

# Introduction

‘Electronic literature’ or ‘digital literature’ has unfolded itself along with the evolution of digital computers, transforming, overlapping and diverging with the ‘print’. Beginning with *Love Letters* (Strachey, 1952) and *Stochastic Texts* (Lutz, 1959) electronic literature further evolved into visual and graphic poetry (1960s), Interactive fiction (1970s) and generative poetry (1980s). These literary activities became more delineated and recognised by the founding of Electronic Literature Organisation (ELO) in 1999. ELO through its Electronic Literature Collection, Directory and conferences attempts to ‘foster and promote the reading, writing, teaching, and understanding of literature as it develops and persists in a changing digital environment’. However, for various reasons, there are certain gaps in ELO, predominantly in terms of representation, with no contributions from South Asian countries and only three from Asia in the three published volumes of Electronic Literature Anthology. This has further ensued to definitions that isn’t sufficing the electronic storytelling across regional languages.

Though Indian Electronic literature spans digital versions of print texts, born digital texts (self-existing or launched before the print version), texts that utilise the multiple capabilities of the web, literary games and social media writings, it is regarded as just “digital versions of the text”. The initial perception about digital literature in India was that of academic inadequacy and a reluctance to be accepted as a serious form of writing. Howbeit, disparate creative conversations and production of digital literature was circulating within small, interested communities without a wider reach, in other words, there was no

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digital platform where one can publish the non-traditional, non-linear, non-static literary works created for the mode of digital publishing, embedded with graphic interfaces, kinetic images and texts, videos, and collaborative narrative. This lack of seminal go to texts for scholars as well as general readers is a huge impediment for Indian Electronic Literature. In a post-colonial context, we don't subscribe to a hegemonic canon, however an anthology of works will hopefully set the tone for a Saidian 'nomadic, decentred and contrapuntal' canon. Indian Electronic Literature Anthology Volume I was initiated as an attempt to consolidate and chronicle the digital literary activities from India in English as well as in regional languages. We are trying through this maiden venture to provide an open access platform through KSHIP to publish and present to the world a collection of electronic works in four languages from India.

The works were selected after an open call and a review, based on diversity, representation, pedagogical relevance and literary significance. The process of compiling the anthology took sincere efforts of two years and multiple outreaches. The primary hurdle was the dearth of awareness about the ambit of a literary publication amongst even the everyday social media and online content creators. Being an attempt that is unfamiliar to Indian academia, financial constraints also thurwated spending money for the outreach.

The works in this volume of the anthology, combines the contemporary trends based on social media networks and widely adopted platforms and apps. The volume features 17 works and each has a unique form, style and genre including flash poetry, slam poetry, frame narratives, generative poetry, interactive narrative and other forms of multimedia writings in English, Tamil and Bengali. The works range from 'I Can't Breathe' by Stephen S George, a frame narrative of inner monologues by a character, whose identity is allusive; Subhanjali Saraswati's ambience based slam poetry touching upon existentialism, entangled in the silence of everyday; 'Gods and Mathematicians', an endless generative, interactive poem developed in Max/MSP as an experiment in surrealism and language development by Antriksh Bali and Shivayan Mukherjee's digitisation of his Grandfather's works as a tribute to the late author, for his work and dedication towards Bengali literature. These works utilise broader forms of communication ranging from written narratives, spoken and sign language, audio and video recordings and user generated content which includes materials that can be viewed online, as well as material that requires internet access.

We hope that this and the following volumes of the anthology will facilitate the wide utilisation of multiple capabilities of the computer and the web in production and publication of literature and its validation in academic and literary environments in India. We expect that our future volumes will be far more diverse and experimental, with the rise of small-scale digital publishing platforms, availability of new interactive content creation software, and establishing of organisations like DIGRA India and Elit India.

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