DEPT OF HISTORY- VISIT TO THE MUSEUM OF WORDS

On 28th July 2026, the Semester VII students of the Department of History visited the newly inaugurated Museum of Word (also officially known as Shabdalok). Located inside the historic Belvedere House at the National Library campus in Alipore, Kolkata, it stands as India's very first language museum. The museum celebrates nearly 380 Indian languages, including all 121 languages officially recognized in the 2011 Census of India. The visit commenced with the 'From Nothingness to Sound' Zone. Students entered an isolated, dark chamber designed to block out the exterior world. The multi-directional speaker and localized projection mapping illustrated how raw vibration and biological breath evolved into human phonetics.

Following this, the First Word Gallery offered insights through two specific sub-zones. The 'Creation of Myths' section consisted of interactive display panels highlighting cosmological and tribal lore regarding the divine origins of speech across ancient cultures. The 'Language Acquisition' section, on the other hand, provided motion-activated biological diagrams and infant audio trackers demonstrating how the human brain instinctively categorizes speech from infancy.

The next section, 'Mother Tongue and I', allowed students to explore their personal linguistic identities. Using digital scanners, the visitors experienced narratives in their native dialects. The zone uniquely integrated touch panels and aromatic dispensers to pair specific cultural words with regional scents and textures. The students then proceeded to the 'Navarasa' room, which is anchored around the *Natyashastra*. This zone breaks down the nine foundational human emotions through two multi-sensory installations - 'Mridang Manjari' and 'Ragini Ashavari'.

A major highlight for the students was the 'Timeline of Languages section. It traces the evolutionary journey of twenty-two official Eighth Schedule languages and nearly three hundred and eighty local dialects. The chronological progression moves seamlessly from ancient rock edicts and copper inscriptions to paper manuscripts, concluding with modern AI text engines. Students engaged with interactive games, selecting a single root word to watch its pronunciation, grammar, and script style transform across centuries. Additionally, the 'Honouring the Legends' zone utilized smart glass and holographic projections to bring legendary linguists like Panini, grammarians, poets, and freedom fighters to life. This section also featured 'Script Restoration Displays', highlighting the preservation efforts that saved dying scripts from colonial and historical erasure.

The final segment of the museum focused on oral and performing traditions. Specialized sound-domes focused localized music directly onto the listeners, isolating the distinct acoustics of the Manipuri Pung drum and the Sarangi. Glowing floor projections of regional domestic art (*Alpona/Rangoli*) shifted patterns as students stepped on them. The display focused on performance as an unwritten script, featuring physical mask artifacts from *Purulia's Chhau* dance,

illuminated *Phad* scrolls from Rajasthan, and shadow-puppetry arrays. The students also visited the ‘Library Movement Room, documenting the evolution of the National Library.

The practical experience encouraged students to establish a deeper connection with the origin of sound, their respective mother tongues, and their broader cultural heritage. The sensory and interactive nature of the museum made the evolution of dialects highly relatable. Seeing the literal transition of scripts across centuries through interactive media made the study of historical linguistics far more interesting, tangible, and encouraging. By exposing students to script restoration, endangered dialects, and digital archiving, the visit successfully stimulated academic curiosity. It pushed the students' interest toward pursuing deeper, specialized research in linguistics, oral history preservation, and archival studies in the near future.




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