

MERAKI INAUGURAL EVENT, FRESHERS' ORIENTATION AND ACADEMIC TALK

14 September 2026 | 1:00–4:00 p.m.

Mata Sundri College for Women, University of Delhi

Department of English | Meraki, The English Literary Society

The inaugural event of Meraki for the academic year 2026–27 was organised to welcome the new batch of students and introduce them to the academic, creative and literary life of the Department of English. The event brought together approximately 50–60 students, faculty members and members of the society for an afternoon that combined intellectual engagement, interaction and festivity.

The event began with a formal welcome to the freshers and an introduction to Meraki as a space for stories, conversations, creativity and intellectual exchange. The principal academic engagement of the day was a guest lecture by Professor Aakriti Madhwani, Associate Professor, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Shiv Nadar University, and author of *Everyday Reading: Middlebrow Magazines and Book Publishing in Post-Independence India* and co-editor of *Indian Genre Fiction: Pasts and Future Histories*.

Professor Madhwani's lecture explored popular literature, literary classification, multilingualism and the intersections of Hindi and Urdu literary cultures. Drawing on examples from nineteenth-century literary traditions and the coexistence of scripts such as Nastaliq and Devanagari, she invited students to rethink fixed boundaries between languages, genres, traditions and identities. Her discussion of texts such as the *Ramayana* and *nazm*, as well as writers and works including Premchand and *Chandrakanta*, demonstrated how literary texts often emerge within overlapping linguistic and cultural spaces.

A central concern of the lecture was the distinction between the "popular" and the "classic". Professor Madhwani examined how texts acquire particular literary and cultural labels and encouraged students to ask: Who makes a text popular? Within what contexts and parameters? What roles do publishers, writers, readers and cultural institutions play in shaping literary value? Her discussion of Hindi magazines, image-rich storytelling, pulp and genre fiction further highlighted the importance of publishing histories and readerships in understanding the formation of literary categories.

The example of *Chandrakanta* was used to explore the relationship between Hindi and other literary traditions, the histories of Hindi literature, and the cultural and publishing contexts through which writers and texts emerge. Professor Madhwani also drew attention to publishers such as Bhaat Publications and recommended its website as a resource for students interested in genre and pulp fiction. The lecture encouraged students to approach literary categories as historically produced and context-dependent rather than fixed or self-evident.

The lecture was followed by the felicitation of Professor Madhwani by members of the faculty with a plant. The freshers were then introduced to the members and office bearers of Meraki, who will serve as their guides and collaborators through the society's academic and creative activities during the year.

The formal proceedings were followed by the ceremonial cutting of a cake to welcome the freshers. The event then moved into a festive segment featuring games including Dumb Charades, Rapid Fire and Wrong Answers Only, along with snacks and student performances. The cultural programme included a dance performance by Manya, solo performances by Ashwajeet and Manpreet and Srishti, and a group dance by Gurneet, Prabhleen, Janya and Hargun.

The event concluded with a vote of thanks from the faculty, acknowledging the participation of the students, faculty members and members of Meraki.

The inaugural event thus brought together the intellectual and creative dimensions of the Department of English. By combining a stimulating academic lecture with games, performances and informal interaction, it introduced the new students to Meraki not only as a literary society but also as a community of learning, conversation, collaboration and creativity.