

## Doing Humanities: Prose, Practice, Partnerships

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Academic research in our department straddles a vast range of disciplines and approaches, often inelegantly combining differing variations of empirical research and theoretical intervention, quantitative analysis and creative production, ethical neutrality and empathetic subjectivity. Located in a technological school, Liberal Arts often awkwardly strains backwards and leapfrogs forwards in an attempt to gesture relevance, centrality, and promise.

As a humanities scholar, I have enjoyed the insulation and privilege that a public research university offers across my graduate school and early teaching years when my fieldwork in the social sector and scholarly contributions within nineteenth-century research could exist in a diffuse but meaningful continuum. However, what has emerged over the years is the necessity to demonstrate the crucially public-facing work with which several of us engage from within humanities disciplines—disciplines that otherwise appear self-enclosed, specialized, and abstract. In more concrete ways than is clear to the wider audience, the field of literature and the arts contributes to the wider domains of social thought, public governance, education, policy, science, and law. In a fluent and unacknowledged way, English and Cultural Studies majors have always graduated to find ready jobs across a range of professions, or entrance into a variety of programs, in the domains of journalism, law, public policy, education, and social work. Much of the crucial work in funded projects that culminate in policy advisory documents for ministries or laboratories is undertaken by humanities scholars.

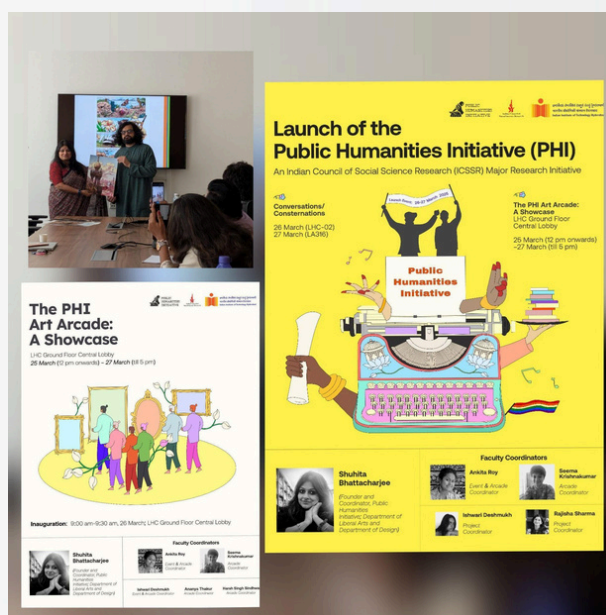
Similarly, creative arts and design speak in concrete and socio-politically impactful ways—whether through graphitis, art galleries, website/application interfaces, advertising campaigns, or corporate marketing designs.



As such, March will see the launch of the Public Humanities Initiative (PHI) from the Department of Liberal Arts at IIT Hyderabad. The PHI will be a hub of public-facing humanities, arts, and design research that will highlight and facilitate significant scholarly ventures directed at a more inclusive and just public sphere.



At this centre, students and faculty from humanities (and social sciences) and design will explore projects along the vectors of gender, health, pedagogy, medicine, and law that will be aimed at crucial and tangible socio-institutional changes. The PHI launch event will consist of two days of rigorous talks by established academics, graphic artists, and civil society actors, rich panel discussions (including a Liberal Arts students' panel), and an art installation that showcases students' community-facing art/designs which facilitate socio-political change.



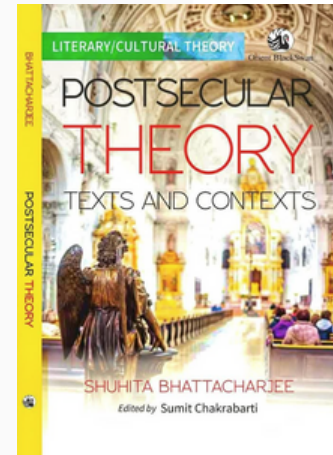
One of the first big international events organized by the PHI will be a UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)-funded Nineteenth-Century Studies symposium in 2026 with eminent keynote speakers and participants from across borders.

The symposium will look in particular at the nineteenth-century colonial encounter from a public humanities perspective—studying how nineteenth-century colonialist structures impact modern societal/legal/technological approaches to, and exclusions within, the field of health, cultural heritage, climate, social justice, or religion.

Scholars will present from medical humanities, environmental humanities, postsecular humanities perspectives—looking, for example, at how nineteenth-century formats of resource extraction impact our climate policies, nineteenth-century discourses of science/medicine shape our current understanding of illnesses, and nineteenth-century perceptions of religiosity produce our modern policies on religion/secularism.



This will bring together my scholarship in nineteenth-century studies (Postsecular Theory: Texts and Contexts, Orient Blackswan 2023) and my long research arc in gender studies as part of which I am currently working with schoolchildren to develop picture books for sexuality education.



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