

MAY 2026 ISSUE

# The India Centre

N E W S L E T T E R



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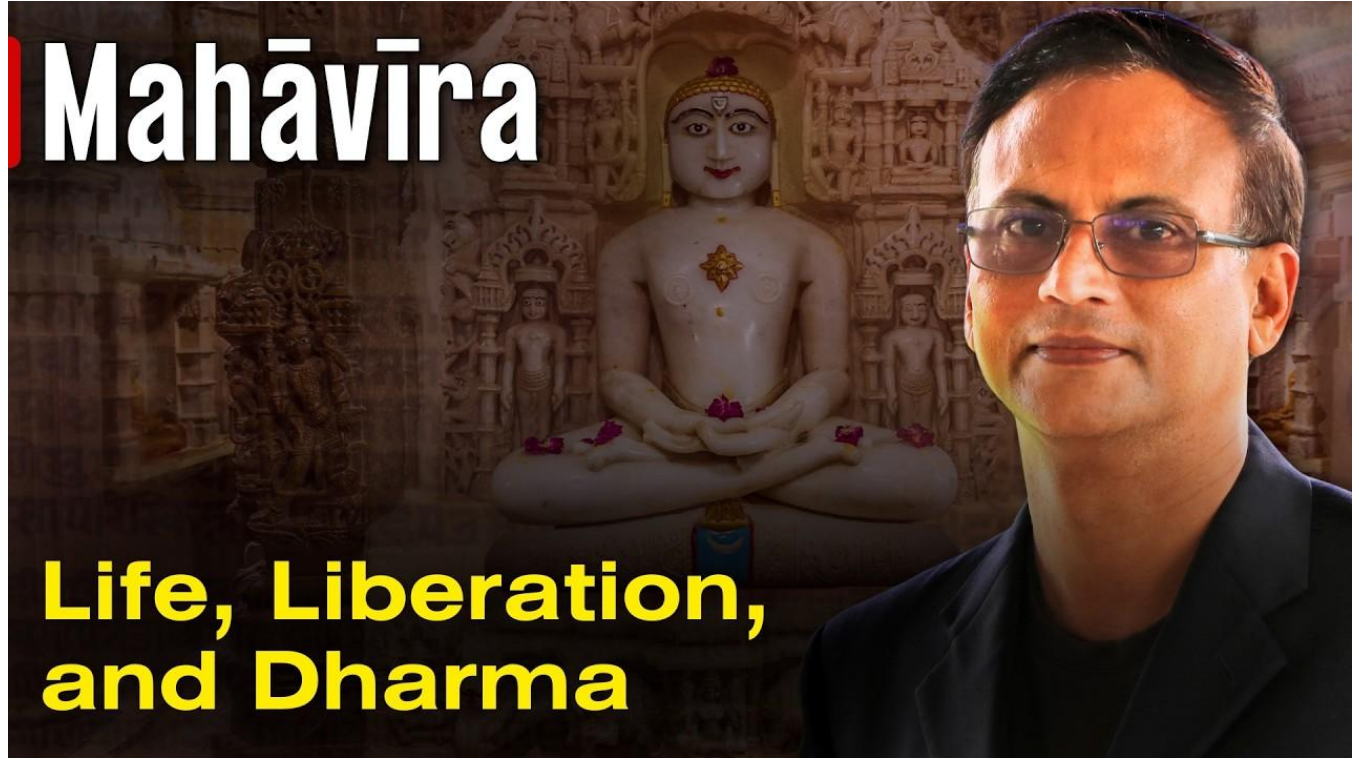
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## THE INDIA CENTRE NEWSLETTER

## Research Highlights



## The Mahāvīra Biography Series (2026)

A Twelve-Part Documentary Series by Prof. Pankaj Jain

## Outreach Summary

Launched in 2026 on the India Centre's Discover India: Bhārat Darśan podcast and YouTube channel, the Mahāvīra Biography Series translates the research undertaken for Prof. Jain's 2025 monograph Jainism: From Bhagwan Mahāvīra to Mahatma Gandhi into a public-facing, research-grounded documentary series. Each episode situates Bhagavān Mahāvīra within the broader civilizational landscape of Dharma traditions while drawing on primary Prakrit and Sanskrit sources and current scholarship in English, Hindi, and Gujarati.

The series is structured around the five Jain kalyāṇakas — conception, birth, renunciation, omniscience, and liberation — and progresses outward to engage Mahāvīra's contemporaries, the Digambara–Śvetāmbara divergence, medieval temple art and patronage, the global Jain diaspora, and the contemporary relevance of Ahimsa and Aparigraha. Episodes released between January and May 2026 include:

- Episode 1 — Conception and the Five Jain Kalyāṇakas: Mapping the Life of a Tīrthaṅkara
- Episode 2 — Renunciation in the Śramaṇa World: Aparigraha as a Civilizational Ethic
- Episode 3–5 — Tapas, Kevala Jñāna, and the Quest for Omniscience
- Episode 6 — Nirvāṇa: Mahāvīra, Jain Deepavali, and the Eternal Soul
- Episode 7 — Karma, Liberation, and the Architecture of Jain Metaphysics
- Episode 8 — Digambara vs Śvetāmbara: The Great Jain Divide Explained [Listen >](#)
- Episode 9 — Jain Temples, Art and Patronage: Dilwara, Ranakpur, Shravanabelagola [Listen >](#)

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- Episode 10 — Jainism Today: Diaspora, Global Influence and the Future of Dharma [Listen >](#)
- Episode 11 — Mahāvīra in Dialogue: Jain Dharma, Buddhism and Vedic Traditions [Listen >](#)
- Episode 12 – Mahāvīra & Gandhi | Nonviolence from Ancient India to the Modern World [Listen >](#)

By bridging classical Indology with contemporary documentary form, the series carries the India Centre's research into Jain virtue ethics and environmental sustainability to a global audience of students, educators, and general viewers. Forthcoming episodes will examine Mahāvīra's enduring influence on Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and modern ecological thought.

**Follow the series:** [YouTube channel](#) · [Apple Podcasts](#) · [Spotify](#).

## Articles in the Times of India

### **Forest, dharma, and the ecological imagination: Lessons from India's epics**

April 7, 2026, 4:00 PM IST (co-authored with Aarushi Raikar and Jaisila Menon)

### **India doesn't need new climate wisdom—It needs to remember Narmada Parikrama**

March 30, 2026, 3:40 PM IST (Co-authored with Ankita Salunke)

### **From Zoroaster to Dharma: Ancient Persian and Indian ethics in an age of war**

March 8, 2026, 8:59 PM IST

### **When NCERT textbooks change, who decides what matters?**

January 31, 2026, 7:37 PM IST

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## Events

### Indian Knowledge Systems Webinar Series — 2026

Through January–May 2026, The India Centre hosted four India Studies webinars under its Indian Knowledge Systems banner, continuing the work begun under the UGC–sponsored Nurturing Future Leadership Programme. The 2026 installments brought together scholars from the University of Vienna, Bilkent University (Ankara), IILM University, and other Indian and international institutions. They engaged audiences across literature, religious studies, music, and the materiality of religious life.

**Full programme and recordings:** [indiacentre.flame.edu.in/events/year-2026](https://indiacentre.flame.edu.in/events/year-2026)

#### Programme Objectives

The 2026 series builds on the Centre's continuing mandate to develop a rigorous, interdisciplinary, and inclusive academic infrastructure for the study of Indian traditions in India. It emphasises four directions of work: literary and philological study of Sanskrit and modern Indian languages; the material and digital life of religious practice; cross-traditional dialogue grounded in Indian conceptual vocabularies; and the analytical study of Hindustani classical music as a living knowledge system.

#### Thematic Panels 2026

- Literary Form and Discipline: Aurobindo, Tagore, and the question of askesis in twentieth-century Indian writing.
- Materiality of Religion: The visual, embodied, and digital lives of mantras in contemporary South Asia.
- Comparative and Interreligious Studies: Rethinking dialogue and plurality from an Indian vantage point.
- Indian Classical Music as Knowledge: Microtonality and Swarup in Hindustani Rāgas.

Each webinar was recorded for The Discover India Podcast and the YouTube channel, ensuring the conversations remain accessible to students and scholars worldwide.

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## TIC Happenings

**WEBINAR: MAY 2026****Hindu Theology and Biology: The Bhāgavata Purāna and Contemporary Theory**

**Speaker:** Dr. Jonathan Edelman, a Fellow of the International Society for Science and Religion (ISSR) and the owner and manager of Scholar Path Consulting.

The webinar examined the relationship between Hindu thought and modern science through the lenses of history, integration, and innovation. Rather than asking whether a classical Hindu text can be reconciled with modern biology in a literal or reductionist sense, the book investigates how a sophisticated theological tradition can engage in constructive dialogue with contemporary scientific thought while preserving its intellectual integrity. By focusing on the Bhāgavata Purāna and its interpretive tradition, the study argues that Hindu theology possesses conceptual resources capable of engaging modern scientific discourse at the levels of metaphysics, epistemology, and philosophical anthropology.

**WEBINAR: APRIL 2026****Negotiating Discipline — Askesis, Poetry, and Desire in Sri Aurobindo and Tagore**

**Speaker:** Dr. Apala Das

Assistant Professor of English, Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey; PhD in English, University of Toronto (2024)

Late-Victorian and modernist writers have been famously preoccupied with ideas of personal and poetic discipline — or the lack thereof. This webinar asked how such notions of askesis are articulated within the global contexts of the twentieth century, taking Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore as case studies. Dr. Das argued that both writers used literary form as a space to reflect on and experiment with askesis as a figure and method. For Aurobindo, blank verse becomes a formal reflection of heterodox ascetic practice and a strategic orientation toward a transhistorical, transcultural vision of future poetry. For Tagore, the figure of the ascetic functions as an aesthetic cipher against which nascent political ideas and imaginaries may be tested. Drawing on Aurobindo's *The Future Poetry* (1917–1920) and Tagore's *The Ghat's Story* (1884), *Rajarshi* (1887), *Achalayatan* (1912), and *Sanyasi* (1917), the talk illuminated the centrality of askesis to global twentieth-century thought on the politics of literary form.

[Watch recording on YouTube >](#)

**WEBINAR: MARCH 2026****Beyond Sound — The Material Lives of Mantras in Contemporary South Asia**

**Speaker:** Dr. Borayin Maitreya Larios

Assistant Professor for Modern South Asian Studies, University of Vienna; Principal Investigator, ERC Synergy Project MANTRAMS

This talk examined how mantras move across media and social worlds in contemporary South Asia, drawing on new research from the ERC Synergy Project MANTRAMS. While mantras are often understood primarily as sonic or textual phenomena, their circulation increasingly depends on visual, material, and digital forms — printed and inscribed objects, devotional paraphernalia, notebooks for *likhita japa*, viral digital images, and new modes of performance and embodiment. Based on recent fieldwork in Varanasi, the talk traced how these diverse

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media transform the meaning, efficacy, and social life of mantras, and how they participate in broader debates about authenticity, authority, and religious practice today. By situating mantras within their multisensory and multimodal ecologies, the lecture highlighted the complex ways in which sound, matter, and memory interact in the everyday religious lives of South Asian communities.

[Watch recording on YouTube >](#)

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**THE INDIA CENTRE NEWSLETTER****WEBINAR: FEBRUARY 2026****Thinking Interreligious Studies from an Indian Vantage Point****Speaker:** Melanie Barbato

Lecturer, RTWH Aachen University, Germany

Interreligious studies is a young and growing academic field that examines interreligious relations and dialogue. This webinar asked what interreligious studies might look like if the Indian experience is centred within the field, not merely as an object of study but as the vantage point from which concepts such as dialogue, research, and inter-religiosity are understood. On the most fundamental level, the speaker observed that, for much of India's history, there was no single concept in use that corresponded directly to the English word 'religion'. At the same time, India has a long history of intergroup encounters and debates, with its own conceptual vocabulary for navigating plurality. The talk offered initial points of reflection on interreligious studies from an Indian perspective, gesturing toward a research programme that does not simply translate Western categories but rebuilds them from Indian conceptual ground.

[Watch recording on YouTube >](#)

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**WEBINAR: JANUARY 2026****The In-Between Notes — Understanding the Subtle Sound of Hindustani Classical Music****Speaker:** Dr. Jatin Mohan

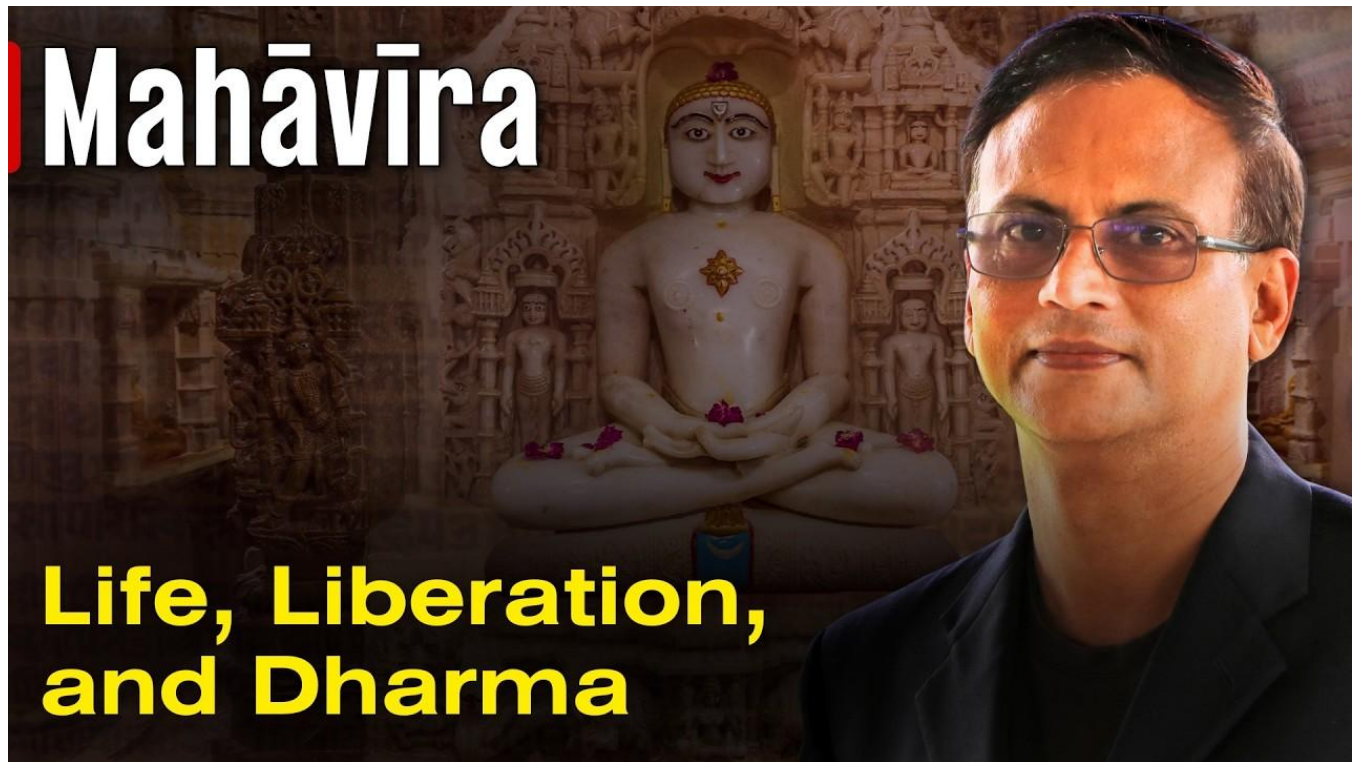
Musicologist, Hindustani classical vocalist, and Fulbright scholar; Assistant Professor, School of Liberal Arts, IILM University, Gurugram

In Western music, microtonality usually refers to minute intervals smaller than a semitone and is often treated as a unique or experimental practice. In Hindustani classical music, however, these subtle pitch movements are not rare but constitutive of common musical expression. Dr. Mohan's talk explored how Hindustani musicians use delicate shifts in notes (swaras) to bring music to life, render phrases expressive, and create a distinct aesthetic atmosphere. Rather than focusing on mathematical pitch ratios, the lecture approached microtonality from the standpoint of performance, keeping the practice of rāgas at the centre. Drawing on examples from Yaman, Bhairav, Multani, Miyan-ki-Todi, and Marwa, he showed how minor variations, ornamentations, and melodic curves help define a rāga's personality — its swarup — and why these 'in-between notes' are essential rather than ornamental: alter them and the rāga loses its identity or transforms into another rāga altogether. Dr. Mohan's doctoral research examined the conflict between the conceptualization and practical applicability of intonation in Hindustani and Western classical music, drawing on scale theory, ethnomusicology, and music history.

[Watch recording on YouTube >](#)

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## Podcasts by Prof. Pankaj Jain

[The Mahāvīra Biography Series](#)

The flagship 2026 production of the India Centre's Discover India: Bhārat Darśan podcast is the Mahāvīra Biography Series — a twelve-episode documentary that translates Prof. Jain's 2025 monograph Jainism: From Bhagwan Mahavira to Mahatma Gandhi into a public-facing, research-grounded narrative. Episodes are released across audio platforms (Spotify, Apple Podcasts) and on the YouTube channel @ProfPankajJain, accompanied by short-form video adaptations. Released between January and May 2026, Episodes 1 through 11 trace Mahāvīra's life from conception, birth, and renunciation through twelve years of tapas culminating in kevala jñāna, his nirvāṇa, the architecture of Jain karma theory, the Digambara–Śvetāmbara divergence, medieval temple art and patronage at Dilwara, Ranakpur, and Shravanabelagola, the global Jain diaspora, and Mahāvīra's intellectual exchange with Buddhism and Vedic traditions.

Designed for students, educators, and general listeners, the series situates Mahāvīra's teachings within the wider civilizational ethos of Dharma while remaining attentive to philological detail. It approaches Jain Dharma not as a sealed religious system but as a living tradition in dialogue with its contemporaries — and one whose principles of Ahimsa and Aparigraha continue to speak to questions of climate, consumption, and care.

[Bhagavad Gītā Explained — Weekly Series](#)

The weekly Bhagavad Gītā Explained series, presented every Sunday on YouTube and audio platforms, continued through the first half of 2026 with verse-by-verse philological and philosophical commentary. Episodes released during this period progressed through Chapters 15-18.

[Indology Shorts \(Wednesdays\)](#)

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The Wednesday short-form release schedule continued through January–May 2026 with concise, single-topic videos written for non-specialist audiences. Selected shorts released in this window include:

- Earth Day 2026 — Why Deep Ecology Isn't Enough: A Case for Dharmic Ecology [Listen >](#)
- Frankenstein and Bhasmasura — The Same Warning from Two Civilizations [Listen >](#)
- Why Is There a Shiva Statue at CERN? The Cosmic Dance and Particle Physics [Listen >](#)
- Discover Dhruva Chatterjee — The Bengal-born Screenwriter behind Woh Kaun Thi, Bees Saal Baad, and Gumnaam [Listen >](#)
- Tilak's Gita Rahasya — Karma-Yoga as a Spiritual Call for Freedom
- Gandhi's Hind Swaraj — Self-Rule, Simplicity, and the Critique of Modernity
- Gau Pūjā — Motherhood, Ahimsā, and Ecological Responsibility
- The Discovery of India Revisited — Nehru's Civilizational Lens
- Introduction to Jainism on SWAYAM — UGC Course Launch Notice
- Asian Religions on SWAYAM — Course Promotion (India, China, Japan)

### Subscribe & follow:

- YouTube — [youtube.com/@ProfPankajJain](https://youtube.com/@ProfPankajJain)
- Apple Podcasts — [The Discover India Podcast: Bhārat Darśan](#)
- Spotify — [open.spotify.com/show/5jSL5qrjKmgYHQhMGLUdJ2](https://open.spotify.com/show/5jSL5qrjKmgYHQhMGLUdJ2)

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# Publications

## Recent Articles

- Tiwari, Gyanendra, and Pankaj Jain. "The Ecodharmic Significance and Liminal Experience of the Kumbh Mela," *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology*, Vol. 29, Issue 3, pp. 223–240. Published online 15 December 2025. [DOI: 10.1163/15685357-02903003](https://doi.org/10.1163/15685357-02903003) ›
- Sharma, Shikha, and Pankaj Jain. "Trishagni (1988): A Review Based on the Jewel Net of Indra, the Buddhist Notion for Environmental Sustainability," *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology*, Vol. 29, Issue 3, pp. 263–270. [DOI: 10.1163/15685357-02903004](https://doi.org/10.1163/15685357-02903004) ›
- Hegde, Chirag, and Pankaj Jain. "Kantara (2022) through the Lens of Indian Religious and Environmental Philosophy," *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology*, Vol. 29, Issue 3, pp. 271–273. [Worldviews 29.3 issue page](#) ›

## Books in Active Circulation

- Jain, Pankaj. *Jainism: From Bhagavan Mahavira to Mahatma Gandhi*. New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 2025. The monograph anchoring the 2026 Mahāvīra Biography Series. [View on Amazon](#) ›

**Full publications archive:** [indiacentre.flame.edu.in/publications](https://indiacentre.flame.edu.in/publications)

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# Meet Our Team

**Editor-in-Chief:** Prof. Pankaj Jain

**Advisory Board (in alphabetical order):**

- Prof. Balaji Kalluri
- Prof. Melody Kshetrimayum
- Prof. Neelima Shukla-Bhatt
- Prof. Tarinee Awasthi
- Prof. Vinod Vidwans

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## The India Centre

**FLAME University**

Gat No. 1270, Lavale, Off. Pune Bengaluru Highway,

Pune – 412115, Maharashtra, India

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