

# Bharat's civilisational journey had, for centuries, been a story of cultural exchange: Hon'ble Prime Minister

**Brihattar Bharat to Strengthen Global Cultural Connections through Joint Research and International Collaboration: Union Minister of Culture and Tourism Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat**

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The three-day international conference on 'Bharat's Cultural Connections across the Globe' by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), an autonomous institution under the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, was inaugurated by the Union Minister of Culture and Tourism, Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat. The conference is being held from 14 to 16 October 2026 at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi conveyed his best wishes for the conference through a message, which was read out by Shri Vivek Aggarwal, Secretary, Ministry of Culture. Shri Vivek Aggarwal also delivered the introductory address.



Dr. Sachchidanand Joshi, Member Secretary, IGNCA, delivered the welcome address, while Dr. Arvind Kumar, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Culture, Government of India, proposed the vote of thanks. Prof. Dharm Chand Choubey, Head of the Brihattar Bharat Division at IGNCA, was also present on the occasion. An exhibition titled 'Asia's Shared Cultural Heritage' was organised during the conference. Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Shri Vivek Aggarwal and other distinguished guests visited the exhibition, which showcases the shared heritage and historical cultural connections between India and other Asian countries.

On this occasion, Shri Vivek Aggarwal read out the message of the Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. Extending his best wishes to the Ministry of Culture and the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, the Prime Minister warmly welcomed the scholars, researchers, diplomats and other distinguished participants from India and abroad attending the conference.

In his message, the Prime Minister said that India's civilisational journey had, for centuries, been a story of cultural exchange. Centres of learning such as Nalanda strengthened the exchange of knowledge between India and other parts of Asia, while Buddhist monks, scholars, traders and travellers carried Indian ideas to different parts of the world through land and maritime routes.

He observed that this cultural dialogue continued to flourish, with Indian philosophy, music, dance, literature, cinema and culinary traditions connecting societies across the world with India. The celebration of Indian festivals and traditions in many countries, along with the global spread of yoga, exemplified how India's ancient knowledge traditions continued to connect people across countries and cultures.

The Prime Minister noted that India's cultural heritage was receiving increasing global recognition. He highlighted the significance of the conference in marking the centenary of the Greater India Society, which had played an important role in promoting the study and understanding of India's cultural and intellectual relations with Asia and other parts of the world. He expressed the hope that the deliberations would further strengthen understanding of the historical and cultural ties between India and the world and advance international cultural cooperation.



Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat said that the Brihattar Bharat Conference provides an opportunity to explore how the wisdom of the past can guide our future and how cultural exchanges enable civilisations to share ideas, knowledge and artistic traditions. Marking the centenary of the Greater India Society, established in Calcutta on 14 October 1926, the conference reaffirms the importance of studying India's historical and cultural connections with the world. Brihattar Bharat should be understood not as a political or territorial claim, but as a broad sphere of cultural and historical connections. He reiterated that India's civilisational outlook, expressed through the principle that the entire world is one family, offers a lasting message of mutual respect and shared responsibility. Culture should connect the world, not divide it. Even when political relations become difficult or languages create barriers, cultural exchanges and evidence-based research can foster understanding and sustain dialogue.



He emphasised that the study of India's global cultural connections should develop into a dynamic, evidence-based field grounded in international collaboration. Brihattar Bharat should become a platform where shared heritage inspires joint research, strengthens mutual understanding and builds enduring international partnerships. The conference should not merely commemorate a significant scholarly endeavour, but also mark the beginning of a renewed international movement to study, preserve and exchange the cultural connections that unite humanity.

Shri Vivek Aggarwal highlighted that the Brihattar Bharat Project seeks to bring India's ancient cultural connections with the world to international recognition through collaborative, evidence-based research involving scholars from around 51 countries. Marking the centenary of the Greater India Society, the project aims to explore India's contributions to global knowledge systems, languages, sciences, art and cultural traditions through joint research, seminars and workshops. It also envisages a structured five-year agenda for international academic exchange and seeks to explore multinational nominations of shared intangible cultural heritage to UNESCO's Representative List. Brihattar Bharat is a joint scholarly endeavour to deepen understanding of our shared heritage and strengthen international relations. By fostering academic collaboration and cultural dialogue, the initiative seeks to carry forward a message of peace, unity and shared prosperity, rooted in the timeless Indian principle of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'- the world is one family.

In his welcome address, Dr. Sachchidanand Joshi said that the identity of civilisations is shaped not only by geographical boundaries, but also by the journeys of ideas, the movement of people and the memories they leave behind. Throughout history, merchants crossed mountains and seas, Buddhist monks and pilgrims travelled between sacred sites, scholars exchanged ideas and translated texts, while artisans carried their skills and artistic traditions across regions. These encounters enabled cultures to engage in dialogue, learn from one another and evolve, creating connections that continue to shape the world. The concept of Brihattar Bharat is rooted in this rich history of cultural exchange.

He explained that Brihattar Bharat is an initiative of the ICR Division of the Ministry of Culture, implemented by IGNCA, to identify, document, preserve and make accessible the shared cultural heritage of Indian civilisation and selected countries. The initiative seeks to look beyond geographical and political boundaries to explore the historical connections and cultural exchanges between people across nations.

Prior to the inaugural session, a plenary session was held under the chairmanship of Ambassador Shashank (IFS, Retd.), Former Foreign Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs and Former President of Antar Rashtriya Sahayog Parishad (ARSP). The session featured Diana Mickevičienė, Ambassador of Lithuania to India; Ambassador Jagannath Sami, High Commissioner of Fiji to India; Ms. Lily Pandeya, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Culture; and Shri T.C.A. Raghavan, former diplomat and author, as speakers. Ms. Priyanka Chandra, Director, ICR(International Cultural Relations) Division, Ministry of Culture, moderated the session. Ambassadors and delegates participating in the conference were also present.

The conference seeks to renew the scholarly legacy of the Greater India Society through interdisciplinary research and international collaboration, exploring historical cultural exchanges between India and the world. The deliberations cover ten themes, examining shared traditions in philosophy, religion, languages, arts, textiles, cuisine, performing arts, trade and diaspora communities across regions. Organised under the Brihattar Bharat Scheme (2026–2031), the initiative aims to advance collaborative research, documentation, digitisation and preservation of shared cultural heritage. It also seeks to strengthen international academic partnerships and promote the global dissemination of research on India's cultural connections with the world.

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