

D or H – What leads in DH? Envisaging the Digital Humanities Space in India

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Introduction

- How do Indian academic institutions visualise the Digital Humanities space?
 - What forms the basis of their curricula, research and professional practices?
- What entails interdisciplinarity in India- upskilling/reskilling of scholars or *relocating* to a more techno-positive academic culture?
- What goes into conceptualising DH pedagogy in the national/regional context(s)?

These are some of the questions we seek to explore through our presentation that investigates the role of higher education institutions in envisioning the DH space as necessarily heterogeneous, constantly grappling with conflicting attitudes while coalescing them into a harmonious whole. As we inspect these issues from an Indian perspective, we also touch upon the location-specific politicalities that play a significant role in determining DH curricula and pedagogy in the nationalistic context. Acknowledging the differences in DH-scholarship of the *majority world* (Alam, 2008) and the pivotal role played by the global north in our discourses, paves the way to addressing the pedagogical responsibilities emanating from the socio-cultural and academic complexities. We acknowledge that to bridge the many gaps between teaching and learning in an interdisciplinary field, academic institutions from the majority world (such as in India) need to establish explicit connections between the different epistemological standpoints.

Roy and Menon (2022) postulate that “...some of the reasons for the resistance to institutionalising DH within the larger Indian university systems” are a result of the causes that are not only historical “but perhaps also arise from the embedded rigidity and regimentation of university curricula across disciplines” (1001). When the DH space is perceived as inspiring cultures of conversation(s), to refer to Kirschenbaum (2007), being cognisant of the cultures that DH-ers come from, one’s positionality in and

outside of the social sphere determines how and what kind of a DH space they build upon. We have surmised from our experience that ongoing conversations on DH in India take on two opposing views. One claims that Indian institutions offering DH/ interdisciplinary courses are more inclined towards the humanistic style of inquiries, with technology playing a supplementary role. The other, more recent view, critiques the prevalent techno-positivist attitude amongst scholars, irrespective of their academic background, as several technical institutes in the country start offering similar courses. Visualising DH as being “rhizomatic” in the majority world (Roy, 2022), it becomes interesting to see how the thought-making of humanities and technical fields mingle. The convergence of the humanistic and technical, per their academic training in its socio-technical and cultural aspects, bear interdisciplinary perspectives, methodologies and frameworks to work with. Navigating the nature of approaches one learns and uses whilst in DH and its reasons will help envision how DH as a discipline will foster future use of digital and computational tools and data practices. For the cultures of conversation and convergence to percolate through all the academic strata, institutions must propose curricula and pedagogy that help build an environment of collaboration and a space of critical empathy (Leake, 2014), both informed by reforms in their prior academic training. Such a collaborative space, ideally, nurtures symbiotic relationships amongst stakeholders without undermining individuality.

Methodology

Our methodology includes a thematic analysis of existing DH curricula and practices through in-depth interviews of alumni/researchers and practitioners from different higher education institutes in the country. We expect to include scholars from the five categories of higher education institutions existing in the country, i.e. central universities, state universities, deemed universities, institutions of national importance, and state private universities to explore the evolving DH space in Indian academia. Topics that we aim to cover are DH curricula across these institutes, courses offered, and credit systems. Purely quantitative studies will not bring out the insights we seek to understand the complex issues stated above. However, a comparative analysis of the impressions gathered through our interactions should help develop a holistic picture of the current status of DH curricula and pedagogy in India. As we propose a mixed methodology (with the more quantitative data gathered from secondary sources), we also do not rule out the possibility of incorporating necessary changes as and when required. While a lot is being discussed in the literature on recent academic attention towards DH/ interdisciplinary education in the country and on decolonisation, direct interviews with practising scholars and students will offer deeper perceptive inputs on how DH is envisaged in the Indian academic context in the years to come. As our long-term goal, we plan to propose a curricular framework in DH, with a necessarily learner-centric approach, based on the *data* we gather from these interviews. We contend that a bottom-up approach (i.e. qualitative data forming the basis of theoretical propositions) will help devise a more inclusive curriculum development.

Conclusion

Menon and Shanmugapriya wrote in “Digital Humanities in India: Pedagogies, Publishing, and Practices” (2021 that “(t)he in-

roduction to Digital Humanities can, therefore, be an evolutionary process and not a revolutionary one” (442). Our presentation, thus, will focus on discussing what is conceived of as best practices in DH (if any) when examined from an institutional viewpoint—the possibility of harmoniously bringing together two binary attitudes in a manner that neither is overshadowed by the other. We shall also deliberate on the shortcomings of inclining more towards technical improvisation and thus, specific methods of inquiry. A study across different institutions will also help us investigate the cultural mores that predefine an academic institution in the Indian national context, impacting the DH curriculum and pedagogy. Furthermore, we shall attempt an overall reassessment of the enterprise of collaboration that forms the backbone of Digital Humanities.

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