Literary Cultures in History

Reconstructions from South Asia

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Introduction

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It hardly seems proper to introduce a work about the literatures of South Asia, long known as home of many of the world's best stories, without telling one:

> Once when the great and all-knowing god Śiva was alone with his wife, she asked to hear a story never told before, and he told her the most wonderful one he knew—one in seven hundred thousand verses called, appropriately, the *Bṛhatkathā* (Great story). The next day when her handmaiden began to tell her the same story, the goddess knew that the girl's lover—who was one of Śiva's attendants—had been eavesdropping. The goddess placed a curse upon him to live among mortals until he succeeded in disseminating the tale. (The goddess knew a good story when she heard one, and, after all, she was compassionate.) Reborn as a poet-grammarian, the attendant eventually found himself in a double exile: Not only had he been banished from heaven, but he was also barred from the court where he had taught poetry and grammar. For, having lost a wager that he could teach his king Sanskrit in a timely fashion, he was forced to leave the kingdom and dwell in the forest, and to avoid human language. To pass on the *Bṛhatkathā* he was compelled to use the language of mysterious beings called *piśāca*s, and the only materials he had for writing it down were palm leaves and his own blood. The learned king of the region, his former patron, alone had the stature to make the book known in the world; but he was appalled by its language and appearance and rejected it out of hand. Desolate and alone in the forest, the poet resolved to burn the book. But before he cast each leaf into the fire, he recited it to the assembled animals, who listened enraptured. The king learned of the marvel and hurried to save the work. Only a fragment was left.

What must have made the *Great Story* great, besides the magic of the narratives themselves, is suggested by this metatale. Stories—and literature more generally—are essential to our lives; if humanity would learn to consider itself candidly and purely in the mirror of its works of literary art (as Flaubert once put it), it would become godlike. Analogously, the literary world of South Asia is essential to our understanding of human culture. It is a complex world, to be sure. Its languages are difficult, often made intentionally so, and its forms can sometimes appear fantastic. But like the king in the story, if we ignore it, we risk losing something precious and irreplaceable.

This is the conviction that animates this book: that the literatures of South Asia constitute one of the great achievements of human creativity. In their antiquity, continuity, and multicultural complexity combined, they are unmatched in world literary history and unrivaled in the resources they offer for understanding the development of expressive language and imagination over time and in relation to larger orders of culture, society, and polity. This volume's main objective is to explore these resources in their historical variety and complexity, and thereby to suggest ways of bringing these literatures back to the center of scholarly attention. For too long they have occupied a marginal place that is radically at odds with their centrality to the lives of people across southern and wider Asia. This marginalization is found even in the area-based study of South Asia itself, to say nothing of such disciplines as comparative literature and historical cultural studies, where the non-West in general and South Asia in particular have long been less than welcome guests.[1] In contemporary South Asia the neglect is even more astonishing.

There are complex reasons for this state of affairs, and briefly reviewing them will help to situate the present project in relation to the many practical, historical, and theoretical challenges it has had to face. I can then proceed more assuredly to explain the particular approaches and methods used by the contributors to this volume, and, indeed, the various meanings we give to "literary culture," "history," "reconstruction," and even "South Asia."

ACTUALLY EXISTING LITERARY HISTORY

A good place to begin is with the history of literary studies, and especially the history of literary history, in South Asia itself, especially since the understanding of literatures in their places of origin is crucially important, both as a problem and as a problematic, to the contributors to this book. Although no comprehensive account of this history for South Asia has ever been offered—and we have been able to do this ourselves only incidentally in the present volume—it is indisputable that criticism, no less than creativity, in two dozen regional and transregional written languages was cultivated by traditional literati continuously up to the coming of European colonialism. They copied manuscripts; prepared new editions of important texts; wrote commentaries and works on grammar, lexicography, and metrics; and taught both cosmopolitan and vernacular literary texts at schools throughout the subcontinent. Such literary study did not of course always proceed uninterruptedly; by the middle of the second millennium much of Tamil *caṅkam* literature, for example, had fallen into oblivion, and Old Kannada literature was hardly read. But the survival of incomparably vast quantities of texts is testimony to the enduring devotion to and care for literary learning that people in South Asia have displayed for centuries.

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[1] Lentricchia and McLaughlin 1995, for example, perhaps the most widely consulted work of its kind, is as narrow in its area focus as it is capacious in its theoretical approach. The non-West is excluded as if by sworn covenant among contributors.

Under the influence of English education from the mid-nineteenth century on, this care and devotion continued and in many ways even intensified. With different historical and text-critical methods added to the traditional repertory, vernacular intellectuals well into the twentieth century produced works of enormous learning, evincing mastery of the entire history of their traditions. Over the past fifty years, however, the ranks of this category of scholar have gradually diminished—so much so that the study of South Asian literary archives in their historical depth has lost two generations of scholars. There is now good reason to wonder whether the next generation will even be able to read *piṅgaḷ* texts in Old Gujarati or *rīti kāvya* in Brajbhasha or *ghazal*s in Indo-Persian. After a century and a half of Anglicization and a certain kind of modernization, it is hardly surprising that the long histories of South Asian literatures no longer find a central place in contemporary scholarly knowledge in the subcontinent itself, however much a nostalgia for the old literary cultures and their traditions may continue to influence popular culture. This is one fact that makes production of an account such as the present one at once so difficult and so compelling.

The study of South Asian literature in the West, especially in North America, has followed a rather different path. It was mainly shaped by forces indifferent if not hostile to the study of literature in general and regional literature in particular. And when South Asian literary studies were pursued, they were typically forced into conceptual models developed for very dissimilar traditions. The reasons for all this are complex. Many readers will know something of the wonderment with which eighteenth-century Europe discovered Sanskrit poetry; Goethe's concept of *Weltliteratur* and, arguably, even the consolidation of aesthetics as a science, are hard to imagine without this discovery. Both, after all, depended crucially on an encounter with what was outside of, yet seemingly encompassed by, a European theory of culture as convinced of its universal truth and applicability as European power was then convinced of its universal right to rule. Part of this fascination also had to do with Romantic Europe's preoccupation with origins and lines of descent, and in the mirror of this preoccupation, India came to be regarded as the cradle of Europe's own civilization. At the same time, as the economic and social dislocations of early modernity produced ever sharper self-estrangement in Europe, India came to be constituted as the repository of Europe's vanishing spirituality. Two important consequences for literary scholarship followed from these developments. On the one hand, the ideology of antiquity—according to which the more archaic a text, the purer it was thought to be, and the more recent, the more derivative and even mongrel—ruled out study of the greater part of South Asian literature, in particular vernacular literature. On the other hand, religion, especially religion as understood in Protestant Christianity, became and has remained virtually the single lens through which to view all texts and practices in the subcontinent, further distorting what little attention had been directed toward literary culture.[2]

In North America in the twentieth century other kinds of intellectual forces were at work. South Asian languages were newly authorized for study at universities after World War II, but this was largely to do the work of the emergent security state and development regime. The study of Indian regional languages was intended in the first instance to meet the needs of the social sciences; in the humanities these languages held interest only for linguistics. South Asia became the "sociolinguistic giant," and attracted new attention during linguistics' meteoric rise to the status of queen of human knowledge. But this waned as the meteor itself disintegrated.[3] Even to speak of authorization is thus something of an exaggeration. Consider that of the fourteen (non-English) language traditions examined in this book, whose histories span some two millennia and embody the expressive energies of something close to one-fifth of humanity, less than half are formally studied at more than one or two universities in the United States. Some are not taught anywhere, or, as in the case of Persian, are taught in such a way that the South Asian dimension is effectively marginalized, all evidence of its historical centrality notwithstanding.[4]

I have somewhat exaggerated in my account so as to highlight the qualitative asymmetry that exists between the scholarly attention paid to South Asian literary studies and the actual historical, cultural, and theoretical importance of South Asian literature. It is not of course the case that modern scholarship has greeted this literature with total indifference. Major contributions have been made by South Asians and Europeans alike; indeed, without them a project such as this one would be impossible.

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[2] All these tendencies are illustrated by the first and still largest European collaboration on South Asian texts, the *Sacred Books of the East* (1879). Its purpose, in the words of the general editor, F. Max Müller, was to allow us to watch "the dawn of the religious consciousness of man," while at the same to provide the missionary with the knowledge that is "as indispensable as a knowledge of the enemy's country is to a general" (Müller 1879: xi and xl). Both the nonreligious, by definition, and the vernacular, by the ideology of antiquity, were rigorously excluded from the project.

[3] On the place of South Asia in sociolinguistics, see for example Fasold 1984: 20.

[4] In the United States, Kannada, Sindhi, and Gujarati seem not to be offered as permanent components of any university program. Sinhala, Malayalam, and Telugu are each taught at a single institution; Bangla and Tamil at only two or three. Persian is usually housed in Middle East departments, where typically an old Irani bias is perpetuated that denies Indo-Persian literature its rightful place in history (see Alam, chapter 2, this volume).

From their first encounter with South Asian texts in the early nineteenth century, European scholars devoted enormous energy to making historical and critical sense of them. This was especially the case in Germany, even among influential thinkers of the epoch such as Friedrich Schlegel and G. W. F. Hegel. From the start and for long afterward, the texts of interest were exclusively Sanskrit. The fascination with Sanskrit was in harmony, on the one hand, with the then emerging search for European origins I have just noted, and on the other, with the scientific objectives of the new historical-comparative linguistics. At the same time, Sanskrit was posited as the classical code of early India, congruent with new, linked conceptions of classicism and class (Sanskrit was usually, and often still is, studied within the field of classical philology). With very few exceptions, European histories of Indian literature remained histories of Sanskrit and its congeners: Pali, the language of southern Buddhism, and Prakrit, an umbrella term for a variety of Middle Indo-Aryan literary dialects used in early Jain religious texts but also in inscriptions and literary works. The real plurality of literatures in South Asia and their dynamic and long-term interaction were scarcely recognized, except perhaps incidentally by Protestant missionaries and British civil servants who were prompted by practical objectives of conversion and control.[5]

By the last third of the nineteenth century, this situation began to change fundamentally. The reduction of South Asian literatures to Sanskrit literature gave way to a much more nuanced understanding. This happened only slowly in Europe. The major literary history of the first half of the twentieth century, Moriz Winternitz's *Geschichte der indischen Literatur* (1908–1922), still restricted itself to the Sanskrit (and Pali and Prakrit) past and retained a vision of Indian literature resolutely in the singular. A stark contrast was offered in the work of the remarkable George Grierson, a British administrator in India whose eleven-volume *Linguistic Survey of India* (1903–1922) was to have so profound an impact, for good and ill, on the understanding and politics of language in north India. Grierson was perhaps the first European to write in self-conscious defense of the study of regional literatures from a truly informed position. Even earlier, however, Indian intellectuals within the colonial sphere, standing at the crossroads of historiographical mentalities, had begun to rethink their regional literary pasts (typically and significantly even before they began to rethink their political pasts). Narmad's Gujarati-language work *Kavicaritra* (Lives of the poets), written in a mode that preserved something of the old *taẕkirah,* was published in 1865, and a history of Bangla literature on the European model appeared seven years later.[6] Accounts like these—of regional literatures seen increasingly as subordinate to a supposed "Indian literature"—grew in number as the nationalist movement with its integrating impulses gained momentum.

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[5] Schlegel 1808; Hegel 1970 (original lectures delivered c. 1820). The link between the literary "classics" and elite "class" status was restated by Sainte-Beuve (on the basis of a remark by Aulus Gellius) in his celebrated essay "Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?" (1850). One of the few among European academics to devote himself to vernacular texts was Garcin de Tassy, the first French historian of Hindustani literature (see Tassy 1839–1847). Missionaries and civil servants who were early vernacular partisans include Ferdinand Kittel (of the Basel Mission) for Kannada, and the colonial administrator Charles Percy Brown for Telugu.

With Independence and Partition for India and Pakistan in 1947, the task of writing literary history as the story of the ever-emergent and now realized nation was begun almost immediately. One of the primary objectives of the Sahitya Akademi of India (National Academy of Letters, founded in 1954) as set forth by Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister and first chairman of the Akademi, was to describe the individual regional literary traditions in a way that would show the citizens of the new nation "the essential unity of India's thought and literary background." Accordingly, the Akademi adopted as its motto "Indian literature is one though written in many languages." Literary histories of eighteen of the twenty-two languages recognized by the Akademi have been published to date.

This project also indirectly influenced the large-scale *History of Indian Literature* begun by the late Dutch Sanskritist Jan Gonda, which has been under preparation in Europe for the past quarter of a century. In turn, the work begun under Gonda seems to have stimulated the project organized by the Akademi itself, *A History of Indian Literature.* Cognate enterprises, each with its specific ideological vector, are found in other nation-states of South Asia, such as Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. And if the genre of subnational literary history has yet to be widely cultivated in these countries, the institutional conditions for it are certainly in place.[7]

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[6] For the Gujarati text, see Dave [1865] 1996–. The *taẕkirah* model is discussed by Alam, Faruqi, and especially Pritchett (chapters 2, 14, and 15) in this volume. The Bangla work is Rāmgati Nyāyaratna's *Bāṅgāla bhāṣā o Bāṅgāla sāhitya viṣayak prastāv* (Introduction to Bangla language and literature, [1872] 1991). This was preceded by two short essays: Kasiprasad Ghosh's "Bengali Works and Writers" (1830) and Raṇgalāl Bandopādhyāya's "Bāṅgālā Kavitā viṣayak" (1852). There is a certain precocity to this indigenous production. Recall that the national historiography of European literatures is not much earlier. In the case of English, this begins in the late eighteenth century, with the work of Warton, and makes a real impact only with Taine's *History of English Literature,* which appeared (in French) in 1863–1864 (English translation 1871).

[7] See Gonda 1973– (10 volumes in 28 fascicles published to date); Das 1991– (2 volumes published to date). Other South Asian literary bodies have far less prominence than the Sahitya

This body of scholarship, in addition to providing enormously valuable data for understanding the history of literatures in South Asia, has bequeathed us problems at virtually every level of conceptualization. This is the case even when—and especially when—the works seem least concerned with enunciating the principles that inform them. These difficulties, which leap from the very titles of the books themselves, are by no means simple; indeed, their intractability is shown by the way they infiltrate the language of this introduction. What, after all, do we mean by "literature," the primary analytical category in all this scholarship? What is South Asia or India or Bengal? What authorizes the boundaries of these regions (if they can be said to have boundaries other than what twentieth-century nation-states and the U.S. State Department devised), and what sanctions these as sensible ways of delimiting an account of literature? The same questions apply to the languages themselves: What do we mean by Hindi or Urdu, Malayalam or Gujarati, when used as a category for charting the historical process of which it is in fact the outcome? What constitutes the substance of the history that supplies the framework of description and understanding in all these histories of literature? What, in other words, can it possibly mean to think of literature as a historical phenomenon?

If these questions seem like so much theoretical mischief-making, consider how the most recent additions to the field of South Asian literary history have understood the very term that grounds their intellectual enterprise. In the introduction to the Akademi's projected nine-volume *History of Indian Literature,* no attempt is made to explain what is meant by the term "literature." The categorical question itself is addressed only indirectly in one of the project's working papers. There we are told that literature comprises in part "all major texts"; in part "fairy tales and tales of adventures, songs of various types and nursery rhymes"—in short, "all memorable utterances."[8]

Akademi; even obtaining information about them is difficult. It has proved impossible to find when the Pakistan Academy of Letters was established, but it has been in existence at least since 1980 (preceded by the Anjuman Taraqqī-e-Urdū, or Society for the Advancement of Urdu, founded in 1905; a branch shifted to Karachi in 1947). The Bāṃla Academy (Bangladesh) has been in existence since 1975. In Nepal, the Gorkhā Bhāṣā Prakāśinī Samiti (Committee for the Dissemination of the Gurkha Language), founded in 1913, became the Nepāli Bhāṣā Prakāśinī Samiti after Nepali was declared the national language in 1959. The Sri Lanka Sāhitya Maṇḍalaya has been in existence since at least 1962. On the narrative of literary Pakistan, see Rahman 1996; for Nepal, Hutt 1988. Regional literary societies in South Asia began with the Bengal Academy of Literature (later renamed Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣad) in 1894, and are now found throughout the area, in India as well as Pakistan (where there exists a Sindhi Adabi Board, a Pashto Academy, a Balochi Academy, and so on). No synthetic study of this institutional history has been done, whether at the national or regional level.

[8] Das 1991–, vol. 8: 5, 13, (and in app. 1) 342, 353. "All major texts" is a category that begins, as we learn from the contents of the *History,* with the ancient collection of liturgical hymns,

Exactly what the parts of this congeries of oral and written, formal and informal, utterances have in common remains unclear—some rough-and-ready distinction between information and imagination, one would assume. But we are never enlightened and so await the remaining volumes with a mixture of curiosity about the choices to be made and commiseration for those obliged to choose.

In Gonda's *History of Indian Literature,* on the other hand, even the implicit definition of literature inferable for the Sahitya Akademi project is absent. Instead, it appears that everything ever textualized in South Asia is qualified for inventory: philology ("grammatical literature"), ritual ("Hindu tantric and śākta literature"), systematic thought on the moral order ("*dharmaśāstra* and juridical literature"), cosmology ("Sāṃkhya literature") and physical sciences ("astral literature"), in addition to "Tamil literature," "Assamese literature," and again, "Vedic literature." When individual authors in this series turn to the objects of their inquiry, they often expose the logical difficulty of framing a stipulative definition (as when we are told that a Sanskrit text will be considered poetry if it is "executed with artistry, i.e., organized in a poetic manner"). Or they betray an impatience that ends up throwing out with the bathwater of stipulation the baby of South Asian literariness ("It is nevertheless still true to say that for the Indologist Pali literature means everything that is written in Pali, irrespective of literary value in the accepted European sense").[9]

To offer these criticisms is not to berate our colleagues for lack of intellectual rigor but to try to make sense of the reasons behind such imprecision. Some may say the reasons are self-evident, even natural; the ambiguities at work in "literature" are built into the protean semantic development of the European word itself.[10] And South Asian literary scholars are by no means alone in their approach. The recent *Latin Literature: A History,* a product of the most mature classical scholarship, sees little need to justify itself (whether on emic or etic grounds) in considering Pliny's *Natural History* and the work of the jurists and philosophers alongside Horace, Vergil, and the rest of the *poetae.*[11] Moreover, seen as inclusiveness rather than imprecision,

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the *Ṛgveda,* and "Buddhist and Jain literatures preserved in Pali and Ardha Magadhi." On the rigorous exclusion of the Veda from the domain of literature in traditional Sanskrit theory, see Pollock, chapter 1, this volume.

[9] Lienhard 1984: 3, and Norman 1983: ix. See respectively Pollock and Collins (chapters 1 and 11) in this volume.

[10] According to the standard accounts, the English word "literature" was not used in the narrower sense of imaginative and "elegant" writing before Samuel Johnson in 1779. On the history of the idea of "literature" in colonial India, see Dharwadker 1993.

[11] Conte 1994. The procedure is defended on the grounds that nonliterary texts could be accepted by "official literature" because they "seemed susceptible to esthetic evaluation and

the resistance to definition can be regarded as an intellectual virtue, if a necessary one. The quest for the essence of literature that occupied European thinkers for the entire twentieth century—their suggestions running from features wholly internal to the text such as the foregrounding of the utterance itself (thus Czech Formalism) to wholly external factors such as pedagogy (Roland Barthes's observation that "literature" is what gets taught)—we now recognize to have been quixotic.

Acknowledging the impossibility of definition, many scholars have begun to argue the postulate that "anything can be literature." Not the least clever scholar here is Terry Eagleton, whose book on literary theory succeeded in part by theorizing the literary away: literature is not some permanent and essential feature of a text but a way the reader relates to it. Texts come into and go out of literary being (as when Plato is read as drama or Homer as history) depending on what we want to do with them. In this, "literature" is like "weed": one person's pest is another's flower and yet another's dinner.[12] And not the least substantive scholar in arguing the openness of the category is M. M. Bakhtin. "After all," he tells us, "the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction, between literature and nonliterature and so forth are not laid up in heaven. Every specific situation is historical. And the growth of literature is not merely development and change within the fixed boundaries of any given definition; the boundaries themselves are constantly changing."[13]

This very observation by Bakhtin, however, helps us locate a constant in Eagleton's otherwise inconstant pragmatism. What is crucial for historical literary scholarship is not the fact that the literary is a functional rather than an ontological category, comprising something people do with a text rather than something a text truly and everlastingly is, but the fact that people are constantly induced to do whatever that something is, and to do it variously because "every specific situation is historical." However pluralistic we wish to be, however generous and accommodating (or nonchalant and lax) in our embrace of things textual, we ignore a crucial dimension of the history of the literary if we ignore the history of what people have taken the literary to be. The key question thus becomes not whether to define or not to define, but how to make the history of definition a central part of our history of the literary. Definitions of the literary in cultures such as those of South Asia can include everything from the sophisticated and powerfully ar-

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were in some way marked by rhetorical characteristics" (p. 4). Yet, the work itself does little to make manifest the process by which the "boundaries of the Latin literary system" shifted.

[12] Eagleton 1983: 6 ff. (the taxon "weed" is a rather popular one, borrowed by Eagleton from John Ellis, and from Eagleton by Jonathan Culler in his *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* [Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997], p. 22).

[13] Bakhtin 1981: 33.

ticulated theorizations found in Persian, Sanskrit, and Tamil, among other traditions, to the entirely practical but no less historically meaningful judgments of anthologizers, commentators, and performers. And a history of definitions would not only take account of both the semantic and pragmatic aspects, but ask directly how such definitions were formed and, once formed, were challenged; whether they were adequate or inadequate to the existing textual field, and by what measure and whose measure of adequacy; whether, and if so, how, they excluded certain forms even while—and precisely by—including others.

The critique applied to definitions of textual forms can be extended to every other element of literary history. Geocultural and sociopolitical templates, identities of languages, narratives of history—all are used in ways that beg most of the important questions. Categories and conceptions that literature itself helps to produce are typically presupposed to be conditions of its historical development. The frameworks of geocultural and sociopolitical reference, for example, that have organized literary histories in the West from Francesco de Sanctis's *Storia della letteratura italiana* (1870), to cite an influential national literary history from the last century, to the *Columbia Literary History of the United States* (1989), to cite a recent one, are not primeval, not "laid up in heaven." Quite the contrary, they are historical in "every specific situation." This means not only that these frameworks are wholly contingent and variable, but also that they are in part the outcome of the very processes they are charged with retrospectively organizing.

This balancing act—or better, this tumbler who climbs up on his own shoulders—is precisely the equivocation of the nation-state itself. We can perceive this with unusual clarity in India as the Sahitya Akademi, at the moment of its founding, struggled with the dilemma presented by the very concept of Indian literature: "The main idea behind the program," the Akademi declared in its *First Annual Report,* "is to build up gradually a consciousness that Indian Literature is one, though written in many languages. One of the limitations under which our writers work is that a writer in one Indian language has hardly any means of knowing the work that is being done in other Indian languages."[14] In other words, none of those writers actually producing Indian literature knew that there was a singular Indian literature. It is the nation-state alone that knows, if only obscurely; or more accurately, it knows, if only tacitly, that it must produce what it is empowered to embody and defend. In this the nation acts exactly like literary history, and even like literary discourse itself, more broadly conceived. For it is literature that produces some of the most influential representations of peoples and places, though the meanings of these representations are always context-sensitive

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14. Sahitya Akademi, "Current Programme," *First Annual Report,* 1954 (Sahitya Akademi archives, New Delhi), p. 14.

and therefore often at odds with those they are made to convey in national histories. To understand literature in relationship to a place, accordingly, is as much a matter of understanding how literature can create places as it is a matter of understanding how it is created by them. But again, in their inattention to this second vector of causality, South Asian literary histories show themselves to be no different from those produced elsewhere.

Consider one of the more influential contemporary literary histories of Europe. Despite its ironic and at times even whimsical structure, *A New History of French Literature* is teleological to the core and unhistorical except in its brute linearity. It projects back into the distant past both a context-free sense of the literary and a static notion of the French language itself. Thus, in one contribution we are told that "the oral literature of France came into being along with the French language as it developed out of popular Latin," despite the fact that there was no literature, no French, and no France when this is supposed to have occurred. To say this is not to make a simplistic nominalist complaint, since the problems inherent here reach to the conceptual heart of the project.

We may note, for example, how the attempt to justify the national history of literature implicit in the title and the organization of the book requires above all else the naturalization of the nation-state. The editor writes: "Not only, as Rousseau said, does language distinguish humans from animals," "but also, as he added, languages distinguish nations from one another." Even if we take "nations" in a very loose sense (peoples, *ethnie*s), this statement is dubious, if only because a number of languages—let us call them cosmopolitan languages—were for much of their history resolutely trans- or supra- or post-national (Arabic, Chinese, Latin, Persian, Sanskrit, Spanish—and indeed English). Moreover, if languages come to distinguish nations, it is in part because nations are made by turning languages into distinctive national markers. And again, if the production and consumption of literature, according to the *History,* are "framed by the experience of frontiers," these are frontiers that literature itself, through both its representations and its modes of circulation, helps to establish as conceptual realities. This suggests that literary history itself should include in its narrative the story of how literature and its historiography for their part narrow or broaden cultural borders. What escapes a national-territorial literary history of France of the kind under consideration is one of its more splendid ironies: that its earliest forms were invented in England.[15] And all this is to say nothing of subnational processes—the codes (of Limousin, Gascony, Brittany) that get left out of the national narrative of French—and transnational processes (interactions with Latin, Arabic, Italian, and so on) that we must understand if we are to understand the historical development of French literature.

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[15] See Howlett 1996; Hollier 1989: 20, xxi–xxv. Hollier is not alone in his vision; not one of the dozen or more reviews of Hollier's work that I have seen is at all worried about the teleology implicit in tracing, as one reviewer puts it, "1143 years of French history."

Clearly, many of the problems contemporary students have inherited from the literary historiography of South Asia are problems it has inherited from Europe. Its object of analysis has been either arbitrarily, and even incoherently, stipulated or left so open as to render analysis an impracticable if not unintelligible enterprise. Boundaries of languages, cultures, societies, and polities that were created after the fact and in some cases very recently—boundaries that literary and linguistic processes in large part helped to create—have been taken as the condition of emergence and understanding of these processes themselves. As for the history in which literature is embedded in South Asian literary histories, one of several modes of European temporality has typically been adopted: the purely serial, almost annalistic mode, whereby texts follow each other over the centuries (as if sequence were somehow meaningful in itself, or were somehow safely situated beyond meaning); or, more problematically, the story of the birth of the nation or region or community, with its teleological embarrassment whereby the nation or region or community that marks a contingent end point becomes the necessary end point, and, in this way, often the starting point. It is this last dimension, where literary history manifests itself as national history, that has made it so difficult to perceive any of the generative literary processes that transcend or escape the national.[16]

FROM LITERARY HISTORY TO LITERARY CULTURE IN HISTORY

If literary history as such has become increasingly vitiated as a form of knowledge, literary scholars of South Asia have found additional problems confronting them. New forms of critique have been generated in other fields of South Asian studies that over the past twenty years have profoundly reshaped thinking in at least three important domains: our moral no less than intellectual orientation in general to the object of inquiry; our awareness of the epistemological no less than political violence of colonialism; and, more broadly, our appreciation of the limitations of an area-based structuring of research.

The Orientalism debate has alerted us to the political constraints—in the widest sense of "political"—that have operated in the production of knowledge about Asia. While sometimes excessive in its claims, and perhaps, in the last analysis, only a subset of a more general problem of knowledge and interests, the critique of Orientalism has at its best made Western scholars more sensitive to the fundamental importance and difficulty of learning to listen, at once sympathetically and critically, to non-Western voices when attempting to understand non-Western cultures. The Subaltern school of historiography has sought to redirect the study of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Indian society and politics toward the popular, the vernacular, the oral, and the local, and to recapture the role of small people in effecting big historical change. Contemporary analyses of colonialism have shown how new Indian pasts with real-life social consequences, such as the traditionalization of the social order by the systematic miscognition of indigenous discourses on caste, were created by colonial knowledge. They have demonstrated at the same time how discourses such as nationalism that were borrowed from Europe entered into complex interaction with local modes of thought and action that, through a process not unlike import substitution, appropriated, rejected, transformed, or replaced them. The reexamination of the theory, practice, and history of area studies, driven in large part by the analysis of globalization, has made us more acutely aware of the artificiality of the geographical boundaries of inquiry, especially as currently institutionalized in universities in the United States. And attention has in fact begun to turn instead to how movement—whether of people, ideas, or texts—tends to ignore such boundaries altogether.[17]

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[16] For Das, a principal contributor to *A History of Indian Literature,* the concept of India is a permanent part of the "psyche of Indian people" and needs no further warrant to become the conceptual cadre of the book. See Das 1991–, vol. 8: 4–5.

In view of all of these important developments, it has become increasingly clear to students of South Asian literature that a different approach to their materials is necessary. Crucially, this approach would seek to avoid reproducing the problems of earlier literary historiography. But it would also mean taking seriously the insights of colleagues in related fields of scholarship. Their insistence, for example, on the need to provincialize European theory encourages the search for ways to generate the procedures, questions, and theory appropriate to South Asian literary materials from those materials themselves.[18]

This search would include listening to the questions the texts themselves raise—as the late D. R. Nagaraj often encouraged members of the Literary Cultures in History project to do—rather than, like inquisitors, placing the texts in the dock and demanding that they answer the questions we bring to them; in other words, focusing on their critical processes rather than on our critical positions. It would mean suspending the otherwise reasonable goals of standard literary historiography—the situating of literary discourse in relation to other kinds of discourse at given historical moments; the elucidation of stylistic change; the contextual interpretation of literary works in service of an "appreciation of literature"—for these presume an already-given map of the literary-cultural world.[19] It would also require suspending literary criticism as normally practiced in South Asian scholarship, as well as the naive subjectivism to which it so often falls victim. And it would mean refusing to segregate literature from the rest of the culture, society, and polity where it comes into being and finds its audience. This segregation is itself culturally specific. It is defended nowadays largely in belief in the Heideggerian-Hölderlinian revelation of a mysterious, even transcendent, essence of the literary that insists on its own uniqueness, forever escaping explanation.[20] But little in South Asian historical experience suggests that literature was ever thought to be quarantined from the world to begin with (even when the literature in question, such as Sanskrit, appears at times to have striven to cultivate such an image), or that it was thought to open into the endless proliferation of private meanings that its inexplicability entails.

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[17] Compare Guha et al. 1985–, Inden 1990, Breckenridge and van der Veer 1993, Bhabha 1994, Appadurai 1996, Cohn 1996, Guha 1997.

[18] See Chakrabarty 2000.

Most important of all, this search would mean learning to think in a historical-anthropological spirit: trying to understand what the texts of South Asian literature meant to the people who wrote, heard, saw, or read them, and how these meanings may have changed over time. We cannot orient ourselves to a text without first grasping how its readers oriented themselves—unless we want to read it in a way that no South Asian reader ever did and abandon the attempt to know what literary culture meant in history. Of course, no audience, however primary, is omnipotent in its capacity to understand its own culture; texts can be thought to bear meanings—ideological meanings, for example—that by definition are unavailable to primary readers. Yet we cannot possibly know and make sense of what early readers could not see until we know what they did see. For this reason, too, the prior recuperation of historical reading practices is a theoretical necessity of scholarship.

When I and the other contributors to this book began to contemplate the zone of freedom we entered when we escaped literary history for the history of literary culture, committing ourselves to taking South Asian people and their ideas seriously, and allowing for (potentially radical) South Asian difference, it was both liberating and unsettling. It was liberating because we now had the opportunity to pose a new set of questions to our materials; unsettling because the inquiry was, effectively, uncontainable and threatened to escape any organizing structure. Our first assessment of objectives showed both features well. Instead of starting from received notions of area-based or national or regional cultures, we knew we wanted to explore how boundaries have been continuously recreated. Instead of deciding in advance what

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19. Perkins 1992: 78; see also Patterson 1995.

20. See for example Bourdieu 1996: xvi ff., 286 ff.; and more programmatically Gramsci 1991: 205. South Asian traditions that emphasized the transcendent characteristics of the literary, such as the new theological aesthetics of eleventh-century Kashmir, far from suggesting that literature is resistant to analysis, essentially reduce it to a set of philosophical propositions.

literature is (or deciding not to decide), we wanted to ask what literature has been decided to be, and how local decisions may have changed over time. Instead of segregating the oral from the literate, or mechanically assuming that the transition to print was exported from Europe with the same consequences everywhere, we wanted to explore what relationships have existed between literature and the often simultaneous orders of oral, manuscript, and print cultures. We wanted to understand how South Asians themselves conceived of the pasts of their literatures, according to modes of temporality that may have been peculiar to them; how they established their canons, and what norms, aesthetics, and readerly expectations these embody, instead of assuming that canons were colonial inventions. We wanted to write not literary criticism but a history of what has been taken as the criticism of literature in our various literary cultures; to provide not our own interpretations, judgments, or evaluations, but an account of how and by what criteria the traditions have interpreted, judged, or evaluated. We no longer wished to segregate the various literary cultures and treat them as discrete and autonomous units that had no actual historical relationship to each other, but instead we hoped to rediscover the arteries that connected them and helped bring each to life. The same would hold true of the languages themselves, which, we aimed to show, never exist as pure, self-identical, thinglike isolates, but are instead processes, in fact, mutually constitutive processes, especially as they participate in the greater dialectic between the cosmopolitan and the vernacular. This binary, for its part, would be thematized not only as a competition for literary and social prestige but also as a larger movement by which communities of readers/listeners produced and reproduced communities of citizen-subjects.[21] We wanted to demonstrate as well that the aesthetic, social, and political forces at work in the cultures of South Asian literatures have had long though never homogenous histories. Region and nation, literature and literacy, canonicity and criticism, language and identity we aimed to consider not as problematics of modernity alone, but as showing complicated, long-term continuities and discontinuities, innovations and iterations, requiring historical differentiation.

This initial program comprised a very ambitious set of goals indeed. While they serve to illustrate clearly the theoretical interests that set the project in motion, these goals also reveal how open is the concept of literary culture itself—productively open where new heuristic practices are desired, disruptively open where conceptual or expository unity across traditions is sought. As the project developed, we found that many of our original concerns were in fact commonly shared by the literary cultures we were examining. At the same time, each of these cultures (or, perhaps, their expert readers) seemed to lay particular stress on one or another question, or generated new questions altogether. Clearly a more pragmatic methodology for understanding literary cultures in history was called for. Because this pragmatism informs the book as a whole, I want to discuss it first, before turning to address the issues more widely confronted in our studies: forms of history, language in literary culture, and communities of literature.

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[21] I consider the relativities in play in the terms "cosmopolitan" and "vernacular" in Pollock 1998.

THE CONTINGENCY OF METHOD

How our black box of literary culture was to be filled proved to be contingent—and quite reasonably so—on the individual histories of the traditions in question. All literary cultures exist in time and space, and they acknowledge this by their specific internal processes of spatialization and temporalization. They all use language and thereby create literary language; they all appropriate and adapt existing conceptions of the literary and invent new ones. Though they have these fundamental traits in common, South Asian literary cultures diverge markedly on the question of which features are to be awarded primacy for historical analysis. Accordingly, the methods themselves that contributors adopted for understanding and explaining the various literary cultures proved equally divergent. Disciplinary or historical preoccupations have no doubt also played a role: some of the contributors work in anthropology, some in history, languages and literature, philosophy, political science, or religion; some concentrate on the premodern period, some on the modern. But the decisive contingencies seem to have been the differences in the histories of literary cultures themselves. In one case, for example, a defining factor of a literary culture in history turned out to be the problematic idea of history itself; in another case, the very absence of the literary; in yet another, the irruption of radical cultural difference in the form of colonialism and European modernity.

In Tamil literary culture we observe a long and complicated confrontation with the problem of historicity—a fact that is anomalous in relation to other South Asian cultures. Some scholars have viewed Tamil literature of the entire premodern period as aspiring to an order of simultaneity rather than succession (let alone supersession): later works were intended to supplement rather than supplant earlier ones.[22] Yet the tradition itself has long thematized its uneven history, beginning as early as the medieval tales of the great flood said to have destroyed the works of a literary academy *(caṅkam)* in the archaic period. The actual texts, which, although they had not been entirely forgotten in the late medieval period, had long disappeared from the standard syllabus of Tamil literary study, were rediscovered or, rather, reintroduced at the end of the nineteenth century by U. Vē. Cāminātaiyar (1855–1942), an event that entailed a radical revision of the history of Tamil. As Norman Cutler shows in chapter 4, the twentieth-century discourse of Tamil literary historiography tells the story of literary primevality, disappearance, and recovery in a new idiom but as if recapitulating those earlier anxieties of loss and much older concerns with antiquity. It is by virtue of this long-term centrality of the historical, then, that literary historiography in the twentieth century comes to occupy a more prominent place in the analysis of Tamil literary culture than in that of any other in South Asia.

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[22] See Cutler, chapter 4, this volume, and Zvelebil 1974: 2.

A tradition's historically variable attitude toward the literary and the consequences of this variability for our sense of the object of our investigation are defining issues in what Steven Collins in chapter 11 has called the Pali *imaginaire*. Literature as constituted in the high tradition of Sanskrit and Prakrit—and understood as such by many regional traditions in the early centuries of vernacularization—seems to have been fundamentally rejected from the beginning by the custodians of the hieratic language of southern Buddhism. This was so despite the clear commitment to literature among Buddhists in the north, who wrote in Sanskrit from the second century onward. Equally important, this was despite the fact that materials in the oldest stratum of the Pali canon demonstrate a strong aesthetic commitment, such as the *Theragāthā* and *Therigāthā* (Verses of the male elders; Verses of the female elders) or the balladlike portions of the *Suttanipāta* (Group of discourses). Other vastly influential, though in some sense counterdominant, literary processes were engaged in Pali, most notably in the case of the dramatized moral discourse of the *Vessantarajātaka* (Birth story of prince Vessantara). At the beginning of the second millennium, however, a new literary culture, Sanskritic to its core, was abruptly created. This was precisely the moment when the transregional career of Pali in Southeast Asia was commencing, and it seems unlikely that the two developments were unconnected.

The character of the literary culture that developed in the area we now call Bengal and that made use of the language we now call Bangla is generally comparable to what is found elsewhere in the subcontinent. Vernacular beginnings were tentative in a literary space entirely dominated by Sanskrit. The semiotics of socioideological registers used in literary texts shows the same complexity as elsewhere in South Asia, and the competition between them shows the same intensity, though both were made yet more complex and intense by the presence of Persianate culture after the sixteenth century. Borders of place and borders of language were as messy as they were elsewhere, until literature began its work of purification. What seems to distinguish Bangla literary culture are the processes inaugurated with the consolidation of British colonialism at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It is crucial to recognize what is often ignored: that we do not all live in the same Now, as Ernst Bloch put it—that the rhythms of historical change are as variable across South Asia as they are anywhere else, and that, as a case in point, the force of the colonial impact on Bangla literature was different from what occurred in Kannada, Sindhi, or Telugu. Nineteenth-century Bangla novelists such as Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay evinced an especially intense literary engagement with colonialism, as Sudipta Kaviraj demonstrates in chapter 8—one that eventually did exercise great influence on other regional traditions. At the same time, colonialism threw into relief the choice of literary language and made this choice more passionate—or made it at least an object of more explicit reflection—than appears to have previously been the case. Here Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824–1873) is the iconic figure, and both Kaviraj and Vinay Dharwadker (in chapter 3) delineate the afterhistory of the existential-aesthetic dilemma that Madhusudan had been the first to confront in the South Asian theater of the war waged by global English.

This sort of specificity of historical problematics, and the shift in methodological focus entailed thereby, may be found everywhere among these essays—for Malayali literary culture in the multiplicity and social significance of oral-performative genres, for Urdu in the politics of language identity, for Tibetan in the image and idiom of India itself. What is revealed in the black box of literary culture is the complex diversity of the phenomenon itself, the variety of points of historical prominence, and the methodological particularity both require.

FORMS OF HISTORY

If the idea of literary cultures can allow for their historical individualization in a way that the homogenizing procedure of literary history does not, history itself as a theoretical problem is by no means thereby simply cancelled. What does it mean to conceive of literary culture as historical? Is it a matter of sheer chronology, because that is the way history happens? Is it like plotting the course of development of an organic life-form from birth to flourishing to decay and death, or like assigning values on a commodity exchange—golden age, silver age, and the rest? Is it the story of the gradual manifestation of the latent nation? What leads us to decide on one approach or the other as especially appropriate for South Asia? Our inquiry into what constitutes the literary showed that stipulative definitions are often nothing more than unwarranted universalizations of this or that particular; instead, the literary needs to be understood as a historically situated practice: how people have done things with texts. This approach suggests that the problem of history may also be addressed, at least in part, by exploring how people have done things with the past and by taking seriously how different modes of temporality may have worked to structure South Asian literary cultures for the participants themselves.

A good example of history as doing things with the past is found in the genre of the *taẕkirah* in Persian and Urdu. In chapter 15, Frances Pritchett explores in detail the complexities of this form of "remembrance" (the root meaning of *taẕkirah*), at once genealogical, critical, and anecdotal. Its visions of a literary culture may not be reducible to a simple chronology, but it everywhere produces some past by assembling the poets who count in the literary tradition. Remarkably, as argued by Muzaffar Alam in chapter 2, what may have been the first such *taẕkirah* in Persian was produced not in Iran but in the Panjab (in the *Lubāb al-albāb* of Sadīd al-Dīn Muḥammad ʿAufī, d. c. 1252), as if the very fact that Persian poets were working at the Ghaznavid court in Afghanistan (or the Ghurid in Uchch, or the Ilbarite in Delhi) was what needed to be preserved in memory. An ironic double reversal marks the end of the *taẕkirah* as a genre: In 1880, when in the wake of the failed uprising of 1857, Urdu intellectuals found a compromise with European modernity inevitable, Muḥammad Ḥusain Āzād produced the *Āb-e ḥayāt* (The water of life), a *taẕkirah* intended to consign the greater part of the Urdu tradition to the trash can of history. Only a generation earlier Garcin de Tassy had adopted the *taẕkirah* as the form most appropriate for describing to Europe what he understood to be the *Histoire de la littérature hindoui et hindoustani*.

Other forms of ethnohistory may be found in the most unexpected places.[23] Sanskrit eulogies of poets of the past create long-term genealogies, even as they create canons and critical criteria, often in a way that approximates positive chronology (though without a trace of evolutionism). It was not unusual for a poet in twelfth-century Gujarat to have a reasonably correct chronological knowledge of more than a millennium of Sanskrit and Prakrit poetry. D. R. Nagaraj has noted (in chapter 5) how Kannada-speaking intellectuals in fifteenth-century Vijayanagara collected, literized, and narrativized the hitherto dispersed, unwritten, and wholly decontextualized utterances *(vacana)* of the twelfth-century Vīraśaivas (militant devotees of Śiva). The biographical impulse in evidence here is a crucial use of the past that for both original participants and later scholars has shaped the entire understanding of the rise of a new cultural form and its political-theological significance.

In the same spirit, rather than offering a chronological survey of texts, which begins at an arbitrary beginning and ends at an arbitrary end (a redundancy anyway, since the literary histories that already exist for all these literary cultures do precisely this), many contributors have preferred to address the problem of what South Asians themselves have decided were beginnings, endings, and critical moments. They have also asked how to gauge what is at stake in the decision to see in this or that writer or text a break in the flow of time. Many cultures have traditions of invention, and it has proved instructive to pay close attention to these, too. They may not necessarily be in accord with what positive historiography marks as significant, but it can be precisely the tension between the two forms of knowledge that yields important new meanings.

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[23] The absence of any term besides "ethnohistory" to describe alternative narratives of temporality without at once affirming the primacy of Western positivist history is a good indication of the absolute dominance of this history as a form of contemporary knowledge.

Consider the case of Eḻuttacchan, the low-caste poet who composed the Malayalam *Rāmāyaṇa* sometime in the sixteenth century.[24] He is not in any simple sense the "primal poet" in Malayalam, as he is often represented by people of modern Kerala. For at least three centuries before him, as Rich Freeman shows in chapter 7, people had been producing texts in what we now call Malayalam and in the script now known as Aryalipi (the script of the nobles; more or less the modern Malayalam writing system) and using those texts in ways that distinguish them from any other texts and in fact make them, for Malayalis, literature. But it is worth listening when the later tradition assigns a primal role to Eḻuttacchan. It tells us something about the place of this multiform narrative, the *Rāmāyaṇa,* in constituting the core of a literary tradition; about the enduring historical importance of the moment when a subaltern social formation achieved the literacy that in the South Asian world conditioned the culturally significant type of textuality we may call literature; and about literature as requiring, in the eyes of many readers and listeners, a particular linguistic register, in this case, the highly Sanskritized.

Thinking of history as a use of a past, in the way that literature is a use of a text, may help us elude deterministic narrative plots, whether teleologies of the nation-state or of the organic life-form, without at the same time retreating to postmodern encyclopedism to avoid "distorting the past."[25] One avoids distortion not by renouncing any determinate relation of the events of the past (assuming such renunciation is even possible), but rather by recognizing that the past in one of its most important dimensions is what people have taken the past to be, indeed, just as literature is what people have taken literature to be.

The analogy between literature and history is nevertheless not an exact one. Texts are objects of intentionality, with a structure of meaning intersubjectively shared between author or performer and reader or listener. The past as such is not exclusively such an object, nor is it solely part of a shared system of meaning. It has larger dimensions with effects that the primary agents themselves may have been unable to grasp, and that consequently have not been thematized or even made present in South Asian discourse. In other words, the view of the literary past from inside—the *tazkirah,* the Sanskrit praise-poem, the Kannada biographies, the different traditions of invention—may be supplemented by the view from outside: our view here and now, when the dust of history has settled.

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[24] Similar arguments can be made about other vernacular poets. See for example the discussion of Narasiṃha in Yashaschandra, chapter 9, this volume.

[25] As described by Perkins 1992: 53–60 and (Perkins claims) exemplified by Hollier 1989.

The view from outside often focuses on ruptures in literary culture, whether constituted by breaks in technology, learning, religion, or polity. Persian literary culture was intimately tied to the fortunes of the imperial Mughal formation and did not long survive when this formation began to mutate in the early eighteenth century. As Nagaraj shows, the militant devotees of Śiva in twelfth-century Kannada country produced an altogether new literature (the nonmetrical, unadorned discourse that they called simply *vacana,* "utterance"), in a new literary idiom (a Middle Kannada that was dramatically de-Sanskritized in comparison with the earlier literary register), with a new social vision of caste transcendence and an antistatist political vision. In thirteenth-century Tibet, a new commitment to Sanskrit intellectual practices in grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic, greater than anything seen before in the region, utterly transformed the styles and standards of literary production for centuries to come. These ruptures are often not explicitly acknowledged within the traditions in question, but clearly any adequate analysis of literary cultures in history must address them. The same holds for ruptures in literary technology.

There are two such technological ruptures, with markedly different historical significance. While contemporary scholarship may be preoccupied with the consequences of print, the transition to manuscript culture around the start of the common era did far more to transform the practices of literary communication than did the transition to print culture in the eighteenth century.[26] Long a preserve of Sanskrit and the other cosmopolitan languages, including Arabic, literary inscription was achieved by vernacular languages at different moments, starting around the beginning of the second millennium. It was this development that, in combination with other factors, inaugurated the vernacular revolution with which many of the chapters of this book are concerned. Precisely how the new manuscript culture interacted with an orality that long remained dominant both in fact and in the ideology of authentic knowledge—to say nothing of its interaction with the true oral culture that maintained its existence outside of literature and history—is one of the great complexities of South Asian literary cultures, and as the different chapters show, this interaction can be variously interpreted. The dichotomy oral-literate neither recapitulates that of folk-elite nor fits with received European notions of cultural-historical stages. For one thing, written literature continued to be orally performed among most social orders well into the modern period. But while in some traditions literacy was unquestionably primary in both composition and performance (the latter typically from a written text), in others orality was a far more powerful influence. Freeman describes how in Kerala text-artifacts were often merely scripts for improvisation; and according to Pritchett's vivid account of the *mushāʿirah,* the Urdu literary salon in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century north India, an undiminished orality and the capacious memory that accompanies it remained vital components in a culture otherwise thoroughly saturated by the written word. And not all oralities are equal: Kaviraj distinguishes a high orality having cultural valorization, such as the Sanskrit *mantra* (liturgical formula), from a relaxed orality of everyday life. But the vernacular can migrate from the second to the first category and radically reform the boundaries of literary culture in the process.

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[26] Recall, however, that woodblock printing was used in Tibet from about the thirteenth century.

The narrative of the history of print culture as told for Europe has little resonance in South Asia, although due to their historical focus, most of the chapters do not demonstrate this systematically. As we learn from the history of south Indian languages—Kannada and Telugu in particular—standardization in orthography and grammar, and unification into a literary language, were preprint achievements (something that holds for literary Prakrit and Sanskrit from a far earlier period). In north India too, as Sitamshu Yashaschandra argues (in chapter 9) in the case of Gujarati, by the fourteenth century a largely unified literary idiom had already been adopted for the creation of literature over a large, multidialectal region. A work like the fifteenth-century *Līlātilakam* demonstrates that the hierarchization of literary dialects in Malayalam could occur in the absence of printed texts. Print and capitalism only slowly achieved (and according to some contributors, may not yet have achieved) a synergy critical enough to transform the character of literary culture. Although mass-circulation journals have proved important for the development of South Asian literary cultures, printed books themselves have remained out of the reach of many people. It is worth observing that today the largest sector of book sales of any sort, including literature, is school texts. How this economic fact affects the production of literature is touched on by Dharwadker. To a certain extent Barthes's definition, modestly amended, seems to find increasing application today: literature is what gets taught and thus sold.

LANGUAGE IN LITERARY CULTURE

As we have tried to think about texts and pasts as situated practices rather than stable things, so also we have sought to conceive of languages themselves as processes rather than objects. This has meant thematizing and attempting to make historical sense of two closely related phenomena: the creation of language by literature, and the competition between and choice of literary languages.

In a world where government censuses and linguistic surveys demand that citizens declare their "mother tongue"—even though a person may have two or three, or have one that can be found on no list of "languages"—and where procedures of classification and objectification can actually create what they seem to only describe, we are prone to think of languages as stable, single, self-identical, and discrete. Thus, according to textbook representations, the world of South Asia may be said to know three international culture languages: Sanskrit, the major Indo-Aryan language of premodernity, with a literary history of two and a half millennia; Persian, whose own history began anew at the start of the second millennium; and from the eighteenth century on, English. (Arabic may be included too, though its use in South Asia was almost exclusively for theological discourse.) Added to these are a small number of Middle Indo-Aryan script languages of the first millennium: the Prakrits (above all Maharashtri and Shauraseni), Pali, and Apabhramsha; the New Indo-Aryan languages of the second millennium, including Bangla, Gujarati, Hindi, Sindhi, Sinhala, and Urdu; and four major Dravidian languages of south India first attested at different points in the first millennium: Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, and Malayalam.

There is a complex truth to such crude representations as these. They can, after all, produce a brute reality of their own: people begin to live the objectifications that the surveys and the censuses create. Thus, should the National Academy of Letters in India decide to institute an award for literature in Dogri (a language spoken in the union state of Jammu and Kashmir), Dogri would take on a harder conceptual and material facticity than it may ever have had previously. But comparable processes of the creation of languages through literature and philology, and their reification as intentional objects, long antedate the rationalizing procedures of the modern state—although again, we must remember that since every specific situation is historical, these processes will have a range of potentially incommensurable significations and purposes. Virtually every chapter in this book has to some degree sought to grasp the means and the meanings of the literary invention of languages—for it is literature itself that above all other forms of elaboration organizes jargons into language—and to gauge the competition that this involved and the grounds for choosing that it often provoked. There is no single rubric under which this has been done. Each tradition has worked through the problem in a particular historical way: in some cases a highly consequential nominalism seems to be the critical issue; in others, it is individuation and differentiation from other literary languages; and in yet others, reconciliation and compromise.

The most familiar and in some regards the most distressing example occurs in the history of the languages now known as Hindi and Urdu. Shamsur Rahman Faruqi (chapter 14), Stuart McGregor (chapter 16), and Harish Trivedi (chapter 17) explore from different perspectives the fortunes and misfortunes of language naming as a problem of power in the colonial period. Since names are in part warrants for making historical claims over texts and persons, what is meant by "Hindavi" ("Hindvi," "Hindui"), "Hindustani," "Hindi," "Dihlavi," "Gujri," "Dakani," "Rekhtah," and "Urdu" entails determining which texts would be included in each language, how ancient and honorable each one may be, and accordingly, how rightful is each one's claim in the present to recognition and status. Less complex and more recent, though participating in a similar process, is the relationship between what are now called Gujarati and Rajasthani. The term "Gujarati," found in "Gurjarabhasha" and related locutions, was only sporadically in use before the eighteenth century (when some Gujarati writers were still calling their language Prakrit), whereas "Rajasthani" is a nineteenth-century European coinage. In the Gujarati case, however, as Yashaschandra shows, a nominalism of a different order is at work, one that lacked the relation to social difference that we find in the case of Hindi and Urdu. Freeman explores the problem of language naming in Kerala. What we now know as Malayalam was called Tamil for many centuries, even as vernacular intellectuals as early as the fourteenth century were attempting to differentiate it from Tamil, which dominated the literary sphere of peninsular India. Bangla and Maithili, Oriya and Bangla, Gujarati and Apabhramsha—the speciation of each has a long history that has complexly interacted with literary processes.

If the common sense of languages as individual and stable is disturbed by the histories of their actual creation, these histories render the common sense of the social identities associated with these languages even less sensible. The linkage now taken entirely for granted between literary language and religious community before vernacularization—the linkage between Sanskrit and what we now call Hinduism, and between Prakrit and Jainism—actually has little foundation for much of the South Asian story. As I argue in chapter 1, writers selected freely from among these idioms. Brahmans chose Apabhramsha for poems about the god Viṣṇu (and for much else besides Vaishnavism), and Buddhists chose Sanskrit for poems about the life of the Buddha (and for much else besides Buddhism) on grounds that seem to have had far more to do with the expressive qualities of register than the restrictions of religion. Other factors informed the choice of Brajbhasha instead of Sanskrit on the part of seventeenth-century writers like Keśavdās, and of Persian and eventually Urdu in the case of Hindu writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. To be sure, religious motivations prompted some writers of devotional poetry to turn to the vernacular instead of Sanskrit or Persian—but the reason often had more to do with the aesthetics of religious experience than with proselytization. These poets included the Sufi writers of theological romance *(premākhyān),* who for their mystical practice (the *samāʿ*) used what was thought of as the sweet musicality of Avadhi (eastern Hindi) or Sindhi in preference to the courtly and imperial overtones of Persian. Ali Asani shows in chapter 10 how in the case of Sindhi, vernacular language and local musical traditions fused so that even written poetic texts came to be organized according to the *rāga* in which they were meant to be sung.

In general, the evidence of the literary cultures surveyed in this book leaves no doubt that social or religious birth was not cultural destiny in South Asia at any time before modernity. On the contrary, affiliation to a literary culture was always something one chose, though again, each choice was made for reasons specific to each historical situation. When in the early centuries of the second millennium Pali literary culture was adopted by Cambodians and Thais, Sanskrit by Tibetans, Kannada by Tulavas and Konkanis, and Persian by Mughals (who originally were speakers of Chaghatay Turkish), it was cultural choice rather than necessity that was at work.

A choice is always made among options, however, and options imply competition. In addition to long-term processes of individuation and differentiation in South Asian literary cultures, countervailing tendencies of appropriation and compromise are everywhere and dramatically in evidence. At different periods in South Asian history, Sanskrit, Persian, and English have constituted powerful, even hegemonic presences in literary culture, and this trait distinguishes them from other transregional codes: Pali, for example, is a sacral language vast in its dispersal but strikingly self-limiting in its literary purposes until late in its career. Tamil's influence was widespread but bounded throughout south India and, after the eleventh century, in Sri Lanka. Urdu was diffused widely (in its western form, Gujri, and its southern form, Dakani, in addition to what was constituted as Urdu in the north), yet though it described a complex cultural geography in some sense unique in the subcontinent, it never went beyond these limits.

The interactions between master languages and their vernacular others—which were decisive for the histories of the latter but also fed back in less obvious ways into the former—show substantial and significant historical differences. Persian and Sanskrit cosmopolitanism, for example, never operated with the kind of scorched-earth policy that contemporary global English (or premodern global Latin) does; regional languages were enabled rather than obliterated by their presence.[27] But this enabling was itself differentiated—each specific situation being historical—and to capture the differences the contributors to this volume have employed various analytics. Western scholarship is again of little help here, despite the presence of comparable processes. It is hard to find much of theoretical value beyond Gramsci's contrast between "molecular" and "massive" forms of influence. Some of these analytics derive from local theorization itself, as in the distinction that emerged in the early centuries of vernacularization among south Indian intellectuals between the literary cultures of the Way *(mārga)* and of Place *(deśī),* as noted in the chapters by Narayana Rao and Nagaraj. The larger cultural-historical implications of this distinction I have elsewhere tried to capture through the terminology of "cosmopolitan" and "vernacular."[28] The term *maṇipravāla* (pearls and coral) came to be used in Kerala especially for the complex appropriations of cosmopolitan language, though the phenomenon itself, and the various possibilities it involves, are visible right across the spectrum of regional literary idioms, northern and southern. Writers were profoundly sensitive to the relative weight, so to speak, of cosmopolitan characteristics: they carefully distinguished and distributed grades of similarity in lexical items (identical, semi-identical, radically different); they debated the propriety of morphological appropriation; and they strove for balance between the cosmopolitan and the vernacular in many other realms of aesthetic practice, from versification to imagery. The historical engagement with many of these questions in Telugu, and Narayana Rao's discussion of them in chapter 6, are exemplary.

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[27] I discuss the notions of "voluntaristic" and "coercive" forms of cosmopolitanism in Pollock 2000.

Other contributors have sought to theorize the social ground upon which these negotiations took place. Thus, Kaviraj differentiates between exclusivist and inclusivist practices. The social intention of the former is to obstruct access to meaning on the part of noncosmopolitan users. The latter allows entry without specialized knowledge because the cosmopolitan language itself is, as it were, almost entirely liquefied into the vernacular.

Seen against the widest canvas of sociality, the competition between vernacular and cosmopolitan, as noted earlier, takes on a particular poignancy in the cultural politics of postcolonial Asia, where writers have struggled with the problem of authenticity and the role of the vernacular in a world of global English. As these chapters everywhere demonstrate, structurally similar contentions, in which emulation, denial, and compromise all came into play, marked the literary cultures of precolonial traditions as well, from the engagement of Old Kannada with Sanskrit to that of Urdu with Persian. Yet, what to all appearance is the same historical problem often discloses crucial differences in political and social effects and in personal meaning at different historical epochs. Premodern negotiations between local and global were complex, to say the least, as were the engagements between local and local, as is evident in Yashaschandra's account of Gujarati (in reference to Hindi, Marathi, and Marwari), Freeman's of Malayalam (in reference to Tamil), and

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[28] See Pollock 1998 and forthcoming (part 2) for a historical account of this theorization of *mārga* and *deśī*. Gramsci's reflections on language influence are found in 1991: 178 ff.

Kaviraj's of Bangla (in reference to Oriya and Maithili). If what was at stake in each particular case remains to be more systematically explored, our different accounts at least serve to show how salient such negotiation was. And by their very juxtaposition in this volume, these cases reveal a crucial fact obscured when each tradition remains in pristine isolation between the covers of its own literary history: that such transactions have fundamentally conditioned, and even defined, the literary cultures of South Asia throughout their long history.

COMMUNITIES OF LITERATURE

Literature, history, and language, I have been arguing here, are as much what people do with a text and a past and a spectrum of articulate sounds as they are pregiven entities that do things to people. Similarly, space—along with the important features of the social and political formations that mark themselves off in space—is a product of literary cultures as much as these cultures may in turn be reproduced by space. Region and nation and civilizational area are no more natural kinds than is literature or history. We observed earlier that members of the project started out from the conviction that literature may have produced Bengal and India and South Asia as much as South Asia and India and Bengal have produced literature; that literary representations can conceptually organize space, and the dissemination of literary texts can turn that space into a lived reality, as much as space and lived realities condition conceptual organization and dissemination.

These are not facile logical palindromes: At issue is the question of how certain kinds of community come to be constituted. One of these is what we may call the sociotextual community—the community for which literature is produced, in which it circulates, and which derives a portion of its self-understanding as a community from the very act of hearing, reading, performing, reproducing, and circulating literary texts. Another is the political community, in which the different sociotextual orders may come to be incorporated, and whose existence as an intentional object often takes the form of narratives made available in literature. When literary history became the handmaid of nationalism in nineteenth-century Europe and in postcolonial South Asia, it was for good reason. Linguistic particularity and aesthetic difference, to say nothing of the actual stories about particular spaces and their reproduction across these spaces, produce powerful ideational effects, and have done so for a long time. But again, these effects can have histories totally different from those consecrated by nationalism and modernity.

No a priori answer to the meaning (and meaningfulness) of "South Asia," "India," "Bengal," or other such notions is possible, for these have no primeval and eternal meanings. They are, rather, culturally and historically constituted and intrinsically relational, which is why they can be constantly revised, with 1947 and 1971 (the dates of Independence for India and Pakistan, and for Bangladesh, respectively) marking only the most recent and most dramatic revisions. Before 1947, the notions of "Bharat," "Al Hind," and "India" each had its own complex and mutable discursive history and domain of reference, whereas "South Asia" gained currency only in the post–World War II era of the security state with its newly segmented spheres of scholarly interest known as area studies. As I argued earlier, classifications of regions, nations, and the rest that are products of discourses—typically discourses provided by literary history—cannot be presupposed as the appropriate frameworks for analyzing what produced them in the first place. A critical historical account needs to understand those classifications themselves, by taking seriously the representations that people in those spaces have provided for the domains of literary culture meaningful to them and charting the shifting boundaries of these domains over time.

The varieties of meaningful literary space in South Asia and the pertinent communities of literature that inhabit them are astonishing in their multiplicity and complexity, as even a cursory reading of these chapters demonstrates. The English readership of contemporary South Asian writers, as well as those writers themselves and the themes of their work, are as globalized as any other cosmopolitan literature or literary culture, as Dharwadker demonstrates. In late-colonial India, the literary production of political space was a complicated dual project in some ways comparable to but not wholly symmetrical with the nationalization of culture in nineteenth-century Europe. On the one hand, writers sought to recreate the region (like Bengal) even while writing the nation through the dissemination of work in translation, as Kaviraj shows in the case of the novelist Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay; on the other hand, they sought to recreate the nation even while writing the region (like Gujarat) through a new form of prose, as Yashaschandra demonstrates in the case of Gandhi. The kinds of spaces to be found in precolonial periods, for their part, at once complement and contradict these later constructions.

The most dramatic transformation in the early centuries of the second millennium was the production of new vernacular places. The projection of a recently regionalized domain is vividly present in the Telugu work of Śrīnātha in the fifteenth century, as Narayana Rao shows, and in a number of texts in tenth- and eleventh-century Sri Lanka, according to Charles Hallisey's account (chapter 12). Often these representations coincide, or appear to coincide, with unifying polities. Kerala presents a rather different picture, however. While courtesan narratives, messenger poems, and a new genre called the *kēraḷōtpatti* (origins of Kerala) produced significant regional spatializations from about the fifteenth century, Freeman shows that these arose in a world where political power was highly dispersed. Around the same time, Persian began newly linking the subcontinent with vast worlds to the north and the west, and poets circulated freely across this increasingly unified culture space. That said, some kind of South Asian particularity was discursively produced in the seventeenth century, as Alam shows, when poets in Iran began to speak (dismissively, as a rule) of an "Indian style" *(sabk-i Hindī)* in the Persian poetry composed at the Mughal court. Earlier, the circulation of Buddhist scholars had linked areas as distant as Tibet and Bengal and Sri Lanka, and more unevenly, parts of Southeast, Inner, and East Asia, as the chapters of Collins and Matthew Kapstein (chapter 13) demonstrate. This macrospace rarely found literary representation in the Pali tradition, except in such forms as the cosmological map of the Rose-Apple Continent. In contrast, the imaginary journeys of Tibetan vision poetry discussed by Kapstein can be supplemented by Tibetan works describing real itineraries and actual geographies. What I have elsewhere called the Sanskrit cosmopolis shows, in the mature form it attained around the middle of the first millennium, a remarkable bifurcation.[29] In repeated and consistent textual representation the cosmopolis was seen as filling—and not exceeding—a subcontinental space and as projecting onto this space a vision, however vague, of polity. At the same time, however, the zones of actual production of Sanskrit culture, in at least some of its most noticeable forms, such as royal inscriptions, extended far beyond this space to include Khmer country, Java, and other Southeast Asian spaces at least up to the end of the fourteenth century. None of this extraordinarily diverse material can be taken as having produced, by a rectilinear development, the regions, nations, or areas as we know them in the present, and yet without this material such spatial divisions could scarcely have been created in the first place.

Even while we may fully embrace the indeterminacy and historical variability of cultural space in the prenational and premodern world, it is obvious that in its very organization, a scholarly project like the present one inevitably presupposes a certain determinate conception of geographical boundaries, a relative evaluation of the literary-cultural importance of regional traditions, and much else of which we may be less vividly aware. But here we are entering only another hermeneutical circle, if a larger one, and not necessarily more vicious. Including among the contributors a historian of Old Javanese would have illustrated how much greater was the domain comprised by "South Asian" literary cultures in history, in any assessment of that term, when unconstrained by postcolonial definitions. The inclusion of a historian of Naga oral poems would have illustrated how much smaller it sometimes was. By the same token, indeterminacy freed the contributors from any theoretical obligation to represent some putative whole, to fill gaps in some imaginary totality. Scholars were accordingly invited to contribute to this volume who were interested in literary processes, wherever they might be working.

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[29] See Pollock 1996.

The contributors know full well that even while we can appreciate and sometimes articulate the strong critique of pertinent categories—that literature and history are practices; that cultures are wholly permeable and constantly reorder themselves; that languages, like nations, are in an important sense the effect and not the cause of literature; that objectifications produce their own indubitable reality—we nevertheless live in a world of nations and languages and linear chronologies. As a consequence, it has not always been possible to resist thinking according to the borders and boundaries and linearities that these comprise. Moreover, all of the contributors, wherever born or educated, have been trained almost without exception within the frameworks of single national and subnational traditions, and these of necessity act as additional constraints on our research and writing. However porous the walls between literary cultures in history may have been in the past, now, at the start of the third millennium, they have become much too dense for any of us to penetrate fully.

SEEING SOUTH ASIA DIFFERENTLY BY LOOKING THROUGH LITERARY CULTURE

How do we see South Asia differently as a result of looking specifically at the history of its literary cultures? How do we see the worlds of greater Eurasia differently, with respect to both their historical and their conceptual linkages to the south? How do we see history differently, especially the fateful transition to the Western model of modernity, and the problem and practice of postcoloniality? Hard questions all of these—but let me in closing try to address them by summarizing several of the themes I have already discussed.

From colonialism, capitalism, and Christianity—three of the forces that, in their different ways, produced the knowledge of South Asia through which we still must go if we are to go anywhere—contemporary scholars have inherited a set of representations and conceptions, some better known, some less, about refinement and cultivation, the social meaning of literature, and the place of religion in South Asia. The history of literary cultures suggests that much of this inheritance should be discarded. The cultural humiliation of South Asia, prerequisite for the civilizing mission of colonizing Europe, is hardly still with us except perhaps in the form of the astonishing marginalization of South Asia in Western intellectual life. And although cultivation is not a function of literary excellence alone, observers must be overwhelmed and humbled by the vision of cultural productivity, unlike any other in the world, that opens up before them here. In an unbroken tradition of literacy of some two and a half millennia, across successive generations that copied and recopied palm-leaf and birch-bark manuscripts under conditions of extreme environmental hostility, in ever-increasing numbers of languages, and with every conceivable degree of literary intricacy, texts were composed and preserved to embody the imaginative experience of South Asian peoples. This is a story of complex creativity and textual devotion with few parallels in history.

How this literary production related to the world in which the literary field was variously embedded seems to escape the explanatory models offered by the twin cognitive modes of modernity: capitalism and nationalism. Language was not destiny, and literary culture was not ethnic culture. Both, instead, were things one chose in accordance with the rules of the literary system or the predilections of the political system. Culture was not subservient to power in the simple, instrumental way postulated by the rationality of capitalism or by extrapolation backward to some Oriental despotism. Yet power was not indifferent to culture; the great vernacular revolution, as many chapters show, was most decidedly a courtly project. The logic of those literary cultures was different. Their spaces were not the spaces of nations to come, yet neither were they the dreamscapes where Orientalists like Hegel saw "plant-like beings" in a vegetative state, "incapable of the prosaic circumspection of the intellect."[30] And despite the images of the spiritual East promulgated by an alienated West and a Christianity that sought to remake the world in its image, culture was far less tied to religious community or to the projects of religious instruction or mobilization than was the case in medieval or early-modern Europe—or in contemporary fundamentalist America.

This volume does not aim to draw parallels and contrasts with other literary worlds such as Europe or East Asia, but it does provide materials for the interested reader to do so. In all three civilizational domains, for example, great transregional languages—Latin and Greek, Sanskrit, and Chinese—completely defined the space of literary culture for centuries. In the last case, this persisted long into the modern period, with vernacularization of the sort found in South Asia effectively proscribed by neo-Confucianism until the end of the nineteenth century. The Greek *oikoumene* in its Byzantine form similarly constrained the universe of the literary to the narrowest compass, so much so that its northern embodiment, in the culture of Old Church Slavonic, restricted the development of a Russian literature until the early nineteenth century. The Latinate world shows far closer parallels to South Asia in the structure of its literary-cultural history, if not in its content. The literary cultures that succeeded that of the Latin *imperium* were increasingly ethnicized and historicized even before print capitalism, and evince thereby a radically different mentality from their analogues in South Asia.[31] Vernacularization may everywhere employ similar techniques, but does not everywhere produce a similar discourse of identity.

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[30] See Hegel 1970: 394.

[31] A helpful account of early-modern literary Europe and nationalism is Garber 1989.

To speak of identity—a problem that many see as peculiar to modern society in general and postcolonial societies in particular—invites comment on the historical focus of this project and its relation to the present moment. The emphasis on the pre–twentieth century, indeed, on the period before European colonialism, is not an accident of personnel but rather part of the project design. It comes out of the conviction that as crucial to contemporary theory as understanding postcolonial South Asian literary cultures may be, these represent a very thin slice of a long historical experience whose careful preservation in texts makes this region of the world so special. Equally important—and here we confront a weakness of a certain species of postcolonial critique—these contemporary forms of culture and the role of colonialism in shaping them cannot be understood without a deeper understanding of the long premodern past. That said, we hope literary precoloniality in itself has insights to offer to the student of postcoloniality. How the categories of self and other were actually constituted before colonialism, to consider one important question, begins to come into focus when we think about writing in the other's language. Although no South Asian Muslim and Hindu writers of the seventeenth century were speakers of Persian in their bedrooms or kitchens, Persian could become their primary mode of literary expression; exactly the same was true of Sanskrit. Vernacular writers, for their part, in some sense resisted the cosmopolitan and thereby avowed a different, if never an ethnicized, self. They developed new ways of intermingling the local and global, indeed, remarkable new forms of hybridity—if we can use this term without implying that purity is anywhere or ever preexistent. These forms, as yet untheorized, often appear far more complex than the "shadows" of Indian languages that, as Dharwadker rightly points out, fill the work of the great postcolonial Indian novelists.

Yet rarely if ever do we hear in the premodern forms the desperate expression of cultural inferiority or the humiliation of mimicry that is so common in Indian modernity. Difference was sought, and sought within a realm of power, but it operated in ways that seem beyond our ability to comprehend. It is in large part the effort to capture these sorts of distinctions between modern and premodern modes of literary culture that engendered this project. We felt, and hope readers will also come to feel, that we could best serve the development of our field of study not by producing a sort of *Cambridge History of Literature* relating to India—a summation of existing scholarship with requisite bibliographical exhaustiveness that in any case presupposes a field far better tilled than what now confronts us—but rather by finding ways to suggest why anyone should even bother to study South Asian literary cultures in history. And one reason is surely their astonishing capacity for suggesting other possibilities of life.

NOTE ON THE ORGANIZATION OF THE VOLUME

From all that has been said so far, there are obviously many ways to arrange a history of literary cultures in South Asia. Unfortunately, however, given the deep anxieties of theory that encumber scholarship at present, most of these arrangements seem flawed. Each one presupposes and reproduces a particular and partial understanding of historical change. Organizing according to gross language family—Dravidian and Indo-Aryan, for example—would be to marginalize in advance the powerful influence that Sanskrit, an Indo-Aryan language, had on Dravidian and to presuppose an interaction among members of these language families that was sometimes less significant than interaction across them. Sinhala, for example, though an Indo-Aryan language, was shaped far more powerfully by its exchanges with Tamil and Malayalam than with Hindi or Gujarati, while Sindhi was as much influenced by its interactions with Persian as with Sanskrit. An arrangement based on other kinds of language relationships is no less problematic. Juxtaposing Persian to Urdu and Sanskrit to Hindi, for example, would undoubtedly highlight the important influence each master code exerted, but at the same time it would erroneously imply that religious community has been the principal determinant of literary-cultural change, to the exclusion of other factors. A simple chronological sequence would hardly be simple, in view of the uncertainties of the historical development of many traditions. And resorting to the false security of alphabetical order would have been an attempt to evade the responsibility of historical interpretation, which none of the participants in the group could endorse.

The arrangement chosen does attempt to make several arguments, and since these are not likely to be grasped before the entire volume is read, it seems advisable to preview some of them here. Although Sanskrit, Persian, and English have had complicated relations with a wide range of South Asian literary cultures, it is their status as self-consciously transregional literary formations that we wish to emphasize in this volume, and they are accordingly grouped together to allow the commonalities and differences in their careers as cosmopolitan languages to emerge. The south Indian literary cultures, for their part, do evince particular interactions and lines of development, especially in their concern with differentiating themselves from one another and producing their own places, that make grouping them together sensible. Quite different is the logic for the arrangement of the vernacular literary cultures of north India. Although Bangla, Gujarati, and Sindhi appear to be located around the edges of South Asia, they are central to the argument of this book as a whole by reason of the problematics that in each case achieved a special salience: in Gujarati, the question of regionality; in Sindhi, the encounter and fusion of Sanskrit and Persian civilizational elements; in Bangla, the impact of colonialism. In the northern and southern rimlands of South Asia, on the other hand, the presence of Buddhist religious culture emerges as a powerful (though obviously not the sole) determinant of the character of literary culture. Urdu and Hindi, lastly, share a complex and disputed past, which makes their juxtaposition especially illuminating.

To be sure, the current arrangement by no means solves all our problems. It continues to reproduce certain illusory spatial dichotomies that bedevil our historical understanding of culture and politics in this region (notably, suggesting that south India as a unit stands in opposition to the rest of South Asia and positing "borderlands" for a world whose borders were defined only post-Independence). It probably continues to exaggerate the dominance of religious identities (for example, Buddhism in the case of Sinhala). It may tend to reinforce the dominance of Sanskrit, a long-standing anxiety among a number of vernacular traditions. No matter how we arrange the chapters, we risk naturalizing categories—of time, place, language, community—whose historical contingency is precisely what we are seeking to demonstrate. Yet we believe that intelligibility at the risk of anachronism or essentialization is probably more tolerable for the readers for whom we have written this book than confusion in the service of innovation.

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