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Humanities Matter
Symposium Proceedings

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INDIA
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INDIA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE A SYMPOSIUM ON HUMANITIES MATTER

Concept Note

Why This Theme?

In contemporary times, the obsession with technology and commerce has eventually led to a total dismissal of sensitivity to environmental issues, humanistic values and social justice. While each discipline of knowledge may have taken leaps in thought and theory, the sum and total of knowledge and learning have not resulted in an overall development of the human mind. Though ‘inclusivity’, divergent/innovative thought and ‘value education’ have become buzzwords in academic seminars and conferences, it is ‘skill development’ and ‘employability’ that have acquired a formidable importance in education. Some of the key attributes crucial in all professions are indeed compassion, empathy, fair-mindedness, emotional maturity, commitment and perseverance that evolve with a knowledge of psychology and even economics. All of these fall into the domain of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Some fundamental questions that arise are:

- What does it mean for a student of sciences, commerce or engineering and even medicine, to not have humanities in their curriculum? What does it mean to have this gap in knowledge? How can this issue be addressed?
- Should we redefine our notion of ‘progress’?
- Why is there so much misery and unhappiness amongst learners as well as teachers?
- Do we equip ourselves adequately to deal with conflict resolutions rather than resorting to violence and aggression?

- How do we work out a balance between theoretical and practical learning?
- How do we make room for pauses for reflection amidst the stress of gathering degrees and certificates?

As we navigate an increasingly complex world, it is essential to revisit the value of humanities and social sciences in fostering empathy, critical thinking and well-rounded individuals.

Key Discussion Points:

- Conceptualising Humanities in Education
- The Interface of Humanities with Sciences
- Role of Critical Thinking and Creativity
- Conflict Resolution and Emotional Intelligence
- Humanities as the Bedrock of Knowledge

Proceedings and Detailed Report

24 September 2025

A one-day symposium titled ‘Humanities Matter’ was convened at the India International Centre, New Delhi, to examine the contemporary relevance of the humanities and their relation to science, technology, policy and public life. Convened by Sukrita Paul Kumar, with Swati Pal and Asani Bhaduri as co-organisers, the event assembled 12 speakers drawn from academia, administration, publishing, fine arts and the civil services. The programme combined conceptual reflection, field experience and illustrative case studies to map how humanistic knowledge shapes moral imagination, public policy, pedagogy, creativity and the ethical use of technology. Each of the panellists contributed their distinctive opinions with remarkable clarity and eloquence, leveraging their extensive experiences in their respective fields, leading to a wide array of perspectives which struck a chord with all the attendees.

Introduction and Framing the Event

Sukrita Paul Kumar introduced the symposium by pointing out an unfortunate global contraction of platforms for humanistic enquiry. She located this contraction

in multiple forces: Consumerist market logic, technocratic governance, an increased privileging of skills and utility in formal curricula and the accelerating presence of artificial intelligence as a conceptual rival to human judgment. She urged an expanded vision so that humanities should not be confined to disciplinary silos, but would be integrated with sciences, performing arts and professional studies; humanistic insight needs to inform civic life, environmental stewardship and the design of technology. Rising consumerism, unchecked development, loss of basic human values and most importantly, the looming shadow of Artificial Intelligence (AI), which is often projected as an alternative to the 'human mind', are some of the rising concerns which lead a thinking mind to re-consider the principles which the humanities possess, not just as a set of disciplines to be studied in a classroom, but in providing essential tools to deal with conflict-resolution and instabilities of the modern-day world. Kumar gently emphasised the 'interaction' between humanities and sciences, performing arts and multiple other disciplines, so as to set a vision for a better planet.

The event moved forward with opening remarks by K. N. Shrivastava, Director, India International Centre, and former IAS officer, amplifying the significant critical argument that development divorced from moral deliberation produces hollow outcomes. He began his speech by complimenting the organisers of the programme and stated that it is the humanities which matter and why this needs to be affirmed and re-affirmed repeatedly. He questioned economic development devoid of moral values and argued that there was an urgent need to bring in social synthesis.

Shrivastava proposed mainstreaming humanities education across technical and vocational institutes to cultivate citizens who anchor technological competence with ethical responsibility. Kumar supplemented this by calling for renewed attention to oral traditions, folklore and community memory as sources of empathy, social cohesion and ecological wisdom.

She mentioned a book, titled *Reconceptualizing the Sciences and the Humanities: An Integral Approach* by Subhash Chandra Malik (2022), in which the author visualised the challenges which this field of study would face more than two decades in advance, enhancing the relevance and relatability of the present-day event. She reiterated an urgent need for a paradigm shift in the present knowledge systems for a greater scope of intersection and interactivity amongst multiple disciplines. Kumar pointed to the necessity of conflict-resolution in the midst of excessive chaos.

Key Framing Themes:

- Reclaiming the public value of the humanities in and beyond university campuses.
- Designing of interdisciplinary architectures—curricula, research programmes and institutional incentives—which allow humanities and sciences to inform one another.
- Restore narrative, ethical and historical imagination as corrective to reductive, purely instrumental modes of knowledge.

After this emphatic start, the event briskly moved towards the next three sessions over the morning.

Session I—Conceptualising Humanities: Purpose, Pedagogy and Performance

Panellists: Vivek Suneja, Ram Ramaswamy and Shovana Narayan

Following the introductory remarks, the first session of the symposium was opened by **Ram Ramaswamy**. The main aspect which he emphasised was the need for more flexibility in education. This need arises both from the enrichment of each of these broad disciplines through perspectives from the other disciplines and from the genuine need for combined methodologies in academics, as data becomes more accessible and technologies like AI become more pervasive. This opening session explored what humanities do, why they matter to non-specialists, and how they can be taught and institutionalised across different circumstances.

Ramaswamy argued for curricular flexibility and a common pool of basic competencies across departments. Drawing on his experience from the field of science education and related technical fields, he recommended:

- Streamlining of common minimum programmes which allow students from science and humanities to cross-enrol meaningfully.
- Methodological pluralism so that problem-orientated enquiry brings relevant disciplines together, rather than asking students to traverse siloed degree structures.

- Framing of interdisciplinarity as both pedagogic necessity and intellectual enrichment in an era of abundant data and pervasive technologies.

His argument focused on the need for more flexibility in the Indian education system (especially higher education) to allow for broader, unrelated disciplines to feed into each other. With the doubling of life expectancy and the quadrupling of the population of the country in the last 78 years, comprehensive and holistic education is a necessity. Though there are some examples of elite science-focused institutions with robust humanities departments, they do not allow many options for interdisciplinary exploration from the perspective of both the student and the educator. He gave an example that even in the IITs, the humanities are regimented. Ramaswamy argued that not only should science students expand into humanities, but humanities students should also have adequate options to be introduced to and explore the sciences.

Referencing D. D. Kosambi's *Combined Methods in Indology*, Ramaswamy emphasised the idea that no discipline that may help find a solution to a particular problem should be excluded, while also highlighting that one should know which disciplines to include in the first place. It is this combined knowledge which will take the collectives forward.

The panel was ably taken forward by **Vivek Suneja**'s speech. His opening deliberations reflected on how, in the age of information technology, artificial intelligence, consumerism, profiteering and non-stop entertainment, it is important to reflect on the idea of humanness. Simply focusing on utilitarian aspects and psychological gratification can lead to dehumanisation. In doing so, we annihilate our capacity of being sensitive and hence, dehumanise ourselves as well. The modern disciplines of economics and management sciences have focused excessively on economic agents, consumers and producers amplifying the aspects of utility and profit and creating a consumerist rather than a creative society. The dehumanising tendencies of these disciplines has led to the proliferation of trivial wants, 'ceremonial' rather than functional consumption, gross inequalities in income and wealth distribution and impending environmental catastrophes. Due to these critical circumstances, it becomes imperative that social sciences re-discover their intrinsic social character and human aspects.

Suneja discussed the need for rehumanising economics and management. Basing his talk on inputs from E. F. Schumacher's book *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered* (1973), he discussed how in the face of tyranny, social and

intellectual capital formation get deeply impacted. The high-sounding social sciences are increasingly becoming more scientific and less social.

Economics and management have borrowed the scientific method and applied it to their own domains, without also retaining the focus on preservation and respect for natural and human resources and interpersonal nature. All economic agents are assumed to be perfectly rational. The economic utility function does not see consumers as human beings. It does not include social and moral sources of satisfaction, only the consumption of goods, reducing the impact of consumer satisfaction to pure materialism. The market operates through manufacturing consumer needs, which they then cater to for profit.

Suneja emphasised on how work is compensated through income, which we consume, but in itself it is not considered a source of satisfaction. Consumption is more important than the quality of work. Economic systems are driven by passive consumption, rather than active creation. Endless consumerism leads to nature being treated as a consumer good, rather than irreplaceable capital.

Suneja made a case for rehumanisation of economics and management and interrogated the dehumanisation of economics and management. Using E. F. Schumacher's critique as a foil, he contended:

- Modern economic models often reduce persons to utility-maximising agents, excluding moral, aesthetic and relational sources of gratification.
- Rehumanising social sciences requires restoring attention to purpose, to labour as meaningful activity and to ecological limits to growth. Suneja urged incorporation of ethics, social-emotional learning and culturally situated knowledge into business and economic education.

The final speaker of the session was **Shovana Narayan**. She highlighted the disconnect between the arts and sciences from the perspective of the common man. STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Management) is treated as more important due to its materiality and utility, with humanities often remaining in the back seat.

Comprehending human experience, mapping human dignity and ensuring sustainable well-being, should be the central concern for the study of humanities. Cultivating vital

transferable skills such as critical thinking, effective communication and empathy, enhancing cultural awareness and encouraging self-reflection, civic responsibility and creativity should be some of its central tenets. Additionally, it is the spectrum of humanities and its intricate connections which provide profound insights into human history and society, thus equipping individuals to become active citizens and thrive in an ever-evolving world.

Involving the audience through an inclusive method of delivery, Narayan demonstrated a rhythm, or *taal*, with an increasing, evenly spaced count. With this demonstration, she explained how mathematics is present even in the performing arts. Performing arts are highly interdisciplinary, also involving knowledge of history and geography. These fields need to be viewed through community understanding and empathy. Arts characterise the human aspect of 'being' and facilitate remembrance, cross-cultural understanding, affiliation and posterity. Through examples of Mauryan sculptures and ancient temple architecture, Narayan discussed the importance of historical consciousness through the spirit of discipline of humanities.

Narayan contended that the performing arts are not treated with the same amount of reverence as the sciences. There is a need to see value in them beyond the aspect of entertainment. Even depictions of Hindu deities (like Saraswati) emphasise the importance of the performing arts and their role in bringing forth cultural syncretism. Narayan emphasised the significance of blending performing arts with education. It is a discipline that can teach learners a lot of personal management, along with creativity and resilience. It teaches one reasoning, judiciousness, critical analysis, sensitivity, compassion and other significant community characteristics.

The **essence** of her discourse was built on three pillars:

- Performing arts encode temporal, mathematical and embodied knowledge that supports cognitive skills such as attention, timing and pattern recognition.
- Arts cultivate empathy, discipline and historical consciousness; they teach learners to hold ambiguity and to respect community memory.
- Integrating training in performance and narrative into broader curricula builds resilience, emotional literacy and civic sensibility.

Collective Takeaways from Session I:

- Humanities are kinetic, not ornamental: they train capacities—listening, interpretation, moral imagination—useful across professions.
- Structural change in higher education (flexible credit systems, cross-department options, joint faculty appointments) is required to normalise interdisciplinary learning.
- Not only do the humanities matter but human beings too matter. It is time we restored the essential dignity and value of life.

Session II — Interface: Humanities, Science and Technology

Panellists: Manindra Nath Thakur, Saradindu Bhaduri, Vandana Madan and Avishek Parui

This session foregrounded philosophical and pragmatic relations between humanistic enquiry, the sciences and technological systems.

The first speaker was **Manindra Nath Thakur**. In exploring the intersection of literature and social reality, Thakur argued that humanities often capture societal shifts more perceptively than social sciences. Through novels, poems, and philosophical reflections, literature reveals ethical, emotional and political insights which help us understand contemporary crises, from capitalism's excesses to the search for human meaning.

The speaker's engagement with chaos theory and its epistemological implications for Karl Marx's thought, subsequently became a guiding principle in his academic career and teaching of the philosophy of science. He emphasised three key points: The first concerning the philosophy of science itself, meaning reality is inherently complex and cannot be understood in isolation. With the emergence of critical realism, it is evident that individuals are multidimensional beings. One persistent epistemological problem in Western thought has been the treatment of humans in singular, binary categories, such as 'ugly' or 'evil'. This reductionism, rooted in Cartesian dualism, obscures the nuanced complexity of human nature.

Building on this insight, the speaker argued that strict disciplinary boundaries are inadequate. Efforts at 'interdisciplinarity' are limited because they presuppose prior

segregation; rather, research and knowledge should be phenomenon-orientated, addressing complex realities directly. Traditional academic structures, he noted, often inhibit meaningful communication between schools or centres dedicated to different disciplines. Human consciousness, he argued, is not isolated; it emerges from our physical, biological, social, and psychological dimensions, and develops within a collective sub-conscious. The implication is that collaborative thinking is essential for addressing complex societal issues.

The speaker illustrated the integration of disciplines through the Mondragon experiment, which refers to the large-scale worker cooperative federation founded in 1956 in Mondragón, Spain, by the Basque Catholic priest José María Arizmendiarieta. This experiment combines economics with spirituality, drawing the attention of economists worldwide. It demonstrates that even economics cannot be fully separated from ethical and spiritual considerations. Modern science, by contrast, has often sidelined spirituality. Thinkers such as Mahatma Gandhi and B. R. Ambedkar recognised the necessity of integrating ethical and spiritual dimensions into social and economic life. Ambedkar, in *Buddha or Karl Marx* (1956), emphasised that no truly egalitarian economic system can exist without a spiritual foundation.

Philosophers such as Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker (1912–2007) have argued that the dualistic foundations of modern society have reached a critical climax, prompting his call: ‘All anti-Cartesians come together to save humanities’. This underscores the failure of segregated disciplinary knowledge and highlights the urgent need for collective, integrated thought. If the humanities are to survive and thrive in the centuries ahead, scholars must cultivate an approach which recognises the interconnections between various disciplines, knowledge and human consciousness.

Thakur highlighted the introduction of a course on ‘Literature and Politics’, emphasising that the social science disciplines often fail to capture emergent trends within the real space. According to him, the understanding of societal shifts often occurs retrospectively. He argued that literature offers a more immediate ‘pulse’ of the contemporary world. For example, the popularity of dystopian novels across multiple languages reflects widespread anxieties and questions about the trajectory of modern society. In contrast, he observed, political scientists and economists rarely display an urge to envision or construct utopias, whereas literature frequently engages with such imaginative explorations.

The economic crisis of 2008 in the US provided a particularly striking case study for this perspective. Philosophically, the crisis underscored the vulnerabilities inherent in contemporary capitalism. Capitalism, he noted, rests on two fundamental principles: Greed and the notion of the common good. It is in this context that Mahatma Gandhi's critique remains pertinent: 'The world has enough for everyone's need but not enough for everyone's greed'. Whereas some contemporary literature and cultural texts even suggested that 'greed is good', reflecting capitalist rationales for growth, analyses of the 2008 crisis revealed that greed was a primary factor in systemic failures. The pandemic-era book, *Greed Is Dead: Politics After Individualism* (2020) by Paul Collier and John Kay offers a complementary perspective, arguing that human greed, legitimised by extreme individualism, has emptied out society and that only a return to mutual responsibility and cooperation can sustain a viable future.

Thakur further illustrated the insights literature provides into societal norms through Michel Houellebecq's novel *Atomised* (1998). The novel presents a mirror to French society; portraying elites as primarily concerned with bodily pleasures. Its protagonist, a scientist, ultimately withdraws from society and travels to Tibet to become a monk, highlighting a search for ethical and spiritual grounding absent in modern life. Similarly, Thakur referred to an Albanian theorist who reportedly embraced Buddhism to capture emotional and subjective realities that his discipline could not adequately address. The overarching implication of these observations is that the humanities remain uniquely capable of addressing questions of meaning, ethics and interconnectedness—dimensions which are often overlooked in other disciplines. Modern scholarship, he contended, must reclaim this holistic worldview, emphasising the unity of human experience rather than fragmented, disciplinary approaches.

The next speaker was **Saradindu Bhaduri**. He began his exposition by pointing towards the presence of strict protocols and automation in scientific methods, often seen as a necessity to make science universal and objective. This tendency, however, has made science and innovation opaque and expensive. A pressing question today is how to make science more transparent, context-specific and affordable. One should deliberate on how an explicit recognition of human sensibilities, tacit and experiential knowledge, improvisations and idiosyncrasies in the conduct of science could facilitate this transition.

Bhaduri examined the conventional binaries between the humanities and the sciences. While science seeks objectively verifiable truths, the humanities explore subjective

human experiences. Science observes patterns; humanities probe the domain of lived experience. When one delineates disciplines along such boundaries, one must then ask: is there a zone in which the humanities should not matter? This inquiry forms a critical starting point for discussing the interface between humanities and science. For instance, Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (1976) contends that three centuries of industrialisation transformed eroticism into a science of sexuality, replacing nuanced experiences with scientific discourse on population, fertility, contraception and sexually transmitted diseases. Contemporary scholarship often favours such scientific approaches over explorations of historical erotic experiences.

Bhaduri further illustrated how Indian education historically engaged with these questions. During the founding of Visva-Bharati in the 1920s, a notable debate occurred between Rabindranath Tagore and historian Jadunath Sarkar. Sarkar, opposed to the integration of humanistic synthesis with scientific inquiry, left in protest, writing a letter to Tagore. Tagore responded publicly, emphasising human sensibility over exactitude in knowledge, while acknowledging that scientific developments outside the laboratory could not be ignored. The discussion also highlighted German geographer and naturalist, Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859) as a paradigm of bridging the gap between experiential knowledge and scientific inquiry. Humboldt used his own body as a site of experiment, refusing to subject others to experimentation, thereby demonstrating how personal and sensory experience could generate scientific insight.

Bhaduri then extended the argument to grassroots innovation, such as the Indian concept of *jugaad*, noting that many innovators operate outside formal laboratories. To understand these arrangements, one must appreciate how people invent in everyday contexts, rather than focusing solely on laboratory-based scientific discoveries. This challenges the perception that scientific protocols are fixed. Instead, methodologies are outcomes of socio-political and economic processes. Ultimately, the talk suggested that meaningful dialogue between the humanities and sciences is possible. Such engagement can influence methodologies, foster mutual understanding and encourage collaborative approaches that enrich both domains.

The next speaker, **Vandana Madan**, extended the discussion about the importance of the interface between the two fields of humanities and sciences, which are often perceived as binary opposites through centralising the classroom experience. She made a strong case for the need to reconsider our perception of different kinds of education, particularly in light of the growing disintegration between science and the humanities.

Madan, through her persistent involvement in the areas of Indian society and culture, education, gender and environmental issues, addressed a pressing concern: The dichotomy that is ingrained in the minds of young learners about science and arts, which hinders their ability to find a synthesis between intellect and emotion and ultimately affects the coherence in their lives.

She pointed out the widely prevalent biases in academia and the normative attitudes of society which typically give preference to science over the humanities. She aptly referred to them as ‘background noise’, which needed to be cut with sound logic. Speaking from her own experiences as a student and then as a teacher, she recounted how disciplines like sociology usually contend for validation and are always attempting to prove their ‘scientific’ legitimacy. But, with the passage of time, she realised the unique and unparalleled significance of social sciences, particularly for their ability to cultivate values such as human connection, empathy and critical thinking—qualities that are often undervalued in the realm of pure sciences.

She further recalled an intriguing incident from her stint as a trainer at the Amar Jyoti Institute for the Physically Handicapped, bringing to the fore the level of scepticism which students with scientific training had towards sociology. When a student criticised a critical sociological text for lacking theory or evidence, Madan stressed its core value through emphasising the aspect of empathy. She argued that the quality of ‘empathy’ was the cornerstone of all education, including the humanities.

Referring to AI and technology as a hydra-headed monster, she cautioned against the sensationalistic ‘clickbait impact’, which in many ways increases the risks in the lives of learners by luring them into uncharted territories, while simultaneously stifling their creativity. Further elaborating upon the challenges presented by AI and technology in the classroom, she went on to reflect how the classroom has evolved into a place ‘where the truth is getting manipulated, redefined and misinterpreted’. Education cannot stay within the pages of a book and has to bounce off the walls of a classroom, like a squash court and a squash ball.

Madan underscored the importance for educators to negotiate the space of the classroom in the present era and to embrace their roles as ‘collaborators’ who could inspire students to critical thinking, ignite their curiosity, and instil a desire for dialogue and not operate as mere mediators of syllabus. She continuously stressed the need to ‘rethink’ and ‘redefine’ teaching and the classroom and to create space

for individuality and ingenuity, which every individual possesses and which must be nurtured and allowed to flourish. Laying emphasis on the need to 're-humanise' learners and the education process, she suggested that instead of depending upon standardised methods, we need to bring back the arts, more specifically, the art of engagement, the art of narrative, the art of conversation, the art of listening and the art of debate and disagreement, which only social sciences or humanities are capable of accomplishing.

She suggested that children have a very unselfconscious acceptance of their surroundings; therefore, we need to create an atmosphere for them which is conducive for self-discovery and introspection and which will be achievable only through a sustained reflection with the liberal arts. She led participants to understand that a teacher's primary responsibility is to encourage students to enquire, to listen, to question, to scrutinise, to reflect, to explore, to disagree, to ask uncomfortable questions, to reason and to also be spontaneous. She further maintained that rather than serving as a place meant for knowledge production, the classroom should be seen as an immersive setting, suited for inner transformation. She underlined that, in times when students are continuously exposed to artificial intelligence and standardised ways of thinking, the classroom, being a site of secondary socialisation, should facilitate education in promoting individuality, agency and resilience in the face of numerous seen and unseen challenges.

Madan concluded by alluding to Sri Aurobindo's theory of integral learning, which reminded one that 'somewhere for you to fill your cup, you must empty it first', informing the audience that an empty mind is a metaphor for being receptive to new insights. She came to the conclusion that both teachers and students can only genuinely change by accepting vulnerability and uncertainty and that 'floundering' is an essential component of growth. Her suggestion was quite unequivocal, as she proposed that teachers should be co-collaborators and co-creators in a shared educational journey, instead of being mere 'mediators of syllabus' or information gatekeepers, and they should humanise the classroom by encouraging creative, critical and compassionate thinking in learners.

The last speaker was **Avishek Parui**, who delivered an intellectually stimulating lecture emphasising the critical importance of interdisciplinary research across the sciences, humanities and allied streams.

Parui explored how memory may be examined in its molecular as well as monumental mechanisms through a healthy synergy of sciences and humanities. Drawing on contemporary research in neuroscience, artificial intelligence and post-digitality and connecting the same to insights from memory studies, his talk projected the pragmatic optimism through which one may anticipate interdisciplinary research in science and humanities in the times to come.

Beginning with a reference to the Slovenian philosopher and cultural theorist Slavoj Žižek (b. 1949–), Parui recited a riveting tale illustrating the way coded communication under totalitarian regimes could unravel suppressed truths. Žižek’s story, about a man sent to a labour camp, who develops a code with his friends to interpret censored letters, served as a striking metaphor. Within this narrative, the absence of ‘red ink’ becomes a metaphor for stifled liberty and forbidden truths.

Parui used this analogy to argue that the humanities function as ‘red ink’—‘the single epistemic instrument’ that enables us to corroborate and articulate absence, perceive non-freedom, and interrogate realities that are not explicitly visible or what Derrida would call the ‘hauntological presence’. Drawing on Derrida’s concept of *hauntology* from *Specters of Marx* (1993), he emphasised the ‘spectral residual presence’ of that which is lost, but not entirely gone. Literature, particularly Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, became a recurring motif in his discussion, whereby he positioned Hamlet as a ‘poster boy’ or a quintessential text to understand psychological complexity and ontological ambiguity.

The talk then transitioned into the domain of memory engineering and affect, illustrated through a compelling case study in neuro-marketing. Parui recounted the story of Nestlé’s failed attempt to introduce Nescafé in post-WWII Japan. Despite promising market-surveys, the launch was unsuccessful, revealing a disconnect between surface data and cultural memory. A turning point came when the French psychologist G. Clotire Rapaille advised Nestlé to reintroduce coffee through coffee-flavoured candies, targeting young consumers and embedding the sensory memory of coffee at an early age. This strategic use of affective memory ensured a successful re-entry of the product years later in what initially was a conservative tea-drinking culture. Parui used this anecdote to explain that one can engineer memory through emotions and tastes. Thus, he established the fact that memory is not merely cognitive but deeply emotional and sensory, reinforcing the centrality of emotions and affect in both marketing and cultural studies.

Elaborating upon the intersection of neuroscience and philosophy, Parui spoke about the contributions of neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, particularly his acclaimed works *Looking for Spinoza* and *Descartes' Error* (1994). Damasio's rejection of Cartesian dualism in favour of embodied memory, inspired by Spinoza's monism, provided a scientific validation of holistic, integrative models of memory and consciousness. Damasio, a neuroscientist, had the potential to win a Nobel Prize like Eric Kendal, however, he preferred to return to philosophy to get a better understanding of the mind. Parui thus concluded that even scientists are aware of the complexity of the mind, understanding that it transcends the brain. They try to figure out how a bunch of neurons become a brain, which then evolves into a mind and then into a cell, ultimately becoming a subject.

Amidst all this traffic, scientists are astute enough to recognise our need for art, literature, philosophy, music and performance to give us a better understanding of our corporeality. Parui also emphasised that the brain is not a disembodied machine, but a distributed network of affective and cognitive processes. Understanding the mind requires not only neurosciences, but also engagement with literature, art, and philosophy to grasp the nuances of emotion, subjectivity and corporeality.

In the final segment, Parui threw light on the plausible connection between memory studies and artificial intelligence. Drawing on the research of neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux, author of the book titled *Anxious* (2015) and known for his work on the amygdala, the anxiety-inducing part of the brain, along with his exploration of anxiety from a cultural standpoint, Parui put forth a thought-provoking thesis: Anxiety is not inherently negative but a sophisticated evolutionary trait—a cognitive mechanism that enables future anticipation and decision-making possible. Further, he pointed out that 'anxiety' is a price that a human brain has to pay for its ability to anticipate the future, and yet it is different from fear and very distinctive from visceral fear.

To explain this further, Parui gave the example of Hamlet's procrastination; his anxiety is a result of his advanced cognitive abilities, as he simulates situations before they happen and receives feedback, which can possibly go wrong, which contributes to his tendency to procrastinate. He further asserted that AI can generate all kinds of narratives about doomsday, yet it lacks the capacity to experience anxiety; it is quantitative and brilliant. It can get a lot of jobs done and make no mistakes; it is a boon in many senses, but at an existential level, it cannot experience anxiety in the same way that a human brain can. He further argued that AI systems, no matter how

advanced, lack the neuro-affective sophistication required to experience anxiety. As such, they cannot fully replicate human consciousness or ethical ambiguity. Citing the example of Hamlet once again, he illustrated how the protagonist's indecision and internal conflict, often perceived as generic 'flaws', are actually reflective of his complex cognitive depth.

In the end, Parui presented a fascinating numerical comparison between the human brain and AI: The human brain carries out deeply emotional and cognitive functions such as falling in love, hesitating, writing poetry, experiencing ambivalence, and feeling anxiety, all while using only 17 watts of energy—less than a lightbulb. He proposed that until AI can replicate such efficiency alongside emotional depth, the human mind remains irreplaceable.

Through his nuanced exploration of memory as a cultural, emotional, and neurological phenomenon, embedded with philosophical reflection and scientific insight, Parui demonstrated that the humanities are not only relevant, but critically indispensable in an age of rapid technological transformation. He emphatically pointed out that it is within the narrative structures of the humanities that we can best articulate what is absent, uncertain, yet deeply human.

Combined Insights from Session II:

- Integration of humanities with sciences is not optional, but epistemically necessary for studying complex human phenomena.
- Ethical design of technology, context-sensitive innovation and the cultivation of embodied knowledge depend on sustained interdisciplinary practice.

Session III—Humanities as Bedrock of Knowledge

Panellists: Pulin B. Nayak, Mridula Garg, Debashree Mukherjee and Rimina Mohapatra

The third and final session addressed institutional impact with regard to how the humanities train administrators, influence public culture through publishing and sustain moral reflection through literature.

The first speaker was **Debashree Mukherjee**. She described how education, in her view, must equip a person with the analytical tools to understand people, events and situations and arrive at conclusions. Education, at its best, also helps each individual develop their moral compass, which, along with the analytical ability, helps navigate through life situations. The study of humanities is particularly well-suited to meet these two objectives. Humanities inculcate an appreciation of different perspectives and a capability to deal with ambiguity. She discussed how her long career in the civil service has led to her grounding in the humanities so as to understand people and their perspectives, communicate better and have greater empathy for different points of view, creating space to go beyond certainties so as to accommodate the unknown and the unexpected.

She described how she was drawn to humanities, despite growing up in an engineering township, where the only career alternatives were engineering and medicine. She recalled how upon entering the civil services, where 80 per cent of her peers were engineers, her background as a literature student provided her with skills that many of her batchmates had yet to acquire. As a civil servant, she felt that her primary responsibility was to be a problem-solver, and her ability to navigate ambiguity effectively aided her in this endeavour. She also emphasised the critical role of communication skills during crisis management. Her education in literature allowed her to read and sift through texts and various sub-texts.

These three attributes made her journey in the civil service much more efficient. She brought up a discussion that she had had with a colleague about the importance of humanities, during which he referred to Plato's idea that 'the unexamined life is not worth living'. This exchange led her to understand the necessity of continually assessing both her actions and the reasoning behind them as a bureaucrat. She mentioned that she was never too certain in her choices and consistently reflected on the reasoning behind her decisions, which grounded her with a strong ethical compass.

She discovered this as a bedrock of every endeavour and it makes her what she is today. She also expressed her interest in water-management, noting that she completed her M.Sc. in water resource management, and her role as a bureaucrat helped her grasp the fundamental challenges in water-management in the country. Furthermore, she pointed out that in India, nearly 11.3 million students are pursuing undergraduate degrees and highlighted the concern whether these students are offered quality

infrastructural support and global exposure or if such opportunities are restricted to prestigious institutions only.

She focussed on the issue of unemployment amongst young graduates due to the lack of employability skills. Hence, flexibility to switch from one field to another is paramount to the modern education system in India. In reaction to Ms. Mukherjee's opinions, Sukrita Paul Kumar praised her for her service in the Indian bureaucracy and recalled the instance when she, accompanied with six students, went to Ms. Mukherjee's office requesting prompt intervention in solving a water-crisis which affected more than 60,000 people. Consequently, two engineers were immediately dispatched, and help was provided.

The proceedings were taken forward by **Pulin B. Nayak**. The main thrust of his presentation was to examine the linkages between economics and humanities. Economics is principally concerned with the material basis of human existence. The key idea is to check how resources may be efficiently used to produce goods and services which human beings value. Mainstream economics often neglects the ethical and humanistic concerns in the processes of production and distribution, which need to be integrated into our discussion.

Nayak reflected that 'humanities' matter because it speaks about the human condition and their existence. He explained that this area is crucial for discussion because in today's world there are two broad knowledge systems—humanities and sciences. He argued that humanities, business management and science have made distinctive and varied contributions to our society, with humanities being the most significant. However, the least number of jobs are generated in the domain of humanities in comparison to business management, economics, science and medicine.

He raised concern about the fact that several universities have reduced funding for humanities and social sciences, which has impacted student intake, and this symposium offers a platform to raise these crucial issues. He proposed that within the ambit of economics, there are two streams of study: One with a humanistic orientation and the other which posits formalisation of scientific and mathematical ideas. He advocated the humanistic school, taking inspiration from Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, Karl Marx, Amartya Sen and Mahatma Gandhi.

He went on to explain that Gandhian economics is an entire field of study which challenges the classical ideas of economics with its core values in self-interest, maximisation of profit and material production. This discourse raises concerns about the environmental damage and excessive consumerism. He then shifted his focus to empirical and mathematical theories of economics, mentioning Paul Samuelson, a leading 20th-century economist and Nobel Laureate, whose study was based on principles of maximisation of profit and minimisation of resources and cost. He argued the appeal of humanities lies in critical thinking and how it encourages questioning issues like unemployment, capitalist inequality and skewed distribution of income and wealth. He noted that humanities makes one reflective.

Hence, study in humanities enables people to challenge critical social issues like patriarchy, gender discrimination, ethnic strife, and armed conflicts. He highlighted the importance of knowing oneself and how humanities make one introspective. He cited the text *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*, where C. P. Snow talks about two branches of study: humanities and sciences, respectively.

He pointed out that several critics favour science over humanities, believing that science brought advancement to human life. However, F. R. Leavis contested this idea and weighed in favour of humanities. The speaker discussed the ongoing discussion about India's GDP growth on a global scale, but the country's ranking of 142 in terms of per capita income overshadows the fact that India is the fourth-largest economy in the world. In his concluding remarks, he expressed his concerns regarding the quality of life in India and advocated the theory of a stationary state where empathy, compassion, fellow feeling and justice are equally important in a flourishing society. Sukrita Paul Kumar, in her comments, appreciated the speaker's views and suggested that more of such economists are needed in our contemporary times.

The next speaker, **Rimina Mohapatra**, began the discussion with a reference to the song 'The hibiscus flower has bloomed', which features in the Korean Netflix series *Squid Game*. In this dystopian survival tale, the original song that evoked innocence, playful joy and cultural nostalgia now transposes meaning, reflective of violent despair and moral conflict in the reel-world. The song in turn morphs into a site of control, fear and surveillance. The story evolves as a cautionary allegory about a degraded contemporary society in face of inequality and disparity.

In a world marked by greed, consumerism and market tensions, the humanities grapple with questions of ethics, resistance and resilience. Humanities urge us to ask questions which AI algorithms fail to do, recalling the science fiction of Asimov's reimagined science as a world of technological advancements combating environmental trials. The function of humanities is to unravel the blind spots, undercurrents and the very premises of meanings, beliefs, judgements and events. As a philosopher, the speaker emphasised the importance of philosophical inquiry for our concepts of truth, reality and what can be known or ascertained.

She argued that any account of global justice is shaped by a plurality of perspectives and histories which are based on the human condition. Humanities form critical thinking, evaluate evidence and provide the language and vocabulary of social enquiry. They help develop frameworks and tools to question propaganda, assumptions, misinformation and echo chambers—these are no longer luxuries but necessities in democracies. The humanities wrestle with the concerns of values, human dignity and moral reasoning to decipher the world.

Further, Mohapatra observed that in research and publishing today, the role of the Global South is imperative to reclaim distinctive, non-dominant and diverse voices, beyond structural and regional barriers, including language, resources, hierarchy and funding agendas. She advocated that humanities have provided us with the power to think critically and to build empathy, to finding connections and contrasts and exploring alternatives in rational and humane ways. In addition, she posited that it is time for Asia, Africa and the Global South to lead world debates, recovering indigenous intellectual systems and decolonising Eurocentric knowledge structures. She alluded to John Mbiti, a Kenyan philosopher who wrote on African religion and philosophy, on concepts related to 'time'. Certain East-African tribes do not have a notion of the future, instead, they are focused on a long past, and the here and now, experiencing seasons, customs, day and night. Since for them time is cyclical rather than linear, the present is everything, they celebrate, rather than utilise or spend 'time'.

To conclude, the speaker noted that the study of humanities is about making sense of meaning and value, whether identity, development, equity or justice. It is equally about dignity, choices and differences, and our ability to understand and imagine experiences and ideas different from our own. The study of humanities fosters decision-making, impacts policy and governance, and offers understanding of collective and individual purpose. Contemporary philosophy tackles crucial questions

in technology and artificial intelligence, biotechnology, environmental ethics, climate change, political conflict, human rights and global justice. In framing critical debates for digital societies, from ethics of freedom and freewill to privacy, citizenship, or bias, humanities present creative insights on underlying values and foundations to open up innovation, discussions and enable solidarities. We can only do this if we see what makes us human, what it means to be human, and our modes, limits and transcendence for any dialogue on the human future.

The last speaker was **Mridula Garg**. An eminent writer, she mentioned that even when she creates literature, she needs to know other disciplines of humanities to create characters so as to deal with contradictions, imposed by political and social practices, marked by cruelty or compassion—increasingly by cruelty and rarely by compassion these days. Literature, hence has a calling to cater to and make its readers shun cruelty and embrace compassion. As eminent a scientist as Einstein felt that music helped in dealing with questions of physics by resolving the intricacies of human behaviour and teaching compassion. Music can be taken as a token for knowledge for all humanities. His scientific research led to the invention of the nuclear bomb, but his knowledge of humanities made him abjure its use on humanity.

Garg spoke about the importance of reading works from a variety of humanities disciplines, such as history, philosophy, geography and psychology, so as to understand the complexities of human nature. She recalled the story of the Maharaja of Travancore and his pepper plantations. When the Maharaja was informed about the intention of Portuguese traders wanting to take pepper plants to Portugal for farming, he joked that the traders could uproot the plants however they pleased, as long as they could also manipulate the weather and seasons to help the plants grow.

She observed that equality is determined by economic inequity, and caste is a significant determinant of inequality in India. In her view, in India, freedom is no longer available since freedom of expression is dictated by the state, cultural traditions, and mega-industrial companies. There is an ultimate subliminal censorship enacted by these forces. Advertising as an industry creates wants, but fails to satisfy them. As a result, one has forgotten what their needs are, and our needs are subjugated not by personal preferences, but by market forces. In a way, the humanities have lost their battle to technology, greed and capitalistic development which has contributed to a rise in social inequality and censorship.

Hence, the prime function of literature remains to instil empathy and kindness in its readers, and anxiety, which should provoke thought and discussion. Garg claimed that today's society is plagued with cruelty and violence made worse by caste-discrimination. In such situations, humanities with its affirmation in empathy, compassion, reflectivity and power of contemplation truly serves as a bedrock to genuine knowledge.

Valedictory Session

Speakers: Sukrita Paul Kumar, Swati Pal and Asani Bhaduri

The event concluded with **Sukrita Paul Kumar** offering her congratulations to all the speakers for making the presentations and the discussion during the symposium meaningful, highlighting their contribution in capturing the correct mood and meaning of the agenda. She applauded them for triggering potent questions in the context of creativity and creative expression. Furthermore, she conveyed that the key message to students and future generations is the valuable lesson that education should be integrative and that humanities cater to humanity and the values to be cherished. Additionally, she remarked that the challenges of AI have to be met by not allowing it to disable meaningful communication especially generated by ambiguities and nuances so essential in understanding human existence.

Swati Pal expressed her gratitude to the speakers for their engaging ideas and deep insights. She reflected on her own training as an English literature student in a family of doctors and how her training made her an exception. She mentioned her fascination with the process of making the atomic bomb and the dilemma she struggled with, as to whether the makers of the atomic bomb were mindful of common folk who would suffer the consequences of such a disastrous invention.

Her enquiry led to a hypothesis that there are no boundaries between humanists and scientists, for she recalled Oppenheimer, who was conscientious about the making of the atom bomb, whereas Einstein in his patriotic fervour urged the then American President to build the bomb but later regretted it, thereby complicating the divide between humanities and sciences. Such a binary between humanities and science is unreal and gives credence to mistaken discursivities. She cited Ibsen's play *Ghosts*, which talked of syphilis when it was unheard of. She reflected that humanities and sciences must come together to transcend the limitations of this divide and foster global citizenship rooted in non-violence and moral values.

Asani Bhaduri concluded the talk by congratulating the speakers and the audience who travelled from afar to make this symposium a success. He highlighted the lack of clarity in policy-making within our country which stems from the lack of interdisciplinary education and understanding. He cited the examples of flooded airports which have been constructed in the wetlands and how dams have destroyed a majority of river ecologies. This reveals the lack of environmental knowledge in our STEM education. He also argued that most discussions centred around the idea of subalterns, but no one raises the question about how subalterns die. He gave the example of nearly 50,000–60,000 deaths due to snakebites in India annually, where the majority of this population is marginalised. However, there is hardly any discussion or writing on ‘snakebite’ in the humanities and social science streams.

In conclusion, Sukrita Paul Kumar mentioned the importance of educating ourselves and others with the right vision of an integrative approach. She also appealed to the audience to send their constructive suggestions and ideas of how to carry forward the discussions started in this symposium.

Takeaways From the Symposium

- Curriculum reform: adopt common core modules in ethics, narrative practice and critical thinking, with credit mobility across departments.
- Institutional incentives: establish interdisciplinary chairs, joint appointments and dedicated funding streams that require co-designed projects by humanists and scientists.
- Pedagogy: train teachers in dialogic methods, performance-based learning and assessment of transferable skills such as empathy, listening and reasoning.
- Policy engagement: create fellowships which embed humanists in government labs, technology firms and urban planning units to translate interpretive insight into action.
- Publishing and access: expand platforms for scholarship from the Global South and support multilingual and open dissemination of humanistic research.

Final Synthesis

The symposium affirmed that the humanities are not merely academic luxury, but the intellectual infrastructure for moral deliberation, imaginative policy-making and humane technology. Reclaiming their place requires institutional redesign, pedagogic courage and an ethic of collaboration across fields. The dialogues at ‘Humanities Matter’ charted both conceptual frameworks and concrete pathways for that work.

SOME RESPONSES TO THE SYMPOSIUM

From Sridhar Balan:

Greetings. Thank you for putting together a wonderful symposium on ‘Humanities Matter’. I wanted to highlight two problems (among others) concerning the study and development of the Humanities.

The first: In the course of my long years in publishing, I have had occasion to visit educational institutions, conducting workshops for teachers. I was struck by the number of schools who have done away with Humanities as a course of study in classes 9–12 and only offer options in Science and Commerce. On inquiry, the principal told me that there was no demand for subjects under the Humanities!

In some schools in Tamil Nadu, classes 9–12 are simply handed over to a professional educator, (a teaching shop) to teach the science subjects and prepare them for the JEE or for medicine. The implications are ominous. The school does not pay much attention to the teaching of the Humanities in the lower classes and may not even have qualified resource persons.

The second: A little more deep-rooted. The family (and our own) mindset and a preference that our children opt for science subjects and not for the Humanities. We tend to have a mental hierarchy regarding subjects and feel bright kids must opt for Science, regardless of their aptitude. If it's not Science, they will settle for Commerce as an alternative. If children have an aptitude for these subjects, surely yes, but very often this is not the case.

In part, this stems from concern about the future and career prospects. In the parental mind, science or commerce seemed to promise a more secure future.

In the Sanskriti School in Delhi (where our son had studied), Mrs Gowri Ishwaran, the founder-principal concerned at this development, organised a career counselling workshop in the Humanities for parents. The parents were simply wonderstruck by the many career options available. It was a great eye-opener and they were now more sanguine and reconciled to their children opting for the Humanities.

Thank you for inviting me.

From Arnab Chatterjee:

Please allow me to thank you for your kind invitation and the resultant wonderful experience of listening to and absorbing so much intellect and purpose on the given day.

Why Humanities matter, to me, is because ‘Humanity’ matters. It’s not just a mere shifting of an ‘s’, but a much larger shifting of the mind that is required. In light of so much discussion, I don’t need to add my two bits to the ‘why’, but I do have the vantage point of having observed the backward shift for the last 20-odd years that has been taking place. Maybe due to increased labour arbitrage. Economic growth and the lifestyle changes aided by technology. Like someone said, phones are becoming smarter and we are dumbing down. Human competencies of debate, argument, critical thinking and questioning, are being replaced fast with collaboration, compliance and amplification. It’s not about STEM or Humanities, it’s about how we approach them and what we do with them.

A cutting-edge design in analytics or generative leaps in AI should lead to solving burning issues of environment, equality and equity, rather than largely aiding elections, profitability or wealth accumulation in markets. Capitalism is not the culprit. Non-Humanisation of economics is (as pointed out by Vivek Suneja). I loved what he said about the duality of an interconnected Universe (time and matter), being comparable to work and humanity as outputs of economic efforts.

My current work is centred around people, future skills, employability, sustainability and mental well-being. I believe organisations need to humanise as much as they are expecting people to design thinking. AI has been thrown into the mix as a competitor, ghost and friend (depending on convenience), to add to this chaos. But as Avishek Parui summed up, ‘Creativity comes from Chaos’, he echoed my thoughts and purpose completely. I believe these are turbulent times, but also an opportunity to truly transform the Social–Science equation to elevate lives collectively, and education does hold the key.

Key Insights

The symposium addressed how current academic fragmentation limits holistic understanding and called for restructuring educational frameworks to integrate humanities across disciplines. This integration is viewed as essential to the National Education Policy (NEP) and the development of future generations who can approach societal issues with critical and ethical insight.

Speakers underscored that humanities education provides:

- Contextual understanding
- Critical thinking and analytical skills
- Awareness of human behaviour, values, and ethics

Such competencies are indispensable for addressing complex, multidimensional challenges in modern society—ranging from technological innovation to public policy formulation and environmental sustainability.

Interdisciplinary Applications

The symposium illustrated how humanities can enrich scientific and technical education. For instance, the concept of complexity science—which studies emergent behaviour among interconnected systems—can benefit from humanistic inquiry. This interdisciplinary approach helps students and researchers grasp phenomena such as non-linearity, emergence, adaptation, feedback loops and spontaneous order. By combining scientific analysis with humanistic values, participants noted that learners could better understand complex systems, while cultivating empathy, ethical reasoning and social awareness.

Humanities and Human Values

A recurring theme throughout the symposium was the reaffirmation that humanity itself is a virtue, rooted in altruistic ethics and the human condition. The humanities were presented not merely as academic disciplines but as a foundation for compassion, empathy, and moral integrity—qualities essential for sustaining the fabric of society.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The symposium concluded that:

- Humanities must be integrated into all streams of education to cultivate balanced and socially responsible citizens.
- Policymakers should embed interdisciplinary humanities frameworks into the National Education Policy.
- Institutions must encourage reflection-based and value-oriented learning that connects academic knowledge with real-world challenges.

By fostering humanistic inquiry alongside scientific, commercial, and technological education, society can nurture a generation capable of understanding complexity, resolving conflict constructively, and keeping humanity alive in all spheres of life.

Bio-Notes of the Speakers and Organising Committee

Speakers

Avishek Parui (PhD, Durham, UK) is Associate Professor at IIT Madras and Associate Fellow of the UK Higher Education Academy. He is the faculty coordinate of Centre for Memory Studies, IIT Madras and founding chairperson of the Indian Network for Memory Studies. He is the author of *Postmodern Literatures, Culture and the Literary: Matter, Metaphor, Memory*; and co-editor of *Memory Studies in India: Texts and Contexts*.

Debashree Mukherjee is an Indian Administrative Service officer and Secretary of the Union Ministry of Skills and Development of Entrepreneurship, before which she was Secretary of Water Resources. She has also been a Joint Secretary in the Prime Minister's Office. Previously, she was the Chairperson and Managing Director of Delhi Transport Corporation, CEO of Delhi Jal Board and Secretary of Social Welfare and Children and Women Development in the Government of Delhi. She has specialised in urban governance and the management of water and sanitation services.

Manindra Nath Thakur teaches 'Indian Intellectual Traditions' at the Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University. A former Fellow at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library and recipient of the Innovative Research Fellowship at Delhi University, he is Convenor of the Creative Theory Colloquium, Founder of the Foundation for Creative Social Research, and co-founder of the Social Healing Group. His works include *Wounded History*, *Gyan ki Rajniti*, and recent essays on democracy and capitalism.

Mridula Garg has a background in Economics and Literature. She has written eight novels, 86 stories, a memoir called *Ve Nayaab Aurtain* and a collection of essays in Hindi, as well as a novel in English and numerous essays. They cover cultural, language, political, literary and economic issues. Her novels *Chittacobra*, *Anitya* and *Kathgulab* are available in translations in English, German, Japanese, French, Russian, Malayalam, Marathi, Odia, Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, etc. She has received the Vyas Samman, Sahitya Akademi Award, Hellman-Hammet Grant & Ram Manohar Lohia Samman.

Pulin B. Nayak taught at the Delhi School of Economics (DSE). He did his Master's in Economics from the DSE, after which he completed his doctorate from the University

of Rochester, Rochester, NY in 1975. He joined the faculty of the DSE in 1978. He was the Director of the School during 2005–08. He has published extensively in the areas of public finance and economic development.

Ram Ramaswamy taught at the Jawaharlal Nehru University between 1986 and 2018, in the School of Physical Sciences and the School of Computational and Integrative Sciences. Post-retirement, he has been Visiting Professor at IIT Delhi, and presently holds honorary positions at the University of Goa and IISER Berhampur. His main research interests are in nonlinear science and complexity, and in recent years he has written extensively on education.

Rimina Mohapatra is author, editor, Senior Manager–Operations, at Routledge & CRC Press, Taylor & Francis Group, Informa plc. She has developed the Routledge India editorial programme in South Asia founded in 2005; collaborated with authors, editors, institutes, universities and researchers; led editorial, research, production and design teams; and is part of the senior leadership team. Her books include *Hegel's India: A Reinterpretation, with Texts* (2017/18), nominated for the Tata Literature Live! Book of the Year Award (Nonfiction), and *Reading Hegel: The Introductions* (2008/13).

Saradindu Bhaduri teaches at the Centre for Studies in Science Policy at JNU. An economist by training, his research focuses on fostering an interdisciplinary understanding of innovation. His works on grassroots and frugal innovation aims at initiating a dialogue with diverse disciplines such as psychology, sociology, cognitive sciences and the philosophy of science. He has held the rotatory Prince Chair in Development and Equity at the International Institute of Social Studies in The Hague.

Shovana Narayan is an acclaimed Kathak performer, Guru and choreographer. She was decorated with the Padma Shri award in 1992, central Sangeet Natak Akademi award in 2001, Delhi Govt's Parishad Samman in 1992 and Bihar Govt's Rashtriya Samman in 2021, besides being a recipient of over 70 national and international awards. She has served as a career bureaucrat (Indian Audit and Accounts, 1976 batch) till her retirement in 2010. She has been conferred Doctor of Literature (HC) by the Khairagarh Indira Kala Sangeet University.

Vandana Madan is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Janki Devi Memorial College. Her areas of academic interest include Indian society and culture, environmental issues, education and gender. She has several publications and her edited book, *The Village in*

India is on the Social Science syllabus of several Indian and Foreign Universities. She has worked closely with organisations engaged in gender and environment, and has been a consultant for Sociology for classes XI and XII with the ICSE Board.

Vivek Suneja is Professor of Strategy, and former Head and Dean of the Faculty of Management Studies, University of Delhi. In the past he has served as Dean, Planning and Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University of Delhi. He has published several books and papers in the areas of Strategy, Economics, Ethics, Culture and Public Policy. He chaired the Interdisciplinary Courses Committee of the University which formulated new courses including 'Ethics and Culture', 'Social and Emotional Learning', 'Innovation and Entrepreneurship', and 'Science and Society'.

Organising Committee

Sukrita Paul Kumar (Convenor) is a former Fellow of Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla. She held the Aruna Asaf Ali Chair at Delhi University. An honorary faculty at Corfu, Greece, she was an invited resident poet at the International Writing Programme at Iowa, USA. Her latest collections of poems are *Yellow* and *Salt & Pepper*. She has authored many books, including *The New Story*, *Conversations on Modernism*, *Narrating Partition*. A recipient of the Rabindranath Tagore Literary Prize for 2023, her poems have been translated into many Indian and foreign languages. She is also Guest editor, *Indian Literature*, Sahitya Akademi.

Swati Pal, Professor and Principal, Janki Devi Memorial College is a Fulbright-Nehru fellowship scholar, a Charles Wallace scholar and the first Asian scholar to receive the John McGrath Theatre Studies Scholarship at Edinburgh University. Author of several books on theatre, creative and academic writing, her newspaper articles articulate her views on education. Her areas of research interest include performance studies and cultural history. She has two collections, *In Absentia* and *Forever Yours and Other Poems* and a collection called *Living On*. She is the Vice Chair of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies in India.

Asani Bhaduri popularly known as Half-mad K-no-w-mad is a polymath with interest and expertise in Molecular and Computational Biology, Infectious Disease, Wildlife and Environment, Citizen Science, Creative Writing, Indian Classical Music, Toys and Handicraft. He is a bilingual poet and an author who is known for his environment and wilderness writings. Asani is recipient of the Excellence Award for Teachers in

Service from University of Delhi in the Centenary Year. When not in the wilderness, Asani is engaged as a Faculty member in Cluster Innovation Centre.

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