Embassy of India

Madrid

9th April 2026

Address by the Ambassador on the occasion of 77th ICCR Day

Namaskar, Good evening and buenas tardes.

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you all to the celebration of the 77th Foundation Day of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR).

2. I extend warm welcome to our ICCR alumni, who are living bridge between our two cultures and they are also Cultural Ambassadors of India in Spain and possibly in other countries. I know a dancer from Kazakhstan she is alumni of Kalakshetra, continued participating and winning in world competitions by performing Bharatanatyam.

3. Before I speak on ICCR, let me state the well accepted definition of culture given to us by a sociologist Edward Tylor that Culture is a set of knowledge, belief, art, science, law, morals and customs acquired by humans as a member of society. Its canvas is very broad, and that is why the scope of ICCR is very vast, not only performing arts but development of other intellectual aspects by means of education.

4. The origins of ICCR are deeply rooted in India's freedom struggle, where one of the key aspirations was to revive and strengthen cultural ties with the world. This vision was reflected in the historic Asian Relations Conference held in New Delhi in March-April 1947 i.e before the independence. This vision materialized with the establishment of ICCR on 9th April 1950, and therefore we are celebrating this day.

5. Let me quote the then education minister, at the time of foundation of ICCR that said that political agreements may be temporary but cultural relations make enduring bonds with the

people. We are talking about that time when many countries were getting their freedom, at that time he said that no program of reconstruction can complete without weaving the fabric of culture in the life of nation.

6. Since its inception, ICCR has worked with clear objective of:

Establishing and strengthening cultural relations and **mutual understanding between India and other countries**.

7. Let me quote Dr. S. Jaishankar, Hon'ble External Affairs Minister of India: It is difficult to talk about diplomacy without its cultural and soft power accomplishments. Dr. Jaishankar has also emphasized on the civilizational aspect in India's diplomacy.

8. When we say India is a civilization state, what does that mean? The following is my own construct, as there is no ready-made definition available.

(i) We knew how to build cities, read sky, calculate distances between heavenly bodies, conduct surgeries and contemplate about the world since 5000 years;

(ii) We knew what is Swaraj or self-rule; This means India's path to development does not rely on other models but leverages its indigenous institutions and practices

(iii) We knew what democracy meant and how to live an affluent life;

(iv) India is the source of rich philosophical, scientific and religious traditions, including the Vedic systems, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism which have influenced global thought;

(v) Indian civilization is known for its ability to absorb and integrate diverse ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups over centuries. This has led to a dynamic interplay and shared cultural traits across communities, which we expand beyond our geographical boundaries.

(vi) We are inspired to share our "civilizational assets" as a form of soft power. Examples include the international

recognition of the International Day of Yoga and the promotion of Ayurveda.

(vii) As a civilizational state, India asserts, not through the zero sum game to have balance of power, but by insisting on bringing equilibrium in the world through multipolarity, strengthening multilateral institutions and making them more inclusive.

9. Coming back to ICCR, one of ICCR's most impactful initiatives has been its scholarship programmes. Every year, ICCR offers over 4000 scholarships under 21 different schemes to students from around 190 countries. At any given time, more than 8000 international students are studying in India under these programmes, pursuing undergraduate, postgraduate and Ph.D. courses across a wide range of disciplines.

10. Let me underline one important aspect of ICCR, it is not about promotion of Indian culture, but promotion of the the cultural understanding between two countries or among many countries. That is the reason ICCR also welcomes cultural troupes from different countries of a variety of genres to India under ICCR programme to familiarize the larger Indian audience. It conducts conferences on topical subjects on a regular basis where scholars bring their own culture's and country's perspective to the table.

11. We are particularly happy about ICCR's support to bringing peoples of our two countries closer. It happens through various ways:

(a) The participation of students from Spain in India's scholarship programme and created legendary scholars like Oscar Pujol and another one in making Ms Monica de la Fuente. Many have immersed themselves in India's classical traditions, studying Sanskrit and learning classical dance forms such as Bharatanatyam, Kathakali, Kathak and Odissi. Others have pursued Indian classical music, including instruments like Tabla and Veena. When you practice Bharatanatyam you are connecting with the dance form as performed 2000 years back, when you speak Sankrit, you are speaking the same language spoken at least 3500 hundred or may be 5000 years back. That's

the gravity and the depth of your understanding when you practice an aspect of Indian culture. Beyond the performing arts, students have also engaged with rigorous academic disciplines such as history of art, arts and aesthetics, cinema and screenplay writing, political science, international relations and Yoga.

(b) ICCR also has established two chairs in the University of Valladolid: one on language Hindi, we have prof, Jyoti ji and the other on the India Studies.

(c) ICCR helps us getting troupes from India and showcase the Indian culture and many a times cultural connectivity between our two countries. From time to time, ICCR also hosts troupes from Spain.

(d) Most importantly we have a unique joint venture in the form of Casa de la India in Valladolid which is a partnership between the University of Valladolid, Ayuntmiento de Valladolid and Government of India in the form of ICCR.

12. In today's interconnected world, the relevance of culture and cultural diplomacy cannot be overstated. Culture speaks a universal language. It builds trust and brings people closer beyond boundaries of geography and politics. Institutions like ICCR play a vital role in nurturing these connections.

13. I was in India last month and I was asked one question by a very famous motivational speaker in India, to sum up my vision of life in one sentence, I told him, since we have taken birth on earth, to see the world as much as possible that is one aspect and secondly to understand the evolution of human thought over a millennium.

14. The other aspect of Culture is that it widens the limits of our lives. It does not let you restrict yourself to your job, social circle and entertainment. Practicing an aspect of culture, expands the life, sometimes multiple times. Of course, ICCR's contribution in that is priceless.

Thank you and muchisima gracias.

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