

**Online Communication in the Digital Age**  
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**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology**  
**Lecture – 24**  
**Introduction to Postcolonial Digital Humanities**

Good morning dear friends and welcome to this module. In the previous module, we had discussed stylometry and intersectional digital humanities. Today, we will talk about postcolonial digital humanities, the geopolitical circumstances that have shaped its trajectories and examine the role of colonial violence and its representations in digital archives. Postcolonial digital humanities is rooted in a broader history of exchange between postcolonial thought in science and technology studies. It interrogates the ongoing influences of colonialism and neo-colonialism within the digital cultural records and knowledge production. It addresses unexplored questions of power and globalization that are shaping the digital environment as well as decentering the role of the global north in the appropriation of digital scholarly practices and narratives of technological development.

## Postcolonial Digital Humanities

- The term 'Postcolonial Digital Humanities' was coined by Adeline Koh and Roopika Risam and was disseminated through the twitter hashtag '#dhpoco'.
- Postcolonial approaches to DH look beyond the politics of representation, to develop design practices surrounding digital knowledge production.
- Its interventions include:
  - To destabilize the role of colonialist and neocolonialist politics within the digital cultural record.
  - To challenge the myth of democratized digital knowledge and to make the case for the creation of new tools with ontological roots beyond Global North.
  - To attend to the role of labour in DH projects and address the hegemonic role of English language in DH scholarship.



**#DHPoco:**  
**Postcolonial Digital**  
**Humanities**



Sources: dhpoco.tumblr.com, www.slideshare.net



The term postcolonial digital humanities was coined by Adeline Koh and Roopika Risam and it was disseminated through the twitter hashtag #atDHpoco. Postcolonial approaches to DH look beyond the politics of representation to develop design practices surrounding digital knowledge production. Its interventions include a destabilization of the role of colonialist and neo-colonialist politics within the digital cultural record. It wants to challenge the myth of democratized digital knowledge and to make the case for the creation of new tools with ontological roots beyond the global north.

It also wants to attend to the role of labor in DH projects and addresses the hegemonic role of English language in DH scholarship. The postcolonial studies entered academic discourse to challenge the foundations of humanistic inquiry that validated and reinforced the right of Europe to colonize the world. It gained a foothold through the writings of Edward Said as well as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who offered a radical critique of Eurocentrism through their writings. Now postcolonial digital humanities looks at colonial and neo-colonial dynamics subtending digital knowledge creation in the humanities. In doing so it is a product of the histories of postcolonial studies and digital humanities.

They are the two sub-fields that have emerged after the first world war in response to a radically changing geopolitical and techno-cultural landscape.

# Postcolonial Digital Humanities

Scholars like Gayatri Spivak and Aijaz Ahmed identify the process of **'worlding'** as the subordination of worlds that are subject to colonial domination and the control over representation of the Global South whose citizens are considered 'subaltern' through colonial discourses.

## Matthew Kirschenbaum and World-Making

- The world making of programming is intimately linked to producing humanities knowledge.
- Digital knowledge production '*selectively*' represents human knowledge and culture through a range of interpretations; this creates a model world that is very different from the lived world.
- Postcolonial DH explores the practices needed to create new worlds that challenge the centrality of Europe and by engaging with the 'subaltern' by placing them at the centre of enquiry in DH scholarship.



Matthew Kirschenbaum

Source: [mkirschenbaum.wordpress.com](http://mkirschenbaum.wordpress.com)

## Decolonization within DH

- Colonial violence appears in discursive forms. This includes the reproduction of colonial influences on the production of digital knowledge that reinforces the ontologies of the Global North.
- Moving towards decolonization requires interrogating the worlds within to examine where colonial violence is being replicated and neocolonial power dynamics are being re-affirmed.



Scholars like Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak and Aijaz Ahmed identify the process of worlding as the subordination of worlds that are subject to colonial domination and the control over representation of the global south whose citizens are considered subaltern through colonial discourse. Let us look at the ideas of Matthew Kirschenbaum. The world making of programming is intimately linked to producing humanities knowledge. Digital knowledge production selectively represents human knowledge and culture through a range of interpretations and this creates a model world that is very different from the world we live in.

Postcolonial DH explores the practices needed to create new worlds that challenge the centrality of Europe by engaging with the subaltern by placing them at the center of inquiry in DH scholarship. So, what do we mean by decolonization within the area of digital humanities? Colonial violence appears in discursive forms and this includes the reproduction of colonial influences on the production of knowledge in digital form which also reinforces the ontologies of the global north. The idea of decolonization within DH wants to oppose this continuation of exploitation and partial generation of digital knowledge. By mediating between physical and virtual worlds, postcolonial DH

calls attention to the dimensions of power in world making through technology. This raises the question whether the digital texts are reproducing the hegemonies of the colonial world and whether decolonization is possible.

Let us listen to Professor Rahul K. Gairola who teaches in the Department of Post-colonial Studies and Digital Humanities at Murdoch University, Australia. He explains about the postcolonial turn in the area of DH. He is also the co-editor with Roopika Risam for the 2021 work on South Asian Digital Humanities: Postcolonial Mediations Across Technology's Cultural Canon.

Post-colonial Digital Humanities

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My name is Dr. Rahul Krishna Gairola and I am the Krishna Somers Senior Lecturer in English and Postcolonial Literature at Murdoch University in Perth, Western Australia. I am delighted to speak to you once more and let me briefly review the first two short talks I gave. In the first talk, I briefly delineated my definition of the digital humanities which I have defined as the reciprocal synergistic manner in which the digital impacts the humanistic fields on the one hand and on the other hand the ways in which the humanistic fields impact upon digitality and thus this reciprocal relationship produces a

kind of new agency that is a fusion of the human and technology almost like a cyborg we could think of it. In addition to that, I also gave a short talk that spoke about the need to put a postcolonial lens over the digital humanities to expose the ways in which Western thought and culture and indeed domination often has attended to the very formulation and birth or we could say genesis of this field of studies and this is evident perhaps most strongly in the so-called genesis narrative that basically says that the history of digital humanities is rooted in the work of a priest, an Italian priest called Father Roberto Busa and his work with the IBM company in the 1940s. So, you know, in locating the genesis or birth of digital humanities in the Western world, it just appears that we're in this familiar trope of the production of knowledge and modernity and being up to date and contemporary.

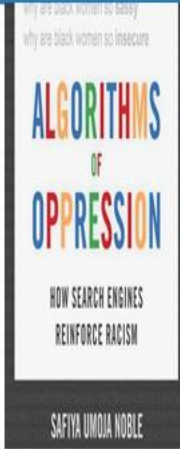
It's once again located in the West and as I said before there's a very familiar trope that Edward Said critiques heavily in his book *Orientalism*. From a postcolonial digital humanities viewpoint we have to look at the ways in which technology is situated in the non-West in the so-called third world or the global South or the ways in which these other spaces have erased or silenced these other histories and one important text that we should be aware of when we're looking at the digital humanities is the new volume, well it's a few years old, *Exploring Digital Humanities in India: Pedagogies, Practices and Institutional Possibilities* and this is a very important book that looks at the ways in which digital humanities is being carried out in India. I'd also like to share two other very important texts with you that I think are quite influential. The first is the *Intersectional Internet* which uses Kimberle Crenshaw's notion of intersectionality to look at the ways in which we are intersectional beings even in the digital milieu when we're online and in through the internet and the second book which has been deeply influential to my own studies of digital humanities is *Algorithms of Oppression How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. This was authored by Safiya Umoja Noble who does a brilliant job at saying and compelling us to ask ourselves why do we think that search engines like Google are objective and they render the pure truth so to speak when we look something up.

For example when you look up something with the word ugly or black girls or Indian girls why do the certain hits and images that pop up come up. So this is an exercise that I've encouraged all of you to think about maybe jot down a few keywords put them into Google and see what kinds of hits you get and what kind of images pop up and then crucially and critically ask yourself why. Thank you. Recovering unheard voices and making them part of the digital cultural record is not only a matter of representation but also one of fully realizing the interpretive possibilities of digital humanities. Postcolonial DH also attends to the structural ways of racism and sexism specific to people of color and women and other kinds of societal bias that are somehow encoded in algorithms.

We have analyzed enough instances to understand that algorithms and big data are never neutral or objective. This is what Safiya Umoja Noble has termed as algorithmic oppression or algorithms of oppression.


## Algorithms of Oppression

- Safiya Umoja Noble, in her work ***Algorithms of Oppression*** (2018), has coined the term 'algorithmic oppression' as a framework to critique the discourse of the Internet as a democratic landscape and to deploy alternative thinking about the practices instantiated within commercial web search.
- Noble's main argument is that popular search engines like Google can inadvertently amplify and reinforce existing prejudices, particularly against marginalized communities.
  - She draws on research about how race is constituted as a social, political and economic hierarchy based on racial categories and how White American Identity functions as an 'invisible' norm.



Algorithmic Oppression is not just a glitch in the system, but rather, is fundamental to the operating system of the web- Safiya Umoja Noble

Source: [www.technologyreview.com](http://www.technologyreview.com)

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She draws on research about how race is constituted as a social, political and economic hierarchy based on racial categories and how white American identity functions as the invisible norm. Noble provides numerous examples in her book where search results can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and reinforce discriminatory attitudes.

## Algorithms of Oppression

- Search engine results perpetuate particular narratives that reflect historically uneven distributions of power in the society.
- She offers examples of how racial algorithmic oppression works in Google Search.
  - In 2016, Google Images offered African American teenagers' mug shots when the keywords "three black teenagers" were given; this insinuates the image of Black Teens with criminality.
  - Search results as artifacts have symbolic and material meaning. They deploy subjectivity and offers a vantage point to understand that representation in media are expressions of power relations.
- Search engines are limited to providing only information based on what is indexed within the network. It is about who has access to provide information in the network that impacts whether information can be found to anyone looking for it.



Source: Sofiya Umoja Noble

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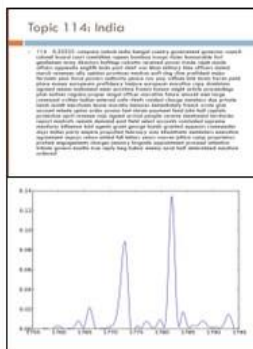
This insinuates the image of black teens with criminality. Search results as artifacts have symbolic and material meaning. They deploy subjectivity and offers a vantage point to understand that representation in media are expressions of power relations. Search engines are limited to providing only information based on what is indexed within the network. It is about who has access to provide information in the network that impacts whether information can be found to anyone looking for it.

The potency of commercial search using Google is that it functions as a dominant symbol-system of society. It is because of its prominence as the most popular search engine nowadays. Postcolonial DH can attend to the ways that existing digital archives bear traces of colonialism. For example, Mae Cappozi and Scott Enderle's project, A Distant Reading of Empire, demonstrates the value of digitized material for

understanding the relationship between colonialism and textuality in the digital cultural record.

## A Distant Reading of Empire

- Mae Capozzi and Scott Enderle's project, 'A Distant Reading of Empire', used the HathiTrust digital library to create a corpus of 2500 18<sup>th</sup> century texts that appeared between 1757 and 1795.
  - A statistics-based natural language-processing software called MALLET was used for topic-modelling (a form of text-mining that groups words in a corpus into topics).
  - A 150-topic topic model was used to interpret the relationship between India and Britain.



- **Topic 114 is the topic regarding India.**
- The words 'company', 'nabob' and 'India' are clear indicators of the colonial relationship and the British interests in India.
- **The topic model also shows a connection between the North American colonies and India.** The spike in the graph between 1765 and 1770 corresponds with the June 1767 Townshend Duties imposed on the North American colonists on imports like glass, paint and most importantly, tea.
- The British introduced tea to the Indian subcontinent and mass produced it there; So, there is a spike in conversation about India at the same time as the Townshend duties.

Sources:  
<https://www.google.com/amp/s/slideplayer.com/amp/8939652/>

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The spike in the graph between 1765 and 1770 corresponds with the June 1767 Townshend duties imposed on the North American colonists on imports like glass, paint and most importantly, tea which had resulted into what is known as Boston Tea Party in American history. One significant dimension of postcolonial digital humanities is rethinking the role of representation in digital archives and the design methods extending



from it. Digital archives are often heralded for their promise of openness and access to knowledge as well as creating spaces for counter narratives. However, there are traces of colonial violence within these archives also.

## Colonial Violence and Digital Archives

- Ann Laura Stoler delineates the need to read archives as technologies of colonialism, as there are consistencies of misinformation, omissions and mistakes along the 'archival grain'.
- According to Ranajit Guha, archives are political distortions that interpolates colonial subjects as 'irrational' and in need of rule.
- The postcolonial digital archive critiques its relationship to imperial culture by acknowledging its rootedness in imperial and colonial pasts.
  - Informed by an awareness of the violence of imperial practices and settler colonialism, the postcolonial digital archive attempts to repair the past by recovering colonized voices and deconstructing imperial values.



Source: [https://youtu.be/O\\_gSRlgwMLs?si=Gn4u1hceG1aFgUg](https://youtu.be/O_gSRlgwMLs?si=Gn4u1hceG1aFgUg)



We can refer to the work of Ann Laura Stoler who has delineated the need to read archives as technologies of colonialism as there are consistencies of misinformation, omissions and mistakes along the archival grain. According to the famous historian Ranajit Guha, archives are political distortions that interpolates colonial subjects as irrational and in need of rule. The postcolonial digital archive critiques its relationship to imperial culture by acknowledging its rootedness in imperial and colonial pasts. It is informed by an awareness of the violence of imperial practices and settler colonialism and therefore, the postcolonial digital archive attempts to repair the past by recovering colonized voices and deconstructing imperial values. It engages with postcolonial and archival theories to reinterpret the colonial ideologies embedded in the archives primary materials both through digital as well as critical frameworks.

Decolonization happens when there is an acknowledgement of the painful colonial violence and a desire to resist the further propagation of the practices of the imperial archive. The decolonizing project can range from the creation of archives that function

as sites of resistance to those that purposefully preserve underrepresented voices and recontextualize colonial material. Let us now look at postcolonial DH from the perspective of South Asian studies to understand how South Asian voices have been marginalized and to understand the hegemony of the canon of western male authors and the intersectionality of marginalization online.

## South Asian Digital Humanities

- South Asia and its diasporas are deeply implicated in technospaces as South Asia is a site where technology has had an embodied impact on its history and contemporary culture.
- Diasporas demonstrate the power, vitality and complexity of South Asian technospaces.
  - The connectivity of migrants in ‘digital diasporas’ is characterized by their use of Internet and social networking applications.
- South Asian digital humanities interrogates the influences of colonialism that have marginalized South Asian voices and diasporic communities, the intersectionality of these marginalizations and the totalizing impulses of algorithms that institutionalize racism and xenophobia.



'Digital India' Campaign Sought to Improve Online Infrastructure to Increase India's Digital Footprint  
Sources: caking.in, www.nrilegalservices.com

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South Asia and its diasporas are deeply implicated in techno spaces as South Asia is a site where technology has had an embodied impact on its history as well as contemporary culture. Diasporas demonstrate the power, vitality and complexity of South Asian techno spaces.

The connectivity of migrants in digital diasporas is characterized by their use of internet and social networking applications. South Asian digital humanities interrogates the influences of colonialism that have marginalized the South Asian voices and diasporic communities. The intersectionality of these marginalizations and the totalizing impulses of algorithms that institutionalize racism and xenophobia. Skewed power relations and transnational capitalism that exist in South Asian and other postcolonial nations testify the ongoing struggle for their representation within digital milieus and digital knowledge production. Cyberspace constitutes an important new space for the subaltern.

This is because cybercultures are extensions of existing social and cultural practices. Digital technologies are embedded in the cultures that produce them and cyberspace itself might be read as a set of social practices which has exclusionary and inclusionary potential depending on the politics of use. Before we move on to digital humanities practices in the South Asian context, it is important to look at techno culture. This transnational global activism can create linkages with other histories of oppression like that of the African Americans. The persistence of colonial structures in digital age is still huge.

To demonstrate this, let us look at the Rushdie digital archive or RDA which is the collection of author Salman Rushdie's work at Emory University. It drew attention not only for its famous author, but also for the innovative creation of a virtualized representation of the author's computer known as emulation. The archive is placed in dialogue with a set of ideological assumptions and in the context of colonial and post-colonial archives.

## Rushdie Digital Archive\*

- The RDA encompasses Rushdie's computers, CD-ROMs, and floppy disks, along with specialized tools for accessing this material.
  - The emulation software replicates Rushdie's older computer's hardware by allowing a newer system to imitate its appearance and capabilities.
  - Drawing on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's interpretation of the colonial archive, which challenges notions of fixity and stability, the RDA through emulation software, engages in a form of colonial mimicry.



Rushdie's transition from analog to digital writing is marked by his use of Mac Stickies and subsequent evolution shows his evolving identity in career and life.

- The guiding principle behind this emulation is that understanding the collection requires considering the context, which cannot be fully comprehended by selectively examining individual files and that it offers authenticity.
- However, this shared desire for authenticity also echoes Homi Bhabha's idea of mimicry- colonial desire for the colonized subject to emulate and resemble the colonizer. However, this mimicry is never an exact replica; it involves a subtle slippage or difference between the original and the copy. This can lead to ironic mockery, challenging the authority of the colonizer.
- Similarly, the emulation software mimics the older computer environment, but it is not an exact replica. There is a "slippage" between the original hardware and the emulated environment. This slippage challenges the notion of perfect replication, highlighting the inherent differences between the original and the copy.

\*Taken from Porter Olsen's article- Emulation as Mimicry: Reading the Salman Rushdie Digital Archive  
Picture Source: www.newyorker.com



The RDA encompasses Rushdie's computers, CD-ROMs and floppy disks along with specialized tools for accessing this material. The emulation software replicates Rushdie's old computer's hardware by allowing a newer system to imitate its appearance and capabilities.

Drawing on Spivak's interpretation of the colonial archive which challenges notions of fixity and stability, the RDA through this emulation software engages in a form of colonial mimicry also. The guiding principle behind this emulation is that understanding the collection requires considering the context which cannot be fully comprehended by selectively examining individual files and that it offers authenticity. This shared desire for authenticity also echoes Homi Bhabha's idea of mimicry, colonial desire for the colonized subject to emulate and resemble the colonizer. However, this mimicry is never an exact replica.

It involves a subtle slippage or difference between the original and the copy. This can lead to ironic mockery challenging the authority of the colonizer. Similarly, the emulation software mimics the older computer environment, but it is not an exact replica. Furthermore, just as colonial mimicry can lead to ironic mockery and challenge colonial authority, the imperfections and partial presences introduced by emulation software in the RDA can lead to critical readings and insights. For example, the Mac Stickies' color coding practice offers a unique view of Rushdie's thinking on a particular day.

Moreover, the evolution of word processors reflects Rushdie's evolving identity, marking distinct phases in his life and career. It is interesting to note that Indian fiction incorporates machine reading in the narrative. One such example is the Indian postcolonial writer Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta chromosome*. The text interest in both electronic textuality and the subaltern archive shows how the concept of information retrieval pervades the novel. The narrative is assembled through the recovery of textual artifact with the aid of a comprehensive digital archive called Ava.

## The Role of Digital Archive in *The Calcutta Chromosome*

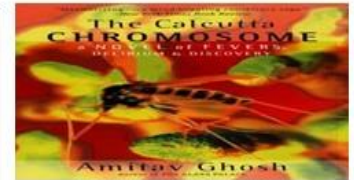
Amitav Ghosh's 1995 novel, "The Calcutta Chromosome", delves into themes of digital archiving and digital forensics, central to the digital humanities.

Matthew Kirschenbaum utilized the method of digital forensics to apply investigative techniques to retrieve, analyze, and understand digital information.

- The narrative is constructed through the retrieval of textual fragments using a comprehensive digital archive named Ava, a character that embodies both an archive and an artificial intelligence.
- The narrative is woven together from fragments found within the gaps and omissions of the archive, incorporating various forms of "colonial modernism" and vernacular literature.
- The representation of vernacular literature, particularly through the character of Phulboni, challenges its status within the electronic text archive, positioning it as valuable data.

- The representation of vernacular literature, particularly through Phulboni, challenges its status within the electronic text archive, positioning it as valuable data to interpret the silence of the vernacular within the colonial archive of modernity.
- The concept of data is crucial in understanding the discourse of the literary in the novel. Data emerges from the archive, revealing aspects of the past that may be overlooked in traditional historical accounts.
- Ghosh's exploration of the digital archive is pertinent to contemporary practices of memorialization and historiography. It raises questions about the transience of cultural memory in the digital age and the desire for a record that resists forgetting.

- Digital forensics becomes pivotal as the character Antar discovers a deleted email from Murugan that potentially holds the key to understanding his disappearance. To achieve this, Ava must sift through the stored memories on Murugan's outdated hard drives. This process is likened to Kirschenbaum's "forensic imagination".



Source: [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com)

Amitav Ghosh's 1995 novel *The Calcutta Chromosome* delves into themes of digital archiving and digital forensics central to the digital humanities. Matthew Kirschenbaum used concept of digital forensics involves applying investigative techniques to retrieve, analyze, and understand digital information. The narrative is constructed through the retrieval of textual fragments using a comprehensive digital archive named Ava, a character that embodies both an archive and an artificial intelligence. The narrative is woven together from fragments found within the gaps and omissions of the archive incorporating various forms of colonial modernism and vernacular literature. The representation of vernacular literature, particularly through the character of Phulboni, challenges its status within the electronic text archive positioning it as a valuable data.

Digital forensics becomes pivotal as the character Antar discovers a deleted email from Murugan that potentially holds the key to understanding his disappearance. To achieve this, Ava must sift through the stored memories on Murugan's outdated hard drives and this process is likened to Kirschenbaum's forensic imagination. The novel suggests that the perspective needed to comprehend the assembled narratives requires new reading technologies which are envisioned as a future digital archive with vast storage



Swajanti






capabilities. This allows the reader like Antar to gain a posthuman perspective. We looked at a brief caricature of how the digital afterlives of colonialism shaped the formation of the digital cultural record and in turn the cultural memory of humanity.



Bichitra: Online Tagore Variarum is an archive project taken up by Jadavpur University India. This project has served to cut across boundaries of various aesthetic notions. It is an online integrated knowledge site of Rabindranath Tagore's works. Tagore as we all know is the first Asian Nobel laureate. Reading closely through the different versions one can trace not only his complex creative process but also a glimpse of the changing socio-political landscape of India through the 19th and early 20th centuries and the author's intellectual response to it.

## Bichitra: The Online Tagore Variorum Project

- 'Bichitra: The Online Tagore Variorum' is a virtual archive that contains all the works and variant readings of the texts of Rabindranath Tagore, the first Nobel laureate from Asia.
  - The three major tools that Bichitra provides for a user-researcher are images and transcription, hyperbibliography and search engine.

<p><b>Transcribing</b> the manuscripts provided an easy-to-read version of Tagore's handwriting and to make the text machine-readable for further processing.</p>		<p>Pagewise transcription with manuscript image</p>
<p>The <b>hyperbibliography</b> provided a pathway to the contents of the website and each entry was linked to its images, text and collation files, accessible through the search engine and timeline. At the most, basic level, items were organized by language and then by genre.</p>		<p>Hyperbibliography of Tagore's English poems and songs indexed according to genre</p>
<p>The search result constitutes a <b>hyperconcordance</b>, as it provides links to the actual works. To avoid repetition of the same results from various versions, it works only on the Collected Works (Rachanabali) in Bengali brought out by Tagore's own university, Visva-Bharati.</p>		<p>Hyperconcordance enables to draw metadata by citing the genre, title, chapter of a novel/play, collection name etc.</p>

Sources: Spandana Bhowmik- Bichitra: The Online Tagore Variorum Project



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So, this virtual archive contains all the works and variant readings of the texts of Rabindranath Tagore. The three major tools that Bichitra provides for a user researcher are images and transcription, hyperbibliography and search engine. So, there is a page wise transcription with the image of the manuscript. The hyperbibliography of Tagore's English poems and songs is indexed according to the genre and hyper concordance enables us to draw metadata by citing the genre, title, chapter of a novel or a play,

collection or name etc. Indian literature especially graphic novels also demonstrate the trajectories of digital cultures in the South Asian context.

## Indian Graphic Novels

- The graphic novel is an alternative hybrid form of storytelling which combines art and writing.
- Indian graphic novels involve the representation of histories, socio-cultural spaces and cultural stances on social issues.
  - Indian graphic novels' digital turn is representative of globalization in that, Indian material is transformed by the Western technology, rendering it easily consumable by an International audience.



*The Harappa Files* (2011) by Sarnath Banerjee is a fictitious story set in the urban locale that showcases everyday instances like a mother taking her children to school. The work invokes a postmodern identity by using a psycho-verbal language, fragmented narration and authentic portrayals of the cultural degeneration, globalization and the loopholes in the nation's governance.



*Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability* (2011) by Srividya Natarajan and S. Anand is based on Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. It introduces its readers to the larger social history of segregation based on caste. It shows that casteism exists in India and tries to gain global support and empathy for caste-based violence and its victims. It incorporates traditional Pardhan Gond art from Madhya Pradesh into a contemporary tale-cum biography of Dr. Ambedkar.

Sources: en.wikipedia.org



Digital Graphic Novels provide a hybrid textual-visual discourse, making the story fluid and imaginative. Sources: www.britishcouncil.org, www.bibliotheca.com



The graphic novel is an alternative hybrid form of storytelling which combines art and writing. Indian graphic novels involve the representation of histories, socio-cultural spaces and cultural stances on social issues. Indian graphic novels digital turn can also be looked at as a representation of globalization as the Indian material is being transformed by the western technology rendering it easily consumable by an international audience. The Harappa files published in 2011 by Sarnath Banerjee is a fictitious story set in the urban locality that showcases everyday instances and it also invokes a postmodern identity by using a psychoverbal language, fragmented narration and authentic portrayals of the cultural degeneration, globalization and the loopholes in the nation's governance. *Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability* published in 2011 by Srividya Natarajan and S. Anand is based on the life of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. It introduces its readers to the larger social history of segregation based on caste. Technological artifacts like computer have impacted the corpus of post-independence Indian English novels. The emergence of new publication houses, digital spaces and technology are increasingly becoming the ones where human knowledge is produced and amplified. The increase in the number of

literary awards and the rise in literary rate also had to do with the widespread acceptance of technologies after independence of India. So, it becomes very important to know that exclusions and biases that have characterized print culture in the colonial days are reproduced in the digital cultural record also in the postcolonial days of our country.

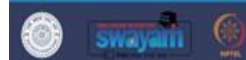
Let us now look at how Indian writing in English had a substantial influence in the marketplace with the help of digital born content.

## Digital-Born Content and Indians Writing in English(IWE)

- Postcolonial authors deliberately or unknowingly incorporate the "exotic" in their work and this established a theoretical framework that is still relevant today in describing diasporic literature, especially novels.
  - This includes 'the yearning for an irretrievable imaginary homeland', 'the discourse of homelessness and displacement' and 'the migrant author hovering between two cultures'.
- However, 'minor genres' present valuable critical opportunities, particularly for considering digital-born content from IWE authors, such as blogs and social media posts, that directly relate to their published work.
  - It is crucial to recognize that epitexts exist "anywhere outside the book" and encompass a range of discourses with functions extending beyond mere paratextual presentation and commentary.



Sources: [theconversation.com](http://theconversation.com), [bookart101.com](http://bookart101.com),  
[www.indianetzone.com](http://www.indianetzone.com)



Postcolonial authors deliberately or unknowingly incorporate the exotic in their work and this somehow was established as a theoretical framework which is still considered relevant today in describing the diasporic literature, particularly novels. For example, yearning for an irretrievable imaginary homeland, the discourse of homelessness and displacement etc. However, minor genres present valuable critical opportunities, particularly for considering digital born content of Indian writers in English such as blogs and social media posts that directly relate to their published work. And therefore, it is crucial to recognize that epitexts exist anywhere outside the book and encompasses a range of discourses with functions extending beyond mere paratextual presentation and commentary.



Digital born content has the potential to expand access to the established market for marginalized populations both authors and readers. Digital humanities can help to scrutinize the digital born content essential for a critical exploration of digital paratexts. Let us look at how Amitav Ghosh's digital epitexts serve as a means to navigate and transcend the confines of the western literary marketplace.

## Digital-Born Content and Indians Writing in English(IWE)\*




- Amitav Ghosh, a highly productive author known for his digital epitexts in "minor" genres, exemplifies an IWE writer who straddles both the Western literary market and its exclusivity.
- While firmly rooted in the Western academic sphere, Ghosh critiques the exclusions within the Western literary market and uses his position to amplify marginalized voices.

In addition to his author webpage, Ghosh maintains an active blog and Twitter feed. These platforms primarily serve as spaces for him to reflect on various issues, engage directly with readers, spotlight marginalized voices, and criticize a literary market that marginalizes non-English publications, subaltern authors, and important yet commercially challenging topics like climate change.

His blog username, "Chrestomather," reflects his role as a language teacher, presenting his blog as a collection of didactic texts. His "Paratextual" posts are closely linked to his published works, offering extended versions, interviews, and stories related to or directly from his nonfiction works. Another category, "Self-Promotion," encompasses posts promoting his published works, including announcements of new releases, special editions, and events. "Audience Engagement" posts involve direct interactions with readers, including responding to comments, addressing reader inquiries, and sharing individual letters or exchanges.

Ghosh employs his blog to champion "marginal" authors, works, and histories in a series of posts categorized as "Promoting the Margins." These include book reviews, transcribed text posts, and historical narratives focused on marginalized postcolonial experiences, often in non-English languages.

\*Taken from Tawnya Azar's 'Inside and Outside the Literary Marketplace: The Digital Products of Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy and Salman Rushdie.'  
Sources: edition.cnn.com, www.theguardian.com



Amitav Ghosh is a highly productive author. He is also famous for his digital epitexts in minor genres.

He can be treated as an example of an Indian writer in English who straddles both the western literary market and its exclusivity. While firmly rooted in the western academic sphere, Ghosh critiques the exclusions within the western literary market and uses his position to amplify marginalized voices. Ghosh maintains his author webpage as well as active blog and Twitter feed also. His blog username, Chrestomather, reflects his role as a language teacher, presenting his blog as a collection of didactic texts. His paratextual posts are closely linked to his published works offering extended versions, interviews and stories related to or directly from his non-fiction works.

Another category of self-promotion encompasses posts promoting his published work including announcements of new releases, special editions, events, etc. Audience engagement posts involve direct interactions with readers including responding to comments, etc., addressing their inquiries. Ghosh employs his blog to champion marginal authors, works and histories in a series of posts categorized as promoting the margins. These include book reviews, transcribed text posts and historical narratives focused on marginalized postcolonial experiences often in non-English languages.

His translator, Anna Nadotti, highlights in an article reposted on his blog that Ghosh has shifted from traditional reportage to continuous blogging using it to enrich the background of his works. He organizes his posts by category, chronologically and offers a seamless interface for readers. His platform allows him to showcase forgotten authors, texts as well as histories. As we have seen during our discussions, digitized platforms and algorithms can perpetuate bigotry and prejudice which is socially and legally spurned by all human beings.

This has been termed as digital necropolitics by Rahul Gairola.

## Digital Necropolitics

- 'Necropolitics' is a term coined by the theorist, Achille Mbembe, as going beyond the right to kill into exercising the right to expose other people to health risks and complete death.
- Rahul K. Gairola uses the term 'digital necropolitics' as exposing netizens represented in and participating in the technological innovations, to danger.
  - This can be seen in the history of colonialism where the 'darker races' existed beyond the boundaries of civility and modernity.
  - Digital spaces can obscure both identitarian politics and power relations riddled by Eurocentric thoughts, the British Empire's partition of the subcontinent and its resulting bloodshed and migrations.
  - The social life and death afforded to subjects in and through digital representations by institutionalizing racism/classicism/xenophobia.



Juxtaposing Necropolitics with Partition  
Sources: artsandculture.google.com, www.documenta14.de  
Refer Rahul K. Gairola- Digital Necropolitics

Necropolitics is a term coined by the theorist Achille Mbembe as going beyond the right to kill into exercising the right to expose other people to health risks and complete death. Gairola uses the term digital necropolitics as exposing netizens represented in and participating in the technological innovations to danger. This can be seen in the history of colonialism where the darker races existed beyond the boundaries of civility and modernity. Digital spaces can obscure both identitarian politics and power relations riddled by Eurocentric thoughts. The British Empire's partition of the subcontinent and its resulting bloodshed and migrations are an example of it.

The social life and death afforded to subjects in and through digital representations by institutionalizing racism, classism and xenophobia. Digital necropolitics becomes a central issue to understand the ongoing impact of the partition in the South Asian diaspora and its relationship with technology. We have already talked about the dominant narrative of the genesis of digital humanities from Roberto Busa, but this genesis narrative of digital humanities is re-evaluated through the postcolonial lens by looking at the broader historical moment and their socio-political significance. Gairola delineates how Bollywood movies offer a counterpoint to digital necropolitics by serving as a cultural outlet for representing the experiences of marginalized communities in India. Movies that depict colonial violence like the partition serve as counter narratives to the conventional origin story of digital humanities associated with Busa.

## Conclusion

- It is a common fallacy that digital environments are democratized spaces where representation is allowed to all through blogging and other social media platforms.
- Postcolonial and South Asian DH aim to represent the stories and voices of those who are underrepresented in knowledge production.
  - Those from formerly colonized countries, indigenous communities and those who are marginalized in their national contexts.
- DH scholars should be committed to social justice by creating knowledge that challenges exclusions in the record of digital knowledge and to make sure that DH does not remain limited to only reflecting the epistemologies and values of the Global North.
  - The potential for DH lies in its capacity for world-making, that is, to create new models for knowledge and the world.



It is a common fallacy that digital environments are democratized spaces where representation is allowed to all through blogging and other social media platforms. Post-colonial and South Asian DH aim to represent the stories and voices of those who are underrepresented in knowledge production. Those from formerly colonized countries, indigenous communities and those who are marginalized in their national context. Scholars in the area of digital humanities should be committed to social justice by creating knowledge that challenges exclusions in the record of digital knowledge and to ensure that the field does not remain limited to only reflecting the epistemologies and values of the global north. In the next module, we will be discussing about feminist and queer digital humanities that deal with technologies and methodologies related to gender, sexuality and social justice in the digital realm.

We would also talk about public digital humanities with respect to open access and the mandates required for scholarly work. Thank you.