

CONFERENCE REPORT



# LEADING TOGETHER

## Decolonising Academia

Melbourne Global Centre, New Delhi, India  
16-17 December 2024



# Introduction



**The Leading Together: Decolonising Academia** conference was hosted by the University of Melbourne at the Melbourne Global Centre in New Delhi, India from 16-17 December 2024. It served as an important platform for interrogating colonial legacies in higher education and fostering discussions on inclusive knowledge production. First launched in 2021, the Leading Together initiative brings together students and scholars from the University of Melbourne's Faculty of Arts, Tetso College (Nagaland), Stella Maris College (Chennai), Savitribai Phule Pune University (Pune), and Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Guwahati Campus).

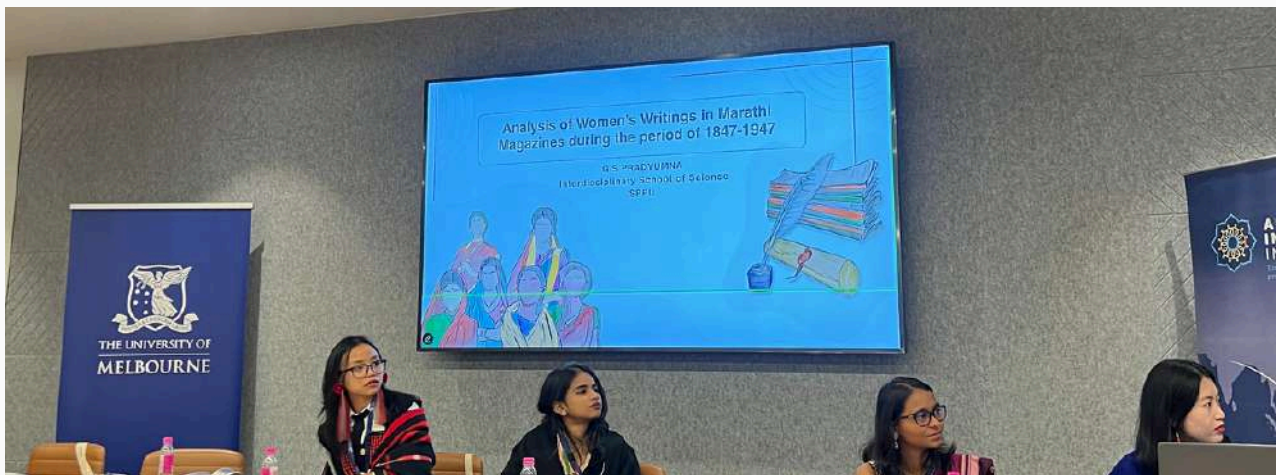
Building on the discussions from previous conferences, which covered gender and inclusion (2022) and indigenous knowledge and sustainability (2023), the 2024 theme continued the decolonisation efforts by analysing, challenging, and addressing dominant structures in academia. The focus was to deconstruct colonial legacies but with a more direct emphasis on how they shape research methodologies, curricula, and institutional policies.

# Student Presentations



The students delivered presentations using different methods. They reaffirmed art, literature, and performance as legitimate tools to challenge issues such as institutional resistance to decolonisation, tokenistic inclusion of indigenous knowledge, and linguistic imperialism.

## Session 1: Decolonisation, Language, and Knowledge



The first session set the stage for examining linguistic hierarchies within academia. Therali Rebecca S Ezung (Tetso College) explored how decolonising linguistic practices in Naga academia has the power to empower cultural resurgence and identity restoration. Anushya K (Stella Maris College) analysed linguistic imperialism in Indian academia and put forward strategies for integrating traditional knowledge systems. G.S. Pradyumna (Savitribai Phule Pune University) investigated women's writings in Marathi magazines (1847-1947) to illustrate the resilience of indigenous knowledge transmission.

## Session 2: Challenging Western Epistemic Paradigms



The second session focused on disrupting Western-centric methodologies in academic research. Nungsangrenla (Tetso College) highlighted the importance of integrating Naga oral traditions into academic discourse. Faiza (Stella Maris College) argued for a balanced approach that recognises both European contributions and indigenous knowledge. Alin Phukan (TISS) addressed the urgency of challenging Eurocentric validation systems in knowledge production. Lakshmi S. (Stella Maris College) promoted the integration of Indian epistemologies like contextual learning alongside Western pedagogies to bridge knowledge gaps.

## Session 3: Exploring Decolonisation Through Art and Culture



The conference facilitated the artistic and performative expressions to advocate for decolonisation. Students showcased paintings, theatre pieces, and poetry reflecting resistance against academic exclusion and colonial erasure.

Shixing Wang (University of Melbourne) presented *Unheard Voices, Unseen Histories*, a theatre performance that amplified marginalised academic perspectives. Tanvi Saikia (TISS) showcased *Abandoned Libraries: Knowledge by Liberation*, a painting showing the intellectual reclamation of post-colonial societies.



Dnyanada Kulkarni (Savitribai Phule Pune University) presented how women in Maharashtra used literature and folk theatre to share their stories and resist colonial narratives. Maha Shweta Nandini (TISS) delivered *Change*, a narrative poem addressing the persistence of colonial hierarchies in education.

## Session 4: Global Approaches to Decolonisation



The fourth session broadened the discussion by analysing how decolonial efforts in education extend beyond national borders. Mahesh Sonone (Savitribai Phule Pune University) explored the role of grassroots organisations in democratising education for marginalised communities in India. Trishita Sarkar (TISS) covered the connection between decolonising academia and the citizen science movement in advancing sustainability. Mohamad Desgia (University of Melbourne) analysed Western-centric public policy models and championed the integration of indigenous governance frameworks.

## Session 5: Challenging Narratives Through Decolonisation



Limeka Yeputho (Tetso College) suggested the implementation of cultural heritage in academic settings would help preserve and protect Naga traditions. Christin Robin Jose (TISS), through his documentary film, explored the complex relationship between language, education, and identity among indigenous communities in Northeast India. Imlipong Jamir (Tetso College) encouraged Naga scholars to share their culture authentically and use it as a valuable resource for today's emerging challenges.

## Session 6: The Personal is Political



Vedika Das (TISS) investigated the gender and sexuality discourse in India from the perspective of Northeast India, a region often overlooked in mainstream narratives. Sanjana (Stella Maris College) examined the traces of colonialism that persist in the curricula of Indian colleges, using a systematic review of college syllabi. Avani Pande (Savitribai Phule Pune University) delved into how India's colonial past influences the academic study of Indian cinema, exploring ways to study Indian cinema that resist the colonial gaze and empower indigenous voices.

## Session 7: Online Participation



In addition to the 18 students from the five partner institutions who participated in the conference in-person, a further 21 students participated online. Online students developed their presentations in groups comprised of students from across the five institutions. Through thought-provoking presentations, creative contributions, and interactive Q&A sessions, participants explored strategies to challenge colonial legacies within academic spaces. The virtual format facilitated a cross-cultural exchange of ideas, emphasising the global significance of decolonising education and fostering inclusive academic environments.

In the first presentation, titled 'Decolonial Education Practices in the Local Context', Ashika Parveen (Stella Maris College), Alexa Dietrich (University of Melbourne), and Magadhi DM (Savitribai Phule Pune University) examined how colonial legacies continue to influence educational systems in India and Australia. They highlighted initiatives such as the National Educational Policy 2020 and the Connecting with Country Framework as critical efforts to reintroduce indigenous philosophies and multidisciplinary learning traditions into mainstream curricula.

This was followed by a poster presentation by Yaamina Buhari (Stella Maris College), Ansh Kirtikar (Savitribai Phule Pune University), and Lavinia Kailis (University of Melbourne). Their poster represented the intersections between cultural heritage, identity, and educational structures, illustrating how visual media can serve as powerful tools to challenge dominant academic paradigms.

Varssha Rose (Stella Maris College) curated a collection of artistic contributions from Mingzhe Xu (University of Melbourne), Aanesha Sharma (TISS Guwahati), Pritika Sinha (University of Melbourne), Jane Chingngaihlian Seldou (TISS Guwahati), and Sesou Thele (Tetso College). The showcased works such as evocative poems and visual art captured themes of colonial resistance, identity reclamation, and cultural resilience. The post-presentation discussion delved into how creative expressions can transcend traditional academic discourse to inspire social consciousness and activism.

Muhammad Arham (University of Melbourne), Nayan Arora (Stella Maris College), Aaranya S (Stella Maris College), Kathryne Honey (University of Melbourne), and Ruoyi Wang (University of Melbourne) presented on 'Love as Practice: The Politics of Radical Generosity in Decolonising Frameworks'. Each student used an artwork to illustrate a different dimension of love (care and empathy, respect, absence of harm, and combating hate) and its relationship to the conference theme of decolonising academia.

Keerthana Anand (Stella Maris College), Aaliyah Naaz (Stella Maris College), Joseph Lama (Tetso College), and Dashiya R (Stella Maris College) concluded the online presentations with a compelling exploration of strategies to create more inclusive academic environments. They challenged the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge systems, advocating for the integration of indigenous perspectives and the empowerment of marginalised voices. Practical recommendations included curriculum reforms, institutional policy changes, and the promotion of underrepresented scholars in academia.

# Conclusion



Not a one-time effort, the conference symbolised the ongoing struggle to amplify the voices and stories of those who have been unheard and invisible. The in-person sessions illustrated the depth of challenges through multiple lenses, reaffirming the idea that decolonisation is not merely a theoretical pursuit but a practical necessity for equitable knowledge production. The online sessions called for a shift toward education systems that recognise and honour diverse histories, empower marginalised voices, and cultivate solidarity through care and critical engagement. Through these efforts, we all can move towards a more inclusive and representative future.