

Introduction



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After a decade or so of its emergence, digital humanities in India has today secured a firm foothold in Indian academia¹. The arrival of this journal is only fitting with this timing, as it coincides with the creation of academic infrastructure for reflections on and applications of the digital alongside real-world challenges. With the irreversible global advent of artificial technologies (AI), we are forced to reassess our pedagogy alongside computational capacity, as this turn also forces a reckoning with what the digital is unleashing onto humanities scholarship worldwide.

India has always contended with its own unique legacies, and perhaps this digital turn is also offering up new opportunities to engage with our demographic dividends and multilingual present. Even beyond our 22 scheduled languages is the lived reality of our spoken Tower of Babel, which has historically been underserved by intra-Indian translation tools. New interfaces are now relaying to our screens practices of humanistic inquiry to help scholars answer humanities questions in new ways, as they embark on tasks like text mining, digital archiving, GIS-based historical mapping, and more. As new affordances open up new registers, academic scholarship today is closer to bridging the gaps that have existed across Indian languages to excavate multimodal heritage and generate meaningful scholarly access to a wider public.

Alongside these opportunities, digital humanities in India also has to contend today with the very recent challenges of AI that are provoking a crisis of purpose across sectors, including education and beyond. While erstwhile demands for decolonisation ring loud across the world, to substantially take on this task requires a deep theoretical pause about our invisible inheritances (that certainly need dismantling) in tandem with acts of creation. What cultures will be visible in the digital, what ancestries shall be traceable, and how these voices will be heard are functions of what digital humanities scholars do today. The speed of synthetic creation that is built on the present Internet renders most Indian linguistic and cultural heritage invisible.

India's current landscape around AI and Indian languages – especially in relation to archives and manuscripts – is defined by rapid digitisation to redress uneven AI integration. The government's Gyan Bharatam Mission², which expands the National Mission for Manuscripts, represents the first explicit national effort to incorporate AI technologies such as OCR, automated transcription and blockchain-based provenance tracking into manuscript preservation and access. Even as the National Archives of India is undertaking a massive project to digitise more than 34 crore public records,³ most of this effort remains focused on scanning and digitisation rather than AI-driven search, analysis or discovery. At the forefront of enhancing capacity, active work on Indic large language models (LLMs) is being led by AI4Bharat at IIT Madras, alongside government infrastructure such as Bhashini, a multilingual AI platform with hundreds of language models. Currently, India's ecosystem operates in two parallel domains: archival institutions digitising materials at scale, and AI labs developing language technologies but without deep engagement with historical collections. Bridging these domains – by applying AI tools to archival corpora and aligning the needs of archivists with the capacities of language AI labs – remains one of the most significant and underdeveloped opportunities in Indian digital humanities today.

Along with these innovations, there is also a growing theoretical conversation about who gets to build corpora, whose texts are considered worth digitising, and how biases inherited from colonial systems might be easily reproduced in technologies of the future. Increased funding in the Indian research ecosystem shall hopefully

¹ For more see the recently published scoping review at P. Chakraborty and M. Shirodkar, "Digital humanities & innovative research approaches: developing comprehensive doctoral research programs for social sciences and humanities in India/South East Asian context", *SN Social Sciences* 6 (2026): 96. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s43545-026-01370-3>

² See Press Trust of India (PTI), "Govt signs MoUs with 17 institutions to expand work under 'Gyan Bharatam'", *The Print*, 25 October 2025. <https://theprint.in/india/govt-signs-mous-with-17-institutions-to-expand-work-under-gyan-bharatam/2770683/>.

This effort is matched by the technical side, with the most active work on language AI being led by AI4Bharat at IIT Madras, which is building translation models across all 22 scheduled Indian languages. Yet these AI initiatives largely focus on contemporary language technologies rather than historical manuscripts or degraded archival documents, and this disparity might create new challenges.

³ See Divya A., "India's history in a digital avatar: Archive 2.0", *The Indian Express*, 23 July 2024. <https://indianexpress.com/article/long-reads/national-archives-digitisation-history-9464645/>.

allow future researchers to become even more ambitious in overturning old epistemic hierarchies and to take these difficult questions on. What has always differentiated the digital humanities from older, traditional ways of humanistic inquiry is collaboration. The way forward needs requires many minds to work collectively, with efforts uniting government missions, academic labs and open-source communities.

The widening spaces of collaboration, as evidenced by the establishment of India's Alliance of Digital Humanities Organisations (ADHO) constituent, DHARTI (Digital Humanities Alliance for Research and Teaching Innovations), and the ever-increasing number of workshops, conferences and winter schools all across the country, are proof of an appetite for learning from each other. Apart from the humanities expertise required to build capacity together, there is also the fundamental need for knowledge sharing across the verticals of law (for questions of copyright and data privacy), technology (from fields such as AI and computational linguistics), and art and design (for the creative ways in which new technologies are being put to fascinating applications). Without the collective might of these energies the field of digital humanities would not be able to unleash its full potential in India.

The growth of public humanities is linked to the promise of digital humanities in India. It is my fervent hope that the forthcoming pages of this journal shall chronicle stories of cultural preservation, social analysis and triumphs of community archiving as rewards of this growing field. The digital has destabilised the dominance of colonial legacies and deeply informs democratic participation through public engagement with heritage, memory and identity. To think through the digital is to reckon with a form of being unique to our contemporaneity, and the journal *Digital Humanities Intersections* shall give us a collective authoring of history, meaning and belonging in the digital age.