

Somaiya SUSTAINABILITY Dialogue 2026-27

Jan 12, 2026

Flagship event of the

**Centre for Achieving Sustainable Climate Action, Development
and Engagement (CASCADE)**
Somaiya Institute for Research & Consultancy (SIRAC)

Spearheaded & Executed by
Interdisciplinary team of Faculties and Students



Somaiya Vidyavihar University, founded in 2019 and rooted in the 84-year legacy of Somaiya Vidyavihar, stands committed to the pursuit of knowledge and societal transformation. Guided by the motto ज्ञानदेव तु कैवल्यम् (“from knowledge alone, liberation”), the university seeks to nurture critical thinking, responsible action, and holistic development. In alignment with this vision, CASCADE (Centre for Achieving Sustainable Climate Action, Development and Engagement) presents its flagship annual event — the Somaiya Sustainability Dialogue 2026.

About Somaiya Sustainability Dialogue

Envisioned as a recurring platform for thought leadership, interdisciplinary exchange, citizen science and collaborative problem-solving, the Somaiya Sustainability Dialogue brings together academics, policymakers, practitioners, and students to deliberate on the most pressing issues of sustainability. The Dialogue reflects the university's commitment to fostering a culture of environmental awareness, ethical citizenship, and sustainable innovation within and beyond campus.

These Dialogues—rooted in India's context, heritage, and culture—are more than conversations. They are spaces where communities, experts, and participants come together to imagine and contribute new possibilities, co-design interventions, foster sustainable innovation, and enable green transitions and circular design. Through these ‘Dialogues/Saṁvāda,’ we aim to nurture awareness and build interdisciplinary, cross-cultural teams. The outcomes are not just tangible—community project interventions, innovations, and policy inputs—but also intangible: stronger networks, shared values, and a collective mindset ready to drive change.

Theme 2026: Human–Animal–Nature Interaction

The 2026 edition focuses on the vital interdependence between humans, animals, and the natural world — relationships increasingly strained by rapid urbanisation, habitat loss, and climate instability. The theme aims to deepen public understanding of these interconnected systems and to inspire actionable pathways for coexistence, resilience, and sustainable futures.

Programme Plan: January 12, 2026

Venue: Red Audi, Fourth Floor, K J Somaiya Institute of Management

8:30am - 9:30am	Registrations & Creating Sustainability Message Wall
9:30am - 9:50am	Inaugural Ceremony & Welcome Address
9:50am - 10:50am	<p>Leader's Perspectives - "What's Sustainability?"</p> <p>Shri Samir Somaiya Chancellor, Somaiya Vidyavihar University, Mumbai President, Somaiya Vidyavihar Chairman and Managing Director, Godavari Biorefineries Ltd</p> <p>Dr Ajay Kapoor Vice Chancellor, Somaiya Vidyavihar University, Mumbai</p> <p>Dr Arun Kumar Nayak Dean – Research and Director - SIRAC, Somaiya Vidyavihar University, Mumbai</p> <p>Dr Larry Walker Former Professor, Cornell University; Professor of Eminence, Somaiya Vidyavihar University; Co-Director, CASCADE President, Somaiya Foundation; Visiting Scientist - K J Somaiya Applied Agricultural Research</p> <p>Dr Matthew Daum Associate Provost and Dean, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Michigan State University</p> <p>Dr Karim Maredia Professor; Assistant Dean and Director of International Programs, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Michigan State University</p>
10:50am - 11:00am	Tea Break
11:00am-1:00pm	<p>Session I "Chola Maati": Pardhan Gond Rituals from Birth to Death <i>This session explores how indigenous communities model sustainable living through resource stewardship, biodiversity conservation, and harmonious human-nature relationships. It invites reflection on ethical borrowing and community-led conservation.</i></p> <p>It includes a presentation followed by a panel discussion with authors of Chola Maati: Pardhan Gond Rituals from Birth to Death, Ms. Padmaja Srivastava, architect and promoter of India's folk and tribal arts; Ms. Komal Bedi Sohal, creative designer and former Chief Creative Officer at Saatchi & Saatchi Dubai; and Mr. Mayank Singh Shyam, well known Gond artist, in conversation with Dr. Shivangi Pareek, a sociocultural and a postdoctoral research affiliate at the Yale InterAsia Initiative.</p> <p>Drawing from their book they will offer insights into how rituals, songs, oral traditions and lived knowledge of the Pardhan Gond community, provides a textured and holistic worldview. More than a record, it animates cultural experience through art, photography and narrative, revealing a world in which human life is deeply interwoven with earth, water, ancestors, forests and the unseen.</p>
1:00pm - 2:00pm	Lunch

2:00pm - 4:00pm	<p>Session II “Beyond the Conflict”: Movie Screening & Discussion <i>This session will have a film screening of filmmaker Atharva Raut’s critically acclaimed work <i>Beyond the Conflict</i> followed by a discussion with Dr. Varad Giri, Head Scientist at Reliance Foundation.</i></p> <p>In the film, we witness how Mumbai has experienced intermittent episodes of human-leopard conflict over several decades. The Rescue team of Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) go above and beyond to mitigate this conflict where the leopards are voiceless victims. This film unravels the story of interwoven lives of the leopards and people that care for them at the SGNP Rescue Centre. This is an unseen story that showcases the themes of dedication, compassion and tragedy that exist beyond the obvious conflict.</p> <p>The discussion will help participants gain a deeper understanding of coexistence in shared landscapes, the practical and ethical dimensions of conservation, and the emotional realities that shape human–wildlife relationships.</p>
4:00pm – 4:10pm	Vote of Thanks
4:10pm – 4:30pm	Tea Sustainability wall activity culminates

Somaiya Citizen Science Initiative (Parallel Sessions)	
11:30 onwards	<p>Session I Nest Watchers’-Bird Nest Design and Monitoring Challenge with Dr. Ninad Marathe, Scientific Officer at SOCLEEN In-service Teachers & Pre-service Teachers <i>Venue – The Somaiya School, Somaiya Vidyavihar University, Mumbai</i> A hands-on Nest-Making Workshop for educational enthusiasts to encourage students to observe urban birds, explore biodiversity, and develop creativity, teamwork, and environmental stewardship.</p>
2:00pm onwards	<p>Session II Aero Trackers’: Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Workshop with Dr Nilesh Wagh, Associate Professor and HoD Environment Science, Somaiya Vidyavihar University Undergraduates <i>Venue – ongoing field study activity under Nature Basket 35U1031 (Urban Environmental Monitoring: Air Quality).</i> A hands-on workshop where participants monitor and analyse real-time air quality, contribute to a growing database, and gain GIS skills to map and interpret environmental data for sustainability.</p>

Speakers



Ms Padmaja Srivastava

Architect and Promoter of India's Folk and Tribal Arts

Padmaja Srivastava is an architect, researcher, art curator, and writer who is a dedicated promoter and activist for the folk and tribal arts of central India. She is the author of the book *Chola Maati: Pardhan Gond Rituals from Birth to Death*, a comprehensive work documenting the life cycle rituals of the Pardhan Gond community. Acting as a vital link, she has been the bridge for projects between the artists and prestigious organizations like Samsung, Hyundai and Pernod Ricard. She is also an active member of a French NGO, Association Duppata, that promotes Indian tribal art in France.

Ms Komal Bedi Sohal

Creative Designer and Former Chief Creative Officer at Saatchi & Saatchi Dubai

Komal Bedi Sohal is an internationally acclaimed creative director, designer, and photographer whose practice bridges narrative, design, and documentary realism. With over three decades in advertising - winning multiple Cannes Lions and serving on the Cannes Lions Jury - she brings a refined eye for storytelling, composition, and detail to photography. Her work captures candid, emotionally resonant moments of everyday life. In 2024, she was selected for the La Vie Un Bleu International Photography Residency, Nice, and has exhibited internationally across Europe, North America, and India.



Mr Mayank Singh Shyam

Gond Artist

An acclaimed Gond artist, Mayank Singh Shyam is known for his unique depictions of modern cities, while incorporating aesthetic traditions of his community. An artist working in the tradition of Pradhan Gond painting, also known as Jangarh Kalam, Mayank Singh Shyam is also the son of the celebrated Pradhan artist, Jangarh Singh Shyam. His works were also included in the Indian Contemporary Art auction at Sotheby's, New York, Organized for the benefit of Kolkata Museum of Modern Art. In 2006 Mayank was Conferred the state award by the Hasta Shilpa Evam Hathkargha Vikas Nigam, Bhopal.

Dr Shivangi Pareek

Sociocultural Anthropologist

Dr. Shivangi Pareek is a sociocultural anthropologist interested in questions of decolonization and development in South Asia. She is currently a postdoctoral research affiliate at the Yale InterAsia Initiative. She holds a B.A. and an M.A. in literature from Delhi University and a Ph.D. in socio-cultural anthropology from Yale University. For her Ph.D. dissertation she has studied the political economy of contemporary 'tribal'/Adivasi material culture. Her current book project examines how historically marginalized and stigmatized communities like Adivasis access socio-cultural inclusion in local and global networks through their expressive culture.



Mr Atharva Raut

Wildlife Filmmaker and Photographer

Atharva Raut is a wildlife filmmaker and photographer based in Bristol, UK and Mumbai, India, with a passion for telling wildlife stories that blend art, science, and conservation. Completed his Master's in Wildlife Filmmaking from UWE Bristol, UK in partnership with BBC NHU. He has contributed to conservation efforts, working on projects like mitigating human-leopard conflict around Mumbai's Sanjay Gandhi National Park and contributing to citizen science initiatives.

Dr Varad Giri

Head Scientist at Reliance Foundation

Dr. Varad Giri is a herpetologist, conservationist, and researcher trying to understand the intricacies in biodiversity. With over two decades of research, he advances biodiversity science, conservation strategies, and science communication, focusing on India's lesser-known species. Earlier worked for over a decade with the iconic Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS).



Dr Ninad Marathe

Scientific Officer at SOCLEEN

Dr Ninad Marathe is an environmental researcher focused on sustainable, community-oriented solutions. He holds a patent for a 'Biological Fluid Screening Analyzer' and authored *Fauna*. His work spans environmental reporting, waste management, wildlife conservation, and public health, along with 167 platelet donations in Mumbai.

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Dialogues



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