

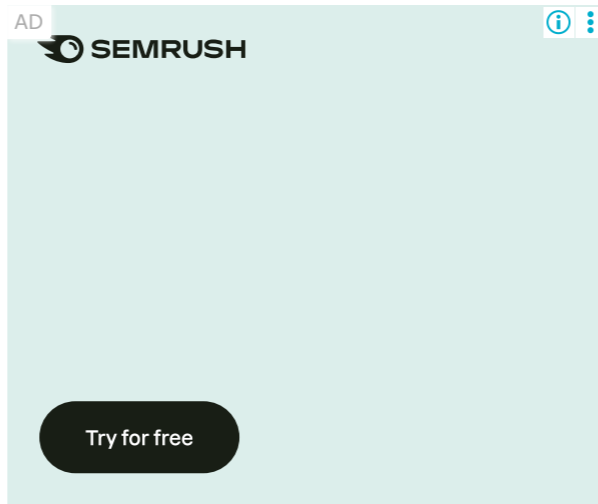
Acharya Prashant Ca Book Festival

At the Pune Book Festival, Acharya Prashant captivated audiences with his challenging views on success and relationships, prompting significant reflections. His session sparked enduring conversations among attendees.

By Sathish Raman Updated: Tuesday, January 6, 2026, 12:26 [IST]

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Acharya Prashant at Pune Book Festival: When a Philosopher Brought the City to a Standstill



AI-generated summary, reviewed by editors

Two weeks after the Pune Book Festival concluded, one session continues to dominate conversations among those who attended and those who wished they had. On December 20, something without precedent unfolded at Fergusson College, the venue for the event.

As Acharya Prashant's car prepared to depart after his session, people lined both sides of the road for over a kilometre. Children, students, couples, elderly citizens, all standing with folded hands, holding out books for signing, requesting photographs, simply wanting to express gratitude.

Traffic police and the fire brigade were present; the crowd remained undeterred. Videos from that evening have since circulated widely, but those who were there say the footage captures only a fraction of what it felt like to witness it.

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The session that preceded this farewell had itself been extraordinary. Organised as a free public event within the Pune Book Festival, Acharya Prashant's appearance at the main auditorium drew a packed hall, with many more waiting outside, unable to find seats. The hall had filled nearly an hour before the session was scheduled to begin.

Senior journalist Gargi Rawat moderated the conversation, drawing questions from chapters of Truth Without Apology, Acharya Prashant's national bestselling book published by HarperCollins. What followed was not the polite exchange typical of literary festivals: for over two hours, Acharya Prashant dismantled comfortable assumptions about success, love, positivity and selfhood, and the audience stayed with him, refusing to let the session end.

The exchanges were sharp and often unexpected. When the subject of positive thinking arose, he cut through the cliché: "What is positive thinking for a thief?" The audience laughed, but the point landed. When asked about emotions, he offered no consolation: "If your tears at a movie were really yours, how would the director know how to stimulate them? Our emotions are not ours."

On relationships, he was typically unsettling: "If your partner accepts you as you are, run away. Stay as you are? That is not the purpose of life. If someone wants you to stay the same, they are not your well-wisher." The questions from the audience reflected a hunger that book festivals rarely surface. What is real success? How do I look at myself? How do I cultivate courage? One attendee asked about choosing a life partner. Acharya Prashant's response reframed the question entirely: "If you don't look in, you will always look out for. The problem is the desperate centre from which the need arises. I am not compelled to be with you. Two complete persons moving in common goal, that is the only basis for togetherness."

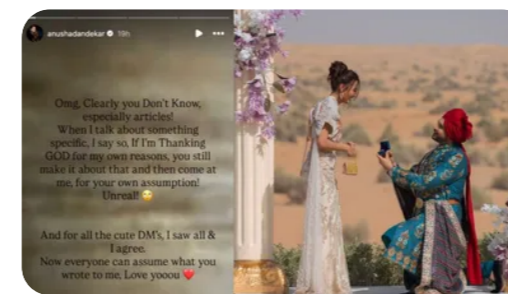
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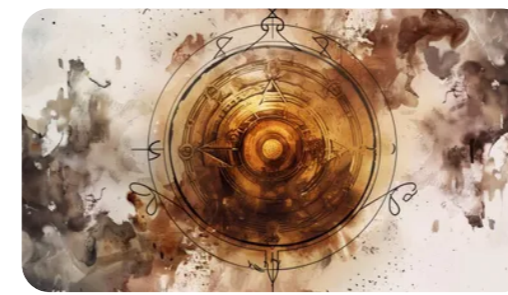
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The Pune Book Festival, now in its 11th year, is one of the largest literary gatherings, drawing over 12.5 lakh visitors. This year, the festival featured Jaishankar, who spoke on the same theme as last year, 'The Future of Indian Literature Festivals in the Country'.

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Grammy Award winner Ricky Kej also performed on the same day. Yet in the weeks since, it is the philosopher's appearance, and the extraordinary scenes that followed, that have remained the most talked-about moment of the festival. This was not Acharya Prashant's only engagement with a major audience in recent months. Between October and December, he addressed students and faculty at IIT Hyderabad, IIT Kharagpur, IIT Madras, IIT Bombay and IISc Bangalore, twice at IISc within the same year. No other philosopher in recent memory has commanded such repeated access to India's most rigorous technical institutions.

The Pune session extended that pattern into the literary sphere, demonstrating that the appetite for serious philosophical engagement is not confined to just academic audiences but also book lovers. What explains the response? Pune is a city that takes ideas seriously. It has a long tradition of reform movements, educational institutions and intellectual discourse. But something more specific seems to be at work.

In an age saturated with self-help platitudes and motivational content, Acharya Prashant offers the opposite: an unflinching examination of the assumptions that govern modern life. He does not tell audiences what they want to hear. He asks them to question whether what they want is even theirs to begin with. "When you observe, what is inside melts," he said during the session. "It cannot survive the seeing."

The line could serve as a summary of his method. He does not offer comfort or escape. He offers the possibility of clarity, and clarity, as he repeatedly suggests, is not a gentle process. After the session concluded, the book-signing queue stretched on for over an hour.

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Many who had come simply to attend a literary event found themselves staying far longer than planned. And then came the farewell: the crowds lining the streets, the folded hands, the sense that something significant had passed through the city. India's literary festivals have grown increasingly sophisticated at drawing celebrity authors, politicians and cultural figures. But they rarely produce the kind of response that Pune witnessed on December 20, a response that continues to resonate weeks later. When philosophy is conducted without apology, without the softening that makes difficult truths palatable, it finds not just an audience, but a lasting imprint.

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