

The Study of All Existence: SSLA Conference on Interdisciplinarity and Big History

The Study of All Existence: Interdisciplinarity and Big History will be a two-day conference on March 23–24 (Friday and Saturday) at the Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts in Vimannagar, Pune, Maharashtra (India). This event is a celebration of Liberal Arts with its creative and integral thinking about the world around us. Big History is a form of super-interdisciplinary and seeks to explain existence by connecting the dots across globalized humanity and in symbiosis with nature. The Big History Association of India is based at SSLA, where the first course on big history in South Asia is now being taught. This refreshing, unique and creative academic event will include students, scholars and activists from across Asia and the world in conversation with each other, sharing ideas and ongoing work, as well as exploring future possibilities. Some of the themes that will be discussed include:

- Interdisciplinarity and Super-Interdisciplinarity (Big History)
- Social Change: NGOs, Business, Communities and Global Networks
- Indigenous Understandings, Rights and Contributions
- Society, Media and Global Understandings
- Visions of Existence, Universal Peace, and Human Society
- Global Realities
- Latin America – Past, Present, Future
- The Search for Meaning
- Nature and the World Around Us

As well as

- Workshops on Cosmic Dance and Meditation

For more information, please see the conference schedule, or contact Professor Barry Rodrigue, Conference Convener, Email: <barry.rodrigue@ssla.edu.in>.

Co-sponsors with the Symbiosis school for Liberal Arts are the Big History Association of India, the Asian Big History Association, and the International Big History Association.

Schedule for
The Study of All Existence:
SSLA Conference on Interdisciplinarity and Big History

23 to 24 March 2018
Friday and Saturday

This conference is an inquiry about the nature of our existence, our studies, and our lives. This gathering engages with interdisciplinarity, which is at the heart of the SSLA model of Liberal Arts education. The new field of big history is a form of ‘super-interdisciplinarity’ and has been adopted by SSLA to engage with global learning. This is the first gathering at SSLA to inquire about this integrated view of our role in the world and seeks to interlace ideal concepts with pragmatic applications. It includes international guests, faculty, students, and community organizers.

Day 1: Friday, 23 March

8:30 to 9:30 AM
Welcome

Chancellor S.B. Mujumdar and Director Anita Patankar with
Atsushi Nagaoka, Associate Director, Office of International Programs, J.F. Oberlin University (Japan)
Lowell Gustafson, President, International Big History Association, and Villanova University (USA)

Introductory remarks: Barry H. Rodrigue, SSLA

9:30 to 11:00 AM
Interdisciplinarity & Super-Interdisciplinarity (Big History) Roundtable

Both models of research and learning encourage a holistic understanding of our existence as life forms and a unified civilization on Earth and in the cosmos. From this understanding, we ask: ‘What now?’

Moderator: Shweta Deshpande, SSLA.

- Lucy Laffitte, North Carolina State University (USA).
- John Clammer, ‘Integral Thought in the Context of Planetary Crisis’, Jindal University (Delhi).
- Hirofumi Katayama, J.F. Oberlin University (Japan).

11:00 to 11:30 AM

Tea break / Jividha exhibition / Salon Presentations
SSLA Theatre Club presentation

11:30 AM to 1:00 PM

Social Change: NGOs, Business, Communities and Global Networks

An important part of changing the way we think is how to put it into practice. This panel considers ways that they and others begin change at the grassroots level.

Moderator: Siddhartha, Fireflies Intercultural Centre (Dinnepalya, Karnataka)

- Harsh Agarwal, 'Tilonia - Inclusive Growth & Sustainable Development', SSLA (Bhilwara, Rajasthan)
- Shishir Nikam, Black Swan Journeys (Pune, Maharashtra).
- Juhi Pandey, KHAMIR: Kachchh Heritage Art Music Information & Resources (Bhuj, Gujarat).

1:00 to 2:00 PM

Lunch / Conversations
SSLA Dance Club presentation

Welcome by the Symbiosis Ishanya Educational & Cultural Centre.

2:00 to 4:30 PM

Indigenous Understandings, Rights and Contributions – Roundtable

The indigenous communities of the world represent a way of life and that has often been forgotten in the rush to modernity. Even more, their vision of humanity and the world have a capacity to help many of the problems we face today. The panellists consider some of these issues and discuss questions of self-organization and identity, including formation of an All-India Tribal/Indigenous Peoples Federation.

Moderator: Yangkahao Vashum, Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, Assam (Tangkhul).

- Anjali Daimari, Boro Women Justice Forum, Udalguri-Guwahati, Assam (Boro / Bodo).
- R.K. Debbarma, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati, Assam (Debbarma).
- Dharamsing Teron, Centre for Karbi Studies, Diphu, Assam (Karbi).
- Rosemary Dzuvichu, Nagaland University / Naga Mothers Association, Kohima, Nagaland (Angami).
- Carl Rangad, North East Slow Food / Agro-Biodiversity Society, Shillong, Meghalaya (Khasi).

4:30 to 5:00 PM

Tea break / Jividha exhibition / Salon Presentations

5:00 to 6:00 PM

Society, Media, Performing Arts and Global Understandings

Media has been the signature accomplishment of humanity. Cultural expression is a way for us to re-envision who we are and provide a medium to share that vision – to create a new reality, a new sense of our existence. Creativity has become increasingly global along with its messages. It is expressed through cinema, anime, literature, songs, poetry and many other forms. This panel considers some of the forms and ideas that have resulted and speculates about future directions.

Moderators: Shyma Dutta, SSLA, and

- Nobuo Tsujimura, 'The Fundamental Roles of Music', Oberlin Big History Project (Japan)
- Swati Gopalkrishna, 'The Expanding Realms of Carnatic Music', SSLA
- Tonmoy Halder, 'Dance Therapy and Evolutionary Psychology' SSLA
- Sulakshana Sen, 'Uday Shankar Style of Creative Dance: A mirror of Modern India', SSLA

6:00 to 7:30 PM

Film screening: Eric Law Anderson, *The Looking Planet*, Giant Dolphin Pictures & others, 2014.

Dinner during the cinema

Cosmic Dance and Meditation

This is a contemplative exercise, with audience participation, on the theme of our place on Earth and in the Universe. It will get our hearts and thoughts flowing with movement and experience.

Introduction by Sulakshana Sen, SSLA

Prashant Olaleker, St. Xavier's College (Mumbai)

Day 2: Saturday, 24 March

8:30 AM: Coffee / Jividha exhibition / Student Salon

SSLA Poetry Club presentation

9:00 to 10:30 AM

Visions of Existence, Universal Peace, and Human Society

In the spirit of the Jividha exhibition, the panellists consider how humans have seen our existence in the past and do so today. We are now confronted with a larger human footprint on Earth and the capacity for larger destruction. Many seek to avert such calamity, as with the Peace Centre partnership between J.F. Oberlin University (Tokyo) and Symbiosis International University (Pune). We ask the question, like Paul Gauguin in his painting from Tahiti: Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?

Moderator: Anita Patankar, SSLA

- Siddhartha, Fireflies Intercultural Centre (Dinnepalya, Karnataka)
- Afshan Majid, Sulh-i-Kul: 'Emperor Akbar's Idea of Universal Peace', SSLA
- Sandip Ravindra, 'Mindfulness and Psychology', SNDT Women's University (Pune)
- Hirofumi Katayama, 'From Yasuzo Shimizu to the Oberlin Big History Project: Peace and Symbiosis', J.F. Oberlin University (Japan)

10:30 to 11:00 AM

Tea break / Jividha Exhibition / Salon Presentations

11:00 to 12:00 AM

Nature and the World Around Us

What is real, what is possible? How has this been done in the past? We explore the nature of reality and seek ways to transcend it.

Moderator: Rashida Atthar (Mumbai)

- Lucy Laffitte, North Carolina State University (USA)
- Isha Mathur, 'Marwadi communities, Women and Change', SSLA.
- Priya Sundarrajan, 'Saving a Fragile Legacy, St. Xavier's College (Mumbai).

12:00 to 1:00 pm

Lunch and Conversations
SSLA Poetry Club presentation

1:00 to 2:00 PM

Agriculture and the Future of the World

Moderator: Priyadarshini Karve, SSLA

- Robert Athickal, Tarumitra: Friends of Trees (Patna, Bihar).
- Anand Karve, Appropriate Rural Technology Institute (Pune)
- Carl Rangad, Agro-Biodiversity Society (Shillong, Meghalaya).

2:00 to 3:00 PM

Latin America – Past, Present, Future

Moderators: Afshan Majid, SSLA, and Lowell Gustafson, Villanova University (USA)

- Sanjana Thandaveswaran and Simran Singh, 'Indigenous America and Latin Identity', SSLA

3:00 to 3:30 PM

Tea break / Jividha Exhibition / Salon Presentations

3:30 to 5:00 PM

The Search for Meaning

Humanity has sought meaning since they began telling stories around campfires and painting symbols on cave walls over a million years ago. What meanings do we consider today?

Moderator: Gayatri Mendanha, SSLA

- John Clammer, 'Creating New Stories: Narratives of Hope and Future', Jindal University (Delhi)
- Matthew Chandrankunnel, 'Context, Meaning & Happiness', Ecumenical Christian Centre (Bengaluru)
- Enid Still, 'Deconstructing the Anthropocene: Search for Meaning or Imagined Goal?' Pune University.

5:00 PM to 6:00 PM

Cosmic Walk

Introduction by Gayatri Mendanha, SSLA

Orla Hazra, St. Xavier's College

6:00 PM to 7:00 PM
Valedictory discussion
Social hour

Salon presentations by

- Prachi Agrawal, 'Wellsprings of Personhood: Hindi and English Harmonies', SSLA.
- Madison Krieger, 'Meditation, Consciousness and Social Transformation', SSLA.
- Joshua Lyngdoh, 'Sherman Alexie and Indigenous Literature', SSLA.
- Luz Hernandez, 'Cultural Identity and Acceptance,' SSLA.

Note: Prashant Olaleker will offer *Cosmic Dance and Meditation* in the mornings from March 23 through March 25 at 6:00 AM in the rotunda.