

INSIGHTS-NEWSLETTER

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School of Liberal Arts

IIT Jodhpur



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Message from the Head



Dear Friends,
Greetings!

I welcome you to the sixth edition of SoLA's Newsletter, which covers various dimensions of the School's growth including teaching, research, and national and international collaboration with academia and industry.

This semester Dr. Bhaskar Kumar Kakati, Dr. Dinesh Mohan Joshi, Dr. Soni, and Dr. Souryabrata Mohapatra joined the School as faculty. I welcome them and wish them a fruitful and prosperous career ahead.

In the middle of the semester, our third Winter School titled "Interdisciplinary Pathways in Computational Social Science: Economics, Sociology and Policy" was held and eminent speakers and experts from the field, including District Collector and District Magistrate Jodhpur joined the sessions.

SoLA also hosted a couple of talks from diverse fields. This time we also have stories from the field by our doctoral scholars. This is a new section where they share their experiences from the field, research journeys and their outreach activities. We also had a visit by the Honourable Director, IIT Jodhpur and a team, where our doctoral scholars presented their research work and received valuable feedback.

I wish everyone a joyful and relaxed summer break.

Kind regards,
Alok Ranjan



Events

Winter School

The third edition of MSc CSS Winter School, titled “Interdisciplinary Pathways in Computational Social Science: Economics, Sociology and Policy” was held on 27 February and 1 March 2025 at SoLA. Eminent speakers and experts from the field, Dr Manohar Kumar, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Delhi, Dr. C. Oswald, Department of Computer Science, NIT Tiruchirapalli and Shri Gaurav Agarwal, District Collector and District Magistrate, Jodhpur led the sessions.



SoLA Seminar Series

This year's first talk was delivered by Dr. Dipa Donde, Research Associate at Mehrangarh Fort Trust, Jodhpur, on "Thinking and Talking Animals in Indic Narratives: Text and Images from the Panchatantra, Ramcharitmanas and Dhola Maru by artists of Marwar in the 18th and 19th Century" in January 2025.



Book Talk

Prof. P.C. Thoudam introduced *The Structure of Manipuri (Meiteiron) Language (2023)*, offering fresh insights into the language. The talk highlighted distinctive features of Meiteiron that set it apart from other Tibeto-Burman languages.



We hosted a virtual book talk by Dr. Achyut Chetan on his book *Founding Mothers of the Indian Republic: Gender Politics of the Framing of the Constitution (2022)*. Dr. Achyut discussed the crucial role of women in shaping the Indian Constitution and the gender politics involved in its framing.



School of Liberal Arts and the School of Design hosted a talk and demo by Björn Lengers (CyberRäuber) in March 2025, exploring XR, AI, and digital performing arts.

The session highlighted innovative tech in storytelling, including XR, AR, 360° film, and real-time AI interfaces.



Dr. Anand Brudhan delivered an insightful talk on Indian Aesthetics, Iconography, and Museums in April at SoLA.



Research Scholars' interaction with the Director



Journal Club



Dr. Alok Ranjan talked on National Health Accounts Estimates for India, 2021-22 in the journal club meeting of December 2024.

Journal Club session in January 2025 was led by Dr. Saurabh Maheshwari with his paper "What Makes People Help More in the Presence of Others? A Counterintuitive Helping Behavior".

The journal club meeting in April was led by research scholar Ms. Pradarshika Biswas on "Lesser Lives: Working class Women in the Fiction of Post-liberalisation India".



New Members of Team SoLA



Bhaskar Kumar Kakati joined the School of Liberal Arts in March 2025. He holds a Ph.D. in Social Sciences from Tata Institute of Social Sciences, along with a Masters degree in Ancient History and another in Rural Development. His areas of research are rural development, migration, livelihood and appropriate technology and sustainability. An accomplished creative writer, Kakati has contributed over hundred poems and stories in Assamese and has authored two books on Assamese theatre. He is actively involved in theatre as an actor and director. In recognition of his work, he was felicitated by the Asam Sahitya Sabha in 2020 and he received the Social Service Award from Dispur Press Club (2024) for his contributions to rural development.

Dinesh Mohan Joshi joined the School of Liberal Arts, as an Assistant Professor in February 2025. He holds a Ph.D. in Indian Mathematics and Astronomy from the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Bombay, and brings over a decade of dedicated research experience in the domain of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). With recognized expertise in manuscript reading, decoding, interpretation, and critical analysis, he brings profound scholarly insight into ancient Indian scientific traditions, particularly in the areas of astronomy, mathematics, and astrology.





Soni joined the School of Liberal Arts, IIT Jodhpur in April 2025. Prior to this, she was an Assistant Professor at GITAM School of Humanities and Social Sciences. She has held a postdoctoral position at IIT Bombay and earned her Ph.D. in History from ETH Zurich. Her areas of research are childhood, youth and gender studies; history of education; modernity; postcolonial & decolonial history. Dr. Soni is currently completing her first book, 'Saving' the Orphans: Historicizing 'Child Protection' in Colonial North India, 1830–1943, under contract with Palgrave Macmillan (UK). When not lost in archives, Soni finds joy in the company of indie dogs. She unwinds with badminton, gardening, and calls museum-hopping her favorite cardio.



Souryabrata Mohapatra joined the School of Liberal Arts, IIT Jodhpur, as an Economics faculty in mid-March 2025. Prior to that, he served as a research faculty at NCAER in New Delhi. His applied studies explore the intersections of environmental and development economics and his areas of Interest are Economics of climate change, sustainable agriculture, green transitions, equitable migration, and rural resilience. Has a longstanding interest in pencil sketching and enjoys reading manga in leisure. Cooking is another passion that grew during hostel life and still continues—experimenting with new vegetarian recipes.



SoLA Stories

Snippets from the field

(This is a new section where research scholars from SoLA share their experiences from the field, research journeys and their outreach activities. This time we have two stories- from Nisha Palliwal and Sanskriti)

Nisha Palliwal

(Nisha Palliwal is interested in folk culture, traditional ecological knowledge systems and community practices. Her research area is at the intersection of energy humanities, political ecology and critical infrastructure studies)



(Photos shared by the scholar from her field visit)

On my first trip to Jaisalmer as a tourist, I was captivated by the larger-than-life windmills that dominated the landscape and stood as the epitome of national development and sustainability in the middle of the desert. However, while staying at a homestay 25 km away from the city while working with the Langa and Manganiyar musicians in Jaisalmer, I first discovered the complexities of green energy transition in Rajasthan.

Narrating the emergence of the wind project in the area, my host informed me about the time when the projects were beginning in the outskirts of Jaisalmer city under the pretence of providing electricity to the nearby villages. Despite protests from the villagers who feared these plants would take over their land, the construction began claiming that the plants would be removed after a few years. The community tried everything in their power to stop the construction, saying they could do without electricity but not the land which supported their entire survival. The village protesters failed to stop the construction and in compensation for their loss, a few residents were offered positions as watchmen or guards. In a few months, they were dismissed. What struck me the most was not a direct response but rather the remarkable climate resilience and the deep ethnographic knowledge embedded not only in local practices but also within the landscape that can be traced through the root-like patterns of seasonal rivers that shape the terrain.

During my field study in August 2024, I witnessed a river form before my eyes, the water emerged from the terrain and coursed through the landscape and within minutes the entire riverbed was filled with water. In the absence of perennial rivers, the local communities have found ways to harness and direct the scarce rainfall for sustainable use showcasing an ecological balance. This challenges the dominant perception of the Thar Desert as a 'wasteland,' a term that fails to acknowledge the ecological complexity and adaptive strategies that sustain life in arid regions. It compels us to reconsider how we conceptualize deserts and to question the tendency to apply a uniform framework to understand them. The assumption that all deserts are barren, lifeless, or unproductive oversimplifies their ecological and cultural diversity.



(Sanskriti's research looks at the media infrastructures and habits of borderland areas by deploying media ethnography)



Image 1- A red carpet screening of Khomlang Laman (2024) at the MSFDS Auditorium
(Photos shared by the scholar from her field visit)

My work aims to use 'border' as a method to study the media infrastructures and habits of borderland areas by deploying media ethnography. The work examines the complex media environments in borderland regions, focusing on phenomena such as Korean films in Manipur, Mizo-dubbed Korean dramas in Mizoram, Japanese anime in Nagaland, and heavy metal and gospel music in Meghalaya.

I have attempted to develop a multi-modal format of media ethnography while documenting my fieldwork journey through images, videographies, interviews, memorabilia, and objects of 'affect.' These objects hold a symbolic value that remains pertinent in tracing the ethnographer's rhythm around the field site(s) during mundane and staggering moments of delay, incertitude, and failure. Contrary to what was anticipated, the situation on my primary field site (Manipur) was faced with challenges compelling me to adapt and reframe my arguments. As a result, I sought field aids, field dupes, and alternative field settings to support my research. The ground realities of my fieldwork were rather strenuous, and accessing knowledge systems based on indigenous histories and experiences demanded a decolonial methodological approach of closely interrogating moments of failed interviews, rupture, and interruptions.



Image 2- A female vendor who offered me a cup of tea while I was photographing the wet markets in the back lanes of Razhu Bus Point of Kohima

Experiencing moments of camaraderie with local stakeholders of knowledge reconstituted the ideas of what defines a field and how one must traverse these contested spaces of belonging. My positionality as an ethnographer was significantly shaped by the connections I developed through lasting relationships and a strong sense of kinship in the area, as I resided there during my master's degree at the height of the pandemic. The interlocutors who agreed to share their stories with me did so in a variety of settings—sometimes in front of a camera, at other times beneath the warmth of their kitchen hearths, within the confines of their offices, or even amidst a family gathering such as Utsav¹. I found myself sharing personal anecdotes, fostering a sense of connection that enriched our dialogues on how identities are shaped and contested in the ongoing struggle between state, quasi-state, and separatist power entities. Regardless of the location, these conversations revealed intimate glimpses into their lives, even as they responded to structured questions about media infrastructures and embodied fan experiences.



¹ In Hindu families, particularly among Meetei Vaisnav families in Manipur, an act of charity is observed in the form of offering a feast to Brahmans, Vaisnavas, and elderly individuals which is primarily carried out during the observance of the death anniversaries of parents and elders.



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