# CRISIS OF TRUTH?

# THE DIGITAL ERA AND FUTURE OF KNOWLEDGE

## 27th-28th August 2021

**The inaugural Academic Writing Lab Symposium, Department of Social Sciences and the Humanities IIIT-Delhi, India**

## BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

## DAY 1: FRIDAY, AUGUST 27, 2021

### 15:30-16:15: Session 1: Home and the Digital
#### Chair: Dr Payel C Mukherjee

**Rahul Gairola, Murdoch University, The Krishna Somers Senior Lecturer in English and Postcolonial Literature and Fellow of the Asia Research Centre, Murdoch University, Australia**

*"Digital Homes: Technology and Sexuality in the Indiaspora"*

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### 16:20-17:30: Session 2: Digital space and knowledge communication
#### Chair: Dr Aasim Khan, IIIT-Delhi

**Zeba and Ravi Kant: Locating Digitalization of Education within a Neo liberal framework: Prospects and Challenges in India**

**Abstract:** Neo liberal framework dominates the public imagination in the contemporary world order shaping all realms of our society and individual being viz. the political; economic and social spheres. Here, the discourse of education which has an impact on all these realms constituting our societal functioning becomes imperative to be understood in relation to neoliberalism in order to make sense of our reality and understand the implications of neoliberalism for these respective domains. Neoliberal philosophy with its thrust on increasing efficiency, productivity, wealth generation, profit maximization governed by the market logic has had a significant bearing in the field of knowledge generation and its dissemination as well. The most evident and glaring manifestation of it has been in terms of increasing digitalization of education and extensive pursuance of online education in the contemporary world. The present Covid crisis has further expedited the process especially in Indian Context where online education has been perceived not just as a substitute of the classroom teaching learning process but also as having a wider imprint in shaping the future of education and transforming the education landscape in the coming years. This paper seeks to correlate the project of neoliberalism with the discourse of Education primarily focusing on the accelerating trends of digitalization of education in the current scenario. It seeks to draw attention as to how the wide expansion of education through the online medium has created an impact on socio economic realms in terms of growing unemployment in labor intensive countries like India and attempts at bridging the digital divide by creating an inclusive online space cutting across socio economic status. Besides it seeks to reflect on how digitalization as a byproduct of Neoliberal education system has transformed the nature of relationship between the teachers and students as service providers and consumers of the respective service. It also raises questions on the nature of knowledge produced and the human capital generated through such teaching engagements. Therefore, the paper is divided into three sections with the first section reflecting on the correlation between Neoliberalism and its impact on Education. The second section shall delineate on the historical trajectory of neoliberal education in the Indian context primarily locating the initiation and the widespread expansion of education in India through the digital medium focusing on government policy making on education over the years. The third section shall calibrate and critically engage with the idea of digitalization of education in the contemporary context of our country and the future implications and challenges that it entails.
**Key words**: Neoliberalism, digitalization, online education, Academic capitalism

**Nishanta Ghatak : e-Poetica: Art of poetry in the age of digital production**

·This paper proposes an insightful analysis of e-Poetica or poetry in new digital media, nature of its distribution, its ability to address universality of readership, reader-response, its role in transforming literature through digital humanities, its possibility of emergence as a new genre, authorial representation and over all its efficacy to address and alter the available socio-cultural and thematic biases in the hope of much more accessible and democratized textual (the italics here embraces the poststructuralist approach of narrative) representations.

The multimodality of e-Poetica calls for a legible hyper-text than for a scriptable traditional- text, often gets lost in translation; for a crossover of imagined community (divided by the geospatial boundaries but unified by inter-media, i.e., internet and media) to interpret and re-interpret (through the digital humanity's pedagogy) the assemblage of a new glocal (global and local hence glocal) linguistic proliferation. Poetry, on behalf of the entire literary canon in this transnational media, thus, questions the validity of the hierarchical structure of cultural capital and dialectical materialism; to make it more reader-centric, 'it advocates the death of the author' and anticipates the process of reading as a multilingual independent act (unlike the previous advocacy of state-ideologies). The digital rhetoric, hence, imagines and re- structures intertextuality among the multiliteracy, for an asynchronous, nonlinear, fluid, dynamic and collaborative composition.

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**17:30-19:00: Session 3: Dissent and the Digital**
Chair: Dr Aasim Khan, IIIT-Delhi

**Manohar Kumar: Dissent in the digital space: An Inquiry**

**Abstract**: The digital space has enabled the emergence of new forms of governance, a form of control and power hitherto unimaginable and unavailable to the past governments. The changing nature of democratic governance has also evoked a reciprocal response from those seeking to challenge the governmental allocation and organisation of power. In this paper I look at the nature of dissent in the digital space. This paper is organised in two parts. In the first part of the paper, I examine the potential of the digital space to enable dissent. I argue that the digital space has enabled both new modes of democratic dissent and amplification of already existing dissent; these modes have strengthened the democratic process and challenged the state allocation of power in general, and state control over digital space in
particular. In the second part of the paper I examine the limitations of the digital spaces of dissent for democracy. I argue that the digital has also reconfigured the nature of dissent in the following ways: (a) Dissent in the digital space need not necessarily be backed by conscience and conviction. The actor in social media can easily back multiple causes without necessarily feeling the need to commit or defend a cause, or stand scrutiny for the strength of their commitments. In the paper I discuss that this has implications for both the cause and the actor. (b) expression of dissent may be guided by the echo chambers or epistemic bubbles they are caught in. This can easily lead to both moral and epistemic arrogance and ignorance; (c) epistemic and moral arrogance undermines the common space of democracy, and the pedagogical nature of dissent

**Jayana Jain: Networks of support and dissent: Digital Politics of Indian Diasporic Youth in Germany**

By conducting a digital ethnographical study, this paper investigates the Indian diasporic youth's social media affordances on selected Twitter and Facebook accounts within the context of the ongoing citizenship discourse in India. It begins by contextualizing how the protest against or support for the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019 staged by Non-Resident Indian (NRI) students, professionals and Indian diasporas in Germany resist or reinforce the populist right-wing Hindutva ideologies of the BJP where Twitter and Facebook serve as digital infrastructures of both convergence and a strategy to facilitate political formations of affect. As the study traces the diasporic networks of support and dissent, it scrutinizes how the performance of migrant digital identities relate to the power relations embedded within the structural, material and affective configurations of social media as politically charged spaces. In doing so, the paper hopes to assess the everyday aporias of Indian diasporas and NRIs in Germany and their vulnerable relationship with the emerging "anti-migrant" nationalist sentiments in India and beyond.
Keywords: Indian diasporas in Germany, CAA, citizenship, politics, social media, Hindutva

**Abhishek and Akansha: 'Revolutionary army of the dead': Anonymity, dissent and political expression on Facebook**

The home quarantine and resulting lack of mobility due to COVID-19 expanded the function of digital space in our lives, as it became a primary channel to access avenues of essential information, employment, leisure and interpersonal communication. This amplification of digital activity was aided by social media platforms which facilitated different possibilities for information circulation; enabling dialogues and contestation. The adverse effect of unplanned COVID-19 lockdown fuelled the already existing discontentment in the public towards the government; the expression of which also found its ways on digital media.

Lately, Facebook has gained attention of scholars for the sizeable presence of Hindu right on the platform, which provides momentum during electoral campaigns, by endorsing governments opinion and their ideologies. In this context, we document a set of accounts on Facebook that imposter revolutionary figures from radical left politics and create accessible political content through memes, humour and satire. These parody profiles masked by anonymity, facilitate the counter-currents in form of permeable digital communities that consume and engage with their content and ideological provocations; enabling narrative development in algorithm driven digital field. In this light, the work gives insight on digital political cultures on social media as these platforms continue to be key anchors in ideological mobilisation on one hand and information circulation on the other.
**Keywords**: Political expression, Facebook, Anonymity, Memes, Digital communities.

**Sarthak Bagchi, Ahmedabad University**
*"Democratic Deepening amidst Digital Divide: Analysing the virtual realm of political campaigns in Indian Elections"*

Ever since Barack Obama's re-election to US Presidency in 2012, the extent of social media's impact on election campaigns has been a focus of study for scholars of electoral politics and political communication. Closer home in India, the Bharatiya Janata Party's emergence as the single dominant national party winning both 2014 and 2019 parliamentary elections has also expanded the scope of analysis of various digital campaign and virtual messaging strategies used by the BJP for its electoral gains. The emergence of terms like, 'IT Cell' for a large and expansive presence on different layers of social media messaging for predominantly the BJP, but also for other parties with limited success has altered the dynamics of how political communication is designed during election campaigns. It is widely perceived that the social media messaging and digital presence of political parties in the digital space is directly related to their strong electoral performance, so much so that all political parties now consider a digital communication strategy as a necessary condition, if not a sufficient condition for contesting elections.

However, recent surveys by the CSDS have unraveled the hype of social media's impact on electoral outcomes in India. The new norms of election campaign of the first elections to be conducted under pandemic guidelines in Bihar 2020, also brought to light the various limitations of the social media campaigns and digital spaces vis-a-vis public spaces especially during election campaigns. The idea of democratic deepening and democratization gets interrupted by a digital divide, which restricts the ability of political parties to penetrate their message and communicate to a large electorate, which is devoid of the digital agency. In this paper, using evidences from the recently held pandemic regulated digital election campaign in Bihar and extensive survey data from CSDS, I argue that the story of digital political campaigns in India is still fraught between democratic deepening on one side and a digital divide on the other side, which restricts its ability to impact electoral outcomes for political parties.

# Day 2: SATURDAY, AUGUST 28, 2021

**Nolen Gertz**
*"The Social (Media) Construction of Truth"*

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**Vinay Brandon: The World according to Crypto-dynamics of networked trust, digital solutionism and computational alterity in an age of monetary informationalism**

·Since the advent of the Internet, new monetary technologies have evolved to facilitate e-commerce and the tethering of financial and transactional motives on to the domain of the world wide web. With the proliferation of platform business models over the burgeoning 'Sharing Economy', a transactional layer of payment interfaces has arisen as the dominant mode of 'Platform Capitalism'—leveraging network effects, control of user-behaviour data and algorithmic prediction capacity, into a sustained means of achieving "value capture". The conversion of "two-sided" or "peer-to-peer" transactional intermediation as a model for simultaneous speculative financialization is at the heart of this computational business model. More broadly, the datafication of money and the monetization of data are twin processes within this project of digital capitalism. At the other end of the spectrum, Bitcoin and Cryptocurrencies, from their very conception, offered an alternative to plastic money, corporate payment infrastructures and integrated modes of 'surveillance capitalism'. Addressing accountability and transparency as its major design concerns, Bitcoin

mysteriously appeared on the scene in 2009 as a 'Maussian Gift' from the gods of open source to the elite overlords among the world of coders and cryptographers. Made operational through the digital infrastructure of the Blockchain Digital Ledger Technology(DLT), it was conceived as a social movement that sought to replicate the anonymity of physical cash for the global 'community' of netizens–thereby offering an alternative configuration of decentralized trust, emphasizing the social signature of money as a form of peer-to-peer exchange or operationalized digital debt, stored in an "infallible", "uncorruptible" and intransigent system, which would be securely embedded in the code. This paper seeks to offer a broad-strokes ethnohistory of the cryptocurrency movement intending to amplify the debates it initially raised over ideas of privacy, trust, community, alterity and ultimately "moneyness". By looking at the socio-dynamics of 'data-mining' as a precept of social/monetary engineering, the paper will seek to descriptively articulate a conception of 'distributed trust', 'digital metallism' and the 'coder's alterity' as the central modes of the working of a techno-utopian imagination, which places computational cultures at the centre

of driving not just the future of knowledge and innovation over Industrial Revolution 4.0, but setting out the terms of the contemporary socio-economic agenda—altering norms, frames and values of contemporary truth conditions. I will also seek to engage with the politics of the material, symbolic and informational aspects of digital monies as monetary tokens, and how these are differentially tied to social fabrics and the project of integrating 'audience-commodities' undergirding the domain of cultural-economic transactions on the web.

**·Madiha Noman: The Orient as a Prop: Analysing Neo-Colonial structures in Spec Ops: The Line and Medal of Honor: Warfighter**

Since the advent of the Internet, new monetary technologies have evolved to facilitate e-commerce and the tethering of financial and transactional motives on to the domain of the world wide web. With the proliferation of platform business models over the burgeoning 'Sharing Economy', a transactional layer of payment interfaces has arisen as the dominant mode of 'Platform Capitalism'—leveraging network effects, control of user-behaviour data and algorithmic prediction capacity, into a sustained means of achieving "value capture". The conversion of "two-sided" or "peer-to-peer" transactional intermediation as a model for simultaneous speculative financialization is at the heart of this computational business model. More broadly, the datafication of money and the monetization of data are twin processes within this project of digital capitalism. At the other end of the spectrum, Bitcoin and Cryptocurrencies, from their very conception, offered an alternative to plastic money, corporate payment infrastructures and integrated modes of 'surveillance capitalism'. Addressing accountability and transparency as its major design concerns, Bitcoin mysteriously appeared on the scene in 2009 as a 'Maussian Gift' from the gods of open

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**Deepshikha Sharma: Politics of Prescription: Epistemological Revelations of the Post-Truth Era**

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**Praveen Priyadarshi: Digital Publics, Analog Institutions: Everyday Urban Politics in Gated Neighbourhoods in India**

Who are the political subjects populating the new urban spaces of the Indian cities and how do they become a public? The paper explores this question in the context of gated communities in the National Capital Region (NCR) in India. Even as the 'gated-ness' of these life spaces constantly underlines the spatial delimitation of the 'public'- that it is constituted within the walls of a particular gated community-the making of this 'public' occurs not so much in the material space of the gated neighbourhood populated by human persons as it happens in the digital spaces-online messaging apps and platforms-populated by unique digital identities. It is through constant digital exchanges of the unique identities that a public is created. However, the institutional framework in place to regulate the making of this public is still analog in the sense that they presume and privilege traditional modes of participation for people to constitute a 'public'. The institutions are designed as rules and norms governing behavior of the people whereas formation of the public is governed by rules and norms designed in the algorithms. In exploring this disjuncture between the analog institution and the digital public, the paper analytically evaluates the nature of everyday politics in the gates neighbourhoods.

**·Debarun Sarkar and Cheshta Arora: Domesticating web3: Indian state and its ambivalent reconfigurations**

As web2 era draws to a close with nation-states and corporations reterritorializing the digital wild west across the globe, they are also scrambling to appropriate experimentations in web3 sphere to launch their own projects using the experimental technologies emerging therein. Organs of the state have already made attempts through other modalities to regulate and deregulate the digital sphere of cryptocurrencies, blockchain and other ancillary technological developments i.e., web3. In 2018, the Reserve Bank of India through a notice on April 6, 2018 blocked the fiat-based banking industry's interaction with the crypto-verse however, the RBI 'ban' was overturned by the Supreme Court in Internet and Mobile Association of India v. Reserve Bank of India (2018). Web3, today, is no more a distant theoretical construct but challenges the limits of control that nation-state's have on the money-printing, economy, data-flows, storage etc. This deterritorialization has forced the Indian state to think through its relationalities with its citizen-bodies, economy and data. Given this, the paper does a close reading of two documents— the draft Banning of Cryptocurrency &; Regulation of Official Digital Currency Bill, 2019, NITI Aayog's report Blockchain: The India Strategy published in 2020, and National Strategy on Blockchain published in January 2021 by MeitY. The paper aims to capture this initial moment that reflects state &ambivalence towards this new technology which will determine the development of web3 sphere in India.
Keywords: blockchain, cryptocurrency, nation-state, regulation, ambivalence

**19:15-20:15: Symposium Keynote**
**Chair: Dr Payel C Mukherjee**

**Professor Dipesh Chakraborty, Lawrence A. Kimpton Distinguished
Service Professor in History, University of Chicago**

*"The Democratization of Public Life and the Declining Value of Evidence: The Case of History"*

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