

## REPORT

### **Shyam Lal College, University of Delhi, organises International Conference that Explores the Journey of Indian Languages and Folklores from Heritage to Horizon**

An International Conference on the theme “**From Heritage to Horizon: Indian Languages and Folklores**” was successfully organised by the **Department of English and IQAC, Shyam Lal College, University of Delhi**, in collaboration with the **Bharatiya Bhasha Samiti, Ministry of Education, Government of India**, on **02–03 February 2026**. The two-day academic event brought together eminent scholars, academicians, researchers, and paper presenters from India and abroad, creating a vibrant platform for interdisciplinary dialogue on Indian languages, folk traditions, and their contemporary relevance.

The first day of the conference commenced with the **Inaugural Session at 10:00 a.m.** on **02 February 2026**, setting an intellectually stimulating and academically rigorous tone for the proceedings. Following the opening of the session, Prof. Kusha Tiwari, (Director, IQAC, and Teacher-in-Charge, Department of English) delivered the thematic introduction to the conference with great enthusiasm, underlining the relevance and timeliness of the international conference theme “From Heritage to Horizon: Indian Languages and Folklores.” She contextualised the theme in accordance with the vision of Bharatiya Bhasha Samiti, highlighting India’s vast linguistic diversity and its rich vernacular traditions. Prof. Tiwari reflected on the impact of colonialism and the Anglicisation of Indian education, with specific reference to Macaulay’s Minutes on Education, which led to the marginalisation of Bharatiya knowledge systems. She reminded the audience that long before colonial interventions, India had thriving centres of knowledge such as ‘*Gurukuls*’ and ‘*Buddhist monasteries*’ which promoted multilingualism and holistic learning. Citing the 17th-century Telugu text ‘*Rayavachakamu*’ in which she illustrated how multilingual competence was considered essential in ancient India. She then described folklore as a “hidden treasure of knowledge” that has immense cultural and economic value. Prof. Kusha Tiwari went on to address common misconceptions surrounding folklore—such as taunts, tongue twisters, slang, and oral expressions—explaining that these forms serve significant cultural, scientific, and cognitive purposes and play an important role in neurological speech therapy and cognitive development.

Prof. Kusha Tiwari further highlighted how folklore extends beyond theoretical frameworks and contributes meaningfully to skill development in areas such as content writing,

storytelling, and digital marketing, aligning with the Government of India's initiatives to integrate traditional knowledge with contemporary applications. Emphasising the need to understand multilingual societies and plural cultures, she asserted that folklore remains a dynamic and evolving tradition rather than a static relic of the past

Thereafter, the session opened with a warm welcome to the gathering by Prof. Rabi Narayan Kar, (Principal, Shyam Lal College), who extended greetings to eminent scholars, academicians, and international dignitaries who had travelled from across the country and abroad to grace the occasion. In his address, the principal highlighted the significance of Indian languages and folklore as dynamic living traditions, transmitted organically across generations and profoundly embedded within everyday discourse, cultural practices, and the collective memory of society. He highlighted the responsibility of higher education institutions in reclaiming and re-contextualising India's linguistic and folkloric heritage within academic spaces while nurturing multilingual and multicultural sensibilities among students and scholars.

The conference Co-Convener, Dr. Kaushiki Shukla, then invited the Keynote Speaker, Prof. Nandini Sahu, (Vice-Chancellor, Hindi University, West Bengal), a renowned Indian poet and creative writer, to deliver the Keynote Address. Prof. Sahu asserted that folklore is the present need of the hour and emphasised the importance of its scientific and academic study. Highlighting the wit and humour inherent in folklore, she explained that humour studies, folk jokes, gothic studies, and literary criticism can be meaningfully interconnected.

Prof. Nandini Sahu then elaborated on the evolution of folklore from an intra-disciplinary to an interdisciplinary field, asserting that folklore cannot be owned or disowned as it is lived, practised, and experienced in everyday life. She referred to "Bhima Bhoi" as the "Milton of India" and underscored the pivotal role of folklore in nurturing a flexible, inclusive, and discrimination-free mind. She further discussed folklore as a phonocentric and body-centric discipline and how it can open new avenues for research, employment, and academic engagement.

Prof. Nandini Sahu vividly recalled proposing an MA programme in Folklore and Cultural Studies at IGNOU in 2007, which attracted a large number of students and highlighted the inclusion of folklore studies across multiple universities as a testimony to its growing relevance. She also shared her experiences in designing folklore-based courses for postgraduate students at the Hindi University, noting their overwhelming acceptance and relevance. Prof. Sahu discussed folklore in relation to Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), Scheduled Tribes, folk medicine, protest literature, ecological sustainability, and cultural food practices—citing the

example of food traditions at the Jagannath Temple prepared in earthen pots without oil or spices and the fact that it aligns with green cultural studies.

Prof. Nandini Sahu emphasised folklore's peculiar quality of helping individuals become better human beings and advocated for developing a "folk mind"—a flexible, inclusive, environmentally conscious outlook that discourages racism, partiality, and exclusion. She not only addressed the presence of folklore across caste, gender, tribal, classical, and modern traditions, but also the role of digital humanities in preserving all forms of folklore in this age of globalisation. Concluding her address, she encouraged students and young researchers to actively engage in folklore studies through research, documentation, and publication.

Subsequently, Dr. Kaushiki Shukla, Conference Co-Convenor invited the Chief Guest, Prof. K. G. Suresh, (Director, India Habitat Centre), to address the gathering. He offered a profound perspective on the Western understanding of folklore studies. He asserted that while folklore is often viewed as a rural or peripheral concept in the West, in Indian thought, it is better understood as '*Loka*', signifying collective consciousness and the welfare of all. Referring to concepts such as '*Lok Sanskriti*' and '*Lok Sangeet*', he emphasised folklore as a living tradition rooted in unity, emotional continuity, and cultural harmony. He cited examples such as the '*Ramcharitmanas*', viewed as a song of protest that advocates dharma and righteous governance, and the oral tradition of the '*Hanuman Chalisa*', a folk form transmitting ethical values. Prof. Suresh asserted that folk songs are not merely sources of entertainment but vehicles of spiritual enlightenment and cultural transmission. He appreciated the diversity of folk traditions from Kerala to the North-East, emphasised the need for translation to ensure wider dissemination, reiterating that language is not merely a medium of expression but a carrier of traditional knowledge. He also urged for the decolonisation of 'folk' and to regard it as '*Loka*', for everyone to move beyond the rhetoric and to see past the western connotations.

Next, the Guest of Honour, Prof. Balaram Pani, Dean of Colleges, University of Delhi, was invited to deliver the Presidential Address. Prof. Pani, drawing upon his interdisciplinary background in the sciences, eloquently reflected on the transformative power of languages and folklore. He described "Heritage to Horizon" as a pathway to the future and referred to folklore as a means of enhancing clarity of expression and articulation of personal views. Using the term "*Chatur*" as an example of folkloric terminology, he illustrated the beauty, depth, and communicative strength of Indian languages. He emphasised that '*Bharatiya Bhasha*' fosters harmony, unity, and collective understanding, reinforcing social cohesion.

The inaugural session concluded with a formal Vote of Thanks by the Conference Convenor, Dr. Rohit Jahari, who acknowledged the encouragement expressed in print in the Book of Abstracts, through the letters written by Hon'ble Minister of Education, Shri Dharmendra Pradhan, and other eminent personalities including, Chairperson – NCST, Shri Antar Singh Arya, Vice Chancellors of DU, JNU, EFLU-Hyderabad, and Hindi University, West Bengal. He appreciated the efforts of invited speakers who travelled from multiple countries to Shyam Lal College to enrich the deliberations of the conference with their scholarly insights on the topic. He acknowledged the support of **Bharatiya Bhasha Samiti** (Ministry of Education, Government of India), the college administration, and all speakers, participants, and organising committee members for their contributions to the successful organisation of the conference. Prof. Nandini Sahu also presented copies of her authored books to The Principal and other dignitaries present on the dais.

The academic deliberations continued with **Plenary Session I** at **12:00 noon** on the first day, chaired by Dr. Keijo Varis, (Professor of Practice, Turku University of Applied Sciences, Turku, Finland). The session featured insightful addresses by Prof. Prakash Joshi (University of Allahabad), Dr. Tikaram Poudel (Assistant Professor, Kathmandu University, Nepal), and Dr. Wisuttichai Chaiyasit (Assistant Professor, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Chiang Mai Campus, Thailand), who offered comparative and cross-cultural perspectives on language, folklore, pedagogy, and cultural transmission. The speakers highlighted the intersections of oral traditions, literary studies, and education, stressing the need for collaborative international scholarship in the humanities.

Following the plenary session, the conference moved into four concurrent technical sessions, conducted in both online and offline modes, showcasing wide participation from scholars across the globe. Researchers presented papers on diverse themes, to name a few, local narratives, translation studies, folk performances, linguistic diversity, cultural memory, and the pedagogical implications of teaching Indian languages and folk traditions in contemporary classrooms. These technical sessions offered rigorous academic exchange and lively discussions, reflecting the interdisciplinary and international character of this conference.

To illustrate further, the session included various presentations, for instance, one by Dixsha Hasnusa, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Maryam Ajmal Women's College of Science and Technology (Degree), Hojai in Assam, on Dimasa Tales of the Tiger: Dimasa Beliefs, Taboos, and Boundaries, with a brief look towards the Son of the Thundercloud. The presentation explored the symbolic role of the tiger in Dimasa culture, portraying it as a moral agent and protector rather than a predator. Tigers were associated with

omens, with their behaviour—such as scratching, sightings, or bites. Such behaviour is interpreted in their culture in different aspects regarding its significations and offered a different reflection each time. It is a reflection of misfortune or ethical signals, necessitating purification or atonement through ritual practices such as ‘*Dharba*’ (holy grass).

The talk highlighted how Dimasa taboos function as an ethical order, emphasising caution, attentiveness, offering an independent judgment. The community’s historical shift from nature worship to influence was discussed, while noting the persistence of traditional practices and connection to nature. The research employed qualitative interviews with local priests and elders, with a focus on ritual practices and cultural memory, thereby ensuring the documentation and preservation of ancestral knowledge. Additionally, the presentation traced the etymology of the Dimasa people, linking the Brahmaputra River (Di = water, Ma = big, Sa = son) to their cultural identity. Tigers served as powerful understanding of the ethical fabric of the 42 clans within the community.

Furthermore, Dr. Saroj Laldinpuii, Principal of Govt. Aizawl North College, Mizoram, presented on the Humanistic Study of Mizo Folklore, Folktales, and Myths. In her presentation emphasised Mizo folklore as a cornerstone of the community’s history and collective identity. By examining key terminologies and their etymological roots, she demonstrated how language, geography, and anthropology intersect to shape traditional narratives. The session highlighted recurring themes such as war, love, hunting, and music, reflecting the Mizo people’s close relationship with the natural world.

Dr. Saroj Laldinpuii, Assistant Professor, Mizoram University, also discussed the role of oral traditions, noting that songs, often accompanied by instruments like guitars and horns, serve as vital emotional outlets and means of preserving heritage. She underscored that folklore is not merely a historical artefact but an active medium for transmitting cultural values to future generations. The presentation concluded that understanding Mizo folklore is crucial for interpreting the historical and social fabric of the Mizo community.

The second day of the conference, dated **3<sup>rd</sup> February 2026**, commenced with Plenary Session II, where we witnessed an academically rich discussion. The session was conducted physically, but Dr. Amrita Satapathy, Associate Professor in the School of Humanities, Social Sciences & Management at the Indian Institute of Technology Bhubaneswar, joined us online. She profoundly examined the trans-generational movement of myth and folklore, emphasising their semantic plurality and their pivotal role in mediating between nature and human-made constructs. She addressed folklore as an everyday cultural practice and discussed themes of

reconciliation, memory, preservation, and translation, while also engaging with narrative structures such as Monomythical patterns and embedded storytelling; the existence of story within a story. The prevalent relevance of folklore in contemporary culture was vividly illustrated through references to films such as '*Tumbbad*', '*Bulbbul*', and '*Kantara*'.

Our second speaker, Dr. Atrayee Saha, Associate Professor, Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University, traced the academic origins of folklore to the nineteenth century, highlighting its indispensable role in preserving cultural memory and ensuring continuity, especially during the colonial era. She emphasised Rabindranath Tagore's efforts to revive Bengali folk literature against the dominance of European tales, advocating for the documentation of oral traditions from village elders. Furthermore, Dr. Atrayee Saha shed light on the fact that the nineteenth-century folk tales and rhymes, often dismissed as mere children's literature, actually reflected the lived realities of ordinary people, tackling themes of poverty and social injustice. Finally, she discussed '*Patachitra*' as a visual medium for social commentary and concluded that folklore fostered a shared cultural identity in Bengal and for the rest of the Indian civilisation, ultimately nurturing a sense of unity and resistance that contributed to the rise of nationalism.

This was followed by **Plenary Session III** at **11:45 am** that was chaired by Dr. Wisuttichai Chaiyasit, (Assistant Professor at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Chai Mai campus, Thailand). The session featured eminent scholars such as Prof. Ni Ni Hlaing, (former Head of the Department of English, Mandalay University of Distance Education, Myanmar); Prof. Braj Mohan (Department of Education in Languages, NCERT); and Dr. Charu Arya (Assistant Professor at Maharaja Agrasen College, University of Delhi). Due to unforeseen circumstances Prof. S. K. Sharma couldn't join us in this session. The speakers present shared their valuable insights on language education policies, folklore in pedagogy, and the role of cultural narratives in shaping inclusive and holistic educational frameworks.

Utilising '*Lanna murals*' from '*Chiang Mai*' as a case study, Dr. Wisuttichai Chaiyasit illustrated the integration of Indian epic narratives and Buddhist traditions into local artistic forms, and the impact of '*Pali*' and '*Sanskrit*' on regional scripts. He emphasised how the adaptation of Indian literary traditions, such as the '*Ramayana*' becoming the '*Ramakien*', reflects cultural continuity rather than mere imitation. He then concluded by asserting that folklore and language act as living systems that preserve civilizational memory and sustain connections between India and Southeast Asia.

Prof. Nabanita Deka opened the session by framing the discussion around the literary and cultural interconnectedness of South Asia, highlighting the crucial roles of language, folklore, and philosophy.

Prof. Ni Ni Hlaing (Retd.), from Mandalay University of Distance Education, offered a comparative perspective, tracing how the Vedas and Upanishads shaped collective thought. She emphasised the urgent need to preserve the fading folklore through conscious strategies, particularly multilingual education, to address contemporary social issues.

Prof. Braj Mohan, from NCERT, subsequently detailed India's ancient linguistic traditions, citing '*Panini's Ashtadhyayi*' as a foundational text and illustrated the philosophical depth found in the works of '*Kalidasa*' and '*Tulsidas*'.

Lastly, Dr. Charu Arya of Maharaja Agrasen College focused on Indian folk traditions as living expressions of community, with specific reference to the linguistic history of Uttarakhand. She concluded by stressing the importance of documentation and translation in preserving these marginal voices and making them accessible to wider audiences.

After the plenary sessions the conference once again like the previous day was moved into four concurrent technical sessions, held in hybrid mode. These sessions provided an inclusive platform for scholars, young researchers, and students to present their work, fostering meaningful academic engagement and networking across national and international boundaries. Two of these sessions were conducted offline in the Multipurpose Hall and the Board Room, while the other two were held online in Computer Labs 1 and 2.

For instance, the paper presented by Dr. Anshu, Assistant Professor, University of Delhi, on the topic '*From Oral to Aural: Re-appropriating the Ghost Trope in Cinema Adaptation of Folk Narratives*' examined the re-appropriation of folk ghost narratives in Hindi cinema (2000–2025), highlighting gendered representations in horror and horror-comedy genres. The paper emphasised orality and aurality as cinematic devices that hold the power to recover suppressed histories, and also cited the references of '*Paheli*' (2005) and '*Bulbbul*' (2020).

The paper presented by Ms. Aanchal Mishra, Research Scholar, Amity University, on the topic '*Folklores in Contemporary Times: Global Conversations with Indian Folk Traditions and Knowledge System*' positioned folklore as a dynamic epistemic system central to cultural memory, ethics, gendered knowledge, and ecology. Drawing on theorists such as '*Jan Assmann*' and '*Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o*', the paper argued for integrating oral traditions into Indian Knowledge Systems to create a more inclusive and decolonialised framework.

The paper presented by Ms. Aeshvarya Thakur, Architect, Delhi, on the topic of ‘From Valor to Verse: Bardic Folklore and the Emotional Grammar of Rajput Warrior Culture’ analysed the Rajput warrior culture through bardic folklore, presenting oral traditions as both indigenous historiography and emotional archives. The study emphasised “emotional grammar” and highlighted the role of bardic communities and women in shaping ethical and emotional values.

Furthermore, paper presented by Mr. Abhiwak Arya, Student of Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, on the topic of ‘Folklore and Society: Transforming Elementary Education through Indigenous Wisdom’ explored folklore as a pedagogical tool in elementary education, underscoring its contribution to holistic development. The paper advocated for integrating folklore into core pedagogy and teacher training, in alignment with UNESCO guidelines and NEP 2022.

Finally, the **Valedictory Session** began at 4:00 p.m. on **03 February 2026**, marking the formal conclusion of the conference. The Chief Guest of the valedictory session, Prof. N. Nagaraju, (Vice-Chancellor, English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU), Hyderabad), delivered the Valedictory Address, in which he reflected on the significance of sustained academic dialogues on Indian languages and folk traditions. He emphasised the need for continued research, documentation, and pedagogical innovation by scholars to ensure that India’s linguistic and cultural heritage remains vibrant and relevant in the future.

The conference summary was presented by the Convenor, Dr. Rohit Jahari, who highlighted the key themes, discussions, and outcomes of the two-day event. Prof. Kusha Tiwari delivered the welcome address for the valedictory session, and Prof. Rabi Narayan Kar, Principal, addressed the gathering, reiterating the importance of such national and international forums in enriching academic discourse and fostering cultural understanding. The session concluded with a heartfelt Vote of Thanks by Dr. Kaushiki Shukla, Conference Co-Convenor, who expressed gratitude to all dignitaries, speakers, participants, organisers, and volunteers for their valuable contributions.

Overall, the International Conference on “From Heritage to Horizon: Indian Languages and Folklores” emerged as a significant academic initiative, reinforcing the relevance of Indian languages and folk traditions in contemporary scholarship. The conference not only celebrated India’s rich cultural and linguistic diversity but also charted new horizons for research, pedagogy, and cross-cultural collaboration in the humanities.



