

SALTA

AY 2025-26 NEWSLETTER



**SOUTH ASIAN LANGUAGE
TEACHERS ASSOCIATION**

A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT



मैं अकेला ही चला था जानिब-ए-मंज़िल मगर
लोग साथ आते गए और कारवाँ बनता गया
— मजरूह सुल्तानपुरी

“I began the journey alone, heading toward my goal,
but along the way, others joined me, and a caravan was formed.”
— Majruh Sultanpuri

This couplet captures exactly how I feel about SALTA.

SALTA was formed in the early 2000s with a simple but important goal: to create a space where South Asian language teachers could share teaching ideas, materials, and research. What began as a small effort has, over time, grown into something much larger.

Today, SALTA is a community. We host conferences and workshops, share teaching resources, run a monthly book club, and build strong friendships and partnerships across institutions around the world. Inclusion has remained central to our work. SALTA’s team works with every language with care and a sense of shared responsibility. Our newsletters and announcements now reach a global audience and we invite anyone creating teaching materials or resources to share their work with us. By including these materials on our resources page, we help ensure that everyone can find reliable tools, stay informed, and remain connected to the larger community.

A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT (CONT.)

This year, SALTA also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Agra. This agreement reflects a shared commitment to strengthening the teaching, learning, and research of South Asian languages. Through this partnership, SALTA and the university will collaborate on academic programs, joint research projects, conferences, workshops, and faculty exchanges, and professional training. Most importantly, it helps build meaningful connections between educators in India and the United States and strengthens SALTA's global mission.

Last year, we launched our inaugural Monthly Book Club, an idea suggested by Ritu Jayaker from Pennsylvania State University, a long time and active SALTA member. The Book Club has become a meaningful space for connection. Participants come from many backgrounds, including language teachers and others who are simply curious about South Asian languages and contemporary literature.

This year, due to funding constraints faced by many universities, our annual conference will be held online. The conference theme is Student centered pedagogy for South Asian languages, focusing on building lessons around students' interests, backgrounds, and motivations. The conference will take place on Friday and Saturday, May 8 and 9, 2026, as a two-day international online event. I am looking forward to an engaging conference with the SALTA community.

As the couplet reminds us, what began as a single journey has become a caravan. My hope is that SALTA will continue to grow as a supportive home for South Asian language educators around the world. I am deeply grateful to everyone who has walked alongside SALTA and helped build this community together.

SALTA PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Dr. Divya Chaudhry, Research Director

From June 2025 through April 2026, SALTA hosted a range of professional, literary, and community-centered initiatives shaped by the evolving interests of our members. These offerings created sustained spaces for engagement and supported opportunities for pedagogical reflection and exploration within the field of South Asian language education.



A central thread throughout the year was the SALTA Monthly Book Club led by Dr. Kusum Knapczyk. It brought together educators, students, and readers to engage with contemporary South Asian literature. Across multiple sessions, participants explored works by writers such as Pratyaksha, Jayanti Ranganathan, SJ Sindu, Rita Kaushal, Uday Prakash, and Yogita Yadav. These gatherings encouraged close reading, multilingual discussion, critical reflection, and continued engagement among members.

In addition to its literary programming, SALTA continued to expand opportunities for professional development and pedagogical innovation. A featured workshop, *From Script to Classroom: Using Theatrical Storytelling to Teach Hindi*, led by Mayuri Raman Nayan, invited educators to explore performance-based approaches to language teaching. The session demonstrated how read-aloud practices, voice modulation, and guided interpretation can transform classroom engagement and deepen learners' connection to language and culture.

Looking ahead, SALTA is excited to introduce its annual SALTA teaching award in the coming year. The award will recognize innovative and impactful contributions to South Asian language pedagogy and support excellence within our teaching community.

If you would like to request a future session on a topic of interest or are interested in offering one, we warmly welcome your ideas. Please reach out to the SALTA Research Director, Dr. Divya Chaudhry at divya.chaudhry@Vanderbilt.Edu.

FROM READING TO REFLECTION: SALTA'S MONTHLY BOOK CLUB

रोया हूँ मैं भी किताब पढ़कर के
पर अब याद नहीं कि कौन-सी
शायद वह कोई वृत्तांत था
पात्र जिसके अनेक
बनते थे चारों तरफ़ से मँडराते हुए आते थे
— रघुवीर सहाय

“I too have cried while reading a book,
but now I do not remember which one.
Perhaps it was a narrative
with many characters,
who kept gathering around me from all sides.”
— Raghuvir Sahay.

This poem beautifully captures what reading often does to us. We may forget titles or names, but the emotions remain. Stories stay alive through memory, conversation, and shared reflection—and this spirit lies at the heart of SALTA's Monthly Book Club.

Books have a special way of bringing people together. While many book clubs exist for individual Indian languages, SALTA's Book Club is unique in its openness. It is not limited to one language or one group. Instead, it welcomes all South Asian languages and encourages members to imagine and create book clubs in additional languages. The goal is simple: to read together, think together, and build community through literature. The idea for the Book Club was proposed by Ritu Jayaker (Pennsylvania State University), a long-time and active SALTA member. The SALTA Board immediately recognized the value of this idea, and the Monthly Book Club was launched. Since then, it has met regularly, drawing a steady and enthusiastic group of participants.

FROM READING TO REFLECTION: SALTA'S MONTHLY BOOK CLUB (CONT.)

One of the most heartening aspects of the Book Club is its openness. Some participants join even when they have not had the chance to read the story in advance. They come for the discussion, the literary atmosphere, and the sense of connection. Over time, we have discussed many powerful stories and, in some sessions, even welcomed the writers themselves—turning hesitation into some of our most meaningful conversations.

Month & Year	Writer	Story	Key Themes & Discussion Focus
Aug 2025	Pratyaksha	<i>Baarish ke Devta</i>	Corruption, caste, human emotions; rain as symbol of social reality
Sep 2025	Pratyaksha	<i>Dilnawaz Tum Bahut Acchi Ho</i>	Intimacy, vulnerability, emotional honesty in relationships
Oct 2025	Jayanti Ranganathan	<i>Kaali Tie Wali Aurat</i>	Family life, loneliness, mobile phones, changing social behavior
Nov 2025	Jayanti Ranganathan	<i>Line ke Baahar</i>	Gender roles, invisibility, emotional sacrifice, unmarried women
Dec 2025	Asghar Wajahat	<i>Cake</i>	Humor, class, social irony
Jan 2026	SJ Sindu	<i>Patriots' Day</i>	Identity, belonging, lived experience; author-facilitated discussion
Feb 2026	Rita Kaushal	<i>Swades ke Pardesi</i>	Migration, memory, discrimination, minority experiences
Mar 2026	Uday Prakash	<i>Ram Sajiwan Ki Prem Katha</i>	Social class, one-sided love, power dynamics in college life
Apr 2026	Yogita Yadav	<i>Galat Pate Ki Chitthiyan</i>	Women's lives, language, gendered treatment at home and society

LEARNING ACROSS BORDERS: PROJECT-BASED HINDI, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, AND THE STORIES OF SAPNEWAALIS

Dr. Shilpa Parnami, Boston University

I am writing this article to share my experiences and reflections from a project-based learning experience that I recently included in my fourth-semester Hindi class with the aim of facilitating language development through meaningful community engagement and interpersonal interaction.

The project was inspired by the work of Sajhe Sapne (साझे सपने), a social enterprise dedicated to launching the careers of young women from rural India. Moving beyond traditional “livelihood” models such as sewing or handicrafts, the organization trains participants, also known as “Sapnewaalis” (सपनेवाली), in modern professional fields like web development and project management through its Sapna Centers. At the heart of Sajhe Sapne’s mission is a commitment to building agency through what they describe as the “Power of Learning, Earning, and Community.”

The final project asked students to work in pairs to produce an in-depth case study of a Sapnewali graduate. The central objective was to document how the organization’s year-long training program shaped the participant’s sense of agency, particularly in relation to career aspirations, financial decision-making, and choices surrounding marriage. This framing encouraged students to engage with complex social themes while maintaining a clear, human-centered focus.

A key feature of the assignment was direct interaction with Sapnewaalis. Students participated in two structured conversations with their assigned interviewee, conducted during class time. In preparation, pairs developed and refined a set of 15 interview questions in Hindi, receiving instructor and peer feedback before the

LEARNING ACROSS BORDERS: PROJECT-BASED HINDI, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, AND THE STORIES OF SAPNEWAALIS (CONT.)

first conversation. One student in each pair was responsible for detailed note-taking, ensuring accuracy and accountability in representing their interviewee's story.

The writing component was divided into two complementary parts. First, pairs collaboratively produced a 1–1.5 page case study in English, written in an accessible, narrative style. These profiles were intended not only as course assignments but also as potential instructional materials for Sajhe Sapne's future cohorts, adding a layer of real-world purpose and audience awareness. Students shared draft versions with their interviewees during a second conversation, incorporating feedback to ensure respectful and accurate representation.



STUDENTS INTERACTING WITH SAJHE SAPNE'S FOUNDER,
SURABHI YADAV

LEARNING ACROSS BORDERS: PROJECT-BASED HINDI, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, AND THE STORIES OF SAPNEWAALIS (CONT.)

Finally, each student wrote an individual reflection paper in Hindi (1.5–2 handwritten pages). This component asked students to reflect on their experience conducting the interviews, their emotional and intellectual responses, and their evolving language abilities. By requiring narrative across different time frames and attention to linguistic detail, the reflection paper served as a capstone assessment of students' written Hindi proficiency.

Student responses to the project highlighted both its challenges and rewards. Many found the interviews initially daunting but ultimately empowering, noting increased confidence in their ability to communicate across linguistic and cultural boundaries. The opportunity to tell a real person's story also fostered a sense of responsibility and care in their writing.

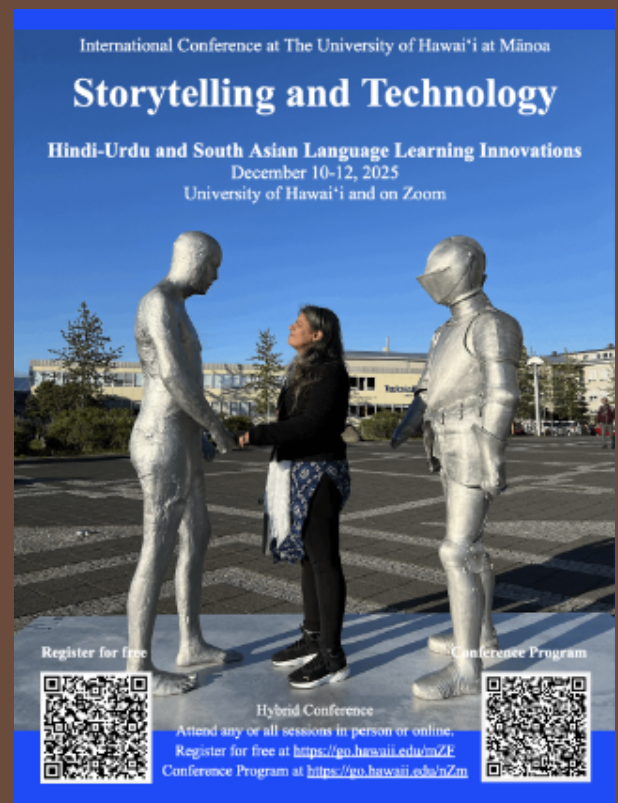
At the same time, the project raises important pedagogical and ethical questions that merit ongoing reflection. How does one create such opportunities for meaningful learning while also recognizing that one side may benefit more from these interactions than the other? Do such exchanges risk reinforcing existing hierarchies of cultural capital and privilege, or can they be structured in ways that actively work through these inequalities? These questions do not have easy answers, but they point to the need for intentional design, reciprocity, and critical reflection. Building in opportunities for participants' feedback, ensuring that community partners derive tangible value from the collaboration, and foregrounding ethical engagement in classroom discussions are some ways educators might move toward more equitable and genuinely mutual forms of learning.

STORYTELLING AND TECHNOLOGY: HINDI-URDU AND SOUTH ASIAN LANGUAGE LEARNING INNOVATIONS

Dr. Sai Bhatawadekar, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

In December 2025, I organized an international, interdisciplinary, and hybrid conference titled “**Storytelling and Technology: Hindi-Urdu and South Asian language learning innovations**” at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. The theme of the conference was and is timely as we all explore the relationship between various methodologies of language learning and the fast emerging technologies. From age-old oral traditions to minute-long instagram reels, stories and storytelling remain central to how we connect with one another, make sense of the world, and understand ourselves. A language, far beyond its “utility” in the “real world,” creates a world of its own, and learning the language becomes an act of inhabiting that world, of rediscovering ourselves in it. Storytelling, thus, is not just a pedagogical tool but a genuine and meaningful way to learn a language, in which creativity and the poetics of self-expression motivate the learning process.

Today, as technology evolves at a rapid pace, we find ourselves not waiting for it to meet our needs, but rather racing to keep up. Language learning is no exception in this context. With this in mind, the conference invited excellent educators, scholars, students, artists, and others who presented their interdisciplinary work on storytelling and technology as language teaching mode, method, and manner.



International Conference at The University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa
Storytelling and Technology
Hindi-Urdu and South Asian Language Learning Innovations
December 10-12, 2025
University of Hawai‘i and on Zoom

Register for free Conference Program

Hybrid Conference
Attend any or all sessions in person or online.
Register for free at <https://go.hawaii.edu/mZE>
Conference Program at <https://go.hawaii.edu/nZm>

STORYTELLING AND TECHNOLOGY (CONT.)

Presenters included professors, instructors, and students from UHM, UBC, McGill, SOAS, Michigan State, Duke, Yale, UPenn, Columbia, NCSU, Ohio State, Osaka University, Tokyo University, University of Fiji, Habib University in Pakistan, Mumbai University, and more. They discussed a range of topics, including stories and storytelling as a methodology for language teaching, preserving indigenous and elders' voices, Project and Performance-Based Language Learning, Digital Storytelling, uses of social media, philosophical and practical perspectives on AI, creative and cautious uses of AI, turning classroom practices into publishable research, using methodologies of other languages (German, Japanese, etc.) to create materials for South Asian languages, Open Access Resources, Virtual Reality, etc. The conference was a great and successful opportunity that brought varied and international scholars together to foster exchange and collaboration of their ideas and practices and to plan future events and research to promote South Asian languages. One of these research plans is already in the works: Prof. Sai Bhatawadekar (UHM) and Prof. Sunil Bhatt (UBC) are in the process of co-editing a book of peer-reviewed papers that came out of the conference.



अंतरराष्ट्रीय मंच पर हिंदी की सांस्कृतिक अस्मिता

Dr. Priyanka Sonkar, Banaras Hindu University

दिनांक 27, 28 फरवरी 2026 को अमेरिका के कैलिफ़ोर्निया राज्य स्थित University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), USA में National Heritage Languages Resource Center की ओर से आयोजित दो-दिवसीय अंतरराष्ट्रीय Heritage Language Conference में मैंने सहभागिता की तथा अपने शोधपत्र को सफलतापूर्वक प्रस्तुत किया। यह दो-दिवसीय सम्मेलन विश्व के विभिन्न देशों से आए भाषाविदों, साहित्यकारों, शोधार्थियों, शिक्षाविदों, सांस्कृतिक अध्येताओं तथा भाषा-अध्यापन से जुड़े विशेषज्ञों का एक महत्वपूर्ण वैश्विक मंच सिद्ध हुआ, जहाँ विश्व की विभिन्न विरासत भाषाओं की वर्तमान स्थिति, चुनौतियाँ, संरक्षण-रणनीतियाँ, सामुदायिक हस्तक्षेप, शैक्षणिक पहल, भाषा-नीतियाँ तथा सांस्कृतिक अस्मिता के प्रश्नों पर सार्थक विमर्श हुआ।

इस अंतरराष्ट्रीय सम्मेलन में मैंने “Cultural Identity and Preservation of Hindi as a Heritage Language in the United States” विषय पर अपना शोधपत्र प्रस्तुत किया। इस प्रस्तुति के दौरान उपस्थित विद्वानों, शोधार्थियों तथा भाषा-विशेषज्ञों के साथ सार्थक शैक्षणिक संवाद भी स्थापित हुआ।

प्रस्तुत शोधपत्र का मुख्य उद्देश्य संयुक्त राज्य अमेरिका में हिंदी भाषा के Heritage Language (विरासत भाषा) के रूप में उसकी सांस्कृतिक भूमिका, भारतीय प्रवासी समुदाय में उसकी स्थिति तथा नई पीढ़ियों के बीच हिंदी के संरक्षण और संवर्धन की प्रक्रियाओं का विश्लेषण करना था। यह प्रस्तुति इस दृष्टि से भी महत्वपूर्ण रही कि इसने हिंदी को केवल एक राष्ट्रीय भाषा-समुदाय की भाषा के रूप में नहीं, बल्कि वैश्विक भारतीय समुदाय की सांस्कृतिक धरोहर के रूप में देखने का आग्रह किया। हिंदी का संरक्षण इस रूप में भारतीयता की स्मृति, सांस्कृतिक परंपराओं, भावात्मक रिश्तों और बहुभाषिक भविष्य के निर्माण से जुड़ा हुआ प्रश्न है।

समकालीन वैश्विक परिप्रेक्ष्य में, जब प्रवासन, बहुसांस्कृतिकता और भाषिक विविधता के प्रश्न अत्यंत महत्वपूर्ण हो उठे हैं, ऐसे में यह सम्मेलन विशेष रूप से उपयोगी और प्रासंगिक रहा। इस मंच ने मुझे यह समझने का अवसर प्रदान किया कि किस प्रकार विभिन्न भाषिक समुदाय अपनी विरासत भाषाओं को अगली पीढ़ियों तक पहुंचाने के लिए पारिवारिक, सामुदायिक, शैक्षणिक तथा सांस्कृतिक स्तरों पर सतत प्रयासरत हैं।

NEW SCHOLARLY RESOURCES FROM SALTA COMMUNITY

This year, several SALTA colleagues have contributed new scholarly resources that we are excited to share with you. These include two OER websites, a video conversation, a book focused on idioms and sayings, and an article on service learning. We hope you find these materials both inspiring and useful.

Hindi with Mansi Bajaj: A website developed by Mansi Bajaj, a Hindi instructor at Yale University, offers a student-centered resource for teaching Hindi as a heritage language, featuring adaptable lesson plans focused on socially relevant themes like mental health, gender, and identity. Drawing on her teaching experience at the University of Texas, Austin and Yale, the project addresses gaps in resources for heritage learners by adopting a “students as partners” approach, where learners actively shape the curriculum. Designed in English for broader adaptability across South Asian languages, the site serves as an evolving open educational resource that promotes inclusive learning, meaningful engagement, and a strong sense of belonging.

Learning Hindi Online Through Current Social Issues, a new educational website developed under the CERCLL initiative funded by the U.S. Department of Education and now freely available at Elementary, Intermediate, and Advanced levels. Reflecting the collaborative spirit and shared pedagogical values of the SALTA community, the project team includes Jieun Ryu (University of Arizona), Poonam Chauhan (University of California, Davis), and Srijeet Mukherjee (Fulbright FLTA, Hindi, University of Montana, 2017–2018). Designed to support both learners and instructors, the site offers accessible resources with themes connected to current social issues, along with comprehensive worksheets to foster meaningful and engaged Hindi language learning.

NEW SCHOLARLY RESOURCES (CONT.)

Chai with Shirvi: This episode features Tej K. Bhatia (Syracuse University) and award-winning translator Daisy Rockwell. They explore art, translation, storytelling, language preservation, and the future of linguistics—offering valuable insights for educators, students, and anyone interested in how ideas travel across languages and cultures.

Kusum Knapczyk’s peer-reviewed article, *Virtual Service Learning in Less Commonly Taught Languages*, published in *The Journal of the National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages (JNCOLCTL)*, explores how virtual service-learning can promote global citizenship and social responsibility. Drawing on her experience teaching Hindi, Knapczyk highlights how digital tools help overcome barriers like limited funding, time, and access to community partners, allowing students to apply language skills in real-world contexts. The article offers practical examples and guidance for educators, showing how such projects—ranging from creating literature to digital initiatives—enhance language proficiency, cultural understanding, and career readiness while encouraging students to see themselves as active global citizens.

Kusum Knapczyk has also published her second book titled ***Speak Hindi with Style: Hindi Idioms & Saying to Spice Up Everyday Conversation***. The book is designed for intermediate and advanced learners of Hindi and focuses on helping students understand and effectively use idioms and proverbs in everyday communication.

Please find links to all the resources mentioned above on the SALTA website: <https://mysalta.org/south-asian-language-resource-sites/>. We also invite you to share your own teaching and learning materials related to South Asian languages—selected contributions may be featured in our next newsletter, helping to support and grow our shared community of educators and learners.

OPENING DOORS TO THE WORLD'S LANGUAGES: MSU'S LEADERSHIP IN OER FOR LESS COMMONLY TAUGHT LANGUAGES

Dr. Rajiv Ranjan

Michigan State University (MSU) continues to strengthen its leadership in global language education through a growing collection of Open Educational Resources (OER) textbooks designed for learners of Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs). Supported by the International Research Studies and International & Foreign Language Education Program and Title VI of the U.S. Department of Education, along with the OER Program at MSU Libraries, this initiative reflects a collaborative effort to expand equitable access to high-quality language learning materials across the world.

The project is led by Dr. Rajiv Ranjan from the department of Linguistics, Languages and Cultures (LiLaC), College of Arts and letters (CAL), Michigan State University Libraries Open Educational Resources Program and the Asian Studies Center at Michigan State University, in collaboration with Dr. Siddharth Chandra, Dr. Linda Miles, and Dr. Samphoas Im. Together, the team has built an ambitious network of scholars from universities across the United States and internationally to produce accessible digital textbooks for learners at different proficiency levels.



OPENING DOORS TO THE WORLD'S LANGUAGES (CONT.)

The initiative currently includes textbooks covering a wide range of South and Southeast Asian languages. Published titles include Basic Hindi, Basic Urdu, Basic Persian, and Basic Tamil for South Asian language learners. These books were developed in collaboration with scholars from MSU and partner institutions, creating comprehensive learning materials that integrate grammar explanations, vocabulary development, cultural contexts, and communicative exercises. Additional textbooks are under publication or in development, including Basic Telugu, Basic Punjabi, Basic Bangla, Intermediate Persian, Basic Tibetan, Intermediate Tibetan, Basic Nepali, and Advanced Hindi. These projects bring together collaborators from institutions such as the University of Pennsylvania, Duke University, Vanderbilt University, the University of Wisconsin, Columbia University, and the American Institute of Indian Studies in India. This growing network reflects the collaborative spirit of OER development, where expertise is shared across institutions to create freely accessible educational content.

As the project continues to grow, new textbooks and updated editions will further expand the range of languages and proficiency levels available to learners worldwide. Through collaborative scholarship, technological innovation, and a commitment to open access, Michigan State University's OER language initiative is helping shape the future of global language education, making high-quality resources available to anyone, anywhere.



NEW SOUTH ASIAN LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

Yale University introduced its inaugural Telugu language program in Fall 2025, housed within the South Asian Studies Council at the MacMillan Center. Joining Hindi and Sanskrit in the Council's language offerings, Telugu places Yale among only a handful of U.S. institutions providing dedicated instruction in this classical language – spoken by over 83 million people worldwide, by more than a million in the United States, and currently the fastest-growing South Asian language in the country. Led by Dr. Shiva Sai Ram Urella, the program offers Elementary and Intermediate courses, introducing students to the linguistic and cultural worlds of Telugu. Its teaching approach emphasizes dialect diversity, student engagement, and real-world media, while supporting both heritage and non-heritage learners. The program also addresses the limited availability of Telugu learning resources and supports research in South Indian studies.



SOUTH ASIAN LANGUAGE TEACHER ASSOCIATION



AY 2025–2026 NEWSLETTER



Prepared by:

Dr. Mansi Bajaj
Communication Director, SALTA