

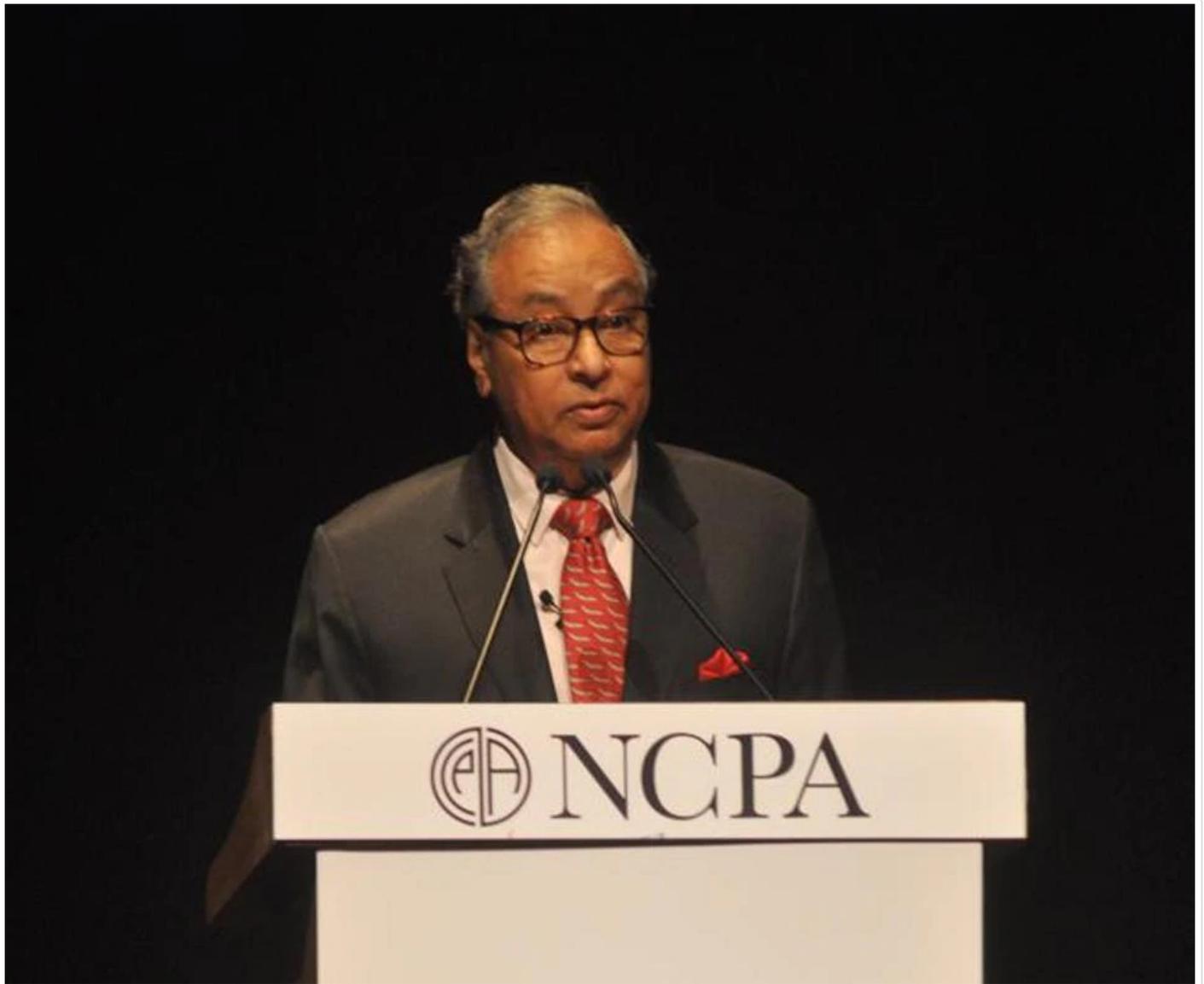
Private sector must help uplift our arts: Ex-Prasar Bharati CEO

Jawhar Sircar, a writer and public intellectual, former culture secretary and ex-CEO of Prasar Bharati, delivered a talk titled, 'What ails the arts in India?' at NCPA.

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Jawhar Sircar delivered the first Jamshed Bhabha memorial lecture, at the NCPA, on Wednesday.(HT Photo)

To celebrate Jamshed Bhabha's legacy and contribution to the arts, on his 105th birth anniversary, the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA) invited Jawhar Sircar, a writer and public intellectual, former culture secretary and ex-CEO of Prasar Bharati, to deliver a talk titled, 'What ails the arts in India?' This marked the NCPA's first Jamshed Bhabha memorial lecture; one will now be delivered annually.

Sircar began, on Wednesday, by drawing attention to the nation's "collective amnesia" when it came to the arts. Take the emperor Ashoka, he said. We'd all but forgotten about him till the 1800s. "It was only in 1837, when 37-year-old scholar James Prinsep began struggling to make sense of the Brahmi and Kharoshti scripts, that we realised Ashoka was not a myth, and repositioned him in history. Similarly, all the wondrous creations of Buddhism from the 3rd century have been wiped out of our memory."

He mentioned this, Sircar said, because he believes the linearity of Indian history was retrofitted. We needed to watch out even now for complacency, Sircar added. "Culture has to be creative and neutral and realistic as well."

A major problem in the tangible arts, he went on to say, is that there is not enough philanthropy. "The government has its limitations. The private sector must help uplift our arts, like the Tatas and the Bhabhas did." The antiquities act could be revised to make it easier for families to register and come forth with heirlooms. "It's only then that we'll have private collectors coming forward to start a second museum movement which is non-sarkari," he added.

Bhabha was always concerned that art was not given its due importance in India, NCPA chairman Khushroo Suntook agreed. "Only if you have appreciation and knowledge of the arts can you become truly civilised. And if you don't, you're depriving yourself of a fuller human experience."

Through these lectures, Suntook added, the NCPA aims to "revive public consciousness towards our arts".