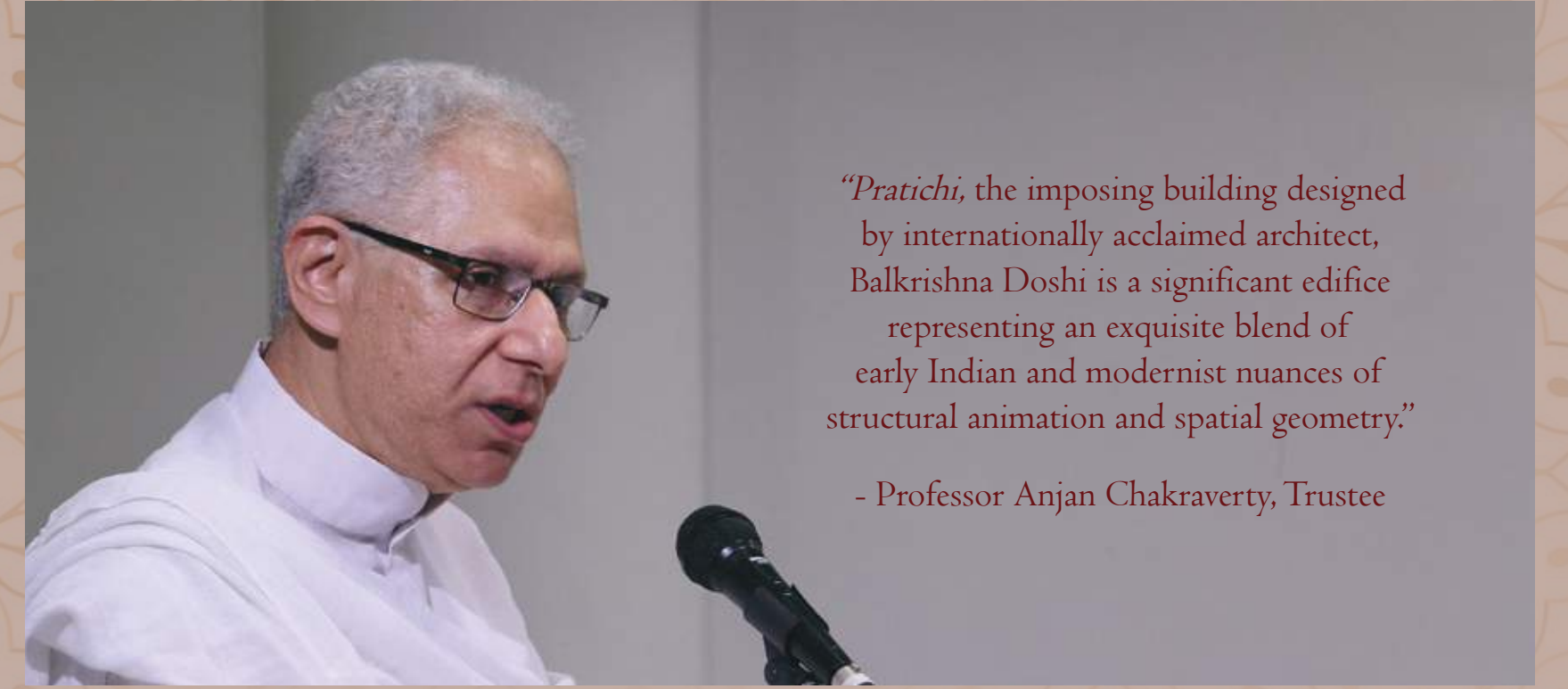
She accepted the award as the blessings of Baba Vishwanath and Maa Ganga.





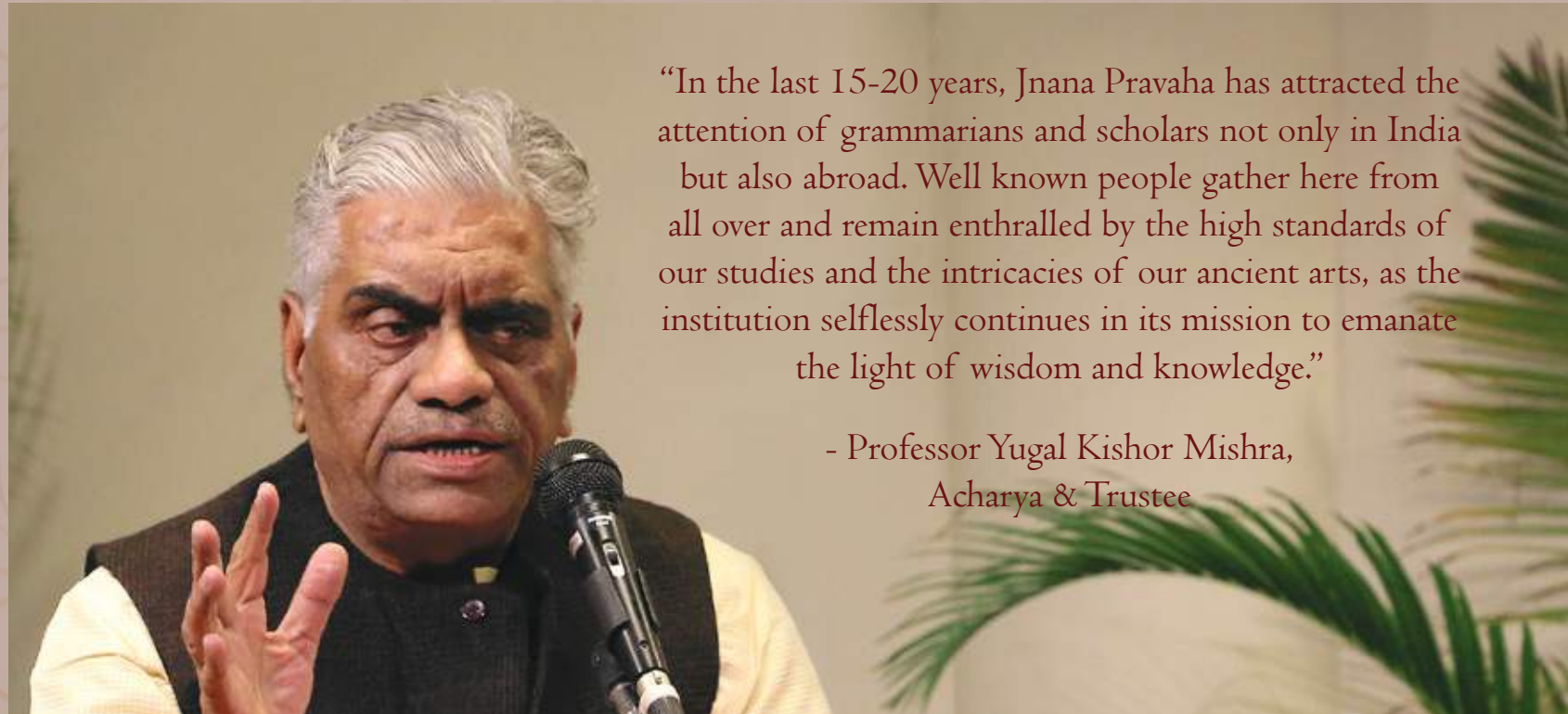
“The highlight of Jnana Pravaha’s theatre productions lies in the fact that it not only maintains the rediscovery of Bharata’s concept of *purvaranga* but also adds new dimensions for the furtherance of Sanskrit plays in contemporary times.”

- Professor Kamlesh Dutt Tripathi
Member – Academic Committee



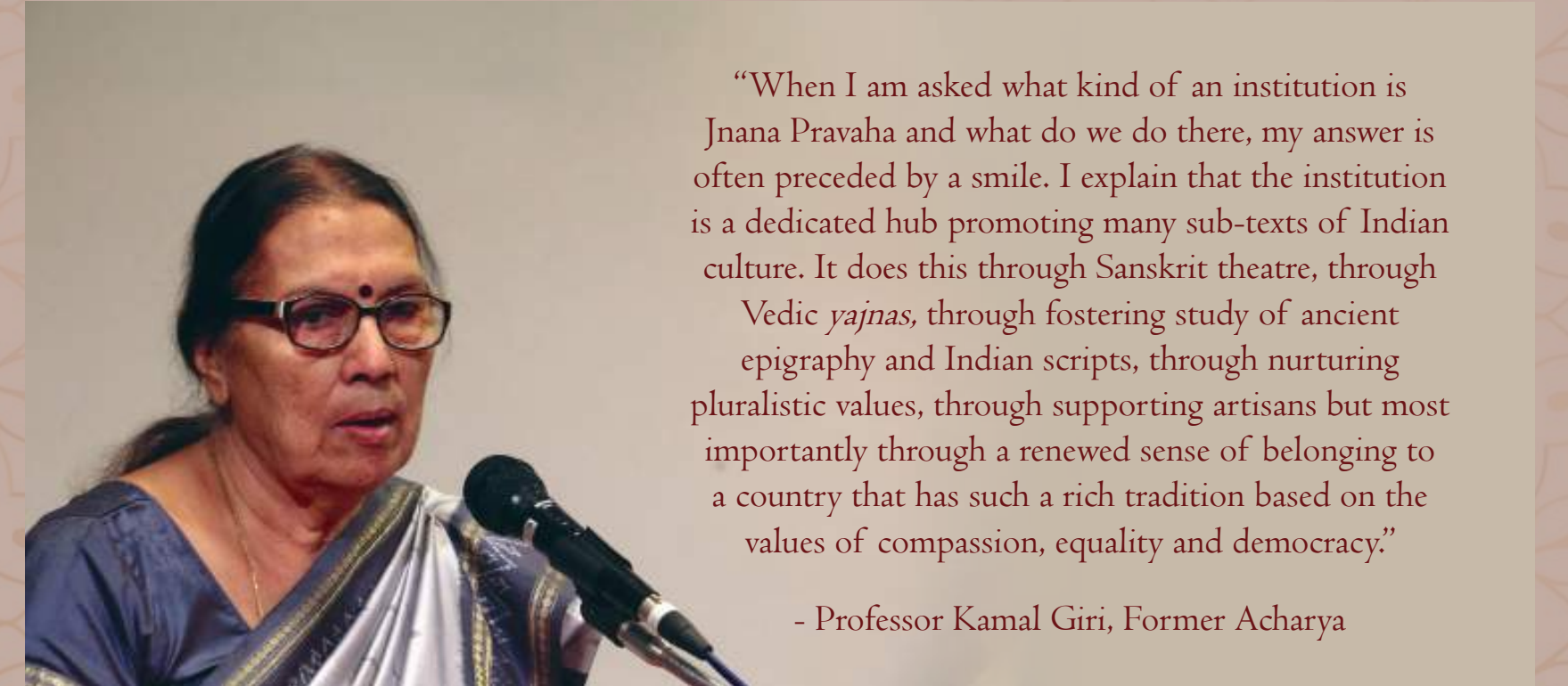
“*Pratichi*, the imposing building designed by internationally acclaimed architect, Balkrishna Doshi is a significant edifice representing an exquisite blend of early Indian and modernist nuances of structural animation and spatial geometry.”

- Professor Anjan Chakraverty, Trustee



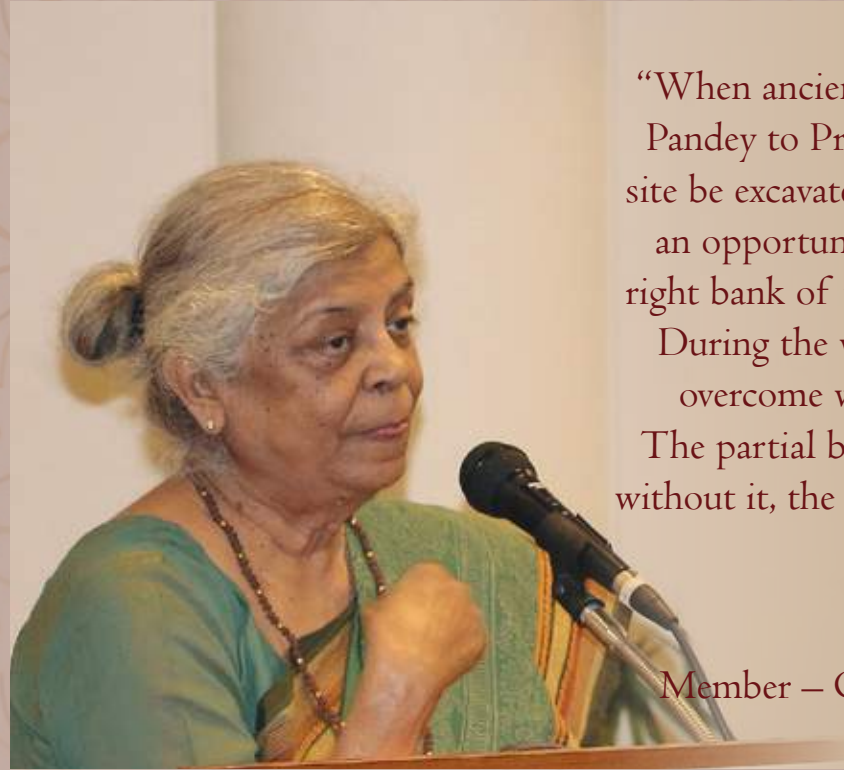
“In the last 15-20 years, Jnana Pravaha has attracted the attention of grammarians and scholars not only in India but also abroad. Well known people gather here from all over and remain enthralled by the high standards of our studies and the intricacies of our ancient arts, as the institution selflessly continues in its mission to emanate the light of wisdom and knowledge.”

- Professor Yugal Kishor Mishra,
Acharya & Trustee



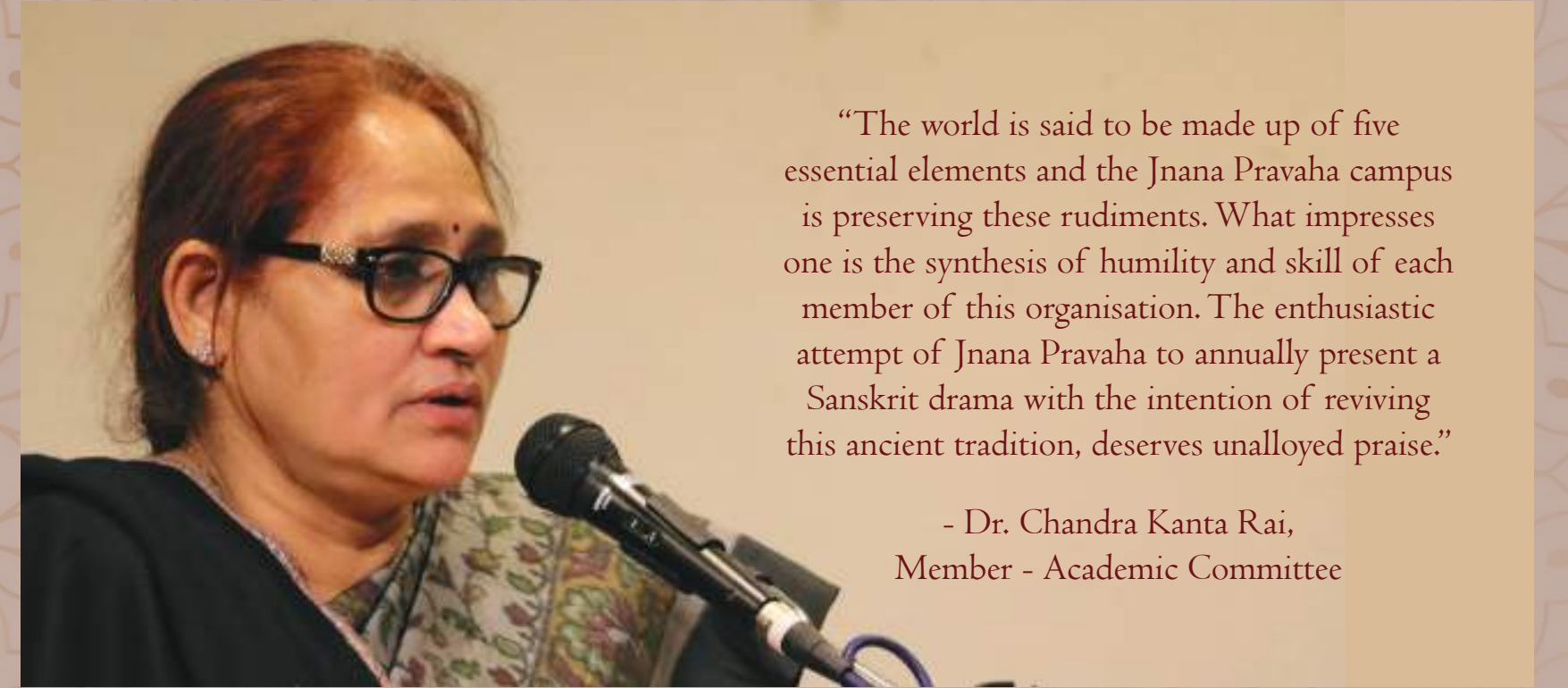
“When I am asked what kind of an institution is Jnana Pravaha and what do we do there, my answer is often preceded by a smile. I explain that the institution is a dedicated hub promoting many sub-texts of Indian culture. It does this through Sanskrit theatre, through Vedic *yajnas*, through fostering study of ancient epigraphy and Indian scripts, through nurturing pluralistic values, through supporting artisans but most importantly through a renewed sense of belonging to a country that has such a rich tradition based on the values of compassion, equality and democracy.”

- Professor Kamal Giri, Former Acharya



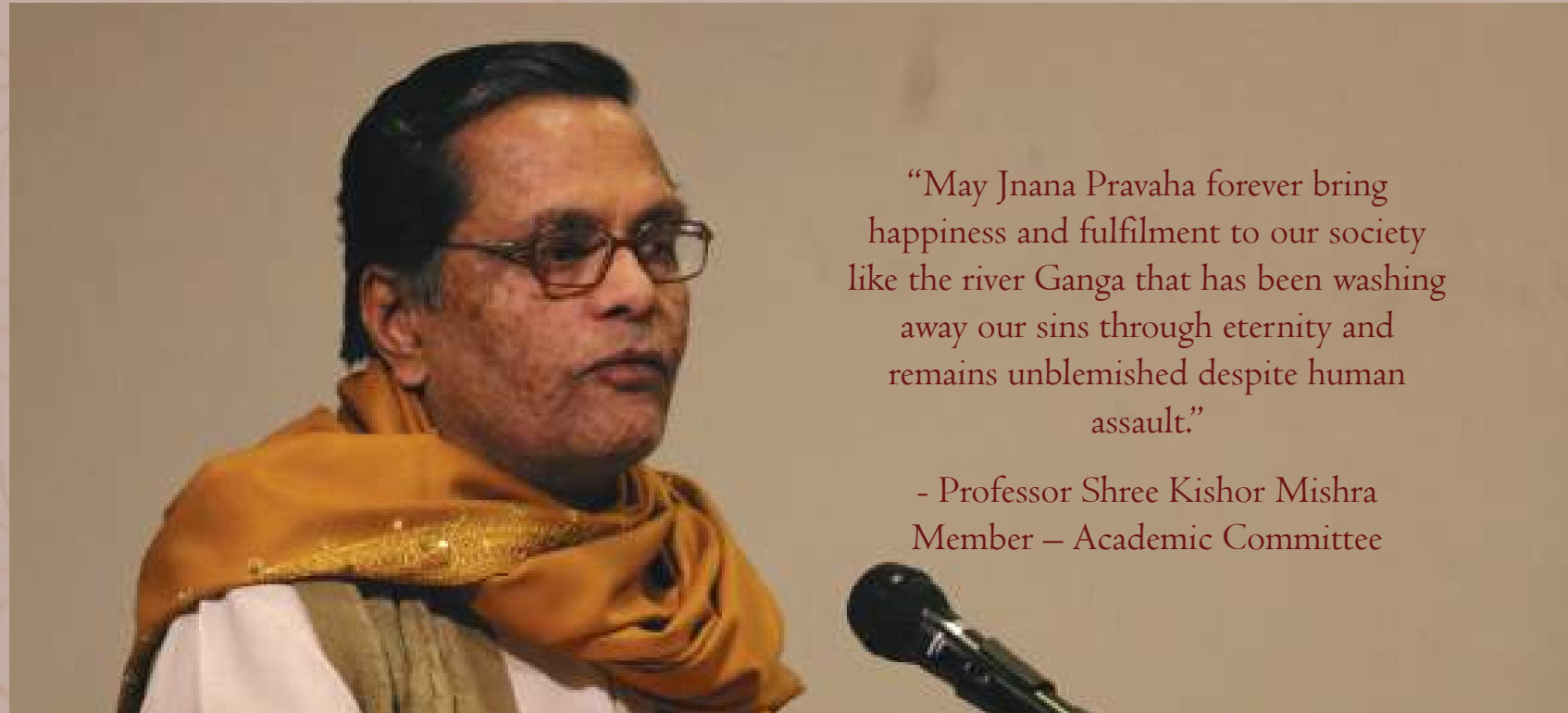
“When ancient deposits at Ramnagar were reported by Dr Niraj Pandey to Professor R C Sharma, he expressed a desire that the site be excavated by Jnana Pravaha under my supervision. This was an opportunity for me to initiate archaeological studies on the right bank of the river Ganga, which so far had escaped the spade. During the work, we faced a fiscal hurdle which was promptly overcome when Bimla *ji* came forward and offered support. The partial burden borne by Jnana Pravaha was indispensable as without it, the matching grant from Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) would not have been obtained.”

- Professor Vidula Jayaswal,
Member – Governing Council & Fellow – R C Sharma Chair



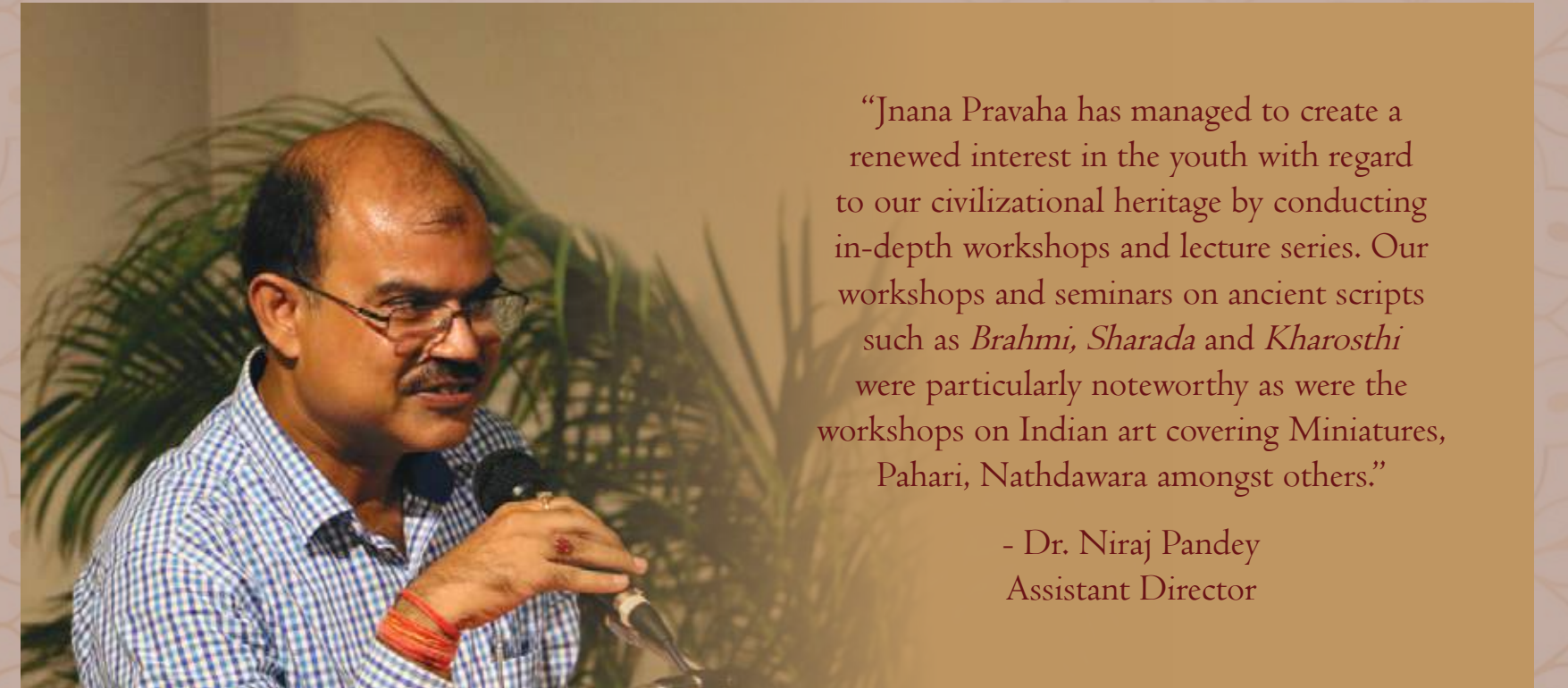
“The world is said to be made up of five essential elements and the Jnana Pravaha campus is preserving these rudiments. What impresses one is the synthesis of humility and skill of each member of this organisation. The enthusiastic attempt of Jnana Pravaha to annually present a Sanskrit drama with the intention of reviving this ancient tradition, deserves unalloyed praise.”

- Dr. Chandra Kanta Rai,
Member - Academic Committee



“May Jnana Pravaha forever bring happiness and fulfilment to our society like the river Ganga that has been washing away our sins through eternity and remains unblemished despite human assault.”

- Professor Shree Kishor Mishra
Member – Academic Committee



“Jnana Pravaha has managed to create a renewed interest in the youth with regard to our civilizational heritage by conducting in-depth workshops and lecture series. Our workshops and seminars on ancient scripts such as *Brahmi*, *Sharada* and *Kharosthi* were particularly noteworthy as were the workshops on Indian art covering Miniatures, Pahari, Nathdawara amongst others.”

- Dr. Niraj Pandey
Assistant Director



Afterword

With gratitude

As Jnana Pravaha marks its 25th year
I'm contemplating
if the tryst may have indeed
begun somewhat earlier
when our home would be buzzing
with the scent of art
with the sound of music
with stalwarts so dear
With Tauji at the helm of affairs
With Badi Ma the ever-dependable peer
I grew up listening
to inspiring discussions
silently participating
in spirited conversations
mingling with connoisseurs
who cast deep impressions
I remember evenings sequined with
philosophy, poetry and art
subconsciously I imbibed ideas
that stuck in my system
that secured a place in my heart
The seed of Jnana Pravaha too
perhaps got sown
in that milieu so rich
With Badi Ma's clarion call of Kashi
the story fell into place stitch by stitch

Deeply inspired as she was
by the legacy of our civilization
Committed as she was to do her bit
for its furtherance, its preservation
Together Tauji and Badi Ma
took baby steps in that direction
Founding Jnana Pravaha
a centre of cultural studies
an institution

Nurtured by passions
by winning collaborations
by the sincerity of purpose
by its core team and their devotion
What was once but a seed,
a mere notion
has received wide spread blessings
acclaim and recognition
Allowing lifelong pursuits
to result in a culmination

So as we mark our silver milestone
my heart stands filled with immense gratitude
A striving born out of an individual's quest
has helped so many of us
stay anchored to our roots

- Harshavardhan Neotia
Chairman Trustee, Jnana Pravaha





Jnana Pravaha, a centre for cultural studies, is mostly frequented by scholars and men of letters; by students and academicians or by those in senior positions of public life. Call it dint of fate or happenstance, but without commanding any of those faculties, I've had a chance to visit, stay and closely experience Jnana Pravaha several times over the past decade or more. I've had a chance to marvel at, observe and assimilate its various facets and closely interact both with its people and its purpose; with its environment and its ethos. *And I have no hesitation in posting that it is indeed a place, an idea and an occurrence that is fairly exceptional.*

There are enough and more achievements that Jnana Pravaha has to its name. In its museum it houses a prized art collection acquired over time; in its atelier it produces craftsmanship that is masterful; in its *pathsala* and *yajnasala* it has kept age old rituals and wisdom alive. The list goes on.

But I daresay that the list, no matter how well enumerated or captured may fall short of capturing the centre's *tour de force*, the centre's hallmark, which to my mind is rooted in the *sookshm*; in its many unquantifiable subtleties and intangibles.

The hallmark that sieves through ideas and aesthetics to adopt only the best; the hallmark that lies in an effective yet sensitive management at the helm and the hallmark that inspires its close-knit team to remain devoted to the pursuance of a larger cause. Perhaps it is the sum total of its many activities and intangibles crowned by the blessings of the eternal city of Kashi, that makes Jnana Pravaha stand stellar at twenty-five.

I am grateful to its guardians and custodians for entrusting me with the telling of its silver jubilee story. As cliched as it sounds, I sincerely hope and pray that this silver turns to gold; that this flow of knowledge, this *pravaha of gyan* continues steadfastly in the years to come.

Supriya Newar

connect@supriyanewar.com

Author's Note

When people think of Banaras as it stands today, they instantly think of its *galis* and *ghats*, of the mighty Ganga that cradles it and the overarch of Mahadev, the God of Gods, Lord Shiva, who guards it. No different from the above, my mind too conjures similar thoughts and images when I think of Kashi.

With one exception.

I also equate my experiences of Kashi and my humble understanding of its pulse with Jnana Pravaha.

Jnana Pravaha Bodies

TRUSTEES

Shri Harshavardhan Neotia: Chairman

Smt. Bimla Poddar: Managing Trustee

Smt. Smriti Morarka: Trustee

Prof. Yugal Kishor Mishra: Trustee

Prof. Anjan Chakraverty: Trustee

Ms. Priyanka Morarka: Trustee

Mr. Parthiv Vikram Neotia: Trustee

Ms. Paroma Neotia: Trustee

GOVERNING COUNCIL

Shri Harshavardhan Neotia: Chairman

Smt. Bimla Poddar: Managing Trustee

Prof. Yugal Kishor Mishra: Hon. Acharya,
Former VC, JRRSU, Jaipur

Prof. G. Ngawang Samten, VC, CIHTS, Sarnath

Prof. Vidula Jayaswal: Fellow, Prof. R.C. Sharma Chair

Prof. Anjan Chakraverty: Trustee

ACADEMIC COMMITTEES

Philosophy, Religion & Literature

Prof. Sudhanshu Shekhar Shastri

Prof. P. K. Mukhopadhyaya

Prof. Ram Pujan Pandey

Dr. Manju Kumari

Prof. G. Ngawang Samten

History, Art & Culture

Prof. Mridula Sinha

Prof. Naman P. Ahuja

Dr. Sunil Vishwakarma

Shri Shashank Narayan Singh

Script, Epigraphy, Numismatics & Archaeology

Dr. B. R. Mani, Former, DG/VC, National
Museum/Institute, New Delhi

Prof. Arvind Kumar Singh

Dr. Shailendra Bhandare, Assistant Keeper,
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK

Prof. Vidula Jayaswal

Performing Arts

Prof. Kamlesh Datta Tripathi

Prof. Ritwik Sanyal

Dr. Chandrakanta Rai

Prof. Shivram Sharma

Smt. Manju Sundaram

Dr. Supriya Shah

Prof. Y. K. Mishra

Samskar & Anushthan Kendra

Prof. Sudhanshu Shekhar Shastri: Chairman

Smt. Bimla Poddar: Member

Prof. Shree Kishor Mishra: Member

Prof. Gopal Prasad Sharma: Member

Prof. Yugal Kishor Mishra: Member/Coordinator

Jnanapravaha, Mumbai (JPM)

Prof. Rashmi Poddar: Hon. Director

Smt. Smriti Morarka: Trustee



JNANA PRAVAHA
Centre for Cultural Studies & Research
South of Sacree Ghat, Varanasi - 221 005 | www.jnanaupanishad.org