



Literary-Cultural Theory and Vulnerability Studies: Ten-Day Online FDP Conducted by Department of Languages and Literature - English, SSSIHL and UNESCO Chair in Vulnerability Studies, UoH

The Department of Languages and Literature - English (DLL-E), Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning (SSSIHL), organised a Ten-Day Online Faculty Development Programme (FDP) on Literary-Cultural Theory and Vulnerability Studies in collaboration with the UNESCO Chair in Vulnerability Studies, University of Hyderabad, Prof. Pramod K. Nayar, from Friday, 6th March 2026 to Wednesday, 18th March 2026.

The programme commenced with invocatory Vedam chanting by students of SSSIHL, following which Dr Maitali Khanna, Head of the Department of Languages and Literature (DLL), SSSIHL, delivered the Welcome Speech, greeting the 600-odd participants of the FDP, comprising faculty members, research scholars, and postgraduate students from across the country. Dr Khanna highlighted the relevance of the Ten-Day FDP in the age of digitisation and destabilisation, where literature and storytelling would be a source of healing, with the literary community fostering care and solidarity. Following this, Prof. B. Raghavendra Prasad, the Honourable Vice-Chancellor of Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, delivered his Introductory Remarks, speaking on the interface between literature and current affairs, and thanked the eminent academics for their time and effort spent on the meaningful scholarly endeavour. Prof. Pramod K. Nayar, the UNESCO Chair in Vulnerability Studies, University of Hyderabad, delivered the Inaugural Address, briefing the participants on the UNESCO Chair's various initiatives worldwide since its establishment in 2022.

Day 1 began with the first academic lecture, delivered by Dr Priyanka Tripathi, Associate Professor in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at IIT Patna, on "Embodied Femininity and Ageist Discourse in Select Indian Television Advertisements". She foregrounded and critiqued the representation of aged women in Indian media, revealing a pattern of social stereotypes of 'old women', calling for a reorientation of how the aged female body is perceived.

The first speaker on Day 2, Dr Srirupa Chatterjee, Associate Professor in the Department of Liberal Arts, IIT Hyderabad, discussed in detail the politics of body image in her lecture titled "Critical Body Studies: Discursive Approaches to Embodiment". She traced the evolution of body image from ancient traditions to the digital age, examining its diverse representations and vulnerabilities across gender, disability, and media contexts. The second speaker of the day, Prof. Susan McHugh, Professor of English at the School of Arts and Humanities, University of New England, USA, dealt with the theme of vulnerability of animals in her lecture titled "Reframing Vulnerability across Species Lines: Genocide and Animal Studies". She explored the portrayal of animals in literature, highlighting themes of extinction, genocide, and exploitation, with a focus on sled dog killings in Canada and Inuit experiences, drawn from her work.

Day 3 began with Prof. Ira Raj, Department of English, University of Delhi, speaking on the topic, "Still Here: Ageing and the Politics of Refusal in Partition Literature". She examined the effect of partition on the lives of the aged, through close reading of selected texts, highlighting themes of attachment, displacement, trauma, and memory. The next speaker, Dr Saurabh Todariya, Assistant Professor in the Human Sciences Research Centre at IIIT Hyderabad, delivered his lecture titled "Storytelling as Healing: An Interface between Care and Narratives in End-of-Life Care". He discussed storytelling as a therapeutic interface

between care and narrative in hospice settings, highlighting its role in helping terminally ill patients in India.

Day 4 began with Dr Vidya Sarveswaran, Associate Professor of English in the School of Liberal Arts, IIT Jodhpur, delivering a lecture on “Entangled Vulnerabilities: An Ecocritical Perspective”. She gave a brief overview of Environmental Humanities and ecocriticism while analysing Terry Tempest Williams’ *Finding Beauty in a Broken World*, highlighting mosaic art as a mode of ecological belonging and experiential storytelling. The next speaker, Dr Svitlana Pidoprygora, Doctor of Philological Sciences and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions for Ukraine (MSCA4Ukraine) Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Innsbruck, Austria, spoke on “The Russian War on Ukraine in Comics: National and International Representations”. She traced the evolution of comics to show how contemporary works depict war, examining war narratives in comics, focusing on representations of the Russia-Ukraine conflict as forms and media of resistance, solidarity, and shared suffering.

Day 5 began with Dr Isha Dubey, Associate Professor in the Human Sciences Research Centre at IIIT Hyderabad, speaking on “Urban History and Partition Studies: Migration, Displacement and the Re-Making of South Asian Cities”. She explored Urban Studies in South Asia, linking historical developments, economic change, and Partition-induced migrations to the transformation of cities, highlighting areas for further research. Next, Prof. Pramod K. Nayar, UNESCO Chair in Vulnerability Studies and Professor of English at the University of Hyderabad, spoke on “Posthuman Vulnerabilities”. He examined biopolitics and posthumanism, exploring how technology blurs human-nonhuman boundaries, raising ethical questions about artificial beings, challenging traditional notions of identity and rights.

On Day 6, Prof. John C. Ryan, Senior Research Fellow at the University of Notre Dame, Australia, established the field of Plant Studies within Environmental Humanities and investigated the idea of vegetal vulnerability, referring to the particular weaknesses of plants and their interactions with people. He introduced different theoretical perspectives for comprehending plant agency and the ability of plants to influence their surroundings, while emphasising the profound effects of the Anthropocene on plant life. The second speaker of the evening was Prof. Kylie Crane, Professor of British and American Cultural Studies at the University of Rostock, Germany, whose main subjects of investigation were Concrete and Plastic in the Anthropocene, while exploring the theme of materiality. Prof. Crane referred to these materials as future artifacts that characterise our current geological epoch and used a new materialist approach to explain how they are active agents with long-term temporal and spatial implications rather than being mere objects.

Day 7 looked at vulnerability from the perspectives of language and cultural narrative. Dr Partha Bhattacharjee, Associate Professor, Department of Literature and Languages and Department of Media Studies, SRM University, Andhra Pradesh, spoke about how trauma and gender-based violence are addressed in such sophisticated cultural texts as South Asian comics and graphic narratives, highlighting their role in articulating marginalised experiences engendered by social and gendered precarity. In the lecture that followed, Prof. K. Narayana Chandran, Professor (Retd) of English, University of Hyderabad, investigated how language and vulnerability are inextricably linked by exploring the relationship between both, stressing language as both expression and cultural archive.

On Day 8, objecthood, colonial history, and the psychological effects of oppression were the topics for discussion. Dr Shuhita Bhattacharjee, Associate Professor, Department of Liberal

Arts, IIT Hyderabad, examined how colonial idols were converted from objects of worship to artifacts in museums. She talked about the politics of their reception, describing how they were acquired and presented as educational and ethnological instruments, divesting them of their original significance. The second speaker of the evening, Prof. Sipra Mukherjee, Department of English, West Bengal State University, provided insights into the psychological vulnerability in Dalit and Adivasi literature, foregrounding the mental and emotional impact of systemic oppression on women in Dalit, Adivasi, and South African literature. Using examples from stories by Bandhu Madhav, Can Themba, and bell hooks, she vividly demonstrated how psychological suffering can be just as destructive as physical violence.

Day 9 saw Sri. Argha Manna, Artist-in-Residence at Dr Kiran C. Patel Centre for Sustainable Development, IIT Gandhinagar, linking historical catastrophes with artistic representation. Using his artwork, Sri. Argha Manna compared the COVID-19 pandemic to the Bengal Famine of 1770 in his talk titled “Drawing Disaster: Colonialism, Famine and Ecological Destruction through Visual Storytelling”. He examined the common experiences of economic collapse, hunger, and mass migration, showing how art can connect traumas from the past and present and make history accessible and relatable. The second speaker of the evening, Dr Simi Malhotra, Professor of English at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, charted the development of women’s movements in India over the course of two centuries. She offered a feminist historiography that emphasised the ongoing and changing fight against gender-based oppression by connecting significant demonstrations from the pre-independence Channar Revolt to post-independence movements such as Chipko and Me Too.

On Day 10, the concluding day of the FDP, Prof. Anna Kurian, Professor of English, University of Hyderabad, and Faculty-Fellow, UNESCO Chair in Vulnerability Studies, offered a diachronic overview of the representation of the child in canonical English literature, demonstrating that vulnerability is not emotional or individual alone, but is deeply embedded within relational and structural contexts, in her talk titled, “The Vulnerable Child in Literature: From Shakespeare to Claire Keegan”.

Collectively, the sessions encouraged the participants to rethink their reading methods, research methodologies, and pedagogical approaches, demonstrating that literary-cultural theory is not abstract or distant, but is closely connected to the everyday ethical realities that inform practices of teaching, learning, writing, and thinking, imbricated as these are with a range of interconnected vulnerabilities that need to be addressed.