

INTERNATIONAL ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE
on
Sindhu Sarasvati Civilisation: Evidence, Interactions
and Civilisational Continuities

organised by

Indira Gandhi National Centre For The Arts
Bharat Vidya Prayojana
&
Sindhu Sarasvati Cell,
National Mission On Cultural Mapping

in collaboration with

Department Of History,
Shaheed Bhagat Singh Evening College
(University Of Delhi)

CONCEPT NOTE

Date and Venue

30 September 2026

11:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Umang Hall, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts,
Janpath Building, Janpath, New Delhi - 110001

Background

The Sindhu Sarasvati Civilisation represents one of the most significant chapters in the early history of the Indian subcontinent. Its extensive urban settlements, sophisticated water-management systems, craft traditions, trade networks, seals, inscriptions, artistic expressions and material culture provide important evidence for understanding the emergence and development of complex societies in South Asia.

The geographical spread of the civilisation extended across regions that are today located in India and Pakistan. Important archaeological sites such as Harappa, Mohenjo-daro, Taxila and Chanhu-daro are situated in present-day Pakistan, while sites such as Rakhigarhi, Dholavira, Kalibangan, Lothal and Banawali are located in present-day India. The political boundaries of the modern period, therefore, do not correspond to the cultural and archaeological geography of the civilisation.

In recent years, the ancient heritage of the Indus Valley Civilisation has received renewed attention in Pakistan's public and official cultural discourse. The Embassy of Pakistan in Paris, for instance, organised an archaeological seminar on the Indus Valley Civilisation and described the ancient Indus region as part of the historical and cultural inheritance of present-day Pakistan. The event focused on archaeological research at Chanhu-daro and the contribution of French archaeological missions to the study of the civilisation. The question has also entered contemporary public and diplomatic discourse in Pakistan. Pakistan's Information and Broadcasting Minister, Attaullah Tarar, has described the Indus Valley Civilisation as central to Pakistani national identity, stating that, when identifying themselves as Pakistanis,

they regard themselves as “the people of the Indus Valley Civilization” and as people belonging to the banks and tributaries of the Indus.

The subject has also entered diplomatic and public discussion in India. In a media briefing reported on 28 July 2026, the Official Spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs, Shri Randhir Jaiswal, stated:

“A country which has been promoting cross-border terrorism, religious fundamentalism and violence for decades, cannot have any claim to any pluralistic cultural legacy.”

The statement placed the question of cultural inheritance within the wider context of pluralism, historical continuity and the treatment of minority communities. The Round Table Conference seeks to examine these questions through scholarly evidence rather than through contemporary political assertions alone.

Rationale

The contemporary discussion surrounding the Sindhu Sarasvati Civilisation raises several important academic questions:

- How should the civilisation be understood through archaeological, epigraphic, linguistic, literary and environmental evidence?
- What were the geographical and cultural networks within which the civilisation developed?
- What forms of interaction existed between the Sindhu Sarasvati region and neighbouring areas of Central Asia, Iran, Mesopotamia and other parts of the ancient world?
- What is the relationship between the Sindhu Sarasvati cultural sphere and subsequent Indian civilisational traditions?
- How should archaeological sites located within modern political boundaries be understood in relation to the wider civilisational continuum?
- What is the relationship between the preservation of monuments and the continuity of living intellectual, linguistic, religious and cultural traditions?
- How may historical claims be assessed through verifiable evidence, transparent methodology and interdisciplinary scholarship?

The article written by Prof. Sachchidanand Joshi, Member Secretary, IGNCA, titled “*Borrowed ancestors: Why Pakistan can’t claim Panini for its rebranding project*,” published in *The Times of India* on 22 July 2026, has contributed to the ongoing discussion on questions of cultural inheritance and civilisational continuity. The article distinguishes between the geographical location of archaeological remains and the continuity of the intellectual and cultural traditions associated with them. It argues that questions of civilisational inheritance need to be examined through the transmission of languages, institutions, knowledge systems and cultural practices across generations.

The article observes, “**Geography gave Pakistan the sites. It did not give it the tradition,**” and further cautions that geographical possession of monuments does not, by itself, establish exclusive intellectual authorship of the civilisation: “**Geography can preserve monuments; it cannot rewrite the intellectual traditions that created them.**” In the context of Panini, the article notes that “**His birthplace may today lie inside Pakistan’s borders; the intellectual universe that produced him does not,**” and, more broadly, reflects that “**Civilizations are not inherited through borders. They are inherited through continuity.**”

These observations provide a contemporary point of departure for examining the larger question of how civilisations, knowledge traditions and cultural practices are transmitted across changing political and geographical boundaries. The Round Table Conference will take these debates forward through a wider academic examination of archaeological, textual, linguistic, epigraphic and cultural evidence relating to the Sindhu Sarasvati Civilisation.

The Conference will not approach the civilisation as the exclusive inheritance of any present-day nation-state. Rather, it will examine the Sindhū Sarasvatī Civilisation within the broader civilisational history of the Indian subcontinent, while also considering its interactions, cultural exchanges and possible continuities with neighbouring regions. The objective is to encourage a multidisciplinary and evidence-based dialogue on civilisational continuity, cultural inheritance and the interpretation of the available evidence.

Objectives

The principal objectives of the Round Table Conference are:

1. To review current archaeological, epigraphic, linguistic, historical and scientific research on the Sindhū Sarasvatī Civilisation.
2. To examine the geographical extent and cultural diversity of the civilisation.
3. To discuss evidence of interaction between the Sindhū Sarasvatī region and other ancient civilisations.
4. To assess the relationship between the Sindhū Sarasvatī Civilisation and later Indian knowledge traditions.
5. To examine the distinction between archaeological possession, cultural inheritance and civilisational continuity.
6. To encourage evidence-based discussion on contemporary claims concerning the civilisation.
7. To bring together senior scholars, archaeologists, epigraphists, historians and young researchers.
8. To identify areas for further research, documentation, digitisation and academic collaboration.

Broad Themes for Discussion

The Round Table Conference will address the following broad themes:

1. Archaeological and Material Evidence

- Major sites and settlement patterns
- Urban planning, architecture and water-management systems
- Agriculture, craft production and technological practices
- Burial traditions, artistic remains and material culture
- Recent archaeological discoveries and scientific investigations

2. Epigraphy, Script and Language

- Sindhū Sarasvatī seals and inscriptions
- Current approaches to the decipherment of the script
- Comparative study of signs and writing traditions
- Linguistic and grammatical hypotheses
- The role of computational and interdisciplinary methods

3. Cultural and Civilisational Interactions

- Trade and exchange networks
- Relations with Mesopotamia, Iran, Central Asia and other regions
- Movement of objects, technologies, symbols and ideas
- Archaeological evidence of early global interactions
- The place of the Sindhū Sarasvatī Civilisation in the history of Asia

4. Civilisational Continuities

- Relationship between the Sindhu Sarasvati cultural sphere and later Indian traditions
- Continuities in settlement, ritual, symbolism, craft and knowledge practices
- The significance of Sanskrit, Vedic and other intellectual traditions in the study of early Indian civilisation
- Living traditions and the transmission of knowledge across generations
- Distinguishing cultural continuity from retrospective political appropriation

5. Heritage, Identity and Historical Narratives

- Shared archaeological heritage across modern political boundaries
- Preservation and interpretation of ancient sites
- Cultural diplomacy and the use of ancient heritage in contemporary narratives
- The role of museums, archives and digital repositories
- The need for transparent, evidence-based and comparative scholarship

Speakers

Prof. Sachchidanand Joshi (Keynote Speaker)

Member Secretary, IGNCA

Prof. Sachchidanand Joshi is the honorary member secretary of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts. His recent article, “Borrowed ancestors: Why Pakistan can’t claim Panini for its rebranding project,” has drawn attention to the distinction between the geographical location of archaeological remains and the continuity of the intellectual and cultural traditions associated with them.

Prof. Vasant Shinde

Former Vice-Chancellor, Deccan College, Pune

Prof. Vasant Shinde is a distinguished archaeologist known for his extensive research on the Harappan and Saraswati-Sindhu Civilisation. His academic work encompasses archaeological excavations, settlement archaeology, material culture and scientific approaches to the study of ancient civilisations.

Prof. Nagaraj Paturi

Former Vice-Chancellor, INDICA

Prof. Nagaraj Paturi is a scholar of Indian Knowledge Traditions, civilisational studies and Indian intellectual traditions. His research interests include Indian cultural traditions, knowledge systems, civilisational frameworks and the transmission and continuity of Indian intellectual heritage.

Prof. Alok Tripathi

Professor, Assam University; Director, Centre for Archaeology and Museology

Prof. Alok Tripathi is an archaeologist whose academic work focuses on Indian archaeology, ancient settlements, material culture and archaeological heritage. He has been associated with archaeological research, field investigations and the study of India's ancient cultural remains.

Dr. Sanjay Kumar Manjul

Additional Director General, Archaeological Survey of India

Dr. Sanjay Kumar Manjul is an archaeologist and senior officer of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). His professional and academic experience encompasses archaeological research, exploration, excavation, heritage conservation, documentation and the study of India's archaeological remains.

Mr. Nicolas Sureau Dessaint

French Epigraphist and Palaeographer

Mr. Nicolas Sureau Dessaint is a French researcher engaged in the study of ancient scripts, epigraphy and palaeography, with particular interest in the Sindhu-Sarasvati/Indus script. His research includes comparative examination of writing systems and the interpretation of ancient inscriptions.

Prof. Karuna Shankar Shukla

Archaeologist

Prof. Karuna Shankar Shukla is an archaeologist and researcher associated with the study of the Sindhu-Sarasvati/Indus script and Harappan cultural remains. His research includes the analysis of Indus signs, inscriptions and proposed approaches towards the decipherment of the script.

Dr. Puneet Gupta

Oncologist and Harappan Epigraphist

Dr. Puneet Gupta is a medical professional and researcher engaged in the study of Harappan inscriptions and the Sindhu-Sarasvati/Indus script. His work focuses on the analysis of inscriptions, sign patterns and the study of proposed decipherment approaches.

Expected Outcomes

The Round Table Conference is expected to:

- Facilitate a multidisciplinary exchange on the Sindhu Sarasvati Civilisation.
- Bring archaeological, epigraphic, linguistic, historical and civilisational perspectives into dialogue.
- Encourage critical examination of competing interpretations and decipherment proposals.
- Highlight the importance of shared heritage and transnational archaeological cooperation.
- Identify areas for future research, documentation and digital dissemination.
- Encourage young scholars to undertake further work on the civilisation and its wider cultural connections.
- Contribute to the development of a structured academic research base on the Sindhu Sarasvati Civilisation.

The conference will seek to establish that the study of the Sindhu Sarasvati Civilisation must remain grounded in evidence, interdisciplinary scrutiny and the recognition of long-term civilisational processes. Its central concern will be to examine how archaeological remains, intellectual traditions, cultural practices and historical memories interact across time and political boundaries.