



Self-Awareness Is Not Merely Knowledge, but Experience – Dr. Bhagesh Vasudev Jha

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The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), through its Kala Nidhi Division, organised the Dr Kapila Vatsyayan Memorial Lecture titled “Aatmbodh se Vishvabodh” (From Self-Realisation to Universal Awareness) on 29 December 2025 at the Samvet Auditorium, IGNCA.



The memorial lecture was delivered by Dr Bhagesh Vasudev Jha, IAS (Retd.), Chairman, Gujarat Sahitya Academy. The session was chaired by Shri Ram Bahadur Rai, President, IGNCATrust. Dr Sachchidanand Joshi, Member Secretary, IGNCATrust, delivered the welcome address, while Prof. (Dr) Ramesh Chandra Gaur, Dean and Head, Kala Nidhi Division, introduced the programme.



Dr Kapila Vatsyayan, founding Member Secretary of IGNCA, was a distinguished scholar of Indian art, culture, and spiritual thought, and a recipient of the Padma Vibhushan. In her memory, IGNCA organises the Dr Kapila Vatsyavan Memorial Lecture annually.



Prior to the lecture, the exhibition 'Abhiyayakti: Expressions of the Loom from the Vault of a Visionary' was inaugurated at the Darshanam I and II Galleries, IGNCA. Drawn from Dr Kapila Vatsyayan's personal textile collection, the exhibition is curated by Ms Sareekah Agarwal, textile archivist and researcher. The exhibition highlights textiles as carriers of memory, cultural continuity, and lived experience, and will remain open to visitors until 7 January 2026.



Delivering the memorial lecture, Dr Bhagesh Vasudev Jha observed that the contemporary global crisis is fundamentally an identity crisis affecting humanity at large. Referring to thinkers such as Francis Fukuyama, Samuel Huntington, and Shankaracharya, he noted that modern ideologies are time-bound, whereas Indian thought is enduring. Citing global conflicts including the Israel–Hamas war and the Russia–Ukraine conflict, he asserted that questions of identity lie at the root of all conflicts.



He described Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's call for Atmanirbhar Bharat as a modern articulation of Indian self-awareness. In an age dominated by technology, he cautioned that the greatest danger is mental imbalance, the remedy for which lies not in technology alone but in self-awareness.

Referring to the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads, Dr Jha highlighted the declarations “Aham Brahmasmi” and “Tat Tvam Asi” as core principles of Indian consciousness that liberate individuals from ego, fear, and jealousy. He emphasised that self-awareness is not merely knowledge but lived experience. Shankaracharya’s Sadhana Chatushtaya—discernment, detachment, cultivation of virtues, and aspiration for liberation—was described as a systematic path to self-realisation. He further clarified that moksha signifies freedom from fear, ego, and attachment rather than salvation.

Elaborating on the Indian worldview, he noted that death is not seen as an end but as a continuous journey of consciousness, sustained through the Upanishads and living traditions. Emphasising the attitude of the witness, he stated that the ability to observe oneself marks the beginning of self-awareness. Referring to the cosmic form described in the Bhagavad Gita, he observed that Indian world-awareness dissolves the division between self and the other. Describing "Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah" as the foundation of India's worldview, he asserted that India's vision is universally benevolent. He concluded by stating that reverence for rivers, nature, and the Earth as mother reflects India's global vision, and that the journey from self-awareness to world-awareness is India's meaningful contribution to addressing contemporary global challenges.

In his welcome address, Dr Sachchidanand Joshi recalled Dr Kapila Vatsyayan's deep association with IGNC and her abiding trust in the institution. He shared that after assuming office, and under the guidance of Chairperson Shri Ram Bahadur Rai, a direct dialogue was established with her, fostering mutual trust and a continuing tradition of guidance. He noted that this continuity and respect reflect IGNC's cultural ethos.

Referring to the Abhivyakti textile exhibition, Dr Joshi remarked that textiles are not merely material objects but carriers of memory, emotion, and tradition. He observed that Kapila Vatsyayan's textile collection reveals layered narratives and lived experiences, and expressed confidence that the memorial lecture and exhibition would offer audiences a renewed intellectual experience.

Speaking on the occasion, Prof. (Dr) Ramesh Chandra Gaur noted that the Dr Kapila Vatsyayan Memorial Lecture has been organised regularly as part of an ongoing scholarly tradition. He reiterated IGNC's commitment to preserving personal collections of scholars and making them accessible to the public. In this context, he described the Abhivyakti exhibition, accompanied by a catalogue, as an extension of this institutional endeavour.

Emphasising that textiles have been integral to human civilisation, carrying cultural, social, and economic narratives, he observed that India's textile traditions constitute a living archive of its civilisational ethos. He expressed confidence that the memorial lecture and exhibition would open new directions for research, discourse, and cultural dialogue.

'Abhivyakti' is conceived as a tribute, a reflection, and a call to action, celebrating the textile collection of Dr Kapila Vatsyayan. The collection reflects her refined sensibility, deep engagement with India's cultural traditions, and belief in safeguarding heritage. In her physical absence, the collection stands as both a treasure and a responsibility, enabling future generations to connect with a visionary who shaped India's cultural discourse while remaining rooted in tradition and forward-looking.

The event was well attended by scholars, researchers, and cultural enthusiasts.

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