

# Whither Humanities: Mapping fork-routes to possibilities in the Indo-Pacific Neighbourhood

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**CAS, Bankura University**

In association with

Department of English, Bankura University

## BANKURA, WEST BENGAL, INDIA



### Concept Note:

The last decade or so has presented a renewed interest in the reflections and recordings of the contribution of Humanities to knowledge and society, presumably stemming from perceived threats to the field evident in constant attempts at devaluing and curbing Humanities to a mere adjunct or auxiliary in public discourse, academic spaces and curriculum. Across geographies and universities, the Humanities seem to be confronted with acute systemic underfunding in research and teaching, challenges to intellectual freedom and critical discourse, and questioning of diversity and imagination by organisations and political forces. The conference thus aims to ask: Whither Humanities?, and engage in academic discussions on intersectional fork-routes which posit “the positive and multidimensional impact of the humanities on core areas of human experience which extend also to the formulation of new frames of reference for and representation of our collective and individual relation to the world and our experiences” as has been the soul of the World Humanities Report (WHR).

In 2017, the International Council of Philosophy and the Human Sciences (CIPSH), in collaboration with UNESCO, commissioned a World Humanities Report (WHR) which would be a tool to better understand and reflect on the contribution of the Humanities to human history and advancement, provide examples of academic practice in the Humanities, and endorse new directions and fork-routes for the field in the twenty-first century. Additionally, “The European branch of the World Humanities Report aims more specifically to demonstrate the rich, varied and necessary contributions of the humanities to knowledge and society throughout the world ... focuses on established universities and highlights where and how the humanities are practised, and makes recommendations to ensure that the humanities flourish in and beyond the 2020s.”

Perhaps the Humanities and its routes and possibilities could not remain a Western concern or construct alone, at least in the contemporary planetary context. The Indo-Pacific neighbourhood, a geopolitical region that includes countries and islands surrounding the Indian and Pacific Oceans, is a center of global geopolitics and homes some of the world's



most economically dynamic and populated countries like India, Australia, Japan, Indonesia and China.

While in May 2022, the United States launched the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity, or IPEF, with a dozen initial Partners across the Indo-Pacific “to advance resilience, sustainability, inclusiveness, economic growth, fairness, and competitiveness for the 14 IPEF economies” partners including Australia, Fiji; India; Indonesia; Japan; the Republic of Korea; Malaysia; New Zealand; Philippines; Singapore, Thailand; and Vietnam, the Indo-Pacific neighbourhood remains a highly complex and untapped area which could become key to a prosperous, secure & inclusive future based on a free, open, inclusive & rules-based Indo-Pacific. Significantly, Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh while delivering the inaugural address at the 13th Indo-Pacific Armies Chiefs’ Conference (IPACC) in New Delhi on September 26, 2023 called for “collective wisdom and concerted efforts to deal with the complexities of the Indo-Pacific Region, while tapping its full potential, to ensure a future marked by prosperity, security & inclusivity, in consonance with the ancient Indian ethos of ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ (The World is One Family) and the G-20 motto ‘One Earth, One Family, One Future’”.

While Prabir De observes that the ‘Act East’ policy is now getting transformed into Act ‘Indo-Pacific’, India’s role in the Indo-Pacific is being considered crucial by countries like Australia, Japan, and the United States in resolving geopolitical challenges and strategic dilemmas, and, mapping and navigating emergent possibilities and opportunities. As per the Joint Statement issued by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India on a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the Republic of India and Australia issued on June 4, 2020, the ocean could well become “the theatre for geopolitical competition”. And New Humanities could provide fork-routes to exploring the oceanic in the context of the Indo-Pacific.

In his book *Humanities at the Crossroads: Reflections on Theory, Culture and Resistance*, Shelley Walia calls for a “second renaissance in the disciplines of humanities and the liberal arts” in the context of an increasingly totalitarian world. Emphasising that “academic scholarship needs to move



beyond the confines of university corridors” he calls for a revival of Humanities and a reiteration of the vital role of “literary and cultural studies in normative political and social theorizing” and forming greater connect with communities beyond that of the university.

This conference aims to move beyond the European or Western outlook and their concerted efforts over the last decade at relocating, re-envisioning and re-situating Humanities per se and present our located responses from the India-Pacific neighbourhood – across academic spaces and dispensations in Australia and New Zealand and India, Japan and South Korea, Indonesia and Malaysia among others.

To “ensure that the humanities flourish in and beyond the 2020s” some key fork-routes of academic discourse and research have been and/or are still being given prominence, relevance and bandwidth. While the redefining of Humanities most probably started with the introduction of the concept of digital humanities as espoused in 2004 in *A Companion to Digital Humanities* by Susan Schriebman, Ray Siemens, and John Unsworth, the primary focus has been to initiate and engage in a process of meditation, transformation in order to meet the multifarious challenges being faced. Hence at the forefront is a branch which aims to address mankind’s most-pressing problem and evident ability to self-destruct, by connecting human activities to the environment, attempting to understand the Anthropocene condition and visualise a sustainable future.

Interrogations of the future can also be found in the interdisciplinary ideations born out of inevitable intersections of medicine and humanities. Hence fields like Biomedical Humanities as well as the newly evolving intersectional fields like Bio-humanities, Medical Humanities, Neural Humanities or Evolutionary Humanities attempt to reconceptualise experiences and representations of health and illness.

But probably the greatest scope to connect and immerse in societal formations and reform is provided by the emerging field of Public Humanities which tries to use “the academic capital and cultural potential of the humanities to connect to broader societal purposes” (Quay and Veninga 1990). Similarly, the focus on how to benefit humans and society



is also palpable in Intercultural Humanities which aims at the “appreciation or recognition of the cultural Other/the others and of symbolically different constructions of reality”.

In this attempt to establish areas of resonance within the field of Humanities, we come across newer fields of study like the Experimental Humanities, the domain of Cultural Heritage Studies, Engaged Humanities (Jay 2010), the Academic and the Civic and Public Sociology with the simultaneous surge of Digital Humanities reinventing connections between new digital media, information technologies and academic institutions, which has generated spinoffs like Humanistic Informatics and Computational Humanities, with Artificial Intelligence being the latest entrant in the virtual fray.

These emergent areas of knowledge production and critical orientations exemplify both “experimental modes of thinking” and the “quest for alternative values”. But at the centre is and will always be the “capital of knowledge the humanities have built over centuries” which would be the cornerstone of newer understandings of meanings, re-examinings of the past and newer contestations, as refracted through public-political, including artistic and literary, practices.

Hence today, when staggering technological advancements, social and economic fallouts and the climate crisis have opened the Pandora’s Box for human limits and horizons, Whither Humanities?

But, would we not also want to ask if there is a need to teach an old dog new tricks or reinvent the wheel – and hence too our question: “Whither Humanities?” Does not David Ferris ask for us, -- “is the moment when we are faced with the question of our future the moment in which we should reconceive humanistic inquiry by concentrating on the discovery of new fields and areas for humanistic inquiry, or is it the moment in which the delivery of humanistic inquiry should be reconceived?”



This conference invites scholarly articles from a broad spectrum within the purview of the Humanities and encourages critical reflection on the following sub-themes, though not restricted to them:

- Humanities today
- New Humanities
- Comparative Literature
- Impact of technology on Humanities
- Digital Humanities
- Feminist digital humanities
- Digital storytelling
- New media studies
- Environmental Humanities
- Environmental history
- Climate narratives
- Animal studies
- Anthropocene
- Bioprospecting
- Bioregionalism
- Biosemiotics
- Climate justice
- Cultural geography
- Deep ecology
- Ecocentrism
- Ecocriticism.
- Energy humanities
- Global humanities
- Urban humanities
- Urban anthropology
- Food humanities
- Medical humanities
- Biomedical Humanities
- Bio-humanities
- Neural Humanities
- Medical ethics and bioethics
- Literary studies and religion
- Health geography
- Evolutionary Humanities
- Legal humanities
- Public humanities
- Public history
- Public folklore
- Public Anthropology
- Public Philosophy,
- Historic preservation
- Museum Studies
- Community Archaeology
- Public Art
- Public Science
- Experimental Humanities
- Cultural Heritage Studies
- Engaged Humanities
- Civic Engagement and Public Sociology
- Intercultural Humanities



**Call for Papers:** Abstracts (not exceeding 200 words) may be emailed to:  
[centre\\_australianstudies@bankurauniv.ac.in](mailto:centre_australianstudies@bankurauniv.ac.in)

**Deadline for sending of abstracts**

**: 20 January, 2025**

**Selection of abstracts would be conveyed by**

**: 23 January, 2025**

**Registration Fees:**

₹ 2,000/- (Indian delegates)

₹ 1,200/- (Research Scholars)

₹ 600/- (Postgraduate students)

\$ 40 (International delegates)

₹1300/- (Indian Delegates presenting papers online)

₹800/- (Indian Research Scholars presenting papers online)

\$ 25 USD (International delegates presenting papers online)

**Publication:**

Selected papers are likely to be published in a blind peer-reviewed Edited Volume / Conference proceedings by a reputed publisher.

**Accommodation:**

Though it may not be possible to arrange accommodation, the conference team may provide assistance if contacted beforehand. Please drop a mail here with your requirements:

[centre\\_australianstudies@bankurauniv.ac.in](mailto:centre_australianstudies@bankurauniv.ac.in)

**Conference Certificates:**

All online paper presenters will receive Hard Copy of their Paper Presentation Certificate & Registration Fee payment Receipt by Speed Post within 1 month of conference.



**Chief Patron of the Conference:**

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***See you at the conference!***

