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Brief Description: The monsoon School on **Digitalisation and Contested Modernities** was organised by Human Sciences Research Centre, IIIT- Hyderabad, from 21st – 25th July 2025.

Link to website: <https://sites.google.com/view/techsoc-2025/home>

Motivation: 21st century modernity is shaped by global ICT infrastructures, instantaneous flow of massive volumes of data and the application of large language models to analyse this data. Yet, the evolution of digital technology is predicated on context-specific multiple digital modernities which both shape and are shaped by the local structures – political, economic, social and cultural. HSRC organized a week-long Monsoon School to interrogate key issues at the interface between digital technology, modernity, and Indian society. The Monsoon School explored the multi-faceted interface between digital technology and modernity from the vantage point of the Global South, particularly India. The deliberations helped in delineating the specific contours of digital modernity for India.

Participation: The monsoon school invited scholars and practioners both internal to IIIT and from outside to facilitate the sessions and act as resource persons. There was a total of 22 participants who attended the sessions throughout the 5 days. The participants were from either graduate students or practioners in the field of policy. The students belonged to Indian and international universities, and their research interests were broadly: economics, sociology, cultural studies, and history.

Workshop Schedule

	Session 1 9:30 to 11:00	Session 2 11:30 to 13:00	Session 3 14:00 to 15:30	Session 4 16:00 to 17:30
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Day 1 21 st July	Anirban Dasgupta (Professor, IIIT Hyderabad) “Digital Capitalism within the Political Economy of the Global South”	Jillet Sarah Sam (Associate Professor, IIT Kanpur) “Household Economies and the Digital Turn”	Nimi Rangaswamy (Research Professor, IIIT Hyderabad) “Platforms in Global South”	
Day 2 22 nd July	Jillet Sarah Sam (Associate Professor IIT Kanpur) “Urban Neighbourhoods and Digital Finance”	Paromita Sanyal (Professor, Florida State University) “Empowerment or Entrapment? Rethinking Credit, Gender, and Modernity”	Paromita Sanyal (Professor, Florida State University) “The Algorithmic Gaze: Financial Inclusion, AI, and the Making of the Modern Subject”	Public Event I Panel Topic: Click, Code, Deliver: The Rise of Platform Economies in India
Day 3 23 rd July	Moinak Biswas (Professor, Jadavpur University), Sushmita Banerji (Assistant Professor. IIIT Hyderabad) “Culture in the Age of Digital Reproduction I”	Moinak Biswas (Professor, Jadavpur University), Sushmita Banerji (Assistant Professor. IIIT Hyderabad) “Culture in the Age of Digital Reproduction II”	Moinak Biswas (Professor, Jadavpur University), Sushmita Banerji (Assistant Professor. IIIT Hyderabad) “Culture in the Age of Digital Reproduction III”	
Day 4 24 th July	Ashwin Jayanti (Assistant Professor, IIIT Hyderabad) “Conceptualising Technology and Digitalisation 1”	Ashwin Jayanti (Assistant Professor, IIIT Hyderabad) “Conceptualising Technology and Digitalisation 2”	Rajorshi Ray (Assistant Professor, IIIT Hyderabad) “Conceptualising Technology and Digitalisation 3”	

Day 5 25 th July	Public Event II	Public Event III		
	Keynote Address M Vijaya Bhaskar (Professor MIDS) Title: Employment and Welfare in Digitalising India	Panel Topic: Tales of two Cities and ICTs		

Day 1 Session 1

Digital Capitalism within the Political economy of the Global South /Digitalisation and India's Political Economy

Anirban Dasgupta (IIIT, Hyderabad)

Anirban Dasgupta's session critically examined how digitalisation intersects with India's political economy and trajectories of modernity. He began by questioning the notion of modernity, urging participants to move beyond homogenised, Eurocentric transition narratives often used to benchmark India's development. Dasgupta traced India's postcolonial economic vision, highlighting its teleological orientation, influenced by Nehruvian industrialisation and Western models.

He drew from scholars like Kalyan Sanyal to frame the contradictions of Indian capitalism, where a majority of the population operates within a subsistence-oriented "need economy" rather than the formal accumulation economy. India's structural transformation remains stunted, with a disproportionate number of workers in low-productivity agriculture and informality (85–90% of the economy), while core digital sectors contribute significantly to GDP with minimal employment impact.

Dasgupta contextualised this within the contemporary push for digital transformation. He noted that gig and digitally mediated work account for only a small fraction of employment, and emerging technologies like AI have ambiguous developmental consequences, particularly in a country with widespread informal labour.

Audience questions raised concerns about AI ethics, tech monopolies, and historical precedents like banking computerisation. Dasgupta clarified that "ethical AI" is often an ambiguous promise on behalf of corporations, and while some past tech shifts had minimal net job losses, current job creation rates are dismal, AI may exacerbate precarity.

He concluded with a theoretical provocation, asking whether it is time to resuscitate and rethink modernity—not as a singular trajectory but through multiple, contested modernities shaped by digital encounters in everyday life in India.

Day 1 Session 2

Household Economies and the Digital Turn/Digital Finance in the Global South: Networked households

Jillet Sarah Sam (IIT, Kanpur)

In this session Sam critically examined the household as a dynamic and relational economic unit in the context of digitalisation and informal labour. Moving beyond simplistic or static understandings, speakers highlighted how households are sites of care, negotiation, and interdependence, where digital and non-digital economies intersect in complex ways.

Drawing from fieldwork in cities like Kanpur and Kolkata, Sam explored how kinship roles, caste norms, and gender dynamics shape access to and control over money. For instance, some women remain excluded from digital transactions, with financial decision-making controlled by husbands or male family members. The persistence of informal norms was illustrated by examples like secret cash savings judged as prudent during demonetisation, or digital money being managed through a mix of apps and informal understandings.

The concept of "relational household economies" was introduced to highlight how households are embedded in wider community and digital networks. Individuals often use platforms like Gojek or local accountants to convert digital money to cash and vice versa. Informal creditworthiness, shaped by one's social standing and obligations—such as hosting community events—coexists

with formal mechanisms like CIBIL scores. Households sometimes take digital loans to meet these social obligations, which are essential to maintaining communal legitimacy and future support.

The session also addressed how digital tools can enable or harm, especially for women. While digital wallets may offer autonomy, they can also be used for financial abuse in intimate relationships. Overall, the session underscored the ambivalence of digitalisation and the need to analyse it through socially embedded, everyday practices.

Day 1 Session 3

Platforms in Global South: What is the story in India?

Nimmi Rangaswamy (IIIT Hyderabad)

In this session, Nimmi Rangaswamy explored the nuances of gig work and platformisation in India, arguing for a context-specific understanding rather than adopting Global North critiques wholesale. With 15 million platform-based gig workers and over 100 million engaged in informal or semi-formal labour, the platform economy in India fills gaps left by shrinking public employment and weakened manufacturing.

Drawing on fieldwork with Uber drivers, Rangaswamy discussed how platforms are formalising previously informal work, offering some workers a sense of autonomy. Many gig workers come from diverse backgrounds such as truck driving, construction, or retail. For some, especially those who own their vehicles, platforms like Uber provide a semblance of stability, even as they operate under tight algorithmic control.

She introduced the concept of “algorithmic despotism”, where platforms use incentives, surge pricing, and behavioural nudges to shape worker conduct. Compliance is often rewarded, but any perceived indiscipline can reduce earnings. This raises questions about agency, conformity, and coercion in digital labour.

Rangaswamy also addressed worker strategies and gamification, sharing examples from Zomato where delivery workers manipulated platform features — triggering geofencing responses and stricter verification systems. These tactics highlight the ongoing tension between platform control and worker resistance.

Ultimately, the session called for rethinking analytical tools to match the fast-changing landscape of digital labour. It emphasised the need to account for material conditions, user interfaces, and local socio-economic contexts when studying platform work in the Global South.

Day 2 Session 1

Urban Neighbourhoods and Digital Finance

Jillet Sarah Sam (IIT, Kanpur)

This session, led by Jillet Sarah Sam, examined how urban neighbourhoods shape and are shaped by digital economies, focusing on the flows—both monetary and non-monetary—within and beyond households. The key question was: Do neighbourhoods matter in understanding digital and economic outcomes? Drawing from ethnographic reflections and personal experience in peri-urban areas in the late 1990s and 2000s, Sam discussed how infrastructure like internet cafes and social linkages in a locality influence access and opportunity.

Exploring the “neighbourhood effect,” the session questioned how neighbourhoods contribute to shaping individual futures and wellbeing. Not all outcomes are uniform within a neighbourhood, and boundaries—both physical (like walls) and symbolic (like school choices or class divisions)—determine access to resources and networks. For example, platform workers often rely on neighbourhood-based ties for recruitment, shared assets, or credit. However, cooperation has limits, especially when shared resources like a delivery bike break down.

The neighbourhood also operates as an alternative circuit of creditworthiness, especially for households engaged in informal or platform work. Lending and borrowing patterns are deeply relational: individuals and families are evaluated based on their participation, reliability, and reputation in the neighbourhood.

Finally, the session discussed digital entrepreneurship among women in India and Chile. Despite using platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook, neighbourhood networks remain crucial to their business models. Whether offering coding classes or food delivery, these women—often former IT professionals—rely on local trust, proximity, and social standing more than on the promise of global digital reach.

Day 2 Session 2

Empowerment or Entrapment? Rethinking Credit, Gender, and Modernity

Paromita Sanyal (Florida State University)

In this session, Paromita Sanyal presented insights from a long-term ethnographic study (2019–2022) of low-income families in urban Mumbai, exploring how borrowing practices shape everyday life, gender roles, and aspirations. Working with a small number of families across caste

and religious backgrounds earning ₹10,000–25,000 monthly, Sanyal found that these households engage in complex financial practices—drawing from banks, NBFCs, caste associations, and informal sources.

She categorised families into gainers, break-even, and losers, based on how credit affected their assets. Out of 30 families, only 5 gained assets, while 16 ended up worse off. Despite these risks, many households borrowed not to invest but to sustain daily life—paying school fees, covering medical costs, or maintaining a middle-class appearance for dignity and social standing.

Sanyal challenged the assumption that women's lack of financial engagement is purely due to patriarchal subjection; instead, she suggested there is often an economic rationality behind such arrangements, especially when male employment structures household stability.

The session also addressed Self-Help Groups (SHGs) like Jivika, Velugu, and Kudumbashree. SHGs offered productive loans, reduced debt burdens, and fostered greater female political and social participation, including speaking up at Gram Sabhas and running for office. Yet outcomes were uneven, especially between urban and rural contexts. Urban SHGs, often approached by private banks like HDFC, face different dynamics, including caste-based organization.

Sanyal concluded by reflecting on the ambivalence of empowerment through credit, where women borrowers have come to embody modern aspirations—often with mixed, unequal, and contested results.

Day 2 Session 3

The Algorithmic Gaze: Financial Inclusion, AI, and the Making of the Modern Subject

Paromita Sanyal (Florida State University)

Paromita Sanyal in this session explored the growing integration of AI in financial systems, particularly in microfinance. Unlike traditional human agents, AI systems now drive decisions related to credit screening, risk assessment, and interest rate calculation using large, often non-traditional datasets—like social media behavior, geolocation, and app usage. These shifts mark a move from conventional credit scoring to AI-driven personalization and automation.

While AI offers opportunities for financial inclusion, such as expanding credit access in saturated and emerging markets, it raises several ethical and philosophical concerns. One study comparing human and AI lending decisions found both systems to reflect racial bias—albeit inferred through indirect data like names and locations—raising questions about fairness and accountability. The lack of transparency in AI decision-making processes, often referred to as "blue washing," complicates oversight and trust.

In contexts like Bangladesh, AI has seen more microfinance applications, though questions remain about the necessity and cost-effectiveness of replacing human agents. The drive to collect massive amounts of data—later sifted for predictive utility—has led to practices like coercive data use, location-based behavior tracking, and even exploitative app-based lending tactics.

These developments have reshaped financial landscapes, blurring lines between empowerment and entrapment. While AI may enable access to capital, it can also deepen surveillance and dependency. Audience discussion emphasized structural issues like loan chains, political entanglements, lifestyle inflation, and speculative finance. The session called for critical reflection on how such technologies shape not only financial behavior but broader social and moral life.

Day 2 Panel

Click, Code, Deliver: The Rise of Platform Economies in India

Panelists: Jiljet Sarah Sam (IIT, Kanpur), Nimi Rangaswamy (IIIT, Hyderabad) Tejaswini Madabhushi(Yugantar, Hyderabad). Moderator: Rajorshi Ray (IIIT, Hyderabad)

This panel explored how digital platforms restructure labour, consumption, and social interaction, particularly in the Global South. Participants debated the nature of platforms—as enabling and oppressive, flexible yet hierarchical. While platforms promise accessibility and inclusivity, in practice they often reproduce exclusions along lines of caste, class, gender, and region.

The conversation traced the historical arc from early BPOs to present-day gig work and data annotation, raising concerns around invisibilized labour and the erosion of long-term employment identities. The panel highlighted how financial platforms like UPI were imposed top-down, especially during demonetisation and the pandemic, with little attention to usability across rural, gendered, and classed lines. Learning to use digital tools often happened through vicarious or partial means, with many users knowing only a few functions and distrusting the system.

Panellists critiqued both the absence of state involvement in tech design and the dominance of elite, often foreign, private actors. They questioned ideas like participatory or inclusive design when scale and standardization are the norm. The role of civil society was framed as essential in pressuring both state and corporate actors.

Further, the discussion revealed anxieties around skilling, platform-based employment identities, gendered restrictions on technology use, and the broader political ambitions driving digitization. While platforms have enabled partial financial security or mobility for some, they have also brought instability, surveillance, and precarity. The need for accountability, robust infrastructure, and genuine inclusion—especially from the state—was strongly emphasized.

Day 3 Session 1

Culture in the Age of Digital Reproduction I

Moinak Biswas (Jadavpur University)

This session focused on how to approach Walter Benjamin's work with attention to his historical, political, and personal context. The speaker emphasized that truly understanding Benjamin requires not just reading his texts but also walking alongside his life—marked by exile, precarity, intellectual marginalization, and early death. A Jewish intellectual with no university position in his lifetime, Benjamin wrote during a time when culture was not considered a serious academic subject.

The session explored Benjamin's Marxist thinking style—intuitive, associative, and anticipatory of late 20th-century media theory. His comparison between the painter and the cinematographer, or the magician and the surgeon, reveals a shift from mystical, distant art forms to close, technical interventions. Film, according to Benjamin, penetrates and dissects reality, offering multiple perspectives and undermining the "aura" of original artworks.

Benjamin saw technological reproducibility as politically transformative. The destruction of aura, for him, signaled not loss, but a shift from ritual to politics—toward mass participation rather than elite control. The Soviet reintroduction of the 'star' was seen as a last attempt to preserve aura. Benjamin insisted that we must politicize aesthetics rather than allow fascism to aestheticize politics. He argued that images—like Eugene Atget's street photographs—could strip away myth, showing everyday life as historical terrain. Symbols, stripped of sanctity, become politically charged. Benjamin's insights urge us to rethink how we read, perceive, and respond to art and politics.

Day 3 Session 2

Culture in the Age of Digital Reproduction II

Moinak Biswas (Jadavpur University)

This session examined how cinema has transformed in the digital age, particularly beyond traditional spaces like theatres. Moinak Biswas discussed the idea of "post-cinema," where

classical conditions of film—such as scheduled screenings, physical formats, and dark viewing spaces—have eroded, especially since the 1990s. The disappearance of darkness in cinema halls, as noted by scholar Francesco Casetti, symbolises this transition. However, the question remains: has cinema truly ended?

Biswas argues that despite changes in technology and viewing practices, the core of cinema—its “kinesis” or movement of images—persists. Referencing John Berger and Walter Benjamin, he emphasized cinema’s mass appeal and its ability to engage viewers through distraction. Unlike high art, cinema reorganizes sensory experience and trains viewers in distracted engagement, a process Benjamin foresaw.

The session also explored cinema's historical connection with avant-garde movements like Dadaism and Surrealism, noting that the medium naturally fulfilled their anti-art impulses through technological means. Filmmakers like Georges Méliès, a stage magician and early cinema pioneer, bridged illusion and innovation, delighting surrealists.

With digital technology, cinema has become even more democratized—anyone can make films. Yet while traditional Hollywood continuity editing upheld consistent narrative and spatial logic, post-cinema often embraces discontinuity. Despite stylistic shifts, core narrative elements like character development and plot coherence remain essential.

Biswas concluded that cinema’s identity may evolve, but its essence remains intact, continually responding to new modes of perception and participation in a mass-mediated world.

Day 4 Session 1

Conceptualising Technology and Digitalisation I

Ashwin Jayanti (IIIT, Hyderabad)

Ashwin Jayanti’s session explored the deep entanglements between technology, modernity, and digitalisation. He began by questioning the assumption that technology is unique to modernity, emphasizing that humans have always been technological beings—using tools and creating artifacts. Drawing on thinkers like Leo Marx, he outlined how "technology" originally referred to the logos of technique, encompassing both material practices and the conceptual study of tools.

Jayanti traced historical hierarchies between artists, scholars, and artisans, noting how modernity emerged alongside a transformation in how technology was perceived. He examined the problematic agency we ascribe to artificial intelligence (AI), arguing that AI is a misnomer. Referencing Alan Turing and the Loebner Prize, he pointed out that mimicking human behaviour does not equate to understanding. He emphasized how current critiques of AI often exaggerate its capabilities, feeding into its mythos.

Using Bruno Latour's metaphor of the "Gordian knot," Jayanti illustrated how modernity is not a clean separation of domains (e.g., science, politics, art), but a tangle of entangled processes. Attempts by academic disciplines to disentangle it often make it more complex. Technology, he suggested, is the material expression of this knot.

He critiqued emotivism, where values are based on personal preferences rather than intrinsic good, particularly in digital spaces like social media. He also discussed how the idea of "progress" has shifted to "innovation," creating a semantic void. AI, he argued, collapses mean and ends—raising critical questions about the infrastructures we are building and why.

Day 4 Session 2

Conceptualising Technology and Digitalisation II

Ashwin Jayanti (IIIT, Hyderabad)

This session examined shifting ideas of progress, focusing on how technology has come to fill conceptual and political voids. Drawing on Leo Marx, the discussion emphasized that the emergence of sociotechnical systems changed how we view progress. Rather than science driving technology, it was often the reverse—technological innovations like the steam engine led to the development of scientific knowledge such as thermodynamics. As technology was framed as "applied science," it began occupying a semantic and cultural void, often eluding capture by the arts or humanities.

The discussion highlighted how infrastructural innovations, like the railroad, reshaped not only space but also time—necessitating standardized time zones and even informing theories like relativity. A people's history of science was evoked, where methods of scientific inquiry emerged from artisan practices.

A second thread addressed colonial and caste-based shifts in access to technical education. Knowledge once held by lower caste artisans in India was institutionalized to serve state power and development. Technology became depoliticized, viewed as neutral "things," though it is deeply embedded with political will. The state, through digital technologies, sees individuals in "high" or "low" resolution—based on documentation.

Audience discussions questioned whether the adoption of such technologies is inevitable. The response suggested that the state functions as a technology of capture, rendering alternatives unimaginable.

Further reflections included Ruth's critique of household technologies that illustrated how technologisation, especially in the household, intensifies productivity expectations. Rather than reducing domestic burdens, new technologies raise standards of upkeep. The session concluded with critiques of modernity and moral frameworks, referencing MacIntyre's virtue ethics as a possible alternative to emotivism and moral fragmentation.

Day 4 Session 3

Conceptualising Technology and Digitalisation III

Rajorshi Ray (IIIT Hyderabad)

The third session on Conceptualising Technology and Digitalisation, this one by Professor Ray, explored the irreversible structural shifts driven by technology, labour, and socio-economic systems. Challenging the notion of technological neutrality, it emphasised how audio-visual media and digital platforms are layered media that reshape production and perception. Drawing on Braverman's critique of deskilling, the discussion highlighted how technological rationality divorces conception from execution—undermining the craftsman's role and deepening the technocratic divide between mind and body.

The evolution of industrial revolutions—from mechanised power to wireless connectivity—was framed as a trajectory of mass production and consumption. Yet, the necessity of constant technological updates was questioned, especially in India, where informal structures and “jugaad” innovations resist homogenised progress. Quoting Pinch, he said technology here is not just material but institutional, shaped by socio-economic contexts and surplus dynamics.

In his talk, Professor Ray also examined how caste, gender, religion, and language shape India's informal sector, influencing formal structures and economic organisation. Caste has morphed into an economic system. He drew on Anthony Giddens and Max Weber's work to highlight that social structures were seen as both mediums and outcomes of human agency.

Platform economies were critiqued for their hub-centric accumulation strategies, disciplining labour while promoting flexibility and risk. Technologies, as Feenberg argues, are embodied and embedded—inescapably woven into our social fabric. Ultimately, the idea that “we can't rewind” is not just temporal but structural: the systems we've built are too deeply entrenched to simply undo.

Day 4 Session 4

Reflections from the Participants - Monsoon School: Digitalisation and Contested Modernities

In an informal session, participants grappled with the layered meanings of modernity—philosophical, empirical, and experiential. The workshop became a space to interrogate how “modern” functions not just as a temporal marker but as a contested expression of the times. Discussions revealed that modernity is often perceived in parallel with contemporaneity, yet its implications stretch far beyond chronology.

Some participants explored the crisis of modernity, questioning how continuities are perceived and whether modernity remains, as Habermas suggests, an “unfinished project.” From comparative literature to economics, disciplinary boundaries were challenged. One participant noted how subjectivity is produced within economic discourse, while another emphasised that literary scholars were critiquing modernity long before it became a mainstream concern.

The conversation turned to digitalisation’s role in shaping modern experiences—particularly in reproductive healthcare and privacy in India. Here, the digital was not merely a tool but a force that remakes communities, reconfigures agency, and contests conventional structures. The city-village divide surfaced as a poignant example of how empirical experiences are often sidelined, and how theoretical literacy can help articulate these lived realities.

Film studies emerged as another lens to examine the contemporary digital moment, prompting questions about technological modernism and its social entanglements. Ultimately, the session invited participants to imagine modernity not as a fixed historical phase but as a dynamic, evolving discourse—one that demands new trajectories and voices in the digital age.

Day 5 Session 1

Keynote Address: Employment and Welfare in Digital India

M. Vijayabaskar (Madras Institute of Development Studies)

M. Vijayabaskar’s session offered a critical lens on India’s post-1990 economic trajectory, spotlighting the ICT sector’s meteoric rise and the structural imbalances it has deepened. While India’s global self-belief is anchored in its IT success—with ICT revenues growing from \$81 million in 1985–86 to \$151.4 billion in 2017–18 and accounting for 55% of global outsourcing—the benefits have been unevenly distributed.

Policy choices played a pivotal role: inward-looking FDI regulations led to IBM's exit, but public investments and the establishment of software parks in 1989, alongside English-language advantages, helped catalyse the sector's growth. Yet, this digital boom has not translated into broad-based employment or manufacturing revival. Trade reforms and flexible labour contracts failed to spur labour-intensive industries, instead reinforcing a skill-biased growth model.

Vijayabaskar argued that income gains have occurred without corresponding employment shifts, exacerbating rural-urban divides and wage inequality. The ICT sector, contributing 7.5% of GDP but employing less than 1% of the workforce, exemplifies this disconnect. Educational inequality, elite bias, and social institutions further entrench disparities in labour market outcomes.

Technological change has led to task polarisation—replacing mid-skill jobs with low-wage supervision and high-paid coordination roles. Declining unionisation and globalisation amplify this trend. Existing labour laws, he contends, are intellectually limiting and hinder competition, resulting in immiserizing growth.

Against this backdrop, Vijayabaskar raised the provocative possibility of Universal Basic Income. While it may offer a safety net, he cautioned that without structural reform, it risks becoming a Trojan horse with significant opportunity costs.

Day 5 Session 2

Panel Discussion: Tales of Two Cities and ICTs

Panelists: Anita Gurumurthy (IT for Change, Bangalore), Ashhar Farhan (Daana Farmer Network, Hyderabad), Nazia Akhtar (IIIT Hyderabad). Moderator: Ashwin Jayanti (IIIT Hyderabad)

The panel explored the evolving urban and digital landscape of Hyderabad, as Ashhar Farhan got the ball rolling with his critique of the erasure of the city's symbolic and social fabric amid rapid infrastructural expansion. Projects like Pharma City and Aerospace City were described as postmodern constructs, lacking the organic idea of a city and contributing to its colonisation. He went on to highlight how Hyderabad's service sector increasingly caters to a privileged minority, fostering economic polarisation and alienation through gated communities and fragmented public spaces.

The discussion delved into the dual nature of platform infrastructures, as Anita Gurumurthy spoke of how digital public systems—often framed as soft diplomacy—reshape the relationship between state and citizen. These platforms displace traditional placemaking and claim making, recontextualising social memory and experience. Concerns were raised about the invisibility embedded in digital infrastructures, where access to services is mediated by app-based obligations, and secondary data use often bypasses consent.

Nazia Akhtar shared her perspective by shining a light on the unpublished writings of Hyderabadi women, revealing how domestic economies shaped literary production. The transition from Urdu publishing to digital platforms like Rekhta was seen as both a loss and a preservation tool. Stories scribbled on calendars and receipts reflect middle-class thrift and intimate histories, now at risk of being commodified or lost in the process of digitalisation.

The panel concluded with reflections on digital democracy and the paradox of digitalisation as both translation and transformation. While AI offers new modes of access and preservation, it also threatens folk traditions and intimate urban spaces—underscoring that history, by nature, is an acknowledgement of loss.