



Insights- Newsletter Vol 4 Issue 1
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SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS



**Editorial Team: Sreedevi D
Sunil Kumar Lohar**

MESSAGE FROM THE HEAD

Dear Friends,

Greetings!

I welcome you to the seventh edition of SoLA's Newsletter, which covers some of the recent activities in the School of Liberal Arts over the last six months. The Science of Happiness Initiative was launched by the School of Liberal Arts, in collaboration with the Rekhi Foundation. This initiative led by Prof. Ankita Sharma has also proposed new courses in the field of Happiness and is setting up the Behavioural Science Lab. Our faculty colleagues published their insights on the measurement of happiness ranking in electronic and print media. Two of the SoLA's PhD students also defended their theses, and some of our PhD students shared their insights from their recent field visits.

I wish you all a healthy, happy, and prosperous New Year 2026!

Kind regards,

Alok Ranjan



SCIENCE OF HAPPINESS- A NEW INITIATIVE

The Indian Institute of Technology Jodhpur (IIT Jodhpur) has partnered with the Rekhi Foundation for Happiness, a not-for-profit organization, to launch the Science of Happiness Initiative. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) of this collaboration was signed in May 2025 by Dr. Satinder Singh Rekhi, Founder of the Rekhi Foundation for Happiness, and Prof. Kaushal Desai, Dean of Resources and Alumni Affairs at IIT Jodhpur.

Co-ordinated by Professor Ankita Sharma of School of Liberal Arts, the initiative seeks to advance research and education in the science of happiness, emphasizing its importance in personal growth and holistic learning. The program will offer courses designed to help students cultivate positivity, build emotional resilience, and lead meaningful lives. Additionally, the initiative includes a state-of-the-art Behavioral Science Lab to be developed.

At the MoU signing ceremony, Prof. Avinash Kumar Agarwal, Director, IIT Jodhpur, emphasized the significance of this collaboration in redefining education.

"At IIT Jodhpur, we aim to support not just strong academic performance but also personal balance and emotional strength. This step gives our students the chance to gain tools for leading a meaningful life during and after their time at the institute."



Prof. Avinash Kumar Agarwal

Dr. Satinder Singh Rekhi echoed this sentiment, "We all realise that mental health is important but there is still some stigma attached to it which prevents us from seeking help. We attempt to teach strategies and equip students with tools to be happier, backed up with science. I believe that happy people are more successful than the other way around. This initiative will help students perform better and achieve their full potential in the future".

Through this partnership, IIT Jodhpur reaffirms its commitment to redefining education by balancing academic rigor with the well-being of its students. The Science of Happiness Initiative combines scientific and philosophical perspectives to develop innovative approaches that promote happiness and improve well-being.

ARTICLE ON HAPPINESS CENTER IN THE HINDU NEWSPAPER

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THE HINDU
Editorial

Wednesday, November 19, 2025
DELHI

Unpacking the global 'happiness' rankings

Why is Finland the happiest country in the world for the eighth year in a row while India languishes at 118? How can Pakistan, which is struggling with political instability and recurring International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailouts score higher than India, the world's fastest-growing major economy? What does this really say about how we define "happiness"?

The World Happiness Report 2025, by the Wellbeing Research Centre at Oxford, again places Finland, Denmark, Iceland and Sweden at the top. India's score is 4.389 of 10, averaging 124 over the years; Pakistan is 109. The contrast seems puzzling against the economic and social realities of both nations.

India, with a \$3.7 trillion GDP, is the world's fifth-largest economy; Pakistan's \$375 billion GDP is barely 10% of that. India's digital economy is booming, and its infrastructure is expanding, whereas Pakistan survives on repeated bailouts. Yet, Pakistan appears "happier"?

Is happiness an economic measure, a perceptual one, or a proxy for something else?

The mirage of metrics

The report relies on the Gallup World Poll's Cantril Ladder, where people rate their lives from 0 to 10, linked with six variables – GDP per capita, social support, life expectancy, freedom, generosity and corruption perception. But perceptions are slippery.

Societies with low expectations often report higher happiness because people adapt to hardship. In vibrant democracies such as India, rising aspirations and constant media scrutiny can lower perceived satisfaction even as well-being improves. When citizens expect better governance or cleaner cities, dissatisfaction reflects higher expectations, not misery.

That paradox explains why the United States has fallen to 24 despite record wealth, while the Nordic nations with high taxes but deep social trust dominate.

The report itself admits that "belief in community kindness" and social trust predict

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Dissatisfaction, for instance, could reflect higher expectations, and not misery

happiness better than income.

India's challenge, then, is not growth but connection. Nearly 19% of young adults globally say they have no one to rely on – up 39% since 2006. With migration and digital life reshaping relationships, Indians too face shrinking real-world networks and expanding virtual ones – prosperity without proximity.

The politics of perception

Critics note that global indices rest on perception-based biases. A 2022 paper by the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (Sanjeev Sanyal and Aakanksha Arora) showed that indices such as Freedom House and V-Dem depend on small, opaque pools of western "experts". Their subjective views skew results.

A one-party state may appear freer simply because dissent is absent; media-controlled regimes look "stable" because citizens voice fewer complaints. Democracies, by contrast, are penalised for openness. The World Happiness Report risks repeating that error – valuing calm conformity over democratic cacophony. India's low score may reflect self-critical awareness – a maturing democracy unwilling to be complacent.

India's rank has swung between 94th and 144th in a decade. The best phase came in 2022 with post-COVID-19 pandemic recovery and welfare programmes such as Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana. The worst was in 2012 amid corruption scandals and slowdown. But happiness rarely tracks fiscal performance. Studies show that social trust, fairness and community matter far more.

In Finland, people believe a lost wallet will be returned – a proxy for institutional trust. In India, governance unevenness erodes that confidence, though local and familial trust remain strong. The COVID-19 lockdown exposed this: millions returned to villages not only for work loss but because community bonds offered the security absent in cities. Such informal trust, ignored by global metrics, sustains resilience.

The report's behavioural framework also carries the WEIRD bias – Western, Educated,

Industrialised, Rich and Democratic. It privileges institutional trust that is typical of individualistic societies and overlooks collective trust networks in countries such as India, where family and community are the real safety nets.

Even so, institutional trust is evolving. Campaigns around mental health, workplace wellbeing and inclusion mark a cultural shift. Programmes such as Tele-MANAS (Tele Mental Health Assistance and Networking Across States) and Mind India place emotional resilience on the policy map. Happiness, once dismissed as a luxury, is now a governance concern.

Aspirations to empathy

To climb the happiness ladder, India must pair economic ambition with empathy infrastructure – investing not only in GDP but also in GNH (Gross National Happiness) through three pathways. First, rebuild social capital. Create community spaces, shared meals and inter-generational ties. The report finds that household size and belief in community kindness significantly raise happiness.

Second, restore institutional trust. Simplify citizen-state interactions. When public services – from ration cards to railway tickets – work transparently, trust follows.

Third, recognise mental health as economic policy. Productivity gains mirror psychological wellbeing. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that every \$1 spent on mental health yields \$4 in returns – an investment no economy should ignore. As *The Pursuit of Happiness* reminds us, happiness is not something we possess. It is something we pursue. India's restlessness – its debates, innovations and demands for better lives – may be the clearest sign of wellbeing. Less satisfaction does not mean unhappiness. It signals ambition.

If rank 118 means that Indians still seek cleaner air, fairer governance and fuller lives, perhaps the nation is not unhappy but just unfinished, still chasing a truer idea of happiness.


The views expressed are personal



SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS CONGRATULATES SAMYA BRATA ROY AND BHAIRAB BARMAN WHO DEFENDED THEIR THESIS SUCCESSFULLY AND GRADUATED



Samya Brata Roy works in the area of Electronic Literature, Digital Humanities, and Videogame Studies. His PhD work examined the emergence of Electronic Literature within Literary Studies in India. Currently, he works as an Assistant Professor, Department of English and Other Languages, Gitam (Deemed-to-be) University, Hyderabad and Co-ordinator, Digital Technology and Cultural Change, Centre for Asian Studies, Gitam (Deemed-to-be) University



Bhairab Barman works in the area of Cinema Studies, and his thesis examined Spatial Aesthetics in/of Cinema with reference to Ritwik Ghatak's Films.



SNIPPETS FROM THE FIELD

(This time, we have our research scholars, Sonal Sinha and Utkarsh Sharma, write about their fieldwork and library research)

A Note from the Field: Tracing Agreement in Eastern Indo-Aryan Languages- Sonal Sinha

(Sonal's research analyses syntactic structures focusing on low-resourced and under-studied languages of India. Her areas of interest are Syntax, Sociolinguistics, Computational Linguistics and Pragmatics.)

Linguist: "Hi dear, can you please translate some sentences in Bhojpuri?"

Participant: "Hey ya...tell me the sentence."

Linguist: "दादा जी और दादी मां खाना खा लिए ?"

Participant: "बाबा अउर अइया खाना खा लेलखिन ? "

Linguist: "मैं और तुम खाना खाने जाएंगे ।"

Participant: "हम अउर तू खाना खाए जाइब ।"

As I progress further into my PhD journey, I've often found myself reflecting on the path that has brought me here—one shaped equally by intellectual curiosity and the incredibly rich linguistic diversity of eastern India. My research focuses on a phenomenon that sits at the heart of syntactic theory yet remains strikingly under-documented in many languages: conjunct agreement in Eastern Indo-Aryan languages. These languages—Bhojpuri, Magahi, Maithili, Awadhi, Angika, and Thethi—form a fascinating cluster within the Indo-Aryan Language Family, yet most of them (except Maithili) remain non-scheduled, underrepresented, and under-resourced, as reflected in the 2011 Census of India. As a linguist, my goal is not only to analyze their agreement patterns but also to contribute to the greater effort of generating structured grammatical descriptions for languages that rarely find a place in mainstream linguistic literature.

The fieldwork experience for this project has been unconventional in the best possible way. Unlike traditional linguistic data collection, which usually requires months of travel and on-ground presence, my approach unfolded through an unexpectedly practical channel—phone calls. Over the span of about six months, while I was based in Jodhpur for my doctoral work, my participants were scattered across several districts of Bihar, including Patna, Bihita, Jamui, Deoghar, and nearby regions. The geographic distance, surprisingly, did not become a hurdle; instead, the telephonic method turned into one of the biggest strengths of this project.



The convenience of the medium reshaped how fieldwork can be imagined, especially when studying spoken language. Phone-based data collection has become a contemporary and widely accepted method in field linguistics, especially when working across large geographic areas or with dispersed speech communities. Spoken interaction remains the primary tool, but the advantage is that speakers often respond more naturally from their own environments, and the researcher can reach multiple districts quickly without extensive travel. Traditionally, in field linguistics, this is done by preparing elicitation lists or conversational prompts, recording the session (with consent), and guiding speakers through controlled and semi-spontaneous speech tasks—just as in on-ground work—except the entire process is conducted through a clear audio connection rather than face-to-face interaction.

Participants could respond from the comfort of their homes, without rearranging their entire day. Many of the participants were working individuals, students, homemakers, or engaged in traditional occupations, and the flexibility of phone-based elicitation allowed me to align entirely with their schedules rather than expecting them to adjust to mine. If someone was available in the morning, I called then. If another preferred late evening after finishing chores, I worked around that. This not only made participation smoother but also created a sense of ease and naturalness in conversation, allowing me to gather more spontaneous, accurate data.

The linguistic tasks involved oral translation exercises, carefully designed to reveal patterns of agreement in conjunct sentences (e.g., ‘Uncle and Aunt are young’ is a conjunct sentence), interactions between features, and the subtle hierarchy that governs how different features—person, number, honorificity, gender—interact within the agreement system. Since conjunct agreement is often sensitive to fine syntactic details, maintaining precision was essential at every step. The ability to call participants repeatedly for multiple validation rounds was an invaluable advantage. Whenever a particular structure needed rechecking, or if I felt a pattern needed deeper clarification, I could simply reconnect with the speaker and walk through the examples again. This iterative process ensured that the data remained consistent, robust, and cross-verified, despite the remote method.

Conducting fieldwork this way has also highlighted how adaptable linguistic research can be. It challenged the notion that meaningful field data can only emerge from in-person interaction. Instead, I discovered that rapport, trust, and linguistic depth can be built through voice alone. Many of my participants began recognizing my calls even before I introduced myself, and what started as formal elicitation sessions slowly evolved into warm exchanges about language, everyday life, and their pride in their mother tongues. There is something incredibly exciting about hearing a speaker produce a structure you’ve only theorised about, in the rhythm and cadence of a language that has been shaped by generations.

Studying these six languages together has also made me profoundly aware of their structural richness. While they share a genetic affiliation, each has its own personality: Bhojpuri’s fluidity, Magahi’s innovative agreement behaviours, Maithili’s documented grammatical depth, Awadhi’s mixed substrate influences, Angika’s distinctive morphosyntax, and Thethi’s lesser-known yet fascinating structural traits. Together, they form a tapestry of linguistic diversity that deserves far more scholarly attention than it currently receives. Working on them has reaffirmed for me how essential it is to bring under-represented languages into the formal syntactic fold—not only to preserve them academically but also to illuminate the theoretical possibilities they offer.

The process has challenged me intellectually, emotionally, and creatively. Theoretical syntax demands precision, but fieldwork demands patience—together they have shaped me into a researcher who is constantly learning, rethinking, and refining. As I continue generating grammar sketches and syntactic analyses for these Eastern Indo-Aryan languages, I think that creating structured documentation for non-scheduled languages is more than a scholarly task; it is an act of linguistic visibility within the broader linguistic discourse.

Looking ahead, I hope this work encourages more researchers to explore remote methodologies, to engage with smaller linguistic communities, and to recognise the tremendous value that under-documented languages offer to syntactic theory. My fieldwork journey—spread across districts, time zones, telephone lines, and countless hours of transcription and analysis—has been nothing short of transformative. It has shown me that research is not confined to laboratories, libraries, or classrooms; it unfolds wherever speakers are willing to share their linguistic intuition, even if it means meeting them through a simple phone call.

As this project progresses, I remain grateful for every voice that contributed, every conversation that built clarity, and every moment that reminds me why I chose linguistics in the first place. The beauty of language lies not only in its structure but in the people who carry it, shape it, and pass it forward with a deep appreciation for the linguistic richness of the region and the communities that keep these languages alive.

MANY NEIGHBOURS, ONE HOME: *BHASHA* IN ITS MANY FORMS

UTKARSH SHARMA

(Utkarsh's areas of research are literary history, book history, and genre studies. His research looks at the formal and the developmental histories of the Indian short story cycle.)

As a Research Assistant in the SPARC project, "Translations in Colonial India, 1800–1947: Paradigms, Networks, and Practices," I was offered a generous travel grant to conduct archival research in the United Kingdom. The opportunity was timely as I was in the process of identifying relevant archives for my research.

After my RP presentation on April 16th, I flew headlong into the discombobulating world of fineprint, trying to prepare my applications for academic leave and the UK Visa. At the tail end of this process, when the documents began to jigsaw together to form the portrait of an eager and precocious researcher who had been blessed with the magnanimity of India's research capabilities, border tensions threatened to send my Icarian dreams burrowing underground before they had even had the opportunity to take flight.

"India will go on," R.K. Narayan had said to V.S. Naipaul in London in 1961. Narayan's worldview is one of a quiet and reserved continuity: the world goes on like a river. To the cold and explosive hindsight of history, the timelessness of a stream is a comforting vision. A kind of time did pass in those days of terror, and when we emerged from hiding, we were already further along in the stream than when we went in.

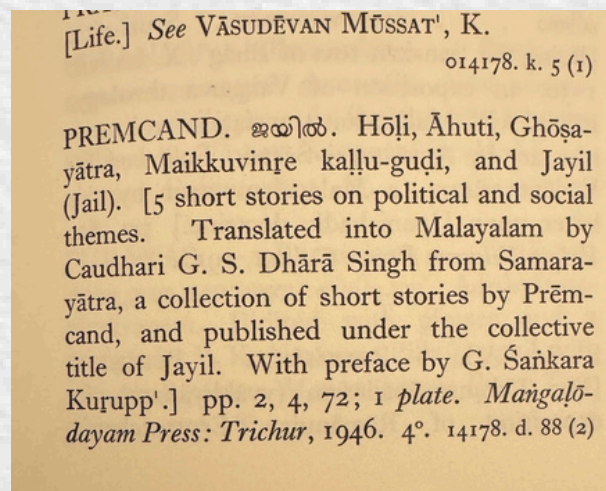
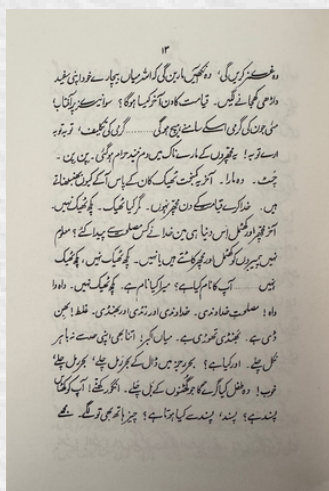


View from a staircase window at my hostel. The sun sets over Edinburgh New Town across the Waverley Bridge. The spire belongs to the Scott Monument while the apex-sheds in the middle are the roofing of the Waverley Street Station. (Own photo.)

Airways resumed, and sixty-four years after the meeting of two literary giants at the heart of an Ozymandian Empire, I landed in Edinburgh on a rainy evening at the precipice of June. Although Edinburgh had its own charms, it was London where I was truly dwarfed by the ghosts of history. This is why I love the Hindi word *bhoot*—derived from Sanskrit, it means both the past and restless spirits. Being in London reminded me of the first time I came to Delhi—both capital cities whose mythologies have founded so much of our worldview that physically being there feels uncanny, a constant sense of *déjà vu* at seeing a world that we already know but have never inhabited. Is this what Dante felt being taken around Heaven and Hell by Virgil? It is what taking the Tube to King's Cross St. Pancras, working at the British Library, eating sausage rolls to save money (I love sausage rolls so 'twas a winning proposition), and finally returning to my hostel via London Bridge felt like.

For SPARC, I had to research networks of translations into and from Urdu in colonial India. What initially felt like shooting arrows in the dark became progressively easier as I browsed through catalogue after catalogue and found romances, philosophical treatises, and even banned texts that had travelled through Urdu in their journey of circulation across the many worlds they came to inhabit. What is important, however, is how the visit reshaped a lot of my opinions on the translational histories of texts and languages in India. History exhumes new *bhoot* at every step. Kamran Rastegar has written on how “translation” and “translatability” are ideas shaped by the colonial encounter, wherein language is seen as an inert tool which can be employed to “carry across” texts from one place, and one language, to another.

The same ideas have not existed in vernacular traditions where often the original texts were reproduced in the “source language” with annotations from the “target language.”



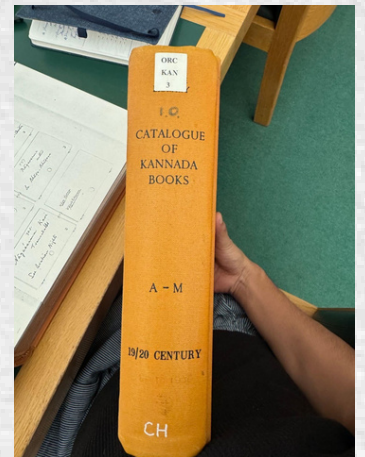
An Urdu original text and an entry on a translation of Premchand into Malayalam. (Own photos.)

Another normative assumption about translation is that English as a link language has enabled the translation of texts across India. While it is also true to an extent, it also hides under the rug divergent vernacular histories of translation.

We often make the mistake of assuming that languages are stable entities with fixed geographical and ethnic makeup. However, my encounter with so many different texts from a bygone time challenged that assumption. It became clear to me that multilingual zones existed within important centres of print in colonial India: enabling the translation of Urdu romances to Tamil or scientific textbooks in Urdu to Bangla. While English remained an important pan-Indian linguistic arch, the space under it was populated by dozens of languages engaged in lively colloquy and tête-à-tête.

Accessing archives, beyond the knowledge itself, makes one appreciate the tireless work that goes into the material aspects of maintaining and running it. The librarians and the staff are your best friends at any archive as they are often the best sources for getting to know the place and its collections. The British Library has about 400 miles of shelves, with everything from the Magna Carta and Shakespeare's First Folio.

Having concluded my research, I returned to Jodhpur just about a month later with a mind full of ideas that now await the many stamps of peer review. Before the findings meet the eye of public scrutiny, however, I would like to express my gratitude to those who made this research possible. First on the list is SPARC whose faith and invaluable support emboldened my intellectual ambitions.



Barnett, Lionel D. A Catalogue of the Kannada, Badaga, and Kurg Books in the Library of the British Museum (1910). (Own photo.)



The British Library: inside and outside. (Own photos.)

On the same pedestal stand Prof. Suddhaseel Sen, the PI in the project, and Prof. Anupama Mohan, the co-PI and my doctoral supervisor, who often led me by hand in the overwhelming everything-bagel of work. I thank Prof. Sourit Bhattacharya of the University of Edinburgh who had to suffer the rawness of my scholarly form and even so guide my research in the UK and beyond. My sincerest thanks and apologies go to Prof. Thoudam as well: our incidental meeting at the British Library led to her most generous offer for dinner be cheekily exploited by my innate preference for hole-in-the-wall spots. My work would not have been possible without the numberless people who make things happen: be it moving papers, books, and information, or offering hugs and words of affirmation. These include everyone from the staff at SoLA, my friends at IITJ and beyond, the tireless workers at every step of the travel process, and lastly, the keepers of the world's knowledge at all the libraries I visited.

While I went to the UK as a researcher, I returned as a literary Johnny English, a dogged sleuth eagerly sniffing for clues. There is so much more to the story which may find its place in a sequel to this feature. If the reader does wish to indulge my love for biryani, I would be more than happy to share my stories and field notes.



An informal get together of faculty and students of SoLA with poetry and music





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