Literary Cultures in History
The Philip E. Lilienthal imprint honors special books in commemoration of a man whose work at the University of California Press from 1954 to 1979 was marked by dedication to young authors and to high standards in the field of Asian Studies. Friends, family, authors, and foundations have together endowed the Lilienthal Fund, which enables the Press to publish under this imprint selected books in a way that reflects the taste and judgment of a great and beloved editor.
Literary Cultures in History

Reconstructions from South Asia

EDITED BY
Sheldon Pollock

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
Berkeley  Los Angeles  London


To the memory of our fellow contributors and cherished friends

D. R. Nagaraj
1954–1998

Norman Cutler
1949–2002
PART 1. GLOBALIZING LITERARY CULTURES

1. Sanskrit Literary Culture from the Inside Out / 39
   Sheldon Pollock

2. The Culture and Politics of Persian in Precolonial Hindustan / 131
   Muzaffar Alam

3. The Historical Formation of Indian-English Literature / 199
   Vinay Dharwadker

PART 2. LITERATURE IN SOUTHERN LOCALES

4. Three Moments in the Genealogy of Tamil Literary Culture / 271
   Norman Cutler

5. Critical Tensions in the History of Kannada Literary Culture / 323
   D. R. Nagaraj

6. Multiple Literary Cultures in Telugu: Court, Temple, and Public / 383
   Velcheru Narayana Rao

7. Genre and Society: The Literary Culture of Premodern Kerala / 437
   Rich Freeman
PART 3. THE CENTRALITY OF BORDERLANDS

8. The Two Histories of Literary Culture in Bengal / 503
   Sudipta Kaviraj

9. From Hemacandra to Hind Svarāj: Region and Power in Gujarati Literary Culture / 567
   Sitamshu Yashaschandra

10. At the Crossroads of Indic and Iranian Civilizations: Sindhi Literary Culture / 612
    Ali S. Asani

PART 4. BUDDHIST CULTURES AND SOUTH ASIAN LITERATURES

    Steven Collins

12. Works and Persons in Sinhala Literary Culture / 689
    Charles Hallisey

13. The Indian Literary Identity in Tibet / 747
    Matthew T. Kapstein

PART 5. THE TWINNED HISTORIES OF URDU AND HINDI

    Shamsur Rahman Faruqi

15. A Long History of Urdu Literary Culture, Part 2: Histories, Performances, and Masters / 864
    Frances W. Pritchett

    Stuart McGregor

17. The Progress of Hindi, Part 2: Hindi and the Nation / 958
    Harish Trivedi

INDEX / 1023
ILLUSTRATIONS

MAPS
1. Contemporary South Asia  / xxx
2. South Asia, c. 1200  / xxxi
3. Central and South Asia, c. 1600  / xxxii–xxxiii
4. Southern India, c. 1800  / xxxiv
5. Western India, c. 1500  / xxxv
6. South and Southeast Asia, c. 1200–1800  / xxxvi

FIGURES
6.1. Poem-picture of a coiled snake (*kuṇḍalinīgabandhamu*)
by Appakavi  / 432

12.1. The circle composition (*cakrabandha*) from the *Kavisilāmaṇa*  / 739
CONTRIBUTORS

Muzaffar Alam, Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago
Ali S. Asani, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University
Steven Collins, Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago
Norman Cutler, Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago
Vinay Dharwadker, Department of the Languages and Cultures of Asia, University of Wisconsin
Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, Urdu Monthly Shabkoon, Allahabad
Rich Freeman, Center for South Asian Studies, University of Michigan
Charles Hallisey, Department of the Languages and Cultures of Asia, University of Wisconsin
Matthew T. Kapstein, Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago
Sudipta Kaviraj, Department of Political Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London
Stuart McGregor, Faculty of Oriental Studies, Cambridge University
D. R. Nagaraj, Institute of Kannada Studies, Bangalore University
Velcheru Narayana Rao, Department of the Languages and Cultures of Asia, University of Wisconsin
Sheldon Pollock, Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago

Frances W. Pritchett, Department of Middle East and Asian Languages and Cultures, Columbia University

Harish Trivedi, Department of English, University of Delhi

Sitamshu Yashaschandra, Department of Gujarati, M.S. University, Baroda
Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia originated in a research proposal consciously designed to implement a new practice of scholarship in the service of new historiographical and theoretical objectives. The new practice required intensive, long-term collaboration among specialists in a range of regional and transregional literary traditions, while the new objectives entailed rethinking some basic presuppositions of literary history as it has been practiced for generations in South Asian studies. The contributors met at workshops over three or more years, engaging with each other’s often radically different viewpoints and attempting to find areas of agreement. The very fact of collaboration enabled them to resituate individual traditions within the multiple literary-cultural systems in which they once existed, and thereby to recover something of the dynamism and complexity that really marked the development of South Asian literatures. As for determining appropriate interpretive protocols, this was more difficult than anticipated. To the degree possible the protocols were developed empirically and collectively, rather than imposed by fiat according to some already given model; at the same time, traditions have their particular histories and often required particular interpretive strategies. The degree of cooperation and goodwill shown by the contributors in the face of these various challenges was inspiring. All were unstintingly generous with their time and learning, and unflaggingly enthusiastic about what proved to be an exciting and innovative scholarly experiment.

There are numerous difficulties in presenting scholarship on early South Asian literary cultures to contemporary readers. Two that seem small but are especially vexatious concern the representation in roman script of South Asian words, and the identification and presentation of geographical information. The procedures adopted here require brief explanation.
South Asian writers have always been remarkably attentive to the correct use of language, showing as profound a concern for grammatical exactitude as for any other feature of literary composition. Ancient Sanskrit stories tell of beings coming to grief because of a mispronounced word: the son of the divine Tvaṣṭr, for example, famously became a victim instead of a victor of the god Indra because his father misplaced the accent when announcing his name at birth. Later poets would ridicule their rivals for failure to discriminate between long and short vowels, as in Tenālī Rāmaliṅgādu’s parody of Allasani Peddana, recounted by V. Narayana Rao in this book. In an effort to take seriously what South Asian literary traditions have taken seriously—perhaps the cardinal methodological principle of this volume—we have tried to be as exact as our sources in attending to their language practices. Accordingly, when transliterating we provide full diacritical marks, appropriate to each language tradition. The guide to pronunciation aims to make as clear as possible to the nonspecialist reader the practical significance of these sometimes extremely subtle distinctions—whose importance to the literary traditions derives in part precisely from their subtlety. The guide is meant to assist in pronunciation; in a few cases, diacritics that are necessary for orthographic precision but have no effect on pronunciation are provided in the text of the book but omitted from the guide. Anglicisms are given without diacritics (thus we write “Vaishnavism” but “Viṣṇu,” “shastric” but sāstra). For words commonly Anglicized we have generally followed Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary except where it misleads (thus we write “Shudra” instead of “Sudra”). We similarly write language names and scripts without diacritics (thus “Sanskrit,” “Brahmi” instead of “Brāhmī”), as well as the names of modern writers that are typically Anglicized (thus, “Rabindranath Tagore,” not “Rabindranāth Ṭhākur”). Titles of works that are compounds are transliterated as such (thus Sūrṣāgar instead of Sūr-sāgar or Sūr Sāgar).

Questions of literary-cultural space have proved to be as important in the eyes of many contributors to this book as questions of history. Whereas dates have normally been transformed into their corresponding Common Era year without much difficulty, spatial issues, especially the correct location of regions and towns but also their spelling, often proved to be more intractable. For modern place names current official spelling has been followed (e.g., Chennai), and the usual colonial-era spellings when colonial-era places are discussed (e.g., Madras); both are written without diacritics. The situation is more complex for the premodern period, where the historical geography is riddled with uncertainties. Not only do multiple spellings abound, but numerous places are difficult to locate precisely on a map. Yet even if the spatial sensibilities of many of the authors discussed here may have differed, sometimes considerably, from those of modern mapmakers, producing the very uncertainties we now confront, the places with which they concerned
themselves in their literary works had their own vital reality. It was therefore imperative for us to try to represent these as accurately as possible, however elusive accuracy sometimes turned out to be. Toponyms are given in the spelling historically appropriate for the map in question, with modern names or identifications often added parenthetically (thus Orugallu [Warangal], Daşapura [Chattisgarh]). Special thanks go to Whitney Cox of the University of Chicago for help in assembling the toponyms referred to in the book, and to Bill Nelson for his careful cartography.

The Literary Cultures in History (LCH) project was initially organized by V. Narayana Rao and myself when we were members of the Joint Committee on South Asia (JCSA) of the Social Science Research Council/American Council of Learned Societies. It was conceived originally as the second component of JCSA’s South Asia Humanities Project (1991–1994), of which I was director. The program officers at the Council, Toby Alice Volkman and Itty Abraham, offered early support and advice that proved decisive to the long-term health of the project. One member of JCSA in particular, David Ludden of the University of Pennsylvania, has been a continuing source of encouragement and inspiration. It is regrettable that the Council’s area committees have since been eliminated and can no longer aid in the incubation of new research such as this.

Francine Berkowitz of the Smithsonian Institution made available funds for a workshop in Hyderabad in 1994, and a gathering the following year in New Delhi, that enabled the project to advance substantially. The Central University, Hyderabad, and the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, both provided various forms of support, and sincere thanks are expressed to Professor K. K. Ranganathacharyulu of Central University and Dr. U. R. Ananthamurthy, then president of the Akademi. Some of the ideas that were eventually developed into core concerns of the LCH project emerged directly out of the Hyderabad workshop and were first published in a special number of Social Scientist that I edited: “Literary History, Region, and Nation in South Asia” (Social Scientist 23.10–12 [1995]). I particularly thank Atluri Murali of the Central University, Hyderabad, who first recommended the collection of conference papers to the journal, and Rajendra Prasad, editor of Social Scientist.

The execution of this project would have been impossible without the support of the National Endowment for the Humanities from 1995–1999 (grant RO-22868). The Endowment’s Collaborative Research Grant Program is the only one of its kind in the United States and is thus a truly precious resource for experimental forms of cooperative scholarship. Elizabeth Arndt, program officer for the Collaborative Research Grant Program, was wonderfully helpful throughout the grant period.

A grant from the Rockefeller Foundation enabled the LCH group to hold its final meeting at the Foundation’s Bellagio Study and Conference Center. I am grateful to Susan Garfield at the New York office for her help, and to
the staff at the Villa Serbelloni for their truly gracious hospitality. Thanks also go to the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi; the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures, University of Wisconsin; and the Committee on Southern Asian Studies and the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago for hosting earlier meetings of the group.

Of the seventeen contributors to this book, ten have had a close relationship with the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago, whether as permanent or visiting faculty or as graduate students. This is more evidence, were more needed, of the University’s long and firm commitment to South Asian literary studies, one that is unparalleled in the United States. Twenty-five years ago, several of our distinguished predecessors in the department—Edward C. Dimock, A. K. Ramanujan, and J. A. B. van Buitenen—collectively published a new orientation to the field of study (The Literatures of India: An Introduction, University of Chicago Press, 1974). It is a source of great satisfaction to the contributors associated with the university that we have been able to honor the memory of these men, their teachers, colleagues, and friends, by continuing the tradition they inaugurated.

Other members of the Chicago South Asia community merit special thanks: James Nye, director of the South Asia Language and Area Center; Ralph Nicholas, former director of the Center for International Studies, and the entire Committee on Southern Asia Studies. In the Humanities Division, Dean Philip Gossett provided financial support in the initial phase; Gilda Reyes, Kathy Watson, Henry Way, and John Whaley offered welcome administrative assistance.

Many other individuals helped in crucial ways in the course of the project and during the production of this book. Robert Devens, my editorial assistant, was unfailingly responsive, impeccably well-organized, and marvelously insightful about the overall organization of the book and each individual chapter. Three superb program assistants, Alyssa Ayres, Daniel Klingensmith, and Andrew Sartori, made the task of organizing the project, especially our periodic meetings, far lighter than it would otherwise have been. A number of my extraordinary graduate students at Chicago worked as research assistants or helped in other significant ways. I am deeply grateful to Yigal Bronner, Allison Busch, Prithvidatta Chandrashobhi, Whitney Cox, Guy Leavitt, and Lawrence McCrea. James Nye and Bronwen Bledsoe, the remarkably accomplished South Asian bibliographers at Joseph Regenstein Library, provided help to many of the contributors over the life of the project.

At the University of California Press I thank first and foremost Lynne Withey, the associate director, for her strong support and encouragement from her first acquaintance with the project in 1994. I was fortunate to have the help of a skillful acquisitions editor in Reed Malcolm. Erika Bûky, assis-
tant managing editor of the Press, provided superb editorial guidance on all matters concerned with the production of a book whose complexity challenged us all. Carolyn Bond proved to be a peerless copyeditor, combining deep knowledge of South Asian languages and cultures with unfailing literary good sense. That the Indian edition is being published by Oxford University Press, Delhi, is due to Rukun Advani, long-time director of academic publications at OUP and now managing editor of Permanent Black. I have greatly valued his enthusiasm and support for the project since its inception.

For their various acts of assistance and goodwill I also thank Seema Alavi, Benedict Anderson, Kunal Chakrabarty, David Damrosch, Ute Gregorius, George Hart, Jesse Knutson, Colin Masica, Walter Mignolo, Mithilesh Mishra, Mithi Mukherjee, Panna Naik, John Perry, Shantanu Phukan, Joseph Schwartzberg, Clinton Seely, and Sunil Sharma.

The literatures of South Asia constitute remarkable achievements of global significance. They are magnificent in their own right and invaluable for what they can tell us, once we learn to listen, about matters of concern to people everywhere—about the power of culture, the culture of power, the uses of the past, or the nature of literary beauty. I know I speak on behalf of all the contributors when I say that whatever else they may accomplish with this book, they hope to have communicated something of their fascination with the quest for learning how to listen.

Sheldon Pollock

Chicago, September 2000/October 2002
GUIDE TO PRONUNCIATION

Sounds marked with diacritics in the book that have more of an orthographic than a phonetic significance in South Asia (e.g., Persian ژ or ی, which are pronounced as English z and t respectively) are ignored in this guide. Conversely, some distinctions made in pronunciation but rarely represented in orthography are merely noted here.

INDIC

“Indic” is a theoretical construct devised here to function as the baseline language.

Vowels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vowel</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>like u in “but”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>à</td>
<td>like a in “father”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>like i in “bit”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>í</td>
<td>like ee in “beet”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>u</td>
<td>like oo in “look”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>û</td>
<td>like oo in “pool”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ŋ</td>
<td>like ri in “rig” (in the north), like roo in “root” (in the south), but slightly trilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>like a in “gate”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ai</td>
<td>like i in “high”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o</td>
<td>like o in “rote”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>au</td>
<td>like ou in “house”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Consonants

k like  in “skate”
kh like  in “Kate”
g like  in “gate”
gh like  in “big house”
\( \hat{n} \) like \( n \) in “sing”
c like  in “eschew”
ch like  in “much help”
j like  in “judge”
jh like  in “budge her”
\( \hat{n} \) like \( n \) in “cinch” before  ,  ,  ,  
\( \hat{t}, \hat{d} \) like English  and  , but with the tongue curved back so as to touch the front of the hard palate
\( \hat{l} \) like English  , but with the tongue curved back so as to touch the front of the hard palate
\( \hat{th}, \hat{dh} \) as  and  , but with aspiration
\( \tilde{n} \) like English  but with the tongue curved back (as in American English “corn”)
t, d like English  and  , but with the tip of the tongue touching the teeth (like the  in “breadth”)
th, dh as  and  , but with aspiration
n like  in “nose”
p like  in “spin”
ph like  in “pin”
b like  in “bin”
bh like  in “club house”
m like  in “mother”
y like  in “yellow”
r like  in “drama”
l like  in “love”
v produced with the slightest contact between the upper teeth and the lower lip; closer to the  in “wile” than the  in “vile”
\( \hat{s} \) like  in “shove”
\( \hat{\varsigma} \) as \( \hat{s} \), but with the tongue curled slightly back
\( \varsigma \) like  in “so”
h like  in “hope”
m a nasalization of the vowel that precedes it
\( \hat{\varsigma} \) an aspiration of the vowel that precedes it (thus,  is pronounced “deva[ha]”)
BANGLA

As in Indic, with the following distinctions:

Vowels

a like aw in “awe”; as Indic o when preceding an i or a u, or when following a final conjunct consonant; thus Pārtha is pronounced “Pārtho.” Modern Bangla does not distinguish between long and short i and u in pronunciation; both are pronounced as the long vowel.

Consonants

v as b
s as Indic ś in most cases, but like the s in “stair” when followed immediately by a dental consonant or r; like the s in “scare” or “spare” when initial in a word and followed by a velar or a bilabial, respectively.
š as Indic ı
Consonant clusters comprising dissimilar consonants behave predictably but varies. The ks cluster, for example, is pronounced “kh” when initial in a word and “kkh” when internal. Thus, Lakṣmi is pronounced “Lokkhi” (note also that the m is lost altogether), and kṣatriya “khotrio.”
m represents the velar nasal

GUJARATI

As in Indic, with the following distinctions:

Vowels

Additional low-front vowels and “murmured” vowels exist in speech but are not represented in the orthography.
a not pronounced in final position, though often preserved in transcription; thus, dharma is pronounced “dharma”

Additionally, vowels pronounced with nasality are represented thus: ō, etc.
HINDI

As in Indic, with the following distinctions:

**Vowels**
- a not pronounced in final position, though often preserved in transliteration; thus, *dharma* is pronounced “dharm”
- ai like a in “sad”
- au like au in “caught”

Additionally, vowels pronounced with nasality are represented thus: õ, etc.

**Consonants**
Hindi has several consonants not present in the standard Indic repertoire.

These are:
- r̥ as ḍ, but with the tip of the tongue flapping the roof of the mouth quickly (distinguish this from Indic vocalic r, transliterated as ṭ)
- r̥h as ṭ, but with aspiration
- f like f in “fast,” but tends to be replaced by the Indic sound ph
- z like z in “zoo,” but tends to be replaced by the Indic sound j
- s as Indic ś

KANNADA

As in Indic, with the following distinctions:

**Vowels**
In addition to Indic e and o (written as ē and ō in Kannada), Kannada includes the short vowels e and a. The long vowels tend to be more open (like e in “net” or even “gnat,” and au in “caught”), and the short vowels more closed, as in Indic. Word-initial e, o, ē, ō are usually pronounced ye, wo, yē, wō.

**Consonants**
Old Kannada also has an additional consonantal r̥ pronounced as a very harsh r̥ and an additional consonantal ṅ, pronounced as a retroflexed r̥.

The aspirated consonants in Sanskrit loanwords are preserved in writing but are not distinguished in pronunciation except in the careful speech of educated speakers.
MALAYALAM
As in Indic, with the following distinctions:

Vowels
Malayalam includes the Tamil short e and o.

The word-final “minimal vowel” u of Tamil is generally marked in Malayalam script; there is no standard diacritic to represent it in transliteration, and so it is not distinguished here from the unmarked, short u.

Consonants
Malayalam includes the Tamil n, r, and l.

The set of Tamil nasal-conjunct and intervocalic contrasts operates for the Malayalam consonant system, but with intervocalic k and c realized more as a lax g and a lax j, respectively.

The contrasts of voicing and aspiration at the beginning of a word are graphically taken over from and ideally pronounced as in Indic. Within a word, however, the Tamil nasal-conjunct and intervocalic contrasts generally override these graphic distinctions in pronunciation.

r is pronounced as a trill, and the conjuncts nr and rr are pronounced like nd in English “end,” and t in “bit,” respectively; l is pronounced as in Tamil.

PALL
As in Indic.

PERSIAN
As in Indic, with the following distinctions (Indo-Persian differs considerably from modern Iranian Persian, retaining some older pronunciations):

Vowels
è as Indic e
ô as Indic o
ai like a in “sad”
au like au in “caught”
Consonants

' weak glottal stop, like in “li’l Abner”
q like k in “skate” but pronounced much further back in the throat
kh like ch in Scottish “loch”
gh like r in French “rien” (though pronounced from the back of the throat)
zh like s in “leisure”
r lightly trilled, with the tip of the tongue against the teeth

SANSKRIT

As in Indic.

SINDHI

As in Indic, with the distinctions and additions included under Urdu, as well as the following:

Consonants

Four distinctive implosive consonants, sometimes written ñ, ñ, ñ, ñ at the beginning of a word, are pronounced by sucking in rather than expelling the breath.

SINHALA

As in Indic, with the following distinctions:

Vowels

In addition to Indic e and o (written as ē and ō in Sinhala), Sinhala includes the short vowels e and o.

â like e in “edify”

Consonants

Half-nasals occur before certain voiced stops, being pronounced in a manner similar to the corresponding full nasals, but kept very short.
Tamil

As in Indic, with the following distinctions:

Vowels

In addition to Indic e and o (written as ē and ē in Tamil), Tamil includes the short vowels e and o. Word-initial e, o, ē, ē are pronounced ye, wo, yē, wō.

The diphthong au, rare in Tamil and occurring almost exclusively in Sanskrit loans, frequently resolves into avu.

Word-final u is pronounced as a u with the lips spread rather than rounded.

Consonants

There are no aspirates.

Tamil orthography does not have separate characters for voiced stops (g, j, d, d, and b). These are represented by the corresponding unvoiced stops (k, c, t, t, and p) under the following conditions:

- After nasals: thus, Tamil ňk = Indic ňg
- When single p, t, or t occurs between two vowels, it is pronounced as a weakened b, d, or d, respectively (that is, with loose contact and some friction). However, k or c occurring between two vowels is pronounced as h (sometimes as g) or s, respectively.

In initial position, pronunciation depends on the word in question. Tarumam (Skt. dharma) is pronounced darumam (never dharumam), but tampi is pronounced tambi.

n, r like English n and r; however, nn is pronounced like ndr in “laundry,” and rr like tr in “tree”

Tamil orthography does not have separate characters for voiced stops (g, j, d, d, and b). These are represented by the corresponding unvoiced stops (k, c, t, t, and p) under the following conditions:

- After nasals: thus, Tamil ňk = Indic ňg
- When single p, t, or t occurs between two vowels, it is pronounced as a weakened b, d, or d, respectively (that is, with loose contact and some friction). However, k or c occurring between two vowels is pronounced as h (sometimes as g) or s, respectively.

In initial position, pronunciation depends on the word in question. Tarumam (Skt. dharma) is pronounced darumam (never dharumam), but tampi is pronounced tambi.

n, r like English n and r; however, nn is pronounced like ndr in “laundry,” and rr like tr in “tree”

Telugu

As in Indic, with the following distinctions:

Vowels

In addition to Indic e and o (written as ē and ē in Telugu), Telugu includes the short vowels e and o. Word-initial e, o, ē, ē are pronounced ye, wo, yē, wō.
Consonants

In native Dravidian words, \( c \) and \( j \) are pronounced \( ts \) and \( dz \) respectively, except before \( i \) and \( e \); thus, \( c\acute{\text{u}}\acute{\text{d}}u \) is pronounced “tsoodu.” (Some transcriptions represent this by the signs \( ç \) and \( < \), a practice not followed here). In Sanskrit loan words, \( c \) and \( j \) are pronounced as in Indic.

The aspirated consonants in Sanskrit loanwords are preserved in writing but are not distinguished in pronunciation except in the careful speech of educated speakers.

TIBETAN

The transcription of Tibetan in English introduces special problems because the pronunciation of the spoken language does not closely correspond to the orthography of the literary language. For this reason, a transliteration of Tibetan spellings is of little use to the ordinary reader, who will have no way of knowing that, for example, \( bsgrubs \) and \( dbyings \) are currently pronounced “drup” and “ying,” respectively. On the other hand, students of classical Tibetan usually prefer the literal transcription to simplified phonetic schemes. The solution adopted here is to give all Tibetan personal and place names occurring in the text in a simplified phonetic transcription that approximates the pronunciation of modern Central Tibetan. Book titles, technical terms, and peculiarities of language that are mentioned parenthetically or discussed in the annotations are given in a formal transliteration of the classical Tibetan, using a system based on that of Wylie.

Vowels

As in Indic, with the following distinctions:
\( \ddot{o}, \ddot{u} \) like \( \ddot{o} \) and \( \ddot{u} \) in German

Consonants

As in Indic, with the following distinctions:

- Tibetan has additional consonants: \( ng, ny, tr, trh, dr, ts, tsh, dz, w, sh, z, zh \). Of these, \( ng, ny, tr, dr, w, sh, \) and \( z \) are similar to their values in English; \( trh \) is like \( tr \) but with strong aspiration; \( ts \) resembles \( ts \) in English “bets”; \( tsh \) is a strongly aspirated version of \( ts \); \( dz \) resembles the \( dz \) in “adze”; \( zh \) is similar to \( s \) in “leisure” or \( j \) in French words such as “jamais.”
URDU

As in Indic, with some distinctions and additions included under Hindi and Persian. These are:

Vowels

ai like a in “sad”
au like au in “caught”

Additionally, vowels pronounced with nasality are represented thus: oñ, etc. 
 represents various vowel sounds in different contexts

Consonants

r as d, but with the tip of the tongue flapping the roof of the mouth quickly
rh as r, but with aspiration
q like k in “skate” but pronounced much further back in the throat
kh like ch in Scottish “loch”
gh like r in French “rien” (though pronounced from the back of the throat)
z like z in “zoo”
zh like s in “leisure”

WORKS CONSULTED

Map 1. Contemporary South Asia.
Map 2. South Asia, c. 1200. Toponyms in italic type represent dynasties.
Map 3. Central and South Asia, c. 1600.
Map 4. Southern India, c. 1800.
Map 5. Western India, c. 1500.
Introduction

Sheldon Pollock

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 *piśācas*, 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. 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 tra-

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.
ditional 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.

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 pingal texts in Old Gujarati or riti kavya in Brajbhasha or ghazals 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 quali-

---

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 non-religious, 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).
tative 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.

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 congener: 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 (1903–1932) was to have so profound an impact, for good and ill, on the understanding and

---

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.
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 *Kavitarita* (Lives of the poets), written in a mode that preserved something of the old *taz kirah*, was published in 1865, and a history of Bangla literature on the European model appeared seven years later. 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.

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.

6. For the Gujarati text, see Dave [1865] 1996–. The *taz kirah* model is discussed by Alam, Faruqi, and especially Pritchett (chapters 2, 14, and 15) in this volume. The Bangla work is Ramgati Nāyāaratma’s *Bāngalā bhasā o Bāngalā sāhiyā visayak 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 Rangalā Bandopādhyāya’s “Bāngalā Kavitā visayāk” (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.”

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 Taraqqi-e-Urdû, or Society for the Advancement of Urdu, founded in 1905; a branch shifted to Karachi in 1947). The Bâmla Academy (Bangladesh) has been in existence since 1973. In Nepal, the Gorkha Bhâsa Prâkâśini Samiti (Committee for the Dissemination of the Gurkha Language), founded in 1913, became the Nepâli Bhâsa Prâkâśini Samiti after Nepali was declared the national language in 1959. The Sri Lanka Sâhitya Mandalaya 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 Bangiya Sâhitya Parishad) 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 (“dharma-sāstra and juridical literature”), cosmology (“Śaṃkhya 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”).

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. 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. Moreover, seen as inclusiveness rather than imprecision,
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.\(^\text{12}\) 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.”\(^\text{13}\)

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-

---


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.”

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

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, ethnies), 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

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.”
with Latin, Arabic, Italian, and so on) that we must understand if we are to understand the historical development of French literature.

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.  

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

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.
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

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. 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. 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.

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

20. See for example Bourdieu 1996: xvi ff., 286 ff.; and more programatically 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.  

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

21. I consider the relativities in play in the terms “cosmopolitan” and “vernacular” in Pollock 1998.
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.

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. 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 Cāminātāiyar (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.

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 Theragatha and Therigatha (Verses of the male elders; Verses of the female elders) or the balladlike portions of the Suttanipata (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 Vessantarajataka (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 con-
solidation 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 *tazkirah* in Persian and Urdu. In chapter 15, Frances Pritchett explores in detail the complexities of this form of “remembrance” (the root meaning of *tazkirah*), 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 *tazkirah* in Persian was produced not in Iran but in the Panjab (in the *Lubāb al-albāb* of Sadid al-Din Muḥammad ‘Aṭfī, 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 *tazkirah* 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 Azād produced the *Āb-e hayāt* (The water of life), a *tazkirah* 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 *tazkirah* 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. 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 Viraśāivas (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 re-

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.
dundancy 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.

Consider the case of Eluttacchan, the low-caste poet who composed the Malayalam Rāmāyana 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 Eluttacchan. It tells us something about the place of this multiform narrative, the Rāmāyana, 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

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

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 vačana, “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. 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 inter-

26. Recall, however, that woodblock printing was used in Tibet from about the thirteenth century.
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 mushah’irah, 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.

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 Vashaschandra 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 Lilātilakam 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 them-
selves 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. Sham-sur 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,” “Hindu”), “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 (premakhya), who for their mystical practice (the sama’) 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. 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

---

27. I discuss the notions of “voluntaristic” and “coercive” forms of cosmopolitanism in Pollock 2000.
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.”

The term manipravāla (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.

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

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 Śri 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 keralōtpatti (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 Hindi) 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. 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

29. See Pollock 1996.
in some imaginary totality. Scholars were accordingly invited to contribute to this volume who were interested in literary processes, wherever they might be working.

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.” 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. Ver-

nacularization may everywhere employ similar techniques, but does not everywhere produce a similar discourse of identity.

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.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


——— et al., eds. 1985–. *Subaltern Studies.* 9 vols. to date. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
PART 1

Globalizing Literary Cultures
In contrast to most other literary cultures examined in this book, Sanskrit literature has a long and deep tradition of scholarship. A serious attempt at a comprehensive account appeared by the middle of the nineteenth century, and today many single- and multi-volume histories are available.\(^1\) Without the foundation this impressive body of work provides, the historical study of Sanskrit literature would be hard indeed to undertake. At the same time, this scholarship, like all human works, has been shaped by the categories and assumptions of its times, and these seem especially vulnerable to criticism from the theoretical perspective adopted in the present volume.

The difficulty of defining the object of analysis, to which the introduction to this volume has called attention, is in evidence everywhere in Sanskrit literary scholarship. For many writers, “literature” embraces everything preserved in writing, or even in speech. Narrower definitions prove to be arbitrary stipulations or mere tautologies, and hand-me-down qualifiers such as “classical” are typically left unexplained.\(^2\) Implicitly, Sanskrit literature is usually understood to be Brahmanical and, by preference, the oldest literature, the Veda, the body of orally transmitted texts of myth and ritual; post-Vedic Sanskrit literature remains for many present-day scholars merely “pretty” and “curious,” as the nineteenth-century scholar F. Max Müller put it, and

---

1. Weber 1852. Among the more influential texts following upon Weber are Müller 1859, Lövi 1890, Krishnamacariar 1906 (and 1937), Winternitz 1908–1922, and Keith 1923 and 1928. The most serious one-volume work to appear recently is Lienhard 1984; six volumes of A. K. Warder’s survey (Warder 1972–) have been published to date. Good regional accounts include De 1960, Banerji 1965, and Raja 1980.

2. For some of these definitions, see the introduction to this volume. Lienhard does define “classical” but darkly: it means “literature that is of a sufficiently high standard to apply the ever-growing canon of poetic rules in a manner that conforms to the traditions of poetry” (1984: 2, 48).
hardly an object of serious intellectual engagement. Sanskrit and India have long been treated as synonyms; works called “Indian theater” and “Indian literature” can unproblematically concern themselves with Sanskrit theater and Sanskrit literature alone. The India that constitutes the conceptual framework of such works, moreover, presents itself as a natural kind, directly given and knowable. At the same time, the prolific genre of regional study (“Bengal’s contribution to Sanskrit literature” and the like) never asks what the regionalization of Sanskrit might signify. History itself is an equally straightforward matter: pure chronological sequence without content, as if time merely passed and nothing passed with it. The dominant literary method is everywhere subjective evaluation, and its standards of taste appear as inerrant as they are unself-conscious. “Too much learning will adversely affect a poem” is a Romantic axiom widely if anachronistically applied by modern scholars, and it is easy to foresee its evaluative consequences for a world where learning could never be too much. In the first comprehensive literary history to appear in post-Independence India, precious little is left that is considered worth reading.\(^3\) Even those most sympathetic to the wider Indian world seem to care little for Sanskrit literature. It is with some wonder, therefore, that one registers what has become of the literary culture that for two millennia exercised a unique fascination for people across all of Asia: few today are able to read its great achievements, and fewer even bother.

This curious state of affairs, where our categories of analysis and our judgment seem radically at odds with our object of inquiry and its historical importance, suggests that we need to rethink the research questions with which we approach Sanskrit literature. Is there something we have not fully appreciated that might bring us closer to understanding its cultural life, something we can perhaps capture by exploring how Sanskrit has understood itself? Might it be worth having a better idea of what those who produced Sanskrit culture actually said about the different kinds of texts they made and the different kinds of meanings those texts were thought to bear? We read Sanskrit literature today in printed books, but what were the media of Sanskrit literature before printing, and what were their implications for the experience of literary culture? We might wish to ask directly an even more fundamental question: What did it mean to choose to write in Sanskrit in the first place? This entails asking as well what Sanskrit actually is and in what sense writing in Sanskrit was in fact a choice. Our historical analysis might benefit from understanding how Sanskrit writers themselves conceived of and used their literary past—indeed, it might benefit from appreciating the very fact that they had such conceptions and uses. What, for example, are we to make of their assertion that what they named kāvya—for which the En-

\(^3\) Dasgupta and De 1962. The judgment on the dangers of learning is that of Lienhard 1984: 4.
glish word “literature” in one of its senses is a good translation—had a begin-
ingning in time? If it began, can we concomitantly say that it has ended, and if so, when and under what circumstances? And what might the history of its end tell us about what was necessary to keep it alive? And last, if India is not a natural kind, what in fact is it as far as Sanskrit’s spatial imagination is concerned?

A lot of questions remain in the study of Sanskrit literary culture—complex and largely unasked questions—and many volumes would be needed to respond to them responsibly for a corpus of texts as vast as that available in Sanskrit. The present chapter is the place to try to state the unasked questions clearly, to explain their cultural importance and theoretical kinship, and to suggest some possible ways of going about answering them. This can best be done by examining a relatively small selection of authors and texts that have exemplary status within the traditions of Sanskrit literary culture and by focusing both on moments that mark points of discontinuity—when newness entered or left the Sanskrit world—and on long-term trends that, as will become clear, signify not so much stagnation as achieved perfection of literary culture.

THE IDEA OF LITERATURE IN SANSKRIT THOUGHT

The introduction to this volume assesses some of the answers that twentieth-century Western scholarship has given to the slippery question of what is literature. Aside from anything else we may learn from them, their disagreements about the object of analysis suggest that, a fortiori, Western science alone is inadequate for understanding the different language phenomena and textual practices encountered in the non-West. An indigenist turn, toward local knowledge, would seem to recommend itself easily; for the meanings of texts and language practices that should concern us here in the first instance, in any case, are those historically available to the primary producers and users of the texts. But, in addition, Sanskrit has a long and sophisticated tradition of reflection on “things made of language”—to use the capacious word *vānimaya* that often provides the starting point for its textual typologies. And this reflection came to produce those very things even as it was refined by them in turn, and not just within the world of Sanskrit culture narrowly conceived. The theory no less than the practice of Sanskrit *kavya*, as almost every chapter in this volume demonstrates, was the single most powerful determinant of vernacular conceptions of literature until it was supplemented or displaced by Persian and English counterparts.

There are sound reasons, then, why local knowledge should command our attention. But I name the turn toward it “indigenist” with a slightly pejorative accent to signal the hazards of looking at culture only from the inside out. The very fact that a representation is held to be traditional induces
us to naturalize it, to render it valid across all times, languages, orders of society. But while there may be remarkable unanimity among Sanskrit thinkers about what differentiates the various things made of language, their definitions undoubtedly reduce complexity, as definitions are meant to do. Marginal cases—sometimes precisely the kinds of texts that make history by disrupting dominant definitions—were excluded, while the very fact of ruling some things in necessarily ruled others out. Any adequate analysis of Sanskrit literary discourse would be expected to recover something of this history, reading it now positively as an account of what was said, and now critically as an account of what was unsaid, and even mis-said: unsaid because no description can exhaust the phenomena it addresses, and mis-said because Sanskrit literary theory, like its object, was enunciated within a field of power and was in the full sense hegemonic in that field. It represented the expression of the culturally dominant—just how dominant can be inferred from the often-resistant work of vernacular literati explored throughout this volume.

Whatever we may conclude about the nature of Sanskrit kāvya from examining the works themselves, local theorization about it began at a remarkably late date. The first such texts, Bhāmaha’s Kāvyālaṃkāra (Ornament of kāvya) and Daṇḍin’s Kāvyādarsa (Mirror of kāvya), belong to the second half of the seventh century, and though Bhāmaha alludes to some predecessors, there is no reason to think that major works from a much earlier period have been lost. The Nāṭyaśāstra (Treatise on drama) attributed to the sage Bharata may in some early and now-vanished form have been contemporaneous with the earliest extant dramas, which are dated to the second century; Kālidāsa in the fourth century and Amara in his lexicon a short time later were the first to testify to the existence of a work so named. But Bharata’s main concern is the structure of drama, not the theory of the literary, however much it may have helped to shape that theory—especially the understanding of how literature embodies emotion (rasa). Generally speaking, Sanskrit literary theory is a tardy development, remarkably tardy considering what the theory itself regards as the historical origins of the literary culture.

What divides this remarkable tradition of reflection, which continued to ponder innovatively the nature of kāvya for a thousand years, until Jagana-

---

4. Here we can invoke a tradition of criticism found in the genre of virttika, whose purpose is precisely to expose all three points (uktānuktānuktārthāvyakti).

5. The text was subject to revision and rearrangement especially at the hands of Kashmiri editor-commentators, who seem to have rediscovered its importance in the eighth or ninth century. On the sometimes irreducible incoherence in the present text, especially in the rasa chapter, see Srinivasan 1980. For a sympathetic reading of the work, particularly its relation with early drama, see Bansat-Boudon 1992.
nātha PaṇḍītaRāja in the mid-seventeenth century, is minor in comparison
with what unifies it. Its sense of purpose may have changed between the sev-
enth and the tenth centuries, away from an original ideal prescriptivism to-
ward an analysis of actually existing texts. Yet the habit of sedimentation
(rather than the will to supersession) demonstrated in Sanskrit intellectual
history across all disciplines ensured the preservation of earlier components
of the discourse on kāvyā even as they were supplemented by new insights
and interests. Thus the preoccupation with the analysis of tropes (artha-
lanākāra) that marked the discourse at its commencement, for example, re-
mained central at its end, with Jagannātha still devoting more than two-thirds
of his treatise to the topic—precisely the percentage of the earliest texts.

Organized thinking about kāvyā originated with the aim of providing the
rules by which an aspiring writer could produce good kāvyā. For Daṇḍin,
whose Mirror is the most influential textbook of its kind in the history of sou-
thern Asia, these rules covered a broad range of phenomena that, combined
and ordered, provide us with an influential pragmatic definition of what kāvyā
was held to be.6 In ascending order of elaboration, Daṇḍin’s rules can be
grouped according to the following topics:

the choice of language, and its relation to the choice of genre;
the components of genre, exemplified by the eighteen story elements
(kathāvastu) of description and narration that constitute the genre
called great kāvyā (māhākāvyā), or chapter composition (sarga-
bandha);
the Ways (mārga) of kāvyā, regional styles defined by the presence
or absence of the expression-forms (guna), various features
of phonology, syntax, and semantics;
factors of beauty (alanākāra), the figures of sound and sense.

While quite schematic in some areas, Daṇḍin’s treatment isolated tend-
encies that were to remain key long into the future. In regard to language
choice, for example, Daṇḍin shows that in the seventh century kāvyā, or lit-
erature as such, was a phenomenon restricted to the transregional cos-
mopolitan languages; the vernacular was entirely excluded. The thematic
construction of the great kāvyā, or courtly epic, which is offered as exempl-
ary of all other genres, required a given mix of descriptive and narrative
topics. The descriptive concerns the natural order (such as sunrise, sunset,
seasons) and the social order (festive gatherings, water sports, lovemaking),
whereas the narrative concerns the political order (councils of state, em-

6. On the impact of the Mirror in Sri Lanka, Tibet, and Karnataka, see respectively Hallisey
(chapter 12), Kapstein (chapter 13), and Nagaraj (chapter 5), this volume, as well as Pollock
1998a. It was also adapted in Tamil in the Tanṭiyalāṅkāra (probably late twelfth century) and
in Pali in the Subodhālāṅkāra (thirteenth century).
basses, military expeditions). These topics find expression in virtually every courtly epic; and every one of these, moreover, is adapted from well-known tales. Clearly, kāvya was not something read for the plot—or perhaps for any simple discursive content. Other ends were sought, such as those the next two of Daṇḍin’s categories suggest. The Ways concern the very language stuff that constituted the literary text. And as his exposition of the Ways demonstrates, and even more so that of the tropes (this takes up the great part of his treatise), whatever else kāvya may have been about, it was for Daṇḍin also an exploration of the nature and power of language itself.

Although it is not certain that Daṇḍin nowhere cites actually existing poetry, he appears to produce ad hoc his own illustrations of the rules he formulates. This procedure, which is of a piece with the general prescriptive tone of the work, implies that in its earliest embodiment the discourse on kāvya was intended not to explain it but to help produce it. It was knowledge meant in the first instance for writers, not readers, even while it inevitably shaped readerly expectations. The move away from normative prescription to theoretically informed description is first clearly visible in a late-eighth-century text whose character is clearly indicated by its title, Scientific Principles of Literature (Kāvyaśāstra). But even this work basically agrees with Daṇḍin about what constitutes its object; the Ways of kāvya and tropes continue to dominate the discussion. A far more profound conceptual innovation occurred in ninth- and tenth-century Kashmir. Ānandavardhana (c. 850) theorized kāvya anew by making use of materials that had not previously enjoyed critical scrutiny: the Prakrit lyric (gāthā) from perhaps the second or third century; and the Mahābhārata, the preeminent “narrative of the way things were” (iśthāṣā) that was textualized during the early centuries of the first millennium. The former enabled Ānanda to develop his new understanding of kāvya as meaning-without-saying (dhvani, aesthetic suggestion or implication); the latter allowed him to demonstrate how the meaning of the work as a whole resides in an emotional content (rasa) that can be communicated only by suggestion. Ānanda’s successors in the next two centuries, especially Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka and Abhinavagupta, transformed the very concept of rasa. In line with the new attention to understanding actual literature (and perhaps in association with new theological concerns), they thought of rasa as a phenomenon less of the text in itself than of the reader’s response to the text. Analytical emphasis was shifted from the textual processes of meaning

---

7. At Kavyadarsa 2.274, 280, 282, 291, and 3.7, 9, Daṇḍin appears to cite from poetry based on Mahābhārata themes; none of the verses are from the epic itself and I am unable to trace them. His immediate predecessor, Bhāmaha, cites from authors and works unknown to us and to the later tradition (one Rāmasārman, author of the Aranyottara, at Kāvyadarsa 2.19; a Śākhāvardhana at 2.47; the Aśokakhaṇḍa and the Rājamanu at 2.45).
production (how literature makes emotion perceptible) and the construction of social subjectivity (why characters act the way they do) to the modes of our depersonalized experience (why we like sad stories). These were significant—even radical—reorientations in the discourse on kāvya. But they have usually been ascribed an importance quite at variance with their historical effects. For although the new conceptions about literature in medieval Kashmir influenced its interpretation across South Asia (as the reading practices of later commentators suffice to show), they left largely unchanged the way it was composed, even in Kashmir itself.

If we are to grasp the dominant tradition of literary theory, and especially to understand how kāvya was held to differ from other language uses and other kinds of texts, we need to look elsewhere. An irreplaceable guide here is the Śrīgāvānaprakāśa (Illumination of passion) of King Bhoja, who ruled over a fabled court in what is today western Madhya Pradesh from 1011–1055. In the 1800 printed pages of the Illumination, Bhoja sought to summarize the whole of earlier thought at a time before the speculations of the later Kashmiris were widely diffused across the subcontinent and, equally important, before the cosmopolitan literary order started to give way—as it was everywhere about to give way—to the new literary vernacularity.

We get a good sense of Bhoja’s understanding of kāvya from two passages: one where he sets out the organization of the Illumination as a whole and another where he provides a typology of the genus “things made of language,” of which kāvya is only one species. In the first, he tells us that the elements that make up kāvya are words, meanings, and the ways in which words and meanings can be “composed” (this is the three-part framework that will structure his entire exposition):

Tradition holds that kāvya is a composition [sāhitya; also “unity”] of word and meaning: “Word and meaning ‘composed’ [sahīta] constitute kāvya.” What, however, does the word “word” signify? It is that through which, when articulated, meaning is understood, and it is of twelve sorts, starting with base and affix and ending with sentence, section, and whole work. “Meaning” is what a word gives us to understand, and it is of twelve sorts, starting with action and tense and ending with word-meaning and sentence-meaning. And last, “composition” signifies the connection of word and meaning, and it, too, is of twelve sorts, starting with denotation and implication and ending with avoidance of

8. This history is sketched in Pollock 1998b: 1–24, and briefly compared with the shift in American theory in the 1970s from the earlier text-centrism of the New Critics to reader-response criticism. For the new theological concerns of tenth-century Kashmir, see Gerow 1994.
9. This is clearly demonstrated by the work of Ratnākara, Bilhana, Ksemendra, Manikha, and other writers in this period (900–1100). The best history of the revolution in Kashmiri literary theory is McCrea 1997.
faults, employment of expression-forms [guna], connection with factors of beauty [alankara], and presence of rasa.10

The definition cited here of sāhitya—a term used to signify kārya as an object of theoretical reflection—is the celebrated if apparently simple formulation offered four centuries earlier by Bhāmaha.11 And it is entirely proper for Bhoja to begin his work with the quotation. The two ideas here—that what makes kārya different from everything else has essentially to do with language itself, and that, accordingly, literary analysis must center on language—are presuppositions that span the entire history of kārya theory and profoundly influenced its production. Assessments based on extralinguistic features are uncommon in the Sanskrit world. Kārya is never conceived of as a unique epistemic form, for instance, teaching us something otherwise unknowable. We find nothing comparable to the Platonic (and pragmatic) opposition between the mythos of literature and the logos of philosophy. In fact, many masters of systematic thought across the religious and philosophical spectrum wrote kārya, often very unphilosophical kārya. One thinks immediately of Dharmakīrti (c. 650) among the Buddhists, Haribhadra (c. 750) among the Jains, and Śrīhāsa (c. 1150) among the Vedāntins, and such men are the rule rather than the exception. The fact that kārya may be uniquely empowered to make certain truths known to us, accordingly, remains something for Sanskrit readers to work out on their own. Hardly more attention is given to what kārya means as a form of moral reasoning, as a way of understanding how life is to be lived. Although every thinker attributes to literature some didactic role in relation to the ethical, material, emotional, and spiritual realms that make up the four life-goals (purusārthas), rarely does this become an object of sustained scrutiny.12 Here another contrast with Greco-Roman antiquity may usefully be drawn. While Sanskrit culture also recognized a trivium of fundamental learning, it was hermeneutics (mīmāṃsā), not rhetoric, that rounded out grammar and logic. The focus on the scientific analysis of sentence meaning as opposed to the

10. Śṛṇgāra-prakāśa p. 6. All translations here and throughout the chapter are my own unless otherwise noted.

11. Kāvyalankāra of Bhāmaha 1.16. The term sāhitya begins its history here. Its various nuances are discussed at the opening of the Sāhityamāṃsā, an anonymous work of uncertain date and provenance (probably late-medieval south India; it is not by Maṅkha, pace Sāhityamāṃsā pp. ka, kha); the broader history is considered by Raghavan 1978: 82–103; cf. also Krishnamoorthy 1970. Modern Indian writers such as Tagore have sometimes misunderstood, or creatively reunderstood, the term as sa-hita (beneficial) in order to assert a moral function for literature.

12. A rare exception is the Śṛṇgāra-prakāśa itself (chapters 18–21). A century earlier Rājaśekhara defended the truth, morality, and civility of supposedly untrue, immoral, and uncivil poetry (Kāvyamāṃsā pp. 24–25), but the thinness of the discussion indicates how little the matter interested him.
art of forensic persuasion, besides essentially differentiating the two ideals of education, *vyulpatti* and *paideia*, is something that derived from and served to reproduce basic protocols of the reading—and no doubt the making—of literature.

And it is this question, how *kāyva* works as a specific language system—literature not as exhortation but as nontransitive communication, as verbal icon—that interests Sanskrit literary theory to the exclusion of everything else; and this is where its explorations arguably probe deeper than any available from other times or places. The one point of contention among the theorists is how to identify this specificity; the history of discourse on *kāyva* can in fact be described as the history of these different judgments. A later commentator provides just such an account for Kashmiri thinkers of the period 800–1000:

Literature is word-and-meaning employed in a manner different from other language uses. This difference has been analyzed in three distinct ways, depending on what is accorded primacy: (a) some language feature *[dharma]*, such as tropes or expression-forms; (b) some function *[vyāpāra]* such as striking expression or the capacity to produce aesthetic pleasure; or (c) aesthetic suggestion. There are thus five positions, which have been upheld respectively by Udbhaṭa, Vāmana, Kuntaka, Nāyaka, and Ānandavardhana.  

One of the last major works of theory, that of Jagannātha in the mid-seventeenth century, shows how long the analytical dominance of the linguistic had persisted when he defines *kāyva* as “signifiers producing beautiful significations.” As for the modalities of “composition” considered by Bhoja himself, which can be reduced essentially to four that occupy him for most of his treatise, all are language-based: (1) *kāyva* must be “without faults”: the congenital threat of solecism, which is copresent with language use, must be eliminated; (2) expression-forms must be used: the phonetic, semantic, and syntactic character of the literary utterance must be carefully constituted with due attention given to the Ways and their emotional register, *rasa*; (3) figures of sound and sense may or may not be joined to the work (unlike 1 and 2, this is optional); (4) nothing must obstruct the manifestation of *rasa*, which for Bhoja is the linguistic production of an emotion in the text.

A second passage in the *Illumination* shows that the definition of *kāyva* as a particular composition of word and meaning needs further limitation, in

---

13. Samudrabandha (Kerala, c. 1300) on Ruyyaka’s mid-twelfth-century *Alaṅkārasarvavva* (text reproduced in Raghavan 1963: 84). Others award primacy elsewhere, for example to propriety (*auściya*, Ksemendra, mid-eleventh-century Kashmir) or aestheticized emotion (*rasa*, Viśvanātha, fourteenth-century Orissa).
15. See *Śrīgaṇapraśāsa* pp. 662, 528.
addition to the narrowly linguistic, based on the provenance of the text and, more generally, its communicative nature. Theoretically, the peculiar word-meaning unity that defines kāvya—whether this is the presence of expression-forms, or figures, or aesthetic suggestion—can be found anywhere in language. But, in fact, not everything can be kāvya:

Words with unitary meaning constitute a unit of discourse [vākyam]. There are three species of such discourse: Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Apabhramsha. As for Sanskrit discourse, it is of three types: relating to revelation, to the seers, and to the world. Discourse relating to revelation has two subtypes: liturgical formulae [mantra] and liturgical commandments and explanations [brāhmaṇa] . . . .

Discourse relating to the seers is of two sorts: revealed texts remembered [smṛti] and ancient lore [purāṇa]. . . . Discourse relating to the world has two subtypes: kāvya and science, or systematic thought [śāstra].

I take up later the question of the actual languages used for kāvya. Here what requires comment is the three-part categorization of Sanskrit texts according to their origin, whether in transcendent revelation, the mythic realm, or the human world. Like the definition of kāvya, this division of textuality long antedates Bhoja and is never questioned in Sanskrit theory before or after. And it shows that kāvya comprises a very narrow range of phenomena in the universe of things made of language. Although the logic of the typology might be expected to bring us closer to extralinguistic ideas of the literary of the kind mentioned earlier (such as the Platonic), this line of reasoning—about the truth that only fiction can reveal, for example—is rarely pursued. The concerns of Sanskrit thinkers are different.

What exactly are these criteria of provenance and communicative nature that exclude all other types of texts from the realm of kāvya? For many thinkers, a decisive factor is vivakṣā, language usage that depends on what a speaker “wants to say,” or what we might call intention. The literary work is in fact sometimes defined as “a sequence of words, succession of units of discourse, or series of episodes delimited with respect to an intended meaning.”

Intention is a feature able to differentiate literature from other textual forms since, surprisingly, it is not uniformly distributed in the world of textuality. This odd claim is explained in a passage where the Illumination reformulates

16. Śyāmāprakāśa p. 165.
17. Intention is defined at Śyāmāprakāśa p. 376 (vaktur vivaṅgaśādiśādavyanvitāḥ); and the literary work on p. 712 (īśṭārthavācchinnā padopārṇikā vākyopadādhitāḥ prakaranaṇvāti vā prābandhakā). Bhoja here borrows from Daṇḍin: “First of all, the body [of a literary text] is defined as a series of words delimited with respect to an intended meaning” (śārīram [sc., kāvyasya] tāvad īśṭārthavācchinnā padopārṇiḥ, Kāvyādārśa 1.10). Or as Ānandavardhana put it: “The meaning of the words of a literary text rides on the poet’s intention” (vivakṣopānudhā eva hi kāvye śab- dānām arthaḥ, Dhvanyāloka p. 496). Authorial intention figures widely in Sanskrit reading and editing practices. See for example the discussion in Bronner 1998.
the three-fold division of texts according to whether they issue from a normal human agent, from a special agent (a mythic seer), or from no agent whatever. Intention itself varies across these three types:

The essence of texts without agents [i.e., the Veda] lies in their specific wording. Given that there is no original speaker of these texts, the category of intended meaning does not apply here at all. The essence of seers’ texts, which consist of revealed texts remembered and narratives of the ways things were ([itihaśa]), lies in their meaning; in such texts, intended meaning is pure. Both wording and meaning together form the essence of human texts [i.e., kavya]; the prominence of both aspects derives from particular intentions on the part of agents consciously aware of both these dimensions.¹⁸

These distinctions merit a closer look, for we learn what kavya is in part by learning what it is not.

The Veda is excluded from the domain of kavya for various reasons. It exists forever in beginningless time and was composed by no author, human or divine. Since there is no one to have desired in the first place, the “desire to say” (vivakṣa) cannot literally apply.¹⁹ That the Veda’s essence is held to lie in its wording reflects an archaic conviction about the magical efficacy of its purely phonic dimension, embodied in the traditional training of syllable-by-syllable reproduction without attention to signification. At the same time, the Veda does have meaning, which lies primarily in its commandments of moral action (dharmaśāstra). This is in fact its primary signification, one that must not be interpreted away by recourse to secondary language functions associated with kavya, such as implication. While kavya, too, can have real-world entailments—from reading Vālmiki’s Rāmaṇa one learns to act like the hero Rāma, and not like the villain Rāvaṇa—kavya does not, like the Veda, prompt, let alone command, us to do anything.

The intentionality of seers’ texts, on the other hand, is “pure,” that is, simple and direct. The authors of such works had infallible knowledge of past events, and their texts transmit this knowledge perfectly by expressing exactly what they mean. In kavya, as in everyday life, when we employ metaphorical language, for example, we desire to express the identity of two things that in reality are different. But no such discrepancy between verbal inten-


¹⁹. Resort to a more metaphorical sense of intention—which a given passage itself “wants to say”—is however common among Mimamsā exegetes, e.g., Tantravārttikā on Mimamsasūtra 3.1.13, Poona ed. pp. 65–70; Sābaraḥbhaṣya on 1.2.31, which considers the question of whether the words of a mantra are “intended” (vivaksita) or not (they are, it turns out).

²⁰. The common formula of didacticism is perhaps found first in Bhoja, Śṛigātrikāśa p. 471; see also Kavyapakṣa 1.2 vṛtta.
tion and reality occurs in seers’ texts; in fact, reality itself adjusted to whatever they may have said: “The language of honest men in everyday life corresponds to reality,” says the eighth-century dramatist Bhavabhūti (whom Bhoja cites here) in his Uttararāmacarita (1.10), “but reality itself came to correspond to the language of the ancient seers.” Elements of kāvyā may appear to be present in Vedic texts remembered (smṛti), in narratives of the way things were (itihāsa), or in ancient lore (purāṇa), as they may in the Veda itself, but they are unintentional and therefore entirely irrelevant—indeed, invisible as kāvyā—to traditional audiences.

Let us see how this textual typology works in critical practice. All kinds of texts—science, narratives of things as they were, and, as just noted, kāvyā itself—have the capacity to teach us something by prescribing or prohibiting action, something Bhoja calls the educative function. But they execute this function in very different ways, as the following examples show (note that their formal organization is entirely irrelevant to the discussion; all illustrations are verse). The educative in kāvyā is shown in the following verse:

> If I call to mind that beautiful girl, what hope have I to stay alive?
> If I forget her and live, what point would there be in living?

This is kāvyā, we are told, because “the expression itself (ukti) has primacy.” However we might want to characterize the “educative” aspect of the text (perhaps it shows how neither prescription nor prohibition applies to the dilemma of unfulfilled love), it does not expressly enjoin or define appropriate action, nor adduce an actual account of such action from the past as authority. Its specificity resides precisely in the self-sufficiency of the utterance itself. In śāstra, by contrast, where prescriptive, injunctive, and related forms of discourse are found, the particular wording or terminology has primacy, as in the descriptions in the following text from the chapter on physiognomy in the Bhāvatsamhitā, Varāhamihira’s early-sixth-century treatise on cosmology (here human śāstra is conflated with its transcendent prototype, as often elsewhere):

> He who seeks lordship over the world should marry a virgin whose feet have nails that are glossy, convex, tapered, and tawny, whose ankles are not bony but fleshy, lovely, inconspicuous, whose toes are thick, whose soles have the hue of lotuses.

---

21. adhyeyam, Śṛigāraśāstrā p. 596; cf. Sarvasvatākarṇṭhābhavavālāṅkāra pp. 228–29, from which I take the definition (yad vidhau ca niselhe ca vyuṭpatte eva kāraṇam).
22. Sarvasvatākarṇṭhābhavavālāṅkāra p. 228.
23. Sarvasvatākarṇṭhābhavavālāṅkāra p. 229 (citing Bhāvatsamhitā 70.1).
In narratives of the way things were (itihāsa) or ancient lore (purāṇa), it is the meaning or reference—indeed, the event—that has primacy, as in this verse from the Vāyu Purāṇa:

In whatever direction the demon Hiranyaakaṣipu glanced with a smile
the gods in confusion and terror thither did obeisance.

Textual types can be mixed, to be sure: The materials of śāstra can appear in itihāsa, as they frequently do in the Mahābhārata, or in kāvya, as when the gasp and cry of a woman whose lover bites her lip during foreplay are described in a poem, with technical allusion, as “the benedictory prelude (nāndi) of the drama of love-making that will ensure its perfect consummation.” The materials of itihāsa can appear in kāvya, as when the eighth-century poet Māgha transforms the puranic verse on Hiranyaakaṣipu just cited into the following:

As that abode of royal power wandered through the universe,
the gods—their trembling hands raised to jeweled crowns in homage—
performed sunrise, noonday, and sunset obeisance
to any direction where he chanced to roam.24

What marks off kāvya from other kinds of text is that the raison d’être of its type of expression is the expression itself. Bhoja states this in another way by distinguishing kāvya from ordinary language in terms of directness: “Ordinary language is the direct language of science and everyday life; kāvya, by contrast, is the indirect language found in descriptions,” that is, in statements that do not prescribe action.25 It is indirection—how what is said is being said—that for Bhoja most simply identifies kāvya as a specific kind of text. At the same time, such an identification suggests a specific way of reading. For to know such differentia (that intention does not pertain to the unauthored Veda but commandment does; that historical truth is a matter only of seers’ texts; that indirection does not mark śāstra) is at once to procure a set of interpretive protocols: Do not read kāvya the way you read science, ancient lore, or the Veda; do not be concerned (except insofar as it is a source of pleasure) about a breach between what is said and what is really meant, about correspondence with an actual world, about information or injunction. And do not expect kāvya to be like ordinary language; its purposes are different.

Everything Bhoja has told us, let me repeat, will be familiar to students of

24. Śīlaṇa śāstrī, P. 316. Normally they would turn to the east, to the zenith, and to the west as the day advanced. The preceding citation is Vāyu Purāṇa 67.2.65.
25. Śrīmad Devīprakāśa p. 351: yad avaham vacai śāstra-loke ca vaca eva tat / vaham yad arthavādīdāvā

tasya kāvyaṃ iti smṛtih (note that artha-vādī is not used here in the narrower sense Bhoja gives it at Śrīmad Devīprakāśa p. 483).
Sanskrit textuality. The distinction between the unauthored Veda and the texts of seers comes from a much earlier period and originates outside of literary-critical discourse. The differentiation of Veda, itihāsa-purāṇa, and kāvya each according to its predominant textual feature (sound, sense, expression) is not original to Bhoja either.26 Much older, too, is the associated formulation that the Veda acts like a master in commanding, the seers’ texts like a friend in counseling, and kāvya like a mistress in seducing. And this is precisely the point. Bhoja is summarizing an organizing logic, an episteme that informed the discourse on kāvya from the beginning and lasted without major modification until the end of Sanskrit literary culture. Not only was it perfectly possible to define kāvya, but its definition was specifically framed by a contrast with a vast range of other language uses that were not literature, could not be read as literature, and never were read as such.27 This does not mean that literary theory offered no further refinements within these dominant definitions. When Ānandavardhana argued that what defines literature is the particular modality of the production of meaning known as aesthetic suggestion, texts lacking this feature could no longer be regarded, in his view, as literature in the full sense. Thereby the tradition of “brilliant literature” (citrakāvya), which had been so important to writers for centuries (it includes among other things the remarkable genre of double narratives [śleṣa]), was devalued in a stroke.28 But the basis of Ānanda’s devaluation itself remains strictly within the dominant paradigm of what constitutes the literary.

The Pragmatics of Literature

If we examine actual practices of Sanskrit literary culture, such as performance (the social spaces for the consumption of literature, for example), com-

26. A similar formulation was offered in the Hydayadarpana of Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka (as cited by Abhinavagupta on Nāṭyāśṭra 16.1, Māṇikyacandra and others on Kavyopakāśa 1.2 vṛtti). But Bhoja appears not to know Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka’s work (cf. Pollock 1998b: 26 n. 37), and both may be drawing on a common source.

27. Contrast this with another cosmopolitan tradition, that of early Latin. Here everyone who wrote was simply an auctor, differing only with regard to their genres, whether philosophia, historia, or poesia (which were differentiated more on the basis of subject matter than mode of expression). In their clear delineation of literariness Sanskrit thinkers seem uncommon in the premodern world.

28. Distinguish citrakāvya in this broader signification from its narrower connotation, “pattern poetry.” See Dhvanyaloka 3.41 ff. (p. 494 ff.). Observe that citra features such as yamaka, or identical syllabic strings repeated with different meanings, are found in the oldest courtly epics (e.g., Saundarananda of Aśvaghosa, cf. 9.49), as are certain schemata grammatica (the illustration of aorist forms in Saundarananda 2). Ānandavardhana’s strictures, it may be noted, again had little impact on practice. If anything, the popularity of citrakāvya only increased in the following centuries. On the history of śleṣa—which was in vogue in the three centuries before Ānanda and may have conditioned his views—see now Bronner 1999.
mentary and pedagogy (who explains texts, and for whom; what is entered onto syllabi and where; the divisions of knowledge in schools and surveys), and the reproduction of texts (the purposes of copying manuscripts and the audiences for which they are copied), we find that the semantics of the literary as summarized by Bhoja is, some remarkable exceptions aside, generally corroborated by its pragmatics. Nowhere does the theoretical differentiation of kāvya from other language uses achieve a greater degree of reality as a cultural practice than in the case of the Veda.

The two genres do, it is true, have some features in common. The liturgical formulas (mantra) were referred to, from within the Vedic corpus itself, as sūkta, well-uttered—a term comparable to that later used for kāvya, sūkta (or subhāśita), well-spoken. The hymnists were called kavi (poet), and some of the old associations of this title were passed along into later periods, though the subsequent use of the term is significantly broader, as Abhinavagupta’s teacher, Bhaṭṭa Tauta (c. 950), argued:

It is said, “None a poet (kavi) but also a seer (gṛi).” A seer is so called because of his vision (darśana), which is knowledge of the true nature of entities and their varied states of being. And it is because of his vision of the truth that the seer is declared in sāstra to be a poet. The conventional meaning of the word “poet,” for its part, is derived from his capacity for vision as well as his powers of description (varṇanā). Thus, although his vision was permanently clear, the sage who was the first poet [Vālmiki] did not in fact become a poet until he attained the power of description.29

In addition, important intellectual ties link the tradition of Vedic interpretation and the analysis of kāvya. Little is known about the early history of this interaction, but by the end of the first millennium the analysis of literature had become thoroughly permeated by the concepts, principles, and procedures of Mīmāṃsā, the “discipline of discourse” (vākyāsāstra), or scriptural hermeneutics. Mīmāṃsā scholars were the first to theorize, on the basis of Vedic texts, a number of themes that were to become central to literary analysis. Śabara (fourth century?) drew the distinction between direct and figurative expression (śruti and lakṣanā) before any literary scholar did, and Ku-

29. For sūkta, e.g., RV 7.58.6 and 10.65.14. The Tauta citation comes from Hemacandra (c. 1170) in Kavyānugāsāna p. 432 (“true nature of entities and their varied states of being,” vicitrabhāvaḥadharmātmātattvavāpyakhyā). He introduces it with the remark: “A kavi is so called both because of his vision, as declared in the phrase ‘None a poet but also a seer,’ and because of his powers of description, coded in the verbal root kav [or kāv] [from which the noun kavi is derived], which has the meaning ‘description.’ The work or activity [karma] of a kavi is called kāvya.” (The taddhita suffix in question is sva, Aṣṭādhyāyī 5.1.123–24: kāvya in this sense is post-Vedic.) For the “vision” of the Vedic kavis see Gonda 1965: 318–48; Granoff 1995 discusses tales suggesting that the word’s archaic associations (of seer, wizard, etc.) may have been alive in some circles into the late-medieval period.
marila (seventh century) theorized metaphor and metonymy (gaṇatā and laṅkāṇā) with a sophistication not seen in literary theory for another several centuries. We even find figurative interpretation of Vedic texts. In the case of mantra, for example, metaphorical analysis is sometimes used to support the hermeneutists’ claim that the purpose of such texts is indeed to communicate meaning (in the view of Mimāṃsakas, the texts’ liturgical efficacy does not derive from the mere fact of utterance) and thus is particularly useful where such a text appears to be nonsensical.30

Aside from these historical linkages, the Veda will strike contemporary readers as objectively literary in respect of form, content, and expression. Major portions of the Veda are versified; they can be emphatically figurative; their use of language is so foregrounded as to constitute an unmistakable part of their meaning. So it is entirely natural that modern scholars, such as the art historian Ananda Coomaraswamy, should judge the Veda to be “in a less restricted and technical sense of the word” kāvya. But it is precisely the technical sense of kāvya—the sense Sanskrit poets and theorists and readers made of it—that matters to us in the first instance. What we may believe in our heart tells us nothing of Sanskrit literary culture in history, and nothing in this history makes the Veda kāvya. The grounds for its original exclusion from kāvya is an important historical problem worth exploring, but for my purpose here, it is enough to note the historical consequences. Not only was the Veda regarded as a form of textuality totally different from any other, but it was never practiced as anything remotely approaching kāvya. Mantra and the other genres of the Veda were never performed as literature (as the nature and location of their ritual use shows), never read as literature (as the commentaries from at least the ninth century onward clearly demonstrate), and never selected for inclusion in literary anthologies. When Śabara wants to draw an absolute contrast between the nonintentional, transcendent Veda and intentional, human discourse, he cites kāvya. The late-tenth-century philosopher and literary theorist Abhinavagupta put it most directly: “It is not

30. RV 4.58.3, which begins “It has four horns, three feet, two heads,” is taken to be a series of metaphors: by the four horns are intended (abhāpṛaya) the four priests, by the three feet the three pressings of soma, by the two heads the patron of the sacrifice and his wife. It is, Śabara adds, “like praising a river by saying that a pair of water birds are its two breasts, a line of snow geese its brilliant white teeth, the silvery rushes its garment, and the dark seaweed its flowing hair.” See Śabarabhāṣya on Mimāṃsāsūtra 1.2.46. The distinction between ivu and laṅkāṇā is drawn by Śabara in his comment on Mimāṃsāsūtra 6.2.20; Kumārila’s analysis of metaphor and metonymy is found in Tantrasūkta on Mimāṃsāsūtra 1.4.22 (p. 313; cited with approval by Mammata in Kāvyaprabhāsa 2.12 376). A striking example of Mimāṃsā-based reading practices of literary texts is contained in the section on “features of discourse units” (vākyādharma) in chapter 9 of Śrīgīrīprakāśa. McCrea 1997, especially chapter 2, explores the impact of Mimāṃsā on literary theory in Kashmir. The meaningfulness of mantra is argued in Mimāṃsāsūtra 1.2.31 ff.
the mere capacity for producing meaning as such that enables a text to be called kāvyā. And that is why we never apply that term to everyday discourse or the Veda." Abhinava and every other reader of kāvyā in South Asia before colonialism would have been mystified to see the West turn the Rgveda into literature.31

If an untranscendable line was thus drawn between kāvyā and Veda, with regard to some other genres and several major texts the boundaries of the literary in practice were more permeable than Bhoja’s description would suggest. What a vital culture does to stay alive—even one like Sanskrit, whose vitality drew on such peculiar sources—is to push constantly on the limits of definitions. Thus, we encounter works that, in light of the taxonomy I have set out, would have to be considered as ambiguous or hybrid, or as having passed into or out of the realm of the literary over time.

Consider first the phenomenon of the śāstra-kāvyā, science-literature. The Bhāshāsamhitā, which Bhoja cites as a model of śāstra, aspirates to the condition of poetry both formally (it uses some sixty different meters, many found only in kāvyā, as well as gadya, or literary prose) and by its use of the self-sufficient utterance (ukti) constitutive of kāvyā. A section in praise of women (which introduces a technical discussion of propitious moments and methods of sexual intercourse) at times resembles a literary anthology:

To enjoy a beautiful woman
is to be king of the world
even if in fact a pauper.
Woman (and food enough!) is the essence
of kingship; all else just fuels desire.32

That the work was excerpted in anthologies demonstrates that it was read as kāvyā.33 Its textual status is made ambiguous, however, by the fact that Varāhamihira himself consistently calls the work a scientific treatise on cosmology, but

31. The contemporary judgment on the Veda is that of Ananda Coomaraswamy 1977: 80 n. (he adds how absurd it would be to think otherwise). Contrast the judicious statement of Lienhard 1984: 57. For Abhinava’s comment see Dhvanyaloka p. 44; Śābara cites kāvyā at Mīmāṁsāstra 1.1.24 (“As they glide among the blue lotuses sweetly calling, the geese seem to be almost dancing, dressed in violet silks”). Later writers such as Jagannātha occasionally identify figures of speech in the Veda or the smṛti (see for example Rasagnidhara p. 420), but this does not imply that they understood these works to be kāvyā. As for the influence of the Veda on kāvyā, Renou exaggerates when arguing that kāvyā as such is the “direct heir of Vedic mantra” and seeks “a Vedic effect” by means of a vocabulary and a density that can often be traced back to Veda (1956: 169 n., 1959: 16).

32. Bhāshāsamhitā 73.17.

33. As for example the Sūkkīmuktāvalī, which was edited by Jalhaṇa at the Devagiri court of the Yadavas in 1258.
also by the undeniable predominance of directness and information—or what Abhinava calls bare meaning—over indirection and imagination. A verse like the following,

A Brahman is rendered homage at the feet, a cow at the rear, a goat at the mouth,

but there is no part of a woman’s body where homage may not be done, could easily be categorized as a “well-turned” lyric, but it is immediately followed by a verse that evacuates any literary impact it might have in isolation:

For a woman is totally pure and cannot become polluted, since every month menstruation removes her impurities.

Premodern readers surely felt this difference, though no major thinker ever bothered to spell it out in the detail lavished on other questions about the literary. And the Bhātatsamhitā is not an isolated case of śāstrakāśya. The version of the Rāmāyana by an author known as Bhaṭṭi, a seventh-century work of enormous popularity in South and Southeast Asia, is a systematic illustration of the rules of grammar and poetics—the first of a large subgenre. It is included by Bhoja in the category of literature; by the seventeenth or eighteenth century, and probably sooner, it was being read exclusively as a grammatical textbook.

More complicated issues are raised by a text like Kalhana’s celebrated Rājatarangini (The river of kings, c. 1150). Present-day readers would immediately label this work a history, especially given the author’s own insistence on the importance of historiographical methods, such as weighing evidence and judging the truth of matters “free from passion and hatred.” And this was the judgment of the translators at Akbar’s court in the late sixteenth century, who rendered it into Persian along with other texts the Mughals regarded as histories, such as the Mahābhārata, while translating

34. The self-descriptor “astral science” (jyotiḥ-yāśtra) is common in the work, and only once—and by implication—does Varāhamihira seem to refer to it as kavya (Bhātatsamhitā 105.4).
35. Bhātatsamhitā 73.8.
36. Bhātatsamhitā 73.9.
37. Śrīguruprakāśa p. 729. The work is listed as a grammar in Kavindrācārya Sarasvati’s library catalogue of the early eighteenth (?) century. Grammar poems after Bhaṭṭi more frequently narrate the political history of a patron than they narrate a legend: Halayudha’s early-tenth-century Kaviraśaya (The poet’s secret) illustrates Sanskrit verbal forms through an encomium of the Raṣṭrakūta king Kṛṣṇa III; Hemacandra’s Kumbhārājācarita exemplifies his own Sanskrit and Prakrit grammars via slesa while telling the history of the Chāluṇa dynasty of King Kumbarapāla. The balance tips from kavya to śāstrā in a work like the Pratītāparavrajayābhisāṇa of the late-thirteenth-century writer Vidyānātha, who defines tropes by way of verses in praise of the Kākātya king. This genre has an afterlife in bhāṣā literature, too, as a work like Kavihūṣan’s Brajbhasha Śwarajabhisāṇ (1674) testifies.
few literary texts. But Kalhaṇa himself explicitly identifies his work as kāvya, and he affiliates it with literature by frequently echoing earlier poems that had achieved the particular synthesis of the literary with the historical-political that Kalhaṇa sought. Moreover, the work was regarded as literature by his contemporaries; one verse is cited in a literary-theoretical text, the Alaṅkāraśarvasva (Compendium of tropes) of Ruyyaka (who undoubtedly knew Kalhaṇa personally), and a dozen or so verses are anthologized in the Subhāṣītavali. Western students of Kalhaṇa have also pointed out the literary conventions that structure the Rājatarangini, while at the same time (mixing endogenous and exogenous criteria) arguing that his work is not "critical in our sense" and therefore should not be interpreted primarily as history.

Yet these arguments, from both outside and inside the tradition, have their limits. For one thing, a degree of literariness (in a less culture-specific sense) unavoidably marks all narrative history, as recent scholarship has sufficiently demonstrated. For another, no other kāvya ever written in Sanskrit commences with the kind of self-justification Kalhaṇa offers; none shows quite the interest in facticity (chronological, geographical, historical), in the reality effects of concrete detail, or in understanding motive or determining what really happened. It is precisely this highly referential quality that renders the status of the Rājatarangini ambiguous in the minds of readers today, as it was also in Mughal Delhi and, no doubt, in twelfth-century Kashmir.

Referentiality of this sort, where direct correspondence with a historical truth (or perhaps the creation of historical truth by such supposed correspondence) constitutes an explicit writerly aim, has long been regarded by modern scholars as a serious deficiency in Sanskrit literature. Quite the opposite is true. The historicization of the literary narrative, if not exactly on the order of Kalhaṇa’s positivism, began with Bāṇa in the seventh century and underwent an ever-intensifying development over the following millennium—so much so that it eventually suffocated the poetry of personal expression that had been one of the luminous achievements of Sanskrit literature. It remains the case, however, that historical fact constituted something of a problem for Sanskrit literary theory.

To be sure, fact no less than fiction was acknowledged as a source of liter-

38. See Rājatarangini 1.7 (on historical method); 1.2–5, 44–47 (on kāvya). The most notable literary echoes are with Bilhaṇa’s Viṅkumāṇihdevaracarita (c. 1080) and Bāṇa’s Haracarita (c. 640). Kalhaṇa’s contemporary Maṅkha in fact compares Kalhaṇa’s historical-literary style to Bilhaṇa’s: “He so burnished the mirror of his poetry that it could reflect the image of Bilhaṇa’s ripeness [prauḍha]” (Śrikanṭhacarita 25.79). Note however that Kalhaṇa never mentions his literary models, eschewing the convention of “praise of poets past” that I examine later in the chapter.

39. See Alaṅkāraśarvasva p. 93, where Rājatarangini 4.441 is cited. For the judgment on history, see Kölver 1971: 8–9.
ary narrative. A distinction between historical and fictional genres (ākhyāyikā and kathā) was drawn as early as Bhāma (seventh century), who contrasts with “imaginary tales” narratives “that celebrate the real events of gods and others.” Yet fact was also held to be malleable, and necessarily so. Anandavardhana counseled poets to alter any received historical account that conflicted with the emotional impact they sought to achieve. One must not arbitrarily modify received stories in any way that runs counter to their already established emotional register (a dramatist cannot, for example, simply turn the dignified hero [uddāta] of the Rāmāyaṇa into a romantic one [lalitā]), but one can and should change fact to suit the rasa:

Another means by which a work as a whole may become suggestive of rasa is the abandoning of a state of affairs imposed by historical reality [itivṛtta] if it fails in any way to harmonize with the rasa; and the introduction, by invention if need be, of narrative appropriate to that rasa. . . . No purpose is served by a poet’s providing merely the historical facts [itivṛtta]. That is a task accomplished by historiography itself [itihāsa eva].

Two centuries later Bhoja added a moral criterion for altering received stories, whether derived from history or imagination. He speaks of “texts whose plots required emendation” (pratisāṃskāryavṛtta):

If one were to compose a literary work on the basis of a story just as it is found to exist in narratives of the way things were [itihāsa], it could come about that one character, though acting with all due propriety, might not only fail to attain the desired result but might attain precisely the result he does not desire; whereas another character, though acting improperly, might attain the result he does desire. In these cases, emendation must be made in such a way that the character acting properly is not denied the result he seeks, whereas the other not only should fail to attain his desire but should also attain what he does not want.

Elsewhere he lists a number of works—most now lost, but undoubtedly all once extant—that altered historical narratives in the interests of moral propriety (aučitya) and rasa.

40. “Fact,” vṛtta, itiivṛtta, the latter term also more generally connoting “plot” (for the narrower meaning “historical narrative,” cf. Arthaśāstra 1.5.14, which makes it a subset of itihāsa); “fiction,” uṭpādavastu, uṭprekṣita. Bhāma’s distinction between vṛttaśāstras (ākhyāyikā and uṭpādavastu) (Kāvyalakāmī 1.17) is found also in the Amaṇakoṣa (1.5.7): ākhyāyikā is a work the matter of which we know to have occurred (upalabdhaḥā), and kathā is “imaginary in its [narrative] construction” (prabandhakahalpanā).

41. Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan 1990: 434 ff. (translation somewhat modified). Ananda mentions as models of such emendation the works of Kālidāsa, the Harivijaya of Sarvasena, and his own Arjunavacara.

42. Śyāivāprakāśa p. 746.

43. Śyāivāprakāśa p. 711. Works with doctored plots include the Nirdoṣadalasāratha (blameless Daśaratha), in which the exile of the hero Rama is effected by two magical creatures im-
In such a universe, where the moral imagination of a literary work and its emotional coherence took precedence over any other dimension, a historical poet like Kalhana was presented with unusual challenges. For his stated aim was to proceed “like a judge in relating what had actually happened,” while yet attempting to ensure that the work produce a particular rasa, that of tranquility (śānta). Unusual challenges also confronted the authors of public poetry: the royal and other inscriptions, especially praise-poems (praśasti), which record the genealogy of kings and celebrate their notable deeds in always stately and sometimes powerful kāvya style. It may be a consequence of these challenges that with few exceptions (approaching a statistical zero), authors of inscriptive poetry never wrote textualized poetry, and they seem to have occupied a place in the world of cultural production altogether different from that of writers of kāvya.

The permeability and instability of Sanskrit textual categories find their limit case in Vyasā’s Mahābhārata. About its genre there is no uncertainty, for in virtually all Sanskrit text-lists it defines the category of itihāsa, the narrative of the way things were. Our standard taxonomies of textual forms represent this genre as radically different from kāvya, and many other thinkers are in agreement. Tauta’s verse cited earlier goes on to say that “Although ‘vision’ may be found to exist in other textual types such as itihāsa, these cannot be kāvya because they lack the descriptive element [varṇana].” The Mahābhārata should therefore be performed and taught and reproduced and, what is most important, read and understood and appreciated differently from kāvya. But from at least the seventh century, the work came to be treated as something close to kāvya. Anandavardhana considered it “moral-spiritual science with the beauty of literature,” and drew from it some of his most powerful examples of aesthetic suggestion, at the same time conceiving of this massive work as a unified literary whole, with a single predominant emotional force. Yet—an exception to this exception, in terms of textuality, performance, and reading—no Sanskrit kāvya in India was ever as textually open, as expandable, as the Mahābhārata. A courtly epic like Kālidāsa’s Kumārasambhava (Birth of the divine prince Kumāra), which ends before the birth of the hero named in the title, could in a later age be perceived as unfinished

personating his stepmother, Kaikēyi, and father, Daśaratha, (the former selfishly manipulative, the latter pathetically uxorious in the “historical” Rāmāyaṇa), and, most famously, Kālidāsa’s Sākuntala (fourth century), in which the lover’s forgetfulness is not willful and perverse (as in the “historical” Mahābhārata) but caused by a curse that results from his beloved’s unintentional show of disrespect to an ascetic.

44. Rājatarangini 1.7, 25.
45. For some brief observations see Pollock 1995b.
46. For the Mahābhārata as śāntarasa kāvyachāyānvyayi and possessing śāntarasas see Dhvanyāloka 4.5 (p. 530). Cf. also Tubb 1985.
and requiring completion (nine chapters were in fact later added), but the body of the work had an integrity that strongly resisted interpolation. Nor did any Sanskrit kāvya (aside from the perhaps unique case of the twelfth-century Vaiṣṇava lyric of Jayadeva, the Gītagovinda [Govinda in song]) ever become the object of endowments for perpetual recitation in temples, as occurred in the case of the Mahābhārata from as early as the seventh century. And a whole history of reading the epic, which is sedimented in centuries of commentary on it, never treats the work as anything but a text of the seers (ārya), with an ontology, authority, and referentiality radically different from kāvya.

In short, whether a text’s purpose is thought to be the direct and truthful narration of the past or, instead, the celebration of its own linguistic realization would seem to make a great deal of difference to the way it is understood. Yet none of this pragmatic slippage in the taxonomy of the literary is ever thematized in Sanskrit, despite the difficulty of accommodating even canonical works in the theory. The Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa, whose status as first kāvya we will consider momentarily, was for many premodern readers a work that simultaneously narrates what truly happened exactly as it happened and makes absolute claims for regulating the moral order; that is, it is both an itihāsa and a dharmasāstra. By contrast, the Bhāgavatam, a tenth-century masterpiece of incalculable literary influence and popularity, calls itself ancient lore (purāṇa) and tries to fulfill a purāṇa’s genre requirements, but it more often looks and sounds and speaks like a kāvya, and was sometimes read as one. A comparable development manifests itself in, for example, the Jain tradition of literary purāṇas, most remarkably with the Ādipurāṇa (First puṇṇa) of Jinasena II (837), which actually calls itself a kāvya.

The behavior of textual types was thus more unruly than the orderly classifications of Sanskrit literary theory might lead us to expect. Yet this un-

47. Cf. also Shulman 1991.
48. This is true from the earliest extant commentator on the work, Devabodha, a Kashmiri ascetic of perhaps 1000, to Nilakaṇṭha at the end of the seventeenth century, who insisted that the text be “treated like scripture” (āgamayitavyam) (p. 2, col. 1, line 16). On the latter, see also Minkowski (in press).
49. Kāvyamimāṃsā (early tenth century), p. 7: rāmāyaṇam itihāsam; for the Pythōrāvajivajyā (c. 1190), the Rāmāyaṇa is “as true as the Veda” (1.3; cf. the commentary of Jonarāja on Pythōrāvajivajyā 1.5). The seventeenth-century scholar Madhusūdhana Sarasvati, in his review of the eighteen disciplines, lists the Rāmāyaṇa under dharmasāstra (Prasthānātheda, pp. 1, 9). A tenth-century writer is praised in an inscription as the “Valmīki of the Kali Age” for “expounding revealed literature in books of moral history” (dharmānubhavas, EI 2: 164). The thirteenth-century philosopher Madhva ranked both the “originary Rāmāyaṇa” and the Mahābhārata with the Vedas (cf. Sarvaparāsasangraha p. 157, citing Skandaparāvāṇa).
50. This holds even for the Kaṇḍacarita chapter of the Viṣṇupurāṇa. See Sāhitayadarpana 4.10, where Viṣṇupurāṇa 5.13.21–22 are cited to illustrate alaiśkāradhvani and the author is referred to as kavi.
ruliness was within limits. The Bhāgavatam is the only (non-Jain) parāśa among scores to aspire so noticeably to the condition of kāvyā; the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa constitute genres unto themselves. And these texts aside, along with a few others noted earlier, there never was any large-scale migration between the literary and the nonliterary in the eyes of those inside the tradition. Literature in Sanskrit thought never remotely approached the open category it has become in the critical and pedagogical (if not popular) practices of the contemporary West. In general, the state of literary taxonomy was a steady one for nearly two thousand years. And in this we can perceive both a victory and a defeat of Sanskrit literary culture: Such an astonishingly broad and long-lasting consensus among readers and writers about how kāvyā should be written and interpreted produced literature of ever greater refinement, and reading of ever greater sophistication. But this was a consensus that arose in and made sense for a particular world, a particular sociality and polity; and when these changed, Sanskrit literary culture was unable to change with it.

WHAT WERE SANSKRIT POETS CHOOSING WHEN THEY CHOSE TO WRITE IN SANSKRIT?

Not only do Sanskrit discourses on literature take kāvyā to be a peculiar use of language, but they also confine this use to a narrow range of languages. Bhoja, as we saw, gave a paradigmatic formulation: “Words with unitary meaning constitute a unit of discourse [vākyam]. There are three species of such discourse: Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Apabhramsha. [Sanskrit] discourse . . . relating to the world has two subtypes: kāvyā and science, or systematic thought [sāstra].” Although this would appear to restrict kāvyā to Sanskrit, we will see that Prakrit and Apabhramsha, too, function as languages of the literary (indeed, only as such, for in Bhoja’s eyes Sanskrit retains a monopoly on scientific discourse, narratives of the way things were, and the rest). That it is possible to make kāvyā only in this triad of languages is the unanimous judgment of Sanskrit literary theory from its beginnings in Bhāmaha and Daṇḍin. And this raises at least three critical questions, which I consider

51. The rise of the grand philosophical prose style (with Śaṅkara’s Brahmaśūtrabhāṣya, eighth century, or Jayantabhaṭṭa’s Nyāyaśāstra, c. 900), which may seem unthinkable without the earlier developments in literary prose, was never read in relationship to it. When Jayanta wanted to be truly literary he wrote literature (the drama Āgamañjūra). Bhoja does vaguely associate literary style with nonliterary discourse when he observes that treatises on polity (arthaśāstra) are characterized by “the eastern path” (gandhīya rīti), and those on spiritual liberation (mokṣaśāstra) by “the western” (lāṭīya) (Śrīnāraprabhāsa pp. 1107, 1179).

52. Bhāmaha, Kāvyāḥakāra 1.16, cf. 34–36; Daṇḍin, Kāvyādarsa 1.32. Daṇḍin and other theorists include Paśchāti, the language of a single work of literature, the placeless and dateless—and lost—Byaitakatha.
in turn: What exactly were these languages? Why in the opinion of theorists (and, with few exceptions, in actual fact) did they constitute the sole vehicles for the creation of kāvyā? And what factors conditioned a writer’s decision to use one language rather than another?

The first question—what actually is Sanskrit (and Prakrit and Apabhramsha)?—is one not asked of most of the other languages treated in this volume, since they come before us like facts of nature. Of course, from a more capacious historical vantage point, there is nothing at all given or natural about any language; all are only jargons until they are unified by certain cultural practices, foremost among which is the production of literature. But in the case of Sanskrit and its two companions we feel compelled to raise the question, which already, and correctly, intimates something of their unusual position in the repertory of literary codes represented in this book.

The need to ask is occasioned in part by the very words we use to refer to these languages. In contrast with, say, “Kannada” or “Bangla” or “Sindhi,” which in their semantic core signify at once a group of speakers and their geographical location, the terms “Sanskrit,” “Prakrit,” and “Apabhramsha” all refer to social and linguistic characteristics and not to particular people or places. The word saṃskṛta points in the first instance to the language’s paradigmatic analyzability: it is something “put together” by means of phonological and morphological transformations of the sort so powerfully described in the Sanskrit grammatical tradition (synthesized around the third or fourth century B.C.E.). At the same time, the term long preserved associations from the sacred domain of Vedic liturgical practices: Sanskrit is also that which is “rendered fit” for these practices because, like other instruments or objects used in ritual acts, it has been made ritually pure. In its oldest form, Sanskrit was an idiom of liturgical acts and their associated scholastic disciplines, spoken and fully alive for that domain in the way long-cultivated learned idioms can be. Only gradually and hesitantly did it enter into the realm of worldly (laukika) communicative practices—coinage, deeds, inscriptions, and the like, including kāvyā—around the beginning of the common era. What is important to bear in mind, however, is that it never fully became—and almost certainly never had been—a code of everyday usage. It was never the language of the nursery, the bedroom, or the field, although since Sanskrit poets experienced childhood, love, and (no doubt some of them) labor, they learned to speak of these things, too, after their fashion, in Sanskrit.⁵³

What they almost certainly did not speak either, whether in the nursery, bedroom, or field, was Prakrit, at least in the form in which we know it in

Prakrit literary texts. The word itself, according to the standard interpretation, refers to the "common" or "natural" dialect(s) of which Sanskrit represents the grammatically disciplined variety. But in fact it typically connotes a literary language and only very rarely is used to mean spoken vernaculars (the usual term for these was bhāṣā, speech). Unlike Sanskrit, for which literary theory acknowledges a single, unified register, Prakrit was recognized from a relatively early date to have three or four regional types: Maharashtri (belonging to Mahārāṣṭra), Shauraseni or Sauraseni (belonging to Śūrasena, or Mathurā and environs), Gaudi/Magadhi ("Gauda" referring to Bengal; "Magadha," to Bihar), and Lati (belong to Lāṭa, southern Gujarat). Often, however, the term "Prakrit" is used in a more restricted sense to refer specifically to Maharashtri, which eventually became the single primary language of Prakrit literary creation. Employed in the early centuries of literacy (c. 250 BCE–250 CE) for public inscription until displaced dramatically and permanently for this purpose by Sanskrit, the Prakrits that we know from actual existing literature are grammaticized dialects. They were in fact not associated with or limited by any regionality and fully shared the commitments and values of Sanskrit literary culture.

A transregional and more or less standardized literary language confronts us in Apabhramsha, too. The name literally refers, once again, to a linguistic trait, that of "degeneration," or the simplification of phonology and morphology, and can pertain both to solemism in general and to the literary language specifically. Daṇḍin distinguishes these two senses, calling the literary language the "dialect of, among others, the Ābhīras," whereas "in scholarly discourse anything that deviates from correct Sanskrit is so named." Although perhaps based ultimately on a Middle Indo-Aryan dialect of the midlands, the Apabhramsha found in literary texts is linguistically unlocalizable, largely without regional variation, and like Prakrit was used ecumenically: in the lyrics in act 4 of the drama Viśvaṃśya (early poems even if not original to the play) by the Śāiva Kālidāsa in fourth-century Ujjayini; in the Harivamśa by the Jain Puspadanta in mid-tenth-century Karnataka; in the

54. The varieties are named as early as Nātyaśāstra chapter 17 and Kāvyādāra 1.34–35.
55. On the notion of primary literary languages see later in this chapter. For the use of "Prakrit" in the narrow sense of Maharashtri see Saṃśćārakāvya v. 2; Gaudavahī v. 65, 92; and Upadhye in Līlāvatī 1966: 75.
56. Kāvyādāra 1.36. "Ābhīra" is usually taken to refer to a pastoral people in western India. The negative connotations of Apabhramsha were eventually lost but were still alive in the seventh century, when the Vedic textual scholar Bhāṭa Kumārila remarked: "The scriptures of the Buddhists are linguistically corrupt and so could not possibly be holy word... When texts are composed of words that are grammatically false— with words of the Magadhan or Dakshinātya languages and even worse, the Apabhramshas of these languages... how could their doctrines possibly be true?" (Tantravārttika on Mīmāṁsāśāstra 1.3.12, p. 164). Kumārila cites an illustration, but its source is unknown; it is not Pali.
messenger poem (*dūtakāvyā*) *Samdeśarāsaka* by the Muslim Abdul Rahman in fourteenth-century Multan.

When the Sanskrit theoreticians inform us that *kāvyā* is composed in three languages, they mean what they say: three languages alone are fit for literary expression, and others are not. The definition becomes meaningless if “Prakrit” or “Apabhramsha” is taken to refer to local language *tout court,* this would be tantamount to saying that literature is composed in language—an un-Sanskritic tautology. Whatever may have been their original regional specificity, by the time of Bhāmahā and Daṇḍin both the literary Prakrits and Apabhramsha had already been subjected to philological analysis and standardization, and along with Sanskrit were represented as tied to no particular place—and, as we have seen, they were not.

For a history of Sanskrit literary culture this formulation has important implications. Multilingualism is a dimension of the writer’s craft for the Sanskrit critical tradition, but this is a multilingualism with two important restrictions. *Kāvyā* is composed only in languages of the subcontinent—nothing indicates that literature was thought to exist in other cultural worlds (translations were made from Greek, for example, but only for scientific texts)—and, more important, only in languages that occupy subcontinental space. It is languages that travel, languages available to anyone anywhere in the world where *kāvyā* is produced, languages that, as their names imply, transcend ethnic group and in a sense transcend space and time, that are qualified for embodying *kāvyā.* Excluded from the world of *kāvyā* as conceptualized in the Sanskrit tradition were the numerous vernaculars, from Kannada to Kashmiri, until such time that these languages themselves claimed the right to embody *kāvyā* by bursting through to textuality and literariness. This historical transformation, which I call “vernacularization” and which was in full development everywhere in South Asia by the middle of the second millennium, contributed substantially to drawing an outer limit to the existence of a vital Sanskrit literary culture by making the choice of language in the making of literature far more problematic than it had ever been earlier.\(^{57}\)

From a postcolonial location one tends to think of choice of language as one pertaining to the regional-language writer when confronted with languages of global cultural power such as English or French. But Sanskrit writers were also making a choice when they made literature in Sanskrit, though the precise nature of the choice and the conditions of choosing differed from those of their postcolonial descendants and varied even in precolonialism from epoch to epoch. In the later medieval period this was largely a decision *not* to write in one of the emergent vernaculars. For the greater part of

---

\(^{57}\) A detailed account of the three-language theory, and the historical practice of vernacularization, is provided in Pollock forthcoming.
the first millennium, however, from the time when we can first refer with historical confidence to the existence of kavya, the choice was more limited, as were the social and cultural preferences it reflected.

For the seventh-century literary scholars Bhāma and Daṇḍin, the division of literary-language labor among the three transethnic and transregional codes was strictly a function of genre. Thus the dynastic prose poem (ākhyaṅyākā), such as Bāna’s Harṣacarita (Life of King Harṣa), was composed in Sanskrit alone, as was the courtly epic (mahākāvyya), such as Kālidāsa’s Kumārasambhava (Birth of the divine prince Kumāra); the genre called the skandhaka, exemplified by Pravarasena’s Setubandha (Building the bridge; also known as the Slaying of Rāvaṇa), was written in Prakrit alone; the osara (no extant example) was composed in Apabhramsha alone; the long narrative tale, such as Bāna’s Kādambari or Dhanapāla’s Bhavisattakaha (Tale of what is to be), could be written in Sanskrit or Apabhramsha. The link between language choice and genre both in theory and practice is old and enduring, and is probably constitutive of Prakrit and Apabhramsha literariness. Prakrit in these discussions refers, let us note again, only to Maharashtri, for Shauraseni and the rest with rare exceptions ceased to have independent literary existence after the second or third century and appear only in drama or related genres.

Indeed, it is language use in drama that helps us understand how, although three languages are prescribed for literature throughout most of Sanskrit literary theory, other languages are not only mentioned in that theory but can in fact make their appearance in literature. Early on it was recognized that drama was written “in a mixture of languages,” as Daṇḍin puts it. This precept invites us to distinguish—and to read traditional accounts of literary language as distinguishing—between what we may call primary and secondary languages for literature. The former consist of those used in the creation of an entire literary work, that is, the three cosmopolitan idioms. These alone can constitute what a twelfth-century writer called the “body of a literary text.” While these “primary” languages were chosen for a given work on the basis of its genre, “secondary” languages were those used for mimetic

58. Kavyādarśa 1.37; Kavyālankāra of Bhāma 1.28. See Ratnasrījīnāna on Kavyādarśa 1.37, where his reference to Setubandha is intended to illustrate the skandhaka. Other writers add further detail. For Ānandavardhana and Abhinavagupta, the independent lyric verse (muktaka) could be written in any of the three literary languages, Sanskrit, Prakrit, or Apabhramsha—and we have examples in all three languages, though these become increasingly rare for the latter two—but language restrictions applied to other genres. Thus, certain minor types of story literature called “short story” (khaṇḍakāthā) and “full story” (sakalakāthā) were written in Prakrit (Dhvanīloka 3.7, p. 323, with Abhinavagupta there).

59. nāṭakādi tu mūnakaṃ, Kavyādarśa 1.37; cf. Abhinavagupta on Dhvanīloka 3.7. Ratnasrījīnāna on Kavyādarśa 1.32, however, explains “mixture” to be that of the three literary languages.
purposes. They appear in drama in direct discourse (royal women always speak Shauraseni, ruffians Magadhi, and so on), and in a few other literary works, such as the tale (*kathā*), where reported speech is prominent. Thus, aside from imitative uses of language to provide local color in drama and similar dialogue genres, language choice for making literature, in the wider literary culture of which Sanskrit was part, was shaped by factors utterly different from that which governs writing today: the use of one’s so-called natural language. In fact, it may not be going too far to claim that it is the exclusion of natural language from the realm of literature that to a significant degree defines Sanskrit literary culture.

The single factor we have so far identified as regulating literary language choice, namely, genre, cannot wholly have determined that choice. For one thing, a genre like *kathā* could be written in any of the three languages. For another, other genres said to be restricted to particular languages, such as the various species of courtly epic, the Sanskrit *mahākāvyā*, the Prakrit *skandaḥaka* or *āśāvāsaka*, are themselves virtually indistinguishable from each other—except for their language (and the metrical form associated with it). It is not easy to believe that a writer would select a genre first and then the language appropriate to it; some commitment to a literary code had to come first, and the choice of genre from among those available to the language in question would follow. What would a commitment to a literary code consist in? Why would a writer choose to write in Sanskrit rather than in Prakrit or Apabhramsha? This is a fundamental question, or so one would think, but it has not been posed in literary scholarship as clearly as one would expect. A recent work called *A History of Classical Poetry: Sanskrit—Pali—Prakrit*, for example, hardly addresses the issue at all, the title notwithstanding.

No doubt one answer for all cases is improbable, since the nature of commitment to language demonstrably changed over time. Assumptions widely shared in modern scholarship are worth considering if only to avoid their errors: One is that such a choice was never actually made, since before colonialism and modernity began their deplorable work of linguistic reduction, Indian poets were always multilingual; another is that religious community

---

60. “These four languages [Paishachi is included] are the ones that may constitute the body of a poem,” *Vaiṣṇavāntāvāk* 2.1. Daṇḍin implies this mimetic use when he says, “A *kathā* is composed in all languages” (*Kavyādarśa* 1.38). The *Kuvalayamalā*, a “mixed tale” (*saṃkīrṇakathā*) completed in Jalor in 799, announces that it is “composed in the Prakrit language, written down in the letters of the Marahatta region. As a curiosity the story is also told in Sanskrit when needed for [i.e., when reporting] another’s speech, and here and there made with Apabhramsha, as well as demonstrating the Paishachi speech” (p. 4, vv. 11–12); it also provides numerous examples of reported speech in various Indian languages and dialects. Further materials on primary and secondary in Sanskrit literary theory may be found in Pollock forthcoming.

61. Lienhard 1984. On p. 49 brief reference is made to the “preferences” purportedly created by the language traditions of the different religions.
regulated cultural commitments and membership in such a community accordingly determined language choice in advance.

The first explanation would seem to find support in the *Kāvyamīmāṃsā* (Inquiry into literature) of Rājaśekhara, a court poet in early-tenth-century Kanyakubja and Tripur. In this partially preserved encyclopedia of literary art the author comments on the question of languages in literature:

A poet must first of all fashion himself. He should ask himself: What is my inborn talent; what are my strengths with respect to languages? What does society favor? What does my patron favor; what kinds of poetic assemblies does he occupy himself with; what is he emotionally attached to? The poet should then adopt a particular language—so say the authorities. But Rājaśekhara holds that while it is true a specialized poet works under such constraints, for a poet who knows no intellectual limitations all languages are as much within his command as a single one. Moreover, a given language is adopted by virtue of [its prevalence in] a given region, as it is said, “The people of Gauḍa [Bengal] are devoted to Sanskrit, the people of Lāṭa [south Gujarat] are fond of Prakrit, the people of all Mālava, the Takkas [Panjabis], and the Bhādānakas employ their own Apabhramsha, the people of Avanti, of Pariyatra, and of Daśapura [Chattisgarh] use Bhutabhasha [Paishachi]. The poet who dwells in mid-Madhyaḍeśa is expert in all [these] languages.”

Again, we should note the premise here that literature can be made in only three primary languages (or four, including Paishachi), albeit a range of secondary languages may be used for mimetic purposes. But while this restriction to cosmopolitan codes for literature is in evidence everywhere, Rājaśekhara’s ideal image of a poet’s unlimited creativity in all four languages seems to be just that, an ideal. If we examine the actual literary-historical record available to us—admittedly, counterexamples may have vanished—it is remarkable how very few writers produced literature in different primary languages.

Three who come first to mind were all scholars as well as poets: Rājaśekhara himself composed one play wholly in Prakrit (it is the only such play, and doubtless an experiment), all the rest of his oeuvre being in Sanskrit; Viśvanātha (first half of the fourteenth century), a literary theorist, tells us he wrote one Prakrit poem besides his Sanskrit works; and Anandavardhana, in addition to a courtly epic in Sanskrit, wrote a text in Prakrit “for the education of poets,” most likely a textbook on aesthetic suggestion that naturally would use the language in which this style had first manifested itself in


63. That the former are uppermost in the author’s mind is shown by the fact that these transregional languages are microcosmically configured in the literary assembly of the ideal king (pp. 54–55). In his play *Bālarāmīyana* 1.11 it is obvious that when Rājaśekhara describes himself as “expert in all languages” he means the three plus Paishachi.
South Asian literature. Aside from such scholar-poets, writers composing works in more than one primary literary language were rarities. Muñja, king of the Paramāras and Bhoja’s uncle (d. c. 996), appears to be the only Sanskrit poet who produced a serious corpus of verse in Apabhramsha as well as Sanskrit (both only fragmentarily preserved); the stray Apabhramsha verse attributed to this or that Sanskrit poet tells us little. Writers we know only as Prakrit poets have Sanskrit verses ascribed to them in anthologies, but such ascriptions are unverifiable; and not a single such poet is elsewhere associated with a Sanskrit work. The tendency we find in the cosmopolitan languages holds true for poets composing in regional languages as well. The tenth-century Kannada writers Ponna and Ranna, for example, may have called themselves “emperor poet in both languages,” but they clearly derived this title from the occasional Sanskrit verse included in their Kannada works. Those few cases of primary text production in both Sanskrit and a vernacular for which we have the evidence of extant texts are wholly exceptional.

It is difficult not to conclude from all this that aside from dramatic mime- sis and the occasional pedagogical demonstration or tour de force, multilinguality has a purely imaginary status in Sanskrit literary culture. In actual fact, a writer was a Sanskrit writer or a Prakrit writer or an Apabhramsha writer or—at a later date, and with very different cultural-political resonances—a vernacular writer. The mid-eleventh-century Kashmirian Ksemendra is instructive here. He advises the aspiring poet of talent to “listen to the songs and lyrics and rasa-laden poems in local languages... to go to popular gatherings and learn local languages,” but he seems not to have taken his own

64. In the Sāhityadarpaṇa, Viśvanātha mentions his (lost) Prakrit kavya Kuvalayāvocarita (Life of Kuvalayāśa) in the vṛtti on 6.326; his Sanskrit Rāghavavilāsa in the vṛtti on 6.324. On Ānandavardhana’s Prakrit Visamabhāvadīlīki, in addition to his Sanskrit Arjunacarita, see Pischel 1965: 12, and Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan 1990: 10–11.

65. The exceptions to the rule of Sanskrit monolinguality include Vedāntadeśika (fourteenth century) in Tamil (and very occasionally, for the demonstration effect, in Prakrit); Śrīnātha (fifteenth century) in Telugu; and Vidyāpati (fifteenth century) in Maithili. In Vikramādityadevocarita 18.65, King Harsa of Kashmir (fl. 1075) is credited with sarvabhūtākāvyaśānam, “literary skill in all languages,” but if this means the ability to produce literature in all languages no evidence is available to support it. On Muñja see Bhayani 1993: 262–66. Ānandavardhana, in describing how the use of different languages multiplies the possibilities of meaning, cites a verse of his own written (possibly ad hoc) in what his commentator calls “Sindhi” (Dhvanyāloka p. 544). The Sanskrit verse 725 in Subhāṣitaranitakosa is attributed to Pravarasena, elsewhere to Bilhaṇa or to one Kaṅka; eleven poems have come down under the name of Vakpatirāja. Viśvanātha says he wrote a praisitaratnāvalī (praise poem of a notable featuring a string of titles) in sixteen languages (cf. Sāhityadarpaṇa 6.337), and many writers boast of their mastery of the six or even the canonical eighteen languages. When such claims are not simply expressions of scholarly (and not creative) mastery or mere bragging, they represent limited experiments.
advice. A large portion of his literary corpus has been preserved, and there is not a scrap of anything but Sanskrit.\textsuperscript{66}

If the explanation of multilinguality does not hold and premodern Indian writers did in fact actively make a choice—from among transregional and not natural languages, and with the genre constraints on language only as a consequence of choosing—we are back to searching for the grounds of the choice. Here most scholars would resort to the second assumption mentioned: that affiliation to religious community underwrote the choices that were made. Yet this is entirely unhistorical with respect to early literary culture. The force of the religious explanation derives, on the one hand, from what are interpreted as ancient and ever-valid injunctions by the founders of non-Vedic religions, such as Buddhism and Jainism, to propagate their tenets in non-Sanskrit or even local language, and on the other, from the widespread modern assumption of an exclusive and exclusionary concomitance between Brahmanism and Sanskrit. Both views are false.

As often, what was done in practice is more instructive than what is claimed in texts, and in practice none of this logic obtains. If early Buddhism was hostile to Sanskrit, by the first or second century of the common era a complete canon of Buddhist scripture in Sanskrit was in existence, and the creativity in Sanskrit of Buddhist poets is massively in evidence. We possess or know of major works from at least a half-dozen masters by 600 c.e.\textsuperscript{67} This literary production has little, in some cases nothing, to do with the religious identity or beliefs of the writers. This is fully demonstrated by the poetry of Dharmakirti (c. 650), the literary scholarship of Ratnasrijana (900) or Dharmadasa (1000?), the metrical studies of Jñāmanāsṛimitra (1000), or the anthological work of Vidyākara (1100). Aside from the occasional Buddhist theme or Buddhist deity hymned in the prelude of a work, there is hardly anything we can point to as constituting a Buddhist literary aesthetic. Not only did Buddhism not stop Buddhists from writing Sanskrit literature, but when they did write, their behavior was not recognizably Buddhist. The Jains, for their part, may have composed their early scriptures in a form of Prakrit, but they eventually adopted Sanskrit as well, among other languages. In Karnataka, for example, in the ninth century they turned decisively to Sanskrit for the production of their great poetic histories with the \textit{Adipurāṇa} of Jinasena II. Other Jain poets produced less specifically sectarian poetry in Sanskrit, such as the monumental mixed prose-verse narrative of Somadevasūri, the \textit{Yaśastilakacampū} (The \textit{campū} of Prince Yaśastilaka, 959). At the same time they wrote dramatically new work in Kannada (Pampa’s courtly epics of the mid-ninth century)

\textsuperscript{66} Kavikanṭha, \textit{bhārata} 1.17, 2.11, pp. 65, 69 (“poems in local languages,” \textit{deśabhāṣākavya}; “lyrics,” \textit{gāthā}).

\textsuperscript{67} These include Aśvaghoṣa, Mātrceṣa, Kumāralāta, Haribhaṭṭa, Candragomin (or whoever wrote the play \textit{Lokānanda}), Dignāga, and Aryaśūra. See also Hahn 1993.
and Apabhramsha (Puṣpadanta’s Mahāpurāṇa [Great purāṇa] of 970). None of the important meanings of such literary-language experimentation can be captured through an explanation based on religious identity. On the contrary, literature, as Bhoja put it memorably, is nonsectarian.  

Attention to the historical record helps us unthink the supposed concomitance of Brahmanism and Sanskrit as effectively as it does that between non-Brahmanism and non-Sanskrit.  

In the archaic period Brahmanism eschewed the use of Sanskrit in the nonliturgical realm, and it was within the political context of new ruler lineages from West and Central Asia that Sanskrit first came to be used for public written forms of royal eulogy, and possibly for literature itself. Staunchly Brahmanical lineages to the south such as the Sātavāhanas (c. 100 B.C.E.–250 C.E.) held to the old ways and supported no literary production whatever in Sanskrit. It is perhaps within such a context, where there obtained a pronounced cultural sensitivity about the very different discursive domains of Prakrit and Sanskrit, that we may come to understand something about the creation of the earliest extant Prakrit poetry. The great Maharashtri Prakrit anthology, Gāhākoso (Treasury of lyrics; also known as Gāhāsattasa, The seven hundred lyrics), is a compendium of the sophisticated culture—a non-Sanskritic but largely vādika culture—of the kings and poets of the Sātavāhana court. It is composed in an idiom imitative of rural life (bordering in fact on a secondary, mimetic function of the language) for an audience at once urban and urbane, as the seventh-century poet Bāna clearly understood when he spoke of the collection as cultured (agrāmya) despite its rustic (grāmya) content. Sarvasena’s Hariwijaya (Viṣṇu’s conquest) and Pravarasena’s Rāmāyaṇa narrative Setubandha register the continuing commitment to the realm of Prakrit on the part of the Sātavāhana successor rulers—Vaiṣṇava rulers—of the northern Deccan. 

That Prakrit poetry continued to be composed by writers in the vādika tradition (or at least writers who were neither Buddhist nor JAIN) long after this date seems to represent more than anything else an aesthetic choice

68. sāhityasya sarvaśārdayatavat, Śṛigupraṅkhaṇa p. 398 (cf. Râmavara on Sarvasvaṭhānābhāsaranaśāhakaṇa 3.3).
69. To those outside the Sanskrit cultural order, however, these distinctions might be blurred and all learned discourse in Sanskrit might be thought of as Brahmanical; thus, it seems, was the case for Amīr Khusrau (d. 1325), for whom Sanskrit was squarely identified with the Brahmins (see Alam, chapter 2, this volume).
71. The Vākāṭaka dynasty, to which these kings belonged, ruled c. 250–500. On Sarvasena (fourth or early fifth century) see Kulkarni 1991. A long tradition of misidentifying Pravarasena (actually Pravarasena II of the Vākāṭaka line, r. c. 400–410) with a Kashmiri king of that name began with Kalhaṇa (Rājatarangini 3.354) and has oddly been continued by Kosambi in Subhāsitaratnakosā, p. lxxxvi, and Lienhard 1984: 234–35. It is corrected first, I believe, in the editor’s note in Kāvyamimāṃsā p. 217; cf. also Mirashi 1965: vii.
shaped by the character of the language itself, its earliest literary uses, and its particular modes of expression—a choice perhaps tinged with nostalgia for a vanished age of imagined simplicity and naturalness. This last factor may be sensed at the beginning of Kōthala’s beautiful and influential Marathi romance, Līlāvatī (c. 800), a work that breathes in every verse mastery of the most sophisticated Sanskrit literary culture. When the author’s mistress asks him for a tale, he responds, “Ah, my love, you will make me look ridiculous for my lack of learning in the arts of language. Far from telling a great tale, I should in fact keep silent.” To this the mistress replies, “Any words that clearly communicate meaning are good; what care we for rules? So tell me a tale in Prakrit, which simple women love to hear—but not with too many localisms, so that it’s easy to understand.” Throughout this exchange, the artifice of artlessness is hard to miss, as is the massive learning required to appear simple.72

Other aesthetic values inform Vākpatiraj’s historical biography of Yāsovarman of Kānyakubja (c. 725), the Gaudavaho. “From time immemorial,” the poet explains, “it has been in Prakrit, and in that language alone, that one could combine new content and mellow form. . . . All words enter into Prakrit and emerge out of it, as all waters enter and emerge from the sea.” At the same time, he seems to have been aware that the language was, for his milieu, culturally residual: many men, he says with a certain defiance mixed with melancholy, “no longer understand [Prakrit’s] different virtues; great poets [in Prakrit] should just scorn or mock or pity them, but feel no pain themselves.”73

Whatever the causes of the desuetude of Prakrit, it is a fact that vaidika as well as Jain and, indeed, nonreligious cultures could and did express themselves effectively in the language. This is equally true, if less well known, of Apabhramsha. Most of the texts in this language for the first half-millennium of its literary existence (up to 1000 or so) have been lost, but we know from citations in later works that to write in Apabhramsha implied no tie whatever to any particular religious community. It was used by all kinds of poets: Brahmanical (for instance, Caturmukha and Govinda, pre-ninth century), tantric

72. Līlāvatī vv. 98, 40–41 (“arts of language,” saddasattha; “what care we for rules,” kim lakkhañey anha; “localism,” dest). The choice of language here no doubt is also partly related to the fact that the Līlāvatī concerns the romantic history of King Hāla Sātavāhana and Līlāvati, princess of Simhāladvipa.

73. Gaudavaho vv. 92–93, 95; see Suru’s note on v. 95 (contrast Bodewitz and van Daalen 1998: 44). The faulty transmission of the language in late-medieval manuscripts of dramas show how alien it had become to the average reader; cf. Coulson 1989: xli ff., though as observed in note 78 below, scholars continued to study the language for centuries. The two beautifully inscribed if perhaps pedestrian Prakrit poems from Bhoja’s court, both Avanikārmāśataka, may have had more to do with the pedagogical environment of the school where they were installed than with any other literary purpose (El 8: 241–60; for other grand and large inscribed Prakrit texts see Archaeological Survey of India, 1934–35, Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1937, p. 60).
Buddhist (such as Kānha and Saraha, tenth century, eastern India), and Muslim (Abdul Rahman, fourteenth century, western India). And it implied no tie to religious expression, either. Many of the early citations are in fact erotic stanzas of a sort familiar from the Prakrit tradition. And they strive to create a similar rural ambience while displaying full mastery of Sanskrit poetics. We find countless verses like the following:

What kind of poison vine is this that grows in the herders’ camp, which can make a strong man die if it isn’t wrapped around his neck?

The god of love invented the strangest arrow in the world, one that can kill you if it strikes—and kill you if it doesn’t.

He didn’t break the hedge or make a sound, I didn’t see him at the door. I’ve no idea, mother, how my lover could enter so quickly into my heart.

The elegant simplicity of such poetry is immediately recognizable to readers at home in the Prakrit tradition. But Apabhramsha could also be used in a very different voice:

Srāvaṇa was in one eye, Bhādrapāda in the other, Māgha in her pallet bed spread upon the ground; in her cheek Autumn, in her limbs Summer, Mārgaśīrṣa in the sesame field of her joy; and on the simple girl’s lotus-pond face deep Winter took up position.

74. For recent surveys see Vyas 1984 and Bhayani 1989b; Sarma 1965 provides a useful review of scholarship on Apabhramsha in Hindi and Gujarati. On Caturmukha, author of a courtly epic on the churning of the ocean of immortality, see Bhayani 1958; Govinda’s poem on the life of Kṛṣṇa is cited in the Swayambhūchandās (Bhayani 1993: 224). A Karṇaparākrama in Apabhramsha is mentioned in the Śāhityadarpana.

75. All three verses are from the Śṛṅgaiṇaprakāśa (which cites nearly seventy, though this number pales in comparison to its more than 1650 Prakrit verses), p. 421 (Bhayani 1989a: 8; the paradox explicit in the verse is resolved by the realization that the poet is talking about a girl, further suggested by the feminine of the Apabhramsha word for “necklace”); p. 478 (Bhayani 1989a: 12); p. 422 (Bhayani 1989a: 9). Similar materials are preserved in the third section of Hemacandra’s grammar, including three of the four verses treated here, and in his Chandonuśāsana (cf. Alsdorf 1937: 73–110; Vyas 1982). A lovely extended poem called a carcarī and composed in Apabhramsha (though called simply “Prakrit”) is given in the mid-twelfth-century royal encyclopedia Mānasollāsa: It is a verse about Holi, meant “to be sung at the spring festival in the Hindolaka rāgā” (see Mānasollāsa vol. 3, p. 33, vv. 305–305). Master 1949–1951: 412 discusses an Apabhramsha dohā from Kuvalayamālā that he considers the “earliest recorded” example.

76. Śṛṅgaiṇaprakāśa p. 376 (Bhayani 1989a: 7). Bhoja understands Māgha as Mādhava, spring, which leads him to interpret its metonymy as the fresh plants associated with spring that are meant to cool down the woman’s body. Compare the English madrigal: “April is in my mistress’
Judging from the commentary on this poem, this is a text taken to embody the most courtly of poetic techniques. Besides illustrating the genre known as “miscellany” by showing the simultaneous presence of all the seasons in the lovelorn woman, the verse displays all six types of verbal powers (from direct denotation to metonymy-mediated-by-metonymy) that, as the commentator says, “one can find in the works of the greatest poets.”

All this said, there is also no question that there was a growing trend—not easy to date but beginning in the early second millennium—toward a reduction in language options. It seems to have become virtually impossible for non-Jain authors to write in Apabhramsha after about 1100; Brahmanical works after Bhoja’s time and non-Jain works after the *Saṃdēśarāṣṭaka* may not exist at all. The same largely holds true of Prakrit, which was more or less completely abandoned, again to the Jains—though occasional literary experiments, and philological interest, continued outside the Jain world at least up to the mid-eighteenth century. For reasons that remain unclear but seem present in the development of the regional literary cultures, too, there were forces at work in the later medieval period that gradually narrowed the spectrum of choices available for literary expression for everyone and at the same

---

77. Sarasvatīkāntabhāvanālankāra p. 135ff., which presupposes the kind of discussion introducing the citation in *Śṛṇgārprakāśa* chapter 7 (“miscellany”: *prakīrṣṇaghatanā*). To give the flavor of this elaborate analysis: The six substantival locatives and “simple girl” are all (1) direct denotations, the last two (“sesame field of her joy,” “lotus-pond face”) are used (2) metaphorically (via the shared qualities of attractiveness [as a place where girls go to meet their lovers] and beauty, respectively). The four month-names (Śrāvana, Bhādrapāda, Maγha, Mārgaśīrāḥ) are used (3) metonymically (referring to the drizzle, downpours, cold, and frost, respectively, associated with them [Mārgaśīrāḥ is also the season when sesame fields, her place for secret rendezvous, are mown]), and although directly denoted, the seasons, since they cannot be simultaneously present, are communicated not by the denotation that expresses reals (tathābhūtārtha) but by (4) denotation that expresses unreals (tadbhāvapatti, cf. *Śṛṇgārprakāśa* p. 354ff.). The verb “has taken up residence” is used in (5) a transferred sense, which leads us toward a (6) metonomy mediated by metonymy (lakṣāvalaṅkāta). “To take up position” in its primary sense is used of kings and their armies; used in a transferred sense with reference to a season, the verb implies the presence of all the season’s accoutrements, its effectivity, power, etc., and thereby the powerful consequences of its action mentioned in the verse. Furthermore, each season or month, by metonymically expressing the woman’s powerful pain of separation from her lover, at the same time metonymically expresses her powerful love for him. The metonymical use of Śrāvana and Bhādrapāda—their drizzle and showers—point metonymically toward the girl’s constant crying and, through yet a further metonymy, to her yearning for reunion with her lover. (A Sanskrit version of this poem is cited by the *Balaprīya* commentary in *Dhvanyālakā* p. 149.)

78. See Upadhye in *Ilāvai* 1996: 36 on Rāma Pāṇiţavā of Kerala. Serious Brahmanical scholarship on Prakrit is demonstrated by the important grammars produced in seventeenth-century Bengal (Mārkandeya and Rāmaśarma), and by the learned commentary on the *Rāvivavaho* composed, again from Bengal, at the end of the seventeenth century (*Rāvivavaho* 1958: xi ff.).
time made those choices seem all the more inevitable. Indeed, it was at this
time that Sanskrit began to develop a concomitance with Brahmanism far
more invariable than it had had for the previous thousand years.

Prior to this period, however—and thus for most of the history of San-
skrit literary culture—writers chose to be Sanskrit writers from a range of
language options, and since multilinguality was not one of these, they had
to choose. Choice was determined in part by genre, in part by aesthetic con-
siderations, especially social register (the degree of rusticity or sophistica-
tion implied by the theme). Yet another condition, as yet unmentioned and
more elusive, concerns the sphere of circulation. One writes to say some-
thing in particular and to a particular audience, and chooses a language ap-
propriate for both message and reader. To choose to write in Sanskrit, even
from the earliest period, was to choose a cosmopolitan readership of truly
vast proportions. I say more about the circulatory space of Sanskrit litera-
ture later, but in the context of the question of language choice it is worth
observing that it extended far beyond the subcontinent, into Central Asia
and as far as the islands of Southeast Asia. Neither Prakrit nor Apabhramsha,
to say nothing of regional-language literature, commanded anything re-
motely comparable to this kind of audience. Only a Sanskrit poet could
make the boast Bihāṇa makes about his work: “There is no village or coun-
try, no capital city or forest region, no pleasure garden or school where
learned and ignorant, young and old, male and female do not read my po-
ems and shiver with pleasure.”

Nor was this an empty boast. Consider just one case from the early period
of Buddhist Sanskrit poetry. We no doubt find a range of languages used for
the inscription of the Buddha’s word (or what could be taken for the Bud-
ha’s word) and for monastic rules of discipline. None of this local-language
material—Gandhari, for example—circulated very far beyond the limits of
its vernacular world. The works of the first great Buddhist Sanskrit poets,
however, such as Āśvaghōsa (second century) and Mātrceṭa (not later than
300), were read not only in northern India but in much of Central Asia. In
Qizil and Sorčuq (in today’s Xinjiang region of China), manuscript fragments
have been found bearing portions of Āśvaghōsa’s dramas and his two courtly
epics, Saundarananda (The story of handsome Nanda) and Buddhacarita

79. Neither appears to be found later in Central Asian manuscripts or is preserved in any
Southeast Asian literary tradition. Pravarasena is mentioned once in an inscription of Yaśovar-
man of Khmer country (c. 900) (Majumdar 1974: 16), though I doubt this is anything more
than second-hand name-dropping. Brajbhasha enjoyed a transregional status in north India
during the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries (see McGregor, chapter 16, this volume), at
the end of the Sanskrit cosmopolitan epoch, and attracted writers such as Keśavādas who in an
earlier epoch would have composed in Sanskrit.

(Deeds of the Buddha). Mātṛceta’s poetic hymns circulated even more widely, to the northern branches of the Silk Road, where the surviving fragments of his texts outnumber all others. A late-seventh-century account of his work by a Chinese pilgrim in India suggests the possibilities for near-universal dissemination that a great Sanskrit poem could have:

In India numerous hymns of praise to be sung at worship have been most carefully handed down, for every talented man of letters has praised in verse whatever person he deemed most worthy of worship. Such a man was the venerable Mātṛceta, who, by his great literary talent and virtues, excelled all learned men of his age. . . . [His] charming compositions are equal in beauty to the heavenly flowers, and the high principles which they contain rival in dignity the lofty peaks of a mountain. . . . Throughout India everyone who becomes a monk is taught Mātṛceta’s two hymns.81

This range of circulation was made possible not so much by the religious universalism of Buddhism as by the literary universalism of Sanskrit and the aesthetic power—beauty “equal . . . to the heavenly flowers”—that it could evince. This at least is the inference suggested by the spread of nondenominational and nonreligious Sanskrit poetry in Southeast Asia, where by the ninth or tenth century at the latest, literati in Khmer country were studying masterpieces such as the Raghuvamśa (Dynasty of Raghu) of Kālidāsa, the Haṭṣararita of the early-seventh-century prose master Bāṇa, and the Siṃhasataka (Hundred verses to the sun) of the latter’s contemporary, Mayūra.82

Accordingly, when poets chose to write in the Sanskrit language, they were choosing, along with a certain aesthetic, a certain readership—in this case a cosmopolitan, virtually global readership. And they did this, we may accordingly infer, because they had something cosmopolitan, something global, to say.

THE TIMES OF SANSKRIT LITERARY CULTURE

Problems similar to those encountered in thinking about the literary and what are taken to be its defining features beset the question of historicity. We find a tension between, on the one hand, the need to understand how readers and writers of Sanskrit fashioned and thought of their literary culture and, on the other hand, contemporary theoretical positions arguing that any text can be literature depending on what one wants to do with it (reasonable po-

81. I-tsing, who also translated Mātṛceta’s Śatapāṭānāsvatostotra into Chinese; see Shackleton Bailey 1951: 4.
82. Clear allusions to Raghuvamśa are found in the Pre-Rup Inscription of the mid-tenth century (Inscriptions du Cambodge, vol. 1, p. 73ff., vv. 164, 194, etc.). Bāṇa and Mayūra, among other poets, are elsewhere named (cf. Majumdar 1974: 16).
itions, given the unruliness of texts in the face of literary rules). A similar
tension between the views from inside and outside appears as we try to grasp
what Sanskrit writers did and did not understand about their existence in lit-
erary time. On the one hand, the visions of the past that Sanskrit poets them-
selves had, and that constitute what history meant to those who made it, have
a first-order significance for us. On the other hand, this tradition offers no
clear conception of literary change, and no way of describing what became
of Sanskrit literary culture over time. That a literary community perceived
nothing of its own development may tell us some important truth, but it can-
not very well be the entire truth. Inevitably, therefore, we sometimes need to
step outside a tradition to see what cannot be seen from within.

The history we are concerned with here is not the raw chronological se-
quence of authors and texts. The many histories of Sanskrit literature avail-
able make this as unnecessary as it is conceptually uninteresting. It is more
purposeful to press on the historical pressure points of literary culture in
history; when Sanskrit literature begins and when it ends—or whether it does
neither, and what is assumed even in asking such questions. Understanding
what it meant for kāvyā to begin (if it began) will give us some sense of what
it is. The process by which it died (if it died) will give us some sense of what
had been necessary to keep it alive.

Sanskrit Literature Begins

A view from within of the history of Sanskrit literary culture is made possi-
ble by the unexpected presence of what we might term the ethnohistorical
habit of Sanskrit writers. I call it unexpected in part because scholarship has
ignored it, but in part because of the concern Sanskrit literature so often
evinces in trying to escape time no less than space.

Around the seventh century the convention was invented (and quickly
adopted everywhere) of prefacing a literary work with a eulogy of poets past
(kavipraṃsā). Bāṇa, author of the Harṣacarita (c. 640), the first Sanskrit lit-
erary biography that takes a contemporary as its subject, seems to have been
the first to use it. This is not to say that earlier writers never refer or allude
to predecessors. In a well-known passage in the prologue to Kālidāsa’s drama
Maṇḍavyā and Agnimitra, an actor complains to the director, “How can you
ignore the work of the great poets—men like Dhāvaka, Saumilla, Kaviratna—
and present the work of a contemporary poet like Kālidāsa?” to which the
director famously replies, “Not every work of literature is good just because
it is old, or bad just because it is new.”83 This exchange contains several fea-

83. Maṇḍavyāgṇimitra 1.2. Variants give Bhāsa for Dhāvaka and Kavi putra for Kaviratna.
Somila (sic) is the author of the Śudrakakathā, which is cited in Bhūja’s Śyāgīrāsprakāśa. Cf. also
tures of the eulogy mode to come. For one thing, it implies a canon of literature in which the author seeks a place, affiliating himself to the lineage of his predecessors by the very act of naming them. For another, it suggests that a precondition for entering the canon is innovation—making literature that makes some kind of history. In the more formal eulogies what constitutes this history, for different writers at different times, takes on a more organized structure.

The temporality of the eulogies is only one of their intriguing features. In addition, a number of the more general propositions about Sanskrit literary culture argued earlier in the chapter find corroboration, and some new insights emerge about communities of readers and standards of taste.84 A literary sphere at once multilingual and restricted is projected: Only the three cosmopolitan languages are ever mentioned (all three, incidentally, share the praise-poem convention), never Tamil, Marathi, or any other regional language, and no writer is ever shown to be master of more than one language.85 The linguistic diversity that poets saw as making up their unified sphere is expressed in terms of genre diversity. Bāṇa’s praise-poems in fact offer a survey of the main varieties of literature by mentioning their foremost representatives or innovators: the tale (kathā) in Sanskrit prose (or Prakrit or Apabhramsha verse) in the Sanskrit Vāsavadattā of Subandhu (c. 600); the prose biography (ākhyāyikā) in the lost Prakrit work of Adhyarāja; the Sanskrit courtly epic (mahākāvya) in Kālidāsa, and Prakrit courtly epic (skandhaka) in Pravarasena: the Sanskrit, Prakrit, or Apabhramsha lyric or anthology of lyrics (muktaka and kośa) in the Prakrit collection of Sātavāhana; the drama (nāṭaka) in Bhāsa (300?).86 The boundaries of kāvya are everywhere affirmed; other forms, such as ancient lore (pūrṇa), are excluded.87 Vyāsa’s Mahābhārata is included, however—further evidence that its place in textual taxonomies was long in tension with the history of its reception, at least among working poets.

---

Sūktimuktvāvali of Jalhaṇa, p. 43, v. 49, where in a verse attributed to Rājaśekhara, “Rāmila and Somila” are mentioned as joint authors of the Śrīdhākathā (sic) (noted in Raghavan 1978: 806).

85. The account that follows is based on five kaviprāṃsvā: Bāṇa’s Harsacarita (Kanauj, c. 640); Dandin’s Aruntisundarikathā (Kaḍimpuram, c. 675); Uddiyotanastīr’s Kvaḷeṇyaṃalā (Jalor, 779); Dhanapāla’s Tilakamanjari (Dhārā, c. 1020); Someśvara’s Kīrtikauṃudi (Anhilapatan, c. 1230). For further detail see Pollock 1995c.

86. The lost work of Harīcandra, named a gadyabandha, or prose text, by Bāṇa, may have been the mixed prose-verse composition called the campū, the one major genre missing from Bāṇa’s list.

87. An exception is the Jain author Jinasena II, who in his Adipūrāṇa (837) eulogizes a number of writers of genres other than kāvya, such as Siddhasena, who is praised as a logician (vv. 42–53).
A distinct, if unanticipated, division of literary communities manifests when we look at these eulogies across their whole history. Buddhist poets seem to never be mentioned, despite their decisive contribution to the development of Sanskrit courtly epic (Āsvaghoṣa), drama (Kumāralāta), verse-prose composition (ĀrYAŚUra), and religious lyric (Mātrcēta). Only Jain poets, by and large, include praise of Jain poets. This kind of community compartmentalization needs more analysis, but some things are already clear. For example, whereas Jains alone read certain kinds of Jain literature (their version of the Rāmāyāṇa found no resonance whatever outside their own traditions), many of them—as Hemacandra or Jinasena demonstrate dramatically—were eager to read anything.

The poems also offer some insight into the standards of literary judgment, sometimes exasperatingly vague standards to be sure, that were used by writers themselves. Command and charm of language, power of description, formal mastery, and sometimes emotional impact, are emphasized, but rarely moral discernment and never mastery of the elements that make up the practical criticism of today, such as plot, characterization, or voice (this distribution of concerns was shared, generally speaking, by Sanskrit commentators, too). Obviously, the praise of past writers also creates a literary canon by representing the representative and providing accounts of what counts in literary history. The criteria of selection at work are, again, unclear, and contradiction between the praise-poems and pragmatic canonization—that effected through quotation in literary treatises, for example, or anthologization—is not unknown. Astonishingly absent from the praise-poems are two names associated with the most powerful lyric poetry in India: Amaru and Bhartṛhari. At the same time a self-canonization is at work, for through his eulogies a poet is affiliating himself to a cultural lineage and asserting his place within it. As such, these verses reveal not so much inert traditions handed down from the past as orders of significance shaped in the interest of each particular present.

88. Citations of Buddhist literary texts in works on literary theory (aside from the commentary on Dandin by the Buddhist Ratnaśīlānā) are very rare. Anandavardhana quotes two poems of Dharmakīrti, whom he names (Dhvanyāloka pp. 487–90), and Rājaśekhara anonymously cites Āsvaghoṣa’s Buddhacarita 8.25 (Kavyāvibhāga p. 18). I find no more.

89. Jinasena’s Pārisaṇātthabhyudaya famously appropriates Kālidāsa’s Meghadūta. Hemacandra wrote a Kāvyāvibhāga that sought to summarize the whole prior history of poetics (a text profoundly indebted to Bhoja). Yet in the kaviśaṃsā of Jinasena’s Adipurāṇa only Jain poets and scholars are mentioned. One exception to community compartmentalization is the praise-poem of the Brahman Someśvara, though this was composed in thirteenth-century Gujarat in a literary world dominated by Jains.

90. Neither is mentioned even in the eulogies assembled in anthologies. The sole exception I find is a verse on Amaru by Arjunavarmadeva, his thirteenth-century commentator (Śūktimuktiṭāvatī p. 48, v. 101).
The temporality of the eulogies is perhaps their most elusive quality, except in point of chronology. Readers familiar with the rudiments of Sanskrit literary history will note with wonderment that Someśvara in the thirteenth century can provide a reasonably accurate chronological survey of well over a thousand years of literary creation. And this was a chronological interest hardly peculiar to the Jain milieu in which that poet worked; it is shared with Daṇḍin, who lived six centuries earlier. Even where the chronology of the praise-poems may be awry, the interest in establishing a historically ordered ancestry remains undeniable. Chronological exactitude is not, of course, of equal concern to all Sanskrit ethnohistories. Some scholars have found more evidence for India’s supposed deficiency in historical intelligence in a work like Ballālasena’s late-sixteenth-century Bhogaprābadha (The story of Bhoja), where Kālidāsa (fourth century), Mayūra (650), Māgha (650), and Bhava-bhūti (700) are placed together along with Jyotirīśvara Kaviśekhara (1475) at King Bhoja’s court (1011–1055). But much testimony besides the praise-poems, not least the temporally punctilious inscriptional discourse, suggests that Ballālasena was not living in a timeless (let alone mindless) universe, but that he was imaginatively telescoping a whole literary tradition into an ideal place and time in order to examine the cultural economy of Sanskrit in what was considered its most perfected courtly embodiment.

In any case, the praise-poems make it clear that to see oneself connected to a cultural practice with a great past, and to know something of the temporal structure of that past, were important values for Sanskrit writers. In this, participants in the literary sphere may be thought to have differed little from their colleagues in other sectors of Sanskrit culture, where the authorizing function of lineage affiliation (paraṃpara) is everywhere in evidence. What this past might have meant to them as a process of change through time, however, is another matter altogether. The chronologies are merely catenated, with poets linked to poets in such a way that nothing historical separates Kālidāsa in the fourth century from Yaśovirā (1475) at King Bhoja’s court (1011–1055). But much testimony besides the praise-poems suggests that Ballālasena was not living in a timeless (let alone mindless) universe, but that he was imaginatively telescoping a whole literary tradition into an ideal place and time in order to examine the cultural economy of Sanskrit literature in it was considered its most perfected courtly embodiment.

Such coevality may in part be seen as a function of the specific nature of Sanskrit literary ideology. This generated and enforced a model of language,
form, and, often, content that was meant to be largely abstracted, isolated, and insulated from the world of historical change—this despite the ever-deeper historicity that historical change was to bring about (as was the case in Vijayanagara-era texts). In this we should perceive not failure but a core dimension of Sanskrit’s cultural victory: In part it was thanks to Sanskrit’s brilliant apparatus of grammar, prosody, and poetics, providing stability no less than dignity, that it effectively did escape time. But in part, the coevality of the praise-poems was owing to the very history of Sanskrit cultivation. The generations of Sanskrit poets could be thought of as simultaneous because in one important sense they were. They continued to be read and copied, discussed and debated, and to provide important models of artistic fashioning for uninterrupted centuries. However scholars might wish to periodize Sanskrit literary culture, it is crucial to bear in mind such local procedures, by which, as part of its fundamental self-understanding, the culture sought to resist all periodization.

That said, the praise-poems all concur in declaring that Sanskrit literary culture began. No one regards the tradition of literature to be without origin, like the Veda, or attempts to locate an origin in God, the way many Sanskrit knowledge-systems envision their textual history as a series of abridgements of a Perfect Text originating with Śiva, Brahmā, the Sun, or other deity. The praise-poems are unanimous in their conviction that literature had a beginning and that it began with Vālmiki. In this they agree with the widespread tradition, far older than the oldest eulogy, that holds the Rāmāyaṇa to be the first poem (ādikāvyya). “Vālmiki created the first verse-poem,” proclaimed the Buddhist poet Aśvaghōsa in the second century, when he himself was in the process of creating what may have been the first courtly epic, one heavily influenced by Vālmiki. In fact, the Rāmāyaṇa thematizes its own innovation at its start, in the remarkable metapoem that represents the sage as inventing something unprecedented. Yet what we are to make of this universal conviction is not immediately apparent. What did Vālmiki actually do that was new?

When Aśvaghōsa attributes to Vālmiki the creation of the first verse-poem (padya), he cannot simply mean versified language. Whatever the Veda’s place in textual typologies, the fact that it consists of metrical texts (long antedating Vālmiki) was denied by no one. Indeed, its commonest name is chandas, “the Verse” (as another well-known collection in the West came to be called “the Book”). The particular verse-form that constitutes Vālmiki’s primal poetic utterance, the eight-syllable quatrain (anusūṭbh, śloka), is used in a large num-

93. Buddhacarita 1.43. Aśvaghōsa himself used Vālmiki’s narrative to structure his account of the life of the Buddha—and perhaps meant to link his own innovation to the first poet’s in the same way as he linked his hero Siddhārtha to the Rāghava dynasty in his second epic (Sundarananda 1.21). See Pollock 1986: 28.
ber of versified Vedic texts. What Āśvaghoṣa meant by padya is undoubtedly versified kāvya, as gadya signifies unversified kāvya and not simply prose (which in fact is also attested from the early Vedic period). But this still does not tell us what Vālmiki invented in inventing versified kāvya, or in other words, what is “first” about the first poem.

There are at least three ways of examining this question, or any other question in the history of a literary culture. We can listen (1) to the text itself, or (2) to the tradition of listening to the text, or (3) to whatever we can hear in the world outside the text and the tradition. When we do the second and try to reconstruct the tradition of the interpretation of Vālmiki’s primality, it is puzzling to discover how thin it actually is. Everyone in South Asia knows that Vālmiki was the first poet, but no one tells us why. After Āśvaghoṣa’s attribution we find only passing allusions. Kālidāsa refers to the Rāmāyaṇa as Vālmiki’s “personal discovery” (upajñā) in the same way that grammar is Pāṇini’s; Bhavabhūti in the early eighth century mentions Vālmiki’s formal innovation, as does Rājaśekhara in the early tenth. But there is nothing more, not even among the phalanx of commentators (perhaps a dozen over the five-hundred-year period beginning around 1000) who cherished and pondered the significance of every syllable of the text. That Vālmiki effected a break in literary-cultural history seems somehow an assumption that derives its power not from any corroborating tradition of analysis and argument but from the poem’s own assertion of primacy, and the manner in which it is made.

The structure and character of this assertion, contained in the metanarrative account in the first four chapters of Vālmiki’s work, add their own complications, and listening to the text in pursuit of some logic of events in the creation of the Rāmāyaṇa requires more than just hearing. “Vālmiki closely questioned Nārada,” the work begins, “and asked him, ‘Who in this present-day world is a man of qualities?’” The abrupt inquiry receives no justification and perhaps needs none, for the problem of moral will that is found at the origin of Sanskrit literature and that continues to shape much of its history is ever with us. Nārada, a kind of deus ex machina whose function, however, is to inaugurate action rather than conclude it, here responses to Vālmiki’s question with a synopsis of the principal action of the Rāmāyaṇa story. It is as if the poet were receiving the legend of Rāma as it may have existed in

94. See Raghuvamsa 15.63 (and Aṣṭādhyāyī 2.4.21), and Uttararāmacarita (beginning from 2.5). According to Rājaśekhara, Sarasvatī, “out of good will toward Vālmiki . . . secretly made over to him beautifully versified language” (sañcchāndamŚ vacāṃsi) (Kāvyamimāṃsā p. 7).

95. According to a late commentator, although the authority of a text obviously cannot be established by the text’s own claims to authority, that of the Rāmāyaṇa is based on the fact that it was composed by an absolutely reliable witness, the supreme sage Vālmiki (Madhavayogin’s Kātaka, vol. 1, p. 30). Presumably no further corroboration was required.
some unadorned, popular oral form (in much the same way, in fact, that Āvaghoṣa was to take a documentary Middle-Indic version of the life of the Buddha and turn it into a courtly Sanskrit poem).

The critical moment in the narrative comes when, taking leave and musing over the tale Nārada has told, Vālmiki sees an act of violence at the riverside: a hunter shoots one of a mating pair of birds, and the poet in his pity (śoka) bursts out with a curse that has the form of verse (śloka), the linguistic affinity here corroborating an ontological affinity in accordance with ancient belief. Astonished at his own spontaneous invention, the poet returns to his dwelling to find waiting for him Brahmā, the supreme deity of Sanskrit knowledge, with his four faces constantly reciting the four Vedas. Brahmā explains that Vālmiki has just created verse and has done so through the god’s will. He commands him to compose in verse the full story of Rāma, both the public and private doings, and assures him that all he tells in his poem will be absolutely true. As Vālmiki begins to meditate, the whole of the story enters his consciousness; he becomes truly the omniscient narrator, and using his new formal skills he transforms the legend into kāvya. He teaches the entire poem, word for word, to two young ascetics, Kuśa and Lava, who are shown to memorize the whole of the text and chant it “just as they were taught it,” and who perform the work in the presence of Rāma himself. What we are listening to or reading when we read or hear the Rāmāyaṇa is what Rāma himself once heard—and those who sang it to him were in fact his two lost sons. The truth of Rāma’s moral vision, and the veracity of the text in which it is embodied, are certified by the protagonist himself and the sons who are his second self. The poem is not only “sweet,” self-conscious in its rhetoric and aesthetic, but a “mimetically exact account,” a perfect representation of what really happened.96

The text itself, then, as well as the many later ethnohistorical accounts, affirms that Sanskrit literature had its beginning in Vālmiki’s work. And this accords with the categories of later theory, which as we have seen radically differentiates kāvya from all earlier textuality (Veda, purāṇa, and the like). But to repeat: exactly what began with the Rāmāyaṇa, what was new and made it kāvya and nothing else, are questions that stubbornly persist, and it is no easy matter to provide historically sensible answers. At this point we may try our third approach and attempt to supplement the arguments of the text and the tradition with whatever else we can discover of literary reality.

While the claim to formal innovation at the most literal level of octosyllabic verse is clearly anachronistic, there is more formal complexity to the Rāmāyaṇa than this, and it may be in the range of its complex meters and other techniques of prosody and trope, less common in earlier forms of tex-

96. Rāmāyaṇa 1.4, especially vv. 12 and 16 (and, for the role of god’s will in the creation of verse, see 2.30: macchandul eva te brahmaṇ pravṛtteyaṁ sarvasvaiḥ); cf. Pollock 1984: 82–83.
tuality, that a measure of its newness lies. Perhaps, however, it is somehow the fact that the vehicle for such formal features is Sanskrit itself, rather than some other form of Old or Middle Indo-Aryan. The text may be elusive here, but surely it intimates something significant by the authorizing presence of Brahmā, the very voice of Sanskrit. More subtly, the text hints that its newness resides not so much in form and linguistic medium but in its recording in metrical Sanskrit of something previously not thought worthy of registering in such a way. Unlike the Veda with its accounts of transcendent and mythic experience, it is the personal response to human experience that fundamentally marks the Rāmāyaṇa and all Sanskrit kāvyā, even when the theme itself is transcendent and mythic. “I was overcome with pity”—the poet speaks in rare first person—“this issued forth from me; it must be poetry and nothing else.” It was to become a staple of later Sanskrit criticism that the literary work expresses the emotional subjectivity of the writer: only the poet who is himself a man of passion can create a poetic world of passion.97 On this view, it is because the poet himself felt pity that there can exist the poetry of pity (karuṇārasa) traditionally held to lie at the core of the Rāmāyaṇa. Perhaps it is this conception of experience and textuality that was viewed as unprecedented. Then again, what made the poem new could be the more mundane but decisive factor that it was a text committed to writing when this was still a relatively new skill in the subcontinent. Or, finally, perhaps kāvyā began in the sense that, for the first time, the culture found one of its examples useful or important enough to preserve—or rather, the culture preserved it precisely because it was the sole example of its kind, a first poem without a second.

These issues are so hard to disentangle because they are in fact historically entangled. Innovations in form, genre, subject matter, language, medium, and mentality all combined to condition the emergence of Sanskrit kāvyā. Two of these in particular, the use of the Sanskrit language as such for the production of kāvyā and the widespread adoption of writing and its impact, merit closer if necessarily brief attention; for if we do not understand that Sanskrit itself, in a sense, no less than writing began, we cannot understand how Sanskrit literature itself could.98

When discussing the word sanskṛta and its primary meanings I alluded to the language’s ancient associations with Vedic liturgy and related practices of knowledge and ritual. That at some epoch Sanskrit emerged from the liturgical realm to which it had largely been restricted and became available for


98. A fuller consideration of the two questions, from which the following is compressed, is available in Pollock 1996 and forthcoming.
new cultural functions such as kāvya and the inscribed political praise-poem (praṇāstī) associated with kāvya is not in doubt. What remains disputed is when this happened, and under what conditions. Inscriptions and testimony from nonliterary texts, among other evidence, combine to suggest that the invention of kāvya was relatively late, not long before the beginning of the common era—that is to say, as many as eight centuries or more after the Sanskrit language in its archaic form was first attested on the subcontinent.

For the first four centuries of literacy in South Asia (beginning about 250 B.C.E.), Sanskrit was never used for inscriptions, whether for issuing a royal proclamation, glorifying martial deeds, commemorating a Vedic sacrifice, or granting land to Brahman communities. The language for public texts of this sort was Prakrit. Abruptly in the second century, and increasingly thereafter, Sanskrit came to be used for such public texts, including the quite remarkable kāvya-like poems in praise of kingly lineages. Nothing suggests that prior to this time there were any comparable inscriptional texts that have since been lost. What epigraphy establishes for us is not the latest date for the existence of literature in Sanskrit (as is usually assumed) but rather the earliest. It provides evidence not of a renaissance of Sanskrit culture after centuries of supposed Jain and Buddhist countercultural hegemony (another old and still common view) but of the invention of a new kind of Sanskrit culture altogether.

This conclusion is exactly what is suggested by the testimony of other realms of cultural activity. From among the vast library of early Sanskrit texts, no evidence compels belief in the existence of kāvya before the last centuries B.C.E., if that early. Our first actual citations from Sanskrit kāvya are found in Patañjali’s Mahābhāṣya (Great commentary) on the grammar of Pāṇini. The materials he cites, if astonishingly thin for a work on the Sanskrit language some 1500 printed pages in length, suggest a state of kāvya reasonably developed in form and convention. The problem is not the data of literary culture in the Mahābhāṣya, however meager, but the date of the author, Patañjali. The evidence usually adduced for an early date is ambiguous and meager; the most compelling arguments place him no earlier than the middle of the second century of the common era.

The ideology of antiquity and the cultural distinction conferred by sheer age have seduced many scholars into attempting to push the date for the in-

99. Patañjali, however, refers to a poet by name only once, mentioning “the poem composed by Vararuci” (vāraṇucaṃ kāvyam, on 4.3.101) (this is also the single use of the word kāvya in the sense of “literature” in the entire Mahābhāṣya). He mentions three literary works, the ākhyāyikās, or prose narratives, Vāsavadatta, Sumanottā (on 4.2.60), and Bhimareṇā (on 4.3.87), though we do not know for a fact that any of these were in Sanskrit. Note that Prakrit works were often referred to by Sanskrit names (Setubandha, Pañcabhaṭṭaṅkālī, etc.).

100. Frauwallner 1960: 111.
vention of kāvyā deeper into the first millennium B.C.E. Everywhere, however, we run into problems. The arguments most recently offered for an early date of the Rāmāyaṇa in the final (or so-called monumental) form we have it today—before the rise of Buddhism in the fifth century B.C.E.—are unpersuasive. The conceptual world of the Rāmāyaṇa, which knows and reproduces core features of late Maurya political thought, is post-Aśoka (after 250 B.C.E.). Attributions in anthologies of kāvyā verses to the grammarian Panini (whose own date is largely conjectural but is conventionally placed in the mid-fourth century B.C.E.) are late and devoid of historical value. The corpus of plays discovered in Trivandrum in the early 1900s and ascribed to Bhāsa, which have been fantastic ally dated as early as the fourth century B.C.E., have been shown in a recent careful assessment to derive most probably from the Pallava court of the mid-seventh century. The very late date of the commencement of literary theory (not before the sixth century) suggests strongly that the object of its analysis was late as well. Consider that in Kashmir, the site of the most intense creativity in theory, the earliest kāvyā we can locate in time with any confidence (the poet or dramatist Candra[ka] being undatable) is the (lost) work of Bhartṛmeṣṭhi from the mid-sixth century. Thus, inscriptions, testimonia, citations in literature, and the history of literary theory, to say nothing of philology—every piece of evidence hard and soft—prompt us to place the development of kāvyā in the last century or two before the beginning of the common era. Moving it back appreciably before this date requires conjecture every step of the way and a fragile gossamer of relative dating.

If with the soberest accounts we locate the invention of Sanskrit kāvyā near the beginning of the common era, we cannot easily dissociate it from the dramatically changed political landscape of southern Asia at the time, when ruler lineages from Iran and Central Asia had newly entered the subcontinent. Little of the precise nature of their social and political order is understood—the collected inscriptions issued by the principal groups, the Śaka and Kuśāṇa, would not fill a couple of dozen printed pages. Some scholars may be right to see in their activities merely the consecration of a new trend rather than its creation. Yet the willingness that others show to link the new

101. See Goldman 1984: 18–23 on a pre-fifth-century date for the Rāmāyaṇa (contrast Pollock 1986: 23 ff.); Warder 1972– vol. 2 (1974), pp. 103 ff. on “Panini”; equally dubious is his early-third-century B.C.E. date for a Sanskrit drama by “Subandhu,” pp. 110–11. On the Pallava connection of some of the Bhāsa plays see Tieken 1993 (if the character of the Prakrit some of the plays exhibit seems to require a somewhat earlier dating, nothing requires placing them before the second or third century). Candraka is mentioned in Rājatannirṇī 2.16, after what Kalhana calculates as more than a thousand years of Kashmiri history (colophon of chapter 1), and is the very first poet mentioned in a work preoccupied with literary history. Note, too, that the earliest complex metrical inscription in Sanskrit is the Mora step-well record of 50 B.C.E., part of which is in the bhujāṅgauṃbhikā meter.
expansion in the ancient prestige economy of Sanskrit with their presence is, I believe, fundamentally correct.\textsuperscript{102} For one thing, these new courts underwrote, or promoted, the development of new forms of cultural production, such as the political praise-poem, which appeared in Sanskrit for the first time in 150 C.E.—and what an extraordinary innovation it must have seemed, to behold the language of the Veda and sacred learning used in public in praise of a ruling Śaka overlord. For another, it is around this era that textual communities previously antagonistic to Sanskrit, such as Buddhists (many of them patronized by these ruling groups), began to adopt Sanskrit for both scriptural and literary purposes. The literary-cultural values that first came into prominence in this period were to remain core values of Sanskrit literature. The royal court, for instance, would become the primary arena for the creation and consumption of kāvya. The universalist aspirations that marked the political formations of the time would mark Sanskrit literature as well, and would limit any tendency toward localism or historical particularity. In every other area of literary communication—from lexi-
con, metric, tropes, and poetic conventions to character typology, narrative, plot, and the organization of elements that create the emotional impact of a work—a universal adherence to a normative aesthetic is discernible. To write kāvya, whether in Tamil country or Kashmir, in Kerala or Assam, was to engage in an activity whose rules, like those of chess or politics, were everywhere the same—though, again like the rules of chess or politics, they only regulated the moves and did not determine the outcome. Moreover, correctness in literary-language use and the informed appreciation of literature not only would come to define cultural virtuosity but would become signs of kingly virtue: every king must be a learned king, and learned above all in kāvya, both in creating and appreciating it.

Echoes of all these developments can be found in Vālmiki’s Rāmāyaṇa, both as a poem and as a cultural practice. For example, at its core it is poetry about polity, offering an extended meditation on the nature of the king: at once a divine being, capable of transcendent acts of power (stimulating the aesthetic emotion of vīra, the feeling of the heroic), and a human being, for whom suffering is ineluctable (stimulating the aesthetic emotion of karuṇa, the feeling of sadness). Its social milieu is courtly, too: the text shows itself to be performed before king Rāma, as it was performed in fact before countless overlords. Everywhere that the text circulated it carried a vision of kingly behavior—and a vision of the practice of kāvya as well—that everywhere inspired emulation. And, to return to the question of beginnings, the fact that

\textsuperscript{102} Sylvain Lévi’s article of 1904, though extreme in some of its formulations and flawed in some of its particular arguments, is nonetheless an important, and unjustly ignored, contribution to the debate. The arguments were restated by Sircar in 1939, and have yet to be adequately answered.
the Rāmāyana was the first text to use the word sanskṛta in reference to the language it uses may reflect that it was the first to use that language for the kind of text it is.\textsuperscript{103}

Another reason for the Rāmāyana’s status as first poem may have to do with its relationship to writing and the possibility that it was one of the earliest major texts to be preserved, if not composed, in written form. We have become accustomed to hearing of the importance of printing for the creation of literature in modernity. What marks the true watershed in South Asia is writing, along with its complex relations with a changing but enduring oral culture. From the middle of the third century B.C.E., when scholars in the Maurya chancellery brilliantly adapted the imported technology of writing to Indic language use, literacy spread across the subcontinent and beyond, never to be lost, with such dramatic consequences for literary creation and preservation that, in comparison, the later transition to print seems almost a historical footnote.\textsuperscript{104}

The mid-third century is, I have suggested, the outermost historical limit of Vālmiki’s kāvyā. Some formative relationship to writing, then, cannot be ruled out a priori. Yet the manuscript tradition is sui generis. It is impossible to reconstruct an archetype; instead, the work must have been written down at different times and places, as transcriptions of oral performances of a more or less memorized text (attempts to show the presence of standard oral improvisational techniques have been unconvincing). At all events, it may have been the very impulse to preserve the work through the new technology of writing that contributed to its status as the primeval poem. The representation of pure orality that opens the monumental version of the Rāmāyana may confirm rather than belie the literacy of its transmission and even origins. The entire metanarrative—Vālmiki’s receiving the story orally, spontaneously creating a new versified speech form, using it to compose his kāvyā through pure contemplation, and teaching it to Rāma’s sons, who memorize and perform it orally—displays precisely the kind of reflexivity about the oral and nostalgia for its powers that would be irrelevant if not incomprehensible in a world ignorant of writing. Far from being the documentary account of oral creation and transmission it purports to be, the prelude to the Rāmāyaṇa is better seen as an attempt to reimagine orality and recapture its authenticity in a post-oral world. As a staged oral communicative situation, it closely parallels narratives of beginnings in other newly literate, and self-consciously literate, cultures.\textsuperscript{105}

\textsuperscript{103} Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa 5.28.18, vāk sanskṛtā, “Sanskrit speech.”

\textsuperscript{104} A general review of recent scholarship on writing in India is offered by Salomon 1995.

\textsuperscript{105} On the Old French chansons de geste see Gumbrecht 1983: 168; the literacy underlying the very exemplum of oral metanarratives, the dream of Caedmon, is argued by Irvine 1994: 431 ff. The manuscript history of the Rāmāyaṇa is discussed in Pollock 1984.
Such speculation aside, there can be no doubt that Sanskrit literary culture was thoroughly imbued with and conditioned by writing from its earliest period. More precisely stated, it is writing itself that made kāvya historically possible as a cultural practice. So little studied is this question that we fail to realize just how literate Sanskrit literary (and general) culture was, as well as the degree to which writing was constitutive of literature in both the cosmopolitan and vernacular periods. At the same time, we need to recognize that the role of writing was conditioned by the enduring ideology of orality, along with the actuality of oral performance.

That the participants in Sanskrit literary culture were thoroughly familiar with writing from an early date is repeatedly confirmed by the casual references to the practice in Sanskrit kāvya itself. In the works of Kālidāsa, for example, literacy is represented as a common and unremarkable skill.106 Later, of course, for a poet like Rājaśekhara (fl. 930), writing material constitutes “basic equipment of the science of literature” (though the real basic equipment, he notes, is pratībha, genius), and the daily routine of the poet is unthinkable without it.107 This is so even for poets who, unlike Rājaśekhara, worked outside the court, such as the author of the tenth-century Śivamahimnāḥ stotra (Hymn to Śiva’s greatness): He was only hyperbolizing his own real practice when he wrote this lovely verse:

If the inkwell were the ocean and the ink as black as the Black Mountain, if the pen were a twig of the Wishing Tree and the manuscript leaf the earth, if the writing went on forever, and the Goddess of Learning herself were to write,
even then the limit of Your powers could never be reached.108

A drier India might have preserved for us the hard evidence to show that the age of Sanskrit oral composition and transmission ended when the age of kāvya began. But the oldest manuscript remains of kāvya that we do possess, second- or third-century fragments of the work of Āśaghoṣa discovered in Central Asia, testify by their very existence that Sanskrit literature circulated not in oral but in written form, and that it was consumed, so to speak, through the eye: read and studied and annotated on birch bark or palm leaf.109

---

106. The scene in Śikuntala in which the rustic heroine writes a letter to her urbane lover on a lotus leaf and reads it aloud (after 3.68) is deservedly celebrated; but we also find the celestial nymph Urvaši writing a letter on birch bark to Purūravas (Vikramorvaśīya act 2.11 f.), and learn that the Vidvādhara women have magical materials available for writing their own love letters (Kumārasambhava 1.7). See Malamoud 1997: 87–89, 99.

107. Kāvyaminēśa p. 50 (“basic equipment of the science of literature,” kāvyavidvādyāḥ parikāva).

108. Śivamahimnāḥ stotra v. 32.

109. Some of the fragments are provided with interlinear glosses from the hand of an attentive Tocharian reader. See Hartmann 1988.
This is not to imply that reading was the sole mode of consuming kāvya, let alone that oral knowledge was obsolescent. If literacy had become commonplace and writing central to the creation and reproduction of Sanskrit literary culture, other evidence suggests how different this was from the culture of modern literacy. Kālidāsa may tell us how the young prince Raghu, “by learning how to write, gained access to all things made of language (vān-maya) as if gaining access to the sea by way of a river,” but he also shows us another prince who, though he learned to write as a child, only “acquired all the fruits of political wisdom when he frequented those mature in oral knowledge.” If the culture of kāvya is unthinkable without writing—and we have to pass over in silence here the many features of style, structure, and intertextuality that are constitutive of Sanskrit literature and unavailable in a purely oral world—literacy in premodern India should never be equated directly with learning (as we might assume from the notion of the litteratus in Latinate Europe). Nor should it be taken as the sole or even the principal mode of experiencing kāvya. That mode remained listening—but listening to a manuscript being read aloud. This was so even for supposedly popular oral forms such as ancient lore (purāṇa). A seventh-century work dramatically describes for us a professional reader. And a striking figure he is: dressed in the finest cloth of Paunḍra, eyes jet-black with kohl, lips brilliant red from chewing betel nut, he places his book before him on a reading stand. Untying the book he opens it to the place marked by a bookmark for the morning reading, takes up a sheaf of manuscript pages and then, As the brilliant white glints from his teeth seem to wash away the dirty ink from the letters with sparkling water, or to bestrew the book with a shower of white petals, he reads out the ancient lore spoken by the God of Wind. And as he does, he charms the listeners’ minds by the sweet modulation of his recitative [gīti], sounding like the anklets of Sarasvatī herself, Goddess of Speech, who must be dwelling inside his mouth.

For public readings of the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa we have massive evidence, but even kāvya occasionally thematized its own literate-oral performance. In his twelfth-century courtly epic Maṅkha describes how he read out his work from a written text (the act that in fact constituted its publication) before a large audience at his brother’s literary salon. Maṅkha’s depiction of the magic by which inscribed letters are transformed into sound (written with the description of the purāṇa reciter in his memory) serves well to suggest the fascination that literacy continued to exercise in a culture.

111. Haracarita pp. 85–86 (“professional reader,” pustakavācaka; “marked by a bookmark for the morning reading” [or: “marking the portion read by the morning reader”], prabhūṭika-prapāthaka; “modulation,” gamaka).
where orality remained, in some measure, alive. When his guru, Ruyyaka, the celebrated literary theorist, invited him to recite his poem, Maṅkha

spread out his manuscript-book: The leaves appeared to be hidden under hundreds upon hundreds of letters—so many dark drops of ichor flowing from the temples of the cow elephant that was Sarasvati, Goddess of Learning.

The letters—black pearls of the jewelry of the Goddess of Speech—irresistibly attracted his eyes. And having spread the book out he calmly recited his poem in a voice that rang like the anklets of the Goddess of Knowledge dancing inside his mind.

And as his poem took to its unearthly path and entered their ears, the listeners showed their pleasure by constantly shaking their heads, while the dark stubble on their cheeks stood erect and seemed to make manifest the letters of poems their ears in times past had drunk in, and were now expelling.

Like specks of dust from the feet [or: words] of the Goddess of Speech, the rows of letters thus made manifest, at every step [or: word] and in consonance with the poem, brought forth a miracle: On gaining entrance into their ears [dustlike though these black letters were,] they produced teardrops in the eyes of those good men, in equal measure to their joy.112

The reading at an end, Maṅkha made an offering of the “book of the poem,” the form in which it ultimately existed, to the Great God Śiva. Both writing and recitation, it is clear, were constitutive of literary culture, as well as of each other.

Such oral performance, along with the well-documented (if unfamiliar) power of memorization that operates in a tradition where texts are objects for listening, constitutes one importantly different feature of the medium of Sanskrit (and generally South Asian) literature in comparison with other forms. But there are additional and larger consequences for Sanskrit literary culture as a whole that derive from this persistent orality. For one thing, if literature is communicated largely through oral performance, then in addition to whatever significations and functions we may imagine, it represents a social, indeed almost a collective or even congregational, phenomenon. As such it typically speaks, thematically, to the concerns of a social collectivity and will change as the relevant collectivity changes, as happens under

112. Śrikanṭhacarita 25.142–45. (“spread out his manuscript-book,” vaṣṭārayat pustakam; “recited,” paṭhan; “feet/words,” pada; “in consonance with the poem,” kāvyavasamvada, presumably meaning that the letters when recited conveyed exactly the information that the poem—conceived as something separate from its graphic realization—intended to convey; “book of the poem,” kāvyapustakam). See also 25.10 for public recitation as a kind of publication, and 25.150 for the author’s ritual offering of his book to Śiva.
conditions of vernacularity. For another thing, Sanskrit poetry in recitation came alive in the minds of listeners in a way that purely bookish literature—works of mute, dead letters such as those of Western modernity—can hardly do. This is a fact that takes on visible shape in the manuscript histories of many poems. The literary work of Bhartṛhari (sixth century), for example, shows what it can mean for fully literate literature—produced by a literate poet and via inscription—to enter the vortex of oral reproduction. The manuscripts of his Śataḥtrayam (The three hundreds) show countless variants—not scribal errors or learned corrections but clearly oral variants in what by any standard still counts as fundamentally a literate culture. A living tradition, then, carries costs for contemporary text-critical and other literary scholarship. Or perhaps better put: The text as unitary entity—however much this is required by the participants’ own insistence on authorial intentionality—is constantly and in some cases irretrievably destabilized by the messy business of bringing literature to life in a world of oral performance.

Whichever factor, or more probably, combination of factors, we decide to take as decisive and however we then choose to answer the question of why Sanskrit literature is said to begin, we should not lose sight of the fact that it is said to begin at all. Somewhere in the Vālmiki story lies embedded the important truth that at some time, and for the first time, a new kind of text came to be composed in Sanskrit: one that was formally innovative, crucially dependent on the new technique of inscription, this-worldly in its social location, centrally concerned with the realm of human emotion, and for which a new name, kārya, would be used. This all occurred in a new world, too, where new social-political energies and practices were coming into being that would shape Sanskrit literature for the next millennium—until those energies dissipated and practices changed so much that a living literary culture could no longer be sustained.

_Sanskrit Literature Ends_

Even if the beginnings of Sanskrit kārya elude precise location in time, the very fact of its commencement is unanimously asserted by the Sanskrit tradition and not open to doubt from historical scholarship. But can we say the same thing about its end? Considering the fact that India’s Sahitya Akademi (Academy of Letters) awards prizes for literature in Sanskrit as one of the twenty-two officially acknowledged living literary languages, one might be inclined to argue that Sanskrit literary culture has not in fact ended. What is undeniable is that its vital signs have changed over time. If we look at three episodes of change—Kashmir after the twelfth century, sixteenth-century Vijayanagara, and Delhi-Vārāṇasi in the seventeenth century—it may be possible to learn something about the mortality of this culture, and what in the
intellectual, social, or political spheres had been required to keep it fully alive.\textsuperscript{113}

Sanskrit literary culture in Kashmir, as noted earlier, does not enter history before the sixth century (with the poet Bhartṛmeṇtha), but by the middle of the twelfth century more innovative literature was being written there than perhaps anywhere else in South Asia. The audience before which Maṅka read out his Śrīkanṭhaścarita indicates the vibrancy of literary culture in the 1140s. In addition to Ruyyaka, the greatest literary theorist of the century, and Kalhaṇa, author of the remarkable historical poem Rājataraṅgini, a host of men were present who embodied the literary-cultural values of the age: Trailokya, “who was as accomplished in the dry complexities of science as he was bold in the craft of literature, and thus seemed the very reincarnation of Śrī Tutātita” (i.e., Kumārla); Jinduka, who “bathed in the two streams of [Mimāṃsa] thought, of Bhaṭṭa and Prabhākara, and thereby washed off the pollution of the Kali age,” and who at the same time wrote “goodly verse”; Jalhaṇa, “a poet to rival Murāri and Rājāsekhaṇa”; Maṅkha’s brother Alaṅkāra, who wrote literary works that “circulated widely in manuscript form” and made him the peer of Bāna.\textsuperscript{114} In short, this was a time and place where the combination of intellectual power and aesthetic sophistication was manifested that marked Sanskrit literary culture at its most brilliant epochs. What makes this particular generation of Sanskrit poets so noteworthy, however, is that it turned out to be Kashmir’s last.

Within perhaps fifty years, creative Sanskrit culture in Kashmir all but vanished. The production of literature in all of the major genres ceased. The last mahākāvya was written around 1200. No more drama was produced, whether historical or fictional (nāṭaka; prakāraṇa), no more prose or verse romance (kathā) or historical narrative (ākhyāyikā); no more collections of lyric poetry (śataka, kośa). The wide repertory of forms was reduced to the stotra (hymn or prayer), hitherto near the margins of literary culture. No new literary theory was ever again produced; the last such work dates from the late twelfth century. And as a whole the generation immediately following Maṅkha’s is a near-total blank.\textsuperscript{115} When in the fifteenth century Sanskrit literary culture again manifested itself in Kashmir, at the court of Sultan Zain-

\textsuperscript{113} This section is abridged from Pollock 2001.

\textsuperscript{114} Śrīkanṭhaścarita 25.26ff. (“circulated widely in manuscript form,” patralabhadivaragati, v. 46). Except for stray anthology citations, the works of all the writers mentioned have been lost.

\textsuperscript{115} One exception is Jayānaka, who left Kashmir in search of patronage and found it in Ajmer, where around 1190 he wrote the Pṛthvīrājavijaya, a remarkable literary biography of Pṛthvīrāj III Chauhan (cf. Pollock 1993). Aside from Jayānaka’s poem, the only text we know of from the entire century and a half following Maṅkha is the Stutikusumānjali of one Jagaddhara, c. 1350–1400, a grammarian. The last maḥākāvya is the unambitious Haracaractītāmāna of Jayaratha, and the last major literary-theoretical text is the Alankararatnakara of Śobhākaramitap.
ul-ʿābidin (r. 1420–1470), it was a radically diminished formation in respect to both what people wrote and how, historically, they regarded their work. Nothing shows this more poignantly than the major texts from the court: two appendices to Kalhaṇa’s history, Rājatarangini (by Jonarāja and his student Śrīvara). Both lament the disappearance of poets, and both readily admit to a creative inferiority that is anyway unmistakable.116 No Kashmiri Sanskrit literature ever again circulated outside the valley, as it used to do. Many important literary works survived through recopying in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but virtually all originate from the twelfth century or earlier. Despite the Rājatarangini’s habit of noting the great writers and scholars that populated earlier courts, neither of its continuations mentions any Sanskrit works either for the three-hundred year interval separating them from Kalhaṇa or for their own periods.117 In brief, we did not lose the great post-1200 Sanskrit literature of Kashmir; it was never written. The kind of Sanskrit literary culture that remained alive in Kashmir was a culture reduced to reproduction and restatement.

How are we to account for the fact—which we can now see was a fact—that one of the most intensely creative sites for the production of Sanskrit culture in twelfth-century South Asia collapsed by the thirteenth century and was never to be revived? One factor seems to have been transformations in the social and political spheres, “troubles in the land,” as Jonarāja put it around 1450, “or, perhaps, the evil fate of the kings themselves.”118 With accelerating intensity during the first centuries of the millennium what we might identify as the courtly-civic ethos of Kashmir came undone. One cannot read in the Rājatarangini itself the account of the start of this collapse without being numbed by the stories of violence, treachery, madness, suicide, impiety, and insurrection. Already in the mid-twelfth century the court had ceased to be a source of inspiration to the creative artist; no one shows this better than Maṅkha himself. The picture we get from Jonarāja’s account of the three centuries separating him from Maṅkha and Kalhaṇa is likewise one of near total dissolution of orderly life in urban Kashmir, to be set right only by Zain-ul-ʿābidin a century after the establishment of Turkic rule in Kashmir, around 1420. It is not easy to grasp the deep reasons for the two hundred years of social implosion before this time—during which “Hindu” rule, to use Jonarāja’s idiom, continued, and the presence of Turks in the

116. Rājatarangini of Jonarāja vv. 6, 13, 26; Rājatarangini of Šrīvara 1.1.9–12, 3.6. Cf. 1.1.12 in particular: “Not a single great poet is left to teach the men of today, who have so little talent for poetry themselves.”

117. Jonarāja offers nothing on this order. When Šrīvara does mention literary production among his contemporaries, it is deša, or regional, literature, by which he meant Persian, not Kashmiri (as 1.4.39 shows).

valley was insignificant—but what is clear is that when it occurred, Sanskrit literary culture imploded with it.

Different circumstances seem to account for the slow depletion of energy in Sanskrit literary culture in Vijayanagara. Named after its capital city in Karnataka, this remarkable transregional political formation ruled much of India below the Vindhya mountains from the Arabian Sea to the borders of Orissa between 1340–1565. In stark contrast to Kashmir at the time, Sanskrit literary production here was continuous and intense, and the domain of cultural politics of which it formed part was far more complex. For this was a multilingual empire, where literary production occurred also in Kannada, Tamil, and Telugu. In Telugu especially, a large amount of strikingly new literature was produced through Vijayanagara courtly patronage, including the poetry of Śrīnātha and Tikanna; the emperor Kṛṣṇadevarāya (r. 1509–1529) himself used Telugu for his most important work, and one of the great texts of political imagination in the sixteenth century, the Āmuktamaññadā (The girl who gave her garland to God).\textsuperscript{119}

Vijayanagara’s Sanskrit literature, by contrast, presents a picture of an exhausted literary culture. It is difficult, in fact, to identify a single Sanskrit literary work that continued to be read after it was written, that circulated to any extent beyond the domain where it was composed, that attracted a commentator, was excerpted in an anthology, or entered a school syllabus. Much may have been destroyed when the city was sacked in 1565, but the works of the major court poets and personalities survive. One of the more compelling questions these works raise is how they survived at all.\textsuperscript{120} The vital literary energies of the time had been rechanneled into regional languages; nothing shows this better than the different reception histories of two texts of the period. Kumārayaśa’s Kannada Bhārata (c. 1450) not only circulated widely in manuscript form but came to be recited all over the Kannada-speaking world, as the Sanskrit Mahābhārata itself had been recited all over India a thousand years earlier. By contrast, the Sanskrit Bhāratāmya (Nectar of the Bhārata) of Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s court poet, Divākara (c. 1520), lay inert in the palace library as soon as the ink was dry and remains unpublished to this day.

Sanskrit literary culture did retain social importance, and it continued to be taken seriously as a state enterprise. The celebrated minister and general Śāyana, in the early decades of the empire, may have been more attracted to religious and philosophical textual work (his editing and commentarial

\textsuperscript{119} See Narayana Rao, chapter 6, this volume. On the paucity of courtly Kannada literature from Vijayanagara see also Nagaraj, chapter 5, this volume.

\textsuperscript{120} These include Arunagirinātha Diṇḍima’s Rāmabhudaya (court of Devarāya II, r. 1424–1446); Divākara’s Bhāratāmya (court of Kṛṣṇadevarāya); Rajanātha Diṇḍima’s Acyutānyābhyudaya (court of Acyutadevarāya, r. 1530–1542), and poems attributed to several princesses and queens, starting with Gāṅgādevī’s Madhurārvivijaya (court of Bukka).
labors on the Vedas reached industrialized magnitude during the reigns of Harihara I (1336–1357) and Bukka (1344–1377), but he also produced a new treatise on literary criticism and an anthology of poems. Many of the later governors responsible for the actual functioning of the empire had a cultural literacy that exceeded the mere scribal and accountancy skills some have ascribed to them; they were men of considerable learning, if again only reproductive, and not original, learning. But perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this scholarly reproduction was its qualitative superiority to the literary creativity of the period.

Something of the dilemma of Sanskrit in Vijayanagara—a literary culture at once politically fundamental and aesthetically enervated—can be suggested by a glance at a Sanskrit drama written by the emperor Kṛṣṇadevarāya himself, the Jambavatiparīṇaya (Marriage of Jambavati). In its mythopolitical character—it celebrates the king’s historic conquest of Kalinga—the work is typical of almost all the rest of Sanskrit literary production in the Vijayanagara world, whose very hallmark is the prominence of the project of empire to which it is so thoroughly harnessed. Virtually all the drama left to us is state drama; the long poems are caritas, vijaya, or abhyudaya (poetic chronicles, accounts of royal “victory,” or comparable accounts of “success”), detailing this campaign and that military victory. All these genres have a long history, no doubt, but in comparison with the previous thousand years of Sanskrit poetry the Vijayanagara aesthetic is emphatically historicist-political. Perhaps this is one reason why none of these works, over the entire history of the existence of the empire, was able to outline its immediate context. Such at least is the inference one may draw from the manuscript history of the works, the absence of commentators, the neglect from anthologists, the indifference of literary analysts and teachers. In Vijayanagara Sanskrit was not dying as a mode of learned expression; Sanskrit learning in fact continued unabated during the long existence of the empire, and after. Something else—something terribly important—about Sanskrit literature here seems moribund. The realm of experience for which Sanskrit could speak literarily had palpably shrunk, as if somehow human life beyond the imperial stage had outgrown Sanskrit and required a vernacular voice. This shrinkage accelerated throughout the medieval period, leaving the concerns of empire, and finally the concerns of heaven, as the sole thematics.

Only once more would the larger realm of human experience find ex-

---

121. The treatise Alankārasudhānidhi is unpublished; cf. Sarasvati 1968. The anthology Subhāstasudhānidhi was edited by K. Krishnamoorthy in 1968.

122. On the culture of the daṇḍanāyakas contrast Stein 1989: 124. Consider Sāhua Goppa Tippa Bhūpāla (a daṇḍanāyaka of Devarāya II), who wrote an important (and the only printed) commentary on Vāmana’s late-eighth-century Kashmiri treatise on literary theory in addition to producing original works in Sanskrit on music and dance.
pression and make literary history in Sanskrit: in the poetry of Jagannātha Pāṇḍitarāja (d. c. 1670). And this was in a much reinvented form and under circumstances more radically novel than the time and the place—Delhi, 1650—might suggest. In his literary oeuvre and in the course his life took, Jagannātha marks a point of historic break in the history of Sanskrit literary culture. His movements as a professional writer traveling in quest of patronage from region to region and court to court—from Andhra to Jaipur and Delhi, and from Udaipur to Assam—show that the transregional space that Sanskrit literature had occupied during the two preceding millennia (which I map later in the chapter) persisted well into the seventeenth century despite what are often represented as discontinuities in the political environment with the coming of the Mughals in the preceding century. In the same way, Jagannātha’s life as a court poet, and much of the work that he produced in that capacity (like his panegyrics to the kings of Udaipur, Delhi, and Assam), was no different from the lives and works of poets centuries earlier. His masterpiece of literary analysis, the Rasagangādhara (The Gaṅgā-Bearer [Śiva] of aesthetic emotion), participates as a full and equal interlocutor in a millennium-long debate on the literary and shares the same assumptions, procedures, and goals.

Yet Jagannātha marks a historical end point in a number of important ways. If it can be said that his ontogeny recapitulated the phylogeny of Sanskrit literary culture, this was probably the last such case; we know of no later poet who circumambulated the quarters of Sanskrit’s cosmopolitan space. While we should not exaggerate his artistic power, still, no later poet produced literary works that achieved the wide diffusion of his Rasagangādhara and of his collection of poems, the Bhāminividāsa (Play of the beautiful woman). His literary criticism is rightly regarded as the last original contribution to the ancient conversation; thereafter all is reproduction. And if his panegyrics are conventional—after all, they were meant to be—one senses in his lyrics some new sensibility. In the stories that have gathered around his life, too, he became the representative of the historical change that marked the new social realities of India and made the late-medieval period late. For he is described as a Brahman, belonging to a family hailing from the bastion of orthodoxy and tradition in the Veṅgīnādu region of Andhra Pradesh, who fell in love with a Muslim woman and met his death—whether in despair or repentance or defiance the legends are unclear—by drowning in the Gaṅgā at Varanasi.

Something very old died when Jagannātha died, but also something very new. What was new in his literary oeuvre had much to do with his social milieu, the Mughal court of Shāhjahān (r. 1626–1656), where he was a client of both Prince Dārā Shukoh and the courtier Āsaf Khān. The sometimes startling intellectual and social and aesthetic experiment that marked this world marked Jagannātha, too. What it meant for Sanskrit, Persian, and vernacu-
lar poets to gather in a common cultural space in Shâhjahânâbâd is an un-
studied question. But Jagannâtha’s œuvre suggests two important areas of
innovation, one in the relationship between Sanskrit and both vernacular
and Persian literature, the other in the kind of subjectivity that could find
expression in literature.

A late-seventeenth-century history recounts Jagannâtha’s association with
the great musician Tansen, and a collection of popular religious songs in the
vernacular is attributed to him as well. None of this material has been pub-
lished, let alone studied. But it all would be consistent with hints in his
writing of an important and perhaps new interaction with regional poetry.
A verse in the Rasagaṅgâdhara,

Her eyes are not just white and black but made of nectar and poison.
Why else, when they fall on a man, would he feel at once so strong and weak?
is almost certainly adapted from an earlier poem in Brajbhasha, and a verse
of the great poet of the preceding generation, Bihârî Lâl, corresponds to
one found in the Bhâminivilâsa. These examples are likely to be the tip of
an iceberg. If we could see all of it, we would know what we do not at present
know: how familiar Sanskrit and vernacular poets were with each other’s
work, what it meant to adapt poetry from one language into another, and
what it was in the first place that influenced a poet’s choice to reject his ver-
nacular (and no longer just Prakrit and Apabhramsha) and continue to write
in Sanskrit.

A similar new relationship with Persian literature is suggested by some po-
ems included in Jagannâtha’s œuvre concerning a Yavani (Muslim) woman
named Lavaṅgi. The historical reality of the poet’s liaison with her is less im-
portant than the fact that the verses about her got attached to his literary
corpus, and to no one else’s—and that they are verses of a sort written by
no one either before him or after:

I don’t want royal elephants or a string of fancy horses,
I wouldn’t give a second thought to money, if Lavaṅgi,
with those eyes that flash, those breasts that rise
as she raises the water jug, were to say to me Yes.

123. The history is the Samprâdâyakalpadruma, v.s. 1729 (= 1673) of one Viṭthalanâtha,
also called Manaraṅjana Kâvi, who claimed to be a grandnephew of Jagannâtha. Cf. Athavale
1968: 418, who also mentions the collection of Vaiśuva bhajans, Kirtanapravâtipadasangraha.
It is not clear whether the author is the same Jagannâtha.

124. “Her eyes are not just white”: compare Rasagaṅgâdhara, p. 365 (= Paṇḍitârâjakâvyasaṅ-
graha p. 58, v. 76), and Bihârîrâtsakar app. 2, v. 123; compare also Bhâminivilâsa in Paṇḍitârâ-
jkâvyasaṅgraha p. 62, v. 127 (= Rasagaṅgâdhara p. 258) and Satsai v. 490. Mathuranath Shastri
was the first to suggest (though he did not identify) the vernacular parallels in the Sanskrit in-
troduction to his edition of Rasagaṅgâdhara (1939: 28).
Dressed in a dress as red as a rose,
Lavañgî—with breasts heaving
as she places the water jug on her head—
goes off and takes along in the jug
all the feeling in all the men's hearts.
That Yavana girl has a body soft as butter,
and if I could get her to lie by my side
the hard floor would be good enough for me
and all the comforts of paradise redundant.125

Part of what seems new here is probably due to a cultural conversation with Indo-Persian poetry made possible by Jagannâtha’s social location (he is credited with knowledge of Persian). For Lavañgî is assuredly a Sanskrit version of the mahbûh, the ever-unattainable beloved of the Persianate lyric whose unattainability is epitomized by otherness: being a Christian (or Greek or Armenian) in earlier Persian ghazals, or a Hindu in later Indo-Persian poetry, as in the following verse from the celebrated Khusrau (1253–1325):

My face becomes yellow because of a Hindu beloved,
O pain! He is unaware of my condition.
I said, “Remove the weariness of my desire with your lips.”
He smiled and said, “nâhi, nâhi.”126

Beside this new willingness to draw sustenance from Persian and vernacular traditions in order to reanimate Sanskrit poetry, Jagannâtha’s work evinces a significant new personalization of the poetic. While this seems to recover something from the distant past—the extraordinary energies of, say, Bhartîhari—it adds something unprecedented, too. No one in Sanskrit literature had spoken in quite so self-referential a way before:

He mastered sâstra and honored every rule of Brahman conduct;
as a young man he lived under the care of the emperor of Delhi;
now he has renounced his home and serves Hari in Madhupur.127
Everything Paññitarâja did he did like no one else in the world.

No one before had dared to make Sanskrit poetry out of personal tragedy, the death of one’s child, for example:

125. Paññitarâjakâvyasaṅgaha p. 190, vv. 582, 584, 585. Sharma rightly remarks that nothing indicates that the verses about her are not Jagannâtha’s—in fact, quite the contrary (Paññitarâjakâvyasaṅgaha 1958: viii). The alternative view fatuously holds the poems to be “the production of his enemies” (Sastri 1942: 21). The Sambhâdiyakalpadruma (see n. 123) affirms that Jagannâtha “married the daughter of a Sâha,” a Muslim (sahasutâ gahi).

126. I am grateful to Sunil Sharma for allowing me to use his translation.

127. That is, Mathurâ. There is a well-attested variant, “in the city of Śiva,” that is, Vârânasî. It is there that, according to tradition, Paññitarâja died.
You didn’t care how much your parents would worry, 
you betrayed the affection of your family. My little son, 
you were always so good; why did you run away 
to the other world?

let alone the death of one’s wife:

All pleasures have forgotten me; 
even the learning I acquired 
with so much grief 
has turned its back. 
The only thing that won’t leave my mind, 
like an immanent god, 
is that large-eyed woman.

Your beauty was like the food of gods to me 
and in my mind transformed into poetry. 
Without it now, most perfect of women, 
what kind of poet can I ever be?128

To be sure, there are complications to a simple interpretation of these verses, 
especially the last two, as autobiographical effusions of the poet.129 But to participants in the culture who copied and recopied and circulated his texts, it seemed as reasonable that the greatest Sanskrit literary critic and poet of the age should compose a sequence of verses on the death of his wife as that this wife should have been a Muslim. Whether he married her or not, somehow the age demanded that he should have; whether he wrote the verses or not, someone did, and for the first time in Sanskrit. From all this, a certain kind of newness was born—but stillborn. There was to be no second Jagannātha.

Sanskrit learning as such certainly continued into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and Sanskrit literature continued to be written. A colonial survey, for example, provides information on hundreds of new works composed in early-nineteenth-century Bengal. With rare exception, however, none of these entered onto school syllabi, none attracted commentarial attention, and most never circulated beyond the village in which they were composed. The depletion that such a pragmatics of literary culture suggests was no mere function of local transformations in Bengal, such as changes in patterns of patronage with the dissolution of the great landed estates; it is found throughout the Sanskrit cultural world, in courtly environments as well as rural. The Maratha court of Taṅjavūr in the early eighteenth century, for example, was a place of intense transformation, increasingly linked to a new

129. The interpretation of these and a number of poems in the Karṇaṇaṅlāsa is complicated by Jagannātha’s own analysis of them in his Rasangāṅlāsa (examined in Pollock 2001).
world economy and intercontinental cultural flows (visitors and missionaries from Europe were common). Vernacular-language literary production showed considerable flair, and indeed, Sanskrit scholarship was of a high order. But only one writer at the court stands out from the mass, Ramaṇaḥ Dīkṣita, and while two of his works, the Patañjalicaritam (The life of Patañjali) and the Śṛṅgāratīlikabhāṣya (The satiric monologue of erotic ornament) retain interest for the quality of the imagination at work and the liveliness of the language, these texts, to say nothing of the rest of his oeuvre, hardly represent literary production commensurate with the dynamism of the time and place. And what has been said of the state of Sanskrit literary vitality found at Tanjāvūr could be said of Jai Singh II’s Jaipur in the early eighteenth century, or Krishnaraja Wodeyar’s Mysore at the beginning of the nineteenth. Sanskrit literary production, while prominent, appears to have remained wholly internal to the palace. Not a single Sanskrit literary work of the period transcended its moment in time in the way, for example, that the work of Bihārī Lal, chief poet at the court of Jai Singh’s father, proved capable of doing.

In the south as in the north, at dates that vary in different regions and cultural formations, Sanskrit writers had ceased to make literature that made history. The reason for this, in the case of the nineteenth-century Burdwan literati interviewed by early colonial officers, is assuredly not their aspiration to fashion a literary-cultural order in which the fourth-century master Kālidāsa would have found himself perfectly at home; even less is it their failure to create literature to our own contemporary liking. Sanskrit literature ended when it became a practice of repetition and not renewal, when the writers themselves no longer evinced commitment to a central value of the tradition and a feature that defined literature itself: the ability to make literary newness, “the capacity,” as a great Kashmiri writer put it, “to continually reimagine the world.”

It is no straightforward matter to configure these three endings of Sanskrit literary culture—and there are certainly others, with other characteristics—into a unified historical narrative. Some generalizations are nonetheless possible. Unlike old Greek literature, which ended with a single political act, the closing of the Academy by Justinian in 529, Sanskrit literature knows no

130. One new or newly invigorated form was the multilingual operetta, see Peterson 1998. Sanskrit scholars included Dhundhi Vyāsa, who composed his remarkable treatise on the Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa, the Dharmakītān, and a valuable commentary on the Muddrāvākṣa.

131. See Raghavan 1952: 41 ff.

132. praṇā navavonmāśaśāśāṃ pratiḥā matā / tadavuprāṇaṇājīvañvadvaranāniśun kau kavik / tasya kārma smṛtyam kīryam (Genius is the intellectual capacity to continually reimagine the world. It breathes life into description, and when a poet has achieved mastery in this, he produces work that can be called “poetry”). The verse is attributed to Bhaṭṭa Tauta (fl. 950) and cited by Ruuyaka in his commentary on Kāvyaprakāśin 1.1.
abrupt and singular moment of termination. Instead, like the later history of Latin, Sanskrit’s literary decline was entropic. At the same time, and because of this very entropy, Sanskrit, like Latin though not so self-consciously, was the object of periodic renewals: forced rebirths stimulated by the politics of this or that region, as in the fifteenth-century Kashmiri sultanate of Zain-ul-Abidin, or at the court of Krishnaraja Wodeyar in eighteenth-century Mysore.

These periodic renewals never succeeded, however. Other deeper forces of change were at work. These may not be easy to specify, but one may quickly dismiss the commonest explanation, which traces the decline of Sanskrit culture to the coming of Muslim power. Even the highly condensed evidence presented here proves how false this reading is. What sapped the strength of Sanskrit literature was not “alien rule unsympathetic to kavya” and a “desperate struggle with barbarous invaders.” It was more often than not the case that the barbarous invader sought to revivify kavya. What destroyed the literary culture of Sanskrit were much longer-term cultural, social, and political changes. Although there were additional social sites for Sanskrit literary production and consumption, in late-medieval Kashmir the enfeeblement of urban political institutions that had previously underwritten Sanskrit seems to have been an especially significant force in the erosion of Sanskrit literary creativity (a process that had begun a full two centuries before the establishment of Turkic rule). In Vijayanagara, it was in part a heightened competition among new languages seeking literary-cultural dignity. But these factors did not operate everywhere in the same degree. There were no powerful exemplars of literary vernacularization in Kashmir to stimulate the kind of competition Sanskrit encountered elsewhere; if anything it may have been the new supraregional idiom of Persian that challenged Sanskrit’s preeminence. In Vijayanagara the institutional structure of Sanskrit literary culture remained fully intact, but literary expression was increasingly constrained by an imperial historicist project. Those who had anything literarily new to say, beyond the celebration of imperial power, said it in Telugu or Kannada; those who did not continued to write in Sanskrit.

The communicative competence of readers and writers of Sanskrit during the late-medieval and early-modern periods remained largely undiminished throughout India. Even in the north, where political change had been most pronounced, great scholarly families continued to reproduce themselves without interruption, and ceased to do so only when a conscious decision was made to abandon Sanskrit in favor of the increasingly more com-

133. Fuhrmann 1983.
134. Warder 1972–: vol. 1, pp. 8, 217, where he continues the fantasy: “In the darkest days [kavya] kept the Indian tradition alive. It handed on the best ideals and inspired the struggle to expel tyrannical invaders.”
pelling vernacular. A good example here is Keśavdās, the great Brajbhasha poet at the court of Orccha in the early seventeenth century, who, though born into a distinguished Sanskrit family, self-consciously chose to become a vernacular poet.135 And it is Keśavdās and others like him—Bihārī Lāl and the rest—whom we recall from this place and time, and not a single Sanskrit creative writer (in other domains, such as philosophy and law, Sanskrit remained unchallenged, as the work of someone like Mitramiśra, a legal scholar at Orccha, shows full well). For reasons that in each case demand careful historical analysis, at different times and in different places but increasingly everywhere, it became more important—politically, socially, and aesthetically more urgent—to speak locally rather than globally. Sanskrit, the idiom of a cosmopolitan literature, died over the course of the long vernacular millennium in part, it seems, because cosmopolitan talk made less and less sense in an increasingly regionalized world.136

THE PLACES OF SANSKRIT LITERARY CULTURE

Literary culture is a phenomenon that exists not just in time but also in space. There are at least three ways we might think of the location of literary culture: as discursively projected by the texts themselves, as concretely embodied in their dissemination, and as conditioned by the sites of production and consumption. The discursive projection of space happens narratively (where stories take place) as well as critically (in spatial frameworks of literary analysis); such representations are internal to the tradition, and, again, are of first-order significance. The concrete embodiment of literary culture is produced by the circulation of manuscripts, and by their potential transformation in transit through processes of localization. The circulatory space of manuscripts and the conceptual space of discourse do not necessarily overlap, and asymmetries are as instructive as convergences. Finally, the sites of production and consumption concern the social locations (court, temple, school, and so on) that help shape the primary meanings and significations of literature.

The sociotextual community for which a literature is produced derives a portion of its self-understanding as a community from the very act of hearing, reading, performing, reproducing, and circulating literary texts. The conceptualization of space in literature and the embodiment of this concept in people are often importantly related to political formations, which exercise power over persons in space. Given the often close relationship between polity and cultural space, and the possibility that South Asian polity was something very different from what we know from European experience, the

135. See McGregor, chapter 16, this volume.
136. For further discussion see Pollock 1998a and 1998c.
places of literary culture present as complex a problem as its times. This is especially so in the case of Sanskrit, in view of the role it has increasingly been called upon to play in the construction of post-Independence culture: as the classical past that has prefigured, and thereby given legitimacy to, the modern nation.

**Mapping Sanskrit Culture**

It is astonishing to find, once we begin to look, how often literary narratives project Sanskrit culture as a spatialized phenomenon. This is not to claim for Sanskrit something unique or to imply that all the spaces Sanskrit literature creates are of the same conceptual order. But the very fact that producing a framework of reference is so dominant a concern has something of general importance to tell us about the character of Sanskrit literary culture, and the kind of frameworks it does produce has something very particular to tell us.

The maps that Sanskrit kāvya texts generate are often complex, producing a range of relevant spaces above and beyond the geographical, though physical place remains always central. Were we to possess an adequate history of the messenger poem (duṭakāvya), one of the most prolific genres in the South Asian literary world and one that by definition charts movement through space, we could demonstrate the shifting boundaries, and the varieties, of literary domains.137 The earliest example in Sanskrit, the Meghadūta (Cloud messenger) of Kālidāsa, in fact offers a set of overlapping transparencies, so to speak, as the cloud journeys from periphery to center through a range of cultural landscapes. Most prominent is the topographical, as the cloud proceeds from the plains of the northern Deccan, Mālava, and the midlands, north to the mountains of the high Himalayas and its destination, Alakā, the magical kingdom of Kubera, overlord of demigods.138 At the same time, a sociosexual landscape is recapitulated in the movement from the naive countryside girls and pastoralists’ wives of the rural world to the urbane and beautiful ladies of the city of Ujjayinī and finally to the perfect woman, the hero’s lover, in Alakā. Again, a more strictly literary-cultural landscape emerges as the cloud travels from the rustic, Prakritic world of the south to a sophisticated

137. On the Pavananātā see later in the chapter, and Freeman’s account, chapter 7, this volume, of the Malayalam (or Manipravalam) examples.

138. From Rāmacṛi (Ramtek, near present-day Nagpur) the cloud proceeds via the Āmrakūta and Revā rivers to Vidiśā in the Dāśaraṇa country, via the Vetravatī and Nirvedyā streams to Avanti and its town Viśāla, and then by the Siprā river to the city of Ujjayinī. From Ujjayinī the cloud passes over other small rivers to Daśapura, Kuruksetra, and on to the foothills of the Himalayas, Mount Kanakhala near Hardwar, the Kraupicandhrā Pass, Mount Kailasa, Lake Mānas, and Alakā.
courtly, decidedly Sanskritic world, with its consummation in the divine realm that Sanskrit poetry imagines as its ultimate referent.\(^{139}\)

In the *Buddhacarita* (Deeds of the Buddha; second century), Aśvaghoṣa plots out the important locales in the life of the Buddha in northern and eastern Magadha (modern Bihar) as the prince pursues both a spiritual and physical quest, from one vision of the world to another (as represented by the teachers Bhṛgu, Arāda, and Udraka) and from his birthplace in Kapilavastu to the site of his triumphs in Rājagṛha. A thousand years later, Bilhana maps the literary courts important to a traveling poet in 1080, as he describes himself leaving home in Kashmir for the great centers of Sanskrit culture in the midlands, Gujarat, and the western coast, until finally he finds patronage at the court of the Western Cālukyas in the central Deccan.\(^{140}\) Five centuries later still, the two demigods whose wanderings form the narrative frame of Veṅkaṭādhvarin’s *Viśvagunādārāvacampū* (The mirror of universal traits, c. 1650) take an aerial tour of India. They move quickly from Badarikārāma in the Himalayas, Ayodhīya, Kāśī (Vārāṇasi), and Gūjārādeśa before beginning their more leisurely tour of the shrines and sites of southern India: the Nāyaka capital at Senji, the great temples and monasteries dedicated to Viśṇu in southeast Andhra and Tamilnādu (while noticing the new English town of Madras on the coast) and those at Melkote in southern Karnataka and Udiπ on the west coast.\(^{141}\) In all three cases, important circuits are being projected, whether of pilgrimage, patronage, or spiritual power—as in Kālidāsa’s case circuits of topography, modalities of feeling, and culture—each specific to its historical moment.

To this diverse selection of mappings—imaginative, biographical, and religiocultural (and others could easily be added)—across one and a half millennia of Sanskrit literary culture we can juxtapose a far more significant and dominant macrospace plotted first and most insistently in the *Mahābhārata*.\(^{142}\) This vast spatialization, largely bounded by the subcontinental

---

139. I have profited from discussion with my former student Yigal Bronner on the maps of the *Meghadūta*.
140. *Vājrasatācārya’s Viśvāsanaśāstra* 18.87–101. Bilhana traveled to Mathurā, Kānauj, Prayāga, Vārāṇasi, Mount Kālañjara and Dāhaka country, or Tripur, in central Madhya Pradesh, thence to Saurāstra (where he wrote the drama *Karṇaśundari* for the Chālukyan king Karṇa) and Kōṅkana before proceeding to Kalyāṇa. The journey has something of an exile about it, and the writer longs to return home to “the good people of Kashmir” (v. 103). See further on the history of late twelfth-century Kashmir earlier in the chapter.
142. Other varieties requiring other kinds of analyses include the network of kingdoms described by the wanderings of the princes in the seventh-century *Daśākumāracarita*; the cultural geography of the *Samayamāṇī* of Kṣemendra, whose heroine’s picaresque adventures map the very self-consciously bounded world of eleventh-century Kashmir (*Laghukavyasairātra* pp. 355–66); and works like the Jain *Kuvalayamāla*, where pilgrimage, trade, and politics all seem to combine as the prince wanders from Jalor in the west to Bījāpur, Mathurā, and eastward to Vārāṇasi.
sphere, accompanies, even constitutes, most of the key narrative junctures in the epic tale itself: when the hero Arjuna departs on his exile at the beginning of the tale; when his brother Yudhishthira dispatches his four brothers to conquer the four directions in preparation for his imperial consecration; when war is declared and troops gather; when, after the war, the victors perform the horse sacrifice to confirm their universal dominion; and lastly, when the brothers renounce their overlordship and begin their "great departure," performing a last circumambulation of the world—of the sort repeatedly described and charted—to gain power over which their family had been destroyed and which they fittingly take leave of as they prepare to die.\textsuperscript{143}

As in the case of the ethnohistorical praise-poems, it is the very existence, and the insistence, of this geography that merit attention, rather than its precision. In this the \textit{Mahābhārata} may be doing nothing unusual; spatialization is a defining concern of much epic literature. But that is exactly the point. Each epic creates a relevant world, for which its vision of culture and power makes sense; and if this world can rightly be said to have created the epic in the first place, the epic recreates it in turn by its very narrative of location. A preeminent example here is the \textit{Rāmāyaṇa}, a text also preoccupied with the geography of heroic action, epitomized by the spectacular aerial tour of the subcontinent during Rāma’s homeward journey.\textsuperscript{144} Its spatial vision was to some degree actualized in the Vijayanagara empire, which was founded

\textsuperscript{143} More detail is available in Pollock forthcoming. Arjuna charts a path from Indraprastha (near modern Delhi) north to Gāndhāravāra and into the eastern Himalayas, southeast to Naimiśa (Avadh region), east to Kausiki (Mithila), southeast to Gayā, and further to Vaṅga (eastern Bengal), south down the Kaliṅga (Orissan) coast, over to Gokarna on the west coast of present-day Karnataka, north to Prabhāsa and Dvārakā in Kathiawar (Gujarat), northeast to Puṣkara in Rajasthan, and thence back to Indraprastha (\textit{Mahābhārata} 1.200–210). For the \textit{digvijaya}, Arjuna proceeds to the north (Anarta [north Gujarat], Kashmir, and Balkh [northern Afghanistan]); Bhima to the east (Videha [Mithila], Magadha, An̆ga [east Bihar], Vāṅga, Tamralipi [south Bengal coast]); Sahadeva to the south (Triṣṇa, Pothana [north of Hyderabad], the lands of the Pāṇḍyas, Dvārakā, Cōḍrakarāḷas, Andhras [peninsular India]); and Nakula to the west (Marubhūmi [Thar desert], Mālava, Pañcanada [Punjab], as far as the Pahlavas [Persia]) (\textit{Mahābhārata} 2.25–29).

The sacrificial horse wanders from Trigarta [Himachal Pradesh] to Prāgoṭīśa [western Assam], Manipūra, Magadha, Vaṅga, Čedi, Kāśi, Kosala, Dvāraka, Gokarna, Prabhāsa, Dvārakā, Pañcanada, and Gāndhīrā (\textit{Mahābhārata} 15.73–85). On their \textit{mahāprāśabha} the Pāṇḍavas travel first to the Lauhiṭyā (Brahmaputra) river in the east, "by way of the northern [i.e., northeastern] coast of the ocean to the southwest quarter," then to Dvārakā and from there to Himavān, Vālukārṇava (the great Ocean of Sand) and Mount Meru (\textit{Mahābhārata} 17).

\textsuperscript{144} The journey from Lankā to Ayodhyā passes over the sea and the causeway at the southern shore, to Mount Hiranyānābhā, Kīśkindhā, Mount Rṣyāmūkā, Pampā, Janasthāna, the Gōdāvari river, Mount Citrakūṭa, the Yamanā and Gāṅgā, Śrīgaverāpurāṇa, and home (\textit{Rāmāyaṇa} 6.111; a beloved scene reworked in a number of \textit{Rāmāyaṇa} retellings, from \textit{Rāghuvamśa} [chapter 13] onward; especially rich is Rājāśekhara’s \textit{Bālaśrīmāṇya} 10.28–96). The \textit{Rāmāyaṇa} geography is more exoticized than that of the \textit{Mahābhārata} and has provoked fantastic readings over the past century (see the brief comments of Goldman 1984: 27–28, and Lefeber 1996: 29–35).
where it was in northern Karnataka in part because of the site’s historical Rāmāyaṇa associations. Mahābhārata space is recreated in later inscriptive accounts of royal conquest, which in turn find their way back into kāvya. The pillar inscription of Samudragupta (r. 335–376), for example, plots an epic space of Gupta power and was itself transformed into courtly epic by Kālidāsa in his account of the dynasty of the sun kings in the Rāghuvaṃśa (chapter 4).145

If the literary geography of power in Sanskrit culture sometimes sought and achieved a kind of symmetry with the aspirations of historical agents, these aspirations themselves often seem to have been shaped by literature.

The epic macrospace has, to be sure, a later history of its own. A range of vernacular domains of culture and power were to be defined in relationship to it when the transregional formation of Sanskrit, and accompanying visions of empire, gave way during the course of the second millennium to new, more regionalized forms of polity and culture. Such is the case with the earliest complete vernacularization of the Mahābhārata, Pampa’s Kannada-language Vikramaśīravijaya (c. 950). Here the epic world has been shrunk to the narrower sphere where the Kannada language and the emerging forms of postimperial polity had application.146 But the compression of space even finds expression in Sanskrit itself in the late medieval period. We have already observed how the Visva-guṇa-dāraṇacampū projects a new circuit of religion and polity in seventeenth-century south India. In the same way, the Pavana-dīūta (Wind messenger) of Dhoi’s poet at the court of Lakṣmaṇasena of Bengal in the late twelfth century, creates a new region of power by combining two illustrious models of Sanskrit spatialization already mentioned: Rāghu’s conquest of the quarters in Kālidāsa’s Rāghuvaṃśa and the journey of the cloud in his Meghadūta. In Dhoi’s poem the spring wind, carrying to Lakṣmaṇasena a message from a lovelorn nymph in the imaginary city of Kanakanagari in Kerala, follows a path from Mount Malaya on the southwest coast to Bengal that retraces the king’s putative conquest of the southern quarters. But the narrative of this journey is perfunctory and clearly only preparatory to the detailed account of Gauḍa (western Bengal) itself.147 It is the region that has now begun to count, even for the writer of cosmopolitan Sanskrit.

Congruent with the subcontinental sphere projected narratively in the Mahābhārata, and in the many kāvya works influenced by it, is the geocultural framework found in the second-order accounts of literature in the Sanskrit tradition—a framework shared by most forms of Sanskrit thought during the age of kāvya and employed for the analysis of every sociocultural

145. See Ingalls 1976: 16 n. for references to earlier scholarship.
146. See Pollock 1998c: 50–51.
147. The descriptions of Suhma, Triveni (the Delta), and Vijayapura (the Sena capital) occupy the greater part of the work (vv. 27 ff.).
phenomenon, from the distribution of female sexual types to forms of customary law. A brief account of the notion of the Ways-of-writing (marga or riti) can illustrate this well.

The different styles of composing Sanskrit literature, based on features of phonology, semantics, and syntax, formed a component of literary analysis from at least the late seventh century, when Daṇḍin described them in detail in the first chapter of his Mirror. To these Ways regional appellations were given—at first just two: Gauḍa, the writing way of Gauḍa (Bengal) in the (north)east, and Vāidarbha, the writing way of Vīdarbha (Berar) in the south. It is probable that the distinctions foundational to the theory of the Ways were originally apprehended by southern poets writing Sanskrit with sensibilities shaped by the Dravidian languages of south India; the range of diagnostics employed for differentiating the two styles is consistent with marked tendencies in the two language families, and in fact southern writing is defined by the presence of features “inverted” or absent in the north.148 But whatever the true origins of the distinction, from the early period of Sanskrit literature the Ways were available for use by writers all over the Sanskrit world—something especially evident after the eighth or ninth century when the Ways were linked with emotional register (southern style was reserved for erotic poetry, northern style for heroic).

The notion of regionalized styles took on a life of its own after the late eighth century, when a Kashmiri critic, Vāmana, made it the core idea of his literary theory. The primary interest of later thinkers was to multiply literary Ways to fill out the subcontinental terrain. Besides the two of the oldest tradition, later scholars distinguished Ways of the midlands, of Gujarāt, and of the zone between them (Avanti), of Bihar in the northeast, of Surat in the west, and, in the south, of Andhra, and of Tamil country.149 Some kind of cultural politics underlay this multiplication; it is as if it were increasingly exigent for every region to be represented on the map of literary style. And it would seem reasonable to attribute this once more to the actual and ever more prominent demarcation of vernacular literary spheres in the early second millennium.

Yet for the writers of Sanskrit literary criticism, such regional differences are not perceived as actually regional at all. As stylistic options, the Ways of literature evinced as little local difference as the Sanskrit literary idiom itself. Writers everywhere wrote “southern” poetry in exactly the same way. And

148. In southern writing there is a de-emphasis of certain consonants prominent in Indo-Aryan languages; analytical as opposed to nominalized usages; primary as opposed to etymologically derived words; and descriptive as opposed to troped discourse. See further in Pollock 1998a.

149. Vāmana added paścāt (riti): Rudrata (c. 875), Bhoja, avanti and māgadhi; Śaśratanaya (c. 1100–1130), svarṣṭi and dravīḍi; Śingabhūpāla (c. 1330), āndhrī.
this is precisely what we would expect: To participate in a cosmopolitan cul-
tural order such as that of Sanskrit meant precisely to occlude local differ-
ence, or rather, to make the local universally standard. Accordingly, what the
Ways served to suggest in the first instance was not the regionality of San-
skrit but precisely its transregionality: Sanskrit is everywhere. However in-
sistent on mapping stylistic places Sanskrit writers may have been, what they
showed thereby was how Sanskrit pervaded all places. And the writers
demonstrated this by producing a literature that sought to escape place no
less than time. The fact that it is as impossible to identify where a Sanskrit
work was composed as it is to identify when, unless we are explicitly informed,
shows how often they succeeded.

It is, furthermore, precisely because it represented a cultural totalization
of this sort that मार्ग, or the culture of the Way (now in the singular), would
come to constitute the counterpart to the culture of Place (देश). The new
binary opposite of the Way and the Place, which emerged around the tenth
century in regional-language discourse, became the principal conceptual
framework by which southern vernacular intellectuals sought to make sense
of their complexly dialogical relationship to Sanskrit literary culture.150

Regionality and Recension

Both the narratives of Sanskrit literary space and the analytic framework of
literary thought, such as the discourse on the Ways of writing, project a much
smaller world than Sanskrit literature historically occupied. As epigraphical
evidence shows, almost simultaneously with the beginnings of the public lit-
ery inscription of Sanskrit in South Asia, an identical cultural practice, with
identical kinds of texts and documents and discourses, made its appearance
throughout the regions now known as Laos, Cambodia, South Vietnam, and
Indonesia. As far as we can judge from the evidence of epigraphy, these lands
of Southeast Asia participated as fully in the culture of the Sanskrit cos-
mopolis as did South Asia itself. Indeed, to think of South and Southeast
Asia in this epoch as separate areas makes little sense; the processes of cos-
mopolitanization and vernacularization occurring in the one region were
identical to what we find in the other at the same period; Java and Kannada
country in the tenth century offer a remarkable illustration of this.

Nonetheless, despite the fact that Sanskrit remained a central feature of
the cultural-political life of much of Southeast Asia for a thousand years from
the fourth century onward—and the fact that the literati of those worlds mas-
tered the entire range of Sanskrit literary practice, displayed this mastery in

150. This matter is considered in detail in Pollock forthcoming. For briefer remarks, see
Pollock 1998a, Nagaraj, chapter 5, and Narayana Rao, chapter 6, this volume.
grand public inscriptions, and produced on its model vernacular literature of great power—the lands of mainland and maritime Southeast Asia were never included in the narratives of epic journeys, in other maps of kārṣya, in the doctrine of the Ways, or in any other cognitive geography from the subcontinent. We can account for this in some part by the actual history of Sanskrit in Southeast Asia. Aside from the political poems of the inscriptions (which are themselves fully realized texts of their kind and sometimes spectacular in their grandeur), we cannot confidently point to the creation of a single new work of Sanskrit kārṣya during the entire seven or eight centuries of cosmopolitan culture in Cambodia, Java, or elsewhere in the area. But the absence itself is enigmatic, and it yields to no easy explanation.

These eastern reaches of the Sanskrit cosmopolis excepted, the internal maps of literary texts and the discursive frameworks of literary theory do have some significant objective correlates. Foremost among these is the range of distribution of Sanskrit literary manuscripts, of which the Mahābhārata again provides a model case. Leaving aside manuscripts disseminated through migration, for the preservation of which no habit of reproduction ever developed,151 the spread of Mahābhārata manuscripts largely followed the boundaries represented so frequently in the text itself. These are visible in what modern (and in some cases premodern) scholars have identified as the principal “recensions” deriving from the different script traditions: Nepali, Bangla, Grantha (Tamilnadu), Malayalam (Kerala), Nagari (comprising north-central India down to Maharashtra and Gujarat), and Sharada (Kashmir and much of west Panjab). There exists no Afghan recension of the Mahābhārata, nor Tajik, Burmese, Cambodian, Cham, or Javanese.

Many of the names applied to these Mahābhārata recensions—some of which, again, are indubitably precolonial, such as gaulityasampradāya, the Bengal vulgate—might be taken to imply that in the course of its diffusion the text itself became regionalized, that there is something significantly Bangla about the Bengal vulgate. Indeed, the same might be assumed for Sanskrit literary culture as a whole, since we can identify regional recensions for countless texts. And accordingly, the supraregionality that so many other factors of Sanskrit literary culture promote would seem to have been counteracted at the level of the text itself. In fact, such an assumption would be false. Nonetheless, examining some dominant traits of Sanskrit manuscript culture and the regional writing systems on which it is based is helpful in understanding the literary objects under consideration. We need to remember that everything we read when we read a Sanskrit text has been copied

151. These include such things as a manuscript of the Adīparvan donated to a temple in Cambodia in the seventh century (the Prasat Prah That inscription), or the eleventh-century Old Javanese version of the epic that is one part Sanskrit prātīka and nine parts vernacular adaptation.
and recopied for centuries—a textual devotion, under environmental conditions of unusual severity, that is hard to parallel in world culture and that has preserved for us the works of the greater number of the canonical poets earlier discussed.\textsuperscript{152} Obviously, the less we understand of this process, the less we understand of the product.

In contrast to all other quasi-global cultures of the premodern past, the Sanskrit order enforced no fixity of the written sign. If elsewhere language and script were as a rule mutually exclusive of all other language-script combinations (Latin was written only in the Roman script, for example), the adoption of Sanskrit literary culture proceeded independently of logographic uniformity. Sanskrit writers wrote the exact same language, with equal success, in scores of different graphic forms, including those that we now call Brahmi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Bangla, Newari, Sinhala, and Javanese.\textsuperscript{153} The specific modality of writing would thus appear to be wholly irrelevant to a history of Sanskrit literary culture.

Conventional wisdom holds, however, that the very diversity of graphic realizations, and their growing distance from each other over time, had an enormous impact on Sanskrit literary history, especially in respect of regions and recensions. Most scholars assume that writing styles and manuscript traditions formed closed systems: Given the regional exclusivity of scripts—or what is taken to be their exclusivity—Sanskrit literary texts are said to have developed versions peculiar to writing traditions, and hence recensions tended to become regionalized. In addition, the more localized the script, the less it communicated with others and thus the purer the textual tradition it is thought to contain; Malayalam (in Kerala) and Sharada (in Kashmir) are usually offered as the model instances.\textsuperscript{154}

There is some truth to this conventional view, but it needs important qualification. Scripts in precolonial South Asia seem to have represented as
little a barrier to supralocal communication as regional languages. And although most scholars who accept the sharp image of impermeable script traditions are prepared to blur it by acknowledging the circulation of literati and manuscripts—which, besides being vast and relatively rapid, is what makes Sanskrit textual criticism uniquely problematic—we know from the textual history of early works like the Vālmiki Rāmāyana and later works like the Nāgānanda of Haṭha (r. 590–647) that even Malayalam manuscripts were accessible and legible to scholars in lands as distant as Kashmir or Nepal.

Little systematic knowledge is available about the lives of literary texts in Sanskrit, especially post-epic texts, since the critical editing of works in which the logic of variation itself has been taken as an object of study has scarcely begun. The textual traditions of important Sanskrit works regularly fall into recensions that editors would have us think of as regional. A recent edition of the Raghuvamśa, for example, identifies five such traditions: eastern (gauḍa), western (nāgara), Kashmiri (kaśmira), southern (dakṣinādēśa); the Nāgānanda likewise shows five (Nepal, Tibet, north India, the Deccan, and south India). But what we do not understand very well for either the Raghuvamśa or the Nāgānanda—and they seem to be representative of many Sanskrit works—is how such regional recensions developed and what, beyond script identity, their regionality actually consists in.

Beside the limited influence of script, the provenance of commentators is likely to be a key factor in textual regionalization. Commentators were editors as much as exegetes, and the editions they established often became dominant in a given region (these, too, however, circulated widely outside their script area, so much so that the commentaries of the tenth-century

155. It seemed unreasonable to Katre to assume that professional copyists could be acquainted with more than one “or at most two scripts,” but substantial evidence suggests that mastery of different writing systems was widely valued (cf. Vāmanīnādhodvavacarīta 3.17; EI 12: p. 286, v. 78; EI 15: 51). Negative evidence includes mistranscriptions from unfamiliar scripts (cf. Dvivedi 1986: xvi–xvii; Vāmana cited by Raghavan 1941–1942: 6; Stein 1900: v). Further doubts about the “writing-system premise” that underlies epic text-criticism and the reality of regional versions have recently been raised by Grünendahl 1993.

156. The critical editing of Sanskrit literary texts is in its infancy. Outside of the two epics, Hillebrandt’s Mudrārākṣasa (1914), Kosambi’s Śatakatrayam (1948), Miller’s Gitagovinda (1977), Coulson’s Mālavimalīhava (1983), Dvivedi’s Kālidāsa (1986) and a few Kālidāsa volumes published by the Sahitya Akademi almost exhaust the twentieth-century list. We have no detailed accounts of the textual history of many great works, from Kurūtārjunīya, Siṣupālavadha, Daśakumāravacarī, Harṣacarī, and Kādambarī onward. This is a consequence of the sheer number of manuscripts available for any important text, their paleographic complexities, and practical difficulties of simply gaining access to them.

157. See Dvivedi in Kālidāsaśravasastra 1986: xlv. Hahn 1991 (who argues that none of the five Nāgānanda versions can be derived from any other).
Kashmiri scholar Vallabhadeva were studied assiduously in fifteenth-century Anhtra. Just how such editions were established also largely escapes us, as do the text-critical principles they were based on. We do know that commentators typically collected and compared manuscripts in order to constitute their text. In some instances efforts were made to secure copies from all over the subcontinent. This is famously the case with the Mahābhārata editor of late-seventeenth-century Vārānasi, Nilakaṇṭha Caturdhara, who tells us he gathered “many manuscripts from different regions and critically established the best readings.” This may well have been the case with skilled kavya editors, too.

As for what constitutes the correct or the best reading and the criteria for establishing it, scholars then as now differed—and they differed, then as now, on the basis of principles and not whim. One of the earliest extant commentators on kavya, Vallabhadeva (fl. 950, Kashmir), often chose a reading on the principle of difficulty and the antiquity such difficulty suggests: “This must be the ancient reading precisely because it is unfamiliar.” Or he might combine principles of antiquity and aestheticism: “The old reading in this verse is more beautiful.” Yet authenticity has its limits for Vallabha; like other commentators he will rewrite a verse in order to save his author from a supposed solecism. The willingness of some editors to emend, whether on the basis of grammatical deviation or supposed aesthetic or logical fault, was a source of worry to poets, such as this twelfth-century Kashmiri poet working at the court of Ajmer:

Noble learning, however pure in itself,
should not be applied to emending the works of good poets.
Holy ash is not scattered, in hopes of purification,
on water one is about to drink.

Yet in fact, emendation was restrained or resisted by many commentators, who took care, as did one fifteenth-century scholar of Anhtra, to assure read-

---

158. Mahābhārata with the commentary of Nilakaṇṭha, vol. 1, introduction, v. 6: bahūn samākhyeta vāhīnūrādāsān kṣāmān vināśicītya ca pāthām aghram.

159. Thus Vallabha replaces the Vedic word trisambhaka (Three-Eyed, a name of Śiva) with an everyday synonym (mahīvāram, Great God), for “Since the [svara]bhakti y in trisambhaka is permitted [by grammarians] only in the Veda and not in this-worldly writing (bhāsā), we must here instead read ‘Great God’” (commentary on Kumārasambhava 3.44, cf. 3.28). For his first principle see 1.46, aprasiddhatvād ārasah pāthah, regarding the reading (lilā-śeṣakām (=catusām, as per Arunagiri and Mallinātha), the Sanskrit version of the familiar maxim lector difficilest melior est; for the second, 2.26, cf. 2.37, joratpāṭha ’tra ranyataraah.

160. Pṛthvīrajyājasṛṇya (Victory of Pṛthvīraj, c. 1190) 1.14: viśodhana satkaviḥhārātīnām śud- dho ’pi pānditātyagunā na yoṣyath / na koṣṭyate bhasma viśuddhākāmān aprām hi pātayatayoddhitāḥ.
Ksemendra similarly attacks grammarians and logicians as hostile to poetry, Kavakanṭhābhāravya 1.15, 19, 22.
ers that they were transmitting exactly what they found in their manuscripts.\footnote{161} Generally editor-commentators sought to establish as coherent and authoritative a text as they could on the basis of the materials available to them (āgata) rather than conjectured (kalpita).

Such practical criteria have something important to tell us about the model of textuality at work: Some readings are not only objectively more beautiful (ramya) than others, or contextually more sensible (yukta) or more clearly what is intended by the author (vivakṣita), but are also older or more original (jarat; ārṣa); some may clearly be corruptions (apaṃśha) and in need of emendation (prakṣipta) and must be rejected.\footnote{162} Text-critical practices of this sort are common among commentaries on not only epics but also kāvyas. It is thus by no means unusual for Arjunavarmadeva (fl. 1215), editor-commentator of the Amaraśāatakā, to reject a number of verses as the interpolations of a second-rate poet satisfied even with the anonymous fame of having his work included in Amaru’s collection.\footnote{163} And when taken as a whole these practices suggest a model of textuality at once historicist-intentionalist and purist-aestheticist—standards that, if obviously contradictory, are perhaps not fatally so. That is to say, texts were held to be intentional productions of authors, whose intentions could be recovered by the judicious assessment of manuscript variants. At the same time, literary texts were lakṣya-grantha—instantiations of the rule-bounded-ness (lakṣana) of Sanskrit literary production in terms of grammar, lexicon, prosody, and the poetics of sound and sense—and when conflict arose, they had to yield to the superior claims of the rules.

What we do not find, however, among the text-critical practices, editor-

\footnote{161. Mallinātha in the introduction to his Rāghuvamśāsaṃjñīvīni (nāmaḥyaṃ likhyate kiñcit). For a good example of emendation based on logic see Manṭyacandra on Kāvyopakāśa (ed. Mysore), vol. 2, p. 372.}

\footnote{162. An important discussion of general principles is found in the work of early-fourteenth-century scholar and religious reformer Madhva (and his commentator Vādirāja). The explanation of the meaning of sāstras such as the Mahābhārata, he tells us, has to be provided by way of the sentences of the text themselves [and not through discourses invented by our own imagination, com.]. But people interpolate passages in the text [prakṣipti], suppress passages that are there [antaritin kuryuḥ] or transfer them [vyatāṣam kuryuḥ] to elsewhere in the text whether by mistake or intentionally. Many thousands of manuscripts have disappeared and those that are extant are disordered. So confused can a text have become that even the gods themselves could not figure it out. Mahābhārataṭātātparyāmarṣayā 2.2–5.}

\footnote{163. Amaraśāatakā pp. 46–47. Arjunavarmadeva’s grounds for rejection of supposedly inauthentic verses are purely aesthetic: “These jangling lines will simply give learned men a headache”; “She ‘takes his breath away,’ like a witch, no doubt”; “her beauty [saltiness] doubles my thirst’ must have been written by a ditchdigger in the Sambar salt lake.” Text-critical procedures among Rāmāyaṇa commentators are discussed passim in the notes to Pollock 1986 and 1991.}
ial principles, or reading protocols of commentators is anything marked by or conducive to regional difference, the occasional vernacular gloss aside. Premodern philology is standardized throughout the Sanskrit world. Likewise, nothing in any sense regional accompanied the regionalization of scripts and the production of regional recensions. The language of the southern recension of the Mahābhārata or of the Bangla recension of the Śākuntala, for example, is as little marked as southern or Bangla as is its material culture or mentality. All recensions of the epic transmit the epic’s transregional talk and thought and realia, as all recensions of the Śākuntala, whether Bangla or Malayali, transmit the talk and thought and realia of courtly culture. Norms of literary form and aesthetics that were universal in their self-understanding universally found application. The diversity and localism of scripts, editors, and recensions did nothing of significance to localize or diversify the cosmopolitan world of Sanskrit literary culture.

The Social Sites of Sanskrit

In addition to the conceptual maps of writers and critics, and the actual routes taken or boundaries created by the inscription, editing, and circulation of texts, the relevant “places” of Sanskrit literary culture include the sites of its production and consumption in the social world. That Sanskrit kāvya was above all a courtly practice may not be news, though we still lack a serious study of exactly what kind of practice this was. Yet the court was not its exclusive social space.

The oldest extant anthology of Sanskrit poetry is a twelfth-century compilation called the Subhāṣītaratnakoṣa (Anthology of well-turned verse). This was the work of the abbot of a Buddhist monastery at Jagaddala in what is now Bangladesh. While the anthology provides many insights into the elements of practical literary consciousness—about standards of selection and canonicity, the principles of organizing the literary universe, the status of and knowledge about authorship—its social location is very puzzling: What do we make of the fact that a collection of this-worldly poetry, three-quarters of it dealing with the physical love of men and women, was prepared at an institution for Buddhist renunciates?

Anthology-making has a long history in Sanskrit and Prakrit literary culture. If we leave aside the ancient testimonies of spiritual awakening in Pali (Thera- and Therigāthā), this begins with a text mentioned earlier, the Maharashtri Prakrit Gāhākoso (Treasury of lyrics, or Gāhāsattasai, the seven hundred lyrics), attributed to King Hāla of the Sātavahana dynasty (c. third cen-

164. In the case of the Śākuntala itself, a recent article finds “regional” variation explainable on entirely nonregional grounds: the inflated (Bangla) recension is argued to be the stage version; the shorter (Nagari) text, the “author’s” version (Bansat-Boudon 1994).
It is remarkable that virtually every one of the important anthologies of whose provenance we have any knowledge turns out to have been, like the Gāhākoso itself, the work of intellectuals associated with royal courts. A rash of such anthologies is found at the beginning of the second millennium (another manifestation of a widespread, if poorly understood, proliferation of encyclopedism throughout Sanskrit culture of the period). The Subhāṣītaratnakośa may fit this pattern. The Jagaddala monastery had close ties to the Pāla dynasty—it was there Pāla kings received royal consecration—and it makes sense, too, that those who were likely recruited as tutors to the court would be expected to be familiar with the literature the court cultivated.

Other hypotheses can no doubt be framed to explain why Buddhist monks had the kind of library such an anthology presupposes. Perhaps this sort of literature was a prompt to meditation on the defilements—or a pleasurable source of them. But whatever the truth of the matter, the presence of erotic poetry in this monastic community (unlike the presence of manuscripts of Juvenal in the monastery of Montecassino) was scarcely accidental: If we can infer anything, it is that Sanskrit literature was seriously cultivated far beyond the assembly of the king—an impression strengthened by a second feature of the anthology, its choice of materials.

In addition to the eulogies of gods and kings and poets, the verses that chart a woman’s erotic history from childhood to old age, and the other long-cultivated topics of Sanskrit poetry, the Subhāṣītaratnakośa includes a generous selection of the poetry of rural life, rural joy, and rural misery. This kind of material, much of it written by tenth-century poets of Pāla Bengal, Yogeśvara chief among them, is not readily found elsewhere, either in other anthologies or in independent works (one of the earliest kāvya texts, the Hari-vamśa, excepted). And it reveals a world of concerns of Sanskrit literature—and may imply other sites of its production and consumption—of which we would otherwise have little idea. One might be prone to suppose that, again, like a Theocritan pastoral or indeed, like the Gāhākoso itself, this poetry of village and field, as it has been called, is a courtly vision of the rural, designed for urban and urbane listeners. But it is hard to sustain this facile interpre-

165. The Saduktikarnāmya by Śrīdharadāsa was produced at the court of Laksmanasena of Bengal in 1205; the Sāktimukhāvali by Jalāna at the Devagiri court of the Yadavas in 1258; the Subhāṣītasudhānūdhi by Sāyana at the court of Harihara I (r. 1336–1357) or Bukka (r. 1344–1377) of Vijayanagara; the Sāṅgadharapaddhati by Sāṅgadhara at the court of the Śākambhari Chauhans in 1563; the Subhāṣītāvali, substantially recited by Śrīvara, at the court of Zain-ul-Abidin of Kashmir, c. 1450 (it is likely to have been originally composed c. 1150). On the far earlier Thera- and Therigāthā, see Collins, chapter 11, this volume. The new drive toward cultural totalization is signaled by, inter alia, a new genre called the dharmāṅghā (compendium of moral action, on which see Pollock 1993), and by such royal encyclopedias as the Mānasolāsa, considered later in this chapter.

Somehow, my wife, you must keep us and the children alive until the summer months are over. The rains will come then, making gourds and pumpkins grow aplenty, and we shall fare like kings.

The children starving, looking like so many corpses, the relative who spurns me, the water pot patched up with lac—these do not hurt so much as seeing the woman from next door, annoyed and smiling scornfully when every day my wife must beg a needle to mend her tattered dress.

I wear no golden bracelet bright as the rays of autumn moon, nor have I tasted a young bride’s lip tender and hesitant with shame. I have won no fame in heaven’s hall by either pen or sword, but waste my time in ruined colleges, teaching insolent, malicious boys.

Both the provenance of the Subhāṣittaratnakoṣa and the materials it contains point toward social worlds—far from the court—where Sanskrit literature was very much alive, and this is an impression corroborated by, among other things, inscriptions reporting local endowments for training in kāvya and related arts. And on the evidence of contemporaneous narratives from the Kashmir valley, at the other end of the Sanskrit cosmopolitan world, we may expand this social universe beyond the monastery and the village (or the village school) to include two other important sites: the temple and the private urban dwelling. In the early ninth century, a councillor named Dāmodaragupta at the celebrated court of King Jayāpiñḍa (r. 779–813, the patron also of the literary scholars Udbhaṭa and Vāmana) wrote a unique narrative poem, the Kuṭṭanīmata (The madam’s handbook). The centerpiece of the work is the tragic love story of prince Samarabhāṭa and the actress Mañjarī, whom he meets at a temple of Śiva where he has gone to offer wor-
ship. Seated amid a crowd of male dancers, musicians, singers, merchants, and guild masters, the prince asks to see some entertainment and is addressed by a drama instructor who has recently immigrated from Kanyakubja:

Do not expect skill in a dramatic performance where the members of the audience are merchants and the performers prostitutes. My student-actresses and myself, by contrast, have recently arrived here, taking refuge in this holy temple, now that great King Harṣa has passed away. But my students are desolate and only rarely, out of anxiety of not having any income at all, do they move their hands and feet in presenting the Ratnāvali.169

The director invites the prince to watch one act of Harṣa’s famous play performed by the all-female troupe, Mañjārī taking the lead role of Sāgariṅkā. At the end of the performance, the prince expresses his appreciation with a learned critique and presents the director with a house and a plot of land.170

The theater in old South Asia, even the Sanskrit theater, could thus be as much a popular entertainment as it typically was elsewhere in the world. That it took place in the temple importantly stretches our sense of that institution in premodern India (though the kind of court-temple division in literary production, found for example in later Andhra, is not known here).171

It is accessible not just to princes but to guild masters and merchants; and it is sustained by strictly material transactions—hardly what we think of as courtly culture.172

Distant from the court, too—if not quite so distant—was the literary salon, of which a memorable description is provided by Manḍaka at the time of the recitation of his courtly epic, which I discussed earlier. This took place at the home of his brother in Pravarapura (present-day Srinagar) around the year 1140. Due no doubt to the unprecedented royal abuses in twelfth-century Kashmir that helped to bring Sanskrit literary culture to an end, the court had more or less ceased to command the sympathies of the subjects, and kingly power was irrelevant to Manḍaka’s life as a poet and to the theme of his poem:

How fortunate am I that Sarasvatī, Goddess of Speech, willful though she may be, has prompted me to praise no one but Śiva.

Away with those whose speech, though immersed in Sarasvatī, Goddess of Speech [bathed in the river Sarasvatī], dirties itself like a drunken woman with the filth of praise given to kings.

171. See Narayana Rao, chapter 6, this volume; and contrast Freeman, chapter 7, this volume. On the temple theater of medieval Gujarat, see Yashaschandra, chapter 9, this volume.
172. Dāmodara-gupta’s description is corroborated by a wide range of other evidence, including, for example, the prologues to Bhavabhūti’s plays, which inform us that they were performed at the popular festivals of Ujjain.
The vision belonging to Sarasvatī is befouled by a poet when rendered subservient to kings.\textsuperscript{173}

Maṅkha’s work is uncontaminated by the evil of praising kings; “All poets, yourself excepted,” he is told by the ambassador from the Koṅkana, “have served only to teach men how to beg.”\textsuperscript{174} Royal power has become irrelevant not only to literature but to literary culture. The venue of the recitation of Maṅkha’s poem amounts to a kind of inchoate literary public sphere, consisting of scholars, literati, and men of affairs from home and abroad—but no king. Yet it seems to have been a sphere that could not be sustained for long.

We are thus obliged to acknowledge a wide range of social locations for the production and consumption of Sanskrit literature, though its primary site, the main source of patronage and of the glory (yāsas) conferred by the approbation of the learned, undoubtedly always remained the royal court. And it is kārya as courtly practice that we need to understand if we are to understand the heart of Sanskrit literary culture.\textsuperscript{175} One important and unexploited document to help us is the Mānasollāsa (The mind’s delight, also called Abhilāṣītārthacintāmani [Wishing gem for all things desired]), a royal encyclopedia composed around 1130 at Kālayana (in the northeast of present-day Karnataka) during the reign of King Someśvara III, the last of the great overlords of the Western Cāḻukya dynasty.

Part of the new encyclopedism of late medieval India, the Mānasollāsa represents a summa of kingly action, touching on everything from the acquisition and consolidation of political power to its physical and intellectual enjoyment. In the last category are included the entertainments of learned discourse (śāstravinoda) and of storytelling (kathāvinoda).\textsuperscript{176} The section actually commences with the entertainment of arms (śāstravinoda), where the king himself comes forth to display his mastery of various weapons. This is followed by learned discourse; displays by elephant drivers and horsemen; diversions such as dueling, wrestling, and cockfighting; and finally, singing, instrumental music, dancing, and storytelling. Whether acting as spectator or participant, the king is centrally involved in all these activities as connoisseur and critic.

The sābhā, or cultural assembly, of the king includes not just courtiers, ministers, and the like but also, prominently, masters of all the verbal arts: scholars, makers of poems, experts in vernacular languages (who are employed

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item See Mānasollāsa vol. 2, pp. 171 ff.; v. 197 ff.; and vol. 3, pp. 162–65, v. 1406–32, respectively.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
principally for singing, not for literature), reciters of kāvya, epic rhapsodists, and genealogists. For the entertainment of learned discourse these are supplemented by disputants and exeges, men learned in the sāstra and skilled in the arts of language, “practiced in the three precious [knowledges]”—grammar, hermeneutics, and logic—“creators and interpreters, men who are adept at versification and who know the principles of sweet poetry, and who are knowledgeable in all languages.”

The entertainment of learned discourse begins when the king commands the poets to recite a lovely poem, and during the recitation he is shown to reflect on the poem’s good qualities and faults. The protocols of critical reflection are supplied by the text as well:

Words make up the body of a literary text, meaning is its life-breath, tropes its external form, emotional states and feelings its movements, meter its gait, and the knowledge of language its vital spot. It is in these that the beauty of the deity of literature consists.

This précis is then expanded into a detailed account of the elements of literary knowledge that a royal connoisseur in central India at the end of the twelfth century was expected to possess and apply: the expression-forms (guna) and the different Ways (or Paths, riti) of writing; the basic concepts and common varieties of meters; the major figures of speech; the features of the principal genres; and the components and operation of the primary aesthetic moods. The king listens to this talk about literature and reflects on the strengths and weaknesses of the poems he has heard recited.

The penultimate entertainment—before the entertainment of magical ointments and powders that render a person clear-sighted or invisible or enable him to walk on water—is storytelling. After the king has finished his daily duties, dined, and rested, he summons men to tell him stories about the deeds of heroes in the Mahābhārata, the Rāmāyaṇa, ancient lore (puṇāṇa), or the Bhātakathā, from plays or courtly epics. The storytellers should be eloquent and cultured men who believe in the truth of the duties demanded by the moral law (dharma), men young in years but mature in intellect, who are “axes to fell the tree of sadness, fires to burn the tinder of despondency, moons to swell the ocean of passion, suns to open the lotuses of desire.”

---

177. Maṇṇalūśavol. 2, p. 155, vv. 3–5 (“creators and interpreters,” utpādaka, bhāvajīna; “the principles of sweet poetry,” read madhurākṣaya).
178. Maṇṇalūśa 4.197–206 (vol. 2, pp. 171–72; the passage cited is vv. 205–6). “The knowledge of language its vital spot” (śabdavidiśaya marmā) the most vulnerable point in a literary text is its correct use of language.
There is a third section of the work, the entertainment of singing (gitavina\-noda), where something of the literary may pertain as well. But here all that earlier in the text has been said to constitute kāvya—above all, the special unity of sound and sense, and the preeminence of cosmopolitan language—no longer applies with any force.181 A verse that still circulates among pandits tells us:

Children understand song, beasts do too, and even snakes. But the sweetness of literature—does even the Great God himself truly understand?182

This brings us close to what the literary could mean as a twelfth-century courtly attainment. The practice of Sanskrit literary culture was, in the first instance, an intellectual endeavor. It consisted of theoretically informed reflection on normativity and thus presupposed active knowledge of all the categories of literary understanding. Without these there could be no analysis and so no “intellectual delight.” And it was at once a coherent discursive science (śāstra) and one entertainment (vinoda) among others. It was no more instrumental to power in any direct or overt way—no more concerned with the attainment or constitution or legitimation of power—than the king’s display of weaponry or his understanding of cockfighting. Kāvya was above all a component, and perhaps the supreme component, of royal competence and distinction, of royal pleasure and civility.

In the primeval moment of Sanskrit literary culture, the Vālmīki Rāma\-yaṇa is recited before the hero of the tale, and in this moment much that characterizes the entire history of the culture is encapsulated. The location of the performance is the royal court, whose fortunes were by and large to be the fortunes of kāvya. Where the court collapsed, as in thirteenth-century Kashmir, an entire creative literary tradition, however great, could collapse with it; when its presence crowded kāvya too closely, as in Vijayanagara, the very life breath could be taken from the poetry. The language of the Rāma\-yaṇa was no quotidian idiom of any historical court, but rather a language of the restricted domain of cosmopolitan culture. It was chosen for this text from among other languages because of its peculiar aesthetic and cultural—and not religious—associations, not least its cosmopolitanism, precisely commensurate at the level of the political with the imaginative projection of power in Rama’s heroic progress across the macrospace of the subcontinent and in the new order he creates. When this order of cosmopolitan power

181. For further analysis of this section, particularly its relevance for a history of vernacularization, see Pollock forthcoming.
182. A version is cited by the glossator ad Kalhaṇa’s Rāja\-tāmāgini 5.1, p. 72.
gave way in the early centuries of the second millennium to a range of new, vernacular polities, Sanskrit literary culture began to give way too. As for the tale itself, everything being told is of course already known to the listener—Rāma lived it, after all. He is not listening for the plot, and what he derives from listening is not a particular form of knowledge. Systematic thought, the way things really were in the past, moral action—these are the concern of other knowledges and textual forms. Yet Rāma listened and was transfixed. Was it the Way of writing that captured him? Or was it what he could catch echoing in the text, a something that was meant without being said? Or was it the feelings represented there that could make him feel beyond himself, even when those feelings were his own?

Knowing something of the history of Sanskrit literary culture and the unparalleled power it exercised in premodern Asia may not answer such fundamental questions, which long preoccupied the best minds in the Indian world. But it at least may suggest why they bothered with them at all.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**Abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CII</td>
<td>Corpus inscriptionum indicarum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EC</td>
<td>Epigraphia carnatika</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EI</td>
<td>Epigraphia indica</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Primary Texts**


Gāthākosa. See Saptācatakam.


Kṣemendralahukāvyaśaṅgraha 1961. Edited by E.V.V. Raghavacharya and D. G. Paḍhye, Hyderabad: Sanskrit Academy, Osmania University.


Laghukāvyasāngraha of Kaemendra. 1961. Edited by E.V.V. Raghavacharya. Sanskrit
Academy Series 7. Hyderabad: Sanskrit Academy, Osmania University.

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.

Mahābhārata. 1927–1966. Edited by E.V.V. Raghavacharya. Sanskrit
Academy Series 7. Hyderabad: Sanskrit Academy, Osmania University.

Mahābhārata. 1927–1966. Edited by E.V.V. Raghavacharya. Sanskrit
Academy Series 7. Hyderabad: Sanskrit Academy, Osmania University.

Oriental Research Institute.

Mahābhārata, with the commentary of Nīlakaṇṭha. 1929–1933. Edited by Ramachan-
dradiśaṭi. Poona: Chitrashala Press.

Mahābhārata, with the commentary of Nīlakaṇṭha. 1929–1933. Edited by Ramachan-

Prasthānabheda of Madhusūdana Sarasvati. 1966. Edited by G.B. Kale. Anandash-

Pythārjavanijaya [of Jayānaka]. 1941. Edited by Gaurishankar Hirachand Ojha and
Chandradhar Sharma Guleri. Ajmer: Vedānta Yantra.

Jaina Jnanapitha.

Purāṇaparāśikā of Vidyāpati. 1881 (śaka 1803). Edited by Kalidasa Shastri. Bombay:
Nirnaya Sagara Press.

Akademi.

Rājarājanī of Jonarāja. 1967. Edited by Srikanth Kaul. Hoshiarpur: Vish-
evishvaranand Institute. (Also edited by Raghunath Singh. Varanasi: Chowkhamba
Sanskrit Series Office, 1972.)

Rājarājanī of Kalhaṇa. 1892. Edited by M.A. Stein. Bombay: Education Society’s

Rājarājanī of Śrīvāra and Śūka. 1966. Edited by Srikanth Kaul. Hoshiarpur: Vishv-
evishvaranand Institute.


Rāmāyana of Pravarasena. 1959. Edited by Radhagovinda Basak. Cal-
cutta: Sanskrit College.


Vāyupuṇḍara. 1885. [No editor.] Bombay: Venkateshvara Steam Press.

Secondary Texts


Sivaramamurti, C. 1952. *Indian Epigraphy and South Indian Scripts*. Madras: Printed by the Director of Stationery and Printing on behalf of the Govt. of Madras.


The Culture and Politics of Persian in Precolonial Hindustan

Muzaffar Alam

Persian has been an integral part of South Asian culture, and the life of northern India (or Hindustan) in particular, for centuries. Recognizing and appreciating the marks of Persian influence, though these are perhaps less visible today than they were in, say, 1800, are nevertheless crucial for understanding northern Indian literary and political culture. The same is true, if to a lesser degree, for other parts of India, though some regions, such as the Deccan, were also considerably affected by Persian over the centuries. The period examined in this chapter is between the twelfth and the nineteenth centuries, when Persian influence was at its apogee in northern India. Much has been written about this phenomenon over the years, though usually within the framework of a straightforward narrative. Where an analysis has been attempted, it has usually been limited to a comparison of the features of the so-called Indian style or Indian usage (sabk-i Hind or isti’nâl-i Hind) in Persian with those of the dominant Iranian style. And though political and social factors that lie outside the strict framework of a literary narrative have been noted, their role has seldom been examined in any detail.1 It is my purpose not only to contextualize Indian Persian, but also to argue that the “Indian style” has a longer history than has often been realized. Sabk-i

1. In English, Ghani’s account (1929–1930 and 1941) is still the best account of the career of Persian in Hindustan. Schimmel (1973) is useful, but sketchy; Hasan (1952) is selective and is ineffective in removing the impression that Browne (1951–1953) has created. Ryplka (1968) is good, but only for some poets like Bidl. In Urdu a very comprehensive description is avail-

I owe much concerning this paper to Sheldon Pollock, who introduced me to the fascinating world of literary studies. Shamsur Rahman Faruqi’s suggestions and support were of great value. Sanjay Subrahmanym was generous with his advice and help. Sections of this paper are reprinted with the permission of Cambridge University Press. The diacritics here follow the Library of Congress system, with some departures. Shams and hijra dates are indicated by “s.” and “h.”
Hindi should not be understood as solely the articulation of Mughal India during the mid-sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries (1526–1857); rather, it had its roots in the early-medieval efflorescence under the Ghaznavids (977–1186) in Lahore with Masʿūd Saʿd Salīm during the eleventh century, reaching a first maturity at the time of Aḥmūr Khusraw Dihlavī in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. It continued to evolve in the context of medieval Sufism before being redeployed in Mughal times after a possible detour through Herat. These developments can only be understood if one takes into account the political and social context not only in South Asia but also in the post-Mongol Perso-Islamic world. The zenith of the istiʿmal-i Hindī in Mughal times also needs to be evaluated anew through a rereading of contemporary controversies on the question, for which the interpretations offered by scholars of Iranian Persian are not always adequate. Here, too, comparative examination of the political cultures of Mughal India and Safavid Iran (1501–1722) is central to understanding both the literary trajectories taken and the manner in which rivalries were posed and understood by contemporary controversialists.

South Asia had of course interacted for two millennia with traditions emanating from Old and Middle Persian. The region came in contact with the emergent New Persian culture sometime around the third quarter of the ninth century, when Sindīh was integrated into the Saffarid kingdom by Yaʿqūb bin Abī Laisī. Persian was still evolving then as a language of literary expression in the Islamic East. Toward the end of the tenth century, the presence of Persian in Sindh, Multān, and Panjāb was further strengthened by the growing importance of the Ismāʿīlī presence there. A more formal relationship of the language with the subcontinent formed later, in the wake of the establishment of Ghaznavid power in Panjāb in the eleventh century. In the area around his capital, Ghazna, the celebrated ruler Maḥmūd (998–1030) and his vizier, Khvāja Abī al-Qāsim Ahmad Maymandī, created


2. Ghani 1941: 74–75; Șālik 1957: 523. To be noted in this connection: (1) Sindī and Multān, being close to its borders, had age-long links with Iran; (2) the Sindhis seem to have fought with the Iranians against the Arabs during the early years of the expansion of Islam; (3) a number of Shīrāzīs (Farsī) were in the army of the Umayyid general Muḥammad bin Qāsim when he invaded and conquered Sindīh; (4) the Abbaṣīd Caliph al-ʿUmayd assigned Sindī and Multān to the Saffarids, and Persian was virtually the official language under Yaʿqūb bin Layhī; and (5) when Maḥmūd of Ghazna chased the Qarmātīs in Multān and Sindīh, it was in Persian that the Friday sermons were delivered from the pulpits of the mosques in Multān.
a major center of Persian culture that was inherited from Bukhara of the Samanids (819–1005). This was the context within which the great Firdausi composed the *Shāh-nāmah*, and which also enabled the development of a particular literary form, the *qasidah* (a long poem in the nature of an ode or elegy). Mahmūd of Ghazna was also responsible for instituting the position of *malik al-shuʿarāʾ* (poet laureate), which after his rule was absorbed into the Timurid court traditions in Herat in the fifteenth century and eventually reached the height of its importance in Mughal India. It was only much later, in the nineteenth century, that the Qajars in the Iranian plateau took on board this innovation. To my mind, the post of *malik al-shuʿarāʾ* was crucial for the development of a certain style of courtly patronage of literature. From Ghazna the New Persian literary culture spread farther east in the eleventh century to Lahore, significantly sometimes called “little Ghazna,” a major staging post for Ghaznavid ventures in Hindustan. In a first phase, the Muslim presence in the city seems to have been dominated by plunder-seeking frontier warriors (*ghāzīs*), but over time large numbers of Persian-speaking people reportedly settled around Lahore. The city, which had emerged as an important political center of the eastern Ghaznavids in the eleventh century, gradually attracted scholars and literary figures from Iran, Khurasan, and Māwarā-an-nahr. Panjāb thus witnessed the beginning and flowering of a high Persian literary tradition. Persian texts of the time of the first Ghurid ruler, ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Jahānsuẓ (1149–1161), stated that among the areas where Persian verse had cast its shadow and was appreciated was “the periphery [or the districts] of the land of Hind” (*atraf-i Hind*), referring to the Panjab. Among the poets associated with this region and its vicinity were the great Abū al-Faraj Ṣūn and Maṣʿūd Saʿd Salmān, acclaimed by Persian literary critics as innovators and masters of a new diction.

Later, in the wake of the Turkish conquest of northern India in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, Persian flourished farther east, in Delhi and beyond. As part of the new political developments of the thirteenth century, Persian speakers entered the region—including soldiers and adventurers from as far as the Qara Khita’i and Qipchaq regions. The sultans of Delhi between 1206 and 1290 extended generous patronage to Persian scribes, writers, and poets. The short-lived kingdom of Naṣīr al-Dīn Qabāchah (1205–1228) in Uchch also played host to some of the best Persian poets and writers. Significantly, the first major *taṣkīrah* (a critical anthology of Persian poetry), *Lubāb al-ʿAlbāb* (The essence of wisdom) of Sadīd al-Dīn Muḥam-

---

5. ‘Auṭī 1982 (s. 1361): 89.
mad 'Aufi (d. c. 1252), was compiled at Qabāchah’s court. When Chinggis Khān invaded the Perso-Islamic world, this trickle of scribes, savants, and holy men became a flow of some importance, and a truly significant elite migration into northern India began. The migrants included members of distinguished ruling families; there were also many men of learning (‘ulamā’) and Sufis. The Persian traditions of these groups were thus rooted more deeply in the northern Indian world. The sultanate of Delhi patronized these men of learning and piety with revenue grants (imlāk, aqāf, ibrāʾ, vazāʾif, etc.), which were often located in the countryside. Thus a gradual penetration of Persian into small towns and rural centers began through these beneficaries of the state’s largesse. Quarters in the cities were given the names of towns and ethnic groups located elsewhere in the Persian-speaking world (such as Atābaki, Khvārazmshāhī, Samargandi, and Khatā’ī); and rural centers, too, were often named anew, or when freshly founded were given names from the new Persian vocabulary. Later waves of migration accompanied political and social turmoil in Central and South-Central Asia: In the wake of the empire-building of Timur in the late fourteenth century additional groups sought refuge in northern India, while in the fifteenth century the Afghan sultans of Delhi and Jaunpur encouraged their clansmen to settle in the Gangetic plain as far east as Bengal and Bihar.

From one perspective, then, northern India became a part of the Perso-Islamic world in precisely the same way as did Transoxania, Ghazna, or Ghur. Just as Bukhara, Tirmiz, Nishapur, Isfaraín, Sabzavār, and Herat were important in this cultural landscape, so too Delhi and Lahore acquired a place there and a reputation. In the thirteenth century there was a certain degree of cultural integration with a coherent Perso-Islamic identity (in opposition to the Arab culture) that is identified with the term “Ajam.” The Persian-speaking residents of Delhi and Lahore seem to have considered themselves a part of this world of ‘Ajam, as is made apparent by ‘Aufi’s description in his anthology, which he terms “an anthology of the poets of ‘Ajam” (tabaqqat-i shuḥurā’i ‘Ajam), the implicit contrast surely being with the poets of the Arab cultural zone. The word “Ajam,” used by the Arabs in the first centuries of Islam and even earlier as a term of contempt for those they considered inferior to them in language and literature, was thus seized upon and used in a self-assertive manner not only by those who lived on the Iranian plateau but by those who inhabited the larger Persian world.

There were few new developments in genre in the Persian written in South Asia. There were also some far more significant changes in terms of style, though in general, developments were uneven. The masnawi (narrative

poem) form of narrative poetry, which had seen an early efflorescence with Amir Khusrau, did not develop or flourish a great deal thereafter. But fields like lexicography and philology generally saw particular development in South Asia, as did a number of shorter poetic forms such as the ghazal (love lyric). Among the possible innovations in generic terms were such narrative forms as the dastan (fable) and malfuz (conversation, table talk), the latter associated with a Sufi context: the recounting of conversations of spiritually enlightened figures. These forms are not my primary concern here, however; instead I concentrate on developments in the field of poetry, which has in particular been marked by debate and controversy.

POETRY AND PROSE UNDER THE EARLY SULTANS OF NORTHERN INDIA

Abū 'Abdullāh Rozbih bin 'Abdullāh al-Nukati of Lahore (d. 1091?) was perhaps the first poet of Persian expression born in India. 'Aufi mentions him among the poets of the Ghaznavid era and praises the pithiness of his compositions. Unfortunately, practically nothing about his life and works is known; only a few verses, recorded by 'AuFi and borrowed from him by later biographers, have survived. On the basis of these verses it is difficult to assess the quality of his poetry, but as the first Persian poet of India he certainly occupies a special position.

Abū al-Faraj Rūni and Mas'ūd Sa'd Salūm were the two major poets during the Ghaznavid era. Abū al-Faraj came from Rūn, a village (no longer existent) near Lahore, and was hence called al-Rūni. He flourished during the reign of Sultan Ibrāhim of Ghazna (1059–1089) and died sometime after 1099. The greatness of Abū al-Faraj as a poet is attested to by two facts: first, he is still known traditionally as Ustād Abū al-Faraj, and second, Anvari (d. 1187), one of the greatest Iranian writers of qaṣīdah, professedly imitated his style:

Let it be known that I am Abū al-Faraj’s slave in poetry;
when I saw it, I became eager for it.12

9. There is no single good work in English on the trajectory of these genres in Indian Persian. In Urdu there is considerable material compiled by Persian language and literature specialists, summed up in Mahmūd (1971a, 1971b, and 1972). Writings on the history of Urdu literature are also useful. Bruce Lawrence (1978) has an excellent book on pre-Mughal Sufi malfūz. Shamsur Rahman Faruqi has recently published a comprehensive work on Urdu dastan (1999b).

11. 'AuFi 1982 (s. 1361): 728–32.
Elsewhere Anvarı praises his patron through metaphors drawing on the poetic stature of Abû al-Faraj and of Farrukhi, a poet at the court of Mahmûd of Ghazna:

In profundity, the cavalry of your fortune is like the poetry of Abû al-Faraj, and in sweetness, the reservoir of your pleasure is like the verses of Farrukhi.\(^{13}\)

Centuries later, 'Urﬁ Shîrâzî (d. 1591) placed Abû al-Faraj at the same level as Sa’dî and Khāqânî; while 'Urﬁ’s contemporary, the Mughal poet laureate Fayzî, considered Abû al-Faraj’s poetry as the source of his own poetic sensibility:

The taste of joy that one can take from poetry
I took from the verses of Abû al-Faraj.\(^{14}\)

According to one modern Iranian literary critic and historian, Abû al-Faraj in a way laid the foundation for the majestic qaṣidah diction of Anvarı. He discarded the style developed and perfected in the Samanid period and pursued generally by the early Ghaznavid qaṣidah writers; in its place, he invented a new qaṣidah diction.\(^{15}\) Further, while in the early phase of Persian poetry few poets excelled in more than one form of versification, Abû al-Faraj was acclaimed as a master not simply of the qaṣidah but of the rubâ‘î (quatrain) as well. Some of his rubâ‘îs are on a par with the best of this genre:

So long as the breath of life is left in me,
my head will be full of the desire for wine and sāqi;
the task I chose to do was just this much,
all the rest was incidental.\(^{16}\)

The other great early Indian Persian poet, Maśûd Sa’d Salmân (d. 1121), was the proud pupil of Abû al-Faraj. Maśûd’s family, which enjoyed an eminent position and was learned and well-to-do, originally belonged to Hamadan. One of Maśûd’s near ancestors, most probably his father, seems to have come to Lahore in connection with state service and settled there. Maśûd was born in Lahore sometime between 1046 and 1048. He rose to a high position in state service, played a prominent role in the politics of his day, and passed through several unhappy vicissitudes of life.\(^{17}\)
Mas'ūd was a versatile and a prolific poet and left three *divāns* (collections of verse), one each in Persian, Arabic, and Hindui/Hindvi. His Arabic and Hindvi *divāns* are lost, while the Persian one has been published many times. During Mas'ūd’s last days, Sanā’i, the well-known philosopher-poet of Ghazna, prepared a collection of Mas'ūd’s verses, which shows the high esteem in which Mas'ūd was held by contemporary non-Indian Persian writers.

Mas'ūd is at his best in his *habsīyyāt* (verses composed in prison). These poems, characterized by pathos and emotion, are unparalleled in their power; and biographers and critics within the Persian tradition have concurred through the centuries that they possess a high degree of eloquence and poetic artistry. Perhaps only Khāqānī’s *habsīyyāt* bear comparison. A pronounced and proud presence of self marks Mas'ūd’s poetry. Many of his verses are autobiographical and narrate both his failures and his accomplishments.

Alas, Lahore! How can you exist without me?
How can you shine without the brilliant sun?
Once decorated by the garden of my verses,
how can you now exist without the violet, tulip, and lily?
Your dear son has suddenly been separated from you—
are you wailing for him in pain and grief?
You were a forest of flowers and I, a lion in this forest.
Having once been with me, how can you now exist without me?

Many other poets and scholars, in addition to Nukatī, Abū al-Faraj, and Mas'ūd, lived and flourished in Ghaznavid Panjāb. These include men closely associated in one capacity or another with state power, such as ‘Atā’ī bin Ya’qūb Rāzī, the poet who was imprisoned in Lahore for the last eight years of his life by order of Sultan Ibrāhīm Ghaznavī and who had spent most of his earlier time in India. Another is Abū Naṣʿī Fārsī, the *vāzīr* of Sultan Ibrāhīm, who served as the *sipāḥ sālār* and deputy governor of Lahore during the viceroyalty of Amir Sherzād bin Sultan Maš’ūd III (1098–1114). Other poets of the time have been compared by writers like ‘Aufrū to prestigious poets of the Samanid and western Ghaznavid courts, such as Rudakī and ‘Unšūrī, respectively.

By the time the Delhi Sultanate (1206–1526) was first established, Persian had fully evolved as a literary language throughout Central Asia. To take an interest in Persian arts and letters was considered a mark of refinement.
and sophistication. No monarch, however brilliant his record of military achievement, could aspire to fame in the world of culture at home or abroad without generous patronage to Persian poets and scholars. So when they came to have sway over India, the Turks—withstanding their military and administrative preoccupations in their newly conquered territories—took keen interest in literary activities and generously patronized Persian poets and men of letters. Persian was the language of their courts and culture.

Among the noted poets and writers of the first century of the Delhi Sultanate were Ḥasan Nizāmī (d. c. 1230), the author of the Ṭāj-al-Maʿāṣir (The crown of glories), which is discussed later in this chapter; 22 Ṭāj al-Dīn Rizah, or Sangrīzah, (d. 1266–1276), an important Indian poet and a noble who was closely associated with court circles; and Muʿāyyad Jājarmī (d. c. 1300), an Iranian scholar who translated into Persian from the Arabic Imām Ghazzālī’s Iḥyāʾ-ı Ulūm al-Dīn (Revival of the sciences of the faith) at the behest of Sultan Iltutmish, thus contributing to the consolidation of Persian religio-literary developments in the epoch. It would not be out of place to also mention Shāhāb Mehmara of Badaun (d. c. 1285), the great Indian Persian poet, scholar, and teacher of Amīr Khusrau, who was attached to the court of Rukn al-Dīn Firūz; as well as Minhājī Sirāj (d. c. 1266), the celebrated chronicler and court historian of Sultan Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd and the compiler of the famous history in Persian, the Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī. The celebrated Amīr Khusrau (d. 1325), the greatest of the pre-Mughal poets, and his close friend, Amīr Ḥasan Sījzī Dihlavī (d. c. 1300), were among the later poets who received patronage from the Khaljī and the Tughlaq sultans of Delhi in the years from 1290 to 1424. 23

Early in the thirteenth century, Uchch in Sindh, which in those years was very nearly a rival political pole to Delhi, also witnessed remarkable Persian literary activities. Sultan Nāṣir al-Dīn Qabāchah, whose seat of government was Uchch, was a great patron of arts and learning. His chief minister, ‘Ayn al-Mulk Fakhr al-Dīn Ḥusain bin Abī Bakr al-ʿAshʿarī, also patronized literature lavishly. ‘Alī bin Ḥamīd al-ʿKūfī, translator of the Chaḥnāmāh; Muhammad ʿAuﬁ, author of the Lūḥāb al-Albāb and the Javāmīʿ al-Hikāyāt va Lavāmīʿ al-Rivāyāt (The compendium of stories and flashes of traditions), and Minhājī Sirāj, compiler of Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī, are among the many writers who, on arriving in India, went directly to Uchch. Unfortunately, the names of only a few of the multitude of poets and scholars who thronged that court are known to us. A certain Majd al-Dīn, according to ʿAuﬁ, prepared an exhaustive anthology of the works of the court poets of Qabāchah. But the work

22. Manuscript copies of the text are found in the Asiatic Society Library, Calcutta, and in the Asafiya Library, Hyderabad. See also Nizāmī 1998. A new edition by S.A.H. ʿAbidī is forthcoming.

is lost. 'Aufi mentions only a few of the many poets attached to Qabâchah’s court on the plea that he was a newcomer, not fully acquainted with the court’s earlier poets, accounts of whom had been provided, he notes, along with their compositions, by Majd al-Din.24

For a short while, toward the close of the thirteenth century, Multan was also an important center of Persian literature. Prince Muhammad, the eldest son of Balbân, had been appointed to the viceroyalty of Multan by his father. The prince was a great lover of Persian literature, and his assembly thronged with accomplished scholars and poets, Amîr Khusrau and Hasan Dihlavi being the most prominent among them. The prince twice invited to India Shaykh Sa’dî, the great poet of Shiraz, and reportedly even sent him travel expenses. On both occasions, however, Sa’dî excused himself on account of his old age. Sa’dî is also reported to have said once that India did not need Sa’dî since it already had Khusrau.25

Kashf al-Mahjûb (Disclosure of the secret), a Sufi treatise by Shaykh ‘Ali bin ‘Uzmân al-Hujvîrî (d. after 1089), is the only noted prose composition from Ghaznavid Panjâb. Thirteenth-century India, however, saw numerous works in prose, the most notable among them being Hasan Nizâmi’s Tâj al-Ma‘âsîr, ‘Aufi’s Lubâb al-Albâb, and Minhâj-i Sîrâj’s Tabâqât-i Nâsîrî. The Tâj al-Ma‘âsîr has long been held up “in the East,” to quote Charles Rieu, “as a model of elegant composition . . . . The book was started as a historical record of the brilliant achievements of Quṭb al-Dîn Aybak, but it ended up in a fine piece of prose literature, which, though imitated in all the subsequent ages, could not be matched.”26 The book opens with the conquest of Ajmer at the hands of Mu’izz al-Dîn Muhammad Ghûrî, in the year 1191, and ends with the appointment of Prince Nasîr al-Dîn Mahmûd, the eldest son of Iltutmîsh, to the governorship of Lahore in the year 1217.27

Lubâb al-Albâb, a taqâkirah, as noted earlier, was the first major anthology of Persian poetry, in the strict sense of the word, to have been produced anywhere. There is a reference to an earlier anthology in Persian, entitled Manâqib al-Shu‘arâ’ (The virtues of poets), had been prepared by one Abû Tâhir al-Khâţûnî. The Majmå’ al-Nawâdir (Compendium of rarities), or Chahâr Maqâlah (Four essays) of Nizâmi ’Arûżî Samarqandî, compiled in Ghor under ’Alâ al-Dîn Jahânsûz, also comments on some poets and their poetry. Al-Khâţûnî’s work, however, was probably not known to ‘Aufi; it has not survived. And Chahâr Maqâlah was principally meant to be a discourse on the code of conduct for the four essential components of a successful and stable royal court, namely, the dabîr (secretary), shâ’îr (poet), munajjîm (astrologer), and ‘Abbâb (physician).

27. For a detailed examination of the Tâj al-Ma‘âsîr, see Khan 1970: 76–77.
The *Lubāb*, compiled in 1222 at Uchch, was dedicated to 'Ayn al-Mulk al-Ash'ārī, the chief minister of Nāşir al-Dīn Qābāchāh. An enormous work in two volumes, it is divided into a preface (*muqaddimah*), two sections (*faşl*), and twelve chapters (*bāb*). The preface is a dedication and includes, besides the usual praises of God and the Prophet (*hamd* and *na't*), a long encomium to the author’s patron, 'Ayn al-Mulk. The first section treats of the origin of human speech and its division into poetry and prose. The second section is a sort of foreword claiming that the *Lubāb* is the first written biography of Persian poets. Of the twelve chapters, the first four deal with the beginning of poetry and its significance and meaning. The fifth and the sixth are devoted to short descriptions and select poetical compositions by different kings, rulers, nobles, ministers, and administrators of Iran, who wrote poetry either for pleasure or informally. The seventh chapter is comprised of short accounts of and select verses from the scholars and divines of Transoxiana, Khurasan, Nimroz (Sistan), Iraq, Ghazna, Jibal (Ghur), and Lahore and its dependencies. The remaining five chapters contain short notices of and selections from 163 professional and other full-fledged poets of whom thirty belong to the Tahirid, Saffarid, and Samanid periods; twenty-nine to the Ghaznavid era; and fifty to the Saljuq period. Fifty-four are roughly the author’s contemporaries, and four of these are the court poets of Sultan Nāşir al-Dīn Qābāchāh. The total number of authors covered is about 300, and the time span some four hundred years.

The *Lubāb* was composed almost three centuries before Daulatshāh Samarqandi’s celebrated *Tagkīrat al-Shu'arā*, which was the first *tagkīrah* written outside India (completed about 1487). But Daulatshāh makes no mention of the *Lubāb*. It is possible he never saw a copy of the text, though he does refer to al-Khāṣṭūnī’s *Manāqīb* as one of his sources. It is also not unlikely that he wished to project himself as the author of the first comprehensive Persian anthology.  

As other commentators have observed, 'Aufī is often not very particular about the dates and biographical details of the poets’ lives. In some cases he notes only the poet’s name, and his selection of verses is also not of a consistently high order. In addition, his comments on the poems’ literary qualities seem motivated by the logic of punning and playing on the letters and the words that comprise the poets’ names, rather than giving a reasoned evaluation of their worth. To cite some examples:

> **Azraqī Heravī:** Of whose speech the revolving blue sky [*falak-i azraq-i davvār*] is jealous to the point of vertigo [*davvār*], the rotations [*advār*] of the stars have

---

failed to produce his match; he is the king of the army of rhetoric, the moon of the heaven of eloquence.

Jaball: The mountain [jabal] of excellence and skill, bright star in the sky of greatness, the learned sage, commander of a wide [lit. in Arabic wasi’, a derivative of va’sat] field of excellence, as his name was ‘Abd al-Wasi’.

Rūhānī: Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī Rūhānī, the spirit [rūh] of whose speech was like the soul [rūh] to the body, whose poetry was a release [rābat, another word composed of r and h].

Sīrāj: Lamp [sham’a, siraj] of the assembly of the learned, brilliant light of heaven, which is illumined from the incandescence of his genius, the scholars of Khurasan of his time lit a candle to dispel the thousand layers of darkness.

Qaṭrān ‘Aṣūdī Tabrizī: Before whom all poets were a mere drop [qaṭrān] while he was an ocean, perfect in craft, dexterity, and elegance.

‘Imād: Like the principal support [‘imād] of the pavilion of excellence, chief [‘amid, from the root ‘a, m, and d, the three together as in ‘imād] of the territory of learning, master of the poets of the time, leader of the learned of the age, ruler of the army of wisdom, moon of the heaven of speech.30

Surprisingly, ‘Auﬁ excludes from his work some of the noted poetic masters, such as Asadī Ṭūsī, Naṣīrī Khusrav, and ‘Umar Khayām. Still, it would be unjust to neglect the importance of the Lubāb, our only source for the names of a number of early poets, together with hundreds of their verses in a diversity of genres. The Lubāb is also important because it apparently seeks simultaneously to create an audience in a nearly carved-out subdomain of ‘Ajam and to cater to the literary demands of this audience.

It is interesting to consider in this context ‘Auﬁ’s other work, the Javāmī’ al-Hikāyāt wa Lavāmī’ al-Riyāyat. The Javāmī’, comprising a vast collection of stories and widely considered a classic of the Persian language, was begun in Multan in 1232/33 and was completed when the author moved to the Delhi of Sultan Iltutmish. It is divided into four large volumes, each comprising twenty-five chapters, with over two thousand stories in all. These contain accounts of the kings and princes of pre-Islamic Persia, episodes from the history of early Islam, and anecdotes concerning the scholars and Sufis from almost the entire area inhabited by Persian and Turkish speakers. Containing counsel, reflections on statecraft, and examples of virtuous religious conduct,31 ‘Auﬁ, through this text as through his Lubāb, aimed to preserve the traditions of ‘Ajam, which in the assessment of the Muslim intelligentsia of the time were to form a part of

their collective memory, and to inscribe this memory in an appropriate landscape.

One index of the spread of Persian as a language of culture is the growth of the corpus of translations of the Arabic classics into Persian. Among the most notable translations was the *Chach-nāmah*, a translation of *Minhāj al-Dīn va al-Mulk* (Pathway of faith and rulership) done by 'Ali bin Hamid bin Abī Bakr Kūfī around 1216. Ghazālī’s *Ihya’i Ulūm al-Dīn* was the second important work to be rendered into Persian. It was translated by Majd al-Dīn Abū al-Ma‘ālī Mu‘ayyad bin Muḥammad Jājarmī at the request of Sultan Shams al-Dīn Iltutmish’s vazīr, Niẓām al-Mulk al-Junaidī. Only fragments of this translation are available today.

Another important Arabic work translated in this period is the *Kitāb al-Sa‘īdala fi al-Tibb* of Abū Rayḥān Muḥammad bin Ahmad al-Bīrūnī (d. 1048). The translation was prepared by Abū Bakr bin ‘Ali bin ’Uṣmān al-Kāshānī about 1214, on his own initiative. He sought to make it a means of introduction to Sultan Shams al-Dīn Iltutmish. The work deals with simples (mufradāt) and the properties of medicinal plants, minerals, and the like. The work is also important for linguists and philologists, as it provides equivalent names for most of the herbs and minerals in Arabic, Greek, Syriac, Jurjani, Khvarazmi, Persian, Hindi, and Sindhi.

**INDIAN ELEMENTS IN PERSIAN**

Persian was associated with the ruler and the court, but the world of Persian literary culture was not confined to the political elite alone. The reach of Persian in this period is best reflected in the smattering of Hindvi words, concepts, and metaphors in the language. Words such as *pānī, chandan, rānā,* and *tāl* appear in the early verses; the teeth of the beloved are compared to red rubies (reflecting the chewing of betel), and rain clouds (rather than the breeze) carry the message from the lover to the beloved. The notion of *bahār* (spring) is virtually transformed in Mas‘ūd’s poetry, for he identifies it as the Indian rainy season. In more than one of his *qasidahs*, where he mentions *bahār,* he actually describes the rainy season:

*A Description of Bahār and Praise of Sulṭān Maḥmūd*  
*(Vasīf-i Bahār va Madh-i Sulṭān Maḥmūd)*  

With [the advent of] the spring the flying cloud dived into the sea to bring out from it the unstrung pearls.

---

32. The name of the author of the original Arabic book is uncertain, but a remark by the translator suggests that this may have been Khvāja Imām Ibrāhīm. See Schimmel 1973: 12.
34. Rasheed 1996: 89, 95, 109, 121; Mas‘ūd Sā’d Salmān 1984 (8. 1363): 527.
The barren waste is bedecked with pearls from the cloud; 
the earth, with beauty like the rosy face 
of the heart-ravishing beloved; 
the wind, with delightfulness like the temperament of the wise. 
With greenery all around, the earth seems a green sea. 
Above the ocean, a green dome. 
The earth with raindrops is the Paradise of munificence; 
the wind with the laughter of the lightning is the mount Sinai. 
The land alongside the river is aglow with robes of ruby hue 
that make its waters look like red wine.35

Again:

\textit{Praising the Bahār and Eulogizing Sayf al-Daulah Maḥūd} 
\textit{(Vāsīf-i Bahār va Sīyāsh-i Sayf al-Daulah Maḥūd)}

It seems as if the wind and the cloud became the maids attending 
on the garden beloved. 
While one helped her dress, another lifted her veil. 
Bejeweled with pearls and gems, it appeared 
as if a new bride were coming out into the pavilion 
from behind the curtain. 
The cloud appeared like a handsome lover, 
with skirts drawn up and head held high with pride. 
From the rolling sky water gushed in buckets, 
in spurts, yes, that is how the water flowed from the water wheel.36

Further:

O rainy season, the spring of Hindustan, 
deliverance from the tortures of summer, 
you heralded the advent of the month of Tir 
and again I got relief from the heat. 
All around, you lead an army of clouds; 
in nobility you raise your head high.37

That in these poems bahār acquires a new meaning is a small gesture toward 
a measure of autonomy for the Persian literary tradition in India. Later, in 
Amīr Khusrāu’s poetry at the beginning of the fourteenth century, this au-
tonomy, or Indian identity, became more pronounced. Khusrāu excelled in 
almost all the forms and genres. He innovated upon the traditions of ear-
lier masters and thereby set an example for the later Indian poets. He rose 
so much in prestige that even some of the great poets outside India, like Jāmī

37. Maḥūd Sa’d Salmān 1984 (s. 1303): 502. Tir is the fourth Iranian solar month.
(d. 1492), took pride in imitating him. Of particular significance is Khusrau’s response to 'Ubayd, his contemporary, when the latter pointed to the blemishes in the magnavis that Khusrau had written in response to the Khamsa (Set of five) of Nizâmi of Ganja (d. 1140–1207). Khusrau, it is said, retorted with these lines:

I am an Indian Turk, I reply in Hindvi;  
I have no Egyptian candy with which to speak to an Arab.

In other words, Khusrau was even willing to identify his Persian as Hindvi, the “language of India.” This assertion goes well with his boastful claim to excellence in Hindvi:

Since I am an Indian parrot, to tell you the truth,  
ask in Hindvi, that I may respond to you with elegance.

A measure of the Indianization of Persian is also discernible in Maš'ûd’s poetry. Maš'ûd’s works include descriptions of the Persian months (mâhâ-i Fârsi), the Persian days of the month (rûžhâ-i Fârsi), and the seven days of the week (rûžhâ-i hafta). These are similar in form and intent to a genre called bârahmâsâ (songs relating to the twelve-month cycle), found in medieval poetry all over northern India. The simple poems of a bârahmâsâ narrate the passing of the months and the moods of the seasons in terms of deeply personal feelings. The genre embodies a significant way of reckoning time, which is not to be measured simply in straightforward, chronological terms. The value of time is judged in terms of the emotions that it arouses; it lies in one’s personal experience. The movements of heavenly bodies assume significance because they generate conditions for experiencing the emotions. There are two basic types of bârahmâsâ: literary ones and those handed down orally as village traditions. The succession of months is a fundamental component, but the number of months is not necessarily twelve. The songs known as chau-  
mâsâs, chaymâsâs, and aṣṭamâsâs (cycles of four, six, and eight months, respectively) belong to same category. These are in some cases mere catalogs of seasonal festivals and read like a kind of calendar.

The Jain tradition preserves a work called the Bârah Navatû (Twelve praises) to which Maš'ûd’s Mâhâ-i Fârs bears close resemblance. The Bârah Navatû, of unknown authorship, is a poem of thirteen stanzas, recently edited from a manuscript discovered at Patan in Gujarat and dated to the late twelfth century. It consists of a panegyric to a Jain sage named Dharamsûri, set in

the form of a bārahmāṣa. The whole poem is paratactic in structure, moving between the months of the year and the virtues of Dharamsūri himself. The first verse introduces Dharamsūri:

Hear the praise of Dharamsūri,  
jewel of the three worlds.  

The first and last stanzas describe the month of Sāvan (Śrāvaṇa, July-August), and there is mention of blue lotuses and jasmine flowers, clouds, dancing peacocks, and so on. The poem then turns to Dharamsūri, whose glory “is like the sun,” and then passes to the month of Bhadon (Bhādra, August-September).

Masʿūd’s Māhhā-i Fārsī (Iranian months), Rūzhā-i Fārsī (Iranian days), and his Rūzhā-i Hafta (Days of the week) are poems of twelve, thirty, and seven stanzas, respectively, in praise of the sultan. Although the Bārah Navaū is regarded by its editor as the oldest bārahmāṣa, in fact Masʿūd’s Māhhā-i Fārsī is the oldest known bārahmāṣa in an Indian language. Masʿūd’s Persian poems were written around the late eleventh century, about one hundred years earlier than the Bārah Navaū. There may have been something in the Indian tradition earlier than Masʿūd on which he modeled his poems, such as the Sanskrit genre of the sāḍtuwarnana (description of the six seasons). These poems describe the seasons of the Indian year and suggest the association of the pleasures of love with descriptions of nature. Even so, Masʿūd’s Māhhā is so far the oldest known bārahmāṣa written in India.

The poems in the Māhhā, which are in the form of qāṣīdahs, are colorful descriptions of joy in alignment with the astrological attributes of the twelve months of the year, the thirty days of the month, and the seven days of the week. The sultan must be eulogized because his generosity, concern for justice, and administrative skills have turned the world into heaven. Whether the influence of the stars is ominous or auspicious, the world is full of joy, and for this we owe praise to the king. The dominant mood in these poems is pleasure and joie de vivre:

The Second Solar Month  
(Urdibihšīt māḥ)  

[The month of] Urdī has made the world a heaven.  
Wine is permitted in heaven [even] for the clerics.  
Come, relax and ask for wine—  
it is a disgrace for you to be without wine.  
The meadow, the garden, the mountain, and the plain

44. I follow Nahata, whose discussion of the Jain and Persian works is summarized by Vaudeville 1986: 18–23.
are pervaded with the precious beauty of Urdibihisht.
The garden of roses laughs and the cloud begins to weep;
the birds sing and the seeds begin to sprout.
Many a bonnet you would find woven by the steward of Paradise;
many a dress you would see spun by the *houri*,
as though in the territory of Malik Arsâlân.
The rose, the amber, and the musk are all mixed.
He is the king, the keeper of the world, for whose country
the high sky has struck a strong convenant.\(^5\)

*The Eleventh Solar Month*

*(Bahman māh)*

It is the month of Bahman, let us drink the wine;
in the month of Bahman, there should be pleasure.
Whosoever is wise in this world
desires the soul-stirring joy.
For today the singer and the *saqi*
have brought the harp and the wine
to the royal gathering;
the king Malik Arsâlân, Masūd’s son,
will enjoy himself and drink wine.
There is none as generous as he,
there is none as manly as he.
O king, as long as
the sun and the sky keep the world warm and cold,
shine on your friends like the sun,
hover over foes like the sky.\(^6\)

In course of time the *bārahmāsa* developed as a part of medieval Indian folk poetry. Nearly all such poems concern the pain of separation (*viraha*) endured by a young wife pining for the return of her beloved throughout the twelve months of the year. In these *bārahmāsas* of the *viraha* type the description of nature is intimately joined to the expression of the heroine’s sorrow. The songs are essentially women’s songs wherein the four months of the rainy season—the season of love, intimacy, and renewal of life—are given more importance than the other months of the year.

A typical *viraha bārahmāsa* is placed on the tongue of a *virahini*, a woman tormented by the absence of her lord. A number of verses borrowed from village *bārahmāsas* are included in the ancient Rajasthani ballad known as *Dholamarura Dūha*. In that famous legend, which has inspired so many miniature paintings in Rajasthan, two heroines in turn appear as sorrowing *virahini*, pining for their common husband, Dhola. Some *bārahmāsas*, mostly of

\(^5\) Masūd Sād Salmān 1984 (s. 1363): 654.
\(^6\) Masūd Sād Salmān 1984 (s. 1363): 658.
the “didactic” type, seem to have been inserted in the folk epics composed in medieval times by Hindu, as well as Muslim Sufi, poets. This is especially the case with the maṅgāl literature of medieval Bengal and the Sufi Hindvi maṣnāwīs composed in the premākhyāna tradition from the fourteenth century onward, the most notable of them the Candāyan of Mullā Dā’ūd (c. 1379).  

It is remarkable that no medieval Indian Persian poet followed Mas’ūd in writing such poems and that in the later medieval Indo-Persian tradition this aspect of Mas’ūd’s work was wholly forgotten. It is not unlikely that because of the royal and urban character of Persian, interaction with the Indian rural poetic tradition was regarded as beneath Persian’s stature. Mas’ūd’s Hindvi poetry has also not survived. This may have included bārahmāsas, chaumāsas, chaymāsas, and aṣṭamāsas, though not necessarily describing viraha. Mas’ūd may also have composed “spring songs” (phāgu or basant) in Hindvi. At present, however, this is mere speculation.

**PERSIAN BEYOND THE COURT**

Sermons (tažkīr) in the king’s court and nobles’ establishments, as well as in army camps, public places, and bazaars, played a role in the cultural exchange between the Persian-speaking settlers and the indigenous societies. Frequently composed in good Persian prose, these sermons were often studded with lines from classical Persian poetry as illustrations. The commoners and soldiers became familiar with these specimens of poetry and carried them to places generally inaccessible to the new immigrants.

Sufi centers (khānqāhs) were another religious institution that played a critical role in popularizing the Persian language and encouraging the evolution of a Persian literary tradition. The Sufi center was the common meeting ground for a wide range of people, cutting across religious affiliations. The desire of the devotees to learn Persian intensified when they realized that their Sufi masters’ malfūzāt (conversations), letters, and other writings were in Persian. The language in the Sufi treatises, malfūz included, was generally of the high literary register. The Sufi orders, the Chishtīs in partic-

48. Compare Dihlavī 1913 (tr. 1332): 52, 86 for the accounts of Nizām al-Dīn Abū al-Mu‘ayyad and Qā‘ī Minḥājī Sirāj, for instance. Shaykh Nizām al-Dīn Auliya is reported to have cited verses of high literary value (62–66) that he picked up in the assemblies of sermon (tažkīr).
49. Amir Hasan Sijzī Dihlavī, the compiler of Shaykh Nizām al-Dīn’s conversations, Fawā’id al-Fu‘ūd, was one of the two great fourteenth-century poets of Persian (Amir Khusrau being the second). He was known for his ghazals and is remembered as “the Sa’di of India.” Hamid Qalandar, the compiler of the other fine malfūz collection from the times of the Delhi Sultans (1206–1526), was a scholar of high order. He was also a poet and made a collection of his poems, but unfortunately his dīwān did not survive (Chirāg-i Dihlī 1959: editor’s introduction).
ular, also integrated the local ideas, phrases, and poetic expressions in their texts.\textsuperscript{50} The emergence of spurious m\textit{alfuẓ} collections is of special interest to us here. There are at least five such m\textit{alfuẓ} from the thirteenth century, for instance.\textsuperscript{51} A number of other such collections are mentioned by Shaykh Niz\text{"{a}}m al-Din Auli\text{"{a}}y and his disciple Shaykh Nas\text{"{i}}r al-Din Chir\text{"{a}}gh, “the Lamp,” of Delhi.\textsuperscript{52} They prompt a range of important questions: Who were the authors of these works? Who read them? What was creating the demand for this genre of Persian literature? Research into these questions would provide us with a sharper picture of the expanding frontiers of Persian in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century India.

Finally, it is significant that the arrival of Persian in India nearly coincided with the first complete Persian translation from Arabic of the Sanskrit collection of animal fables, the\textit{ P\text{"{a}}n\text{c}\textit{a}t\text{an}\text{t}ra}. This translation, titled \textit{Kalilah va Dimnah}, was undertaken by Abū al-Ma\text{"{a}}līʿ Naṣrullāh bin ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd. Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ had translated an earlier Pahlavi version into Arabic. \textit{Kalilah va Dimnah} was among the first works to introduce the Indian world to the Islamic people. One can assume that as it circulated, its stories would trickle down to the Indians, who in turn would tend to compare the Persian version with the memory of these tales in the Indian psyche passed down by word of mouth. The \textit{Kalilah va Dimnah} aroused great interest among both the Turko-Persians and the indigenous people. This is reflected in some measure by the reported collation of a translation called \textit{Ans\text{"{a}}r-i Su\text{"{a}}hāli}, prepared at the Herat court, with the Sanskrit \textit{P\text{"{a}}n\text{c}\textit{a}t\text{an}\text{t}ra}. Two more versions—one entitled \textit{Pan\text{"{c}h}\text{"{a}k}iyān\text{"{a}n}ah} and the other, by Abū al-Fażl, titled \textit{fyār-i Dāmīnš}—were prepared at Akbar’s court in the sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{53} Another Indian fable, \textit{Tūtī-nāmāh}, was translated from Cintāmanī Bhaṭṭa’s Sanskrit work, \textit{Ṣuk\text{"{a}}saptot} (Seventy tales of the parrot) in the fourteenth century by Zīyā al-Dīn Nakhshabī. In Sufi circles, the \textit{Hadṭiy\text{"{o}g}a}, a work on bodily and spiritual dis-

\textsuperscript{50} For a discussion on aesthetics of expressions in a verse, see Nizām al-Dīn 1992: 134; Maněrī 1985: 569–83. There are innumerable citations in medieval Indian \textit{malfuẓ} from the Hindī poetry, highlighting its emotive appeal and affability.

\textsuperscript{51} These thirteenth-century \textit{malfuẓ} are: \textit{Anīs al-Ārwi}, the collection of the discourses of Khvājah Usmān of Hārvānī (d. 1220), said to have been prepared by his renowned disciple, Khvājah Muʿīn al-Dīn ῾Hāsān Siāzī of Ajmer (d. 1253); \textit{Dārīl-Ārwi}, the collection of the talks of Khvājah Muʿīn al-Dīn ῾Hāsān Siāzī, said to have been prepared by his disciple, Khvājah Qūfī al-Dīn Bakhštīyar Aushi Kākī (d. 1235); \textit{Fawā'id al-Sūhīn}, the collection of the utterances of Khvājah Qūfī al-Dīn Bakhštīyar Aushi Kākī, said to have been prepared by the discoursor’s disciple, Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn Ganjī Shākar of Ajd̢hān; \textit{Ans\text{"{a}}r al-Auliāy}, the collection of the conversations of Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn Ganjī Shākar (d. 1265), reportedly prepared by his disciple and son-in-law, Bādī al-Dīn Isḥāq; \textit{Rūḥāt al-Qūsh}, another collection of the discourses of Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn, said to have been prepared by his eminent disciple, Shaykh Nizām al-Dīn Auliāy.

\textsuperscript{52} Habīb 1974: 3̄1̄7–433.

\textsuperscript{53} For a detailed discussion of various translations, see Māḥjūb 1970 (s. 1349): 122–225.
cipline first translated into Arabic in Bengal, was also rendered into Per-
sian early in the fourteenth century. The indigenous imagery thus gradu-
ally became a part of Persian literary style through the translation of Indian
texts. Shaykh ‘Abd al-Quddūs Gangohi’s Rushd-nāmah and Mir ‘Abd al-Vāhid
Bilgrāmi’s Haqīq-i Hindi were extensions of this process in the sixteenth
century.54

These developments show the expanding territory of Persian and also im-
ply its gradual Indianization—which, according to some, meant the dilution
of the purity of the earlier Persian speech. The result of this is perhaps what
began to be identified, by the time of the Afghans (c. 1450–1650), as the
lahja-i Hindustāniyān (Indian style), Hindustāniyānah (Indian), or ravish (style)
of the people of Hindustan.55 Attempts to standardize the language must
have been made in response. It is in this context that the development of
Persian lexicography in India may be appreciated. Only four dictionaries
were compiled in Iran during the thousand years between the tenth and the
nineteenth centuries. India, on the other hand, offered no fewer than sixty-
six dictionaries during this period, and it is likely that others were produced
that are no longer extant. Most of these dictionaries were compiled before
1526, when the Mughal period began. The proliferation of dictionaries at
one level certainly validates our contention about the dissemination of
the language. But it is also true that this lexicographical exercise came from the
purists, who wanted to protect and promote a high literary culture and to
ensure conformity to the universal standards of the language. Thus while
the early dictionaries served as tools for language learning, these were also
intended, perhaps above all else, to cater to a certain literary taste. Most of
the dictionaries were meant to be manuals for what is termed sukhanfahmi
(“appreciation of poetry,” in this context). They reflect a demand on the part
of learners to appreciate and comprehend the higher reaches of literary ex-
pression. The Mua’yyid al Fuqāla’ (1519), compiled by Muhammad bin
Shaykh Lād of Delhi, was the first dictionary in which the compiler avowedly
intended that the work assist the reader in learning the language. This trend
picked up during the Lodi period, by which time many Hindus had begun
to learn Persian in order to enter state service. Notably, the dictionaries also
echoed the linguistic developments in the larger Persian-speaking world. Ear-
lier lexicons tended to emphasize native Persian and Arabic words, despite
the predominance of Turks at the Delhi court. It was only by the late fifteenth
century that separate sections for Turkish words in Persian began to appear,
as in Shaykh Ibrāhīm Qāvām Farūqī’s Sharaf-nāmah-i Maneri (1472).56

New Persian symbolized the vanquished ’Ajam’s endeavor to conquer the Arab conquerors culturally. Since there was little in ancient ’Ajam to enable it to build its literary culture, it did not hesitate to borrow and appropriate from the Arabs, even as the latter were also portrayed as lacking in culture. In the early phase of New Persian there was thus a heavy influence of the Arabic literary canon on Persian literature and poetry. This was true of the Persian literary tradition in India as well, its distinctive features aside. One can discern the influence of ’Abdullah ibn al-Mu’tazz’s work and Sa’albi Nishapuri’s Yatimat al-dahr on the early Persian writings.57 Afii, who, we have noted, in early-thirteenth-century Multan compiled the first comprehensive biographical dictionary of Persian poets, observes that in the beginning, the Persian poets carefully studied the styles of the language and literature of the Arabs and examined in depth and appreciated fully the different forms of their poetry, vocabulary, and prosody. Arabic diction thus emerged as the primary model of Persian creative writing.58

Gradually Persian poetics began to chart a course of its own. And in this, its association with India was not inconsequential. The first known treatise on Persian literary canons, titled Tarjumān al-Balāghah, was compiled by Muhammad bin ’Umar Radīyānī (copy c. 1114). Radīyānī emphasizes as the most distinctive feature of good poetry that each line in a poem should approximate the others in grandeur and beauty (baithā-i mulā’im).59 The most important early book dealing with poetics interalia was the Chahār Maqālaḥ of Niẓāmī ’Arūzī Samarqandi (d. 1164), the noted poet and writer at the court of ’Ala’ al-Dīn Jahānsūz in Ghur. For Niẓāmī, the poet, together with the dabīr (secretary/writer) and astrologer, was integral to good political management. Poetry was to glorify and eulogize the court and thus earn favors from the king. But poetry also occupied a crucial, causative role in the order of the universe (umūr-i ’izām ra dar niẓām-i’alām sabab shavad), and it granted perpetuity to the poet’s reputation. Poetry was a noble art; the poet was expected to have command over a variety of sciences, in particular rhetoric and prosody (har ‘ilm dar shi’r bakār mi ravaḍ). Poetry, Niẓāmī said, should engage with the accomplishments of past and present poets. The poet should carefully choose his words without being verbose or convoluted. Niẓāmī disapproved of the use of commonplace words. Poetry should dis-

58. ’Afī 1982 (s. 1361): 60–70.
play a harmony of words and be pleasing, fresh, and smooth. Accordingly, the ideal poet was of noble character, possessing the incisiveness of mind to appreciate details, and had the power to present small matters as big, and vice versa. He could clothe good in the dress of evil and project the bad in a good form (niki dar khi‘al-i zisht va zisht dar ši‘rat-i niki). A good poet, said Nizāmi, through his words could inspire bravery, blissfulness, joy, and anger. Thus poetry for Nizāmi was not only a source of joy; it had serious didactic roles to perform, too.

Around the same time as Nizāmi wrote his Chahar Maqālah, Rashid al-Din Vatūt of Balkh (d. 1177) compiled his treatise on rhetoric called Ḥadā‘iq al-Ši‘r fi Daqā‘iq al-Ši‘r. Vatūt included in his book a long discourse on Arabic poetry and a discussion of several new figures of speech. To him the best word is “like a soft, beautiful, transparent body, which shows the meaning straight, unhindered, without mediation and casts such a spell on the reader or listener that he becomes totally oblivious of the existence of words.” The compatibility between the form (ši‘rat) and the meaning (ma‘nī) should be such that the form itself assumes the garb of meaning. This was certainly a step forward in the history of Persian aesthetics, but nothing compared with the way the new aesthetic expressed itself in the poetry of Firdausī. Firdausī’s poetry was fired by the experiences and the feelings of one witnessing the predicament of ‘Ajam subsequent to its subordination to the Arabs. Firdausī intended his poetry to infuse spirit into the soulless body of ‘Ajam: “With this Persian I have resurrected ‘Ajam.” As his mission was to resurrect the dead, his verses were also meant to inspire high cultural and ethical values:

I have made the world like heaven with poetry. No one has sown the seeds of poetry better.

The Persian literary canons thus developed not very far from the Indian frontier, and, in fact, not strictly inside Iran itself. The collections of works in ‘Afu‘i’s anthology reflect these developments. Qaṣidah is given prominent place in his discourse; in his understanding, poetry in the main consisted of

---

61. ‘Abbās Iqbal (1929 [s. 1308]) does not include this discussion in the edition of the text he prepared based on the earliest manuscript preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.
63. Firdausī 1870, 1: 15 (dibā‘ah [editor’s introduction]); 1990 (s. 1369), 1: 102–3. These lines are from the Hajv Firdausī is believed to have written for Sulfān Maḥmūd, and are cited in many editions of the Shah-nāmah. Some scholars have expressed doubts regarding their authenticity; see Shīrānī 1968, and Darakhshan 1995 (s. 1374). The question awaits fuller treatment. Notably, the verses of the Hajv are cited in many medieval texts and have long been part of the living memory of Firdausī’s text.
high-flown language and hyperbolic praise of king and nobles: the poet’s creative, hyperbolic language turns black into white, bronze into gold.\(^{64}\) It may be noted that Aristotle placed hyperbole among the metaphorical devices and regarded metaphor as the true mark of the poetic mind.

In the thirteenth century a major work titled \textit{al-Mu’jam fi Ma‘āyir-i Ash‘ar al‘Ajam} (The book of the principles of the poetry of ‘Ajam) was compiled by Shams al-Din Mu‘hammad bin Qays al-Rāzī. For Rāzī also, the edifice of poetry stood on exaggeration (\textit{ghulū-i mufrij}), even on lies (\textit{hīzh}) and fabrication (\textit{zūr}).\(^{65}\) The hallmarks of poetry were grand language and verbal richness—rhetorical devices by which the poetry acquired majesty. As Persian poetry drew on the rich tradition of Arab poetry, it also inspired ‘Ajam to march on triumphantly. The poetry of Abū al Faraj Rūnī and Maš‘ūd Sa‘d Salman, in particular their \textit{gaṣīdahs} celebrating the Ghaznavid rulers’ “victorious” campaigns in India, resonated with this triumph. Maš‘ūd’s poetry echoed his master’s ambition to extend the frontiers of ‘Ajam:

\begin{quote}
May you build a thousand palaces like the palace [of Mada’in] in India.
May you capture a thousand kings like the Sassanian emperor one after another.\(^{66}\)
\end{quote}

The triumphant march of ‘Ajam was arrested by the Mongols’ incursions in the thirteenth century. Nishapur and many cities in the Persian world were decimated. The destruction wrought by the Mongols shook the very basis on which ‘Ajam had built its edifice of culture and lifestyle. The trauma triggered a process of introspection and rethinking, which is reflected in the works of the post-Mongol poets of Iran, most notably in the poetry of Jalal al-Din Rūmī (d. 1273) and Muṣliḥ al-Din Sa‘dī (d. 1291).

Sa‘dī’s poetry was noted for its grace, softness, and elegant expression of tender yet complex experience of love and grief. Rūmī, on the other hand, interpreted religion afresh. He claimed:

\begin{quote}
I picked up the substance from the Qur‘ān
and threw the bone to the dogs.
The tunic, the turban, and the external knowledge,
I threw them all in the flowing river.\(^{67}\)
\end{quote}

He emphasized a measure of catholicity and the reconciliation of apparently irreconcilable phenomena.

This mood is also discernible in Rāzī’s definition of poetry in \textit{Mu‘jam}. Rāzī
stressed the element of thought in poetry; poetry should be well considered, well thought out (sakhun-i andishidah). He also discussed the ghazal, a significant form of Arabo-Persian poetry that now emerged as an important vehicle to express the new anguish of the time. Rāzi suggested that the word ghazal was derived from the pitiful cry for help that the gazelle raises when confronted by hunting dogs. But in the final analysis, ghazal for Rāzi remained, as earlier, a story of love and beauty, a dialogue between lover and beloved, a further extension of aspects of already fully developed forms of poetry, in particular the tashbih in the qaṣīdah. The content of the ghazal to him was romance, the ordinary human love stories of women.

India, too, experienced the disastrous consequences of the rise of the Mongols. A large part of the resources of the early Turkish empire in India was mobilized to defend the northwestern frontiers against the Mongols, who threatened on occasion even to destroy the seat of power in Delhi. Many families from the Perso-Turkic world migrated to northern India and settled in Delhi and other major cities, bringing with them memories of the desolation of their ancestral lands. In Indian Persian creative writing one can hear the echoes of the cries of tormented souls. The poetry of Amir Khusrau and Hasan Sijzi (d. 1327) bear the influences of Rūmī and, especially, Sa’dī. The “thoughtful poetry” (sakhun-i andishidah) described by Rāzi now turned ablaze with Khusrau:

The fire of thought burns inside me, one ligament to another.  
May God forgive him in whose bone this rages as a fever.

As Khusrau praises things Indian, he advocates a cultural adjustment and appropriation in the Indian context, taking inspiration from Rūmī, in view of the politico-cultural turmoil in the contemporary Perso-Islamic world. His poetry perhaps derives its unique literary flavor from his social mission. Thus, native Indian imagery is appropriated by Khusrau and glorified so as to project to his readers an Indian tradition as rich as that of Central and West Asia, and worthy enough to be appropriated within the newly emerg-

68. Tashbih, also called nasib, formed the opening part of a qaṣīdah. It celebrated love, extolled the details of the beauty of one’s mistress, and highlighted the varying shades of emotions felt for her. From this form the ghazal later evolved. The words and expressions used in tashbih were chosen with special care; they were expected to be soft, sweet, and supple, for the poet also intended to win and attract the attention of his audience, in particular the master praised in the qaṣīdah. Some Arab poets are reported to have narrated the true tales of their love in tashbih (Rāzi 1959 [s. 1338]: 415–16).
ing Indo-Persian culture. The language, in the process, also becomes further indigenized.73

The poetry of Ḥasan Sijzī assimilated the elegance and the grace of Saʿdī; Khusrau’s combined an extraordinary artistry with thoughtfulness and a latent social agenda. He knew about the havoc that the Mongols had wreaked in the Islamic East. He had heard the tales of woe and grief from the victims and had himself experienced terrible agony at the hands of the Mongols when he was captured from the camp of Prince Muḥammad. He was much more than a mere litterateur, being closely associated with the administration and politics of the consolidation of Muslim power in India. For him, poetry was not simply an expression of grief; it was comprised of noble ideas as well.74

The ghazal matured in the work of Ḥafiz of Shiraz (d. 1398), who set the standards of high poetry in the subsequent period. The ghazal now ceased to be the story of love alone; it came to embody and express the secrets of the universe. Thus was laid the foundation of Mughal Indian Persian literary culture.

TOWARD A NEW IDENTITY FOR PERSIAN

The cultural underpinnings of New Persian poetry were spread, between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, throughout nearly the entire non-Arab Muslim world, even though its linguistic moorings were confined to the Iranian plateau. It was not simply the people of the plateau who identified themselves with New Persian. For over three centuries after its rise, the principal centers where the emergent Persian literature was cultivated were sustained by non-Iranian Turkish rulers. A large number of early poets, writers, and scholars, including Rūdakī (d. 940), the first major New Persian poet, hailed from non-Iranian lands.75 Persian symbolized ʿAjam’s endeavor to conquer the Arabs culturally, and a literary culture based on New Persian encom-

73. There have been three distinct stages or levels, not necessarily chronological, in the formation of Indian Persian. At first, only a smattering of Indian words, including expressions like shāh-nā-i mawdī and bīr-i tānbul, was allowed to mix into Persian, and only to a limited extent, as necessary. By the fourteenth century, when the Indians had mastered the language, a new and different style (ravish-i dīgār), delicately blended with sweet and delicious Indian artifices (mānū’l-āl-i shīrīn), began to emerge. The development of an independent diction in poetry under the Mughals marked the zenith of Indian Persian. Now difficult, terse, and abstruse Indian ideas were integrated into Persian, and the best poetry in Iran, Central Asia, and India aspired to excel in this diction.


75. Noteworthy here are that the territory of what was then Khurasan covered a considerable part of modern Central Asia and Afghanistan, and that among the first great patrons of Persian literary culture were Maḥmūd, his successors, and their allies and rivals in Ghazna and Ghur in Afghanistan.
passed Iran, Central Asia, Afganistan, Anatolia, and northern India—its western parts in particular.

Amir Khusrau excelled at poetry and composed thousands of verses, including his famous parallels to the verses of the legendary Nizāmī of Ganja. He boasted of an Indian prose style mixed with delightful artifices (māsnūʿūt-i shīrin), the relish of which was unknown to “the ice-crunchers” (yakhsīkānān) of Khurasan and Transoxiana.76 This famous line of Ḥāfīz of Shiraz was a testimony to the appreciative audience of Persian poetry and thereby to an advanced level of Persian literary culture in north India:

All the Indian parrots will turn to crunching sugar with this Persian candy, which goes to Bengal.77

Sadīd al-Dīn ‘Afi and Daulatshāh Samarqandi, authors of the two major taghiraḥs, also asserted that the literary world of Persian extended far and wide. They listed the achievements of Iranian and non-Iranian poets in equal terms. On Daulatshāh’s literary map, Central Asian, Afghan, and Indian towns like Badakhshan, Balkh, Bukhara, Ghazna, Herat, Khajend, Samarqand, Delhi, and Lahore occupied the same prominence as Iranian cities such as Astrapad, Kashan, Shiraz, Tus, and Yazd. While evaluating the poetry of Amir Shāḥi, a fifteenth-century poet, Daulatshāh evokes the excellences of the Persian verses of a wide world, from Delhi to Shiraz and Isfahan: “Scholars agree that the poetry of Amir Shāḥī combines the passionate ardor [soz] of Khusrau, the grace of Ḥasan [of Delhi] with the delicacies of Kamāl [of Isfahan] and the elegance of Ḥāfīz [of Shiraz].” Delhi, then, was on par with Isfahan or Shiraz in creating the best in Persian poetry.78

In the wake of new social and political configurations that began in the late fourteenth century, however, the linguistic diversity of the different parts of the Persian world tended to become more pronounced. Persian steadily came to be identified as the language of the Iranian plateau. With the establishment of Timurid power in Iran, the Iranians began to crave a distinct political self-definition. The assertion of an exclusive politicocultural identity intensified in the fifteenth century as part of resistance to Turkish and Timurid domination, leading to the formation of a consolidated Iranian identity with the rise of the Safavids in the early sixteenth century. The socioreligious upheavals of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries

76. Khusrau 1875: 66.
77. Ḥāfīz 1972: 172.
78. Daulatshāh Samarqandi 1901: 426. It is significant that while evaluating the poetry of Jāmī, Daulatshāh, who rates Jāmī as one of the best poets of all times, invokes the contributions of both the “sugar-crunching parrots of India” (ṭūṭīyān-i shakkar-shikan-i Hind) and the brave people of sweet speech of Fārs (shīrin zabānān va farisān va mayādān-i Fārs) (1901: 483).
represented the early stages of this assertion. Portrayals of the Turk in Persian poetry in Iran at this stage are also worth special mention. Ḥāfiz Shīrāzī, for instance, at first welcomed Timur, who he expected would deliver Iran from the disorder (fitna) that had afflicted his time:

Arise to give a hearty welcome to that Turk of Samarqand from whose gentle breath spreads the fragrance of the breeze of the river Muliyan.

But soon he realized that Timur and his people only exacerbated the sad plight of his countrymen. He said:

Do not give your heart to the Turks; look how ungrateful the Turks of Samarqand have been to the people of Khwarizm.

And

My heart did not seek succor from the beautiful eye of this cup-bearer (saqi) since it knew well the habit of that black-hearted Turk.

Ḥāfiz then believed that only an Iranian hero could save his country from devastation:

I have burnt in the well of patience for that candle [beloved] of Chigil. The king of the Turks is oblivious of my condition. Where is Rustam?\(^79\)

As a consequence of these political developments Persian was increasingly represented as the language exclusively of Iran. Ḥāfiz, to quote the great poet again, called for an unalloyed Iranization of the New Persian:

\(^79\) Ḥāfiz 1972: 412, 407, 58, and (again) 412:

\[khiz tā khāṭ̱ṟ budān Turk-i Samarqand dihīm kāz nasīmā bū-i jū-i Mūliyān āyād hamī.\]
\[ba Turkān dīl mādih Ḥāfiz bahīn ān hūsāfā ‘thā ku bā Khvārāzmīyān kordand Turkān-i Samarqandī.\]
\[dīlēm zī nargis-i sāqi āmān nakhvāst bajān chūrās shāhī ān Turkān dīl sī’yāh dānṣīt.\]
\[sokhtām dar chāh-i sāb rā az bahī ān shāma’-ī chīgil shāh-i Turkān ghasīfāst az bū-i mā kū Rustāmī.\]

There are variations in the readings of the text. The Delhi edition (1972: 407, 412), for instance, has zulfī-i būriyān (tresses of the hours) instead of jū-i Mūliyān (the river Mūliyan [in Bukhara]). In the second verse quoted, khābān (beloved), tugh-i zabān (sword of the tongue), and makhāvān-i Alwand (the cheats of Alwand) replace Turkān, Khvārāzmīyān, and Turkān-i Samarqand. Apparently such readings were preferred in the texts in vogue in Mughal Hindustan, which the Delhi edition draws upon. See also the editions of Muḥammad Ṭūḡ Nā’īnī Jalālī and Naqīr Ḵān Ḵoṣūl (Tehran, 1971 [1350]) and Muḥammad Ṭūḡ Nā’īnī Jalālī and Nūrānī Iqbāl (Tehran, 1993 [1372]).
Sing, O sweet and melodious-voiced singer,
a Persian verse in the Iraqi tune.80

Once the Iranians had reclaimed Persian as theirs alone, the people and the nations who associated with them culturally were welcome to fall in line, but not to innovate. Interestingly, the Iranian success in establishing a culturally restrictive control over Persian was abetted by significant politicocultural developments beyond the Iranian plateau as well. Not only was Persian given up in favor of Turkish in the Anatolia area among the Ottomans, but north of the river Amu the Uzbek language was poised to dominate as a part of the assertion of the Uzbek political identity.

In India, the sixteenth century saw the enhancement of regional literary cultures, largely by those very individuals and institutions that promoted Persian. Sultan Ibrāhīm ʿĀdil Shāh, who ascended the throne in Bijapur in the Deccan in 1536, is reported to have proclaimed Hindvi (in this case, referring to Marathi) as the language of his government, entrusting all the important administrative and financial offices to the Brahmans.81 Further, from the Barid Shahi Sultanate of Bidar (1503–1619) we have some inscriptions both in Persian and Marathi, while in Golconda the vernacular was given the honor of being the language of the sultan. Ibrāhīm Qutb Shāh encouraged the growth of Telugu, and his successor, Muhammad Quli Qutb Shāh, patronized and himself wrote poetry in Telugu and Dakani.82 Abdullah Qutb Shāh instituted a special office to prepare royal edicts in Telugu (dabīrī-yī farāmīn-i Hindvi). While administrative and revenue papers at local levels in the Qutb Shahi Sultanate were prepared largely in Telugu, the royal edicts were often bilingual.83 The last Qutb Shahi sultan, Abū al-Hasan Tānā Shāh, sometimes issued his orders only in Telugu, with a Persian summary given on the back of the royal edicts (farmāns).84 Northern India also witnessed the elaboration of Hindvi, which gradually incorporated much of Persian culture—in particular through Sufi centers—and then expressed it forcefully in its poetry. There were hardly any notable Persian writers in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, while Malik Muhammad Jāyasi’s Pādmāvat, a Hindvi reworking of an Indian fable, represented the best expression of Islamic Sufi ideas in this period.85 In spite of their close association

80. ʿAbdullāh Qutb Shāh 157: 411; bašāz ay muṣtri-i khwāshkhwān-o-khwāshqū / ba shīrv-i Pārsi, šaut-i `Irāqī.
81. ʿAbdullāh Qutb Shāh 157: 411; bašāz ay muṣtri-i khwāshkhwān-o-khwāshqū / ba shīrv-i Pārsi, šaut-i `Irāqī.
82. ʿAbdullāh Qutb Shāh 157: 411; bašāz ay muṣtri-i khwāshkhwān-o-khwāshqū / ba shīrv-i Pārsi, šaut-i `Irāqī.
83. ʿAbdullāh Qutb Shāh 157: 411; bašāz ay muṣtri-i khwāshkhwān-o-khwāshqū / ba shīrv-i Pārsi, šaut-i `Irāqī.
84. ʿAbdullāh Qutb Shāh 157: 411; bašāz ay muṣtri-i khwāshkhwān-o-khwāshqū / ba shīrv-i Pārsi, šaut-i `Irāqī.
with Persia, most of the Afghan chiefs could not speak Persian, and Persian
does not appear to have been the preferred language at their court.\footnote{Bābur 1970: 459–60.} Hindvi
was recognized as a semi-official language by the Sūr sultans (1540–1555),
and their chancellery rescripts bore transcriptions of Persian contents in Dev-
anagari script. The practice is said to have been introduced by the Lodis
(1451–1526).\footnote{Momin 1971: 28.}

Yet later, under the Mughals, India was to witness its most productive—
perhaps even incomparable—efflorescence of Persian literary culture. In-
deed, Mughal literary culture has been celebrated primarily, if not exclusively,
for its extraordinary excellence in Persian poetry and prose. Yet instead of
being treated as part of an 'Ajam-wide Persian literature, Mughal literary cul-
ture was virtually subordinated to the Iranian. This is reflected in the nar-
rowing world of the taghirahs, in particular those compiled by Iranian authors,
as well as in the raging controversy around Indian usage (isti‘mal-i Hind) and
the definition and assessment of good poetry.

But before examining these matters it is proper to identify the conditions
that encouraged the phenomenal rise of Persian under the Mughals, after
a century or more of decay. This needs special attention because these con-
ditions were independent of the heritage of the earlier Indo-Persian regimes
and also because the Mughals were themselves Chaghtai Turks. And we know
that, unlike the Mughals, the other Turkic rulers outside of Iran, such as the
Ottomans in Turkey and the Uzbeks in Central Asia, showed no comparable
enthusiasm for Persian. Indeed, in India also, Persian does not appear

\footnotetext{Momin 1971: 28.}
\footnotetext{Köprülü 1960; Hasan 1985: 192–93.}
\footnotetext{Reis 1975: 47. 49–51.}
\footnotetext{Bairam Khān 1971.}
PERSIAN UNDER THE MUGHALS

A large number of Iranians accompanied Humāyūn on his return from Iran, where he had taken refuge following his defeat by the Afghans. They assisted him in reestablishing Mughal rule in Hindustan. Later, Akbar encouraged them to join the imperial service to help him confront the ambitious Chaghtai nobles. (Earlier, Iranians had also helped Bābur in his fight against the Uzbeks, following the destruction of the Timurid power in Herat.)

Especially worth noting is Akbar’s unusual interest in promoting social, cultural, and intellectual contacts with Iran. In 1585/86 Ḥakīm Humam, a brother of the famous Ḥakīm Abū al-Fath Ḥilāni, was sent to Turan and Iran on a mission to increase friendly contacts (dostī o āshna ‘ī) between the people there and the emergent Mughal empire by identifying the literati and persuading them to come settle in India. The emperor also commissioned the famous poet Fayyā’ī (d. 1595) to submit a report on the prominent literati of Iran, based on which he sent an invitation to Chalapī Beg and issued orders to an Iranian trader to make arrangements for the scholar’s journey to India. On his arrival, Chalapī Beg was made the principal teacher at a royal college (madrasah) at Agra. Earlier, the travel expenses of ʿAlī Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad Naqīb, who had communicated his wish to Akbar to join the Mughal court, were also defrayed by the emperor.

Akbar’s efforts to engage Iranian literati received an encouraging response from Iran. A large number of Iranian Persian writers and poets came to India, many in search of a better fortune, others fleeing from the religious or political persecutions of the sectarian Safavid regime. Akbar’s India earned distinction as the place of refuge, an abode of peace (dār al-ʿāmān) where the wise and the learned received encouragement. How Akbar succeeded in creating conditions in his territory to welcome the Iranian scholars, religious nonconformists though some might have been, is illustrated by the story of ʿĀmilī’s arrival in India as recorded by Mullā ʿAbd al-Qādir Badāuni, the well-known historian of Akbar’s time. ʿĀmilī, who was a Nuqtavī, was made welcome by Akbar and his courtiers, in Badāuni’s view, because of the extraordinarily tolerant atmosphere in India. This was largely

91. An earlier version of this section appeared in Alam 1998.
96. Badāuni 1869, 2: 253. The Nuqtavī sect was founded in Iran in the fifteenth century by Ḥilāni, an excommunicated member of the Ḫūrūfī sect established in the fourteenth century.
true, but the generous welcome extended to the Iranian scholars may also have been due to the emperor’s desire to pay back the Mughals’ debt to the Iranians for their support in reconquering India.

Under the Safavids, Iran had turned to an orthodox form of Shiism, in a very narrow sense of the term. In Mughal India, on the other hand, the space for accommodating oppositions and conflicts was widening, subsequent to the Mughal policy of *sulh-i kull* (peace with all). The policy, as is well-known, was a result of Akbar’s bold initiatives, but it could also be explained in light of Mughal India being a country where people with diverse beliefs and social practices had learned to live together, occasional clashes notwithstanding. The nonconformist and dissident Iranians, who included a large number of literati, therefore found a natural refuge in India. As an ambitious ruler in obvious competition with the Iranian shah, Akbar also tried to exploit this situation to extend the frontiers of his authority into the Safavid domain. He even wrote personal letters to some noted Iranian scholars.\(^97\)

By extending generous invitations to the Iranians, Akbar intended to neutralize the awe with which the Iranian shah was regarded by the Mughals because of the Safavids’ help to Bābur and Humāyūn. Whether he could achieve this is not my principal concern here. The Mughal emperor’s desire to bring “the exalted [Iranian] community close to him spiritually and materially [ṣuvār va ma’navī]”\(^98\) prepared the ground for many Iranians to make India their second home. Iranian talent flourished better in Mughal India than in its native land. Soon the belief became widespread in Iran that a visit to India promised material comforts and an honored position. According to an oft-cited verse of the poet Salim Tehrani:

> The means of acquiring perfection do not exist in Iran.
> Henna did not acquire color till it came to India.\(^99\)

As India drew close to Iran culturally, Persian began to attain status as the first language of the king and the Mughal court. Among the first literary

by Faḍlullāh Astrabādī. The Nuqtavīs considered the atom of dust (*nuqta-i khāk*) to be the origin and the first element of human life; all other elements rose out of it. All the Nuqtavī ideas, which often ran counter to the orthodox tenets of both Sunni and Shia Islam, were developed around this concept. The Nuqtavīs also believed in transmigration of souls. Since Akbar was also a nonconformist, in search of “truth,” he encouraged the Nuqtavīs, who were persecuted in orthodox Shia Safavid Iran, to settle in India.

\(^97\) Islam 1983: 351–73.
\(^98\) Islam 1983: 357, 368; also Islam 1979: 101.
\(^99\) See Browne 1953–1955, 4: 166; Sultan 1978: 109 (citing from Salim’s *Divān*, MS, National Museum, New Delhi). Gulchin-i Maʿānī 1990 (1369): 566–82 discusses Salim’s poetry but ignores this well-known verse, conflicting as it does with Maʿānī’s explanation of the Iranians’ reasons for migrating to India.
works of the reign of Akbar, at a time when he was consolidating Mughal power in India, was the preparation of a Persian translation of Bābur-nāmah. Ironically, the translator was ʿAbd al-Rahim Khān-i Khānān, the son of Bairam Khān, who, as noted earlier, was also a poet of Turkish. But it was not just Bābur’s memoir that was to be rendered into Persian; the emperor also desired that the sources of the new court history, recording Mughal achievements, be redacted in Persian. Humāyūn’s sister, Gulbadan Begum, had written the Humāyūn-nāmah in Persian, even though Turkish was the native tongue of both the princess and her husband, Khizr Khvājah Khān. Indeed, Annette Beveridge, who translated Gulbadan’s account into English, suspects that the book was originally composed in Turkish. Similarly, the other two accounts of Humāyūn’s time, Tazkīrah Humāyūn va Akbar (History of Humāyūn and Akbar) and Tazkīrat al-Waqiʿat (Account of the happenings) were meant to serve as sources of Abū al-Fażl’s history, Akbar-nāmah. Their authors, Bāyāzīd Bayāt and Jauhar Āftābchī, respectively, could manage little beyond a “shaky and rustic” Persian. Jauhar, in fact, had the language of his account revised and improved by Ilāhdād Fayyīr Sirhindī, the reputed litterateur and philologist who authored the dictionary Madār al-Afāżīl (The orbit of the learned) before presenting it to the emperor.\[100\]

Akbar did not have any formal education. Important books were therefore read out to him regularly in his assembly hall. His library consisted of hundreds of prose and verse texts in Arabic, Persian, Hindvi, Greek, and Kashmiri. But the books that the emperor listened to repeatedly were all in Persian.\[101\] According to one report, Akbar could compose verses in Persian and Hindvi, but the Mughal sources generally record only his Persian couplets, and we have to wade through them to find the few Hindvi verses attributed to him.

Further, Persian poets generally enjoyed royal patronage at Akbar’s court. Among the Muslim rulers of northern India, Akbar was possibly the first to formally institute the position of malik al-shuʿarāʾ (poet laureate) at the court. Awarded only to a Persian poet, this position continued until Shāhjahān’s time (1626–1656). With the sole exception of Fayzī Fayyāzī, the malik al-shuʿarās during this period were all Iranians: Ghazālī Mashhādī, Ḥusain Sanāʾī, Ṭālib Amūlī, Kalīm Kāshānī, and Qudsī Mashhādī. Further, of the 59 poets who were rated the best among the 1000 poets of Persian who had completed a divān or written a maqāna, only 9 could be identified as non-Iranians.\[102\] Again, a large number of other Persian poets and writers—81 according to Niẓām al-Dīn Bakhshī and 168 according to Badāūnī—received the patronage of the emperor or his nobles. Over a hundred poets, and thirty-

100. Gulbadan 1972: 79; Ethé 1903, 1: 222.
one scholars, were associated with the establishment of the courtier 'Abd al-Rahîm Khân-i Khânân alone.103

Persian thus emerged as the language of the king, the royal household, and the high Mughal elite. Akbar’s son and successor, Jahângîr (1605–1627), was not skilled in Turkish, but he had his own style in Persian and wrote his memoirs in an elegant prose. He was also a good judge of Persian poetry and composed some verses and ghâzals.104 It was for him that Jâyasî’s Padmâvat was translated into Persian, but the work was recognized only as an Indian fable (afsinah-i Hindi) without any bearing on Islamic mysticism. Still later, with his volumes of letters and edicts, Aurangzeb (1658–1707) established himself as one of the fine prose writers of his time.105 The formal abolition of the institution of malik al-shu’arâ affected little the supreme status of Persian. Indeed, late-seventeenth-century northern India witnessed numerous native poets of high standard in Persian, including the great Mirzâ 'Abd al-Qâdir Bîdîl (d. 1720) and Nâṣîr ‘Alî Sirhindî (d. 1696).

Akbar was also the first among the Indo-Muslim kings of northern India to formally declare Persian the language of administration at all levels.106 Thus, it was not simply the royal household and the court that bore the Iranian impress; the Iranians were seen everywhere in the government offices as officials (mutaṣaddîs) and minor functionaries, even though they were not in exclusive control of these offices.107 A substantial part of the administration was carried out by the indigenous Hindu communities who had earlier communicated officially in some form of Hindi. Their adoption of Persian is of even greater consequence to the development of Persian literary culture than the presence of Irani poetry. They learned Persian and joined the Iranians as clerks, scribes, and secretaries (muḥarrîrs and munshîs). Their achievements in the language were soon to be extraordinary. This development was reinforced considerably by Akbar’s reform in the prevailing primary and secondary education, influenced again by the Iranian Mir Fathullâh Shirzâ. The Hindus began to learn Persian in Sikandar Lodî’s time. Badaunî mentions a person called simply “Brahman” as an Arabic and Persian teacher of this period.108 Akbar’s enlightened policy and the introduc-
tion of nonreligious themes into the syllabi at middle levels stimulated a wide application to Persian studies. Hindus—Kayasthas (of the accountant and scribe caste) and Khatri (of the trading and scribe caste of the Panjab) in particular—joined madrasahs in large numbers to acquire training in the Persian language and literature, which now promised good careers in imperial service.

Akbar’s educational reform pertained in the first place to the learning of the Persian alphabet and basic vocabulary. Children were no longer to spend much time on the alphabet, as had been the earlier practice. After learning and practicing the shapes and names of the letters, they were required to commit to memory some Persian couplets or moral phrases and thus gain a sense of the ethos of the language at a very young age. Then they studied the prescribed curriculum, which included ethics (ahlāq), arithmetic (hisāb), notations peculiar to arithmetic (siyāq), agriculture (jalāhat), measurement (mashāhat), geometry, astronomy, physiognomy, household economy (taelibr-i manzil), the rules of government (siyāsat-i mudun), medicine, logic, mathematics (riyāzi), and physical and metaphysical (tablī and ilāhi) sciences.

At the advanced level, works of the classical masters were studied in order to acquire proficiency in Persian composition and poetry. Texts prescribed at this stage were Shaykh Sā‘di’s classics, Bustān and Gulistān, for literary prose and verse; and for ethics, Akhlaq-i Naṣirī of Khvājah Naṣir al-Dīn Tusi and its later recensions: Akhlaq-i Jalāl of Jalāl al-Dīn Davānī and Akhlaq-i Muḥsīnī of Mullā Husain Va’īq al-Kāshīfī. From these texts the students were expected to learn about the good and bad qualities of human beings, socially approved etiquette and moral values, principles and norms of family organization, and state politics. For history, the students generally read about Islam, Mongols, and Turks in Central Asia and Persia in Khvāndamīr’s Ḥabīb al-Siyār, Mīrkhvānd’s Rawzat al-Ṣafā, and Ḥamdullāh Mustaufī’s Tarikh-i Gūzīdah. Sharaf al-Dīn Yazdī’s Zafer-nāmah was prescribed for an appreciation of Timur’s achievements. Later, Abū al-Faḍl’s Akbar-nāmah, together with his works on insḥā (draftsmanship), also figured as essential readings.

Most of the students discontinued their studies after completing their secondary education, since that was sufficient qualification for employment on the clerical staff in local daftars (offices). The accounting department was the most attractive because it promised better salaries. The job of munshī (secretary) was a difficult task—“a whole life was required to acquire proficiency in that art.”

Initially, the teachers in charge of these madrasahs were often the masters from Fārs and Shiraz (ustādān-i Fārs va Shirāz). But in time, Indians—

including Hindu masters—also began to teach. Their writings, in particular the specimens of their inshā', formed part of the Persian syllabi at various levels.\footnote{Nadvi 1971: 28–29.}

In India “there was always a ‘set ready and a fixed caste [jami’]’ of workmen of every profession and trade, for any employment, to whom vocation descends as a family heirloom.”\footnote{Momin 1971: 42.} So too, the trainees for government positions crystallized into “a fixed caste” of scribes, accountants, and secretaries. The son of a clerk (muharrir) was destined to be a clerk not because he preferred this profession but in order to keep up the family tradition, and if he worked hard, he would rise to the status of a chief secretary (mir munshi). In most cases, the munshi families trained their own relatives, a father teaching his son either under his direct care or through correspondence. This is illustrated best in a fascinating document: the advice of the famous munshi Chandrabhān Brahman to his son Khvājah Tej Bhān:

Initially, it is necessary for one to acquire training in akhlāq [the system of norms]. It is appropriate to listen always to the advice of elders and act accordingly. By studying the Akhlāq-i Nāṣiri, Akhlāq-i Jalālī, Gulistān, and Būstān, one should accumulate one’s own capital and gain the virtue of knowledge. When you practice what you have learned, your code of conduct will become firm. The main thing is to be able to draft in a coherent manner, but at the same time good calligraphy also possesses its own virtues and earns you a place in the assembly of those of high stature. O dear son! Try to excel in these skills. And together with this, if you manage to learn accountancy (siyāq) and scribal skills (navissindagi), that would be even better. For scribes who know accountancy as well are rare. A man who knows how to write good prose as well as accountancy is a bright light even among lights. Besides, a munshi should be discreet and virtuous. I, who am among the munshīs of this court that is the symbol of the Caliphate, even though I am subject to the usual human errors, am still as discreet as an unopened bud, though possessing hundreds of tongues.

Although the science of Persian is a vast one, almost beyond human grasp, to open the gates of the language one should read the Gulistān, Būstān, and the letters of Mullā Jāmī to start with. When one has advanced somewhat, one should read key books on norms and ethics, as well as history books such as the Habīb al-Siyyar, Rauzat al-Safā, Rauzat al-Salāfīn, Tārikh-i Guzīda, Tārikh-i Ṭabarī, Zafar-nāmah, Akbar-nāmah, and other similar books that are absolutely necessary. The benefits of these will be to render your language elegant, and also to provide you knowledge of the world and its inhabitants. These will be of use when you are in assemblies of the learned. Of the master poets, I am setting down here the names of some whose collections I read in my youth. When you have some leisure, read them; they will give you both pleasure and relief, increase your abilities, and improve your language. They are Ḥakim

May my good and virtuous son understand that when I had finished reading these earlier works, I then desired to turn my attention to the later poets and writers and started collecting their poems and maqānīs. I acquired several copies of their works, and when I had finished them, I gave some of them to my disciples. Some of these are as follows: Ahlī, Ḥilālī, Muḥṭashām, Vāḥshī, Qāẓī Nūr, Nargīs, Maḥkīf Ummidī, Mīrzā Qāsim Ḥunābādī, Mullā Zābānī, Partavī, Ḥabrānī, Ḥiṣābī, Ṣābrī, Ṣamīrī, Rashkī, Ḥassānī, Ḥalākī, Naẓīrī, Nāʿīrī, Ṣāzīm Vaghmā, Mīr Ḥaydar, Mīr Maḥṣūm, Naẓīr, Māshhādī, Vālī Dāshī Bāyāzī, and many others who had their own collections [divān], and maqānīs, and whose names are too numerous to be listed in this brief letter.¹¹₄

From the middle of the seventeenth century, the departments of accountancy and draftsmanship and the offices of revenue minister (divān) were mostly filled by the Kayastha and Khatrī munshīs and muharrirs. Harkaran Das Kambūh of Multan is the first known Hindu munshī whose writings were taken as models by later munshīs. Chandrabhān Brahman was also influential, rated second only to Abū al-Fażl, and wrote poetry of high merit.¹¹⁵ Then followed a large number of Kayastha and Khatrī munshīs, including the well-known Mādho Rām, Sūjan Rāī, Malīkzādah, Ānand Rām “Mukhlīs,” and Bīndrān “Khvushgū,” all of whom made splendid contributions to Persian language and literature and whose writings formed part of the syllabi of Persian studies at madrasahs. Certain fields hitherto unexplored or neglected found skilled investigators, chiefly Hindus. In the philological sciences, the Hindus produced excellent works in the eighteenth century. Mīr̄āt al-Iṣṭilāḥ of Ānand Rām “Mukhlīs” (d. 1751b), Bahār-i ‘Ajam of Tek Chand “Bahār,” (d. 1766), and Muṣṭalad-hāt-i Shu’ārā of Siyākot-Mal “Vārastāh” (d. 1766) are among the most authoritative Persian lexicons compiled in India. These scholars’ Persian grammars and commentaries on idioms, phrases, and poetical proverbs show their wide-ranging research, sensitivity to literary excellence, and overall accomplishment in Persian language and literature.¹¹⁶

The masters of the Persian classics found an increasingly appreciative au-

¹¹⁴ Abūdullāh 1967: 241–43, who cites the passage from Brahman’s Chīr Chāman.
dience among literate town-dwellers, as well as among village-based revenue officials and other hereditary functionaries and intermediaries. All Mughal government papers, from the imperial orders (farmān) to the bonds and acceptance letters (muchalaka and tamassuk qabilīyat) composed by the village intermediary (chaudhari), were prepared in Persian. There was no bookseller in the bazaars and streets of Agra, Delhi, or Lahore who did not sell anthologies or collections of Persian poetry. The madrasah pupils in general were familiar with the Persian classics.

In two separate documents, one an arzdāsht (a letter sent from an official to the emperor or to an official of higher rank) addressed to Emperor Akbar and the other a dastūr al-ʾamal (administrative manual) meant to be a handbook for officials, Abū al-Faḍl, the premier ideologue and the mīr munshi of the Mughal empire, suggested as essential readings Tūsī’s Akhlāq-i Naṣīrī, Ghazālī’s Kīmiyā-i Sūʿādat, and the Maṣnavī of Maulānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī. In Abū al-Faḍl’s own era, these were normally available only to the high nobles. By Shāhjahān’s time, however, these books and many similar titles began to figure as routine readings even among the literate town-dwelling Hindus associated with the Mughal state.

Persian was thus something approaching a first language for many Indians. They appropriated and used Perso-Islamic expressions like Bismiʾllāh (with the name of Allah), lab ba-gūr (at the door of the grave), and ba-jahannam rasīd (damned in hell) as their Iranian and non-Iranian counterparts did. They also sought out and appreciated the Persian renderings of traditional Indian texts. Lest they be forgotten, certain religious scriptures were translated in full into Persian by individual Hindu authors.

If for Hindus the prospects for good careers and direct access to some ancient scriptures—traditionally not available to non-twice-born and now available in Persian—provided incentives for learning Persian, for the Muslims the language acquired a kind of religious sanctity. Jamāl al-Dīn Injū, author of Farhang-i Jahāngīr, a major comprehensive Persian lexicon of Jahāngīr’s time, dwells at length on the point that Persian, together with Arabic, is the language of Islam. Even the Prophet of Islam, he reports from various sources, knew and spoke Persian and spoke highly of the merits of the people of Pars. Injū cites verses from the Qurʾān in appreciation of the people of Pars for their bravery and courage to fight for a noble cause. Faith (imān), accord-

---

117. Even in Bengal, the administrative papers prepared and issued in the name of the local Hindu intermediaries were in Persian. Persian inshā, indeed, had influenced Bangla prose (Acharya 1994).
120. This is how Gopāl bin Govind justifies translating the Rāmāyaṇa into Persian in the preface to his translation of the Rāmāyaṇa (for a description, see Blochet 1905: 222).
ing to Injū, is integral to the character of the people of Pārs; they would have acquired the true faith even if it were far in the sky. Injū began to compile the *Farhang* at Akbar’s request, and since it was completed after the emperor’s death, it was dedicated to his son, Jahāngīr.  

There was certainly wide cultivation of Persian studies among the generally Hindvi-speaking *shurāfā*—the middle-order Muslim landed magnates, the revenue-free landholders in the rural areas, those who had religious grants (*aʿīma, vazīfa*) in towns, and petty officials. Even ordinary literate Muslims, such as soldiers, were now expected to read simple Persian. In Shāhjahān’s time, treatises on religious disputations in simple prose were written for common poor Muslims in order to prevent them from falling into the Brahmanical “trap” and from leaning toward innovation, idolatrous practices, and infidelity. One such treatise, *Hujjat al-Hind*, as its anonymous author claims, was translated from Hindvi into simple Persian for the benefit of “the Muslims who live in the villages” where “the elites are generally infidels.”

**MUGHAL POLITICAL CULTURE AND PERSIAN**

Learning, knowledge, and high culture thus began to be associated with Persian at many levels in Mughal Indian society. General command over idiomatic Persian was a matter of pride; deficiency in elegant self-expression meant cultural failure. For Mirzā Muḥammad Bakhsh Ṭashūb, a noted poet and writer of the later Mughal era, a major failure of Ṣamsām al-Daulah Khān-i Daurān, the well-known early-eighteenth-century Mughal noble, was his inability to speak good Persian; Khān-i Daurān generally spoke in Hindvi. On occasion he would embellish his conversation with Persian couplets and hemistichs, but with a remark that “for an Indian, to speak in Persian is to make oneself the butt of ridicule.”

Khān-i Daurān, however, was an exception. In general, Persian was considered the only effective language in which to express cultural accomplishments. Persian came to be recognized as the language of politics in nearly the whole of the subcontinent. This status received nourishment from the Mughal power it sustained, and the belief that Persian was the most functional, pragmatic, and accomplished vehicle of communication remained unshaken even after the Mughal empire had, for all practical purposes, collapsed. Mirzā Asadullah Ghālib (d. 1869), the last of the great Mughal poets, believed that the depth, complexity, and variety of his ideas could be

122. *Hujjat al-Hind*, fols. 11.  
123. Ṭashūb: fols. 726.  
124. Persian continued to be the privileged language of power until the early nineteenth century. For its position in the English East India Company territories, see Cohn 1985.
conveyed only through Persian words. Note the poet’s plea to his audience to evaluate him on the strength of his Persian compositions, even as he earned a high place in literature with his Urdu poetry:

See my Persian [poetry] so that you may see colorful pictures of many hues.
Pass over my Urdu collection; it’s only a sketch.125

The inner strength of the language was no less important in the Mughal ruling elite’s choice of Persian as the medium for their culture. The Mughals aspired to evolve a political culture that overarched the diverse religious and cultural identities of India. Persian, under the circumstances, promised to be the most appropriate vehicle to communicate and sustain such an ideal. Indians across the subcontinent, from the banks of the river Sindh to the Bay of Bengal, knew Persian well. If Amir Khusrau is to be believed, as early as the fourteenth century “Persian speech and idiom enjoyed uniformity of register throughout the length of four thousand parasangs of India, unlike the Hindvi tongue, which has no settled idiom and varies every hundred miles and with each new group of people.”126 As late as the eighteenth century Hindvi had not evolved a uniform idiom even in northern India. Siraj al-Din ‘Ali Khan Ārzū (d. 1756), a noted eighteenth-century poet, writer, and lexicographer, mentions Gwaliori, Braj, Rajputi, Kashmiri, Haryanavi, Hindi, and Punjabi as diverse authentic forms of Hindvi, along with the dialects of Shāhjahānābād (Delhi) and Akbarābād (Agra).127 Sanskrit, or Hindī-yi kitāb (Hindi of the book), as Ārzū calls it, could have been chosen in place of Persian as a language of the empire. But as Mirzā Khān, the author of Tuhfat al-Hind, noted in Aurangzeb’s time, Sanskrit was not regarded by the Indians as an ordinary human tongue; it was a language of the gods or of heaven (deva bānī; ākāś bānī). The language was too sacred, too divine. No barbarian (mleccha) would have been allowed to pollute it by choosing it as a symbol and vehicle of his power. No mleccha could have used it to create the world of his vision. Prakrit, by contrast—which was pātal bānī, the language of the underworld, of the snakes—the Mughals considered too low to appropriate for lofty ideals. Braj, or Bhakha, the language of this world, was only a regional dialect. Furthermore, Bhakha, in the Mughal view, was suitable only for music and love poetry.128

Persian poetry, which had integrated many themes and ideas from pre-Islamic Persia and had been an important vehicle of liberalism in the medieval Muslim world, helped in no insignificant way in creating and sup-

porting the Mughal attempt to accommodate diverse religious traditions. Akbar must have gotten support for his policy of nonsectarianism from the general ethos of Persian ghazals and from verses like the ones of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, whose *Maznavī* the emperor heard regularly and nearly learned by heart:

```
Thou hast come to unite,
not to separate.
The people of Hind understand the idiom of Hind;
the people of Sindh appreciate their own.129
```

We hear the echoes of such messages in Mughal Persian poetry as well. The Persian poets also generally disapproved of mere formalism. Fayāzī Fayāzī had the ambition of building “a new Ka’ba” out of stones from the Sinai:

```
Come, let us turn our face toward the new altar.
Let’s bring the stones from Sinai and build a new Ka’ba.130
```

The Mughal poets portrayed the pious (*zāhid*) and the *shaykh* as hypocrites. Instead, the eternal divine secrets were to be sought from the master of the wine house (*mughān*), and in the temple rather than in the mosque:

```
Give up the path of the Muslims
if you desire to come to the temple of the Magi and see the esoteric mysteries.131
```

The idol (*but*), to them, was the symbol of divine beauty; idolatry (*but-parasti*) represented the love of the Absolute; and significantly, they emphasized holding the Brahman in high esteem because of his sincerity, devotion, and faithfulness to the idol. To Fayāzī it was a matter of privilege that his love for the idol led him to embrace the religion of the Brahman:

```
Thanks to God, the love of the idols is my guide;
I follow the religion of the Brahman and Āzar.132
```

The temple (*dargah, but-kadah*), the wine-house (*may-khānah*), the mosque, and the Ka’ba were the same to ‘Urffī; the divine spirit pervaded everywhere:

```
The lamp of Somnāth is [the same as] the fire at Sinai;
the light spreads from it in all directions.133
```

133. ‘Urffī 1915: 44.
This feature of Persian poetry remained unimpaired even when Aurangzeb sought to associate the Mughal state with Sunni orthodoxy. Naṣīr ʿAlī Sirhindī (d. 1696), a major poet of Aurangzeb’s time, echoed ʿUrfī’s message with equal enthusiasm:

The image is the same behind the veil in the temple and the haram. Though the firestones vary, there is no change in the color of the fire.\footnote{Sirhindī 1872: 15.}

To a poet, neither the mosque nor the temple is illumined by divine beauty; the heart (dil) of the true lover is its abode. The message of the poetry was thus to aspire to the high place of love for God. Ṭalīb Āmulī raised the call to transcend the difference of shaykh and Brahman:

I do not condemn unbelief, nor am I a bigoted believer.
I laugh at both the shaykh and the Brahman.\footnote{Tālib ʿAmulī 1967 (s. 1346): 668.}

Persian thus facilitated the Mughal cultural conquest in India—a conquest, as ʿUrfī declared, that was intended to be bloodless:

We have received wounds, we have scored victories, but the hues of our garments have never been stained with the blood of anyone.\footnote{ʿUrfī 1915: 3.}

The desire to build an empire where both shaykh and Brahman could live with minimal possible conflict necessitated the generation of adequate information about the diverse traditions of the land. Akbar’s historian, Abū al-Fażl, was not content in his Akbar-nāmah with a mere description of the heroic achievements of his master; he concluded his account with what he calls the Ṣaḥīḥ (Institutes) of Akbar. Particularly notable are the third and, above all, the fourth books of the Ṣaḥīḥ. The former contains a survey of the land, the revenues, and the peoples or castes in control of the land; the latter “treats of the social conditions and literary activity, especially in philosophy and law, of the Hindus, who form the bulk of the population, and in whose political advancement the emperor saw the guarantee of the stability of his realm.”\footnote{Blockmann 1965; cf. Jarrett 1978.} Further, to make the major local texts accessible and thus to dispel ignorance about the Hindu traditions, Akbar took special care in the rendering of the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyāṇa into Persian.\footnote{Tālib (1978: 60–91) lists with brief descriptions the Mughal Persian translations of the Hindu scriptures.} These translations were followed, in Akbar’s own time and later, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, by Persian renderings of a large number of texts.
on Indian religions, Hindu law and ethics, mathematics, medicine, astronomy, romance, moral fables, and music.\textsuperscript{139}

Persian literary culture had a certain logical connection with the Mughal political ideology. It helped generate and legitimate the Mughal policy of creating out of heterogeneous social and religious groups a class of allies. Like the emperor and his nobility in general, this class also cherished universalist human values and visions.

While the most sublime and accomplished Persian poetry was produced in India in the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, the eighteenth century was the richest in terms of the number and varieties of both prose and poetic works. Seventy-seven of the Persian poets who lived during the first half of the eighteenth century found a place of honor in the \textit{tazkirah}, entitled \textit{Majma` al-Nafa`is}, of Siraj al-Din `Ali Khân Arzû, who was the greatest linguist and lexicographer of his age.\textsuperscript{140} One of the many other \textit{tazkirahs} written in this period, `Ali Ibrâhîm Khalîl’s (d. 1793) comprehensive \textit{Suhuf-i Ibrâhîm}, notes 460 northern Indian poets of the eighteenth century whose works he considered of worth. Fifty-six of these were non-Muslims.\textsuperscript{141}

\textbf{MUGHAL PERSIAN POETRY}

The Mughal age constituted a significant stage in the development of Persian literary sensibility. The poetry of this epoch was marked by an outspoken spirit of innovation and experimentation, yet not without due regard for the earlier literary heritage of Iran as well as Central Asia. In Central Asia at the court of the late Timurids, Daulatshâh Samarqandi and `Ali Sher Navâi had tried to establish a canon. The poetry of `Abd al-Rahmân Jâmi (d. 1492) represented the achievements in the poetics of the late Timurids in Central Asia. This tradition was later refined and reformulated by Bâbur. The emphasis had hitherto been on rhetorical artistry, even as Bâbur also pointed to the importance of idea (\textit{ma`ni}) and ecstasy (\textit{hâl}), together with color (\textit{rang}), in a good poem. In Iran there were attempts similar to Bâbur’s, like the ones by Sâm Mirzâ, a contemporary of Bâbur, to revise the standards of literary criticism. Simultaneously, however, Bâbâ Fighânî Shírâzî (d. 1519) made a plea for poetry that concerned itself with routine matters of love but at the same time invested old words with fresh new meaning.\textsuperscript{142}

Mughal poetry signified a fine blending of rhetorical excellence and grandeur of thought, in which thought occupied a superior position; and

\textsuperscript{139} Rizvi 1975: 205–22.
\textsuperscript{140} Arzû: MS.I.O. 4015.
\textsuperscript{141} Khalîl 1981; `Abdullâh 1967: 19, 69–84.
while Abū al-Fażl emphasized the splendors of ideas, his poet brother, Fāzī, advocated their sublimity and emotional texture:

Do not be surprised if there are no dregs in my poetry
because I have refined this wine by filtering it through the heart. 143

The following verse by Ghānī Kāshmīrī (d. 1688) may be the best description of Mughal poetry’s many-sided splendor:

The luminous presence of your beauty set me to poetic thought.
You applied the henna and I created colorful themes.144

All this was a marked feature of tāzah-gū’i (freshness in composition), the major tenet of Mughal poetry.145 The call for new and fresh themes was heard throughout the Mughal age. Fāzī detested imitation (taqlīd):

How long should one look to others for ideas?
How long should one be generous with the wealth of others? 146

He then invited his audience to break with the past:

Come, destroy the glitter of the bazaar,
push the thorn into the gardener’s eye.
The arrogance of those who wear their cap askew [i.e., the beloveds] has exceeded all limits;
be bold and twist the ends of their turban,
go past the Ka’ba, sipping the goblet,
pull down walls and door in drunkenness. 147

For Fāzī, poetry and the poetic imagination transcended the ordinary world. The poet was to scale heights insurmountable for an average human soul:

I walk where a step is a stranger,
I speak from a place where breathing is a stranger.148

The Mughal poet thus aspired to unearth “the secret treasures of the unseen world” (ganjīna-i asrār-i ghaib). To Nāẓīrī, poetry was divine:

Do not think the story I narrate comes by itself.
Come close to me, and you will hear a Voice.149

The beginnings of some elements of tāzah-gū’ī can be traced in the poetry of Bābā Fīghānī, but its most distinguishing feature in the Mughal period was its humanism, and here its achievements were unprecedented.150 While Fayżī gave a call to go beyond the limits of the beloved’s coquetry, ‘Urfī celebrated the enlargement of self where the lines between the success and failure of an individual, on the one hand, and his concerns for humanity, on the other, become blurred:

In my heart the sorrows of the world turn into the sorrows of love.  
In my goblet an immature wine matures.151

It is risky to explain the nuances of poetry in terms of concrete social and political conditions. Still, the valuing of tāzah-gū’ī and the concern for humanity in Mughal poetry emerged and flourished in a literary environment specific to the time. It is significant that while the Mughal poets celebrated the victories of their patrons, they also gave expression to the susceptibilities of the vanquished in their poetry. They narrated the sufferings of others with the same intensity as they lamented their own afflictions. The wounded ego of the vanquished thus found in this poetry compensation, in some measure, for what it had lost:

I have nothing but bitter tears drenching my sleeves;  
[even] if I have honey, I sell it for poison in return.  
Whoever has his house in my neighborhood,  
I keep him happy with my cries of suffering.  
My love takes me from temple to idol and idolhouse;  
I am ashamed to come face to face with those who follow the path of faith.152

The poets of the Mughal age were aware that the new poetry was expanding the realm of art beyond its erstwhile frontiers. Enthralled by its newness, they were possessed by a sort of collective ego, even though each of them diverged from the others and experimented with new images and tropes in his own individual style. Mirzā ‘Abd al-Qādir Bidil, for instance, had little in common with ‘Urfī, yet he seems aware that they belonged to the same group of “new composers”:

150. For a discussion of Fīghānī, see Raziyah 1974: 135, and ‘Abdullah 1977: 114–26; Losen-  
152. Nazīrī 1961 (s. 1340): 294. To paraphrase: Suffering and sorrow have become an in- 
tegral part of my life. Sweetness and comfort suit me no longer; I find myself uneasy with things pleasant and joyful. I thus give away to others whatever little I have of joy and take from them their suffering in return. I do not, however, protest my plight and loss, being unwilling to disturb the peace of those who live in my neighborhood.
As my poetic thoughts were reflected in the light of the “new” composers margins drawn on the pages of diwans become as colorful as a peacock’s wings.153

Naṣīr ‘Ali Sirhindī (d. 1696), sensitive to the accomplishments of the Mughal poet, emphasized the difference between Indian diction and that which found favor with the Iranians and declared boastfully: “The Iranian nightingale possessed little [comparable] to the grandeur of the Indian peacock.”154

INDIAN PERSIAN VERSUS IRANIAN PERSIAN

It was the Iranians’ enviable cultural strength as well as their ancient prestige that enabled them to continue dictating terms, to a certain extent, to the Persian poets in Mughal India. While Indian Persian diction matured under the Mughals, Iranian idiom remained the reference point, the pole star of literary and idiomatic speech. This is reflected in, among other things, the concern for the purification of Persian (taṭḥīr-i Fārsī). The objective of the Persian lexicon that Akbar had asked Jamāl al-Dīn Husain Injū of Shiraz to prepare in his name was to purge the language of non-Iranian words and expressions. The drive for purification continued. Injū’s Farhang and Abū al-Qāsim’s Majmaʿ al-Furs Surūrī (1626), were considered the standard lexicons during the first half of the seventeenth century. By the middle of the century, however, Mullā ‘Abd al-Rashīd Thattawi felt that a new dictionary should be compiled. According to him, in the dictionaries by Injū and by Abū al-Qāsim certain Arabic and Turkish words were enlisted without clarifying that they were not Persian, and the diacritics (iʿrāb) of many words were wrongly indicated. ‘Abd al-Rashīd composed his Farhang-i Rashīdī in 1663 and was sharply critical of the “errors” in Farhang and Surūrī. Other principal Persian philological works of the Mughal period, including Sirāj al-Lughat of Ārzū, Mirʿāt al-Iṣṭilāḥ of Anand Rām “Mukhliṣ,” Mustalahāt-i Shūrārā of Siyālktī Mal “Vārastāh,” and Bahār-i Ḵayāl of Munshi Tek Chand “Bahār,” were written in the eighteenth century. They were composed mainly to update the vocabulary in light of the current usage in Iran.155

The practice of Mughal lexicons was in sharp contrast to the approach of pre-Mughal Persian authors, such as Amīr Khusrau of the early fourteenth century. He had disapproved of the Khurāsānī idiom and had noted that in India, Persian was written and pronounced according to the standard of Tu-

ran. In prose particularly, the models were the authors of Transoxiana: the writings of Rashid al-Din Vašt and Bahā al-Dīn of Khvorazm, for instance, were studied and followed by Indian Persian writers. Khusrau may be said to have consolidated or even to have inaugurated a new Indo-Persian style.\(^{156}\)

For the lexicographers of the fourteenth century, the speech current in Shiraz, Māvarā-an-nahr, and Farghana represented nothing but dialects of the same Persian tongue. Their lexicons included words used in Fārs, Samarqand, Māvarā-an-nahr, and Turkistan. As a matter of routine, they often provided Hindi synonyms of Persian words.\(^{157}\)

The attempts during the Mughal period by Indian Persian to acquire an autonomous position were feeble and exceptional. Ārzū, for instance, defends the \(\text{tasarruf}\) (intervention) of masters like Mirzā Bidil. In fact, in his bid to legitimize the use of Indian words in Persian, he earned the distinction of being the first to discover and point out the correspondence (\(\text{tavāfuq}\)) between Persian and Sanskrit.\(^{158}\) Not only in \(\text{Sirāj al-Lughat}\) and \(\text{Chiragh-i Hidayat}\) but also in his linguistic-grammatical treatise, \(\text{Muṣmīn}\), he discusses this at length and shows how the two languages are similar. It was a great achievement, and he was conscious that it was great. He writes:

> To date no one, excepting this humble Ārzū and his followers, has discovered the \(\text{tavāfuq}\) [lit. agreement, concord] between Hindi [Sanskrit] and Persian, even though there have been numerous lexicographers and other researchers in both these languages. I have relied on this principle when assessing the correctness of some of the Persian words, which I have illustrated in my books \(\text{Sirāj al-Lughat}\) and \(\text{Chiragh-i Hidayat}\). It is strange that even the author of \(\text{Farhang-i Rashidi}\) and those others who lived in India neglected the \(\text{tavāfuq}\) between these two languages.\(^{159}\)

Ārzū also led a literary debate against Shaykh ‘Ali Ḥāzīn (d. 1766), an eminent Iranian poet who came to India in 1734 and settled in Benares. Ḥāzīn was generally dismissive of Indian Persian poetry as not measuring up to Iranian literary and linguistic standards.\(^{160}\)

Moreover, the spurt of production of \(\text{taẓkira}s\) in eighteenth-century India, with an unusually confident definition of what was good in Persian literature, was also meant to highlight Indian achievements. These were

---

\(^{156}\) Khusrau 1875: 66; 1988.

\(^{157}\) Husaini 1988: 201–26. Compare, for instance, Badr-i Ibrāhīm’s \(\text{Farhang-i Zufān-i Gūyā}\) (1989), which is one of the early such lexicons compiled sometime around 1370.

\(^{158}\) Interestingly, Ārzū’s theory of \(\text{tavāfuq}\) is similar to and apparently an earlier indigenous version of William Jones’s declaration in 1785 of the relationship among the classical languages, which in turn laid the ground for the development of comparative philology. But Jones does not mention Ārzū.

\(^{159}\) Ārzū 1991: 221.

\(^{160}\) Ārzū 1981; also editor’s introduction.
scarcely noticed by later Iranian critics and writers, however. In contrast to the early *tažkirahs*, wherein the world of Persian stretched from India to the Caspian Sea, in Safavid and post-Safavid *tažkirahs* the Iranians accorded Iran an exceptionally prominent place. Such prejudices, for instance, are glaring in the *tažkirahs* of Muḥammad Ṭahīr Naṣrābādī (d. 1781) and LuṭfʿAlī Beg Āẓar (d. 1780). Naṣrābādī dispatches the accounts of the non-Iranian poets in just under 24 pages—fourteen for Central Asian poets and a little over seven for the Indian poets—while he devotes over 220 pages to contemporary Iranian poets.  

Naṣrābādī was familiar with Mughal literary culture and had friends and relatives who lived in India. Ironically, his own poetry shows the clear influence of Kalīm Kashānī (d. 1650) and Mīrzā Șāʾīb (d. c. 1669), major poets of the Indian style, and he even indicates that for a fuller appreciation of the civilized world one has to journey through and understand the vast land between Iraq (southern Iran) and India. He cites a quatrain while evaluating the verses of Mīrzā Șābir, an Iranian poet of his own time:

O free-living friends! I wish to be in your company;  
I want to fly away from this narrow suffocating world;  
I seek strength to travel in my head  
through the land of India and the open fields of Iraq.  

Āẓar’s mid-eighteenth-century *Āṭishkadaḥ* (Fire temple) turns to ashes not simply the high qualities of Mughal poetry but also the achievements of hundreds of Indian Persian poets. The book lists over 850 poets from Iran, Turan, and the three *vilâyats* (territories) of India, namely Delhi, Kashmir, and Deccan, yet only about twenty of them are identified as Indian. Further, Āẓar’s account of Amīr Khusrau is very brief, without any significant expression highlighting the qualities of Khusrau’s poetry; this is in sharp contrast to the account given in the fifteenth century by Daulatshāh, which uses a number of adjectives of praise.

Most of the Indian *tažkirah* writers, however, like Ārzū, Gulām ʿAlī ʿAzād Bilgrāmī (*Khazānah-i ʿAmīrah*), ʿAlī Ibrahīm Khān Khalī (Šuhuf-i Ibrāhīmi), and Brindābān Khvashgū (*Safnah*), maintain a certain balance, as in earlier *tažkirahs*, in listing and assessing the poets from across the lands of Persian literary culture. But many, indulging as if in a kind of polemic with their Iranian counterparts, mention only Indian poets as if to suggest that real Persian literature thrived equally, if not more, in India. Lachhmī Narāyān Shafīq Aurāngābādī’s *Gul-i Raʿūnā* (A beautiful rose; 1767) and Shaykh Gulām Hamađānī Muḥṣafī’s *Iqd-i Šurayyā* (The string of gems; 1784), for example, list the achievements of the Indian poets only; while Mir Gulām ʿAlī Sher Qāʿānī’s *Maqāliṭ al-Shūrār* (The speeches of the poets; 1750), ʿAbd al-Ḥakim Lāhori’s

---

162. Naṣrābādī 1938 (s. 1317): 64, 66.
Diqqat pasand (The pupil of the eye; 1761), Zulfiqar ‘Ali Mast’s Rīyāz al-Vifāq (The meeting garden; 1814) and Ghulām ‘Ali Mūsā Rīzā’s Guldestah-ī Karnatak (A bouquet of flowers of Karnatak; 1832) list the poets of Sind, Panjab, Benares, Calcutta, Karnatak, and Madras. As if to assert how prolific and popular were the Persian poems of India, Mīr ‘Abd al-Vahhāb Daulātābādī’s Taẁzīrah-ī Bināzīr (The matchless taẁzīrah) focuses on the poets of only one period, whereas Mohan Lal Anis’s Anīs al-Aḥbāb (A companion of the friends; 1789) comprises the accounts of the disciples of just one Indian master poet, Mirzā Fakhir Makin (d. 1814).\footnote{Naqvi 1972: 167–68.}

To reinforce further the feeling that Mughal India by no means lagged behind in Persian literary achievements, there is an emphasis in some taẁzīrāhs on the widespread vogue of poetic soirées (majālis o māhāfīl) even while Mughal imperial power was in decline. Persian literary gatherings were then an integral part of Indian culture. Some taẁzīrah writers, like Ārzū (Majmū’ al-Nafis’s) and Qudratullāh Qāsīm (Majmū’ah-i Naghīz), also note that a number of poets came from artisan and “low” professional groups.\footnote{Naqvi 1972: 172–73.}

THE DEBATE OVER INDIAN PERSIAN DICTION

A notable feature of some taẁzīrāhs is the words they use to evaluate the level of excellence in poetry. Muḥammad Aḥzāl “Sarkhvush,” who compiled his Kalimāt al-Shu‘arā’ (Discourses of poets) in 1682, was principally concerned with the rich and colorful images and the fresh themes and ideas of the poetry of his own time (the period of Jahāngīr, Shāhjahān, and Aurangzeb, 1605–1682), an era when the unfolding of philosophical and aesthetic ideas (ma‘nī yābī) reached the height of its development (mi‘rāj-i kāmāl). In his Hamishah Bahūr, a taẁzīrah of the Mughal poets compiled in 1723, Kishān Chand Ikhlāṣ (d. 1748 or 1754) provides a wide range of features that he considered distinctive of good poetry. These include ma‘nī ašrīnī (to create a new idea/meaning), ma‘nī yābī (to unfold and discover an idea/theme), ma‘nī niqārī (to depict an idea in writing), ma‘ānīhā-ī dilāvīz (heart-ravishing ideas/themes), ma‘ānīhā-ī barjasta (spontaneous ideas), ma‘nīhā-ī bandī (to weave, contrive, and compose an idea), ma‘ānīhā-ī gharīb wa badī‘ (far-fetched and novel ideas), ma‘ānīhā-ī ba‘īd al-fahām (ideas difficult to comprehend), taliṣhā-ī tāzah, ma‘ṣāmīn-ī tāzah (search for new themes and ideas), zihr-ī dīqqat pasand (predilection for nuance and subtlety), iḥām (ambiguity, double entendre), isti‘ārāt-i bi andāzah (innumerable metaphors), anwā‘-ī bāda‘i va šanā‘i (variety of rhetorical devices) and fikr-ī dūr az kār (abstract, remote idea).\footnote{Ikhlaṣ: Aligarh MS. See also Pritchett, chapter 15 in this volume.} Without further comparative research it is difficult to say definitively
whether the Iranian tagkirahs used the same terms to mark the qualities of good poetry. This seems quite unlikely, however, for these terms used by Ikhlās to define good poetry indicate the very qualities that later Iranian commentators criticized as the elements of sabk-i Hindī.

Indian-style diction, sabk-i Hindī, as against sabk-i Khurāsānī and sabk-i Īrāqī, at one level signified the continuity and reiteration of the translocal identity of New Persian at a time when Iran made a case for itself, within the narrow Safavid boundaries, as the land of Persian. (Mawrā-an-nahr and Anatolia by that time had turned in large measure to Turkish.) The term sabk-i Hindī, however, has often been used in Iranian writings to point to the abstruse ideas expressed in Mughal poetry. The Iranian critics considered such ideas outlandish, convoluted, and twisted, disturbing the flow, elegance, and even the basic principle of poetry. Notable in this connection are the invectives of Lutfu’din Aza’r and Shaykh ‘Alī Ḥażīn.

Ḥażīn derided the Indian poets as “crows.” For him, only Fayzī and his historian brother, ‘Abū al-Faḍl, were of some consequence (dar zāghān-i Hind az in dā bīrādār bihtar-i bar nakhvāsta), but even these two were ultimately treated as “crows” rather than “nightingales.” He considered the writings of Bīdīl and Nāṣīr ‘Alī totally meaningless, beyond comprehension, useful only as a comic gift for the delectation of his friends in Iran (ṇagār muvāja’at ba Īrān dast dihad barā’i ṣirḵẖān-i bāz-mi ahbāb rah āvardī-yi bihtar azin nīst). Commenting on the verses of Ṭālib Amuli (d. 1626) and Mirzā Sā’īb—both Iranians but also major poets of sabk-i Hindī—Āzar did not simply express his strong dislike for their style but also judged it a major factor in the decline of classical Persian poetry. Later, in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, Rizā Qulī Khān Hidāyat (d. 1872) and Malik al-Shu’arā’ Muhammad Taqī Bahār (d. 1931) used even harsher words to air their criticism of the Mughal poets. To Hidāyat, the Indian style was “nonsensical”; to Bahār it was “infirm,” “spineless,” and even if it “possessed novelty,” it was crowded with “feeble” and “unattractive” ideas, wanting in eloquence. While one can explain the modern critics’ attacks in terms of the influence of the new, Western aesthetics, continuity from earlier times cannot be altogether ruled out. Traces of this criticism are discernible in the works of many other noted twentieth-century Iranian litterateurs and literary critics. The writers of other parts of ‘Ajam, however, did not share this dismissive attitude. In fact, in recent times the attitude of even Iranian critics has begun to show signs of change, and they have begun to count Amīr Khusrau, Bīdīl, Mirzā Ghālib, and even Iqbal among the great Persian poets. Maʿṣūd Sa’dī Salāmī

166. Ārzū 1981: 28, introduction.
168. Yarshater 1988: 258–59 n.; Subḥānī 1998 (s. 1377): 96. This change is illustrated in some important works on Bīdīl, Ghālib, and Iqbal published in recent years by Iranian schol-
and Abū al-Fāraj Rūnī, however, are yet to be recognized by these critics as harbingers of the Indian style; they prefer to classify them among the poets of the Khurāsānī and ʿIrāqī styles.

The shaping of sabk-i Hindī signified a dialogue between the Persian language and the Indian cultural ethos. It developed as a result of constant interaction between the literary matrices of India, on the one hand, and of Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia on the other. It implied the use of words and phrases, as well as the appropriation and integration of ideas, from the Indian world into Persian. This diction had its inception with Masʿūd Saʿd Salmān and Amir Khusrau during the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, and first showed signs of stability in fifteenth-century Herat, where were gathered the best of ʿAjam culture. Among other things, Herat played a role in nurturing the ideas of Bābā Fīghānī of Shiraz, who lived there during his formative years. Sabk-i Hindī matured and scaled new heights under the Mughals in the tāzah-gūʿi of Fāyżī, ʿUrfī, and Kalīm; the imagination of Saʿīb; and the abstract images, tropes, and allegories of Bīdīl. Persian poetry achieved this grandeur, as the noted Mughal writer Ghulām ʿAli ʿAzād Bilgrāmī (d. 1786) maintained, by assimilating Indian ideas. And this was not the last of its accomplishments; the poetry was to soar still higher and excel. Bilgrāmī wrote:

It should be known that Hindi [Sanskrit?] poetry is very old, as is evident from the study of the books of the Indians. The rule is that art gets perfected when ideas blend with each other [ba-talāhuq-i aflāk]. From the time of Sultan Maḥmūd [eleventh century] to this age of ours, Persian poetry has [thus] traveled far and wide, having risen from the lowly earth to the very sky [az zamīn tā falak al-aflāk]. This does not mean, however, that there are no new ideas left to be composed. For, maintaining that ideas have been exhausted implies the possibility of loss and decrease in the infinite source of the divine bounties. God is far greater and more gracious than that. The drinkers will keep emptying vessel after vessel until the last day of the world, yet they will have exhausted not even a drop from His winehouse.

[Qurʾānic verse] Say: If the ocean were ink [wherewith to write out] the words of my Lord, sooner would the ocean be exhausted than would the words of my Lord, even if we added another ocean like it, for its aid.169

PERSIAN IN PRECOLONIAL HINDUSTAN

ars and literary critics, such as Muḥammad ʿRūzā Shafīʿī Kadkānī, Fakhr al-Dīn Ḥījāzī, and Muḥammad ʿAlī Ḫūṣaini Nādūshan. Centers for studies in Bīdīl’s poetry have been instituted in Tehran, Esfahan, and Shiraz. Iqbal’s prose writings, including The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, have also been translated into Persian.

169. This seems to be addressed specially to those who believed that the “Indian, or Safavid” marked the decline of classical Persian poetry. These two paragraphs are from Bilgrāmī 1871: 5–6.
Ihām, which Amīr Khusrau claimed to have invented, was one of the most distinctive new features of this sabk. As a rhetorical device ihām was not new in Persian poetry. ‘Arūzi Samarqandi in his Chahār Maqālah used the word in the plain sense of “imagination”—and also a derivative of the word, muhāmah (imaginary)—while defining poetry. In his view, the task of the poet was, in the first place, arrangement (ittisāq) of imaginary propositions (muqad-damāt-i muhāmah) and blending of fruitful analogies to make a small thing appear great and a great thing small. Second, the poet should act on the imagination (ihām) and thus excite the faculties of anger and desire in such a way that by this act of imagination (ta badān ihām) he could affect men’s temperaments, causing, on the one hand, depression and constriction (inqibāz) and, on the other, expansiveness and exaltation (inbisāt) that would help in accomplishing great things in this world.170 Samarqandi used the term ihām in its straightforward dictionary sense, imagination, but Rashīd al-Dīn Vātāvī in his Ḥadā’īq al-Sihār described ihām as a poetic artifice:

Ihām in Persian means to create doubt. This is a literary device, also called takhyīl [to make one suppose and fancy], whereby a writer (dahr), in prose, or a poet, in verse, employs a word with two different meanings, one direct and immediate (qarīb) and the other remote and strange (gharīb), in such a manner that the listener, as soon as he hears that word, thinks of its direct meaning while in actuality the remote meaning is intended.171

Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad bin Qays al-Rāzi, author of Al-Mu'jam fī Ma'iṣīr-i Asbār al-'Ajām, the second major work in Persian rhetoric and prosody, defined ihām in almost the same words.172

The new thing in Khusrau’s discussion of ihām was the suggestion that a poet might use a word, or a combination of words, in as many senses as he could (gul vujuk) and that all these could be simultaneously intended—each direct, equally true (durust), logical, and sensible.173 To some degree Khusrau rejected the suggestion that ihām implied deception. He showed a special liking for ihām; over half of the descriptions of the qualities in Persian poetry that he boastfully describes as his inventions in his Ghurrat are devoted to ihām of one or the other sort. He expects in the reader a certain general intelligence and skill at reading poetry; the meanings in poetry, even with ihām employed, are discernible, radiant (roshan rū), and clearer and brighter than even a mirror (muwajjah tar az ʿīna). He wants the reader to concentrate and to keep thinking on and around the verse (gird-i bāyūt nikū bigardad); if the reader finds any difficulty, it is due to his incompetence

While there was concern for a certain order or standard in the literary creation, the reader or listener was also expected to be imaginative and erudite. The language of poetry is intricate, complex, multilayered, and often deceptively simple, and its meanings are intertwined, subtle, and difficult to grasp.

The Sufi religious circles resonated with echoes of this aspect of Indian Persian literary culture. Sayyid Muḥammad Gisūdarāz (d. 1422) is reported to have compiled a treatise in which he discussed the true meanings of selected *thām* verses. He was followed later in this enterprise by Mir ‘Abd al-Vāḥid Bilgrāmī (d. 1608). Bilgrāmī compiled a treatise (*risālah*) with explanatory notes on the ghazals of Ḥāfiz Shirāzi. Of greater interest still is his commentary on Hindvi (Brajbhasha) songs (1566). His interpretative endeavor to find Islamic meanings for the evidently non-Islamic words is fascinating. “Krishna” and Kān’s other names in Hindvi, Bilgrāmī writes, mean the Prophet Muḥammad and sometimes the perfect man (*insān-i kāmil*). Sometimes it indicates the creation of the human world in relation to the Unity of Being (*vaḥdat al-vaṭi‘ād*). The word *gopi* (cowherdswoman) refers to an angel, or sometimes to the reality of mankind. Braj and Gokul (Kṛṣṇa’s home) stand for the three ontological realms: the *jabarūt*, the highest point in the spiritual world; the *nasūt*, or physical world; and the *malakūt*, or intermediary psychic world. The Gaṅgā and the Yamunā (or Kālindī) represent the rivers of *vaḥdat*, the ocean of *maʿrifat* (gnosis), or the streams of creation or contingent existence. The *murali*, or *bānsuri* (Kṛṣṇa’s flute), refers to the appearance of existence out of void; Kaṃsa (Kṛṣṇa’s evil uncle) symbolizes the *naṭḥ*, the devil, and sometimes the *sharīʿah* prior to the advent of Islam; Yasodā (the foster mother of Kṛṣṇa) indicates divine mercy; Mathurā (Kṛṣṇa’s birthplace) signifies temporary stations in *maʿrifat*; and Dwārakā (Kṛṣṇa’s final dwelling place) the permanent stage, *maʿād* (final destination), or the ultimate station of mystical pursuit.

Most historians have seen such readings mainly in the context of Hindu-Muslim religious interaction. But this is a somewhat reductive treatment of a complex issue. Furthermore, the *māṣnāvīs* of Sanāʿī, ʿAṭṭār, and Ṣūrī were also interpreted allegorically by medieval scholars. Rather, to read Indo-Persian poetry in this manner may be seen in the light of the extended connotative power of *thām*, which creates space for possible meanings far removed from the explicit. Unlike Vaiṣṇav and Ṭāzī’s discourse on poetics, there was little distinction between the *qaʿrīb* (familiar, close, obvious) and *gharīb* (strange, remote, subtle). “A verse by itself has no fixed meaning,” proclaimed the great mystic Shaykh Ṣanāʿī near the end of the fourteenth century. “It is the reader/listener who picks up an idea consistent with the subjective con-

dition of his mind." A verse is like a mirror; having no image of its own, it reveals only the image of the person who looks into it. So also, the literariness and aesthetic quality of a poem are not to be judged simply in terms of its external composition and rhetorical ornaments.

The gap between the Iranian and Indian views of *sabek-i Hind* cannot be explained away simply in terms of the ethnic and geographical location of the critics. Differences in the nature of knowledge of poetry, the definition of poetry, the autonomy and innovativeness of the poet, and issues of communication (*iblaugh*) as well as of reception are also factors. Sâm Mirzâ, a sixteenth-century Safavid prince and a literary critic in Iran, evaluated a verse in terms that were close to those of the eighteenth-century Mughal writer Arzû; on the other hand, an Indian poet, Abû al-Barakât Munîr Lâhorî (d. 1645), was the first to denounce the achievements of the *tâzah-gū* maestros. Munîr, as it happens, was also one of the first Indian writers to explicitly debunk the claims to superiority of the Iranians. Thus, while some elements of India-Iran rivalry exist in this debate, the question is far too complex to be reduced to this dimension alone.

We may also note here that with Munîr’s essay, Persian literary criticism emerged as an independent genre. In Persian, as we know, the evaluation of poetry is generally found in *tazkirahs*, either systematically compiled or, on occasion, developed from notes in the margins of books or notebooks (*bayâz*). Sometimes a political chronicle composed purportedly to extol the achievements of the patron/ruler would end with a section on poets and scholars at the court, together with some comments on their compositions. Lexicographical compilations prepared with the intention of elaborating meanings of words also offered evaluations of verse. After Amîr Khusrau’s *Ghurrât al-Kamâl*, Munîr’s treatise of the mid-seventeenth century, together with the subsequent eighteenth-century literary debates on both the grammar of poetry and the sensitivities of the audience, introduced high standards of literary criticism.

Munîr opens his essay on Mughal poetry with a description of an imagined literary assembly (*mahfîl, majlis*) in which his contemporaries discuss, evaluate, and highlight the qualities, new ideas, and refreshing combinations of words in the poetry of the four great *tâzah-gūs*: ‘Urfî, Tâlib, Zulâlî, and Zuhûrî. The assembly praises their achievements beyond the limits of truth, thus casting aspersions on the masters of the past. Munîr feels constrained to intervene, but he realizes that he would not be listened to; for in his time, he thinks, it is age, wealth, Iranian origins, and aggressiveness, more than ability and knowledge, that carry weight. He therefore occupies a corner seat

176. Maneri 1985: 573. For further discussion of *ibâam*, see Faruqi, chapter 14 in this volume.
178. See Pritchett, chapter 15 in this volume.
in that literary gathering. Still, for the sake of justice he has to demonstrate the weaknesses of the new poetry of the tāzah-gū style. So in his treatise he cites several verses by these four poets to illustrate his point.\(^{179}\)

Munīr’s criticism, even though he tends to couch it in terms of an Iran-India clash, centers on the question of communication, the poet’s rapport with the audience. He argues that some of the words and metaphors these poets use are bizarre and totally unfamiliar, and they thus fail to produce any impact on the reader/listener. Munīr, however, was not quite fair in his attack. Much of his hostility arose from his refusal to regard as legitimate the development of certain new features in the diction of poetry, a point that later in the eighteenth century was well brought out by Ārzū. Munīr stuck to the old use of words and did not subscribe to the belief that a change in grammar was necessary if a poet was to convey new ideas. Ārzū commented:

Much of Munīr’s criticism derives from the fact that he mistakes isti’ārah bil-kiniyāh [submerged or implied metaphor] for izzāfat-i tashbihī [simile]. Indeed, with the later poets, particularly those of Akbar’s time and those who came after and followed them, metaphor assumed a completely new significance; the link between the intended idea and the word used metaphorically became very tenuous. This usage, you may say, is the divider between the styles of the ancient and the later poets. Only those who have mastered this art can appreciate this point. Those among the later poets who do not consider this [change in usage] to be of any significance, continue with the old style. Abū al-Barakāt Munīr imitates Amīr Khusrau and therefore is critical of these four poets.\(^{180}\)

Indeed, even in terms of communication, the Mughal litterateurs and connoisseurs (mardum-i mu’tabar) were already familiar with the new development. However, Ārzū’s position vis-à-vis Munīr is judiciously balanced. He explains that if a certain looseness of expression (sustī, nāhamvāri) is found in the writings of these poets, it is precisely because they attempted to “speak freshly.” However, he does not hesitate to support Munīr as well, declaring on several occasions that “truth is on Munīr’s side” (haq ba jānīb-i Munīr ast).\(^{181}\)

Ārzū was also of the view that a literary style could be appreciated only if it was standardized. Thus he compiled dictionaries and initiated philological discourses not simply to disseminate Persian but to set norms for the literary in Persian. It was also for this reason that when he joins issue with the Iranian poet and critic Shaykh ‘Alī Hazīn, he attaches special value to the authority (sanad) that came from the master poets and writers of the past. He was in favor of innovation and constant change in both time and space, in consonance with the diverse social and literary traditions of the wide world


\(^{181}\) Munīr 1977: 36, editor’s introduction.
of Persian. He therefore wrote a rejoinder to Munir even as the latter targeted Iranian poets.

While Arzu made a strong statement in favor of the continuation of the translocality of Persian, he did not try to establish, as, for instance, Munir did, the place of his own country by simply citing the examples of the major Indian Persian poets or by demonstrating his own achievements. He raised a point of principle by insisting on maintaining a distinction between the spoken language (zabān-i muḥāvarah) and the language of poetry (zabān-i shī’r).

He held that mastery over the zabān-i shī’r required a certain level of literacy and a knowledge of rhymes and rhetoric. In some geographical areas a language close to the literary language might be in use, whereas in other areas of the same literary culture there could be several spoken languages. Thus Iranians were certainly the masters of spoken Persian, and here the Indians might be far behind them because Hindvi, not Persian, was their language of social communication. This did not imply, however, that Indians could not be masters of literary Persian, since Persian grammar and rhetoric were very much a part of the literary pursuits in India. India had long been integrated into the Persian literary world.

Such a theory could have emanated only from Arzu’s observation of the Indian literary scene. In India, he saw masters of Hindī-yī kitābi (Hindi of the book, or Sanskrit) who came from regions having different spoken languages. A person who used Hindi/Urdu as his daily language could have command over Persian literature in the same way as a speaker of Telugu or a Brajbhasha could be a master poet of Sanskrit. It was not only Arzu who illustrated this with his own example; MuḥammadʿAzīm Šabāt, the son of one of Arzu’s contemporaries, Mir ʿAzīl Šabīt, also demonstrated forcefully the command of an Indian over Persian poetry. Šabāt did so, however, as a rejoinder to Ḥazīn’s criticism of his father’s poetry.

Arzu’s position perhaps also owes something to the existing political conditions. In the mid-eighteenth century the Mughal empire had declined and the image of universality that the Mughal state had created for itself was in danger of being shattered. In Arzu’s advocacy of the translocality of Persian there is a desire to relocate himself in the larger literary world. In this process, a glint of transregional Islamic identity often shimmers, but there were many forces working to the contrary, too. Arzu’s major supporter in this was Anand Ram “Mukhlīs,” a well-known Hindu Persian writer of the period. Indeed, it is arguable that instead of emphasizing a pan-Islamic identity, as seen in the writings of the noted eighteenth-century theologian Shāh Valī-Allāh (d. 1762), Arzu was invoking a pan-literary identity. He thus also represented in the In-

---

dian social and political context the tradition of accommodation and assimilation that cut across sectarian and ethnic identities.

Many of the Iranians who settled in India, including the poet ‘Ali Quli Khân Vâlih Dâghistâni (d. 1756), supported Arzû’s position. Vâlih noted the Indian view in his taṣkîrah, Riyâţ al-Shu’ârâ, and sent it to Iran. During the second half of the eighteenth century, Mir Muhammad Muhsin further clarified and elaborated upon this position. On the other hand, some Indians, such as Fatâ ‘Ali Khân Gardezî, wrote about it disapprovingly. As a matter of fact, even some who advocated the translocality of Persian, like Ghulâm ‘Ali Azâd Bilgrâmî, had reservations about Arzû’s position. But the argument of the editor of Arzû’s Tanbih al-Ghafilin—that Siyâlikti Mal Vârastah was among the arch enemies of Arzû’s view—needs reconsideration. Such an interpretation can be sustained only if we take the debate in terms of conflict between the two individuals—Arzû versus Hazin—or between Iran and India. Vârastah seems in fact to have taken the same position as Arzû, making a plea for enforcing that position further. Significantly, Vârastah is said to have studied in Iran for about three decades with the objective of compiling a dictionary of idioms and phrases, which he called Muṣṭalâhâ-i Shu’ârâ. The dictionary does reaffirm Arzû’s view that while speakers of a language may have an edge over the others in zabân-i muhâvarah, for command over zabân-i shi’r it was not necessary to use the language of daily speech. The fact that the compiler of Bahâr-i ‘Ajam—who is clearly not an opponent of this position—incorporates Vârastah’s finding in the second edition of his dictionary indicates that at one level they all held a similar view. It may also be noted that in his dictionary Vârastah supported many definitions with verses from Indian Persian poets.

The claim for India’s distinct share in Persian literature, and for Indian writers’ and poets’ equal mastery over Persian, became muted by the mid-nineteenth century. The backbone of Persian was broken under the British regime, when its status as a language of power was lost as the new rulers aimed to replace it with English and also encouraged the vernaculars. Urdu took the place of Persian. The high spirit of the eighteenth century was gone, and the mastery of Iranians alone, even in zabân-i shi’r, was everywhere conceded. Thus Imâm Bakhsh Şâhba’î (executed in 1857) not only supports Hazin but also proclaims in unqualified terms that for him tradition and authority (sanad) are where the Iranians identify them to be. This amounted to accepting that Iran was not only a country where Persian was a spoken tongue;

it was also the sole normative center of Persian literary culture. Even Ghâlib, the great Urdu/Persian poet of the nineteenth century, had to invent a fictitious Iranian figure, ʿAbd al-Šamad, as his ustâd to establish his credibility in Persian, his claim as a master poet of the language notwithstanding. On the other hand, some Indian masters may have realized that they could thrive in the literary and poetic world only if they wrote and composed in their own zabân-i muḫâvarah. Šahbâʿi’s formula was, at any rate, a pragmatist’s solution for peace among the competing Indian tongues in the face of the overwhelming political power of the rival of all these languages, namely, English:

I sat down to arrive at peace,
    determined to work hard at it.
Look at me, ending the dispute of friends.
Look at the strength of my resolve!
I well knew both sides of the matter,
yet I hoped to achieve peace.
One was with sword; the other, dagger in hand.
I cast my glance on either side.
Were Justice but to open her eyes,
a hundred [hidden] scenes would be revealed.
My heart tilts to neither side,
I place neither one over the other.
O Šahbâʿi! Enough of this tale.
Let silence prevail, and with it, courtesy.188

CONCLUSION

This chapter has traced the career of Indian Persian from its origins in the early medieval period to its last great moments in the opening years of the nineteenth century. The beginnings of Indian Persian closely followed chronologically the establishment of the canon of New Persian elsewhere, and the great literary burst associated with Abû al-Faraj Rûmî and Mašʿîd Saʿd Salmân was separated by only a few decades from writers like Firdausî, whose career was in turn linked to that of the Ghaznavids. The second phase of Persian literature, which may have been conditioned by the Mongol turbulence in the Islamic East, marked the transition from the qaṣīdah form, with its more or less heroic tenor, to forms characterized by a greater suppleness and pathos, and having themes that occupy a softer register than works of the first phase. These changes, which may be seen in Persian literature in general, find direct echoes in the case of Indian Persian, where the great figures of the second phase include Amîr Khusrâu and Ḥasan Dîhlâvî. In both of these early phases there was broad consensus on an inclusive con-

188. Šahbâʿi 1878 (H. 1296): 201–2 (1862 ed.: 162–63).
cept of 'Ajam as embracing the world from Afghanistan to Anatolia. Centers like Lahore, Multan, and Delhi—as well as the great cities of Transoxania, which had also emerged as centers of Persian learning and literature—aspired to participate in this world side by side with the urban centers of the Iranian plateau. Subsequently, this ecumene fragmented, despite the efforts of a number of political powers to reunite it, of which the most noted is probably that of Timur in the last decades of the fourteenth century. In Iran, in response to these trends toward unification a notion of “Iranian-ness” emerged—associated with an assertive sectarianism (Twelver Shiism under the Safavids) and a number of other social and religious movements—that was destined to separate Iran from the rest of the Persian-speaking and Persian-writing world. And in the sixteenth century, Mawarān-nahr and the Ottoman domains turned increasingly toward Turkish.

The case of South Asia stands somewhat apart from that of the rest of the Persian world. In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, vernacular languages (subsumed generally under the category of Hindvi) began to emerge in northern India even within the contexts of power and administration, but the reemergence of Persian under the Mughals in the late sixteenth century put paid to this trend. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, as the pull of the Mughal and provincial Indian courts drew vast numbers of litterateurs, the Mughals emerged as the sole viable alternative to Iran as a center of Persian literature. The production in this period was so enormous and of such quality that commentators in both Safavid and post-Safavid Iran were obliged to pay attention, no matter how much repugnance they may at times have expressed. However, in order to analyze what they termed the “Indian style” (sabk-i Hindī) of the Mughal period, modern Iranian critics (beginning with Malik al-Shurārā Bahār) have adopted a largely chronological framework, arguing that Persian literature was dominated first by the Khūrasānī style, then by the ʻIrāqī style, and finally—in the Mughal period—by the Indian style, which on account of its purportedly “over-ripe” or “baroque” character marked in their eyes the decline of classical Persian poetry. This influential schema has a number of disadvantages, including that it renders the history of Indian Persian in the pre-Mughal period either insignificant or incomprehensible. The argument of this chapter, on the contrary, is that there are several advantages in taking a long view of Indian Persian—from the time of Mašʿūd Saʿd Salmān down to the early nineteenth century—and that the entire development can indeed be viewed as the history of the Indian style. Moreover, the evolution of Indian Persian can best be understood in terms of the synthesis between the themes and aesthetics of Indian vernacular (and perhaps even classical) literatures and the Persian that was practiced in northern India. A clear recognition of this fact can be found as early as the eighteenth century in the remarks of Ghulām ʿAlī Azād Bilgrāmī.
The revival of Persian in the Mughal period must also be understood in terms of the relationship between northern India and Iran concerning the pragmatics of the Persian language. The Mughals seemingly felt culturally inferior in this regard, such that they reinjected Indian Persian with heavy elements drawn from Iran, rather than permitting an autonomous trajectory for Indian Persian in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This may be seen in, among other evidence, the nature of lexicographic practice in the Mughal domains and the attempts at language “reform” and “purification,” from which even such savants as Abū al-Fażl were not entirely exempt. These attempts eventually led to sharp disagreements and debates among writers and critics, of which I have noted an important example concerning the intervention of Munir Lāhori in the mid-seventeenth century. But the controversy reached a crescendo only in the eighteenth century with the debate around the so-called Indian usage (isti‘māl-i Hind). I have argued that crucial elements in these debates includes not only vocabulary and cultural identity, but also deeper aesthetic and even philosophical questions concerning the very nature of poetry itself, as evident in the tagkiraḥs compiled in India in the eighteenth century. Some voices in this debate also seem to have called for the reestablishment of a single world of Persian poetic discourse, implying a nostalgia for the early medieval world of Ḥam. One of the major participants in the debate, Ārzū, stressed the importance of tradition (sanad) in defining what the poetry of his time should aspire to. By the eighteenth century, the elite (shıraf) of the Mughal empire had invested heavily in Persian as a part of their cultural identity, even as Persian invested them with a cosmopolitan character that another language might not have afforded.

The attempt at defining a translocal Persian identity ran parallel to that articulated along lines of religion, save that here the key factor for giving shape to a universe of belonging was the “secular” attribute of language. This is not to argue that Indian Persian was entirely devoid of a religious character, for in India vast compilations, translations, and commentaries on religious questions were made in Persian as well as in Arabic. Yet on the whole, the balance remained on the side of “secular” literature, and it may even be argued that this nonsectarian catholicity had always been written into the very nature of Persian, from the Samanid period on. The character and traditions of Persian thus were well-suited to the demands of kingship in the Indian context, and the two entered into a happy marriage of convenience to a certain degree. Even during the Mughal decline, Indian Persian retained a demonstrable vigor for as long as it was associated with the successor states. The death knell was sounded when Persian, the language of power par excellence, was divorced from power—first under the East India Company and then under direct British rule. Macaulay would allow, in his celebrated Minute of 1835, that “Hindee” might be permitted as “a part of an English educa-
tion," for he did not perceive it as a threat to the scheme of cultural and political transformation he had in mind. On the other hand, he wrote in the same document, "To teach [the Indians] Persian, would be to set up a rival, and as I apprehend, a very unworthy rival, to the English language."189 Persian was unworthy in the aesthetic judgment of Macaulay, but it was still threatening enough to be deliberately set aside. The career of Persian did not, of course, come to an end in India in the late nineteenth century. Yet its divorce from power and the dismantling of the cultural coordinates within which it had functioned for the greater part of the second millennium meant that by the twentieth century it would have a more arcane and secondary character than it had once possessed. Persian became, in these circumstances, the language of Iran, and in India came to be associated above all with a certain register of Urdu.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Bīdīl, Mīrza ʿAbd al-Qādir. 1922 (h. 1341). *Khizānah-i Aḥmirah*. Kanpur: Maktba Muṭjahā. (Also in 2 vols., Navalkishor, 1875.)


The Historical Formation of Indian-English Literature

Vinay Dharwadker

LOCATING INDIAN-ENGLISH LITERATURE IN HISTORY

The first text to be composed in English by an author of Indian origin was The Travels of Dean Mahomet, A Native of Patna in Bengal, Through Several Parts of India, While in the Service of The Honourable The East India Company, Written by Himself, In a Series of Letters to a Friend, which appeared in print in two volumes in Cork, Ireland, in 1794. Din Muhammad had emigrated from India a decade earlier at the age of twenty-five, probably had converted to the established Protestant church in Ireland shortly afterward, and had married a young woman from the Anglo-Irish gentry. At the time he wrote his book, he lived in Cork in comfortable financial circumstances, supporting his wife and children by working as a domestic supervisor on a large estate. His marriage as well as his employment gave him access to the city’s upper-class society, then the most prosperous in Ireland after Dublin’s, thriving on maritime trade with the newer colonies of the British empire. In early 1793, when he advertised a proposal to publish his Travels by subscription, and personally visited prominent families in southern Ireland to raise money for his venture, his social status as an immigrant Indian was sufficiently secure, as Michael H. Fisher remarks, for “a total of 320 people [to entrust] him with a deposit . . . long in advance of the book’s delivery.” The appearance of the two-volume edition the following year evidently enhanced “his personal prestige among the elite of Cork,” and though the work attracted “little lasting attention from the British public,” it contributed at least tangentially to his distinction in later life in England, where

he resettled around 1807 and worked as an entrepreneur until his death in 1851.2

Din Muhammad’s biography and literary career inevitably raise a number of historical, interpretive, and theoretical questions. How did he achieve the proficiency in English and the broad acculturation to British and European ways of life that he possessed when he migrated to Ireland as an adult in the last quarter of the eighteenth century? How did he acquire the sophisticated knowledge of eighteenth-century English literature and print culture that seems to be encoded in his epistolary travel narrative and autobiography set in early British-colonial India? What social, political, and economic conditions in Patna and the Bengal province before his time, and between his birth in 1759 and his departure in 1784, could have prepared him for the transformations he underwent after immigration—a linguistic shift from Bangla, Hindustani, and Persian to English, a religious shift from a mixture of Islam and Hinduism to Protestant Christianity, and an occupational shift from subaltern soldier to household manager, writer, restaurateur, and innovative physical therapist? What role, if any, did his literate Indian multilingualism play in his thinking and writing in English, or in his representations of India to an Anglo-Irish audience at that early date? What were his purposes in composing and publishing his *Travels* with such close attention to detail, why did he choose to cast his material in the epistolary travelogue form, and what larger historical and cultural dynamics did he initiate? Was he merely an anomaly, or was he representative of an entire class of phenomena that had just begun to take shape in his lifetime and was to accumulate a great deal of cultural momentum over the next two centuries? In any case, what made his extraordinary life story between 1759 and 1851 possible in the first place?

Some of these questions can be answered by digging deeper into the particulars of his career and background, but when we do so we discover that the man as well as his published writing can be reconstructed historically only as the direct or indirect causal effects of a number of discrete social, economic, political, and aesthetic processes. That is, the historical agent we now identify as Din Muhammad turns out to be an irreducibly composite figure, different parts of whose life and personality seem to be constituted by rather different contextual determinants. He and his book are as much the products of the history of the Muslim elite that ruled Awadh and Bengal in the late Mughal period, the history of the British army in India during its precolonial and early colonial phases, and the international history of race relations and interracial marriages in the early British empire, as they

---

2. For Din Muhammad’s life and its contexts, consult the preface and chs. 1 and 3 in Fisher 1997; for further details, see Fisher 1996. The quotations here are from Fisher 1997: 137, 179, and 141.
are of the social history of the English language on the subcontinent since the end of the sixteenth century, and the history of British representations of India since the Renaissance. This composite quality is not peculiar to Din Muhammad or his text: when we turn to other Indian-English writers and works, we find that they, too, appear to be dispersed historically across an array of mediating material and cultural phenomena. In one perspective, in fact, the history of Indian-English literature that Din Muhammad inaugurates and anticipates appears to be little more than an aggregate of several histories unconnected to literature, each of which determines a portion of its literary trajectory but also absorbs it into a diversionary turbulence.

Literatures and literary cultures are located in history most often at the intersection of multiple, crisscrossing histories, but the contextual complexity of Indian writing in English may be peculiar to it and to other literatures of its kind. The source of the complexity lies in the double relation of literature to language and of language to its users. The general relation between a literature and its language is identical to the specific relation between a given utterance (or text) and the particular verbal medium in which it is articulated. This relation makes the existence of the language a necessary (but not a sufficient) condition for the existence of the literature, and consequently embeds the history of the writing in the history of the medium of its composition. The nesting of literature in language and of literary history in linguistic history becomes more elaborate, however, when the language in which a particular population composes, circulates, and consumes a literature is historically alien to it. When individuals and groups practice literary production in a language of foreign origin, the history that enables them to do so branches into three distinct histories and three separate necessary conditions. One is the history of the particular modes of contact that link the community to a foreign language and its native users and that comprise the necessary condition for the transfer of the language from native to non-native users; another is the history of the new community’s acquisition of literacy in the foreign language which, by the basic definition of literature as a body of writing, is a prerequisite for any literary activity in it; and the third is the history of the community’s broad acculturation to the ways of life, thought, and expression represented by the foreign language, which also is essential for successful textual production in it. The consequence of the necessity of contact, literacy, and acculturation is that concrete social, political, economic, and aesthetic elements—different from those present in its indigenous environment—actively penetrate the language in its alien

3. Fisher deals with the first three of these histories in detail, and touches on the fifth, in The Travels of Dean Mahomet and The First Indian Author in English; here I complement his work by focusing on the fourth history, namely, the social history of English in India since the late sixteenth century.
setting, even as they affect the history of its use as a medium of communication there, as well as the history of the literature that comes to be embedded in it over time. The history of English in India therefore diverges from its history in England, as well as its history in the other British colonies; the history of Indian writing in English differs from the history of, say, Canadian, Jamaican, Nigerian, or Australian writing in English; and both these histories, in turn, are located at the intersection of several social, economic, political, and cultural histories that are unique to the subcontinent.

Given the diversity of the factors that contribute to the formation of a figure like Din Muhammad, or of the collective and cumulative lines of development that come after him, the early history of English as a language in India proves to be the most cogent and efficient starting point for a comprehensive critical account of Indian writing in English. The arrival, establishment, and spread of this foreign language starting in the late sixteenth century conjointly establish the very possibility of the (future) existence of an Indian literature in English, generate the particular conditions that help to translate the potential into actuality by the end of the eighteenth century, and launch the discursive dynamics that propelled Indian-English literary culture through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At the same time, the social processes that domesticate English in India in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries explain some of the unexpected features of the first published text in the tradition: why, for example, Din Muhammad casts it as a travel narrative, why he chooses the form of “a Series of Letters to a Friend,” or why he is at once a belated imitator and an unprecedented original in the multiple discourses that intermingle around him.

THE ARRIVAL OF ENGLISH IN INDIA
Contrary to untested commonplaces in the existing scholarship on Indian-English literature, English launched its history on the subcontinent two decades before the birth of the East India Company.\(^4\) The first person to think, speak, and write in this language on Indian soil in historical times most likely was Father Thomas Stephens, a Roman Catholic who escaped religious persecution in Elizabethan England by joining the Society of Jesus (based in Rome) in 1578, and persuading his superiors to let him sail for the Jesuit mission in India the following year. Stephens, who came to be known among Indians as Father Estavam, lived in Salsette and Goa for over thirty-five years, studied Indian languages, and composed a mixed Marathi-Konkani version of the Gospel known as the Christian Purana, which was published posthumously in Goa in 1640. Despite his position as the first Englishman on the

subcontinent, however, and even in spite of his scholarly and evangelical interests, Stephens did not produce an English text intended for publication, limiting his output in this language to a series of personal letters to his father in England.5

The first Englishman to compose a text or portions of a text in English in India that appears to have been intended for the print medium was a close contemporary and temporary acquaintance of Stephens. The Company of Merchants of the Levant received its royal letters patent in 1581 and organized an expedition to India two years later, seeking to secure trading concessions from Emperor Jalaluddin Akbar at his capital, Fatehpur Sikri. The expedition team consisted of John Newbury, a merchant and adventurer who served as its leader; Ralph Fitch, also a merchant; William Leedes, a jeweler; and James Story, a painter. The group sailed from London on February 12, 1583, and made its way safely to the Strait of Hormuz, at the mouth of the Persian Gulf. But the Portuguese, who controlled all the sea routes in the Indian Ocean region throughout the sixteenth century, arrested the four Englishmen on the suspicion of being Protestant spies and sent them to be interrogated and imprisoned in Goa, where they arrived on November 29, 1583. The Portuguese officials in the colony brought in their only local Englishman, Stephens, as an interpreter and intermediary, thus setting up the first community of native speakers of English on Indian soil.6

This, however, proved to be short-lived. Story evaded an Inquisition-style treatment by promising to join the Society of Jesus, but refused to do so after his release; he was arrested and deported a few years later, and died in a shipwreck on his way to Europe in 1592. Newbury, Fitch, and Leedes resisted the pressure to join the Jesuits, were released reluctantly by the Portuguese under a deal brokered by Stephens, and escaped from Goa in 1584 or 1585, to travel to Fatehpur Sikri, their original destination. Akbar apparently liked Leedes’ handiwork as a jeweler and employed him at court, but there is no record of his activities after 1585. Newbury presented himself to the emperor and then decided to return to England over land (via Lahore, Persia, and Aleppo or Constantinople) but disappeared in north India without a trace. Fitch journeyed alone eastward across the Gangetic plain to “Bengala and . . . Pegu” and turned southward to Melaka, from where he sailed to arrive safely in England in 1591—the only one of the first five Englishmen in India to reach English shores again.7

Fitch sent letters from the subcontinent to fellow merchants in London, and kept notes or journals during his travels across what are now India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, and Malaysia. On his return to England,

7. See Edwardes 1973: 32–33, 44–45, 77, 77; the quotation is from 77.
he compiled an account of his eight years in the East which, when it appeared in Richard Hakluyt’s *Principal Navigations Voyages Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation* in 1599, became the first comprehensive representation in print of an Englishman’s personal experience of India. While Stephens was little known to his countrymen, Fitch came to be celebrated in his own lifetime as a pioneering explorer in what later became a period classic of English literature, Michael Drayton’s *Poly-Olbion* (1612). Despite the fame, however, Fitch lived in London in relative obscurity after 1606, possibly as a leather merchant, and died there in uncertain circumstances around 1616, the same year that Stephens passed away in India.8

The historical significance of Stephens and Fitch may be disproportionate to their actual accomplishments as writers, but both separately and together they occupy primary positions in two large bodies of writing: British literature about India and Indian literature in English. Besides being the first to use English in its spoken and written forms on the subcontinent, and the first to produce English texts in India that have survived in the historical record, Stephens and Fitch were also the prototypical representatives of two entire classes of historical agents—the missionary and the merchant—that were to dominate the history of British evangelism, trade, conquest, and colonization over the next four and a half centuries. Most vitally, these two men between them launched the enormous discourse that cumulatively represents what may be called “the British experience of India.”

Between the 1580s, when Stephens and Fitch arrived independently in Goa, and the 1780s, when Din Muhammad landed in Cork, the English language accumulated a substantial archive of the Englishman’s personal experience of the subcontinent, recorded in manuscript and print mostly in the three genres that the original missionary and merchant had used: the personal letter from and about India; the more carefully organized epistolary eyewitness account of people, places, and events in the Indian environment; and the formal travel narrative or memoir, frequently emplotted as a quest, structured by certain descriptive, expository, and argumentative motifs, and textured by a series of stylistic conventions.9 In the final decade of the eighteenth century, when Din Muhammad, still a relatively recent immigrant, decided to articulate his own knowledge of India for a primary audience of Anglo-Irish merchants, soldiers, and administrators associated directly or indirectly with the East India Company and its territories on the subcontinent, he positioned it in an intricate relation to the British discourse on India that had disseminated itself in the society around him. He placed


his *Travels* thematically, structurally, and stylistically on a continuum with the genre of the travelogue that dominated that discourse in the eyes of the British reading public of the time, but he reoriented the form rhetorically in order to represent a distinctively “Indian understanding of India.” This reorientation was potentially radical and conflictual, since it sought to correct the misimpressions that were current in the British representations of the subcontinent at the end of the eighteenth century. As a matter of prudence and politic civility, Din Muhammad therefore scripted his text as “a Series of Letters to a Friend,” publicly addressing an idealized Anglo-Irish reader who would be attached and sympathetic to India, would be bound by friendship to an Indian with whom he shared an experience of the colony, would be generously willing to arrive at a common understanding of the complex world of the subcontinent across racial and civilizational differences, and therefore would be capable of looking at that object of experience and knowledge from a new angle of vision without perturbation.  

In doing so, however, Din Muhammad established two rather different connections with the powerful discourse that Stephens and Fitch had launched two hundred years earlier. On the one hand, he started a new discourse about India in the *same* language, generic configuration, and stylistic canon as theirs; on the other hand, however, he articulated his representation of an alternative Indian understanding of India explicitly as a *counter*-discourse to theirs. Din Muhammad’s modulations of tone, form, and detail in his *Travels*, in fact, quietly masked what seems perfectly obvious on hindsight: that the first text in English composed by an Indian was already and fully a countertext, and that it inaugurated a historical dynamics in which a high proportion of subsequent Indian writing in English has been driven by the desire to question, correct, or displace British representations of India.

In retrospect, the principal consequence of this remarkable innovation has been to intensify the energy around the discourse initiated by Stephens and Fitch and, at the same time, to multiply the actors and kinds of actors involved in its production and reproduction. The discourse that cumulatively represents the British experience of India, starting in manuscript around 1579 and entering the domain of print in 1599, can therefore be thought of as having engendered a multipolar, cross-cultural contestation over the power to represent India to a reading public in English. Along one axis, writers of British origin from successive generations after Stephens and Fitch have competed with each other to expand, consolidate, and appropriate the power to represent the British experience of India, individually as well as collectively. Along the other axis, starting with Din Muhammad in 1794, writ-

ers of Indian origin have come to contest the British representations of India on an ongoing basis, developing an equally comprehensive counterdiscourse in English on the Indian understanding of India, which attempts to share, deny, diffuse, arrogate, or redistribute that power. Against this backdrop, the competitive symmetry between Fitch’s and Din Muhammad’s texts—inaugural printed works in their respective discursive formations—is disarmingly exact. Both texts authenticate themselves as inscriptions of personal experience and eyewitness testimony, and both plot heroic, pioneering journeys across much the same terrain on the Gangetic plain in north India, even though they stand almost exactly two centuries apart and view their respective objects with different eyes. This cultural contestation manifests itself in a relatively mild and miniaturized form between Fitch and Din Muhammad, yet it constitutes one of the principal motivations of Indian writing in English throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

ZONES OF INTERRACIAL CONTACT AND ACCULTURATION

The inception of the British discourse about India and the inception of its Indian counterdiscourse are intimately related in time and structure, but the two events are separated by almost two centuries. The interval is so protracted because the second event could occur only after the conditions that made it possible had come into existence and had mobilized the social processes capable of actualizing the potential they predicated. Before an author of Indian origin could compose and publish a recognizably literary text in English, the language had to establish itself as a common medium of communication on the subcontinent, had to become accessible to Indians individually and in groups, had to draw them into its practice of literacy, and had to acculturate them more broadly to the ways of life, thought, and expression it represented. This process proved to be uneven and uncertain: although the East India Company received its first charter the year after Ralph Fitch published his account of the East, during the steady erosion of Portuguese power and the rapid ascendancy of the Dutch in the Indian Ocean in the first half of the seventeenth century, England neither invested sufficiently in the Company, nor granted it the long-term trade monopoly and the consistent Parliamentary support that might have made it financially secure or commercially competitive.\(^\text{12}\) Under these circumstances, the Company’s presence on the subcontinent remained desultory and ineffective for several decades, until the trend reversed itself under Oliver Cromwell’s government in the Interregnum, and then under Charles II after the Restoration. In 1657 Cromwell issued the Company a charter that, in Stanley Wolpert’s words, “in-
augurated the first permanent joint stock subscription, which became the capital base of a newly revitalized company that thus embarked upon its modern phase of corporate immortality; and, after his Restoration in 1660, Charles II empowered the Company “to coin money, to exercise full jurisdiction over all English subjects residing at its factories or forts, and to make war or peace with ‘non-Christian powers’ in India,” so that “The merchant adventurers of London . . . became a virtual state unto themselves, and acted accordingly whenever east of [the Cape of] Good Hope.” The most tangible consequence of this reversal of fortune was that in the last four decades of the seventeenth century—some eighty years after Stephens and Fitch and his companions had landed in Portuguese Goa—more than one hundred British factors came to live and work in India. This established a stable and sizable community of Englishmen on the subcontinent for the first time in history. As a medium of practical communication, English thus came into regular and continuous use in the Indian environment only around 1660, when the East India Company’s factories finally started to prosper along the Malabar and Coromandel coasts. But as it emerged on the margins of India this community of migrant and itinerant English-speakers evolved a cumbersome framework, in which certain types of Indians could interact regularly and closely with Englishmen, their lifestyles, their ideas and principles, and their modes of communication; and from which English could leak out into Indian society, largely under the pressures of survival and practicality, as much as 175 years before the language came to be transmitted through educational institutions sponsored by the colonial government.

The social mechanisms that enabled English to migrate from its community of migrant native speakers to groups of potential Indian users consisted of four primary zones of interracial contact and acculturation. These four zones were first formed between the mid-seventeenth and mid-eighteenth centuries, but they continued to serve as the most common sites of British-Indian interaction afterward, modifying their structures and functions with changing circumstances in the colonial and postcolonial periods, and accommodating the additional space of acculturation that appeared when English education was institutionalized in India in the mid-nineteenth century. Although the primary contact zones were formed on the grid of precolonial British and European trading centers on the subcontinent, they derived their historical efficacy—as causes, enabling conditions, or mediating

13. All the quotations here are from Wolpert 1993: 147.
14. For colonial contact situations in linguistics, see Holm 1988, chs. 1 and 2, and Romaine 1988, ch. 1. In Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation, Mary Louise Pratt argues that European imperialism creates “contact zones” that are “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (Pratt 1992: 4; quoted in Fisher 1997: xxi).
factors—from a form of historical and cultural energy exterior to them that was injected into them by the very agents they ended up shaping or constituting. The energy that actualized contact and acculturation in the zones was located in early-modern literate Indian multilingualism, which manifested itself prior to and outside the new zones of East-West interaction specifically as a product of the high cosmopolitan culture of the Mughal order under the successive regimes of Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan. As I shall suggest later, the Indian acquisition of verbal proficiency, literacy, and acculturation in English before the beginning of colonial rule, as well as the emergence of the first generation of Indian writers in English at the end of the eighteenth century, are primarily the offshoots of literate Indian multilingualism in motion in the spaces of interracial contact, which may be described as follows.

The Zone of Employment

From the beginning, as Bernard S. Cohn observes, “the business of the company was conducted through Indian middlemen and brokers.” Starting around 1660, hundreds of literate Indians converged on the British factories to serve a range of functions, from in-house record keeping and translation under the supervision of the Company’s writers and factors, to interpretation and commercial negotiation alongside the factors and junior merchants in the urban and rural markets. These Indians belonged to a loosely defined late-Mughal class of protoprofessionals called dubhāsīs, whose history from the mid-seventeenth century onward is summarized aptly by Burton Stein:

Indian speakers of the English language appeared very early in the colonial encounter; they were called dubashis (literally, those with two languages) in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century world of small European trade centres, and had successively learned Portuguese, Dutch, French and English as before them others had learned Persian in order to serve [the] Mughals. The East India Company in Madras, and later in Calcutta and Bombay, employed them as intermediaries to link Company officials with the markets that they sought to control. To the dubashis were later added a larger group of English speakers who served in the first of the territories which the Company acquired by purchase in Bengal and Madras. Formal schooling played little part in the acquisition of English and other European languages; instruction was obtained from family elders who often had menial jobs with the Europeans. Indeed, the numerous clerks of the East India Company’s commercial, and later legal and

17. On the Company’s writers, factors, and junior and senior merchants, see Marshall 1976: 10–11.
political, offices learned their jobs by sitting with relatives who were employed by the Company. They learned to write and keep the records without pay until they were proficient enough to be employed themselves. English-medium schools came later, and enrollments there increased rapidly during the later nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{18}

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the \textit{dubhāśis} came to occupy two specific types of position with their British employers. One was that of the literate multilingual clerk-interpreter, who mediated between Englishmen, on one side, and Indians in the marketplace and in the Mughal bureaucracy, on the other; and who used English (and possibly Portuguese) with the former and Persian or an Indian language with the latter, handling documents in roman, Persian-Arabic, and one or more Indian scripts. The other type of position involved serving an individual Company official as a personal agent or manager, in which case, as William Bolts put it in 1772, a \textit{dubhāśi} was at once "interpreter, head book-keeper, head secretary, head broker, the supplier of cash and cash keeper and in general also secret keeper."\textsuperscript{19}

While the clerical \textit{dubhāśis} remained anonymously in the historical background, many of the personal \textit{dubhāśis} (commonly called \textit{baniyās}, banyans, or banians in colonial Bengal) became prominent and powerful \textit{compradors}, in the original Portuguese sense of this word. As P.J. Marshall reminds us:

\begin{quote}
All Europeans of any consequence employed banians. Nominally their status was servile and they performed some menial tasks, such as managing their master’s household and his personal spending. But the banian of a prominent European was a man to be reckoned with. The Governor’s banian presided over a court in Calcutta. Men like Gokul Ghosal [\textit{a kulīn} Brahman], banian to Harry Verelst, or Cantu babu [Krishna Kanta Nandy], banian to Warren Hastings, were among the richest and most influential members of the Indian community in Calcutta.\textsuperscript{20}
\end{quote}

While widespread criticism of the corruption of Company officials and their \textit{dubhāśis} and \textit{baniyās} (when involved together in private trade) led Governors-General Cornwallis and Wellesley to dismantle the institution of the personal agent at the end of the eighteenth century, the consolidation of Orientalism as an essential part of the colonial state under Warren Hastings created a third type of position for \textit{dubhāśis}. In this case, literate multilingual Indians who had been trained as scholars in the major subcontinental styles of learning were hired as assistants to colonial administrator-scholars and Orientalist scholars, serving as their so-called native informants in the Persian, Sanskrit, Dravidian, and middle and modern Indo-Aryan tradi-

\textsuperscript{20} See Marshall 1976: 45.
In the course of the eighteenth century, these three types of _dubhāsīs_—the clerk-interpreter, the personal manager, and the indigenous scholar—became the principal embodiments of Indian multilingualism in motion inside the zone of employment with the British. They were the first Indians to become literate in English.

From the early eighteenth century onward, Indians also sought and found employment with the British in two other domains. One comprised domestic service in British households: after about 1725, it became socially obligatory for Englishmen in India to maintain large domestic retinues in the notorious Nabob style, and this led to the partial Anglicization of a significant segment of Indian society. The other domain was defined by service in the Company’s army, which had covenanted English officers and an assortment of European, African, and Asian soldiers in subaltern ranks, including many lower-class men from Britain and steadily increasing numbers of Indians from various social ranks. In the nineteenth century the British army began to recruit Indians heavily from the lower Hindu castes (including untouchables), from communities converted to Islam and Christianity, from other religious groups (especially the Sikhs), and from marginalized ethnic communities (for example, the Gurkhas of Nepal); but around the mid-eighteenth century it was still seeking and accepting Muslim soldiers from the Mughal army, Hindu Kshatriyas, and first- and second-generation Anglo-Indian _mestizos_, many of whom came from literate, well-placed families and communities. The Anglo-centric ethos and discipline of the Company’s army quite rigorously Anglicized its subaltern soldiers and its large population of camp followers, thereby transmitting English to several additional segments of Indian society.

Even around the beginning of the colonial period, this zone of acculturation was part of a much larger sphere of employment in which Indians worked for various European trading companies and—on a much smaller and more selective scale by the end of the eighteenth century—certain types of Englishmen and Europeans worked for the so-called Indian princes and princely states. The specific internal structure of the zone of employment changed as the Company’s rule entered its high colonial phase after 1818—and especially after 1835, when the _dubhāsīs_ gave way to modern middle-class Indian professionals with formal English education. As I show later, this zone has undergone a massive transformation after decolonization and within the postcolonial diaspora. Throughout its history, however, the zone of employment has remained important because, starting in the mid-seventeenth cen-

---

21. Consult Cohn 1990, chs. 15 and 20; also see Cohn 1987.
tury, it brought significant numbers of Indians in close daily contact with the British, exposed literate and multilingual Indians to the English language, and required them to learn to speak, read, and write it for practical purposes. Within the first one hundred years of its existence, this zone had successfully acculturated three or four generations of Indians “on the job.” The earliest Indian writers in English—Din Muhammad, C.V. Boriah, and Rammohun Roy—encountered and learned to speak English, acquired their English literacy, and adapted themselves to British and European culture in the course of their employment, using the resources they already possessed as literate Indian multilinguals.

The Zone of Marriage and Family
Although the Company’s first charters excluded women inhabitants from its factories, Englishwomen started to travel to the subcontinent as early as 1617. Over the rest of the seventeenth century, a total of several hundred Englishwomen came out to India for various reasons, but at any given moment the number of Englishmen exceeded the number of Englishwomen on the subcontinent by a factor of many.25 As the Church prohibited Christians from marrying non-Christians, Englishmen made ingenious alternative arrangements under these constraints. Some married European women of other nationalities; some married the widows or daughters of Portuguese men, since the widows—mostly women of Hindu origin—were already converts to Christianity, and the daughters were Luso-Indians raised as Christians; some took Indian wives, who had to convert to Christianity before the marriages could be solemnized; and some—willing to live with the social consequences of their decisions—took Indian mistresses, who did not have to be subjected to conversion.26 Within and outside marriage, Englishmen had many children by Indian women: C.A. Bayly estimates that by 1788 there were more than 11,000 mestizos living in the British coastal territories.27 Most of the children of these interracial marriages and liaisons were baptized and brought up as Christians, and especially because Indian communities tended to cast out converts to Christianity as well as those who married across racial boundaries, the Anglo-Indian mestizos identified themselves strongly with the white, European Christian community on the subcontinent. From early in the eighteenth century Englishmen secured distinct advantages for their Anglo-Indian children, who received preferential treatment, for example, in em-

27. See Bayly 1988: 70.
ployment with the Company’s army. In effect, at this level, the logic of racial intermixture in India in the eighteenth century reversed what had evolved by that time in the New World, where interracial children (fathered by white slave owners on black slave girls) were invariably classified as blacks and hence were subject to slavery.

Starting in the late seventeenth century, the zone of interracial marriage and family Anglicized a large number of Indian women, and sometimes also their original families. Anglo-Indian children usually grew up with English (the father tongue) as their first language at home, and often with an Indian language (the mother tongue) as a second, frequently pidginized and creolized, medium of communication. As Christian children, they were nurtured in a well-defined though heterogeneous (and internally divided) community of British, European, Eurasian, and Indian Christians. They shared a literate Anglocentric culture with their parents and, like their Indian mothers, they were deeply acculturated to Western ways of life, thought, and expression.

The zone of marriage and family was part of a larger sphere of East-West racial mixtures on the subcontinent, which included the much more extensive Luso-Indian community in Portuguese India, and the much smaller Franco-Indian and Dutch-Ceylonese creole communities in south India and Sri Lanka. The zone became culturally problematic in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as racial lines hardened in colonial India, numerous British families came out to live on the subcontinent, and more British women—like Adela Quested in E. M. Forster’s *A Passage to India*—traveled to the colony to seek out and marry rich and powerful young Englishmen.

The zone was also structured by a gender asymmetry from the start: marriages and liaisons between Englishmen and native or *mestizo* women were far more acceptable than relationships with the gender identities interchanged. Starting in the eighteenth century, some Indian and *mestizo* men did marry white women, but usually at a great cost on the European as well as the Indian side. Although Indian princes and upper-class and upper-caste men had more access to European women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly within Europe itself, the resistance to such relationships remained high until the diaspora partially dismantled it after Independence.

33. For instances, consult Fisher 1996: 240 and 248–51; also see Cohn 1990: 529 and 540.
The significance of the zone of interracial marriage and family is that it quickly became a site of literate Anglicization on the fringes of Indian society and produced a number of important Indian-English writers, or at least affected the lives and careers of several figures in the tradition, from the earliest historical phase. Din Muhammad’s marriage to Jane Daly in Cork in 1786 was crucial to his formation as a writer; Henry Derozio, the first poet in Indian-English literature, was the son of a Luso-Indian father and an English mother, which contributed directly to his remarkable career; and Michael Madhusudan Dutt, a paradigmatic nineteenth-century figure, first married a Scottish woman and then a Frenchwoman, both of whom influenced his writing.34 Equally importantly, this zone has produced a unique group of Indian-English poets and prose writers in the post-Independence period which, among others, includes Anita Desai, Dom Moraes, Aubrey Menen, Ruskin Bond, Eunice de Souza, Melanie Silgado, Charmayne D’Souza, Santan Rodrigues, and Raul D’Gama Rose.35

**The Zone of Religious Conversion**

The zone of religious conversion may be taken to define the space of the conversion of Indians to Christianity and the general influence of Christian missionaries on Indian society. This zone appeared historically at an early date: the evangelical work of Catholic missions in Portuguese India began around the turn of the sixteenth century, and that of Protestant missions (initially from England and Holland) commenced elsewhere on the subcontinent in the seventeenth century.36 However, since Christian evangelism and conversions induced disturbances and even violent reactions in Indian society, the directors and stockholders of the East India Company (together with the Crown and Parliament) prohibited missionary activity in the Company’s territories, removing the stricture only in 1813. During the long period of exclusion, British missionaries operated out of the territories of other European powers on the subcontinent: in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, for example, the Serampore Baptist Mission survived under the protection of a Danish mission in a small pocket in Srirampur, north of Calcutta. After the revision and renewal of the Company’s charter in 1813, British missionaries flourished in colonial India, with the Bishop of Calcutta...
representing the high Anglican church and administering a bishopric that extended initially from South Africa to Australia.  

Conversion to Christianity for Indians meant Europeanization in language, literacy in at least one European language, and a broad acculturation to Western ways of life. In Portuguese Goa, conversion implied fluency and literacy in Portuguese (and usually, given Portuguese educational policy, also in Spanish and French), whereas in British India it frequently entailed a literate Anglicization. This relation of conversion to language acquisition is permanently foreshadowed and encoded in the inaugural moment of the history of Indian print culture: the world’s first printed book containing a text in an Indian language, the *Cartilha* of 1554, published in Lisbon, contains a translation of scripture into Thamiz (a Dravidian language proximate to Tamil) prepared by three literate bilingual Indian converts to Roman Catholicism, who were able to participate in the project (supervised by a European Jesuit) because they had already acquired literacy in Portuguese. In terms of proportions of colonially subjugated populations, Christianization in British India was less extensive than in Portuguese India, since Portuguese state policies and church policies were much more coercive throughout—including, as they did, the introduction of the Inquisition into Goa in 1560 and its application to Goan Catholics as late as 1812. Nevertheless, conversion in British India exercised a powerful force on some seven million converts in all, especially in relation to linguistic and cultural Anglicization: when placed on a continuum with the zone of interracial marriage and family, the zone of conversion produced a high proportion of the major Indian-English writers of the nineteenth century, from Henry Derozio and Michael Madhusudan Dutt to Govin Chunder Dutt, his brother Girish, and his daughters Toru and Aru (the first two Indian women poets in English), to Pandita Ramabai Saraswati (the first Indian woman prose writer in English). The rate of conversion decreased in the twentieth century, but this zone has continued to produce Indian-English writers, Jayanta Mahapatra and Deba Patnaik being two intriguing instances in recent times.

Even when they did not convert Indians to Christianity, missionaries from England, Scotland, Ireland, and America had a strong, long-term effect on the transmission of the English language and its culture to Indians. In a specific case, such as Rammohun Roy’s, his Unitarian supporters and cor-

---

39. See Dharwadker 1997; also consult Kesavan 1985: 16.
40. This is discussed in Russell-Wood 1992: 188.
respondents—in Calcutta, Great Britain, and the United States—shaped many aspects of his religious thought, social activism, and polemical writing in English, Bangla, and Persian. More generally, despite the restrictions imposed on them, Christian-missionary schools and colleges have been the most influential English-medium institutions in the nongovernmental sector of Indian education in the colonial and also the postcolonial periods. As in the nineteenth century, a high proportion of Indian-English writers in the twentieth century were educated at or professionally associated with English-medium missionary institutions, the notable examples including Bharati Mukherjee (Loreto Convent, Calcutta), Eunice de Souza and Adil Jussawalla (St. Xavier College, Bombay), and Amitav Ghosh, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Shashi Tharoor, I. Allan Sealy, Mukul Kesavan, and Makarand Paranjape (St. Stephen’s College, Delhi). As I argue later, in spite of its historical-cultural primacy in the diffusion of English in India and the formation of Indian-English literary culture, the zone of conversion and Christian influence underwent a perceptible internal reversal in the twentieth century.

The Zone of Friendship and Social Relations

As a space of contact and acculturation, the zone of friendship emerged around the second quarter of the eighteenth century, when English and Indian men appear to have formed their first consequential personal relationships, not through voluntary association between equals but through mutual dependence and indebtedness, both literally and metaphorically, on the fuzzy edges of the zone of employment. If some of the closest social bonds in the precolonial period were between young Company officials and their personal dubhais, in the early colonial period they were between Orientalist administrator-scholars and missionary-scholars and their Indian assistants and collaborators. Starting in the late eighteenth century, British-Indian friendships based on mutual respect, depth of personal feeling and commitment, shared attitudes, and common intellectual and artistic interests were founded in a variety of contexts: the colonial literary examples include Din Muhammad, Godfrey Evans Baker, and William A. Baille; Rammohun Roy, William Adam, Lant Carpenter, William Ellery Channing, and Joseph Tuckerman; Henry Derozio, David Drummond, and John Grant; Pandita


43. On Mukherjee, for example, see Alam 1996; on de Souza, see King 1992, chs. 8 and 9, and de Souza 1997: 37–47; on Jussawalla, see King 1992, ch. 15; on Ghosh, Sealy, and Tharoor, see Nelson 1993: 137–45, 385–90, and 433–37.

44. A number of such relationships are described in Marshall 1976, and Cohn 1987.
British-Indian friendships expanded greatly and became immensely complicated by the early twentieth century: the networks of interracial contacts surrounding Rabindranath Tagore, Mohandas Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, E.M. Forster, and C.F. Andrews between 1910 and 1940, for example, indicate the pivotal role that this zone has played in the development of prose in English in relation to India. In all such cases, friendships and social relations across racial and national boundaries vitalized the writers, stimulated their literary activities and intellectual growth, increased their degree of acculturation, and contributed directly to their readerships and reputations. This zone has a literary dimension in itself, in that its actuality appears to contradict the bleak perspectives on East-West friendship that have been thematized in British as well as Indian writing about India in the twentieth century.

As the foregoing descriptions suggest, in their formative period, between about 1660 and 1760, each of the four primary contact zones drew certain types of Indians into its ambit, introduced them to the English language, enabled them to Anglicize themselves in oral and written communication, exposed them to Western cultures at close and even intimate range, and provided them with the space necessary for a life-transforming acculturation. The crucial dynamic factor in the initial diffusion of English was the prior literate bilingualism or multilingualism of many of its Indian participants: this provided them with the resources to add another language to their repertoire, even in the absence of systematic training. Without this active literate Indian multilingualism, the contact zones could not have introduced English into specific segments of Indian society: the necessity of this condition is evident from the failure of these zones to induce productive literacy in English among those groups that did not possess a prior literate Indian bilingualism. The earliest historical impact of the primary contact zones was to produce the first Anglicized Indians by the turn of the eighteenth century, well before the beginning of colonial rule; as I argue in what follows, the effect of these zones almost a century later was to produce the first Indian writers in English.

46. On Tagore see, for instance, Thompson 1993; on Tagore as well as Andrews, see Trivedi 1989; on Gandhi and Nehru, respectively, see Nanda [1958] 1981, and Gopal 1989; on Forster, consult Furbank 1977.
47. Refer, for example, to the texts by Kipling, Forster, and Rao cited in note 48.
48. Spear notes that the Hindus among the Indian converts to Christianity were “drawn mainly from the lower castes” ([1965] 1979: 164) and so, by implication, would lack literacy in an Indian language. For a different ambiguation of the link between literacy and Christianization among low-caste Hindu converts in early-nineteenth-century north India, see Bhabha 1994, ch. 6.
The first three Indian writers in English—each of whom, at different historiographical moments, has been celebrated as the earliest author in the tradition—entered the history of this literature at the intersection of diverse historical processes. We now know that the earliest of these writers was Din Muhammad who, as Michael H. Fisher tells us, was born in 1759 into a family that belonged to the “Muslim service elite of Patna,” with kinship ties to the Nawabs who ruled Bengal and Bihar in the third quarter of the eighteenth century, and with relatives at the provincial court in Murshidabad. The family belonged to the landholding class and on the paternal side probably was descended from Indian converts to Islam, while on the maternal side it had “strong links to the indigenous Brahmanic-Hindu culture of the Ganges plain.” Din Muhammad grew up in a household that preserved both sides of its religious-cultural heritage; he is likely to have been bilingual in Bangla and Hindustani (or a speech variety of the Patna region), and he knew Persian and learned either the Nagari or the Bangla script at an early age.49

Shortly before Din Muhammad was born, his father joined the Indian ranks of the East India Company’s Bengal Army, and he followed his father and his elder brother when, as Fisher notes, “At age eleven, he attached himself to a teenage Anglo-Irish patron: Ensign Godfrey Evan Baker.” Baker had just arrived in India from Cork, where his father, a prospering Anglo-Irish merchant, had recently been elected mayor of the city. He paid Din Muhammad’s mother four hundred rupees (a large lump sum, under the circumstances) for the boy’s services as a camp follower. Over the next fifteen years in the Bengal Army, the boy “rose from camp follower to . . . market master and then subaltern officer [in the Indian corps] as Baker rose [from cadet to lieutenant and then] to his captaincy and independent command” in the English corps.50 It is likely that over this long and close personal association with Baker, as also with other British and European officers and soldiers in the field of military operations, Din Muhammad acquired sufficiently strong skills in speaking, reading, and writing English to serve his patron exceptionally well. The bond between the two men was such that in 1784, at the age of twenty-five, Din Muhammad left India with Baker and emigrated to Ireland, living in Cork and working for the Baker family on its prosperous estate for the next twenty-three years. For several months after his arrival, he attended a school to improve his spoken and written English, but his brief formal education was interrupted permanently when he met a young, middle-class Anglo-Irish student named Jane Daly. They fell in love, eloped,
and were married in 1786; the marriage lasted until Jane’s death in 1850. About six years after the wedding Din started to plan and write his *Travels*, and he spent 1793–1794 raising subscriptions and putting his manuscript through the press personally. About thirteen years after the book’s publication, he and Jane moved with their children to London to begin a new, independent life, which makes a fascinating cultural narrative of its own. What is clear from the first half of his life story, however, is that Din Muhammad was formed as a writer in a foreign language by the close contact between mid-eighteenth-century literate Indian bilingual culture and British culture, first in the zones of military service and personal friendship on the sub-continent, and subsequently in the zones of interracial marriage, domestic employment, social relations, and conversion to Christianity. The formal schooling in spoken and written English that he received in Cork for several months in or around his twenty-sixth year (when he was placed among much younger students), obviously contributed to his later literary and entrepreneurial success, but it primarily sharpened the Anglicized linguistic and social skills that he had already acquired in his teens in India.

Like Din Muhammad, both Cavelli Venkata Boriah—whom K. R. Srinivas Iyengar and M. K. Naik, writing in the 1970s and 1980s, place at the chronological beginning of Indian writing in English in the first decade of the nineteenth century—and Rammohun Roy—whom virtually all scholars locate at the tripartite beginning of Indian-English literature, modern Indian literature as a whole, and Indian modernity itself—also were formed as writers in the networks linking indigenous multilingual literacy and specific zones of East-West acculturation. Boriah was a dubhāṣa in the scholar-translator tradition who joined the new Orientalist bureaucracy in the Madras Presidency in the late 1790s, becoming a field assistant to Colonel Colin Mackenzie, later the Company’s first surveyor-general. In Naik’s words, Boriah was “A master of a number of languages including Sanskrit, Persian, Hindustani and English,” whom Mackenzie praised as “a youth of the quickest genius and disposition.” Boriah had studied mathematics, geography, and astronomy, and wrote poetry in his mother tongue, Telugu; for the Company, he “discovered ancient coins and deciphered old inscriptions” and gathered ethnographic information from other Indians, as he did for his “Account of the Jains” (written around 1803). He belonged to a literate, multilingual Vaiṣṇava Brahman group associated with administration that probably had emigrated from the Andhra region to Tamilnadu in the late Mughal period, and he learned English in a relatively short time from contact with English speakers in the colonial workplace—outside the framework of institutional English education. The force of literate multilingualism in

---

51. See Fisher’s account in Fisher 1996, chs. 6 and 7.
52. The quoted passages are from Naik 1982: 13.
Boriah’s short life could not have been accidental: many years after his “Account of the Jains” was published posthumously, with Mackenzie’s help, in *Asiatic Researches* in London in 1809, his elder brother, Cavelli Venkata Ramaswami, produced two pioneering works in English. One was a rendering of Arašanipala Veṅkaṭadhiśvarin’s early-seventeenth-century Sanskrit poem, *Viśvagunadarśana*, probably the first literary translation into English by an Indian to enter print (in 1825); the other was an account of more than one hundred Telugu, Tamil, Marathi, and Sanskrit poets of different periods in *Biographical Sketches of the Dekkan Poets* (1829), the first Indian-English work of literary biography, most likely modeled on Samuel Johnson’s *Lives of the English Poets* (1779–1781).

Rammohun Roy was the most accomplished of the early Indian-English writers, but his background can be summarized more easily than either Din Muhammad’s or Boriah’s because it is more familiar. Born in 1772 into a *kulin* Brahman family of Bengal, he learned Persian at home from a *muni* hired as a tutor, and probably also in Patna. As Stephen Hay observes:

His mother’s family, who were shaktas devoted to goddess-worship, insisted he steep himself as well in Sanskrit learning at Banaras, the Hindus’ most sacred city. Rammohun apparently preferred Persian to Sanskrit culture, and with it the Islamic rejection of the use of images in worship. At sixteen he clashed with his parents over the practice of image worship. His father may have ordered him out of the house, for he then set off on his own, traveling up into Bhutan or Tibet, where he both studied the Tibetan form of Buddhism and angered its monks by criticizing their worship of lamas.

In the late 1790s, Rammohun “began acquiring property in land and lending money to young British civil servants,” and in 1804 he joined the Indian staff of the Company’s Revenue Department, thus playing two roles that were strongly associated with the *dubhāsīs* of the late eighteenth century. He acquired most of his knowledge of the English language and of European culture “on the job” in the Company, particularly between 1809 and 1814, when he was posted in Rangpur, in northern Bengal, as the assistant to a British revenue officer, John Digby. As Hay notes concerning Roy, “By 1815, when he was in his early forties, he had grown wealthy enough to retire from his post in the revenue service and to settle in Calcutta,” where he began his

---

54. The word *kulin* describes a family or clan ranked high in the social and ritual hierarchy; a *muni*, in this context, is a scholarly teacher of Persian and Urdu; *sāktas* are Śaiva devotees of Śakti, Devī, Kālī, or Durgā, often in a left-handed Tantric tradition; and a *lāma*, literally “superior one” in Tibetan, is an experienced spiritual preceptor who guides initiates in Vajrayāna Buddhism (on *lāma*, see Harvey 1990: 134 and 218). The quotation is from Hay 1988: 15.
later multidimensional career as a writer and reformer. During the period from 1815 to 1833, Roy worked simultaneously in the Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, Bangla, and English intellectual traditions, learned Hebrew (from a Jewish tutor in Calcutta) as well as Greek, and published his own texts in English, Bangla, and Persian and, occasionally, in Sanskrit and Hindustani. Rammohun Roy was a product—in the strongest, most positive sense of this term—of the complex interactions between a literate, multilingual Indian culture and the English language and European print culture. More than anyone in the tradition before or after him, he embodied the full logic of multilingual literacy at the intersection of multiple cultures—Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Christian, Indian, Anglo-European—in his life as well as his writing. He composed his first published work, *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin* (A defense of monotheism, 1803) in Persian, with a preface in Arabic; he most likely also wrote the anonymous *Jawaj-e-Tuhfat-ul Muwahhidin* (A response regarding a defense of monotheism, c. 1820), a Persian rejoinder to Zoroastrian attacks on the earlier work. Starting in 1815, he published nearly thirty major texts in Bangla, including *Vedanta Grantha* and *Vedanta Sār* (The book of Vedanta; The essence of Vedanta; both 1815), accounts of Upanishadic thought; Bangla translations of five Upaniṣads—the *Kena* and *Īśā* (both 1816), the *Kathā* and *Māṇḍūkya* (both 1817) and the *Mundaka* (1819); *Bhāṭṭachāryer Sahit Bicār* (Discussions with Brahmans, 1817) and *Caritī Praśner Uṭṭar* (Answers to four questions, 1822), important responses to orthodox Brahman criticism of his interpretation of the Upaniṣads; *Gosvāmīr Sahit Bicār* (Discussions with orthodox Vaishnava Brahmans, 1818), an attack on Hindu polytheism and image worship; and *Sahamaran Bīṣaye Prabartak o Nibartak Sambād* (A debate, pro and con, on the subject of sati, 1818) and *Sahamaran Bīṣaye Prabartak Nibartak Dvitiya Sambād* (The second debate, pro and con, on the subject of sati, 1819), two critiques in dialogue form. Starting in 1816, he published an equally diverse series of English texts, which included translations of three Upaniṣads: the *Kena* and *Īśā* (both 1816) and the *Mundaka* (1819); *Translation of an Abridgement to the Vedanta and A Defence of Hindu Theism, in Reply to the Attack of an Advocate for Idolatry at Madras* (both 1817), the latter long regarded as the first original composition in English by an Indian; *Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness* (1820) which, in Sisir Kumar Das’s understatement, started “a serious debate on theological issues between Rammohun and the Christian missionaries,” especially the Baptists.

at Srirampur; and *Exposition of the Practical Operation of Judicial and Revenue Systems of India* (1831), which demonstrated that by 1825, the British had already repatriated a total of about 100 million pounds from India to England.\footnote{On the English texts, refer to Srinivasa Iyengar 1973: 30–34; Naik 1982: 14–18; Lal 1991: 3708–9; and Tagore 1966: 14–30, respectively. The quotation is from Das 1991: 442. Roy’s *Exposition* is discussed in Tagore 1966: 42.}

Din Muhammad, Boriah, and Roy entered the primary contact zones with multilingualism and literacy already at their disposal, but the specific linguistic and cultural resources each brought into play were different and had strikingly divergent textual outcomes. What the three men had in common were a remarkable self-assurance in their use of the English language, an equally notable control over their materials and themes, and complex authorial intentions or designs embedded in carefully crafted verbal textures, with multiple rhetorical orientations toward projected audiences. They further shared a characteristic that differentiated them prospectively, as a group, from their Indian successors in English, who entered the print medium after the first quarter of the nineteenth century: they produced primarily instrumental prose texts designed to have definite social or political effects. All three had well-defined literary skills and interests, but they subordinated the aesthetic dimension of their English writing to its social instrumentality.\footnote{All three writers were also poets. Din Muhammad wrote some verses in English; see Fisher 1997: 136. On Boriah, see Naik 1982: 13. On Rammohun’s Bangla poetry, see Tagore 1966: 32, and Lal 1991: 3708; also consult Hay 1988: 34.}

What distinguished them most clearly from each other were their particular proportions and combinations of literariness and pragmatism, their chosen genres and their inflections of existing generic conventions, and their self-positionings within the larger discursive dynamics of writing in the English language. Din Muhammad’s writing was primarily in the narrative and expository modes, whereas much of Roy’s work in English combined exposition with polemical argument on controversial social, economic, political, historical, and religious issues. Both Din Muhammad’s *Travels* and Boriah’s “Account of the Jains” belonged to the discourse that represents Indian understandings of India in English and stood in a contestatory relation to the British discourse on India, but neither text was aggressively argumentative. In contrast, Roy’s works not only contested certain British (and Christian) representations of India, but also complicated the Indian counterculture internally by using it to contest conservative Indian understandings of India, thereby propelling modern Indian writing, in English as well as other languages, into its overtly reformist mode. In this sense, Din Muhammad’s and Boriah’s shared purpose was to produce an *epistemological change* in relation to the object of knowledge called “India” without resorting overtly to
social or political activism, whereas Roy’s conscious (and consciously disturbing) intention was to initiate a change—in relation to India, in relation to the West, and within India itself—that was at once epistemological, social, political, and religious.

Between them, Din Muhammad, Boriah, and Roy thus constructed an elementary form of the dynamics of critique, countercritique, and self-reflexive critique that became central to Indian-English literary culture after them. They were able to do so because they entered the field of discourse in English from cultural locations outside the circumference of British colonial control or domination: their prior immersion in the Indian multilingual and multicultural world of literacy in Bangla, Hindustani, Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit, Telugu, and Tamil, together with a knowledge of Islam, Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism in practice, introduced powerful precolonial and noncolonial elements into their interactions in specific contact zones and into their constructions of discourse in English. In fact, the literate Indian multilingualism that these three writers carried into the contact zones carved out a permanent aperture inside the discursive formation of Indian-English literature through which the precolonial, the noncolonial, and the colonial (and, most recently, the postcolonial) have constantly leaked into each other, differentiating this body of writing from British literature about India. Given the fact that this aperture was already open inside the earliest Indian-English texts, it is possible to maintain that causally, Indian writing in English cannot be solely or entirely a colonial phenomenon. The strong form of this thesis would be that the cultural contestation between Indian and British representations of India, and within Indian-English literature itself, is not merely a case of “Western stimulus and Indian response”; that Indian writing in English is not homogeneously a literature of complicity, collaboration, or mimicry; and that the originality of its texts, particularly in the twentieth century, cannot be predicted by, or predicated on, its supposed genesis in the mind-body of colonialism.

THE INVENTORS OF INDIAN-ENGLISH AESTHETICS

The Indian-English writers who entered print for the first time in the 1820s and 1830s, together with most of their successors, were markedly different from the first three writers in the tradition. The new writers, who define a long nineteenth century from about 1825 to 1925, collectively started a process of inventing Indian literariness in English in a highly aestheticized and self-conscious form, and continued it through several phases until the arrival of the modernist and Progressive Writers’ movements in the last two decades of the colonial period. As some of these writers and their admirers attest, their goal most often was to compose texts that emphasized “beauty of expression and sentiment,” and that produced an experience of linguis-
tic, imaginative, and intellectual pleasure and satisfaction in their readers.  

Such a shift from instrumental writing to aestheticized expression took place in concrete and often unique circumstances, however, and therefore can be understood only through the details of their biographies and texts. Five Indian-English writers of the long nineteenth century—Henry Derozio, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Toru Dutt, Manmohan Ghose, and Sarojini Naidu—constitute particularly instructive examples, but I shall discuss only the first two here.

Chronologically, the earliest aesthetic innovator was Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, whose father, Francis Derozio, was Luso-Indian and whose mother, Sophia Johnson, was English, the sister of an indigo planter in Bhagalpur, Bihar. In 1815, at the age of six, Henry entered the Dhurmtollah Academy, a strictly secular school operated by a Scottish poet and scholar named David Drummond, and over the next seven years or so he “read widely in English literature” under the latter’s guidance.

Around 1823, however, Derozio was “obliged to leave school,” and he worked as a clerk at a British mercantile firm in Calcutta for two years before his uncle, Arthur Johnson, offered him more congenial employment on the indigo estate in Bhagalpur. But Derozio soon returned to Calcutta, where he worked briefly as an assistant to John Grant, a classical scholar and the influential editor of The Indian Gazette, who had been impressed by the boy’s accomplishments at Drummond’s school and had printed some of his early Bhagalpur poems in the Gazette. In 1826, in J. B. Alphonso-Karkala’s words, “On Grant’s recommendation, the young poet was appointed lecturer [or preceptor] in English literature and history at Hindu College, which, by that time, had become the intellectual center for young Bengalis.”

Over the next five years, as David Kopf notes, Derozio inspired a whole generation of Westernizing radical intellectuals known historically as Young Bengal. Under him, students read John Locke on civil liberty and natural rights; Rousseau on the justification of a representative democracy; David Hume on the bankruptcy of metaphysics; Voltaire on the supremacy of reason, enlightenment, and good taste; Bentham on the reformation of the legal system to achieve the most happiness for the largest number; and . . . Tom Paine on liberty and the flowering of the human spirit.

---

62. See, for example, the quotations from Edmund Gosse on Toru Dutt in Alphonso-Karkala 1970: 112–14; and from Laurence Binyon on Manmohan Ghose (together with the tribute by Rabindranath Tagore and the comments by W. B. Yeats, T. Sturge Moore, Walter de la Mare, Oscar Wilde, Laurence Binyon, and John Freeman) in Ghose 1974: 224–25 and 247–57.
63. See Alphonso-Karkala 1970: 35; on secular English-medium schools, also consult Kopf 1979: 44–45.
64. See Alphonso-Karkala 1970: 36.
65. Quoted from Kopf 1979: 43.
Derozio organized an extracurricular discussion group for his students; it expanded quickly and led to the founding of the Academic Association, which attracted many Indian as well as European intellectuals in Calcutta. The discussions in these two forums focused on “all problems of life,” ranging over “free will, fate, faith, meanness of vice, patriotism, attributes of God, and idolatry,” and “championed the fashionable ideas of progress” as well as “an optimistic vision of mankind’s future” centered around Enlightenment humanism. But Derozio’s free thinking, together with the radical activism he inspired in his students, sparked off strong protests from parents as well as Christian missionaries, forcing the college to ask him to curtail his extracurricular activities. When he persisted, outraged Hindu parents charged him with “corrupting the minds of the youth,” and demanded that “Mr Derozio, being the root cause of all evil and public alarm should be discharged from the college.” The administration sought his resignation, but the twenty-one-year-old poet submitted “a spirited rejoinder” in which he denied “all the charges” and “affirmed his deep love of intellectual freedom.”

Ultimately dismissed from his position at Hindu College early in 1831, Derozio turned to journalism, launching a newspaper, The East Indian, with the support of his Indian and European friends. But his effort to establish a new career for himself was cut short when he died of cholera on December 26, 1831, a few months before his twenty-third birthday—thereby fulfilling a prophecy that a saṃnyāsī is said to have made, that “he would not live for more years than there were letters (23) in his name.”

Derozio published two books, Poems (1827) and The Fakir of Jungheera, a Metrical Tale, and Other Poems (1828), before he turned nineteen. He emerged from the zones of interracial marriage and Christian upbringing in India, the one early Indian-English writer to grow up monolingual in English. But his formal education between 1815 and 1823 hybridized his background considerably: Drummond’s secularism at the Academy infused him with post-Christian humanism and Europeanized him with training in the French and German traditions, so that at the end of the 1820s he wrote a critique of Immanuel Kant and also translated essays by the eighteenth-century French scientist Pierre-Louis Moreau de Maupertuis. Moreover, as writers and scholars, Drummond and Grant taught Derozio the craft of verse and prose and disciplined his aesthetic sensibility, thereby nurturing...
his lyricism; his prosodic competence; his willingness to experiment with a wide range of meters, rhyme schemes, and stanza forms; his ability to develop images as well as allusions; and even the “romantic passion” with which, in Alphonso-Karkala’s words, he “identified himself with his native land and wrote purely on Indian themes with a reformer’s zeal.” The shift toward literariness in Indian-English writing that Derozio initiated around 1827–1828 is palpable in his poems, particularly the “Sonnet to the Pupils of the Hindu College”:

Expanding like the petals of young flowers  
I watch the gentle opening of your minds,  
And the sweet loosening of the spell that binds  
Your intellectual energies and powers,  
That stretch (like young birds in soft summer hours)  
Their wings to try their strength. O! how the winds  
Of circumstance, and freshening April showers  
Of early knowledge, and unnumbered kinds  
Of new perceptions, shed their influence,  
And how you worship Truth’s omnipotence!  
What joyance rains upon me, when I see  
Fame in the mirror of futurity,  
Weaving the chaplets you are yet to gain—  
And then I feel I have not lived in vain.  

Derozio’s particular interests in secular philosophy, humanism, and Romanticism combined with his Eurasian genealogy and Anglocentric upbringing to articulate a new literary position with respect to India. On the one hand, as Percival Spear suggests of the Young Bengal movement in general, he “regarded the whole structure of [contemporaneous] Hinduism as superstitious and archaic,” and therefore attacked such practices as sati (as in his long narrative poem, “The Fakir of Jungheera”). On the other hand, since he was acutely conscious of being “neither exclusively European nor Indian” (as Edward Farley Oaten puts it), and England remained remote despite his Europeanization, he developed a passionate love for an “imagined” India (in Benedict Anderson’s sense of the term) that can only be described as the first expression of romantic nationalism in Indian literature, as in “To India—My Native Land”:

My country! in thy days of glory past  
A beauteous halo circled round thy brow;  
And worshipped as a deity thou wast.

Where is that glory, where that reverence now?
The eagle pinion is chained down at last,
And grovelling in the lowly dust art thou:
Thy minstrel hath no wreath to weave for thee
Save the sad story of thy misery!
Well—let me dive into the depths of time
And bring from out the ages that have rolled
A few small fragments of those wrecks sublime,
Which human eye may never more behold;
And let the guerdon of my labour be,
My fallen country, one kind word for thee!  

Derozio—the first to call India “Mother”—thus positioned himself squarely inside the Indian critical discourse put into circulation by Rammohun Roy (one of the founders of Hindu College), and aestheticized the Indian criticism of India as well as the Indian countercritique of the British discourse that disparaged the histories and cultures of the subcontinent.

The mediations of Indian multilingualism and the zones of British-Indian acculturation by secular Western-style education, Europeanization, proto-nationalism, and Romantic aesthetics that we find in Derozio’s life go much further in Michael Madhusudan Dutt’s career. Madhusudan was born in 1824 in Sagardanri, a village in Jessore District (now in Bangladesh), the son of Rajnarain Dutt, a prominent lawyer in Calcutta, and Jahnavi Devi, who came from a well-placed zamindar family. He attended the village school, where he learned Bangla, some Sanskrit and Persian, and arithmetic; at age seven, he also attended afternoon sessions at a maulavi’s school, where he acquired facility in Persian. At home, in the evenings, Jahnavi Devi often read aloud from the two ancient epics in their popular Bangla versions, Krittivasa’s Rāmaṇya and Kaśirāmdas’s Mahābhārata, and from two Bangla maṅgalkavyas, Mukundarāma’s Caṇḍimāṅgal and Bhāratachandra’s Annadāmāṅgal. In 1832, after two younger sons had died in infancy, Rajnarain and Jahnavi moved with Madhusudan to Calcutta, where they lived as a nuclear family (an unaccustomed style) in their house in Kidderpore. For the next five years, Madhusudan attended a grammar school near the courthouse, learning English, Latin, and Hebrew, and in 1837, he joined Hindu College, where he excelled in English and mathematics. Although Derozio had been dismissed from the college in 1831, his legacy of free thinking, Europeanization, and radicalism persisted among the Young Bengal students of Madhusudan’s age, now energized by the teaching of Captain David Lester Richardson, a minor

74. Oaten is quoted and Derozio’s sonnet is reproduced in Alphonso-Karkala 1970: 43 and 40, respectively. On the nation as a construct of the imagination, refer to Anderson 1983.
English poet and a Utilitarian. In 1841–1842, Madhusudan began writing poems in English, a number of which appeared in the leading English-language literary journals in India, such as The Bengal Spectator and The Calcutta Literary Gazette. By this stage he had read William Shakespeare, Alexander Pope, George Crabbe, Robert Burns, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Robert Southey, Thomas Campbell, Percy Bysshe Shelley, William Wordsworth, Thomas Moore, and Lord Byron, and had come to admire the last three greatly (with John Milton added to this group later). At Hindu College Madhusudan already exhibited the extravagance and the extravagant Europeanization that made him notorious in Calcutta in the 1860s and 1870s and impoverished him in his final years: according to Amalendu Bose, as a teenager he “dressed as a dandy,” “yearned” to visit England, and acted out a “deep admiration for things European—manners, social life, literature, food and drink, philosophy,” and music, which foreshadowed his subsequent social distinction as “the first Indian to smoke cigarettes, rolling them himself,” and as one of the first Indians to be admitted to the bar at Gray’s Inn, London.76

By 1842 Madhusudan had firmly resolved to travel to England. His parents, alarmed that their only surviving son might undertake the proscribed journey across the black waters, attempted to distract him (in early 1843) by arranging his marriage to a Hindu girl. But the young man eluded them—and kept alive his hope of going abroad—by disappearing from the college, hiding in Fort William for two days, and converting to the Church of England at a special ceremony conducted by Archdeacon Dealtry on February 9, 1843. Unable to live with his family any more and unable to continue at Hindu College because he was homeless, Madhusudan—now christened Michael—lived successively with Dealtry and other missionaries, before enrolling in November 1844 as a lay student at the residential Bishop’s College, which prepared Indian Christians to become clergymen and mission school teachers. Though shocked by Michael’s conversion, Rajnarain and Jahnavi continued their generous financial support, and he visited them regularly at the Kidderpore house—until a crisis occurred in 1847. Rajnarain, one of the three most successful Indian advocates in Calcutta at the time, had always practiced law in Persian. In 1847, however, a dozen years after it had become the official language of British administration, English also became a language of the lower courts, thereby greatly diminishing Rajnarain’s income. The financial strain caused a quarrel between father and son, and when Rajnarain stopped his allowance altogether, Michael decided to move to Madras.77

76. The biographical details are from Bose 1981, chs. 1, 2, 3, 7, and 8; also refer to Alphonso-Karkala 1970: 45–50. The quotations are from Bose 1981: 12 and 18.
77. Refer to Bose 1981, ch. 2.
Starting around Christmas 1847, Michael lived in Black Town, Madras, working as an usher (assistant teacher) and later as a second tutor at the free day-school for boys attached to the Church of England’s Madras Male and Female Orphan Asylum. While there, he fell in love with Rebecca McTavish, a Scottish inmate of the girls’ hostel at the Asylum, and married her in 1848. During the next eight years Michael and Rebecca had four children and lived on his limited income, which he supplemented by working as a journalist in English; early in this happy phase of his life he wrote and published the last of his English poetry, including three long works in verse. Of these, “Visions of the Past,” composed in 1848 but left unfinished in thirteen fragments, dealt with Christian themes and was the first Indian poem in English blank verse, a prosodic form that Michael was to transplant subsequently into Bangla. “The Captive Lady,” also composed around 1848, was a long narrative poem in the iambic meter, divided into a prologue in pentametric quintets and two cantos in rhyming octosyllabic couplets (the latter modeled on Sir Walter Scott and Lord Byron), with epigraphs for canto 1 from Byron and for canto 2 from Thomas Moore. Following Chand Bardai’s thirteenth-century Rajasthani *Prithvirāj-rāsa*, Michael’s poem retold the legend of Prithviraj III, the last Chauhan king of Delhi before the turn of the twelfth century, his elopement with the Princess of Kanauj (the daughter of his greatest political enemy), and the lovers’ immolation on the same funeral pyre after Muhammad Ghuri’s victory over Prithviraj in the Second Battle of Tarain in 1192. The third text, “Rizia, the Empress of Ind,” was a verse-play that appeared anonymously in installments in seven consecutive issues of *The Madras Circulator and General Chronicle* in 1848–1849, dramatizing the history of Sultana Raziyya, the first woman to rule Delhi (in the mid-thirteenth century), and blueprinting the play on the same theme that he was to produce in Bangla in the next decade. At the end of this intensely creative two-year period, Michael collected the first two of these pieces and some lyric poems in *The Captive Lady* (1849), his only published book in English.

In 1856, by which time both his parents had died, Michael decided to move back to Calcutta, but he separated permanently—apparently without acrimony—from Rebecca and their children, who continued to live in Madras under the Anglicized name of Dutton, without any contact with or financial support from him. By 1858, Michael had married Henrietta, a Frenchwoman deeply enamored of Bengal and the Bangla language, with whom he had a daughter and son. The return to Calcutta and the second marriage, together with the persuasions of his Indian as well as English friends, precipitated his decision at the age of thirty-five to stop writing po-

78. See Bose 1981, ch. 3.
etry in English. Between 1859 and 1873, he became the pioneering modern poet and dramatist in Bangla, a contemporary of Bankimchandra Chatterjee and a precursor of Rabindranath Tagore.80

Michael Madhusudan Dutt is a paradigmatic figure in—and for—the history of Indian literatures in the middle of the nineteenth century. Like Din Muhammad three generations earlier, he lived in all four primary contact zones: employment with the British (both inside and outside the state sphere); marriages to two European women; conversion to the high Anglican church; and close friendships and life-long social relations with Anglo-Europeans. His acculturation to the West in these zones was extended and intensified by three other mediating factors: his education in Western-style institutions in India from 1832 to 1847 (including a grammar school, Hindu College, and Bishop’s College), which Europeanized him for life; his sojourn in Europe between 1862 and 1867 with Henrietta and their children, which finally gave him the opportunity to experience life in England and Europe at first hand, though in great poverty and in utter—sometimes suicidal—misery; and his late formal education in England, which enabled him to practice law on his return to India in 1867. He wrote poetry, journalistic prose, and personal letters in English, applying a wide-ranging knowledge of the English poetic tradition from Shakespeare to his own late-Romantic and early-Victorian contemporaries, and composed verse texts that were technically more experimental and demanding than those of the Indian-English poets before him, which made him a literary model for the next two generations in this tradition. He also combined a versatile Indian multilingualism, centered on the poetic traditions of premodern Bangla, Persian, and Sanskrit, with an astonishing multilingualism in non-Indian languages that ranged over English, Latin, Hebrew, French, and later in life, Greek, German, and Italian. Starting in his late teens, he pushed acculturation to its logical limit by Europeanizing and Christianizing himself; starting in his mid-thirties, he then brought his Indian and European multilingualism to its logical conclusion by choosing to invest his creative energies in his first language—his mother tongue—while widening his multilingual horizons even more. He thus established the paradigm that for the past 150 years has governed the careers of several hundred Indian writers: they have cultivated Indian as well as European multilingualism and acculturated themselves to the cosmopolitan cultures of modernity, yet have concentrated on becoming literary innovators in the indigenous languages of the subcontinent.

At the same time, Dutt also lifted the aestheticization of Indian-English writing to the next level—in his intentions if not successfully in his practice.

Not only did he focus largely on Indian themes, intertextualizing them, as Derozio did, with legendary, historical, and literary sources in the subcontinent’s past; he also attempted to bend English usage, within the limits of English prosody, toward an imitation of the syntax, imagery, and figuration of the Indian languages, particularly Bangla and Sanskrit. He thus consolidated a principle and a practice of Indianizing literary English in its very texture, treating English as a medium of translation within the field of original composition in English itself—a strategy that came to distinguish Indian-English literature as a whole after his time. In working through this cluster of literary choices, however, Dutt also added an original twist to the dynamics of British-Indian cultural contestation. On one side, he Europeanized himself so aggressively and publicly that he seemed entirely complicitous with the imperial mission of the metropolis. On the other side, he also decolonized himself earlier than most of his Westernized Indian contemporaries, by becoming a poet and dramatist in Bangla and by reversing the counter-critique of British representations of India via writing on Europe and European themes in Bangla. Thus, while in England and France, he wrote caturdasi-padis (sonnets) in Bangla to Victor Hugo and Lord Tennyson, and on Dante’s six-hundredth birth anniversary, he sent a Bangla sonnet on the poet to King Victor Emmanuel of Italy, perplexing various correspondents. When he composed his Bangla sonnet on “The Palace and the Park at Versailles,” it contained no image of the site in France but offered, instead, a lyrical invocation of Indra’s palace, Vaijayanta; his mentor, the pīś Bṛhaspati; and his miraculous son by Kunti, Arjuna. Dutt’s poetic counter-critique thus penetratingly Indianized Europe itself, foreshadowing by almost 125 years the most famous moment in Salman Rushdie’s The Satanic Verses (1988), in which Gibreel Farishta, hovering over London, decrees the fabulous post-colonial “tropicalization” of the metropolis.

A juxtaposition of Henry Derozio and Michael Madhusudan Dutt with other Indian-English poets of the long nineteenth century—especially Toru Dutt, Manmohan Ghose, and Sarojini Naidu—reveals an important pattern. The shift around 1825 from the instrumentality of writing for epistemological, social, and political purposes to the literariness of verbal composition was not a retreat into mere aestheticism. Rather, the reorientation that these poets pursued reflected a substantive change in the enabling con-

82. This is analyzed in Bose 1981: 85–88.
ditions of Indian textual production in English: whereas the first three writers in the tradition were products of various contact zones with little or no formal education in English, most of the aesthetic innovators of the next four generations were formed in the same contact zones but with institutional training in English and its literature and, in some cases (notably, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Toru Dutt, Manmohan Ghose, and Sarojini Naidu), with education or acculturation in England itself. A simple but important consequence of this transition from instrumental writing to aesthetic production, under the influence of formal English education, was that it initiated a shift from prose to verse as the exemplary literary category.

The reorientation also indexed a change of perspective on the social efficacy of Indian writing in English, its relation to real and imagined audiences, the pressures of the ongoing contestation between British and Indian representations of India, and the particular circumstances in which the contestation had to be carried out. The concentration on lyricism and the technicalities of versification in various poetic genres from Derozio to Naidu was aimed not at an ideal of “art for art’s sake,” in Walter Pater’s or Oscar Wilde’s sense of this phenomenon in England in the 1870s or the 1890s, but, rather, at the acquisition and application of artistry that matched, or could match, the artistry of contemporaneous British poets and poetry. The nineteenth-century Indian-English aesthetic innovators seem to have been impelled by a desire to demonstrate that, in spite of their cultural and political handicaps, they could develop the same degree of verbal facility, technical virtuosity, mellifluousness, and imaginative inventiveness as their more celebrated counterparts in Great Britain. If Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Toru Dutt, and Manmohan Ghose craved the approval of fellow writers and critics in England, they did so not because they were infected with “colonialitis,” as R. Parthasarathy has said in Ghose’s case, but because they dreamed (impossibly) of being acknowledged as artistic equals. The aestheticization of Indian-English writing in the long nineteenth century thus was an integral part of the dynamics of cultural contestation begun by Din Muhammad and complicated by Rammohun Roy: it displaced the ongoing real-world conflict between India and Great Britain from the political and economic spheres into the aesthetic sphere, so that the war of colonization and resistance, almost in Clauswitzian terms, was now fought—and lost—by the “other means” of pure literariness. It is therefore possible to suggest, in retrospect, that this long century of aestheticism was a century of subterranean warfare over anything but—or over much more than—literature and literariness.

The nineteenth-century aesthetes had limited talents and energies, and their actual accomplishments were smaller than their aspirations: the most

talented writers of the period wrote in their mother tongues, investing their energies in the creation of the other modern Indian literatures. The Indian-English poets were also hampered by their aesthetic anxieties, being unable to transform their milieux and times to the same extent that Bankimchandra Chatterjee, C. Subramania Bharati, and Rabindranath Tagore, for instance, were able to transform theirs. Nevertheless, this group of writers started a legacy of significant proportions. On a small scale, they discovered the means to combine Indian poetic materials with Indian sensibilities within the limits of English prosody, infusing this medium with motifs from classical Indian literature and Indian history, legend and folklore, to construct the first explicit forms of literary Indianess in English. On a larger scale, they prepared a blueprint of Indian-English aesthetics that envisioned some of the actual building that was to occupy the twentieth century.

CULTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The lives and literary careers of the writers of the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries were mediated by specific, overlapping zones of contact and acculturation, with formal English education playing an increasingly influential role through the nineteenth century. In addition to acculturation in Western-style schools and colleges, however, two general processes contributed directly to the consolidation of Indian-English writing and its epistemological, sociopolitical, and aesthetic functions in this period. One was the diffusion of English beyond the early contact zones, leading to the formation of a new political economy of language and class on the subcontinent, and to a lasting association between this language and the modern Indian middle and upper classes. The other was the establishment of Indian print culture within the framework of colonial subjugation, which determined the constraints and freedoms as well as the economic conditions of the marketplace under which Indian-English literary culture had to sustain itself. These two developments, which need to be described in some detail, affected the conditions that were to give birth to important trends in Indian writing in English in the twentieth century.

The Political Economy of Language and Class

As the East India Company concentrated its colonial power in stages from 1757 to 1818, English moved outward from the primary zones of contact into three wider domains: the sphere of colonial administration, the Indian market sphere, and the Indian social sphere at large. In this process of dispersion,
English changed its status from that of a language identified with one group of European traders on the coastal margins of India to that of a language of power. But as it did so, it had to displace a number of other languages from their older positions of dominance in the Indian state, market, and social spheres, thereby creating a new linguistic order on the subcontinent.

When Company officials began to use English for governance in Bengal in the late 1750s, the language entered a sphere regulated by Persian, which had been installed as the official language of the Mughal state under Akbar in 1582 (shortly after Stephens, and just before Fitch and the Newbury expedition, arrived in Goa). Since the Company derived its legitimacy as the administrator of its territories from the limited position it occupied within the Mughal imperial order, it had to conduct a significant portion of its state affairs in Persian, so long as the Mughals remained in power—even if only nominally—at their court in Delhi. This meant that from the start, the English language had to share discursive power in the colonial state sphere with Persian, and the Company had to build and maintain an extensive, cumbersome, and cost-inefficient bilingual bureaucracy to perform its administrative functions. British officials could use English freely for their internal affairs and their communications with the Crown, Parliament, and the Company’s board of directors and stockholders in Great Britain. But since most of the British were not sufficiently proficient in spoken and written Persian, Indian employees from the multilingual *dubhāsi* tradition had to handle the bulk of the official discourse in that language and, when needed, in the indigenous Indian languages. The situation of English in the state sphere did not change until 1835, when Governor-General William Bentinck and his Council in Calcutta unilaterally declared English the sole official language of British-Indian administration, adopting Macaulay’s Minute on Indian Education to support the formal training of Indians in English under the new dispensation. The legislative events of 1835, in effect, removed British India from its subordinate and interstitial position within the late Mughal order and resituated it within the global British imperium on the basis of language, rejecting the bilingual equation with Persian in favor of a monolingual ascendancy in which English could assert a fresh form of power over the legal subjects of the colonial state on the subcontinent.

As English started to spread from the early contact zones to the domain of state-subject relations in the late 1750s, it also began to infiltrate Indian markets as the language of a new political regime. However, the domain of

87. The status of Persian in India is discussed in Marek 1968: 723.
90. Refer to Spear (1965) 1979, ch. 10, especially 127.
international trade and finance in the Indian Ocean region, from the Cape of Good Hope to Macao and Melaka, was saturated by Portuguese (together with its pidgins), which had become the lingua franca in the market sphere around 1550 and retained its primacy even after Holland, England, and France eroded Portugal’s maritime power in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. During the careers of Robert Clive, Warren Hastings, and William Jones in India, for example, and around the time that Din Muhammad left India, “market Portuguese” was the language of international transactions throughout the Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta regions.\footnote{Consult Russell-Wood 1992: 191–93, and, more broadly, Subrahmanyam 1993, chs. 8 and 9. Unlike Hastings and Jones, Clive never learned Persian or an Indian language; his second language was “market Portuguese.”} It took nearly half a century after the commencement of British colonial rule for English to displace Portuguese, and English did not emerge as the principal medium of communication in this domain until around 1800. When it did so, however, its dominance in the marketplace contributed directly to its general recognition in Indian society as a prestige language—almost a quarter-century before the India Education Act of 1835 raised it to the status of the sole official language of British India.

Around the time that it completed its displacement of Portuguese, English also began to spread across the subcontinent and its indigenous society, beyond specific contact zones. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, this diffusion was aided significantly by Western-style English-medium education in schools and colleges in the nongovernmental sector. The first English schools in British territories had appeared almost one hundred years earlier: one in Cuddalore, near Madras, in 1717; another started by Richard Cobbe, a chaplain, in Bombay in 1718; and a third endowed by the Thomlinson family in Calcutta in 1720. Moreover, since the turn of the century, Christian missions located outside British India, British educators and entrepreneurs within it, and Indian associations and charities interested in Westernization had vocally promoted English education among Indians.\footnote{See Srinivasa Iyengar 1973, ch. 2, especially 26.} But this phenomenon gathered momentum quite dramatically after the revision and renewal of the Company’s charter in 1813, even though the colonial government did not support it administratively or financially for another twenty-two years. As William Carey, the Baptist missionary-scholar of Srirampur recalled this period wryly in his memoirs, “Every Englishman in straitened circumstances—the broken-down soldier, the bankrupt merchant and the ruined spend-thrift—set up a day school.”\footnote{Quoted in Bose 1981: 10.} Starting around 1813 and accelerating after the administration’s adoption of an Anglocentric educational policy in 1835, English thus spread quite widely through certain seg-
ments of Indian society, creating a new balance of power among the various languages that Indians could and did use on a daily basis, particularly in their pursuit of wealth and power.

This dispersion of English in the first half of the nineteenth century across the Indian social sphere (as distinguished from the state and market spheres) was part of a new political economy of language and class, since the use of English by Indians was now implicated deeply in the formation of the modern professions and a modern middle class in the Indian economy. Starting sporadically in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, and continuing more consistently in the second, Indians in particular social categories learned English and Westernized themselves primarily because verbal proficiency, literacy, and acculturation in this language would enable them—at least in theory—to become clerks, administrative assistants, revenue officers, accountants, lawyers, magistrates, teachers, journalists, and businessmen in the colonial economy. For mid-century Indians (as in the representative case of Michael Madhusudan Dutt), English thus metonymically represented increased social and economic mobility, professional rewards, community empowerment, individual growth and freedom, and the satisfactions of modernity and modernization. But this emergent political economy of language and class was complicated by the fact that English had to spread through the multilayered structure of the Indian social sphere, and therefore could not occupy an uncontested position of power among the everyday languages of the subcontinent.

The position of English in the social hierarchy of languages varied by indigenous community, political configuration, and geographical location. Within British territories, for any social group aligned with the colonial professions and occupations, English was the language of the professional sphere and, as such, often had to coexist with two (if not three) Indian languages, each with its own sphere of everyday use. One of these was the language that the members of the group used primarily or exclusively in the domestic sphere, as the medium of communication in the household and its limited economy, and in the network of family relations within and around it. Another was the language—sometimes different from that of the domestic sphere—which the members of the group used in its Indian community sphere to maintain an array of vital relations beyond the web of kinship. A third language in this series usually was an Indian lingua franca, different from the language or languages of the household and the community, which had to be used for general transactions in the local or regional marketplace. At least until Independence, and frequently after, even the most Anglicized Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Jains were reluctant to use English in their do-

mestic and community spheres, treating them as linguistically incompatible with the colonial workplace. While such a linguistic differentiation of household, community, profession, and market became quite commonplace in the modern Indian middle and upper classes that had been formed in the colony by the end of the nineteenth century, a different political economy of language and class emerged in the Indian states outside British territories. In the so-called native states, most of which had accepted the principle of British paramountcy on the political and economic planes by the mid-nineteenth century but conducted their internal affairs with a measure of cultural independence, English did not become the principal language of the royal courts or their administrations. Certainly in the less modernized princely states and sometimes even in the more Anglicized ones, the ruling elite, the bureaucracy, the commercial class, and the classes that controlled the agricultural and financial sectors of the economy carried on their activities in either a community language or a regional Indian lingua franca. Many of the privileged and powerful groups in the native states were quite thoroughly Anglicized by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, but they reserved English for their transactions with the British colonial state and its representatives, with British or European employees, associates, or visitors at court, and with migratory middle-class Indian professionals from other parts of the subcontinent. Thus, in the political economy of most of the Indian states, a restricted sphere of English was differentiated from the administrative-commercial sphere of a regional lingua franca (or a community language elevated to that role), as well as from the spheres of specific community and domestic languages. But the position of English in this hierarchy was ambiguous: on the one hand, it was superior to the regional lingua franca, since it was reserved for trans-regional and international transactions, while on the other, it was also inferior, since it was excluded from the circuits of local and regional power. In British territories as well as in Indian states, English thus did not replace one or more Indian languages, but displaced them as it jostled for a position in a new hierarchy of languages in everyday use.

Cumulatively, the institutionalization of English education in British India, its gradual dispersion in the sphere of the colonial state until it became the sole official language of the colony, its parallel diffusion in the marketplace for international transactions, and its emergence as a medium of communication used in specific contexts by middle- and upper-class Indians had four major consequences for Indian-English literary culture. The first was that literate Indian multilingualism acquired its characteristic tripartite modern structure, in which English, an Indian lingua franca, and an Indian domes-

95. An interesting account of this linguistic configuration appears in Tandon 1961, chs. 1 and 2. Also see King 1989, especially 184–187.
tic language came to coexist in the linguistic repertoire of many educated middle-class Indians. In its high literary and cultural form, this threefold multilingualism brought together English, either Sanskrit or Persian, and a modern Indian mother tongue (whether Indo-Aryan or Dravidian) with literacy in two or three different script systems. Between about 1850 and 1975, most Indian writers engaged in textual production in English were equipped with this particular type of multilingualism. The second consequence was that Indian writing in English, like acculturation to the West more broadly, came to be strongly associated with writers and readers of middle- and dominant-class backgrounds, so that even in the post-Independence period, Indian-English literature has been almost exclusively associated with privilege and power. This has meant that since about 1850, Indian-English authors as well as readers have had to struggle with, for, and against their peculiar class interests to a much more visible extent than their counterparts in the indigenous Indian languages. The third consequence was that the linguistic-social developments of the nineteenth century created a basic map that more or less determined the geographical distribution of the centers of Indian-English literary production over the following century. On this map, the regions comprising many of the princely states have remained much less Anglicized than those comprising a few highly modernized native states, and the latter, in turn, have remained less Anglicized than the three Presidencies and the urban centers of British India. As a result, most notable Indian writers in English have emerged from a relatively small set of cities and towns that became prominent in the nineteenth-century political economy of language and class: Bombay, Baroda, Delhi, Lahore, Srinagar, Mussoorie, Lucknow, Allahabad, Patna, Calcutta, Darjeeling, Cuttack, Hyderabad, Madras, Trivandrum, Bangalore, and Mysore. The locations of Indian-English culture in the past two centuries therefore have been geographically and socially more exclusive than the locations of Indian-language literary cultures. The fourth consequence was that after British India was placed under Crown rule in 1858, English rapidly became the intellectual lingua franca of the three presidencies, jostling with Sanskrit, Persian, and Hindi-Urdu as the common medium of learning, debate, activism, and transregional communication. This meant that in practice, from about 1860 to 1947, the subcontinental “public sphere”

96. Raja Rao, for instance, describes this type of multilingualism in his preface to Kanthapura, which I discuss in the final section of this chapter. A. K. Ramanujan also discusses it in his Collected Essays (1999, ch. 18).


98. These generalizations draw on the biographies of the writers cited in this chapter, particularly in the sections “Late Colonial and Early Postcolonial Fiction and Prose” and “The Domination of the Diaspora.”
was partitioned between two “foreign” languages (English and Persian) and two Indian languages (Sanskrit and Hindi-Urdu)—an uneasy condition that has persisted after Independence, with Hindi and English as equally (though differently) contested official languages of the republic.\footnote{Consult, especially, Das 1991, chs. 1, 2, and 6; 1995, ch. 2; also see Brass 1990, ch. 5.}

\textit{The Effects of Print Culture}

From around the beginning of the nineteenth century, the characteristics of Indian writing in English have also been mediated strongly by the particular history of print culture on the subcontinent. Among the major literatures of Indian origin, Indian-English writing is the only one that did not pass through a phase of scribal reproduction and manuscript circulation. Its appearance in history, in fact, coincided closely with the formation of a modern print culture in India, following the protracted transfer of print technology from Europe to the subcontinent between the mid-sixteenth and late eighteenth centuries.\footnote{This is discussed further in Dharwadker 1997.} One of the primary factors that affected Indian print culture at this stage was the British colonial state itself, which by definition could not and did not allow its Indian subjects to constitute a civil society in the form that this institution had taken under the influence of Enlightenment thought in eighteenth-century England, France, and Germany. Nor could the Company, in the interests of its own survival, permit Indians to construct a European-style liberal public sphere in the medium of print: it engendered instead a far more restricted colonial sphere of publication and publicity.\footnote{On the public sphere and civil society, see Dharwadker 1997, especially 114–117 and 130 n. 25.} In this sphere, the colonial administration closely monitored and regulated the use and flow of print in its territories, often with an authoritarian application of its censorship laws centered around libel and sedition. However, since the British were self-consciously trapped from the start in the contradiction of being “democrats at home but despots abroad,” the print culture they molded on the subcontinent was also, paradoxically, protoliberal in its outline.\footnote{See Dharwadker 1997, especially 116.} Thus, the force of colonial censorship was counterbalanced, to some extent, by three important features of the print medium in British India: Indians could and did make extensive financial and cultural investments in print technology and its products and institutions; print media were subject to restricted market competition, but within the limits set by the state, the competition was real, so that published texts could achieve an important measure of expressive and communicative freedom; and the protocols of expression and representation fell far short of the ideals of civil society and the liberal-democratic public
sphere, but they were sufficiently flexible to nurture the growth of multiple, divergent, and critical discourses in print. Under the peculiar combination of constraints and freedoms that constituted the colonial sphere in British India (which was different from the print sphere that emerged in the Indian states), the intersection of the print medium and the process of representation (which, historically, has been inexorably literary as well as political) induced two large-scale transformations in the dynamics of Indian writing in English, as also in the modern Indian languages. One was the differentiation of mutually contestatory British and Indian representations of India into more specific rhetorical orientations toward India, which were related to particular market segments in the economy of print. The other was the generation of a new set of interlinked ideological positions, cultural locations, political identities, and modes of representation that resituated Indian writers with respect to India and the British empire. Once these series of orientations and positions had been formulated in the nineteenth century, they changed the internal kinetics of Indian-English literature.

The first of these transformations involves a long series of discursive shifts. The British representations of India that commenced with Thomas Stephens and Ralph Fitch in the 1580s and 1590s shared a rhetorical orientation toward object and reader that remained fairly consistent for the next 150 years or more. This orientation projected India as a place of wealth and wonder; a destination of heroic journeys; a land of opportunities and adventures; a fertile field for evangelical missions; and hence, a desirable object in the economic, political, and religious imagination of the English nation. In the decades leading up to and just after the inception of colonial rule, however, the British discourse on India bifurcated into two conflicting discourses, one which continued to treat the subcontinent in heroic terms and one which took a critical, often satirical stance toward it. The two orientations became interlocked after the mid-eighteenth century, since British writers sometimes combined them in a single text, either praising indigenous Indian society and criticizing the British and their activities in it, or more often, portraying Englishmen as heroes and denigrating Indian politics, history, religion, and culture. When Din Muhammad initiated the representation of Indian understandings of India in English, he attempted to redress the excesses in both these combinations of the heroic and the satiric in existing British depictions of the subcontinent; and when Rammohun Roy complicated the discursive contestation, he bifurcated Indian discourse itself into a branch of satirical self-criticism and a branch of heroic self-transformation at the collision point of East and West. As Orientalism (much of which valorized indigenous Indian culture) gathered momentum in the colony as well as in

103. Refer to Dharwadker 1997; also see Chatterjee 1995, and Roy 1995.
Europe in the early nineteenth century, and as the Anglicist movement (which was critical of Indian culture) accumulated force among Whigs, evangelicals, and Utilitarians in Great Britain as well as India, a third rhetorical orientation appeared in the discourse about the subcontinent, mediating the incommensurability of heroic and satiric representations. This was the orientation defined by a conjunction of rational argument and empirical evidence, which treated India as an object of dispassionate epistemological investigation and sought to persuade readers without resorting to the prejudices of heroic narrative or satirical attack. In the long run, however, the rational-empirical discourse on India itself was divided and dispersed between the heroic and satiric traditions around it, so that its so-called objective methods of inquiry were absorbed into the textual politics of praise and blame. The historical importance of this development from the mid-eighteenth century onward is that both British and Indian representations of India steadily differentiated themselves into distinct heroic, satiric, and rational-empirical strands in the print medium. These specific orientations toward the subcontinent have greatly diversified the dynamics of representation and contestation within and between the two national traditions over the past one hundred years.104

Such a structured multiplication of discourses about India has had concrete material-cultural consequences for Indian writing in English during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Publishers as well as writers have aimed each rhetorical orientation or combination of orientations at a specific readership in the literary marketplace, so that each discourse has come to be implicated in a cycle of demand and supply in the economy of print. Henry Derozio and Toru Dutt, for example, constructed a lyrical heroic discourse about India that appealed to a small but well-defined liberal, anti-colonial audience in nineteenth-century England and British India; whereas Sarojini Naidu constructed a similar discourse that in the early and mid-twentieth century appealed to a community of Anglicized Indian nationalists in the presidency regions.105 In contrast, in the postcolonial period, Nirad C. Chaudhuri produced satirical nonfictional prose that catered especially to postwar British, American, and Commonwealth readers with a distaste for indigenous and modern India; whereas Salman Rushdie has capitalized on a combination of satiric and heroic fiction about historical and contemporary India aimed at cosmopolitan readers, but not at traditionalist or nationalist readers.106 In further contrast, the Subaltern Studies historians, work-

104. This process is discussed in greater detail in Dharwadker 1989, ch. 1. Also refer to Dharwadker 1993.
105. On Derozio and Dutt, see Alphonso-Karkala 1970; on Naidu, consult Naravane 1980.
ing on the fringes of Indian-English literary culture, have developed a heroic and rational-empirical discourse on indigenous India that specifically targets a worldwide audience of anticolonial intellectuals and activists. Indian-English as well as British textual production in the heroic, satiric, and rational-empirical modes thus has energized an ideological connection between author and reader and, at the same time, has been energized by an economic connection between discourse and market segment.

The second transformation initiated by the peculiar circumstances of print culture in the colonial sphere involved the generation of a series of discursive positions in Indian-English writing—and in modern Indian culture on a wider scale—quite apart from the heroic, satiric, and rational-empirical representations of the subcontinent. In this arena, the primary object of representation was not India in or by itself, even though it remained a constant master referent; instead, the process of representation focused on the mutually constitutive, conflictual interactions between empire, nation, village, and city. This processual complex emerged in Indian culture over the course of the nineteenth century, and in its most general form it may be described as a series of “subject-positions” that Indians came to occupy under colonial rule, as follows.

One subject-position was that of collaboration, in which an Indian aligned himself (or, interchangeably throughout, herself) with the colonizer, reproducing the ideology of imperialism in his discourse and valorizing the culture of the metropolis over the indigenous culture of the colony or protection. Around the turn of the nineteenth century, Din Muhammad and C. V. Borah entered the field of English discourse potentially as mimics of colonialist and Orientalist discourse; as the century progressed, the collaborator came to be embodied most vividly in the babu, the eagerly complicitous native clerk in the colonial bureaucracy, who was satirized heavily in Bankimchandra Chatterjee’s fiction in Bangla and, much later, in the characters of Banerjee in G. V. Desani’s All About H. Hatterr (1948) and Saladin Chamcha in Salman Rushdie’s The Satanic Verses (1988). A second subject-position was that of Indian provincialism or traditionalist revivalism, in which an Indian located himself literally or figuratively in the Indian village and oriented himself against both foreign empire and Indian city in order to produce a discourse of cultural authenticity. The strongest articulations of this position in nineteenth-century print were Dayananda Saraswati’s Satyarthaprakasa (1875) in Hindi, the founding text of the Arya Samaj movement,

107. See, for example, Guha and Spivak 1988, especially the foreword by Edward W. Said.
108. Three of these subject-positions are discussed at length in Dharwadker 1997.
and Swami Vivekananda’s writings in English, which urged the revival, justification, and mobilization of Indian tradition against Westernization, modernity, and cosmopolitanism and, in an important reversal of Hegel’s projection of India, emphasized the superiority of Indian spiritualism to Western materialism. A third subject-position was that of nationalism or proto-nationalism, in which an Indian advocated resistance or opposition to colonial domination, and sought to establish solidarity in an inclusive, subcontinental (rather than provincial) concept of Indianness or national identity. This position was articulated in early forms in Henry Derozio’s poems and in the first Indian short story in English, Kylas Chunder Dutt’s “A Journal of Forty-Eight Hours of the Year 1945” (published in Captain Richardson’s *Calcutta Literary Gazette* in 1835), which futuristically envisioned a heroic, armed Indian uprising against British rule in the mid-twentieth century. The fourth subject-position was that of cosmopolitanism or cultural ambidexterity, in which an Indian located himself in the contemporaneous Indian city as a site of invigorating cultural ambivalence, distancing himself from empire, village, and nation, but borrowing from all three to produce a discourse of modernity and reform, and arguing against mere traditionalism and authenticity, mere nationalistic fervor, and mere Westernization. This position was represented early in the nineteenth century in the works of Rammohun Roy and late in the century in the speeches, essays, reports, and books of M. G. Ranade.

Each of the four subject-positions that appeared in the Indian cultural sphere and in print in the nineteenth century was constituted dynamically in its differentiation from the other three positions, with which it interacted conflictually, continuously, and untranscendably. Each position was a condensation point for a historical process, a geographical location, an ideology, a cultural identity, a corresponding political strategy, and a characteristic mode of representation and style of writing (the last of which split further into the heroic and satiric genres). This multitiered complex may be represented structurally and schematically as a series of semiotic squares that semantically parallel each other and, in effect, decode what Indian writers encrypt in their texts, as in table 3.1.

110. For information on Dayananda and Vivekananda, see Hay 1988: 52–62 and 72–82; and Das 1991.
111. On Derozio, consult Alphonso-Karkala 1970, ch. 2; and on Dutt, refer to Das 1991: 80.
113. On the semiotic square, see Jameson 1981: 46–49 and elsewhere. In the interests of concision, my chart reduces the various relations among the four elements of each square (such as contrariness, contradiction, and implication) to a uniform relation of opposition (“versus”); for the more complex version of this semiotics, see Greimas 1987, particularly ch. 3.
This structure within the colonial sphere complicated the dynamics of intra- and inter-cultural contestation and of intertextured heroic, satiric, and rational-empirical representations of India in Indian-English writing because it relocated India within a perpetual four-sided confrontation involving empire, nation, village, and city. As I show at length in the next two sections, the mutual interactions of imperialism, provincialism, nationalism, and cosmopolitanism launched in the nineteenth century were to achieve their full literary embodiment in the Indian writing in English of the late colonial and early postcolonial decades and, with significant modifications, in the post-colonial diaspora.
LATE COLONIAL AND EARLY POSTCOLONIAL FICTION AND PROSE

By the beginning of the second quarter of the twentieth century, the social, economic, and political changes of the preceding one hundred years or so had modernized the Indian-English writer’s environment both materially and culturally. In the urban centers of British India as well as the more prosperous and progressive Indian states, members of the middle class now frequently chose to be educated in English-medium institutions and to pursue professional careers in medicine, engineering, industry, education, journalism, business, law, and government. The contemporary town and city had been invaded by the paraphernalia of modernity: bicycles, trains, and cars; the telegraph, the photograph, the phonograph, and the typewriter; industrial manufacture, mass production, and modern advertising; and newspapers, magazines, books, and libraries. On the coast, the modern port had been besieged by steamships and ocean liners. By 1925 the Gandhian movement had engaged the passions of many writers and artists, and, within the decade that followed, the spectrum of left-wing politics—from Fabian socialism to Leninist anti-imperialism and Stalinist collectivism—had attracted an entire generation of intellectuals and activists.114 The everyday environment of young Indian-English writers even by the late 1920s and early 1930s was more crowded, more diverse, more fast-paced and technologically complicated, more connected to events abroad, more cosmopolitan, and more rootless and alienated than the one their predecessors had inhabited at the turn of the century.

The Indian-English writers who entered the domain of print for the first time in the altered and accelerated world of the second quarter of the twentieth century rejected the aestheticism of the previous one hundred years and, with it, the dominance of verse and poetry. The primary innovators of this period—R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and G.V. Desani—found that their interests and energies required the liveliness, immediacy, malleability, and capaciousness of prose for proper articulation, and they therefore chose the novel, the novella, the short story, the essay, and the personal sketch as their preferred forms. In contrast to the high aesthetic aims of the nineteenth-century poets, their discursive intentions belonged to the low mimetic mode, in which a writer confronts and represents contemporary reality and everyday life, individual experience, shared social phenomena, and the unfolding events of current local and national history. The chosen style of the late colonial decades (and, subsequently, of the early post-Independence decades) therefore turned out to be realism, which brought together psychological realism and social realism, and within the latter cat-

114. See Das 1995, chs. 1 and 3.
egory, both humanist social realism and Marxian socialist realism. If the poets of the long nineteenth century had achieved a limited yet remarkable aestheticization of Indian-English literature, then what the prose writers of the late colonial decades accomplished was the literary invention of Indian contemporaneity, a formation in which the writing of a period succeeds in minutely yet comprehensively representing the Lebenswelt, or “lived world,” of the times. But this contemporaneity was not monolithic: it was fragmented and energized by the class affiliations, ideological motivations, and rhetorical orientations that had pluralized Indian-English literature and its cultural contexts by the end of the nineteenth century. The internal contestation among the discourses of authenticity, nationalism, cosmopolitanism, and complicity that drove the fiction and prose of the 1925–1975 period may therefore be described as follows.

**Authenticity**

The first ideological position to be articulated in late colonial realism was that of provincialism and Indian authenticity, whether celebrated in a heroic mode or situated ironically in an antiheroic framework. Whereas the nineteenth-century poets had tried to Indianize and thus authenticate their writing by composing lyric, dramatic, and narrative poems on distinctively Indian themes, especially by intertextualizing their verse in English with folk and literary materials from the subcontinent’s past, some of the fiction writers of the 1920s and 1930s attempted directly to (re)locate their narratives thematically and aesthetically in the Indian village. Narayan, Rao, Anand, and Desani contributed significantly and differentially to this cultural shift, but Narayan’s construction of an authentically Indian narrative location proved to be particularly durable and influential, partly because it was unique. In the fifteen novels that he published over six decades (from Swami and Friends [1935] to The World of Nagaraj [1990]) Narayan focused almost exclusively on the possibilities of innovation latent in the form known in modern British literature as the ironic comedy of manners. He appropriated and altered this form at three basic levels: he composed his texts in relaxed, idiomatic English, paring down the verbal texture to a figural minimum; he used this style to translate a fluid mode of oral Indian storytelling into written representation and print; and he employed it to explore the changes—initiated by the moral dilemmas of its inhabitants and the incursions of modernity from the outside world—in the slow-paced, traditional

---


(predominantly Hindu) existence of a fictional place called Malgudi, set in contemporary central south India. The specific topography of Malgudi continues to be especially interesting in this context: although Narayan portrayed it on the surface as a small town, his short stories, prose sketches, autobiographical writings, and novels gradually suggested that it was what the twentieth-century Marathi novelist Vyankatesh Madgulkar once called a “village without walls,” so that its principal social dynamics was that of traditionality and provinciality under siege. Narayan’s characteristic narrative strategy in this regard was to add an anagogic level of meaning to his otherwise humanist realism by introducing a thick layer of Hindu myths into the psychodrama of Malgudi, whereby the personalities and actions of its twentieth-century characters frequently paralleled or replicated those of gods, epic heroes, and villains in ancient, archetyped social conflicts and psychological struggles.

Within his minimalist aesthetics, Narayan’s characteristic trope was understated verbal and structural irony, which as William Walsh points out, turned his novels into “comedies of sadness,” “blending exact realism, poetic myth, sadness, perception and gaiety” in such a way that Malgudi became a microcosm where “things flow, an infinite variety of things, of men and manners, relations and women, avocations and degrees, joys, disappointments and disasters. To the author this is the nature of reality; to the characters living their day to day life, it is what they will, perhaps, with a moderate kind of happiness, finally accommodate themselves to.”

Given the “principle of balance” that structures Narayan’s low-key, almost antiheroic narratives, what emerges, in Fawzia Afzal-Khan’s words, is a harmonious coexistence symbolizing unity, a wholeness, toward which Narayan’s protagonists are constantly progressing and which they must achieve if they are to mature fully. The wholeness—which ... becomes a hollowness for Salman Rushdie ... —is possible in the Malgudi of Narayan’s novels because it is a world rooted in Indian myth and tradition, a town that is still pastoral in its innocence of the political reality of modern, twentieth-century India. ... Here, what matters most is not how the natives deal with the aftermath of political fragmentation, but whether they will achieve an authentic and sincere identity as Indians in an “authentic” Indian setting.

The extratextual irony of Narayan’s “village without walls” is that its way of life—its perpetual mediation between tradition and modernity, old village

117. For brief comments on Vyankatesh Madgulkar’s village in Bāṅgarvāḍī (1955), see Das 1995: 851; also consult Deshpande and Rajadhyaksha 1988: 167–68.
118. On the anagogic level of meaning, see the second essay in Frye 1957, especially 116–28; on Narayan’s use of myth, see Afzal-Khan 1993, ch. 1.
119. Quoted from Walsh 1982: 59, 168.
120. The phrase “principle of balance” is from Walsh 1982: 59; the quoted passage is from Afzal-Khan 1993: 27–28.
and potential new city—has been so pervasively eroded by post-Independence economic, technological, demographic, and political transformations that it now exists only inside his fiction.

Nationalism
Starting in the 1920s and 1930s, late colonial Indian-English writers also constructed a second ideological position for themselves in the discursive space of the nation, national solidarity, and anticolonial nationalism, at once complementary and opposed to the position of provincial authenticity. The combination of national solidarity and anticolonial nationalism further distinguished itself from various types of revivalist nationalism (which may or may not be directed at colonialism) and from cosmopolitan patriotism (which may reject all forms of nationalism), producing a literature marked by nation-centered Indianness and collective resistance to imperialism. The primary influence on this branch of Indian writing in English was that of Gandhian nationalism which, despite its frequently criticized reactionary and revivalist tendencies, remained distinct from a cluster of more provincial nationalisms developed by the Arya Samaj, the Hindu Mahasabha, and the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh. The specific feature of Gandhian nationalism that affected the late colonial Indian-English novel was its superposition of the emergent Indian nation on the Indian village, such that the village ceased to be an isolated, self-enclosed place and, instead, became the transformative site of anticolonial national consciousness and national action. The paradigmatic novel of the village as the theater of national identity formation was Kantha-pura (1938), in which Raja Rao—like Michael Madhusudan Dutt some seventy years earlier—pushed Indianness beyond the limits of thematization and into the form and aesthetics of representation itself. The novel tells the story of how Gandhi’s swaraj movement penetrates a traditional, peaceful village and a British-owned coffee estate in central south India in the 1920s, how the villagers—including the women—risk nonviolent protests against the colonial regime, and how the regime’s violent retaliation, together with the very logic of modernization, destroys and thereby transforms the village.

122. These three organizations are discussed in Hay 1988: 52–62, 159–71, 289–95, and 359–65; Wolpert 1993; and Brass 1990: 15–17, 77–78, respectively. These organizations are the forerunners of the Jana Sangh, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, and the Bharatiya Janata Party, among others, in the post-Independence period.
Rao’s remarkable aesthetic improvisation was to use an old woman (a Brahman widow) belonging to the (former) village as the narrator, to develop her narration in the rough and dense style of a folk sthala-purāṇa (an oral history of a particular place, composed and transmitted in the local language over many generations), to structure the story as a performance text, and at the same time, to weave the English texture as a stream-of-consciousness monologue modeled after James Joyce, so that Kanthapura was also a highly crafted, experimental high-modernist novel. Unlike Michael Madhusudan Dutt’s experiments in translating Sanskrit and Bangla diction into English, Rao’s brilliant grafting of oral-folk puranic storytelling in Kannada onto written novelistic representation in the heroic-mimetic mode in English prose was aesthetically successful, opening the way to subsequent Indian-English experiments in hybridization of language, form, and style that intensified with G. V. Desani’s All About H. Hatterr (1948) and led up to Salman Rushdie’s improvisations from Midnight’s Children (1980) to The Ground beneath Her Feet (1999). As I suggest at the end of this essay, such a melding of Indian and Anglo-European textual and aesthetic elements has enabled Indian-English literature to achieve literariness by subcontinental as well as Anglophone norms, to translate “Indian life” into a “foreign” language, and at the same time, to domesticate that medium by filling it with the long shadows of the languages of the Indian Lebenswelt. In the case of Kanthapura, this interpenetration of cultures was particularly striking because Rao carried it out at the double site of superposed village and nation and in the contestatory political voice of uncompromising anticOLONIALISM.

Cosmopolitanism

Distancing themselves from Narayan’s provincial Malgudi and Rao’s nationalistic Kanthapura, some writers of the 1925–1975 period developed a discourse of cosmopolitanism, which was centered on the contemporary Indian city, mediated ambidextrously between Indian and Western cultures without committing monologically to either, and was driven by a subcontinental agenda of self-reform, alternative development, and indigenized modernity. In its heroic mode, this discourse has been modernist and postmodernist (where both modernism and postmodernism are mediated by Indianness), and in its satiric mode it has been antirevivalist or antitradition-

125. On Desani, refer to note 109. On Rushdie, see the sources cited in notes 83 and 106. I have referred to the following important works by Rushdie: Midnight’s Children; Shame; The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey; The Satanic Verses; Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981–1991; East, West: Stories; The Moor’s Last Sigh; and The Ground beneath Her Feet. In addition, consult Rushdie and West 1997.

126. Cultural ambidexterity is analyzed further in Dharwadker 1997: 120–24.
alist on the one hand and anticolonialist on the other (and hence frequently distant from both village and empire).\textsuperscript{127} Of the three basic forms that Indian-English cosmopolitanism took in the 1925–1975 period, the first was defined by Nehru’s Fabian socialism and modernizing secularism, which attempted to define, celebrate, and reproduce India’s “unity in diversity.”\textsuperscript{128} The second was shaped by Marxist socialism, which pushed cosmopolitanism toward a different kind of internationalism, opposed to the globalizing tendencies in liberal capitalism.\textsuperscript{129} Both types of socialism differentiated themselves from Gandhian nationalism, which seemed to them at once antimodern and anticosmopolitan; and both were motivated by an ideal of historical progress grounded in the theory and practice of science. But whereas Nehruvian socialism aligned itself with a secular-scientific rationality that rejected religious ritual and dogma and therefore privatized religion, and that promoted planned economic modernization in the interests of nation building, Marxist socialism was impelled by its scientific critique of capitalism, religion, and liberal democracy to dismantle the nation-state and nationalism (in its religious as well as secular forms), and to pursue the ideal of social justice in a classless society. The third form of Indian cosmopolitanism evolved alongside the other two, deriving its ideological force from a combination of liberal humanism, Enlightenment universalism, and Anglo-American high modernism. Locating itself in a framework of progressive enlightenment and improvement—as contrasted to the stagnation and retrogression it attributed to province and village, traditionality and revivalism—this humanistic cosmopolitanism came to focus its attention on individuals, personal relationships, and individualism; on the importance of individual rights, social equality, and democratic institutions to Indian modernity; on the essential role of the rule of law and the principle of checks and balances in the subcontinent’s public life; and sometimes, more loosely, on the Utilitarian-democratic ideal of the greatest good for the greatest number.\textsuperscript{130}

A detailed mapping of cosmopolitanism is necessary because in the 1925–1975 period as well as the post-1975 diaspora, most Indian-English writers have identified themselves with one or another, or some combination, of its three versions. Socialist cosmopolitanism—both Nehruvian and Marxist, with the two often intertwined—took deep root in twentieth-century India, defining the social and economic program that dominated state policy and na-

\textsuperscript{127} On modernism and postmodernism in Indian writing, see Dharwadker 1994b and 1994c.
\textsuperscript{129} On the various communist and socialist parties in India, see Brass 1990, ch. 2, especially 72–76; on literary socialism, see Das 1995, ch. 3.
\textsuperscript{130} On the humanist basis of such a cosmopolitanism, see Davies 1997, ch. 2, especially 41–47.
tional cultural life for the first three decades after Independence. This combination gave birth to a large literature of “social conscience,” which, starting with the formation of the Progressive Writers Association in 1935, adopted a pro-subaltern and anti-elitist position on key issues concerning the economy, social practices, civic and political institutions, and individual, community, and national welfare. The paradigmatic texts of pro-subaltern cosmopolitanism in the 1930s were Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936), which became proletarian classics in English and in eastern European translations in the Soviet-bloc countries in the high period of socialist realism.

The interacting discourses of Nehruvian, Marxist, and humanist cosmopolitanism also produced an extensive materialist and cultural critique of imperialism in the post-Independence period, starting again with Desani’s *Hatterr*, which in Salman Rushdie’s words, was “the first great stroke of the decolonizing pen” in Commonwealth literature. Over time, this discourse expanded to include the searching critiques of the East-West encounter in Raja Rao’s *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960); Kamala Markandaya’s *Some Inner Fury* (1956), *Possession* (1963), *The Coffin Dams* (1969), *The Nowhere Man* (1972), *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977), and *Shalimar* (1982); Anita Desai’s *Bye-Bye, Blackbird* (1985) and *Journey to Ithaca* (1995); and in the diasporic fiction of Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh.

In addition, the Indian version of liberal-humanist cosmopolitanism generated a parallel discourse on India and the West during this period, resulting in fiction that was aesthetically more accomplished than socialist realism and, partly in response to the latter, also relatively more apolitical. This humanistic cosmopolitanism found its most persuasive articulation in the work of Anita Desai, whose later career has overlapped with the history of the Indian-English literary diaspora. From the 1960s onward, Desai’s cosmopolitan novels and short stories became lexically and syntactically more highly wrought than Narayan’s or Anand’s, being concerned often with explicating the minds and characters of their protagonists through interior monologues modeled on Virginia Woolf’s high-modernist stream-of-consciousness style. Like Narayan but unlike Anand and Rao, Desai came to see herself primarily as an aesthetic and moral craftsman rather than as a vocal social critic or political activist. Yet her fiction—especially from *Clear Light of Day* (1980) to Baumgartner’s *Bombay* (1989)—focused frequently on the social complexities

---

131. See Brass 1990 and Wolpert 1993, ch. 25.
132. Consult Das 1995, ch. 3.
of middle- and upper-class Indian life, and on the devastating effects of family, society, and history on innocent or helpless individuals, particularly when they are plunged unwittingly into violent political events (such as the Partition in *Clear Light of Day*, and World War II and the Holocaust in Baumgartner’s *Bombay*). A substantial portion of her early and late fiction—particularly *Cry, the Peacock* (1963), *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), and *Clear Light of Day* (1980)—has also concentrated on middle-class Indian women characters, exploring their lives systematically and sympathetically in rich, realistic detail, and confronting difficult social issues (problem marriages, unexpected pregnancies, widowhood, lifelong disabilities, and emotional dependencies) without resorting to a strident feminist rhetoric. Her writing thus has centered on individuals but has incorporated powerful social, historical, and political components, even though she has treated the latter obliquely, through the trope of indirection or suggestion (which parallels the classical Sanskrit device of *vakrokti*). Desai’s humanist aesthetics may be best characterized as a sensuous classical aesthetics, which has subordinated her social and political interests to the rigors of verbal refinement and imaginative resonance, and has allowed such interests to surface only as supplementary textual effects. What has been distinctive about Desai’s body of humanist-cosmopolitan work is its capacity to transmute the conventional late-modernist comedy of urban manners (as contrasted to Narayan’s “serious comedies” of provincial manners) into a searching tragicomedy in a middle-class Indian city setting, or into a searing tragedy in an international landscape.

**Collaboration**

The enlargement and intensification of the national freedom movement after Mahatma Gandhi’s return to the subcontinent in 1915 and the influence of his swadeshi campaign on Indian literary thinking in the 1920s and 1930s—which encouraged Indians to reject the English language, along with all English goods—made it virtually impossible for an Indian to criticize India or to praise the British in the final decades of colonial rule. Indian-English collaborative discourse, however, survived this phase and resurfaced strongly just after Independence as a fourth ideological position in the newly constituted national public sphere, particularly in the voluminous prose writings of Nirad C. Chaudhuri. In a series of books beginning with *The Autobio-
graphy of an Unknown Indian (1951) and continuing up to Thy Hand, Great Anarch! (1993)—another installment of his autobiography—Chaudhuri defined the core of voluntary postcolonial complicity with the ideology of imperialism. In his biographies of Friedrich Max Muller (1974) and Robert Clive (1975), in works of social criticism such as The Intellectual in India (1967) and Culture in a Vanity Bag (1976), in accounts such as A Passage to England (1959), and in works of historical and ideological criticism such as The Continent of Circe (1966) and Hinduism (1979), he rejected practically every aspect of indigenous Indian society, arguing that whatever is valuable on the subcontinent is a legacy of British colonization and Westernization. Starting in the mid-1960s, Chaudhuri’s unrestrained and unrepentant Anglophilia found unexpected corroboration in the work of V.S. Naipaul, who, as a descendant of agricultural workers from Uttar Pradesh indentured in Trinidad and Tobago in the mid-nineteenth century, returned to the subcontinent as an observer at the center of Anglophone Caribbean and postcolonial writing and on the fringes of Indian-English literary culture. Naipaul’s three New Journalistic travel-accounts, An Area of Darkness (1964), India: A Wounded Civilization (1977), and India: A Million Mutinies Now (1990), indicted historical and post-Independence India from a partial-outsider’s point of view as virulently as Chaudhuri’s books did from an insider’s perspective. The critique of India that Chaudhuri and Naipaul refurbished between them may be interpreted as stemming from a “self-hatred” that, as Fawzia Afzal-Khan says of Naipaul,

drives him incessantly to demarcate the difference between what he is today (an inhabitant of the world of “light”) and what his distant past (with its link to India) was (a world of “darkness”). What he is today, he repeats obsessively . . . is an Anglicized West Indian with a remote Indian ancestry—with the emphasis on “Anglicized.” “London,” he writes, “had become the center of my world, and I had worked hard to come to it.” . . . As the westernized native par excellence, Naipaul succumbs to the syndrome of alienation so astutely described by Frantz Fanon: “At a given stage, [such a writer] feels that his race no longer understands him, or that he no longer understands it....” In so doing, Naipaul creates a literature of self-hatred that duplicates Orientalist strategies of containment . . . [to create] a symbol of petrified societies enshrouded in perpetual darkness.

For further reading:
- Chaudhuri’s obituary in Time (August 16, 1999: 21).
- Naipaul’s works: An Area of Darkness; India: A Wounded Civilization; and India: A Million Mutinies Now. For his recent autobiographical reflections on India, see Naipaul 1999a and 1999b.
Articulating a vision in which India is representative of the postwar Third World, and “the Third World in general is a nightmare of history” that the complicitous postcolonial writer “seeks desperately to avoid by living in the world of light—the West,” figures like Chaudhuri and Naipaul have reinvigorated the satiric attacks on India and Indianness that have been characteristic of evangelical, Anglicist, and colonialist British discourse since the eighteenth century, and that became prominent in Indian writing during the Bengal Renaissance in the nineteenth century. At the same time, they have also provoked countercritiques from Indian-English writers and scholars such as Nissim Ezekiel, Dilip Chitre, and Harish Trivedi. The rift between satiric and heroic representations of India has thus been deepened by Indians themselves.

As the foregoing discussion indicates, the fertility of Indian writing in English in the closing decades of colonial rule and the first few decades of political freedom has immensely complicated the historical dynamics of this literature. Where Din Muhammad had launched a discursive contestation between Indian understandings and British experiences of India, where Ram Mohun Roy had initiated a contestation over India itself within the larger contestation with the West, and where the poets of the long nineteenth century—from Henry Derozio to Sarojini Naidu—had multiplied the levels of contestation by adding the aesthetic plane to the ongoing conflicts on the political, economic, and social planes, the writers of the 1925–1975 period quadrangulated the entire process with their polarization of the ideological incommensurabilities of empire, village, nation, and city. This great broadening of the literary scope of Indian writing in English in the second and third quarters of the twentieth century defined the turbulence within which the postcolonial Indian diaspora began to hammer out its separate cultural identity in the last quarter of that century.

THE DOMINANCE OF THE DIASPORA

In the last few decades of the twentieth century, the very centers of Indian-English literary culture appear to have migrated from the subcontinent, as writers of the Indian diaspora—particularly in Great Britain and North America—have rapidly and increasingly come to dominate the international literary marketplace in the English language. Migrant and itinerant writers have energized Indian writing in English in most of its historical phases: Din Muhammad and Ram Mohun Roy at the inception; Toru Dutt and Manmohan Ghose before the close of the nineteenth century; Sarojini Naidu, Mulk

141. The quotations here are from Afzal-Khan 1993: 13.
Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and G. V. Desani in the late colonial period; and Ni-rad Chaudhuri, Ved Mehta, Santha Rama Rau, Aubrey Menen, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Nissim Ezekiel, Dom Moraes, Adil Jussawalla, and A. K. Ramanujan, among others, in the early postcolonial decades. Despite such precedents, however, the literary-cultural output of the contemporary diaspora has metamorphosed the inner kinetics of Indian-English literature on an unprecedented scale.

The diaspora has perceptibly modified the four primary zones of contact that have provided a social framework for Indian-English literary culture since the late eighteenth century, the principal change being that the zones are now geographically relocated overseas. In its foreign setting, the zone of employment retains the structural characteristics it has possessed since the final decades of the nineteenth century, because a high proportion of Indians abroad continue to consist of professionals in private-sector and state-sector service. But the zone now brings Indian professionals into contact with people of many more races and nationalities than it did in the colonial period on the subcontinent, absorbing them into a radically multicultural and multilingual international white-collar workforce. It also attracts much higher numbers of educated Indian women into a wider array of professions than before, especially in North America, which has contributed generally as well as concretely to the growth and dissemination of Indian women’s writing and intellectual work, Indian feminist and gender-centered discourse, and Indian women’s sociopolitical activism across international borders. Well-educated, professionally successful, and financially secure diasporic and itinerant Indians in the zone of employment abroad currently constitute networks of a few million Anglicized, Europeanized, or Westernized men and women scattered around the globe. This fragmented yet interlinked community has produced many of the newest authors of Indian origin in English, besides serving as an extensive, enthusiastic international readership for contemporary Indian-English writing.

The zone of marriage and family is perhaps the zone that has altered the most in its internal structure, transmuting itself into a fuzzy domain of varied interracial and intercultural social-sexual relations. More members of the middle- and upper-class populations of Indian origin now marry across racial, religious, and linguistic borders than at the midpoint of the century, and Indians of both sexes also explicitly adopt alternative sexual lifestyles in interracial diasporic settings. A high proportion of the younger writers in


144. Refer to Clarke, Peach, and Vertovec 1990, and van der Veer 1995.
English from the Indian diaspora have acculturated themselves to the Anglophone West in this blurry zone, consequently affecting the racial, cultural, and sexual aspects of Indian writing in English even within India. The zone of interracial marriage in the diaspora mediates the work, for instance, of Bharati Mukherjee, Meena Alexander, and Sujata Bhatt, among women writers, and of Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh, among male writers; and its sexual and familial boundaries are ruptured by the thematization, for example, of homosexuality in Agha Shahid Ali’s poetry, of bisexuality in Vikram Seth’s poetry and fiction, and of lesbian identity and queer politics in Suniti Namjoshi’s verse and prose.\textsuperscript{145}

The zone of religious conversion, however, which had such powerful effects in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, has continued a trend that was consolidated in the early twentieth century. This is the trend of internal reversal within the zone, so that it has increasingly become the space of Indian resistance to conversion, especially to Christianity, over the past one hundred years. The great majority of writers of Chinese, Korean, Philippine, Indonesian, African, and Caribbean origin who are classified as Asian-American, immigrant, or postcolonial writers in the Anglophone West today consists of descendants of old or recent converts to Christianity.\textsuperscript{146} In contrast, many of the Indian-English writers in the diaspora come from non-Christian backgrounds and continue to occupy a remarkable spectrum of identities and backgrounds in relation to religion. Although much of Indian writing in English remains broadly secular in content and perspective (given the predominance of cosmopolitanism noted earlier), the sheer diversity of the religious backgrounds of its authors—and hence also of their related ethnic, linguistic, regional, and cultural origins on the subcontinent—constitutes one of the great strengths and sources of fascination of this literature: by background, for example, Salman Rushdie, Saleem Peeradina, and Agha Shahid Ali are Muslim; Bharati Mukherjee, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor, Chitra Divakaruni Banerjee, Anjana Appachana, and Amit Chaudhuri are Hindu; Meena Alexander, I. Allan Sealy, and Ruth Vanita are Christian; and Rohinton Mistry, Bapsi Sidhwa, and Ardashir Vakil are Parsi.\textsuperscript{147}

The zone that has expanded the most in scope and effect in the diaspora is that of intercultural friendship and social relations. In this space, net-


\textsuperscript{146} Consult, for example, Cheung 1997.

\textsuperscript{147} On Rushdie, see notes 83, 106, and 125; on Mukherjee, Tharoor, and Sealy, see note 43; on Ghosh, see notes 43 and 134; on Ali, Seth, and Alexander, see note 145; on Peeradina, refer to King 1992; and on Mistry, see Nelson 1993: 207–18.
working with other Indians in the diaspora and on the subcontinent has proved vital for the maintenance of the Indian component in a culturally ambidextrous, cosmopolitan identity, whereas daily or regular contact with non-Indian friends, neighbors, colleagues, and associates has been essential for the Anglicized or Westernized component. The primacy of this division of cultural loyalties in the diaspora has contributed to the extensive revision of two key features of Indian writing in English. Along one track, the interspersion of continuous contact with Indians as well as non-Indians has altered Indian writers’ conceptions of what constitutes their Indianness and what the limits and possibilities of the East-West encounter are, especially with reference to the influential earlier formulations on the latter subject by Rudyard Kipling, E. M. Forster, and Raja Rao. Along the other track, the constant exposure to the Anglophone West in much of the diaspora has radically changed the very language of Indian writing in English, shifting away from the bookish Oxbridge norm of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries toward a plethora of national, international, colloquial, generic, and experimental styles. There still may be no Indian English as distinctive as African-American, Jamaican, Irish, Nigerian, Fijian, or Australian English, but the distinction of recent Indian-English writing may be precisely that it appropriates almost every available variety of the language with its omnivorous cosmopolitan appetite.

The diaspora also frames a series of other reversals that spill beyond a cartography of well-defined zones of contact and acculturation. Since the late eighteenth century, Indians have migrated steadily to most parts of the globe so that at the beginning of the twenty-first century there are more than ten million people from India or of Indian origin in more than 130 countries. The emigrations in successive generations have been mediated by recursive economic and social factors, but the displaced communities in different locations have developed diverse relations to India. Indian immigrants and their descendants in Fiji and Malaysia, for instance, differ from each other in their attitudes toward and actual connections with India, as they also differ from their counterparts in, say, Australia and New Zealand, the Middle East, East Africa, Western Europe, the Caribbean, the United States, and Canada. Among Anglophone writers of Indian origin, this geographically articulated diversity generates a corresponding spectrum of

148. Kipling’s most famous line on this theme, of course, is “East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.” Forster’s skepticism surfaces in the conclusion of A Passage to India, cited in note 32. Rao’s classic statement is The Serpent and the Rope (1960), analyzed at length in Sharrad 1987.

149. On Indian English, see Kachru 1982.

150. For statistics from the 1980s, see Clark, Peach, and Vertovec 1990, especially 1–29.
conceptions of India, Indian religions and cultures, and especially of Indian-anness, that is directly related to the psychosocial effects of displacement and dislocation.\textsuperscript{151} The most interesting of these effects may be the literary consequences of living at a distance from the subcontinent and of raising families—both Indian and interracial—outside it. A historical aspect of this phenomenon is that in the colonial period, most mestizo children of partially Indian origin were brought up \textit{in India}, whereas at the beginning of the twenty-first century, most such children are raised \textit{outside} the subcontinent. If, between the early eighteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, the great majority of Anglo-Indians grew up in India with England as a remote but much-longed-for “true home,” in the post-Independence diaspora most children of Indian and interracial origins have grown up or are growing up with the subcontinent as a distant, exotic “other home” in their imaginations.\textsuperscript{152} Coupled with the geographically articulated diversity of diasporic conceptions of India, this reversal has powerful consequences for the representation of India in writing: it undercuts the verisimilar constructions of India and Indian-anness that Indian-English writers living on the subcontinent canonized for themselves and their readers during the late colonial and early postcolonial decades, and it leads to a renewed exoticization—practically a re-Orientalization—of India in diasporic writing.\textsuperscript{153} This exoticization, which is also a fresh commodification of India in the global literary marketplace, is most visible in the antirealistic representations in Salman Rushdie’s later fictions, especially from \textit{The Satanic Verses} (1988) to \textit{The Ground beneath Her Feet} (1999), as well as in the more realistic depictions in, say, Bharati Mukherjee’s \textit{Jasmine} (1989) and \textit{The Holder of the World} (1993), and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s \textit{Arranged Marriage} (1995) and \textit{The Mistress of Spices} (1997).\textsuperscript{154} The diaspora’s appropriation of the power to represent India in the international print sphere in the 1980s and 1990s is such that its portrayals of India as “a land of fantasy”—to echo Hegel’s phrase from 1830—has now infected Indian writing in English on the subcontinent itself.\textsuperscript{155} The complex formation of the diaspora has resulted in another large-scale reversal in the evolving Indian-English tradition. Socially and economically, \textsuperscript{151} On diasporic Indians in different national and continental settings, see the relevant chapters in Clark, Peach, and Vertovec 1990, and van der Veer 1995. \textsuperscript{152} Refer particularly to Kain 1997. \textsuperscript{153} Consult Dharwadker and Dharwadker 1997, especially the conclusion. \textsuperscript{154} Refer to Rushdie’s novels, cited in note 125; Mukherjee 1989 and 1993; and Divakaruni 1996 and 1997. \textsuperscript{155} Refer to Hegel [1899] 1956: 139. On the diaspora’s influence on writing in India, see Dharwadker 1999.
the dispersal of Indians around the globe has been a multilayered and mul-
ticentered phenomenon, so that Indians from a range of socioeconomic
backgrounds on the subcontinent have translated themselves into other hi-
erarchies of rank and status in their adopted societies. But the new im-
migrant and itinerant writers of Indian origin come overwhelmingly from
privileged-class backgrounds on the subcontinent as well as outside it. The
biographies of Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Salman Rushdie, Agha
Shahid Ali, Meena Alexander, Vikram Seth, Shashi Tharoor, and Amitav
Ghosh, for instance, show that their migrations and traveling identities do
not cross or disturb class boundaries as they move back and forth between
the upper levels of Indian society and the upper levels of British, American,
and European society.

The strong, almost uniform affiliation of the diasporic writers as a group
with the dominant classes has reversed some of the social, economic, and
political trends in the Indian-English literature of the preceding fifty years
or so. The diasporic writers have largely marginalized the search for dis-
tributive and restitutive social justice that motivated the anti-elitist and pro-
subaltern writers of the late colonial and early postcolonial decades. In con-
trast to the social commitments of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, G.V. Desani,
Adil Jussawalla, Arun Kolatkar, and even R.K. Narayan and Anita Desai, the
attitudes of Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Divakaruni Banerjee, Meena Alexan-
der, Agha Shahid Ali, Shashi Tharoor, and Amit Chaudhuri seem unapolo-
getically elitist, and even those of Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh re-
semble the attitudes of, say, the mid-twentieth-century British champagne
socialists that George Orwell satirized. The shift in class alignments from
the 1925–1975 period to the post-1975 period thus is closely connected not
only to the thematic and stylistic changes in this transition—diasporic
writing swerves away from the realities of the subcontinent, rejecting real-
istic representation in favor of magic realism, fabulation, and discursive
constructionism—but also to comprehensive material-ideological changes.
This implies that the exoticization of India and the hegemony of magic re-
alism in diasporic writing—which, in this case, signifies escapism in relation
to the problem of social injustice—are not merely aesthetic choices or de-
velopments; rather, they are the discursive complements of a socioeco-
nomic and ideological upheaval in the very kinetics of Indian-English liter-
ary culture. The full extent of this upheaval may be most evident in the style,

156. Consult Clark, Peach, and Vertovec 1990, and van der Veer 1995.
157. Sources on these writers are cited in notes 35, 43, 106, 125, 134, 135, and 145.
159. See Afzal-Khan 1993 for her discussion of realism and social responsibility (especially
15–18, 21–26, and 59–61); and for her and Timothy Brenan’s respective critiques of magic re-
content, and design of Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997), as also in its material-cultural contexts and its astonishing international literary-commercial success.  

The emergent ideological structure of Indian writing in English after 1975 alters the specific ideological paradigms established in the preceding fifty years, but does not disturb their abstract interrelations. Revivalism and the quest for authenticity reappear in the diaspora as a nostalgia for a home and an India that have ceased to exist. In R. Parthasarathy’s recent poetry, for example, the nostalgia has taken the form of a pan-Dravidian cultural provincialism that may be insularly aesthetic rather than politically active, yet retrieves and repetitively celebrates the ancient Dravidian past in the heroic mode, at a historical as well as geographical distance. The contrary of this reactionary provincialism in the diaspora is a mostly apolitical, deeply aestheticized cosmopolitanism, as represented by Anita Desai’s *Journey to Ithaca* (1995), Vikram Seth’s *An Equal Music* (1999), Amit Chaudhuri’s *Afternoon Raag* (1993), and Anjana Appachana’s *Listening Now* (1998). The diasporic discourse of collaboration now celebrates immigration and assimilation to the West in the heroic mode, particularly with reference to the melting-pot multiculturalism of the United States, as in Bharati Mukherjee’s *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988). The most intricate and productive of these ideological locations may be that of immigrant solidarity and anti-neocolonialism, which valorizes a heroic resistance to the racism of North American and European societies and celebrates a subversive hybridity. This combative postcolonialism also powerfully satirizes the colonial and neocolonial West, seeking to overturn the existing (im)balance of power in order to enact a postcolonial revenge against the metropolis from its interstices and margins. This last ideological position in the diaspora is most fully articulated in Salman Rushdie’s *The Jaguar Smile* (1987), *The Satanic Verses* (1988), and *Imaginary Homelands* (1991), and in the critical and theoretical writings of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha. The striking literary ramification of this extensive ideological work within the diaspora is that it can be (and has been) done most effectively in various forms of prose, and therefore reinforces the massive elevation of prose over poetry that has characterized Indian-English literary culture in the twentieth century.

160. For a discussion of Roy, refer to Dharwadker and Dharwadker 1997, and Dharwadker 1999. On different aspects of Roy, see the other essays in Dhawan 1999.


ENGLISH AND THE INDIAN LANGUAGES

The process of the internal self-differentiation of Indian writing in English into multiple, incommensurate, and contestatory discourses that I have traced over a period of more than two centuries in the foregoing pages is connected closely to its identity as a literature, especially to one of its central concerns: the representation of India, Indians, and Indianness. Even as it relocates the subcontinent on an interactive grid demarcated by empire, nation, village, and city, and thus shifts away from an essentialist definition of Indianness, contemporary Indian-English literature persists in its effort to arrive at a comprehensive representation of Indian ways of life. Its special problem still is that it wishes to do so in a medium that was originally foreign to the culture it seeks to represent, and that it has had to domesticate continuously over the past two centuries for such an objective. But even as various social mechanisms have enabled English to be at home in India and among Indians, the language has retained an indissoluble final fraction of its alienness: Indian writing in English is still not a body of writing in an unmistakably “Indian” English. Raja Rao attempted to conceptualize this problem six decades ago, in his preface to Kanthapura (1938):

The telling [of the story in this novel] has not been easy. One has to convey in a language that is not one’s own the spirit that is one’s own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word “alien,” yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up—like Sanskrit or Persian was before—but not of our emotional make-up. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will some day prove to be as distinctive and colorful as the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it.

It is now possible to suggest that the difficulty is not only one of representing something Indian in an alien language but, more precisely, also one of “translating”—carrying across—an object from its “natural” linguistic habitat into an adjacent, different linguistic space. Even as it serves as a medium of “original” composition, English in Indian-English literature also has to serve as a medium of translation, of re-presentation across a gap of irreducible foreignness, into which Indian authors render their particularized versions of India, Indianness, or Indian ways of life. In this specific sense, Indian literature in English is as much an original literature as a literature of translation, though in itself it is not a body of texts translated from the Indian lan-

guages. In its accumulation over two centuries as a body of translations, Indian-English literature has overcome its predicaments—as a literature written in a “foreign” language and as a “bastard child” of colonialism—by making itself inseparable from India as one of the subcontinent’s many translated bodies.\textsuperscript{166}

This nebulous effect of translation is most perceptible when we stand back from individual authors and works and let their cumulative resonances play on our readerly memories, feelings, and imaginations. When we do so, we find that the translatory effect of Indian-English writing is embedded in the concrete relation of English to the Indian languages. One of the objects that Indian-English literature as a whole renders into the medium of English is the Indianness that resides “naturally” in the various indigenous languages of the subcontinent—the composite, specifically Indian quality which, in a Heideggerian and Derridean vocabulary, may be said to have its “being” in the “house” of the Indian languages.\textsuperscript{167} The prose of Mulk Raj Anand and Khushwant Singh resonates with the rhythms and images of Panjabi; the verse of Shiv K. Kumar and Agha Shahid Ali echoes the music of Urdu; the poetry of A.K. Ramanujan and R. Parthasarathy and the fiction of R.K. Narayan capture the clipped cadences and ambiguities of the Tamil language and of Tamil life; the novels and stories of Raja Rao and Anjana Appachana reverberate with spoken Kannada; the experimental poems of Sujata Bhatt, Dilip Chitre, and Arvind Krishna Mehrotra are strongly flavored with Gujarati, Marathi, and Hindi styles of expression, respectively; Nissim Ezekiel, Adil Jussawalla, Eunice de Souza, Arun Kolatkar, Salman Rushdie, and Rohinton Mistry verbally reenact the multilingual hodgepodge of Bombay; Jayanta Mahapatra lets us listen to the hypnotic, abstract stillness at the heart of Oriya; and Amitav Ghosh and Amit Chaudhuri, among others, carry us into the sensuous ebb and flow of Bangla.\textsuperscript{168} This intertexture of the Indian languages and English, however deeply mediated by other factors, is not a mirage: by now, after nearly two centuries of continuous aesthetic refinement, the highly crafted “English” of Indian-English literature is full of the long shadows of the Indian languages. The indigenous languages are among the social, political, and aesthetic elements that have penetrated the English language in its alien environment on the subcontinent, and like other precolonial and noncolonial presences, they have leaked continuously into this literature through the aperture that opened inside it two hundred years ago. To the great distinction of Indian-English writers and their collective creativity, this

\textsuperscript{166} See Prasad 1999.
\textsuperscript{167} Refer to Derrida 1982.
\textsuperscript{168} Sources on most of the writers mentioned in this paragraph are cited in the preceding notes. On Singh, see Srinivasa Iyengar 1973: 498–504, and Naik 1982: 220–21. On Kumar, Bhatt, Chitre, Mehrotra, and Kolatkar, see King 1992; and on Bhatt, also see Nelson 1993: 23–27.
shadowy interspersion constitutes a pervasive, internal “decolonization” of English at the level of language itself. And, in the logic of intercultural contestation and “post”-colonialism, that—perhaps—is exactly as it should be.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


———. 1997. “Print Culture and Literary Markets in Colonial India.” In Language


PART 2

Literature in Southern Locales
Three Moments in the Genealogy of Tamil Literary Culture

Norman Cutler

This essay focuses on a few key moments in the genealogy of Tamil literary culture that are described and enacted in, respectively, (1) the autobiography of the great textual scholar and editor U.V. Cāminātāiyar (1855–1942), which treats approximately the first half of his life; (2) histories of Tamil literature that emerged as a genre of scholarship in the twentieth century; and (3) a fifteenth-century literary anthology titled Pugattirāṭṭu (Anthology of poems on the exterior world). I have chosen each of the three for the insights it affords into ways of cognizing and using literature at particular points in time and in particular environments, and also because each, in a sense, represents a distinct mode of making and performing Tamil literary culture. Thus the aim of this chapter is to illuminate three historically located perspectives on Tamil literature, rather than to offer an omniscient master narrative.

At the same time, certain recurrent themes provide a mechanism for identifying salient areas of similarity and difference in some of the forms that Tamil literary culture has taken throughout its history. These include the ways the domain of Tamil literature has been constituted in different intellectual environments and at different points in time; the variable degree to which Tamil literature has been viewed through a historical lens; the degree to which literary culture and other cultural domains, such as religion or politics, have been interconnected or separate; and the relative prominence of written and oral modalities in the composition, transmission, and consumption of literature. While this chapter does not illuminate these issues for all of Tamil literature throughout the entire expanse of its history, it aims to establish a framework that can be used to extend the present explorations to other moments in the genealogy of Tamil literary culture.
LITERARY CULTURE IN LATE-NINETEENTH-CENTURY TAMILNADU

In 1887, U. V. Çaminaïyär (1855–1942), the scholar who today is synonymous in many people’s minds with the Tamil Renaissance of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, published a critical edition of CivaKaca-cintāmāni (The wishing-stone tale of Jivandhara; tenth century) a long narrative poem of the early tenth century attributed to the Jain poet Tiruttakkatēvar.¹ This was Çaminaïyär’s first major editorial venture in a long and distinguished career devoted largely to recovering, editing, and publishing Tamil literary texts that, for many generations, had disappeared from the prevalent curricula of Tamil learning. Indeed, these texts played virtually no role in Çaminaïyär’s own education. Çaminaïyär witnessed momentous developments in the constitution and (re)configuration of the Tamil literary world during his lifetime. His education and early career were deeply embedded in a literary culture that was closely intertwined with Hindu sacred geography, devotional expression, and social practice. He is generally singled out as the most prolific, if not necessarily the earliest, participant in the movement to recover a corpus of texts, and their concomitant literary culture, that largely lay outside of and predated the horizons of the literary world in which he himself was raised.² Reading Çaminaïyär’s autobiographical account of his life and career, one would never guess that he lived during a period when new fictional prose genres such as the novel and short story entered the field of Tamil letters.³ It is important to keep in mind that while he was largely responsible for extending the horizon of the Tamil literary past, many of his contemporaries were involved in blazing new literary pathways into the future.⁴

Çaminaïyär’s prolific output includes close to one hundred published books; these are primarily editions of traditional Tamil texts but also include some original works. Among the latter are his autobiography and a biography of his teacher, T. Miṅācicuntaram Pillai (1815–1876).⁵ Besides intro-

¹. The story of the hero of this long narrative in verse follows Vādibhasimha’s Kṣattra-ca-
dāma (Crest-jewel of Kṣatriya power), itself based on Guṇabhadrā’s Uttarapurāṇa (The lore of the later epoch), completed in 897/98 C.E. (Zvelebil 1995: 169).
². After Çaminaïyär, the best-known figure in this movement is probably the Sri Lankan Tamil scholar C.V. Tāmōtaram Pillai (1832–1901). Among his contributions are editions of two of Tolkāppiyam’s three sections, published respectively in 1868 and 1885.
³. Çaminaïyär 1982. The autobiography was also published in an abridged version by Çaminaïyär’s student Ki.Va. Jakannātān (Çaminaïyär 1938), and the abridged version has been translated by S.K. Guruswamy (Çaminaïyär 1980). More recently, Kamil V. Zvelebil has translated the unabridged text of the autobiography (Çaminaïyär [1990] 1994). In his autobiography Çaminaïyär treats only the first half of his life, through the year 1899.
⁴. Çaminaïyär’s lifetime encompassed that of C. Subramania Bharati (1882–1921), who is often referred to as the “father of modern Tamil.”
⁵. Çaminaïyär 1986. The biography is available in a very abbreviated translation by K. Guruswamy (Çaminaïyär 1976).
ducing the reader to a fascinating cast of characters, both works are enor-
mously valuable for the insights they provide into the cultural and literary
worlds inhabited by Cāminātaiyar and his teacher.

Mīnāṭcintaram Pillai was renowned for his phenomenal talents as a poet,
especially his ability to mentally compose long passages of verse, seemingly
without effort. His career as a poet, scholar, and teacher was closely inter-
twined with traditional patronage relationships, primarily within the Tamil
non-Brahman Śaiva community. Pillai’s income was derived primarily from
two sources: commissions he received to compose poetic works for patrons
(sometimes individuals, sometimes groups who pooled their resources), such
as poems that celebrate particular Śaiva sacred places in Tamilnadu; and em-
ployment as a resident Tamil scholar and teacher at the Śaiva monastic cen-
ter located at Tiruvāvatuturai in Taṇcāvūr district, one of the wealthiest and
most influential sectarian institutions in the area.6

Cāminātaiyar became Pillai’s pupil in 1871, only five years prior to Pillai’s
death. Although his tutelage under Pillai was relatively brief, Cāminātaiyar
would have us understand that the relationship between the non-Brahman
guru and the Brahman disciple was extraordinarily close, equaling if not sur-
passing the bonds of blood kinship. Cāminātaiyar was sixteen years old when
he joined Pillai’s coterie of pupils. Cāminātaiyar attended classes Pillai con-
ducted for the monks who resided at Tiruvāvatuturai and also served his
teacher by transcribing on palm leaves the original compositions that Pillai
composed mentally and dictated to him. In virtually every instance the cre-
ative process culminated in a formal debut (arankeppam)7 before an audience
composed of the work’s patron(s) and other guests; and customarily, upon
completion of the debut ceremony, Pillai received ritual honors and cash
payment.

After Pillai’s death in 1875, Cāminātaiyar remained at Tiruvāvatuturai and
pursued the final stage of his formal education, receiving training from Cup-
piramaṇiya Tēckar, head of the monastery, in Śaiva philosophy and various
literary (ilakkiyam) and grammatical (ilakkān) texts.8 Simultaneously, he

6. The three most important Śaiva monasteries headed by non-Brahmans in Tamilnadu are
located in Tiruvāvatuturai, Tarumapuram, and Tiruppaṇantāl, all in Taṇcāvūr district. The first
two of these, being parent institutions that exercise authority over subsidiary monasteries, are
most properly identified by the appellation atiyam.

7. Literally, ascending the stage. In modern-day Tamil culture the term most often desig-
nates the first public dance recital given by an adolescent girl.

8. In the traditional scheme of things texts are classified as either “literature” (ilakkiyam) or
“grammar” (ilakkana). The Tamil word ilakkiyam is derived from Sanskrit lakṣaṇā (that which is
defined, described, or designated), and ilakkana is derived from Sanskrit lakṣana (that which
defines, describes, or designates). These terms highlight the complementarity of the two tex-
tual categories. The category of ilakkana is further divided into the subcategories phoneme/
grapheme (duṇa), word (cil), subject matter (poru), meter (yāppu), and poetic figures (ānī).
was given responsibilities for instructing monks and laymen attached to the monastery (maṭha; in Tamil, maṭam). Cāminātaiyar’s career as resident literary scholar at Tiruvāvaṭutuṟṟai was relatively short-lived, however. In 1880, Tiyākarāca Cēṭiyār, a former pupil and close associate of Pillai, convinced Cuppiramaniya Tēcikar to release Cāminātaiyar from his duties so that he could accept the position of Tamil pandit at the Government College at Kumpakōṇam, a position hitherto held by Tiyākarāca Cēṭiyār himself. Thus Cāminātaiyar entered a professional scholarly world, different from but not totally unconnected to the one he had inhabited up to that time.

It was near the beginning of his career as an employee of the college that Cāminātaiyar first became aware of an early Tamil literary culture that lay almost entirely outside the scope of his training. As he tells in his autobiography, the rediscovery of ancient Tamil literature began with a courtesy call that Cāminātaiyar paid to a government official, Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār, who was newly stationed at Kumpakōṇam. Mutaliyār was known to be devoted to literature, and he initiated the interview by quizzing Cāminātaiyar on the texts he had studied. Cāminātaiyar describes how he confidently reeled off a long list of texts he had studied with Pillai and other teachers, only to meet with an indifferent response from Mutaliyār. Apparently Mutaliyār was hoping to find someone who had studied old Tamil texts such as Cīvakaciṁtaṁani, Čilappatīkāram (The ankle bracelet; c. fifth century), or Maṇimēkalai (lit. The jeweled girdle, also the name of the story’s heroine; c. sixth century). Cāminātaiyar was dumbfounded by this response, since he had never even seen copies of these texts, let alone studied them. Nor did he know anyone else who had studied them. It so happened that Mutaliyār had a copy of Cīvakaciṁtaṁani in his possession, but he had been searching in vain for a scholar who was qualified to guide his reading of the text. Somewhat rashly, Cāminātaiyar volunteered to take on the task, and thus he began to delve into a text about which he had hitherto been completely ignorant.

As it turned out, though Cīvakaciṁtaṁani was unknown to Cāminātaiyar and others whose literary education was shaped by late-medieval Hindu culture, in the Tamil Jain community the text was revered and actively studied. He sought out and cultivated relationships with Jain scholars, with whose help he familiarized himself with the text. Ultimately he embarked on the project of collecting manuscripts and publishing a critical edition. It appears that though the Cīvakaciṁtaṁani was initially unknown to Cāminātaiyar and many of his contemporaries, it actually played a vital role in the literary culture of a small segment of the educated population of Tamilnadu of their day. Cāminātaiyar’s contribution was to greatly expand the text’s audience and to formulate a critically sound edition of the text. Moreover, Cāminātaiyar’s work on this text led him to unearth other, earlier literary texts that seem to have been almost completely unknown to nineteenth-century audiences. Cāminātaiyar became aware of these texts through references in
the fourteenth-century commentary on *Civakacintāmani* by Naccinārkkiniyar. Unable to trace these references, Cāminātaiyar’s curiosity was piqued, and he embarked upon the detective work through which he ultimately recovered many of the masterpieces of early Tamil literature.

But let us now backtrack—not to the chronologically oldest stratum of Tamil literature, but to the moment in Tamil literary history represented by Cāminātaiyar’s early career, prior to his discovery of these ancient texts, and consider some of the defining features of this moment.

**Language**

Cāminātaiyar would have the reader of his autobiography believe that his passion for Tamil was all-consuming and that no other language held even the slightest appeal for him. But it is also clear that he did not live in a monolingual environment. Cāminātaiyar’s father, Vēṇkaṭacuppaiyar, was a professional singer, and like most musicians of the south Indian classical tradition, his repertoire included songs composed in Tamil, Telugu, and Sanskrit. Vēṇkaṭacuppaiyar envisioned a similar career for his son, but while Cāminātaiyar proved to be a good student of music, and especially of Tamil, he showed no particular aptitude for either Sanskrit or Telugu. Cāminātaiyar failed to perform well in Telugu studies under a teacher whom his father had sought out for him, and subsequently, in his own words, “both Telugu and Sanskrit receded far into the distance.”

Though references to English in Cāminātaiyar’s autobiography are scant, it is clear from several scattered remarks that by the mid-nineteenth century, English education had made definite inroads in south India, and mastery of English was often viewed as the key to a prosperous and successful career. However, in the Saiva sectarian context that framed the early phase of Cāminātaiyar’s career, it was Sanskrit, the traditional lingua franca of Indian intellectual life, that was the significant linguistic other in Cāminātaiyar’s intellectual world, rather than the language of India’s imperial rulers.

While Cāminātaiyar gives the impression that both he and his teacher, Pillai, were virtually monolingual in Tamil, Sanskrit learning and Sanskrit texts did play a significant role in the intellectual and literary world they inhabited. This is apparent in Cāminātaiyar’s description of the educational and scholarly endeavors at Tiruvāvaṭutugai. For instance, we learn that Cuppiramaṇīya Tēcikar, head of the monastery, had sound knowledge of Tamil, Sanskrit, and music. We also learn that the monastery supported scholars who specialized in all three fields of learning. The most lavishly staged event at the monastery was the annual celebration in honor of its founder, Na-

---

maciśvāya Mūrtti. The event was attended by scholars, musicians, monks, and lay devotees who traveled to Tiruvāvaṭutuṅgaī from all over Tamilnadu. Describing his first experience of the Tiruvāvaṭutuṅgaī founder’s day, Cāmināṭaiyar reports seeing congregations of Sanskrit scholars versed in various learned treatises, as well as ritual specialists engaged in recitation of sacred texts. Meanwhile, the Tamil Tevāram hymns and other canonized Tamil Śaiva poems were performed to musical accompaniment by őțuwārs, the traditional non-Brahman reciters of this corpus.  

Sanskrit impinged on Pillai’s intensely Tamil world in another way. Among the many texts Pillai composed on commission were sthalapurāṇas (Tamil, tālapurāṇam), mythological narratives on particular sites, especially Śaiva temples, in Tamilnadu. Pillai often based his poetic descriptions of these sites and his narrations of their sacred history on Sanskrit prototypes. He would apparently find someone to translate the relevant Sanskrit text into Tamil prose, and he would use this as a starting point for his own poetically elaborated version in Tamil verse.

**The Institutional Setting and Curriculum of Literary Study**

Cāmināṭaiyar lived during a time of great cultural transformations. It was then that the transition from a textual tradition based on palm leaf manuscripts to one based on printed, critically edited texts was taking place. There was also an important transition in the area of educational practice. Cāmināṭaiyar acquired his knowledge of Tamil literature, grammar, and poetics primarily by seeking out guidance from teachers versed in these subjects. For Cāmināṭaiyar this traditional mentoring process culminated in the five years he spent as a member of Miṅāṭicuntaraṁ Pillai’s inner circle of pupils. To the extent that Pillai’s career as a teacher was integrated into the routines of the Śaiva monastery at Tiruvāvaṭutuṅgaī, the monastery provided an institutional setting for Cāmināṭaiyar’s education. Cāmināṭaiyar’s training groomed him to teach pupils in much the same manner, and after Pillai’s death he served as resident Tamil scholar for a period of time at Tiruvāvaṭutuṅgaī. However, his career as a teacher shifted to a different institutional setting when he succeeded Tiyaṅkaracar Cēṭṭiyar as Tamil pandit at the Government College at Kumpākōṇam.

10. The Tevāram hymns, by the poets Tiṟunāṭacampantar (seventh century), Tiṟunāṭukkaracar (seventh century), and Cuntaramūrtti (eighth century) are canonized as the first seven of the twelve Tirumūṟai (Sacred arrangement), the sacred scripture of Tamil Śaivism. Selections from the Tevāram as well as other selections from the Tirumūṟai are recited ritually in Tamil Śaiva temples and in temple festival processions by őțuwārs.

11. The Sanskrit texts that recount legends associated with sacred places belong to the genre of māhātmya (legends of greatness).
Cāminātaiyar’s account of his student days, of classes in literature conducted at Tiruvāṉaṭūṟai, and of Mināṭicūntaram Pillaï’s career as a teacher, scholar and poet, as well as his description of his own early career as a teacher of Tamil, provide a detailed picture of the contents of a traditional Tamil literary education and career during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The autobiography affords a more vivid picture of the educational environment at Tiruvāṉaṭūṟai than it does of the Government College. It would appear that many of the same texts were taught at both institutions and that a similar mode of instruction—a passage-by-passage exegesis of the text—was employed in both settings. But there were also differences. At the Government College classes seem to have been larger, and there would have been less opportunity for one-on-one contact between teacher and pupil. Further, the means for assessing students’ progress differed (students at the college sat for examinations), and the degree program at the college included subjects that played no role in the curriculum at the Śaiva monastery.

Cāminātaiyar studied with several teachers, both Brahmans and non-Brahmans, prior to his tutelage under Pillaï. At Ariyilur, where Cāminātaiyar’s father was employed as court musician by the local zamindar, Cāminātaiyar was sent to study with Kuruṇa Vattiyar, an elderly teacher known to be well-versed in Tamil literature. Cāminātaiyar mentions some of the texts he was introduced to at this time, which included collections of moral maxims, such as Āṭṭicityi (The chaplet of āṭṭi flowers), Muṭurai (Ancient sayings), Nalaṭiyār (The quatrains), and Tirukkūṟaḷ (The holy book in kural meter) and a number of poems belonging to the catakam genre. All four of these texts are collections of moral maxims in verse. Āṭṭicityi and Muṭurmi are attributed to the female poet Auvaiyar (tenth or twelfth century). Nalaṭiyār, a Jain anthology, was compiled by Patumāṅar (seventh century). Tirukkūṟaḷ, attributed to the legendary poet Tiruvaiyār, is probably the earliest and certainly is the most prominent among these texts. It is usually dated around the fifth century.

Catakam (Skt. śataka) poems, consisting of one hundred verses, were very popular until the first quarter of the twentieth century and were considered especially well suited for beginners in literary study. Many of these recounted legends associated with particular territories of Tamilnadu (Zvelebil 1995: 127).

12. Cāminātaiyar refers to Pillaï as ācārya (Skt. ācārya). The semantics of this term comprehends all of these roles.

13. During the 1880s the curriculum at the college at Kumpakonam would probably have been similar to the one instituted at Madras University in 1854. In the general education branch the subjects covered in the senior department included English literature, history, moral philosophy, political economy, mathematics, and natural philosophy. In the junior department it included grammar, English reading and writing, geography, elementary history, English composition, geometry, and algebra. Both departments included study of vernacular languages (Sathianathan 1894: 47–8). I am grateful to Eliza Kent for this information.

14. During the 1880s the curriculum at the college at Kumpakonam would probably have been similar to the one instituted at Madras University in 1854. In the general education branch the subjects covered in the senior department included English literature, history, moral philosophy, political economy, mathematics, and natural philosophy. In the junior department it included grammar, English reading and writing, geography, elementary history, English composition, geometry, and algebra. Both departments included study of vernacular languages (Sathianathan 1894: 47–48). I am grateful to Eliza Kent for this information.

14. All four of these texts are collections of moral maxims in verse. Āṭṭicityi and Muṭurmi are attributed to the female poet Auvaiyar (tenth or twelfth century). Nalaṭiyār, a Jain anthology, was compiled by Patumāṅar (seventh century). Tirukkūṟaḷ, attributed to the legendary poet Tiruvaiyār, is probably the earliest and certainly is the most prominent among these texts. It is usually dated around the fifth century.
mates, but Kiruṣṇa Vāṭṭiyār nevertheless insisted that they memorize verses from these texts.

Later the family moved to Kūmmam, where Cāminātaiyār studied with the village accountant, Citamparam Pillai, who was known for his special mastery of the complex literary genres known as pirapantam (lit. text), as well as Tiruvilaiyātpurāṇam (The lore of the sacred sports; seventeenth century), a poetic account of myths associated with the city of Maturai and environs as a locale sacred to Śiva. Up to this point Cāminātaiyār’s education had been confined to literary texts; during the next phase of his education he turned to grammar, meter, rhetoric, and poetics. The standard texts on these subjects include the thirteenth-century grammar Nannul and a manual on meter titled Yapparunikalakkārikai (Stanzas on the ornament of meter; late tenth century?), both of which Cāminātaiyār was introduced to at this time. In hindsight, all of the preceding merely served as a prelude to the years Cāminātaiyār spent with Pillai, under whose guidance he studied a wide array of literary and grammatical texts, none of which, however, predated the tenth century.

We can surmise from Cāminātaiyār’s account that in the literary culture that informed his education, most Tamil literary (as opposed to grammatical) texts were assigned to one of two large and not very precisely defined categories: pirapantam on the one hand and purāṇam and kāviyam on the other. Pirapantam (Skt. prabandha, text), according to a formulation that first appears in the sixteenth century, comprises ninety-six literary genres, though comparison of the contents of different lists of the genres comprising pirapantam yields a much higher composite number. In the many references he makes to texts he studied with Miṅāticuntaram Pillai and to Pillai’s own compositions, Cāminātaiyār mentions the genres of tiripu antāti, yamaka antāti, piḷḷaiṭṭamūḷ, ula, kalampakam, and kōvai, all of which are usually classified as pirapantam. Among these, tiripu antāti and yamaka antāti, in particular, provided a virtuosic poet such as Miṅāticuntaram Pillai ample opportunity to indulge his taste for language play.

In contrast to the relatively short pirapantam texts, the narrative poems classified as purāṇam (ancient lore) and kāviyam (or kāppiyam; Skt. kāvya, ornate poem) are long. Among the conventions associated with this category

15. These lists are found in a genre of text known as pāṭṭiyal. The earliest extant pāṭṭiyal text is Punnarupāṭṭiyal (The twelfold rule of poetry; tenth century?) in which seventy-four pirapantam genres are described.

16. In Tamil prosody, as in Sanskrit, yamaka (pair) denotes a technique whereby a string of syllables is repeated in a line or stanza, yielding different meanings in each instance, often through changes in the word boundary boundaries are demarcated. Tiripu is a similar technique, the difference being that the strings differ in one syllable.

17. Another term often applied to the collective corpus of genres designated by the term pirapantam is cirilakkīyam (ciru, small; dakkīyam, literary text).
are various set pieces used to introduce a text’s subject, such as lengthy descriptions of the locale in which the story takes place. It is clear from Čāminātaiyar’s comments that according to conventional wisdom, a student should have a good grounding in the study of pirapantam texts before undertaking the comparatively advanced study of kāvīyam texts.

It was after Pillai’s death and under the direction of Cuppiranmiya Tēcikar that Čāminātaiyar, in partnership with another advanced student, undertook concentrated studies of Paratam, Pākavatam, and pirapantam texts. Cuppiranmiya Tēcikar also instructed him in the Tamil aiva Siddhānta sūstras and various grammatical texts.

While many of the texts Čāminātaiyar studied would be considered minor or obscure by modern-day students of Tamil literature, there are several notable exceptions, such as Kampan’s Irāmāvatāram (The incarnation of Rāma), or Kampārāmyāvanam (Kampan’s Rāmāyanam), and Tiruttonṭarparātvam (The lore of the sacred devotees), or Periyaparātvam (The great lore), by Cēkkīḷār. Both of these are twelfth-century kāvīyam texts that enjoy great prestige and are widely read and studied today. It comes as no surprise that the curriculum of study at the Saiva Tiruvāvatutugai monastery and its branch mathas should include Periyaparātvam, the canonized account of the lives of the Tamil Saiva saints, the nāyāṉmār. It is perhaps somewhat less expected that toward the end of his life Pillai conducted classes on the Vaiṣṇava Kampārāmyāvanam at Tiruvāvatutugai at the request of Čāminātaiyar and other senior pupils. This is one indication, among several found in Čāminātaiyar’s autobiography and his biography of Miṅāṭcticuntaram Pillai, that Kampan’s kāvīyam belongs to a literary realm that at the time was not delimited by Saiva or Vaiṣṇava loyalties. (This is not equally true of the Saiva Periyaparātvam.) Pillai, an orthodox practicing Saiva, we are told, copied Kampan’s entire text in his own hand three times and gave two of these copies to his most devoted patron-pupils, keeping the third for his own use.

A contemporary reader who is even minimally familiar with Tamil literary history will probably be struck as much by the absences in this summary of the curriculum that shaped Čāminātaiyar’s education as by the texts and genres he mentions. For instance, we hear nothing of the eight anthologies

18. There are several Tamil renderings of the Mahābhārata story. The most famous version was composed by Villiputtur Aṭṭār, who lived during the late fourteenth/early fifteenth century. This, most likely, is the version Čāminātaiyar studied. There are several Tamil versions of the Bhāgavataparātvam. Čāminātaiyar does not indicate which he studied.

19. The fourteen Tamil Saiva Siddhānta sūstras, the earliest systematic expositions of Tamil Saiva Siddhānta theology, are attributed to six authors who lived between the twelfth and the early fourteen centuries. The heads of several non-Brahman Tamil Saiva monasteries trace their preceptor lineage to the authors of these texts. The pivotal text among these is Cīvāṇāyagolam (The teaching of the knowledge of Śiva) by Meykaṇṭṭār, who lived during the thirteenth century.

and ten long poems (pattupāṭṭu) that constitute the caṅkam corpus, nor do we read of the so-called twin epics (śrāvitaṅkāppiyakal), Cilappatikāram and Manimekalai, attributed, respectively, to Jain and Buddhist authors. Likewise, a glaring hiatus in the list of grammatical texts he mentions is the absence of Tolkāppiyam (The ancient poetry), which is now considered the earliest and most important text of its kind. The great watershed in Cāminātaiyar’s career was his discovery of the existence of these very texts, and the special place he occupies in the history of Tamil literary scholarship derives primarily from his dedication to the cause of bringing them to light. Largely through the efforts of Cāminātaiyar and a few others, the contours of the Tamil literary universe he knew as a student were radically changed. This has had far-reaching repercussions for Tamil speakers’ sense of both their linguistic and intellectual history and the degree to which the Tamil literary academy is or is not coincident with Tamil Shaivism and Vaishnavism.

Besides the early classical texts, other texts, composed much later, were absent from Cāminātaiyar’s literary education. Many of these may be described as belonging to quasi-popular genres, such as Köplakiruṇa Pāratiyār’s very popular poem, set to music, on the life of the outcaste Saiva saint Nantaṇār. Cāminātaiyar’s account also points to a de facto distinction between literature proper and texts that function primarily as the focus of personal devotional practice and temple ritual. We learn that Pillai, a devout Saiva, never missed a day’s recitation of poems from Tēvāram and Tiruvācakam (Sacred utterance), but these poems apparently were not included in the syllabus Pillai taught to his pupils. Cāminātaiyar also mentions that

---

21. The earliest corpus of Tamil literature includes eight anthologies of relatively short poems (most under fifty lines, some as short as three lines) and ten longer poems ranging in length from 103 to 782 lines. The core of the corpus is thought to have been composed approximately between 100 B.C.E. and 250 C.E., though the dates of certain poems may be considerably later. The poems of this corpus are classified into two broad poetic categories, poems of the “interior world” (akam) and poems of the “exterior world” (puram). The former concerns the love shared by a nameless young woman and young man. The latter is dominated by warriors and members of ancient Tamil royal lineages. This corpus of poetry is commonly referred to as “caṅkam literature” (caṅka ṭakkiyam), because, legend tells us, the authors of these poems belonged to a literary academy (caṅkam) that was patronized by the Pāṇiya king. The Tamil word caṅkam is a loan word (from Sanskrit/Pali saṅgha). For excellent English translations of selected poems from the caṅkam corpus and a critical discussion of the poems and the literary culture with which they are associated, see Ramanujan 1985.

22. This work grew out of a musical discourse Pāratiyār performed on the life of Nantaṇār, an outcaste to whom Cēkkilār (twelfth century) devotes a portion of Periyapurāṇam, his hagiographical poem on the Tamil Saiva saints. Cāminātaiyar writes in his autobiography that Miṅāciṟuntaram Pillai disapproved of the work because, in his view, Pāratiyār took liberties with the story, and the text violates certain norms of grammatical usage.

23. See note 9 on Tēvāram. Tiruvācakam, an anthology of poems by the ninth-century poet-saint Manikkavācakar, is included in the Tirumurai, the Tamil Saiva canon, as is the earlier Tēvāram.
one of his early teachers had him recite the twenty verses of Manikkavacakar’s Tiruvempavai (The holy [song of] our vows) at four o’clock each morning; this was most likely for the benefit of Caminatayar’s spiritual development rather than part of his formal literary education.

In Caminatayar’s representation of the literary curriculum that formed his education we find that while the texts that constituted this curriculum belonged to various epochs, little importance seems to have been attached to the relative chronology of these texts or the historical circumstances of their composition. It is almost as if the pirapantam and kaviyam texts that made up this literary world constituted a synchronic textual order. To the extent that different groups of texts within the curriculum were distinguished from one another, the basis for such distinctions was primarily generic rather than historical—for instance, one studied pirapantam before studying kaviyam.

Pillai’s own compositions—divided into the two major classes of pirapantam and purana (the latter should perhaps be regarded as a subset of kaviyam)—occupy curricular space on equal, or nearly equal, terms with texts composed centuries earlier.

**Patronage**

Minatcicuntarm Pillai’s entire career as a poet and scholar was sustained by the patronage he received from a number of sources. His primary patron was the Shaiva monastery at Tiruvavatuturai, and most immediately, Cuppiramaniya Tecikar, who was junior head of the matha when Pillai was officially appointed resident Tamil scholar. Tecikar later became head of the monastery, and he continued to support Caminatayar for several years after Pillai’s death. Pillai conducted classes not only at Tiruvavatuturai but also at the branch matha at Mayuram, and he was residing at Mayuram when Caminatayar became his pupil. The monastery and its head were also subjects for Pillai’s creative activities; he wrote a kalampakam and a pillaittamil (two genres classed as pirapantam) on Ampalavan’a Tecikar, head of the monastery previous to Cuppiramaniya Tecikar.

The catalogue of patrons and commissions that filled Pillai’s career, culminating with his appointment at Tiruvavatuturai, is long and suggests both the high prestige and the lack of financial security incumbent upon his position. Caminatayar tells us that more often than not Pillai was in debt, and he suggests that Pillai’s voluminous output as a poet (he composed at least twenty-two puranas and numerous pirapantam poems) was sometimes moti-
vated as much by financial need as by love of poetry. Pillai’s activities not only as a poet but also as a teacher were bound up in an economy of patronage. For instance, in 1848, Aruŋacala Mutaliyar, an admirer of Pillai, built and furnished a house for him in Tiruccirāppalli, thereby providing Pillai with not only a residence for himself and his family but also a place to house and teach his pupils. A recurrent theme in Pillai’s career is that of accepting pupils of limited financial means and providing them with room and board while they studied with him; in this way he routinely passed on the largesse he received from his patrons to his pupils.

Some of Pillai’s wealthy patrons, whether motivated by a love of literature or by the prestige acquired by association with a literary celebrity like Pillai, employed Pillai as a live-in tutor for several months, or even a year, at a time. It was not unusual for Pillai to bring other pupils with him on these occasions. Tēvarāca Pillai, a wealthy businessman and connoisseur of literature who resided in Bangalore, arranged for Pillai to come and tutor him at his home. While in Bangalore, Pillai also continued to teach the pupils he had brought with him as well as to work on a commission he had received to compose a purāṇa on the town of Uraiyūr. When Pillai took leave of Tēvarāca Pillai to return to Tiruccirāppalli, he was rewarded with a large sum of money, much more than he expected. As a gesture of reciprocity, Pillai offered to have two of the poems he had composed while residing in Bangalore published under Tēvarāca Pillai’s name, arguing that for poets to issue their compositions under the names of the patrons who supported them was sanctioned practice.

Many of Pillai’s compositions—purāṇas and pirapantams alike—extol the virtues of a particular locale (or temple or deity) and were commissioned by residents of that locale. Cāminātaiyar gives some information about how these commissions were initiated and arranged. For instance, we are told that some friends and influential people who lived in Uraiyūr commissioned Pillai to compose a poetic Tamil version of the Sanskrit Uraiyūrpurāṇa, and that preparatory to executing this commission Pillai found qualified scholars to provide him with a Tamil prose translation of the Sanskrit version. Among the influential people who patronized Pillai’s creative activities were several who held posts in the colonial administration. One of Pillai’s numerous locale-based compositions is a purāṇa on the town of Kumpakōnam, and apparently the commission was initiated by the local government officer.

Though some of Pillai’s compositions were published through the efforts and financial support of his admirers, in Cāminātaiyar’s account it is not so much the appearance of Pillai’s poems in print that marks their entry into the public sphere as their official arakēram. This official debut, a cultural event that casts light on the nature of literary composition, performance, and patronage, helps us understand many of the distinctive features of the
literary culture in which Pillai participated. The essential component of the debut was the oral recitation of the text by the text’s author, one of his pupils, or someone else so honored before a public audience. If the text was a long one, the recitation was usually conducted on a daily basis over a period of weeks or even months. Cāminātaiyar mentions many such occasions in Pillai’s career. Among these are the debuts conducted for the purānas he composed on the towns of Uraiyūr, Kumpakōṇam, and Peruntuṟai.

At Uraiyūr, we are told, a special thatched-palm canopy was erected adjacent to the local temple, and the event was attended by many scholars, people well-versed in erudite Tamil usage, and high-ranking Śaivas. Upon completion of the debut Pillai was presented with traditional honoraria such as jewels and clothing woven with gold thread. The debut of Pillai’s Kumpakōṇappurāṇam, composed later, was conducted with greater pomp and ceremony. Kumpakōṇam’s most prominent residents bestowed silk cloth and other traditional marks of honor upon Pillai, as well as a sum of two thousand rupees raised by public collection. Further, the palm leaves on which the text of the purāṇa was written were placed upon an elephant and taken in procession through the town while Pillai was carried in a palanquin, specially purchased for the occasion, by local dignitaries.

Pillai composed his purāṇas on Uraiyūr and Kumpakōṇam and presented them to an admiring public prior to Cāminātaiyar’s tenure as his pupil. Cāminātaiyar was directly involved, however, in both the composition and the public debut of the purāṇa on Tirupperuntuṟai. He served as Pillai’s scribe, writing on palm leaves the verses Pillai composed and dictated, and he was also given the responsibility and honor of reading the text aloud to the audience that assembled for the daily debut of each installment of the purāṇa.

The scenario for the debut of Pillai’s pillaittamil on Ampalavaṇa Tēcikar, head of the Tiruvvāḷuturai monastery, was somewhat different. This event took place, as expected, at Tiruvvāḷuturai, and Ampalavaṇa Tēcikar himself presided, with monks, scholars, and dignitaries in attendance. In his biography of Pillai, Cāminātaiyar’s description of the event highlights an exchange of mutually flattering banter between the poet and Tēcikar. This incident suggests that a kind of parity prevailed between the matha’s leading religious authority and its official poet. We find echoes of this notion in Cāminātaiyar’s autobiography, where he describes a kind of mutual teacher-pupil relationship that prevailed between Ampalavaṇa Tēcikar’s successor, Cuppiramaniya Tēcikar, and Pillai, with Cuppiramaniya Tēcikar playing the role of teacher in the sphere of Śaiva philosophy and Pillai playing that role.

25. Cāminātaiyar’s description of this event is reminiscent of the description of the debut of Čekkiṣa’s Periypurāṇam described in Čekkiṣipurāṇam by Umāpati Civacīrayar (fourteenth century).
in the literary sphere. A rather different interpretation of the relationship between the two emerges from Čaṅnātaiyar’s account of an incident that transpired during his first visit to Tiruvāḷvatūṟai. After Čaṅnātaiyar, in the company of his teacher, had received an audience with Tēcikar and demonstrated his literary accomplishments, some monks detained him to comment on Piḷḷai’s evident fondness for him and Tēcikar’s satisfaction with his performance. And one of the monks described Piḷḷai as one who excels in bestowing knowledge and Tēcikar as one who excels in bestowing food and gold.

Čaṅnātaiyar’s record of Piḷḷai’s career introduces us to an economy of literary creativity, performance, and patronage in which the currency of exchange was material wealth, talent, reputation, learning, and aesthetic experience. This economy is perhaps brought into focus most clearly in the debut of a newly composed text. Here poem, poet, patron, audience, and oftentimes pupil participate in a single event. While all are key elements in this system, the poet’s position is central. In the context of the debut the poem seems to function as the vehicle for bringing forth the poet’s genius. The poem is not only a text but a performance event that is incomplete without the presence of the poet. Public recitation serves as a medium of contact between audience and poet, providing a context for audience members to participate in the poet’s genius. It is an occasion for the poet’s patron(s) to claim a position of prestige within the community. And last, it provides an opportunity for the poet to publicly present his pupil as a supporter and inheritor of his genius.

While the debut may validly be viewed as the keystone for a structure in which status and wealth circulated, poetry should by no means be relegated to the status of a neutral conveyor of social and economic commodities. The aesthetic elements of this system were no less real than its social and economic dimensions. Thus in his description of the debut of Piḷḷai’s purāṇa on Ugaḻūr, Čaṅnātaiyar emphasizes not only the tangible signifiers of honor.

26. In order to preserve the fine balance in their relationship, Tēcikar would have the junior monks ask questions on his own behalf, rather than putting himself blatantly in the position of a pupil of Piḷḷai by posing questions to him directly (Čaṅnātaiyar 1958: 137).

27. Čaṅnātaiyar portrays Tēcikar in accord with the classical model of beneficence. It seems that especially during the annual Founder’s Day at Tiruvāḷvatūṟai he freely gave gifts to the monastery’s many visitors. The respective Tamil terms for gifts of knowledge, food, and gold that Čaṅnātaiyar employs are vītiyātān [Skt. vīdyādāna], ānnapātām [Skt. annādāna], and kovaiyātām [Skt. svārṇadāna].

28. In at least two incidents reported in Čaṅnātaiyar’s biography of Piḷḷai the poet is put on the same plane as Kampan (twelfth century), author of the classic Tamil version of the Rāmāyaṇa, and he is associated with “the goddess Tamil” (tamiḻti)” (Čaṅnātaiyar 1976: 59, 65).

29. In a very similar way, I have argued, recitation of the Tamil saints’ hymns in the context of temple worship serves as a medium of contact between an audience of devotees and the temple’s deity. See Cutler 1987, esp. ch. 3.
presented to Piḷḷai by his patrons but also the audience’s appreciation of Piḷḷai’s poetry in performance. In keeping with the conventions of the Tamil genre of *talapurāyaṟm*, Piḷḷai embellishes the puranic story of Uṟaiyur’s sanctity with elaborate descriptive passages, including praise of the the town of Uṟaiyur and the countryside surrounding it. Čāmināṭiyar imagines the audience’s aesthetic appreciation of the *purāṇa* as Piḷḷai recited it to them as follows:

Some enjoyed hearing the celebration of the countryside; some enjoyed hearing the celebration of the town. Some took delight in hearing the description of castes in the section on the town; and the temple officials listened to the descriptions of the town contained in that section with tears in their eyes.30

The aesthetic impact that Piḷḷai’s compositions made upon their audiences, whether it emanated from the emotional charge imparted to familiar puranic stories or from elaborate word play, is a recurrent theme in Čāmināṭiyar’s account. This is a point worth keeping in mind, since in more recent appraisals of Tamil literary history, these compositions tend to be devalued as somewhat laborious exercises in technical display.31

*Memory, Orality, Writing, and Printing*

By the latter part of the nineteenth century the printing press had made substantial inroads into Tamil cultural life.32 Yet despite the fact that some of Piḷḷai’s compositions found their way into published form, print culture seems to have played a relatively minor role in his career. While both orality and writing come into play in virtually all of Piḷḷai’s activities as a poet and teacher, with regard to writing—whether in the context of composition, reception, or transmission—palm leaf manuscripts are far more prominent than printed books in Čāmināṭiyar’s narrative.

It appears that Piḷḷai routinely astounded his own pupils and other contemporaries by his ability to extemporaneously compose long, technically complex passages in verse without handling any instruments of writing. When composing a poem, he would usually dictate verses to a scribe, often one of his own students; and we are told that only a scribe with great facility in the use of stylus and palm leaf could keep up with the pace of Piḷḷai’s dictation. While most of Piḷḷai’s poetry seems to have been composed in such dictation sessions, apparently he sometimes mentally composed long passages of poetry in a kind of reverie and later had them recorded on palm leaves.

30. Čāmināṭiyar 1986, i: 132.
Writing did, however, play a role in Pillai’s composition of his poems beyond record-keeping and preservation. Cāminātaiyar describes how, when Pillai was dictating his *Tirupperuntuappurāṇam*, periodically Cāminātaiyar would read portions back to Pillai, which Pillai would amend as he saw fit. Finally, Cāminātaiyar would make a clean copy of the revised text on palm leaves.

Aspects of both orality and writing were also factors in Pillai’s teaching method. According to Cāminātaiyar, Pillai never consulted a written text when teaching. He had no need to because his memory of the texts was flawless. He would recite a verse, explain its meaning, and parse it into phrase units. Sometimes he would also introduce quotations from other texts into his explanations. But though the medium of instruction for these sessions was oral, Pillai would have his pupils make their own copies of the texts he taught on palm leaf manuscripts. And sometimes he would have a student read the verses of the original text from a palm leaf manuscript rather than reciting them himself from memory. Cāminātaiyar was often chosen to do this because, drawing upon his musical talent and training, he could set passages of the text to classical ragas.

The debut of a text, of course, was a predominantly oral event. But the written form of the new work played no small role in this ritual. Probably more often than not, the manuscript served as a script for the public recitation, and as we have seen, on at least one occasion the manuscript itself was ritually honored by being paraded triumphantly through the streets.

**Social Environment**

It is useful to remind ourselves that the literary culture we come to know via Cāminātaiyar’s autobiography was the preserve of a limited segment of the Tamil population. As mentioned earlier, Cāminātaiyar’s descriptions of Mīnāṭicuntaram Pillai’s patrons and audiences tend to be couched in generalities—for instance, he mentions that at the end of a debut the poet was gifted with money collected from local residents, without telling us very much about the residents’ social identities. Nevertheless, a considerable number of Pillai’s students, fellow scholars, and patrons are named in the narrative, and to the extent that their names indicate their social identity, Cāminātaiyar’s narrative is populated in part by Tamil Brahmans, such as Ė-
minātaiyar himself, and to an even greater extent by high-caste non-Brahmans, primarily Veḷḷālas and to a lesser extent Mutaliyārs and Čeṭṭiyārs. The caste name “Pillai,” which Veḷḷālas traditionally append to their names, is ubiquitous. There are also two Christians who play fairly important roles in this story—C. Vētanāyakam Pillai, a government administrator and author who maintained close ties with Miṅāticuntaram Pillai throughout much of his career, and Cavērināta Pillai, one of Pillai’s most devoted pupils. Furthermore, Mutaliyārs, Čeṭṭiyārs, and especially Veḷḷālas are the castes that constitute the social base of Tamil Śaiva sectarianism, which is given quintessential institutional expression in the influential Śaiva monastic centers at Tiruvāṭuṭūṟai, Tarumapuram, and Tiruppaṇantāl.

Cāminātaiyar’s account of his own life and his teacher’s suggests that during the nineteenth century the cultural activities of at least some Brahmans and high-caste non-Brahmans were largely congruent, much more so than one might expect from certain modern-day politicized readings of Tamil cultural history, according to which Veḷḷālas and members of other non-Brahman castes are true sons of the Tamil soil and Brahmans are interlopers from “the North.” Furthermore, in Cāminātaiyar’s story this community of common interests and sensibilities was largely defined by Śaivism and by the study and appreciation of Tamil literature. Cāminātaiyar, a Śaṁra Brahman, numbered among his teachers both Brahmans and non-Brahmans; and of course his mentor, Miṅāticuntaram Pillai, was a non-Brahman. Needless to say, certain markers of distinction between Brahman and non-Brahman prevailed—for instance, when Cāminātaiyar traveled with Pillai he did not take his meals with his teacher, and special arrangements had to be made for his food. This was also true at Tiruvāṭuṭūṟai, an essentially non-Brahman institution, where facilities were nevertheless provided for Brahmans, many of whom were Sanskrit scholars patronized by the non-Brahman monastery.

In Cāminātaiyar’s story, segments of the Tamil population other than those just mentioned—lower-caste Hindus and Christians, as well as Muslims—are conspicuous by their absence. Though I do not pursue this point in this chapter, we cannot but wonder what kinds of literary cultures members of these groups participated in contemporaneously with the one Cāminātaiyar describes for us so vividly. Through Cāminātaiyar’s autobiography we are introduced to a canonical literary world, but we should not lose sight of the fact that during this time noncanonical genres, many of them exclusively oral, circulated in parallel literary universes—though from the vantage point of

34. Vētanāyakam Pillai is credited with writing the first novel in Tamil, Pratīṭapamutaliyār Carittiram (The life of Pratīṭapā Mutaliyār), first published in 1876.
35. Cāminātaiyar represents both his Brahman father and his non-Brahman teacher as devout Śaivites.
the keepers of the literary canon these texts most likely would not have been recognized as literature.

LITERARY HISTORY AS A MODE OF LITERARY CULTURE

Perhaps the most striking difference between the vision of Tamil literature that informed Cāminātaiyar’s education and more modern visions of the Tamil literary sphere is the degree to which each incorporates a chronological dimension. As we have seen, Miṇṭcicuntaram Pillai and other participants in a literary culture centered largely at non-Brahman Śaiva monasteries paid little attention to the relative historical placement of the texts they studied and composed. Nor did they categorize the literary domain in terms of historical periods. We have also seen that during his long career Cāminātaiyar played a key role in reformulating the prevailing vision of Tamil literature by bringing to light early Tamil literary texts such as Cīvakacintāmani, Cīlappatikāram, and many of the cānkaṇam anthologies. The effect of reintegrating these works into the Tamil literary curriculum went beyond a simple expansion of the Tamil literary sphere, however; the rediscovery of these texts at a critical juncture in the evolution of Tamil cultural and political identity also contributed to the historicization of literary studies. Scholars began to take an interest in the historical contexts in which literary texts were produced and to view literary texts as windows on an ancient Tamil cultural past. Further, their understanding of this past was profoundly affected by cultural politics.

The term “Tamil Renaissance” is often applied to the period beginning in the latter half of the nineteenth century when Tamil literary culture was altered through the recovery, editing, and publication of the early Tamil classics. This period coincides with the development of a Dravidianist political agenda, popular among certain sectors of the Tamil population, that emphasized the antiquity of Tamil civilization and, most importantly, its essential independence from Sanskritic culture. K. Nambi Arooran observes that there was an “intimate relationship between the Tamil Renaissance and the ways in which Dravidianist sentiment arose. . . . The Dravidian ideology. . . . was formulated partly if not largely on the basis of the ancient glory of the Tamils as revealed through literature.” In a similar vein, K. Sivathamby writes that “it was Tamil Literature, more than anything else, that was called in to establish the antiquity and the achievements of the Tamils.”

It therefore comes as no surprise that Tamil literary histories, especially some of the earliest, are informed by issues underlying ongoing debates concerning the Dravidian roots of Tamil culture.

M.S. Purnalingam Pillai (1866–1947) is credited with writing the first comprehensive survey of Tamil literature plotted as a historical narrative. First published in 1904 as *A Primer of Tamil Literature*, a revised and expanded edition appeared in 1929 under the title *Tamil Literature*. Purnalingam Pillai was a professor of English literature at Madras Christian College, and he intended that his work be used as a university textbook. The story of Tamil literary history as he tells it is emphatically underwritten by a Dravidianist ideology. It begins with the first extant Tamil grammatical text, *Tolkāppiyam*, and the poems collected in the *caṅkam* anthologies. For Purnalingam Pillai, as for many like-minded scholars, this corpus lends credence to the view that Tamilnadu was the site of an early Dravidian civilization that predated and flourished independently of the Aryan-dominated North. He interprets the history of Tamil literature as largely a record of the interaction between this civilization and other cultural forces that entered Tamilnadu from the outside. Central to Purnalingam Pillai’s representation of Tamil literature are its antiquity, its vastness, and its high moral standards.

Purnalingam Pillai’s history exhibits a number of features that are recognizable, though sometimes somewhat modified, in subsequent histories of Tamil literature. Most notably, he subdivides the literary field into chronologically ordered segments: (1) poems collected in the *caṅkam* anthologies and the so-called eighteen shorter works (*patinenkikkanakku*; see discussion of this term later) (The Age of the Sangams, up to 100 C.E.); (2) long narrative poems by Jain and Buddhist authors generically classified as *kāviyam* in Tamil and often referred to as epics in English (The Age of Buddhists and Jains, 100–600 C.E.); (3) canonical poems of the Tamil Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva poet-saints (The Age of Religious Revival, 600–1100 C.E.); (4) works by court poets composed during the reign of the imperial Cōḷas, the Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta sāstras, the most influential medieval commentaries on *Tolkāppiyam*, *Cilappatikāram*, and *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, and the poems of the Tamil *siddha* poets (The Age of Literary Revival, 1100–1400 C.E.); (5) late medieval poetry, much of which was composed and circulated in sectarian communities (The Age of Mutts, 1400–1700 C.E.); and (6) works composed during the

---

37. Purnalingam Pillai [1929] 1985. Notably, some of the most influential histories of Tamil literature, and certainly the earliest ones, were written in English.

38. Among the earliest and most influential of these scholars was P. Sundaram Pillai, who is best known as the author of the Tamil drama *Mugamaniyam*, first published in 1891. His views on Tamil literary history appear in his *Some Milestones in the History of Tamil Literature* (1985).


40. The corpus of poems attributed to the Tamil *siddhas* generally features a highly iconoclastic form of Shaivism characterized by yogic and tantric themes and a renunciatory ethos. The *siddha* tradition also has close ties with alchemy and healing practices.

41. “Mutt” is an informal transliteration of *matha*, which I have translated as “monastery” throughout this chapter.
eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (The Age of European Culture, 1700–1900 C.E.). This basic model is followed by many subsequent histories of Tamil literature, even if they may differ somewhat in specifics.

Purnalingam Pillai’s conceptualization of the Tamil literary field differs from earlier conceptualizations not only because it emphasizes chronology; it also encompasses texts that would not have been included in earlier models of literature, such as the canonized poems of the Tamil Vaisnava and Shaiva saints and the poems of the Tamil siddhas. The literary domain (ilakkiyam) as instantiated in earlier models was fairly precisely defined by its relationship with the complementary domain of normative grammar, poetics, and rhetoric (ilakkanam). Later, historicized models of Tamil literature are defined more globally and less precisely.

Purnalingam Pillai and other authors of global historical surveys of Tamil literature invented a master narrative of Tamil literary history that incorporated works hitherto produced and consumed in largely separate cultural spheres. Purnalingam Pillai’s version reflects a vision of Tamil cultural history once popular in certain non-Brahman Shaiva circles. According to this account the ancient Tamilians populated a land mass now largely submerged by the Indian Ocean. These ancient Tamilians were said to be ruled by the Panthiya kings, a dynasty famed as great patrons of literature. They worshipped Siva without the mediation of Brahman priests under the guidance of four sacred texts (margai) in Tamil, now lost, that antedated the Sanskrit Vedas. Those remnants of this ancient civilization that survived the incursion of the ocean constitute the bedrock, so to speak, of Tamil culture as it has evolved over time, upon which other cultural layers brought to Tamilnadu by Buddhists, Jains, Brahmanic Aryans, and later Europeans have been deposited. While other versions of Tamil literary history may be less committed to or even take issue with the Dravidianist-Shaiva agenda promoted by Purnalingam Pillai and others of his ideological bent, there are broad similarities in the ways they conceive of the content of the Tamil literary domain.

42. The dates given here correspond with the dates Purnalingam Pillai gives in his discussion of periodization in the introduction to his text ([1929] 1985: 1). The book’s table of contents is organized according to the same six periods, but the dates given for some are different.

43. The legend of the ocean successively inundating the first two Panthiya capitals was first recounted in Nakkiar’s ninth- or tenth-century commentary on Laiyasangaranakapporul, a normative text on the poetics of akam poetry, also known as Kalaiyiyal, “The Study of Stolen Love” (see Buck and Paramasivam 1997). This story plays a prominent role in the Dravidianist perspective on Tamil cultural history.

44. Margai means literally “that which is hidden” and is also often used to denote the Sanskrit Vedas.

45. For succinct, informative discussions of this agenda see Ramaswamy 1997 and Nambi Aroravan 1980.
and structure it in terms of discrete time periods associated with certain cultural sensibilities.\footnote{A notable exception is the volume Kamil Zvelebil contributed to the series \textit{A History of Indian Literature} edited by Jan Gonda and published by Otto Harrassowitz. In his introduction Zvelebil writes, “This book was conceived as based, in the first place, on the critical and evaluation approach (distinct from, but not opposed to, a strictly historical approach), and as such, it appeals primarily to the structures which may be designed as major literary types. Tamil literature is here classified principally not by time, but by specifically literary types of organization or structure. It is viewed as a simultaneous order, and the book is concerned with the interpretation and analysis of the works of literature themselves” (Zvelebil 1974: 2-3).}

S. Vaiyapuri Pillai, like Purnalingam Pillai, attempts a master historical narrative in his influential \textit{History of Tamil Language and Literature}.\footnote{Vaiyapuri Pillai 1988.} Though he is concerned only with texts produced prior to 1000 C.E., his conception of the content of the Tamil literary domain within this time frame is not substantially different from Purnalingam Pillai’s. Yet in other ways the two men were poles apart in their approach to Tamil literary history, especially regarding the relationship between Tamil and Sanskrit, the antiquity of the Tamil literary tradition, and the significance of traditional legends concerning authors and literary institutions.

Vaiyapuri Pillai makes a radical break with Purnalingam Pillai’s appropriation of Tamil literary lore, and he aims to establish a chronology of Tamil literature based on rigorously applied scholarly principles. Compared to dates assigned by Purnalingam Pillai and other Dravidianists, he dates many texts relatively late. He also sees Sanskrit as an important catalyst in Tamil literary history. While many present-day scholars respectfully beg to differ with Vaiyapuri Pillai on these issues even as they acknowledge the value of his contributions to the field, during his lifetime his views were regarded by many as nothing short of blasphemous. While Purnalingam Pillai’s narrative of Tamil literary history supported a Dravidianist social and political agenda, Vaiyapuri Pillai provided a brief for the opposition in the Tamil culture wars of the 1930s through 1960s.

Different as Purnalingam Pillai’s and Vaiyapuri Pillai’s perspectives on Tamil literary history may be, their writings nevertheless share a number of themes and concerns that frequently resurface in subsequent literary histories. These include: a historicized perspective on Tamil literature; concern for the relationship between Tamil and Sanskrit; concern for the religious affiliations of texts and authors; a stand on the relevance (or lack thereof) of Tamil literary legends to literary history; and a tendency to highlight certain “great books” as exemplary contributions of Tamil culture to world literature. Conspicuously missing from these and most of the extant narratives of Tamil literary history are: an explicitly articulated concern with the liter-
ary as a category of textual production; an acknowledgment of the existence of a plurality of Tamil literary cultures; ways in which Tamil literature has been institutionalized at different times; and ways in which literary texts are embedded in performative contexts.

Insofar as they share certain presuppositions concerning the Tamil literary sphere, its composition, and its internal articulation, the literary histories of Purnalingam Pillai, Vaiyapuri Pillai, and others who followed in their wake constitute a distinct moment in the genealogy of Tamil literary culture. In the following I focus on a few of the “great books” that invariably receive attention in Tamil literary histories, considering the similarities and differences in the way they are typically incorporated into these narratives. Among these Tamil literary classics, three tend to receive lengthier treatment or to be flagged as especially significant. These are Tirukkuṟaṟa, attributed to Tiruvaṉavar; Cilappatikāram, attributed to Ilango Aṭikal; and Kampan’s Tamil rendering of the Rāmāyaṇa.

**Tirukkuṟaṟa**

*Tirukkuṟaṟa* contains 1330 couplets on a wide range of topics pertaining to family life, society, asceticism, kingship, and the protocols of love. Virtually no definite historical information is available concerning Tiruvaṉavar, the supposed author of the text. According to legend, he was a low-caste weaver. The text has been dated variously by different scholars. Kamil Zvelebil, evaluating the evidence, proposes that the *Kṟaṟa* was composed during the fifth century C.E. Some scholars hypothesize that Tiruvaṉavar was a Jain, while others vehemently dispute this. But since the text is virtually free of sectarian polemics, the debate over Tiruvaṉavar’s religious identity seems of secondary importance. The verses of *Tirukkuṟaṟa* are grouped in “chapters” (*aṭākāram*) of ten verses each, and each chapter bears a title that putatively, and in most instances fairly obviously, identifies the topic or theme treated in its constituent verses. The chapters are further grouped in three divisions that bear titles corresponding to three of the four “aims of man” (Tamil *uruttipporu*; Skt. *puruṣārtha*): virtuous behavior in the context of both household life and a life of renunciation (*agam*), prosperity realized through life in the public sphere and good government (*porul*), and pleasure through amorous experience (*kānām or inpam*). Some commentators further subdivide these three divisions into two or more subsections.

The evidence for *Tirukkuṟaṟa’s* stature as a classic, not only in modern times but also in the past, is considerable. There are ten premodern commentaries on the text, of which five are extant and five have been lost. Quotations from

---

or allusions to *Tirukkuṟaḷ* are found in other Tamil literary works, the most frequently cited being verbatim quotations of verses 55 and 360 in *Mānamēkalai*. Yet another indication of *Tirukkuṟaḷ*’s long-standing eminence is a collection of fifty verses praising *Tirukkuṟaḷ* and Tiruvaḷḷuvar titled *Tiruvaḷḷuvamakai* (tenth century?). Each verse is attributed to a different poet, including, in the early verses of the poem, a disembodied voice, the goddess of speech, Śiva in his manifestation as the poet Ṣanaiyāṉar, and many of the poets of the legendary Tamil *caṅkam*.

Scholars have tended to situate *Tirukkuṟaḷ* either as part of the *caṅkam* corpus in the earliest period of Tamil literary history or in a succeeding post-*caṅkam* age. According to certain widely accepted versions of Tamil literary history, the earliest period of Tamil literary production, the *caṅkam* period, which was dominated by a largely native Tamil aesthetic sensibility, was closely followed by an age characterized by a strong didactic bent, due at least in part to the influence of Buddhism and Jainism. The majority of the texts included in the traditional grouping of eighteen shorter works, including *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, are assigned to this later period.49 Only one other text of the eighteen—*Nālaṭiṟṟan*, said to be an anthology of verses by Jain monks—ever remotely approaches *Tirukkuṟaḷ*’s visibility among premodern Tamil texts.

The paradigm “eighteen shorter works” postdates the composition of *Tirukkuṟaḷ* and the other texts included in this group. The term first occurs in Pēṟaiyar’s thirteenth-century commentary on *Tolkāppiyam*. It also occurs in other roughly contemporary commentaries on the *ilakkaṇam* texts *Tolkāppiyam* and *Viracōliyam* (eleventh century). The defining criteria for this grouping are purely formal, though most modern literary historians note the preponderance of texts among this group that fall within the category of ethical literature (Tamil *nītinul*). The term *nītinul* is attested as early as Parimēḻaḻakar’s50 late-thirteenth-century commentary on *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, but this tells us little about the text’s status as a distinctively literary work.51

We have seen that *Tirukkuṟaḷ* is often located in an era when Buddhism and Jainism were apparently highly influential in the literary life of Tamilnadu, and that a number of scholars, notably Vaiyapuri Pillai, have argued that the author of this text was a Jain. But over time, and especially in the climate of modern Tamil cultural nationalism, *Tirukkuṟaḷ* has acquired a sig-

49. Eleven of the “eighteen shorter works” are didactic, six fall within the rubric of classical love (*aham*) poetry, and one is a war (*puyam*) poem.

50. Interestingly, while it has become an article of faith among modern-day critics like M. Arunachalam (1974) that Vāḻuvar speaks for an ethical code that is categorically independent of the classical codes of behavior based on caste and stage of life (*vāraṇśaṇamadharma*), the most influential of *Tirukkuṟaḷ*’s medieval commentators, Parimēḻaḻakar, employs this paradigm as a frame for his whole interpretive program (Cutler 1992).

51. Notably in this regard, *Tirukkuṟaḷ*’s commentators have been concerned almost exclusively with interpreting the text for its content and attend little if at all to issues of poetic form.
nificance that transcends any identification it may once have had with a Jain religious or cultural program. Virtually every religious community represented in Tamilnadu has staked a claim to *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, and especially in certain non-Brahman Śaiva circles one encounters strong resistance to the suggestion that the author of *Tirukkuṟaḷ* was Jain. N. Subrahmanian, somewhat less polemically, locates the composition of *Tirukkuṟaḷ* in the framework of a “liberalized Hinduism” that was not adverse to incorporating ideas identified with other religious communities. Other scholars are inclined to emphasize the text’s tolerance, eclecticism, and indeed its “universality” without attempting to assign it a specific religious affiliation.  

A certain tension haunts this discussion. On the one hand, scholars feel compelled to at least address the question of Valluvar’s religious affiliation; on the other hand, many end up taking the position that the text transcends sectarianism. This tension can perhaps be traced to *Tirukkuṟaḷ*’s career in Tamil cultural history. The text has, in various times and environments, been appropriated by spokespersons for one or another religious tradition. The most noteworthy example is found in the late-thirteenth-century commentary by the Vaiṣṇava Brahman Parimēḷakar. Even if specifically Vaiṣṇava themes are not prominent in this, the most influential of the several “old” commentaries on *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, Parimēḷakar unequivocally construes the overall plan of the text, as well as specific verses, in terms of Brahmanic paradigms. In recent times, however, Parimēḷakar’s construction of *Tirukkuṟaḷ* has often been challenged, sometimes respectfully and sometimes adversarially, in favor of other interpretations that downplay any strong association between *Tirukkuṟaḷ* and Sanskritic culture. For some scholars, the *Kūṟa* expresses the values of an early Tamil civilization characterized by a “rationalist” rather than a narrow sectarian sensibility, while for others it represents a unique experiment in ecumenicism.  

This tension in the discourse on *Tirukkuṟaḷ* calls attention to what I think is one of the most interesting questions for any exploration of Tamil literary culture(s) in history: How closely are religious sectarianism and literary culture intertwined? On the one hand, *caṅkam* poetry is often described as secular; on the other, the canonical poems of the Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva saints and the theologically oriented commentaries on the Vaiṣṇava poems were clearly produced in a sectarian context and have played a major role in the formation and maintenance of sectarian identity. This is not to say that the

52. For examples of resistance to the suggestion that the author of *Tirukkuṟaḷ* was a Jain, see Purnalingam Pillai [1929] 1985 and Arunachalam 1974; N. Subrahmanian writes of “liberalized Hinduism” (1981: 21); those who emphasize the text’s tolerance and eclecticism include Meenakshisundaran 1965 and Varadarajan 1988.

53. For these two positions, see, respectively, Kulāntai 1949 and Maharajan 1979.

Vaishnava and Shaiva saints were not conversant with the conventions of caikam poetry; clearly they were. In other areas of the Tamil literary sphere the relation between literature and religion is even more problematic. Many of the texts belonging to pirapantam genres have deities or other religious figures as protagonists; but one hesitates to characterize these as sectarian literature on par with, say, the canonical poems of the saints or the long narrative poem Manimekalai, whose author argues for the superiority of Buddhism over other religious paths. And how should we regard Kampamayam, which is invariably counted among the classics of Tamil literature and frequently as the greatest work in all of Tamil literature? Even if in the narrative Rama does not always seem to be aware of his own divinity, Kampam clearly portrays Rama as an avatara of Vishnu. Does this necessarily mean that in the eyes of its audience Kampamayam is primarily a Vaishnava text? The evidence seems to support an answer in the negative, but the case can be argued, and has been argued, both ways.

The issues of Tirukkuval’s religious affiliation and of its relation to Sanskrit sources cannot, of course, be categorically separated. Not surprisingly, Purnalingam Pillai and Vaiyapuri Pillai hold largely divergent views. Purnalingam Pillai emphasizes that the Kuval “is almost free from the influx of Sanskrit words” and that it “shows the richness and power of the Tamil tongue.” In contrast, Vaiyapuri Pillai observes that the percentage of Sanskrit words in Tirukkuval is higher than in caikam poems, and he emphasizes Valluvar’s debt to Sanskrit shastric sources, particularly Manu, Kautilya, and Kamandaka. He observes, however, that Valluvar worked significant changes on his sources; in fact, he asserts that Valluvar’s rendition of the “aims of man”—virtuous behavior, prosperity, and pleasure—is superior to those of his Sanskrit models. But even such exuberant praise of Tirukkuval failed to satisfy Vaiyapuri Pillai’s critics, who argue that he dates the text too late (no earlier than 600 C.E.) and that he exaggerates its links with Sanskritic models.

Cilappatikaram

It is difficult to imagine two premodern Tamil texts more different in form and content than Tirukkuval and Cilappatikaram. Yet in modern discourse on

---

57. Vaiyapuri Pillai 1988: 62. In both the Tamil and the Sanskrit traditions four aims of mankind are enumerated, the fourth being “release” (Tamil vij; Skt. moksha). Scholars have offered a variety of explanations for the absence of a separate section devoted to release in Tirukkuval. According to Parimelalakar, Tiruvalluvar confined his project to the first three of the aims because the last cannot be captured through normal discursive means.
literary and cultural matters these two texts, more than any others, have become emblematic of a distinctively Tamil genius. The two texts may not be very far removed from one another historically, and it is quite possible that the authors of both were Jains.

As in the case of Tirukkuṟaḷ, literary historians have offered various dates for Cilaṟpatikāram, which is one of the earliest long narrative poems—if not the earliest—in Tamil. It is generally accepted that the author of Cilaṟpatikāram based his narrative on an earlier tale. A popular ballad known as Kövalan Katai (The story of Kövalan), though radically different from Cilaṟpatikāram in many respects, is clearly an offspring of the same underlying story. Tradition has it that Iḷaiṅkō (the name means young king), the putative author of the text, was the younger brother of Ceṅkuṭṭuvāṅ, ruler of the Čeḻra kingdom, and that he became a Jain monk in order to circumvent a prophecy that he would one day displace his brother on the throne. Since Ceṅkuṭṭuvāṅ is thought to have ruled during the second century c.e., traditionalists date the composition of Cilaṟpatikāram in the second century. Others, however, date the text considerably later. Zvelebil hypothesizes that the poem was composed in the mid-fifth century.

Iḷaiṅkō drew upon many sources to construct his sophisticated literary work, and not surprisingly, scholars differ in the degree to which they find Sanskritic elements in it. As we would expect, Purnalingam Pillai downplays the Sanskrit connection. Following tradition, he draws attention to the role played by the Čeḻra king in the composition of Cilaṟpatikāram and describes the members of this ancient Tamil dynasty as “great Tamil scholars and patrons of Tamil learning.” The territory ruled by the Čeḻras is understood as having been roughly coterminus with modern-day Kerala, and Purnalingam Pillai cannot restrain himself from chiding the modern Malayalis who “have forgotten their birthright and heritage in their craze for Sanskrit.” Vaiyapuri Pillai is true to form in accord with the view from Kerala of the relationship between Malayalam, Tamil, and Sanskrit literature.

---

60. For an English translation of one published version of Kövalan Katai, see Noble 1990.
64. Vaiyapuri Pillai 1988: 98, 100.
R. Parthasarathy, author of the most successful English translation of *Cilappatikãram*, describes the structure of the text as "a collection of thirty distinct long poems, twenty-five of which are story-songs or cantos [kâtai], and five of which are song cycles that appear at critical junctures and function as choruses unobtrusively commenting on the action." He also postulates a direct line of development from the kinds of relatively short poems found in the *caîkam* anthologies to a long "poetic sequence" such as *Cilappatikãram*. The thrust of this sort of understanding of the genesis of *Cilappatikãram* highlights its kinship with an indigenous Tamil literary tradition and downplays any notions that the Tamil genre of "poetic sequence" exemplified by *Cilappatikãram* and other roughly contemporaneous poems is fundamentally related to the Sanskrit genre of *mahâkâvya*.

*Cilappatikãram*’s twenty-five cantos are composed in the *akâval* meter, the meter used for most of the poems in the *caîkam* anthologies. In part because the word *akâval* is a derivative of the verb *akavu* (to call, to declaim), scholars have reasoned that the early poems composed in *akâval* meter were originally performed in a declamatory style. The alternative name for this meter, *ãcirophyri* (verse of the teachers) suggests an association between verse composed in this meter and learned culture.

In contrast, the five song cycles are composed in meters that many scholars believe were derived from folksongs and were very likely originally set to music when the text was performed. These song cycles invariably receive special attention in discussions of *Cilappatikãram*’s significance in literary history and its merits as a work of literary art. M. Varadarajan regards Êãñkô as the first poet to attempt to give a written form to folksongs and praises the felicitous manner in which Êãñkô uses meter to complement the meaning expressed in these songs. Varadarajan’s emphasis on the song cycles accords well with a theme that runs prominently throughout his narrative of Tamil literary history and is to some extent present in the work of other scholars, namely, that the fount of poetic creativity is to be found in folksongs. In this view, folksongs serve as a continuing source of vitality for institutionalized literary culture, and the best Tamil learned literature maintains an active connection with its folk roots. It is probably no coincidence that this assessment tends to devalue any connections between learned Tamil


66. *Cilappatikãram* is traditionally numbered among the *aîmersñkâpîpâyãikãl*, the “five great kâvya” in Tamil; see further on this category in n. 98.

67. Varadarajan 1988: 21, 91. Arguably, some of the earlier poems collected in the *caîkam* anthology Aîkunûnîgu (The five hundred short poems), in their formal design, bear a close relationship to folksongs (Cutler 1980).
literature and Sanskrit literary culture and to highlight connections with local culture.

*Cilappatikāram*’s prominence in narratives of Tamil literary history is not predicated upon its literary merits alone, however. The role that cultural themes play is as great, if not greater, in modern-day understandings of the text. In Parathasarathy’s words, “The *Cilappatikāram* speaks for all Tamils as no other work of Tamil literature does: it presents them with an expansive vision of the Tamil imperium.” This political vision originates in the notion of the “three kings” (*muṉṉentar*) who ruled in the ancient Tamil country and belonged, respectively, to the Cōla, Cēra, and Pāṇṭiya lineages. *Caṅkam* poems of the *piṟam* type sketch a political landscape in which rulers of these three dynasties frequently waged war against one another, as well as against lesser chieftains whose spheres of influence were confined to the more remote areas of the Tamil country. The story of *Cilappatikāram* moves through the domains of all three kings, and the text accordingly is divided into three sections (*kāntam*), named after the capital cities of the three kingdoms—Pukār (Cōla), Maturai (Pāṇṭiya), and Vañci (Cēra). The Cōla king plays a peripheral role in the story; however, the Pāṇṭiya and Cēra kings are major actors, though their roles are almost diametrically opposed. By hastily and unjustly ordering that Kōvalan be executed as a thief, the Pāṇṭiya king forfeits his right to rule, and when Kōvalan’s widow, Kaṇṇaki, appears at his court to confront him with evidence of the injustice he has perpetrated, he immediately acknowledges the gravity of his failure and gives up his life. In contrast, the third section of the text is a panegyric to the glorious rule of the Cēra king, Čenkuṭāvān. It describes his conquest of “northern kings,” who are said to have “poured scorn on the Tamil kings,” and his consecration of a memorial stone carried from the Himālaya to create a shrine for Kaṇṇaki, who has been transformed into the goddess Pattini.

The third section of *Cilappatikāram*, in particular, appears to support Parathasarathy’s contention that the text presents its audience with a vision of a Tamil imperium. But it is also true that in Ilāṅkō’s political vision Cēra

---


69. In poetry the king’s scepter frequently functions as a symbol of his fitness as a ruler. The “straight scepter” (*cenkol*) symbolizes the king who upholds dharma, and the “bent scepter” (*koṭukol*) symbolizes the king who fails to do so. At the moment when the Pāṇṭiya king sentenced Kōvalan to death, his scepter “turned crooked” (Parthasarathy 1993: 168). Note that the same prefixes, which are etymologically related to the nouns *cemai* (straightness, evenness, excellence) and *koṭumai* (crookedness, severity, cruelty) are used by the author of *Tolkāppiyam* to distinguish “correct [literary] Tamil” (*centamil*) from colloquial Tamil (*koṭuntamil*).

70. Parthasarathy 1993: 233. In this particular passage the Tamil text simply says “kings” (*maṇṇar*), and Parthasarathy has interpolated the qualifier “northern.” However, in other passages the Tamil text explicitly mentions “northern kings” (*vaṭai ṇ marunken maṇṇar*) and “Aryan kings” (*aṉiṇa maṇṇar*).
Ceṅkuṭṭuvān is singled out as the defender of Tamil honor and the chief agent of Tamil military and political power. Iḷāṅkō’s sense of political geography seems to operate on two levels. Within the sphere of the Tamil land, the text conveys a degree of rivalry among the three Tamil kings, and at this level Cīḷappatikāram presents a picture that closely matches the political landscape of caṅkām poetry. But within the larger sphere of India as a whole, Ceṅkuṭṭuvān appears to act as an agent of all three Tamil kings. For instance, when Ceṅkuṭṭuvān announces his resolve to embark on an expedition to bring a stone from the Himālaya to create a shrine for Kaṅkāki, his minister replies:

May your upright rule
Last for many years! On the bloodstained field
Of Koṅkan you routed your equals
Who forfeited their banners with the emblems of the tiger
And the fish. This news has spread to the four corners
Of the earth. My eyes will not forget the scene
Of your elephant among the Tamil hosts that overcame
The armies of the Koṅkaṇas, Kaliṅgas, cruel Karunāṭaḷs,
Pāṅkaḷaṇs, Gaṅgas, Kaṭṭiyan菅s renowned for their spears,
And the Āryas from the north.
We cannot forget
Your courage when you escorted your mother
To bathe in the swollen Gaṅga, and fought alone
Against a thousand Āryas [so] that the cruel god
Of death was stunned. No one can stop you, if you wish,
From imposing Tamil rule over the entire world
Clasped by the roaring sea. Let a message be sent forth:
“‘It is our king’s wish to go to the Himālaya
To bring a stone for engraving the image
Of a goddess.’” Close it with your clay seal
That bears the imprint of the bow, fish
And tiger, emblems of the Tamil country,
And dispatch it to the kings of the north.\(^{71}\)

The bow is the emblem of the Cēra, the tiger the emblem of the Cōḷa, and the fish the emblem of the Pāṇṭiya. Thus this passage informs us that after overcoming his Tamil rivals, the Cōḷa and the Pāṇṭiya kings, in battle, Ceṅkuṭṭuvān, representing his two defeated rivals as well as his own Cēra line, has gone to war against rulers throughout India.

Parthasarathy sees in Cīḷappatikāram “a psychological response to the memory of the Aryan penetration of the south, including Aśoka’s, that had culminated in the Kaliṅga War of 260 B.C.E.” He further claims that “we can see here the beginnings of Tamil separatism that has manifested itself in the

\(^{71}\) Parthasarathy 1993: 225.
mid-twentieth century.” Similarly, N. Subrahmanian writes, “In thus encompassing the whole of the Tamil country in its epic sweep, [Cilappatikāram] has posited a cultural integrity for the Tamils, and through Ilangō, it may be said without fear of serious contradiction, Tamil nationalism got its first expression.” Whether or not this last claim is well founded, proponents of modern Tamil cultural nationalism certainly construe Ilangō’s text as a potent symbol of Tamil identity and power. Telling examples are the reworking of the story by the poet Parthas pointing in his Kanṇākip Purataṭhāppiyam (The epic of Kaṇṇak’s revolt, 1962) and Mu. Karunānti’s Cilappatikāram: Nāṭakak Kāppiyam (Cilappatikāram: An epic play, 1967), which was also produced in a film version titled Pāmpukār.

Notably, however, when modern-day Dravidianists appropriate Cilappatikāram as a statement of Tamil cultural nationalism, they bracket the elements of Ilangō’s rhetoric and ideology that they tend to identify as Aryan importations. For instance, the rhetoric of karmic retribution—a supposedly Aryan ideology—is very strong in Cilappatikāram. Consider also that in the story Ceṅkuṭṭuvan fulfills his destiny not only by forcing the northern kings to acknowledge the prestige of the Tamil kings and creating a shrine for Kaṇṇaki, but also, and ultimately, by performing a great Vedic sacrifice as urged by the Brahman character Māṭalan. While Aryan kings of the north may serve as “the other” against which Tamil political identity is defined in Cilappatikāram, at the same time the north, represented by the Himālaya and the Gaṅgā, carries an undeniable prestige. This is brought out tellingly in the following exchange between Ceṅkuṭṭuvan and his councillors when the idea of dedicating a shrine to Kaṇṇaki is introduced. The councillors speak first:

“An image of her should be made
With stone brought from the Poṭiyil hills
Or from the great Himālaya where the bow-emblem
Is engraved. Both are holy: one is washed
By the floods of the Kaṉviri, and the other by the Gaṅgā.”

The king replied:

“It does not redound to the good name
Of kings born in our family of fierce swords
And great valor to get a stone
From the Poṭiyil hills and lave it in the waters
Of the Kaṉviri. In the Himālaya live brahmans
With matted hair, wet robes,
Three-stringed cords across their chests,
And the power of their three sacrificial fires. . . .”

It is thus evident that if the author of Cilappatikāram speaks on behalf of a Tamil imperium, he also employs a rhetoric that emphatically is not exclusively Tamil.

Kamparāmāyaṇam

Because Kampan in the Irāmāvatārām, his Tamil rendering of the Rāmāyaṇa, builds upon the foundation of Vālmiki’s Sanskrit text, Dravidianists have not always embraced this work as readily as they have Tirukkural and Cilappatikāram.⁷⁴ Their ambivalence about the Kamparāmāyaṇam, as the text is commonly known, has not, however, significantly eroded Kampan’s well-established reputation in the Tamil tradition as kavičakravartin, “emperor of poets.” Further, while most literary scholars acknowledge the presence of Sanskrit influences in Kampan’s text, they also unanimously locate Kamparāmāyaṇam squarely within a trajectory of Tamil literary development.

While there is general agreement that Kampan lived and composed his great work in the political sphere of the Cōḷas, his biography and the precise conditions under which he composed his text are no clearer than in the cases of Vaḻuvar and Ilaiyākō. Based on different lines of reasoning from the available evidence, Kampan has been variously assigned to the ninth, tenth, and twelfth centuries. Thus scholars differ as to whether Kampan’s era should be located in the early or the late phase of the Cōḷa imperial formation, though in the most recent work the later date tends to be favored.⁷⁵ Among Kampan’s many acknowledged accomplishments are his mastery of meter, his skill at correlating meter and other sonic dimensions of the text with content, his adaptation of features of caṅkam poetry, and the vividness of his characterizations.

Among Tamil literary historians, the Jesudasans offer the most developed evaluation of Kampan’s place in Tamil literary history. Though the Jesudasans assert that Tamil epics of the Cōḷa period were “written in open emulation of Sanskrit,” and they make a case for Kālidāsa’s influence on Kampan, they also conclude that “Kampan has skyrocketed his epic clean out of the Sanskrit atmosphere.” In fact, they regard Kamparāmāyaṇam as a kind of depository of Tamil literary development in which the three currents of “the Sangam [caṅkam] spirit of sheer aesthetic enjoyment, the Kurāḷ spirit of ennobling ethics, and the bhakti spirit of devout worship in the shadow of Sanskritism . . . run into one broad stream.”⁷⁶ George Hart and Hank Heifetz, in their translation of the Aranyakkātām portion of Kamparāmāyaṇam, offer a similar list, substituting the early Tamil epics for

---

Tirukkur—“the poems of the Caṅkam age, the Cilappatikāram and other early Tamil epics, and the hymns of the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava saints”—and they tell us that “such works embodied and passed on an aesthetic with strong realistic elements, great visual delicacy combined with naturalistic precision, and a tropical density of imagery and emotional oscillation.” They list among Kampan’s sources the Sanskrit Rāmāyana of Vālmiki; ideas gleaned from yoga and the heterodox traditions; Sanskrit kāvyā literature; basic philosophical ideas of orthodox Indian religion developed in texts such as the Upaniṣads, the Bhagavadgītā, and the works of the philosophers Śaṅkara (eighth century) and Rāmānuja (eleventh century); and the bhakti movement.

Scholars differ regarding the relative importance of Sanskritic and ancient Tamil literary and cultural elements in Kāmparāmāyanam. Purnalingam Pillai harshly judges the literary and cultural climate of Kampan’s age due to “the diffusion of Aryan ideas and Aryan literature.” But even though he acknowledges that “Kamban’s Ramayanam is an adaptation of Vālmiki’s,” he nevertheless describes Kampan as “the poet of poets and the renowned author of the immortal Tamil epic, Ramayanam.” Like some of his contemporaries, Purnalingam Pillai sees in the story a thinly veiled account of the Aryan conquest of south India; but he also reads Kampan’s text as a subversive rendition of this story that, upon close consideration, extols Dravidian over Aryan civilization.

For Hart and Heifetz the key to understanding the cultural forces at work in Kāmpag’s text lies in the terms aγam and maγam. According to their reading, maγam signifies an early Tamil social and political order described in the puram poems of the caṅkam anthologies. It is an order characterized by small self-sufficient food-producing units called naṭus, each of which tends to have its own chieftains and armies, who are dedicated to subduing other similar neighboring units.

81. The following are some of the meanings given for these words in the Madras University Tamil Lexicon: For aγam: moral or religious duty, virtue, performance of good works according to the śāstras, duties practiced by each caste; merit; that which is fitting, excellent; religious faith; wisdom. For maγam: valor, bravery; anger, wrath; enmity, hatred; strength, power; victory; war; killing, murder; injury; vice, sin.
Marām is connected with battle and the glorification of the king, who must fight often and well. The valorous army is often characterized as being like Death or . . . like a possessing demon spirit.” Aram, on the other hand, signifies an order “first manifested during the rule of Pallavas in about the sixth century A.D. In this model, the upper-caste landowning non-Brahmins . . . ally themselves with the Brahmins and adopt a Hindu life-style characterized by large kingdoms in which the landowners of each nātu support the central king in return for his protection from local chieftains and armies. In this second pattern, the upper castes adopt Hinduism with all its characteristically South Indian attributes: respect for Brahmins and the Northern traditions of Hinduism; devotion to Viṣṇu or Śiva; and temple worship.82

In Hart and Heifetz’s reading of Kampārāmāyaṇam, Rāvaṇa represents the older Tamil king and the order signified by maṇam, whereas Rāma represents the newer order of aṣṭam. While Kampārāmāyaṇam depicts the triumph of the newer dharmic order over the older system, in Kampāṇ’s text Rāvaṇa “is a chaotically powerful figure, whose entanglements in deep feeling and rebellions against conventional morality ring more human and conform far more to Romantic ideas of the heroic than the immaculate . . . behavior of Absolute Good.” But contrary to Dravidianist readings of Kampārāmāyaṇam such as that offered by Purnalingam Pillai, Hart and Heifetz affirm that “there is no question that within the value system of the Kampārāmāyaṇam . . . Rāvaṇa is evil, though magnificent and intricate evil.”83

While Rāma’s status as an āvāra of Viṣṇu is incontestable in Kampārāmāyaṇam, the text has not played a role in Tamil Viṣṇava sectarianism comparable to, say, that of the poems of the āḻvārs. Beginning as early as the late tenth century, these poems have been recited ritually in Tamil Viṣṇava temples and have provided a foundation for highly technical theological discourse. In contrast, the Śrīvaṣṇava Brahmans of Śrīraṅgam, according to legend, were initially hostile to Kampāṇ’s text and gave it their approval only after he surmounted a number of obstacles they had set for him.84

Several literary historians suggest that Kampārāmāyaṇam is more appropriately approached in the context of a nonsectarian literary culture than

84. In the recitation of the poems of the āḻvārs in Tamil Viṣṇava temples, see Nilakanta Sastri 1955: 639. The difference between Kampārāmāyaṇam and the poems of the āḻvārs is not entirely clear cut, however. For instance, citations from Kampārāmāyaṇam are found in theological commentaries on the poems of the āḻvārs. Also, Stuart Blackburn (1996) has recently documented a tradition of shadow puppet performance, based on portions of Kampāṇ’s text, at temple festivals dedicated to the goddess Bhavati in the Palghat region of Kerala. For an account of the traditional legend of Viṣṇava sectarian resistance to Kampāṇ’s text and an interpretation of the legend, see Shulman 1993: 8–13.
in the context of Vaiṣṇava sectarianism. Purnalingam Pillai, who, as we have seen, is strongly committed to the notion of a primordial Tamil Shaivism, insists that Kampāṇ did not compose his text in a Vaiṣṇava sectarian context and that “the morality [of Kamparamāyaṇam] is that of the epic in Tamilnadu.” M. Arunachalam, who also has strong Śaiva leanings, asserts in a similar spirit: “When Kampāṇ chose the Rāmāyana, he did not choose it because Rāma was considered the incarnation of Viṣṇu the Supreme Being; he chose it only for the potentialities for epic creation which it offered.” Several verses from Kamparamāyaṇam are included in the literary anthology Purattiraṭṭu, which draws upon a wide range of literary sources. As mentioned earlier, Cāminātayi’s autobiography reveals that Kamparamāyaṇam was included in the curriculum at the Tiruvāvatūṭai monastery, a bastion of Tamil Shaivism; and in a recent paper Vasudha Narayanan describes the place of this text in the intellectual tradition of Muslim Tamil speakers.85

Yet the impetus to dissociate Kampan from Vaishnavism is not universal. M. Varadarajan contends that Kampan drew upon the devotional spirit of the Vaiṣṇava poet-saints, the aḷvārs, and he traces several passages in Kamparamāyaṇam to passages in the bhakti poetry of Tirumānaiāḷvār (eighth century). And while some have argued that the presiding deity in Kamparamāyaṇam is not so much Viṣṇu as Dharma, Hart and Heifetz note that “Kampan makes his idea of dharma totally dependent on Rāma/Viṣṇu.”86 Perhaps the most telling indication of Kampan’s integration into Tamil Vaiṣṇava sectarian culture is that he is the attributed author of a poem praising the Namāḷvār, though some scholars question his authorship of this work.87

What underlies these seemingly contradictory evaluations of Kamparamāyaṇam’s status as a sectarian text? Since detailed information regarding the environment in which the text was composed is lacking, any evidence for Kampāṇ’s intentions must come primarily from the text itself; and it can hardly be denied that Kampāṇ’s Rāma is represented as an avatāra of Viṣṇu. However, once a text is in circulation, it can conceivably participate in more than one literary culture. That the Vaiṣṇava ācāryas cite passages from Kamparamāyaṇam in their commentaries on the aḷvārs’ poems indicates that the text was incorporated into Tamil Vaiṣṇava sectarian discourse. Yet there is very strong evidence that Kamparamāyaṇam actively participates in a broader

85. Quotations in this paragraph are, respectively, from Purnalingam Pillai [1929] 1985: 223; Arunachalam 1974: 116–17; and Narayanan 1996. On the anthology Purattiraṭṭu, see later in this chapter.
87. The poem in question is called Cātaṭkāparamāṭṭi. Cāṭṭakāparamāṭṭi is an alternate name for Namāḷvār, generally considered the most important of the Tamil Vaiṣṇava poet-saints. Several other works are also traditionally attributed to Kampan, though his authorship of all of these has been questioned.
literary culture that is not defined in sectarian terms. The text enables its participation in Tamil Vaishnava culture through its understanding of Rama’s character, and in the wider literary culture by drawing upon, for instance, the legacy of cañkam poetry.\(^88\)

The foregoing discussion suggests that the writing of literary histories is itself a distinctive mode of literary culture. Despite their disagreements over particulars, the authors of these histories conceptualize the literary domain in similar ways and ask similar questions about literary texts. They tend to bring similar perspectives to issues concerning the composition of the Tamil literary domain, which works and authors are most worthy of sustained study, and the nature of the relationship between works of literature and their historical environment. One might argue that there is something distinctively modern about the way such issues are raised and confronted in these literary histories—an observation to which I return. This prompts a question: In premodern Tamilnadu, what sorts of analogous projects enact earlier modes of Tamil literary culture? Three in particular come to mind: commentaries on literary texts, compendia of legends concerning the lives of poets, and literary anthologies. In the remaining portion of this chapter I focus on the last of these traditional means of representing, making, and performing Tamil literary culture.

ANTHOLOGIES: A SITE FOR THE REPRESENTATION AND CREATION OF TAMIL LITERARY CULTURE

As K. Sivathamby has so rightly remarked, consciousness of a Tamil literary heritage has deep roots in the past. In Sivathamby’s view, the earliest evidence of a self-reflective Tamil literary heritage is the compilation of the cañkam anthologies. Very little is known about the circumstances underlying these anthologizing projects. However, in some instances the colophons that accompany the anthologies give the names of the compilers as well as the names of the rulers under whose patronage the anthologies were compiled, suggesting that these poems were composed and circulated primarily in the context of ancient Tamil courtly culture. Sivathamby has hypothesized that the compilation of the cañkam poems, embarked upon during a period characterized politically by a transition from tribal groupings to territorial sovereignties, was intended “to consolidate the literary gains of the immediate past and thus ensure the continuity of the royal lines.”\(^89\)

Complementing, and perhaps roughly contemporary with, the anthologies is the first textual account of the legendary literary academies (cañkam) where, under the patronage of Panthiya kings, the classical literary corpus was

\(^{88}\) Shulman 1991.
\(^{89}\) Sivathamby 1986: 33.
said to have taken shape. The work in question is Nakkīrar’s commentary on *Iraiyāṟṟaṇkapporuṟṟu* (Inner themes according to Iraiyāṉar), a normative text that delineates the conventions of love (*akam*) poetry. The root text and the commentary are usually dated in the eighth century. According to tradition, the author of the root text is none other than the god Śiva, who participated in the activities of the *caṅkam* under the name of Iraiyāṉar (the lord). Sivathamby reasons: “The legend of the Cankam as seen in the commentary of IA is clearly an effort to ‘Hinduise’ Tamil, especially make it part of the Saivaite tradition. Seen this way the significance of this legend in Tamil literary history is very great. It attempts to take over an obviously Jain and Buddhist institution (Sangha) and give it a Hindu form and content.”

Given his particular interest in the social and political dimensions of literary culture, Sivathamby finds the role played by the Pāṇṭiya kings in this legend even more interesting than its sectarian partisanship. In his view, “constructing a royal base for the Cankam in which the Gods themselves take part, legitimises, beyond question, the rule of the newly emerging Pandyas.” Viewed thus, both the *caṅkam* anthologies and the legend of the Tamil *caṅkams* may be understood as efforts to relate past literature to current social, political, and religious needs.

Sivathamby also finds this sociopolitical approach a productive way of understanding later landmark developments in the emerging self-awareness of Tamil literary culture. These include the codification of the Tamil *bhakti* poems (c. eleventh century) and the somewhat later codification of the Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta āstras. Sivathamby reasons that the *bhakti* movement was politically useful to the Pallavas of the Sinhaviṣṇu (560–580) line and the Pāṇṭiyas of the Kaiṭukon (590–620) line. The Jain and Buddhist monasteries and their economic organizations would have constituted an impediment to the firm establishment of Pallava and Pāṇṭiya power, and rulers of these dynasties would have found in the *bhakti* movement an effective means of confronting this obstacle to their political ambitions.

Sivathamby also calls attention, as others have done, to the close interrelationship between political structures in the Tamil country, beginning with the Pallavas and further developed under the Cōḷas, and the construction of stone temples where the Tamil *bhakti* poems performed an important liturgical function. Codification of these poems both contributed to efficient running of the temples and helped “consolidate the very socio-political structure in which the temples operated.”

As the formation of the Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva canons of *bhakti* hymns is closely

---

90. Sivathamby 1986: 35.
91. Sivathamby 1986: 36.
associated with the rise of the temple as a central religious and political institution in the Tamil country, so the later composition and codification of the Śaiva Siddhānta śāstras are associated with the rise of non-Brahman monasteries in the former heartland of Cōla power. We saw earlier in the chapter that these non-Brahman monasteries eventually became an important locus for the preservation and transmission of a wide range of Tamil literary texts by patronizing scholars such as T. Miṉāṭc cuntaram Piḷḷai.

Purattiraṭṭu: A Fifteenth-Century Literary Anthology

Sivathamby views the compilation of the cankam anthologies, the canonization of the poetry of the Tamil Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva saints, and the codification of the Śaiva Siddhānta śāstras as “the major landmarks in the history of the consciousness relating to the Tamil literary heritage and Tamil literary thought” prior to the eighteenth century. He also briefly refers to a few “minor” developments in this history, and he offers as one of these a literary anthology called Purattiraṭṭu, which was compiled by an anonymous editor, very likely during the fifteenth century.94 This text may not be especially prominent in present-day Tamil cultural consciousness or literary scholarship, but I suggest that a close study of the logic underlying the choice of texts and the internal organization of this anthology can tell us quite a lot about the nature of Tamil literary culture during a critical phase of its development. Moreover, I would argue that Purattiraṭṭu is informed by a much greater consciousness of a specifically literary heritage than is the case with either the canonization of bhakti poetry or the compilation of the Śaiva Siddhānta śāstras.

The poems of the Tamil Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva saints are accorded an important place in the cavalcade of works treated in Tamil literary histories, such as those examined earlier in this chapter. But it is doubtful that in premodern Tamilnadu these poems, though poetically accomplished, were considered in the same textual category as, say, the poems of the cankam anthologies. Among the issues involved in the distinction I am drawing are contrasting models of authorship—the image of the spontaneous, inspired creativity of the bhakti poet-saint versus the acquired skill of the poet-pandit (pulavar)95—as well as the context of performance and circulation in which a text participates. Certainly by the eleventh century, and possibly somewhat earlier, the bhakti hymns had become, first and foremost, liturgical texts and were firmly embedded in the culture of Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva temples. Additionally, the Vaiṣṇava hymns of the aḻvārs became the centerpiece for elaborate theological commentaries. In contrast to these works, the Tamil tex-

94. Sivathamby 1986: 44.
95. For a discussion of several models of authorship in the Tamil literary tradition, see Shulman 1993.
tual universe includes works that I would identify as more centrally literary. While these may carry sectarian overtones or even have been composed to satisfy a sectarian agenda, they circulated, at least for a period of several centuries, in a realm of discourse that was not defined primarily by religious concerns or delimited by sectarian boundaries. It is such texts that found a place in an anthology like Purattirattu and became the object of literary, as opposed to theological, commentary.96

The very name of this anthology, which literally means “a collection of puram (verses),” implies a selective principle—namely, that the verses included belong to the literary category of puram, the “exterior,” public realm, in contradistinction to the category of akam, the “interior,” domestic realm. The distinction between these categories is of course fundamental to the system of literary conventions that governs the poems collected in the cañkam anthologies, and, with just one exception, each of these anthologies is devoted exclusively to poems belonging to one of these two poetic domains. While Purattirattu includes poems found in Purananiyru and Patiruppattu (second or third century c.e.), the two early anthologies devoted exclusively to poems of the puram genre, most of the texts included in Purattirattu are of a very different character. This suggests that in post-cañkam times the accepted understanding of the two-fold division of the poetic world into akam and puram expanded to encompass a far greater range of subject matter and poetic forms. A close examination of the structure of Purattirattu in tandem with certain commentarial remarks on the structure of Tirukkuṟaḷ by Parimēlaḻakar, the most influential of its many commentators, will help to clarify the nature of this expansion.

The Organization of Purattirattu The arrangement of Purattirattu and of Tirukkuṟaḷ is almost identical. The former was almost certainly modeled directly on the latter, with a few significant, and some perhaps less significant, departures. As we saw earlier, each of Tirukkuṟaḷ’s 1330 verses belongs to a titled “chapter” (atikāram) of ten verses, and the text as a whole is divided into broad divisions labeled “virtuous behavior,” “prosperity,” and “pleasure”—three of the four “aims of man.”

Historically, Parimēlaḻakar’s commentary on Tirukkuṟaḷ has dominated

96. The period spanning the eleventh through the fifteenth centuries was a prolific time for Tamil commentarial discourse. Dating from this period are what have come to be viewed as classic commentaries on Tolkāppiyam by Ilampūranar (eleventh century), Perācirayar (thirteenth century), and Naccinarkkiṅyar (fourteenth century); Atiyarkkunallar’s commentary on Cilappatikāram (late thirteenth/early fourteenth century); and Parimēlaḻakar’s commentary on Tirukkuṟaḷ (late thirteenth century), in addition to others (Zvelebil 1973: 247–63). All are examples of what I am calling “literary” commentaries. Contemporary with these are commentaries on the devotional poetry of the ṛṣis authored by the Śrīvaishnava ācāryas. On the latter tradition see Carmen and Narayanan 1989, Clooney 1996, and Venkatachari 1978.
the interpretation of the text’s verses and its overall plan, although relatively recently this commentary has come under attack in some quarters for its decisively Brahmanic leanings. With respect to its form, Parimēḷalākār’s commentary conforms to a pattern that is ubiquitous in Tamil commentarial literature. By far the greater part of the commentary is devoted to interpretative paraphrases (patuvurai) of each verse and “illuminating information” (vilakkañam), which in the commentator’s estimation helps the reader clearly grasp the verse’s meaning and implications. But certain aspects of the commentary—for instance, introductory comments to each of the text’s chapters as well as to each of its three major portions—are geared not so much toward elucidation of specific verses as toward bringing into focus the conceptual plan that organizes the text as a whole.97

In these introductory comments Parimēḷalākār calls upon and effects connections between a number of cultural and literary paradigms, such as the “aims of man,” the codes of behavior specific to one’s caste and stage of life (varnasramadharmam), and akam/puṣam. In his introduction to the third portion of the text—on pleasure—in particular, he lines up the first two “aims of man,” virtuous behavior and prosperity, with the poetic category puṣam, and he aligns the third aim, pleasure, with the complementary category akam. In the context of the caiñam corpus, as we have seen, akam poems are love poems and puṣam poems are poems of war and kingship, though manuals on poetics tend to treat akam as the formally marked category, and puṣam as all subject matter that falls outside the akam realm.

The anthology Puṭṭirattu is divided into two major portions, devoted to the topical rubrics of virtuous behavior and prosperity, respectively, and these in turn are subdivided into chapters. Not only does this basic organizational schema mirror that of Tirukkuṟṟaḷ—with the omission of Tirukkuṟṟaḷ’s third portion, on pleasure, which, we noted, formally belongs to the realm of akam rather than puṣam and thus is not germane to this anthology—the titles of the chapters in Puṭṭirattu are almost identical to those in the first two portions of Tirukkuṟṟaḷ. The most significant departure is in the final twenty-three chapters of Puṭṭirattu, the titles of which are not found in Tirukkuṟṟaḷ but correspond to themes treated in puṣam poems of the caiñam anthologies. This further underscores the alignment of the classical poetic categories and the ethical schema of the “aims of man,” which has been embraced by this intellectual tradition.

Texts Represented in Puṭṭirattu The texts represented in Puṭṭirattu encompass a large expanse of Tamil literary history, ranging from poems included in Puṇanṛṇuṟu and Patiṟṟuppattu to a verse from a Jain purāṇa com-

97. For further discussion of Parimēḷalākār’s commentary on Tirukkuṟṟaḷ, see Cutler 1992.
posed possibly as late as the fourteenth century. Quite a few of Puṭṭirattu’s texts are included in traditional textual taxonomies, such as the eight anthologies, the eighteen shorter works, the five major kāvyas (aimperunkappiyam), and the five minor kāvyas (aiṅcirunkappiyam). While these paradigms were certainly devised later—and in some cases considerably later—than the compositions they comprise, references to all of them predate the compilation of Puṭṭirattu.

The profile of texts represented in Puṭṭirattu provides valuable information about the nature of literary culture in fifteenth-century Tamilnadu. Among the thirty-one texts represented, several closely follow the conventional norms of classical puram poetry, including, of course, the two cankam anthologies. Of these puram and puram-inspired texts, the cankam anthology Puṇanāṇīṇu contributes the greatest number of verses to the anthology—proof enough that during the fifteenth century these poems were known, even if they were effectively lost to Tamil literary culture later on.

Nine texts included among the eighteen shorter works are represented in Puṭṭirattu. Most of these would be described by Tamil literary historians as didactic literature (nītinul). However, notably missing from this group is Tirukkurā. Although none of Tirukkurā’s verses is included in Puṭṭirattu, a special role is reserved for this, perhaps the most universally honored and most intensively interpreted of all Tamil texts, for as we have seen, Tirukkurā provides a master blueprint for the anthology as a whole. Among other works belonging to the nītinul genre, two, Nalaṭiyār and Paḷamoḷiṇāṇīṇu, contribute more verses to Puṭṭirattu than any other, and they are generally ranked second and third in order of prominence among Tamil didactic texts after Tirukkurā.

A third category of texts well represented in Puṭṭirattu is the genre of long narratives in verse known in Tamil as kāvīyam. Verses from three of the five great kāvyas and one of the five small kāvyas appear in Puṭṭirattu. Cīvakaṅciyānumi, counted among the former, is especially well represented.

It comes as no surprise that two didactic texts should contribute a large number of verses to an anthology that is, after all, structured in terms of categories borrowed directly from the most distinguished example of this genre. And clearly, in Puṭṭirattu these categories are understood broadly enough

98. This term, which first appears in Mayilaināṭar’s commentary on the grammatical text Nāṇūl, is a verbatim translation of the Sanskrit paścimahākāvyam and seems intended to establish a correspondence between the five “great kāvyas” works of Sanskrit literature and five long narrative poems in Tamil, only some of which are extant. It is complemented by the term aiṅcirunkappiyankal, the “five lesser kāvyas,” which has no analogue in Sanskrit. It is far from obvious why the texts included in this group should be considered “less” than the “great kāvyas.” Most modern-day Tamil scholars consider this taxonomy highly artificial, and they tend to dismiss it as having little direct relevance to the texts so classified.

99. Recall that this is the text that changed the course of Cāmināṭaiyar’s career.
to encompass a much larger range of textual production than the traditional didactic corpus. This is evident from the fact that a Tamil hāvyam and a canikam anthology contribute, respectively, the third and fourth greatest number of verses to Purattirattu out of a roster of thirty-one source texts.

Further, the compiler of Purattirattu includes texts by authors known to be Jains, Śaivas, Vaiṣṇavas, and Buddhists (in descending number) as well as texts by authors of unknown sectarian affiliation; and the amount of sectarian polemics featured in the source texts varies widely. To whatever degree the source texts were or were not composed to serve such agendas, sectarianism appears to play no significant role in the selection and arrangement of verses from these texts in Purattirattu. It would appear that a nonsectarian or transsectarian literary culture flourished in Tamilnadu in the fifteenth century—a time when Tamil Shaivism and Shrivaishnavism were well on the way to assuming their mature institutionalized forms. This suggests that literary culture was, at least to an extent, independent of religious sectarianism.

Significantly also, Purattirattu’s source texts include both collections of self-contained verses and texts composed of verses that narrate a story. In the terminology of Tamil grammar/poetics these textual categories are known, respectively, as tokai (collection) and totar (sequence). This is not to say that tokai texts are all random assemblages of unrelated verses. To the contrary, the verses of many of these texts—Tirukkural being a telling example—are fit, either by their authors or later redactors, into highly structured organizational frameworks. The key distinguishing feature between tokai and totar is the element of narrative. One might say, therefore, that in Purattirattu, as in comparable anthologies, the principle of totar is superceded by tokai, since the verses selected from narrative texts (e.g., Cīvakaćintāmani and Kampārāṇaṇaṇa) are disengaged from their original narrative context and inserted into a nonnarrative superstructure.

It is also worthwhile to consider the kinds of texts that are not represented in Purattirattu. This being an anthology that defines itself as a collection of puram poems, it stands to reason that it would not include poems traditionally associated with the complementary akam category. These would include poems of the canikam akam anthologies, as well as later poems that share many of the conventions of the early akam poems. Also not represented are poems that came to be performed primarily in liturgical settings, most notably the canonized poems of the Tamil Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva poet-saints. This is in keeping with my previous remarks concerning the distinction between texts treated in a culturally specific sense as literature and texts primarily associated with other cultural domains, no matter how literary they may appear to an outsider. But more mysterious is the absence of examples of pirapantam genres that may be described as descendants of classical puram poetry, such as Nantikkalampakam (Miscellany on Nandi; anonymous, ninth century), which extols the Pallava king Nandivarman III, or Kalinkattapparani (The
parani of the Kalingas) by Cayaṅkoṇṭār (twelfth century), a war poem inspired by the conquest of the Kaliṅka country by the Cōla king Kulottuṅka I.

**Literature as a Model for Life**

George Hart has observed that in India there is a strong tendency to approach literature in moral terms, and that this is frequently achieved through techniques of framing and distancing the literary text. In demonstrating his point Hart does not mention Purattiraiṭṭu or, for that matter, any literary anthologies, but Purattiraiṭṭu seems to be tailor-made to underscore Hart’s observation. Here is a collection of verses gleaned from a heterogeneous assemblage of texts and arranged according to a very detailed framework structured by ethical themes. Some of these texts are themselves organized along similar lines, but verses from other source texts, especially long narrative texts, are radically recontextualized in Purattiraiṭṭu.

This process of recontextualization will become clear by looking at a few verses included in Purattiraiṭṭu’s chapters titled “The Greatness of Renouncers” (“Nālatiyār”) and “Abstaining from Meat” (“Pullai Maruttal”). Both chapters are found in the first portion of the anthology, on virtuous behavior, and the titles of both are also chapter titles in Tirukkuṟaḷ. The source texts represented in these chapters include Nālatiyār, Palamoḻināṟṟu (The four hundred old sayings), Civakacintāmanī, and Kamparāṉaṟam.

Nālatiyār’s organization is very similar to that of Tirukkuṟaḷ—and by extension, to that of Purattiraiṭṭu. Like the Kugai, it is divided into three major portions devoted, respectively, to virtuous behavior, prosperity, and pleasure; and some but not all of its forty chapter headings are also found in Tirukkuṟaḷ. While the verses of Palamoḻi are not arranged under the umbrella of the “aims of man,” some of its thirty-four chapter titles correspond to chapter titles found in the first two major sections of Tirukkuṟaḷ. The structure of the two long narrative texts in this sample, Kampāṉ’s Irāmavatāram and Tiruttakkatēvar’s Civakacintāmanī, are, of course, completely different. In both cases the narrative is apportioned into books; and in Kampāṉ’s retelling of the Rāmāyaṇa story, these are further subdivided into shorter narrative segments.

“The Greatness of Renouncers,” the third chapter of Purattiraiṭṭu, contains five verses gleaned from three source texts, including one verse from Palamoḻi and three verses from the Ayottiyakkaṟam of Kamparāṉaṟam:

100. Hart 1997: 166.
101. The terms used to designate the narrative divisions of these two texts are taken directly from Sanskrit. Kampāṉ’s text follows Vālmiki’s Sanskrit example in its division into books (kāṝṇa). The thirteen sections of Civakacintāmanī are designated ilampakam, a term that also denotes the chapters of the Sanskrit Kathāsaritāśāra (Skt. lambaka).
The precious life-breath sustains life due to the grace of wise people (உரையர்).

Without the support of people who are restrained in thought, word, and deed, who think deeply and are free of desire, the life-breath will perish. (Palamoli 262)

Renouncers are equal to God (நீளவன்).

In your heart cherish renouncers, for they are greater than the Black God [Viṣṇu], the God with an eye in his forehead [Śiva], and the God who rests upon a lotus [Brahmā]. They are greater than the five elements, and even the Truth. (Kamparāmēiyam, A.K. 106)

Even the lives of gods are subject to renouncers.

Innumerable are the gods who have been brought to grief by the anger of renouncers, and innumerable are those who have been raised to the heavens thanks to their grace. (Kamparāmēiyam, A.K. 107)

Renouncers control the dictates of fate.

When even Good Fortune and Bad Fortune follow a renouncer’s will, is there anything of this world or the next comparable to the grace of these veritable gods on earth? (Kamparāmēiyam, A.K. 109)

The clustering of these verses in Purattirattu under the topical heading “The Greatness of Renouncers” underscores the important role that framing plays in the interpretive process. The verses included in the anthology are contextualized in at least three ways: first, by the two-fold division of the text in sections devoted respectively to virtuous conduct and prosperity; second, by the more finely calibrated sorting of the selected verses into a large number of thematically defined chapters; and third, by adding proems for each verse. These prefatory glosses are apparently intended to extract a core of meaning from each verse and link together the several verses (often selected from diverse texts) included in a particular chapter to form an integrated statement.

Although Palamoli is a collection of didactic verses, and the compiler of Purattirattu has organized verses selected from various works to, in effect, cre-
ate a similar kind of text, Palamoli 262 has been recontextualized in its new setting. The operative word in this verse is ñmpavār, literally “people who protect, support, or preserve” (translated as “support of people”). In his proem for the verse, Purattarattu’s compiler glosses this word as ñmayr, “wise people.” The implication that these “wise people” are renouncers follows from the verse’s location in the chapter titled “The Greatness of Renouncers.” However, in the source text, Palamoli, this verse is found in the chapter “Ministers [of the king],” and in his summary statement of the verse’s core idea, a commentator writes: “Good ministers (amaiccar) are the cause for living creatures sustaining life.” Thus the sense of “protector” in the original verse has been semantically tailored to fit two different topical rubrics. Apparently, the source text provides raw material that Purattarattu’s compiler feels at liberty to mold into shapes of his own choosing, without regard to its original context.

The three verses from Kamparāmāyanam occur in the source text in the context of advice offered to Rāma by his family’s priest, Vasiṣṭha, at the request of Daśaratha, Rāma’s father. This advice comes just prior to Rāma’s coronation, which of course is subsequently thwarted by Kaikeyi, the mother of Bharata, his half-brother. These verses, it goes without saying, are far more likely candidates for inclusion in an anthology like Purattarattu than many other portions of Kampan’s text, such as verses devoted to description of forest or city scenes or to narration of events. In their didactic tone they are not so very different from the verses one would find in a text of the nittinūl genre. Nevertheless, in the source text they are embedded in a narrative context, and most Western readers, at least, would interpret their significance in terms of their contribution to the larger curve of the narrative. But again, the compiler of Purattarattu felt no compunction about extracting them from their original narrative setting and grouping them with verses that presumably were felt to be thematically related. Here too, the semantics of the operative word in the selected verses and the anthologizer’s proems are interesting. Both Kampan and Purattarattu’s compiler use the word antantar, a word of many meanings that, depending on context, can mean either “Brahman” or “renouncer.” The authors of commentaries on literary texts typically steer the reader’s understanding of such polysemic words along what they deem to be appropriate channels. Thus, a modern commentator on Kampan’s text tells the reader that in these verses the word antantar carries

104. This is not to say that only Western readers are disposed toward such a strategy of reading. The modern commentator of one edition of Kampan’s text points out that it is especially appropriate for Vasiṣṭha to lecture Rāma on the virtues of renunciation at this juncture in the narrative because Rāma himself will soon be exiled to the forest and will be forced to adopt a renunciatory style of life. Cētupillai et al. 1959: 114.
the sense of renouncer (*tuṟṟantavaṟṟu*). The compiler of *Purattiraṭṭu* orients our understanding of this word similarly by including these verses in the chapter “The Greatness of Renouncers.”

*Purattiraṭṭu’s* chapter “Abstaining from Meat” contains eleven verses gleaned from seven texts, including one verse from *Paḷamoḻi*, two verses from *Nālaṭiyār*, and two verses from *Civukacintāmani*. All three of the verses selected from the didactic texts are recontextualized in their transfer from source text to the anthology: The verse from *Paḷamoḻi* is included in the source text’s section titled “The Householder’s Life” (“Ilvālkakai”), and the verses from *Nālaṭiyār* are included in that text’s section titled “Avoiding Bad Karma” (“Tivinai Accam”).

*proem*: Nothing can save people who eat flesh.

> Even if people rid themselves of strong, clinging passions
> and follow the path of virtue,
> they are doomed
> like a calf that drowns in the mud on the shore
> after swimming the ocean
> if they should ever eat flesh,
> even in time of distress. (*Paḷamoḻi* 342)

*proem*: The karma that advances due to breaking legs and eating.

> When people hunger for crabs,
> break off their legs, and devour them,
> their evil deed tracks them down,
> and they are reborn as lepers
> with fingerless stumps for hands. (*Nālaṭiyār* 123)

*proem*: The stomach filled with flesh is a nest filled with bodies.

> The scores of animals and birds
> that meet their end in the stomachs
> of senseless, narrow-minded people
> are like the corpses of people who have shunned renunciation
> and languish in sorrow,
> burning at the cremation ground. (*Nālaṭiyār* 121)

The message of the verse from *Paḷamoḻi* and the first of the *Nālaṭiyār* verses is straightforward: do not eat meat under any circumstances, because meat-eating has dire karmic consequences. The rhetoric of the second *Nālaṭiyār* verse is less clear. Is it intended to inspire revulsion for meat by comparing the flesh of animals and birds to human corpses, or to convince people to shun the worldly life to avoid a fate comparable to that of animals and birds killed for their flesh? Who exactly is the target of this verse, meat-eaters or

---


nonrenouncers? Again, it is an issue of contextualization, and I would suggest that the recontextualization of the verse in Purattiraṭṭu reorients its rhetoric.

The two verses from Civakacintāmaṇi included in Purattiraṭṭu’s section “Abstaining from Meat” read:

_proem:_ People who abstain from meat become gods.

“Is it better to nourish the body with flesh
and end up in hell
or to deprive the body
and dwell among the gods?
Tell me what you think,” Civakan asked.
And the hunter replied,
“It is best to abstain from flesh
and become one of the gods.” (Civakacintāmaṇi 1235)

_proem:_ The distress incumbent upon eating meat is like a ball being tossed aloft.

O King, who owns rutting elephants
that uproot their stakes in their fury,
dull-minded people who eat flesh
are tossed about by their sin
like a ball in the hands of girls
wearing bangles of pure gold. (Civakacintāmaṇi 2765)

The first verse is spoken by Civakacintāmaṇi’s hero when he meets a hunter and instructs him in the benefits of vegetarianism. Here Civakan quizzes the hunter to determine how well he has learned his lesson. The second verse occurs in an episode toward the end of the text in which Civakan receives instruction from a Jain monk. Again we find that the narrative context of these verses in the source is of little concern for the anthology’s compiler.

The recontextualization of the poems included in Purattiraṭṭu, and indeed the very existence of the anthology, highlight a broader pattern in traditional Tamil literary culture: the quasi-autonomous status of the individual verse in relation to a textual whole. Many students of Sanskrit literature have noted that Sanskrit poetic theory places comparatively great emphasis on the individual verse and very little on larger issues of textual structure and meaning. This pattern is found as well in the literary culture of Tamil, which, like Sanskrit, has a long history of literary theorization and criticism in the form of normative texts on poetics and literary commentaries. In such an environment one would expect relatively little resistance to literary performances in which textual portions are deployed out of context, that is, detached from their original textual structures. For instance, the descriptive phrase _prasān-_

---

gābharana (ornament for the occasion), which is associated with Purattiraṭṭu, indicates that the anthology served as a source of literary quotations that speakers might use to embellish an oral discourse. The topical arrangement of verses in Purattiraṭṭu suggests that the anthology’s compiler attended only to the rhetorical potential of individual verses considered autonomously and was not concerned about whether or not their meaning was conditioned by their location in their sources. The compiler actualizes a network of topical affiliations among verses selected from a variety of texts no doubt composed in different places and times and in response to different agendas of authorship and patronage. In somewhat similar fashion, traditional literary commentators are fond of identifying “parallel passages” from various texts that, in their eyes, illuminate the text at hand.

Nevertheless, the example of literary commentary calls attention to the fact that, in traditional Tamil and other South Asian literary cultures, individual verses are not always treated as merely free-floating verbal creations completely detached from any larger textual framework. Obviously, larger textual structures do and must matter. While commentators typically devote most of their attention to the analysis of individual verses, they also frequently attend to the logic that informs higher levels of textual structure. A good example in Tamil is Parimēlājakar’s commentary on Tirukkugal, which principally takes the form of verse-by-verse exegesis but also includes introductions, brief as they may be, to each chapter of the text, as well as somewhat lengthier introductions to each of the text’s major divisions. And needless to say, there must be something in the textual structure of Tirukkugal that prompted this commentarial procedure, even if Parimēlājakar’s comments on individual verses do not always emanate from a vision of the text as a whole. Consequently, the overall effect is a somewhat uneasy equilibrium between the part and the whole, with the part only incompletely contained by and subordinated to the whole.

It is not hard to imagine a similar sort of dynamic operating in, say, Miṇaṭṭicutaram Pillai’s oral discourses for his pupils. A particular text would provide the starting point for his instruction, and in the course of teaching this text he would move through it, verse by verse. But his discourse would focus principally on individual verses considered separately from one another, and it would also include references to parallel verses from many other texts. A tokai text such as Tirukkugal, which is in a certain sense anthology-like to begin with, lends itself to this sort of treatment. But in this literary culture, texts whose verses tell a story receive similar treatment. This is not especially surprising if we keep in mind that these texts are not prose nar-

108. Sivathamby 1986: 44.
ratives. While stories can be told either in verse or in prose, the two media lend themselves to different sorts of creative endeavors. In a verse narrative such as *Kamparanayagan* or *Civakacinthamani*, some verses may be included principally to advance the story line while many others—devoted, for example, to description or to didactic discourse—easily lend themselves to treatment as self-contained verbal creations. The latter may, in fact, reflect a process whereby a story line is expanded and elaborated over time. It may be, therefore, that the verses could so easily be removed from their narrative context and recontextualized because they were, in a sense, inserted into the original context to begin with.

**SUMMING UP**

Can meaningful comparisons be made between the three moments in the genealogy of Tamil literary culture that provide the focal points of this essay? Will such comparisons enable us to discern the contours of Tamil literary culture as its defining features change in response to and in tandem with changing cultural and historical circumstances? To make such comparisons we require some points of entry, and the following are just a few of many possible “ways in.” We might ask, for instance: In the cultural environment that prevails in each of these moments, how closely are literary consciousness and historical consciousness related to one another? What sorts of texts are included in and what sorts of texts are excluded from the realm of “literature proper”? How is literary knowledge institutionalized? What is the relationship between the literary and textuality? In what ways does the literary intersect with, serve, or draw sustenance from other cultural concerns? Cāminatāiyar’s autobiography and his biography of Minaicuntaram Pillai are, of course, very different kinds of documents from the literary histories discussed in the second section of this chapter, and both are quite different from a literary anthology such as *Pugattiraṭṭu*. To the extent that we give credence to his representation of the world in which he and his teacher moved, Cāminatāiyar’s writings provide much more direct answers to the kinds of questions posed here. But certainly the histories, and perhaps to a lesser extent the anthology also, afford glimpses into the particular cultural perspectives that produced them and into the nature of the literary as constructed by those perspectives.

The realms of the literary as represented by Cēminatāiyar and by the compiler of *Pugattiraṭṭu* are related in certain fundamental ways that set these two moments apart from the world envisioned by the literary historians. Per-

---

109. Tamar Reich has analyzed in detail the process by which didactic discourse was interwoven into the core narrative of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* through a complex process of textual expansion (1998).
haps what we are dealing with here is a fundamental distinction between premodern and modern modes of literary culture. In the former, variables such as genre and meter articulate and categorize the literary realm, with the historical location of texts playing a much less central role. This is not to say that the literary domain as constituted in the fifteenth-century anthology and in the curriculum of literary study portrayed by Cāminātaiyar are identical. Indeed, there is relatively little overlap between the texts that Pillai taught his pupils and the texts included in Purattirattu; but the two are similar in their seeming lack of concern with the historical origins of the texts they contain. Also, both implicitly acknowledge the complementarity of the textual categories of literature and grammar/poetics, and include texts belonging to both, even if texts of the former type predominate. Further, both emanate from a culture in which the usage and performance of literature—that is, literature as event—predominates over literature as written artifact. The debut of a literary text, as described by Cāminātaiyar, as well as Pillai’s manner of instructing his pupils, are essentially oral performances. While we have only scant evidence that enables us to reconstruct the contexts in which Purattirattu was deployed, in all likelihood the anthology was intended principally as a source of literary citations for practitioners of traditional oral performance genres.

The worldview that informs the writing of Tamil literary histories in the twentieth century provides a striking contrast to this picture. Literature is plotted on a time line, and the category of literature generally excludes texts on grammar, meter, and poetics. These histories also include kinds of texts that Pillai and the compiler of Purattirattu would exclude from the domain of “literature proper,” such as bhakti poetry. And perhaps most importantly, the literary historians are deeply concerned about the context in which particular texts are produced. This concern extends to the dating of texts, identification of the sectarian affiliations of their authors, and the cultural conditions that prevailed at the time of their composition. And as we have seen, projects of writing Tamil literary history have often served commitments to particular versions of Tamil cultural history or political agendas.

The break between the premodern and modern envisionings of literature is significant. We might well ask: Do these two perspectives share any common ground? Perhaps so obvious that one might tend to overlook it is the fact that in each of the moments explored in this essay, “Tamil literature” is a meaningful category—that is, the Tamil language is axiomatic for the definition of a definable literary realm. This is not to say that the force of literary creation and propagation in Tamil is hermetically sealed off from contact and cross-fertilization with other languages and their literatures. But in each of these moments, there is an underlying sense that the Tamil language provides an arena for the creation of, transmission of, and reflection upon literature.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Kuḷṑntai [Pulavar], comm. 1949. Tirukkuṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟwrócić


Critical Tensions in the History of Kannada Literary Culture

D. R. Nagaraj

THE BEGINNING AND CONSOLIDATION OF KANNADA LITERARY CULTURE

The Moment of Historical Differentiation

The first thing one notices about the emergence of Kannada literary culture is that the very notion of literature is linked to the practice of writing; at least it is so according to the Kannada scholars who have considered the literary culture’s beginnings. Invariably, every discussion of the formative period of Kannada literature starts with a reference to the Halmidi inscription (450 c.e.). The “originary” moment that scholars have posited with Halmidi should be viewed in the context of a broader discussion of the relationships between writing, literarization, and inscriptions. In the context of premodern Kannada—to be precise, the archaic period between the fifth and tenth centuries—these three among themselves had come to constitute a certain kind of organic unity. Inscriptions were the first document of the public sphere available in the geocultural region called Karnataka. Moreover, something of a public sphere in its own right was created in the Kannada language using inscriptions. The inscriptions have a certain well-formed conception of the world, the community, and the role of the individual in history; they seek to represent a body of social knowledge, which is put to specific use by a self-conscious agent or political institution. Against this background,

D. R. Nagaraj passed away before completing the scholarly apparatus of this chapter. The editor acknowledges the help of Prithvidatta Chandrashobhi of the University of Chicago in filling in many of the blanks.

1. It has become mandatory to discuss the Halmidi inscription while tracing the beginning of Kannada literature. See Mugali 1953, Cidanandmurti 1970, and Kalaburgi 1988.
I have chosen to call inscriptions “public narratives,” because something that is already prewritten in the society is being reproduced.

I have selected four important inscriptions, all undated but perhaps from around the eighth or ninth century—the ninth century being the period for the first noninscriptional written text in Kannada, the Kavirajamarga, a treatise on poetics. The four inscriptions chosen—three from Sravana Belagola and one from Badami—document notions of self, polity, and religious ideals. The accumulated material of these public narratives in the linguistic, ideological, and stylistic spheres has a very complex bearing on the making and consolidation of what constitutes the literary in the history of Kannada literary culture. In this section, my purpose is to offer two propositions about these early inscriptions and the special correspondences they have with the courtly epic (campû) produced in Kannada from the mid-tenth century on.

The first proposition is that there were significant exchanges between inscriptions as public narratives and literary works, and this special connection posed problems for the formation of the epic imagination and for writing practices between the fifth and twelfth centuries. Only gradually could the epic imagination carve out a distinct identity for itself, an individual place in literary culture. This process is worth studying in some detail because, at the level of tropes and styles, the two look nearly identical. The second proposition is a continuation of the first: the resolution of the problem of exchange between literature and the public narratives of inscriptions and the consolidation of the epic imagination later, in the twelfth century, led to a revolt against the epic practices themselves and the notions of the literary that went into their making.

It is essential to reflect, at least briefly, on the aesthetic and ideological function of the genre of inscriptions. Inscriptions are not exclusively statements of the polity or any one of its components. Rather, they are assertions of certain codes that are recommended for endorsement on the part of the entire social order. The idea of recording an event—making it visible in historical time—and thus adding it to the cultural sedimentation of a community operates behind the practice of carving and installing inscriptions. The ideals and the models of political and ethical behavior that the inscriptions sought to present to the community had long been familiar from Sanskrit and Prakrit language records. In the fifth century the Kannada language was used for this purpose for the first time; it was the first great critical moment in its life, a moment of historical differentiation. All four of the inscriptions I discuss betray a kind of awkwardness, even anxiety, in the newly found grammatical and ideological use of Kannada.

2. I have taken these four documents from Narasimhacarya 1975: 1–2.
The Bādāmi inscription records and elaborates on the construction of the social type that we also see in the Halmidi record: the individual as the hero of the community. Similarly, the inscription of Śrāvaṇa Belagola, a prominent center of Jain religious power, celebrates the saint Nandisena and his journey to devaloka, the world of the gods. In contrast, the two modes of poetry that the tenth-century Kannada poets perfected, the laukika (worldly) and the āgāmika (scriptural), have king and saint, respectively, as their heroes. The verses from the inscriptions can also be woven into the epics of the tenth century, with some corrections. The construction in the inscriptions of the social type of “hero of the community” involves individuals ranging from peasant to prince, thus giving the public narratives the air of a totalizing discourse. These forms of reasoning and feeling are something the epic imagination will later participate in and build on. That the poets themselves had identified their work with inscriptions is evident from the many references to inscriptions in the work of Pampa (tenth century). The first great poet, or adikavi, of Kannada, Pampa had established a very conscious form of exchange with public narratives. He used the images of inscriptions at different levels and in divergent contexts, and indeed identified his work as a kind of larger poetic inscription. This also explains the influence of Pampa and Ranna (late tenth century) on the writers of inscriptions, who though less recognized than the great poets, nevertheless thought of themselves as their siblings.

It is not unreasonable to argue that the laukika and āgāmika modes of creativity developed by Kannada poets of the tenth century were imaginative efforts at poeticizing the material that was already available in inscriptions. This way of reading literary texts also opens up the question of the relationship between codified forms of subjectivity in the public imagination and ways of bringing them into literary spaces. An epic poet in the premodern context in Kannada had special access to a body of codified cultural material of different kinds, mainly related to polity, religions, and sexuality, and he reorganized them in the framework of a familiar story. The greatness of such a poet lies in the way he connected the material and brought to it a kind of coherence; even experiences of rupture could be a part of this connecting process. In other words, the values and purposes that had shaped the inscriptive practice had been appropriated into writerly practices as a whole. Many images that reached great heights in epics, for example, the image of Śrī in tenth-century poetry, appear with the same aesthetic and ideological purpose in inscriptions.

3. This is how the authorial function was seen in premodern Kannada—Pampa, Harihara (thirteenth century), Maṅgarasa III (fifteenth century), and Nījaguṇavīyōga Yōga (fifteenth century) provide ample statements exploring the nature of their creativity and responsibility.

4. See the inscriptions at Beluru (dated 1022), Rona (1022), and Nagāi (1058) in Narasimhaḥacarya 1975: 8–17.
The question that emerges from all this concerns the relationship and the difference between the poet as an inscription writer and the poet as a literary artist. Historically speaking, the inscriptive poet’s role has something special about it. A particular agent has used a language for a very sophisticated form of communication, and an elevated status is attached to such an agent. This is especially so given the social context of inscriptions. The beginning of inscriptive writing in general makes an assertion about the cultural identity of a language. It represents a critical moment in the process of vernacularization, whereby a language seeks and achieves a new kind of dignity and responsibility.

Kannada’s moment of historical differentiation has some specific characteristics. First, the unity between institutions of state and religious power was striking. This is an important theme because, as we will see, the twelfth-century Viraśāvya movement broke this coalition. The genealogy of two crucial categories, jōlavali and velevali, that appeared in both literary and public narratives gives an interesting twist to this relationship, and changes in their signification signal the creation of an alternative space for literary production. Initially, the term jōlavali referred to one who is committed to the ideals of polity or, to put it crudely, is an employee of a master; the term velevali meant one who voluntarily gives up his life for his master. But by the thirteenth century, velevali came to signify a man committed to the ideals of religion. In other words, the oppositional relationship between politics and religion that came about in the twelfth century was new. Second, the moment of differentiation developed a new conception of language itself, which marked a sharp departure from hierarchical conceptions of speech that the Sanskrit cultural formation had sought to legitimize. As Sheldon Pollock puts it, it was the discourse of exclusion that had kept a vast number of bhasās, the vernaculars, out of the spheres of literary production. The Kannada language had transgressed the sanctioned boundaries that had until then restricted its use to lower forms of mimetic function and social communication.

What compulsions did states and public institutions experience during the latter half of the first millennium in the geocultural territory of Karnataka that made them use and develop Kannada for larger societal purposes? The creation of a new language out of the spoken forms, and its transformation into a sophisticated medium for larger purposes, are consciously reflected upon and theorized in several texts in Kannada after the ninth century. This problem is merged with the problem of choice of language that existed in this early period. It was only after the twelfth century that Kannada came to be seen as a natural option, something that is evident in the new celebratory

---

5. Pollock 1998 and chapter 1, this volume.
reflexivity that characterizes the Kannada poet. Sanskrit certainly remained available to them but they did not choose to write in it, although the excessive presence of Sanskrit in their works was inevitable, considering the literary-ideological forces operating in the sites of textual production. More important, all the major authors of Kannada literary culture were quite conscious of the larger responsibility with which the new process of vernacularization had invested them. The whole epoch had experienced the release of social energy at all levels of textual production, which makes their works continue to live even today. This can be seen in the mode of self-identification practiced by Kannada authors in relation to master figures of both Sanskrit and Prakrit. We often find claims that a given poet has excelled Kālidāsa by a hundredfold. The identification of Immadi Nāgavarma’s (fl. 1042) with the Sanskrit grammarian Śrāvakarman, the author of the ancient Kātāntaraśākaran, is typical: “Nāgavarma taught the memory of words (śabdasmarana) to the people and they call him the new Śrāvakarman.” Śrāvakarman was supposed to have taught grammar to a Śrāvāhana king whose lack of grammatical knowledge had made him a target of ridicule by women of the palace. The story suggests a pedagogical responsibility—or rather, two closely related responsibilities.

Nāgavarma presents himself as responsible for training native speakers of Kannada to relearn their own language through rules of grammar and for equipping them with new forms of self-understanding. He and a whole range of authors before and after him were devoted to building Kannada as a strong language that could compete with Sanskrit or Prakrit. There was, however, another aspect to Nāgavarma’s project. He wrote a grammar of Kannada in Sanskrit, the Karnāṭakabhāṣabhūṣana (Ornament of the Karnataka language), leading us to speculate about the purpose of such a text and who its readers might have been. Another interesting work by Nāgavarma, the Abhidānavastukōṣa (Treasury of significations), a kind of dictionary of Sanskrit for Kannada users, prompts similar reflection. This text relocates the natural, social, and intellectual universes of the Kannada language by providing definitions of nearly eight thousand Sanskrit words. Here the pedagogical function seems more obvious: the dictionary expands the conceptual domain of the language and thereby provides Kannada speakers with a different perspective on experiences of everyday life. The idea was to build a common area of cultural referentiality that could integrate Kannada into the complementary circles of the Sanskrit cosmopolitan cultural order. In the same way, Nāgavarma’s grammar appears above all to be an attempt to establish parity with Sanskrit cosmopolitanism, or at least to negotiate with it on an equal intellectual footing, in the eyes of the participants in the emer-

gent Kannada literary culture. Whatever may be the truth of the matter, both texts represent considerable efforts at cultural translation.

The author who wrote in the domain of early Kannada literary culture saw himself at a critical moment of multiple transgressions, in genre as well as in language. In particular, there were many authors who wrote in more than one genre: śāstra and kāvya as well as purāṇa. Pampa was the first to write both a kāvya and a purāṇa, though the latter was considered a genre of ārya texts (works by mythic sages, or āsīs), having a set of specifically defined characteristics. When a poet like Candrarāja (1014–1042) wrote the Madanatilaka (Forehead ornament of passion), an adaptation of Vatsayana’s Kāmasūtra (which incidentally Candrarāja asserts he was writing in āsī Kannada or new Kannada), he claims that he is writing in the kavinārga (path of the poets) and also records with pride that his project was approved by the budhamandali (the circle of the learned). The notion of budhamandali is crucial to the emergence of this vernacular literary culture. All texts should be both educative and objects of pleasure, though especially the former. The pedagogy of building a new cultural community was in operation everywhere in this historic epoch. Most of the poets at this moment saw themselves as ubha-yakavi, in the sense that Sanskrit writers of the time gave this term: “one who can write both śāstra and kāvya.”

The freedom and the challenges experienced by such cultural expectations separate the Kannada writer from his Sanskrit counterparts. Pampa, Ponna, and Ranna wrote both this-worldly epics and sagely texts, or purāṇas, and this was not a matter of merely writing differently. As they moved from one genre to another they had to enter into a different psychological domain of creativity and a different worldview. Whether such total conversion of sensibility is really possible is another question altogether. The problem of the internal expectations of a genre like purāṇa is the source of some of the defining features of Kannada literature. But the theorists of literature, even the Jains who were the most prominent, did not make a fine distinction between purāṇa and kāvya. In two important anthologies, Mallikārjuna’s Sūktisudhārṇava (Nectar ocean of well-turned verse; thirteenth century), and Mallakavi’s Kāryasāra (Essence of literature; fifteenth century?), poems from fourteen Jain purāṇas are placed alongside kāvya, śāstra texts (such as grammar and erotica), and even inscriptions, suggesting how open the category of the literary in Kannada could be.

What exactly did the Kannada poets try to achieve by writing in Kannada? One can begin to frame an answer only by first accepting their self-representation: that they were also quite capable of writing in the languages of the cosmopolitan cultural order, Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Apabhramsha, though this does not of course tell us why they chose not to do so. A theory based on notions of modern sentiment such as restricted inwardness cannot be readily deployed to explain the choice of language by Kannada poets of me-
dieval times. The answer may lie, rather, in the train of identifications that the choice sets into motion. It was a matter of asserting one’s choice of the language of the community with which one had elected to identify. To put this in Saidian categories, it was a choice of affiliation, though it might not be the language of filiation in a sociobiological sense.7 For instance, Pampa wrote in Kannada, though he is thought to have come from a Telugu-speaking family, or at least a Telugu-speaking region.8 One chooses, it would seem, to become a poet of a particular language. In the context of the South Asian vernaculars, and certainly in the Kannada world, the act of choosing one particular language also entailed that vernacular poets became bearers of certain values that were not accepted by the dominant Sanskrit literary tradition as the authentic voice of the literary or as embodying true cultural authority. This is important to register because, in the high culture, authority was considered to be truth. Compared to the Sanskrit poet’s choice, which may be seen as basically aesthetic, the Kannada poet’s act of choosing was more complicated. It began as a complement to the agencies of the Sanskrit cosmopolitan world; subsequently, the process took its own course and unleashed new forces. “Folk” structures, of which Sanskrit was almost entirely devoid, also came into the field of literature, thus imposing a limit and a framework for negotiation and exchange with the cosmopolitan formation. The poet of the public narratives was only the first product of the vernacular’s interaction with the Sanskrit cosmopolis.

Public Narratives and the Epic Imagination

The line that divides public narratives and poetry has to be theorized in terms of the imaginative spaces that both have at their disposal. An additional problem is the limitation that the site of cultural production imposes on a genre. Judged by its exterior, the public narrative has everything—metrical forms and license to a special use of language—but it has to stop at the boundaries of codified social knowledge. It does not have the freedom to fictionalize. We may illustrate this argument by analyzing an important inscription from Śravaṇa Beḷagola dated 1131 C.E. The document in question records the death of the Hoysala queen, Śántala Dēvi, an event that captured the imagination of many authors in the twentieth century.9 Tradition holds that she

8. An important inscription at Gaṅgādharam village in Telangāna, Andhra Pradesh, installed by the poet’s brother Jinavallabha and giving an accurate picture of his family, uses three languages: Kannada, Telugu, and Sanskrit. The problem of Pampa’s primary language has been discussed in Telugu scholarship in considerable detail. It has even been asserted that the poet has a “Telugu heart” (see Jagannāthan et al. 1993–1994: 228–30).
threw herself from the summit of the Śivagānge hills, where she had gone to perform worship at a Śaiva temple. The long narrative begins with a grand eulogy of the king—featuring an impressive string of epithets typical of inscriptions—followed by a lengthy praise-poem of the queen. The writer suddenly interrupts this, however, to record her death in one startling abrupt sentence. “On Monday, the fifth lunar day of the bright fortnight of Caitra, in the Śaka year 1053 [c. 1131 C.E.], the year Virōḍhi, she ended her life at the holy place of Śivagānge and attained heaven.”

One gets the feeling that the writer is keen on getting his account of the queen’s death over with, that he is in a hurry. The narrative quickly moves on to a description of the queen’s parents. We are told that after hearing the news of her death they, too, committed religious suicide. For any writer this is certainly quite a dramatic episode to recount. Even in terms of religious ideals it demands a deeper treatment than what we see in the inscription. The public record lacks what we might refer to as interiority. The author’s principle purpose is to glorify the benefaction that all the actors in the tale have instituted; the occasion and the site of the writing have also conditioned the act of writing. The most important sentence refers to the king as the “alleviator of the poverty of storytellers, bards, and poets.” Even death has lost its weight and become a part of the language of gift-giving and the aura of kingship.

Why can we not consider Bokimaiah, the author of the inscription, a poet? The material he had to handle had all the potential to become a literary text. But for Bokimaiah the temple, as a source of signification of material power, was the only thing that mattered; the world of the social gift was the ultimate reality. Bokimaiah and other writers of public narratives seem to have been condemned to a state of creative unfreedom. They had every formal instrument at their command, yet their work clearly lacks something, some element of imagination or sentiment. They had no entry point into the inner worlds of real people. Compare Bokimaiah’s treatment of the death of the Hoysala queen with the scene of Bhīṣma’s death as explored by Pampa in the Vikramarjunavijaya. The family resemblance between the two kinds of writers was only skin deep. While inscriptions before his time celebrated the deaths of warriors, Pampa does something very important, something that enables us to characterize his works as achievements of literary and poetic imagination. Pampa has the freedom to enter into the subjective world of his character, for instance, connecting various moments in Bhīṣma’s life and weaving them into a symbolic narrative. As a lifelong brahmacāri (celibate), Bhīṣma scrupulously avoided women; even at the moment of death he could not possibly lie on the earth, since in the literary-linguistic imagination the

earth is a woman. An undated but relatively early inscription from Shimoga district has an identical description of a soldier killed in battle:

He himself and many others shooting arrows and approaching
Close, were caught up as in a cage of arms
And fell as Bhīṣma fell,
Without touching the ground.11

It is difficult to say which of the two writers used the image of Bhīṣma first. Even if one agrees that it was the inscriptional poet who made it available to Pampa—indeed, such exchanges became more and more common after the tenth century—the ṛādkāvi’s originality is not diminished. Pampa’s Bhīṣma appears as an altogether different figure from what we find in the inscription: a man who faces the deepest truth of his life while dying. This was the achievement of Pampa’s fictionalization. Access to a fictional domain through the imagination made Pampa an epic poet; the lack of it forced Bokimaiah and other inscriptional authors like him to remain chroniclers. The family resemblance between the two did not extend very far.

**Consensus as the Basis of Literary Culture**

Śrīvijaya’s Path of the Poet, for those who feel it, has become a mirror and lamp.
Śrīvijaya is god; how can I describe him?12

Durgasiṃha (eleventh century)

Even by very generous standards this praise looks a bit out of proportion, but Durgasiṃha, who translated the Sanskrit Pañcatantra into Kannada, is making a very important statement. Śrīvijaya is god indeed for the Kannada literary culture; in fact, he virtually created that culture. His one surviving work, the Kavirājamārga (Kingly path of poets), reveals the structure of the conflicts, compromises, and transformations that shaped Kannada literary culture. Kavirājamārga is the earliest work in Kannada that is available to us and is also the first text that tried, quite successfully, to legitimate the practices of Kannada literary culture. The text uses both originary and projective modes of legitimation and rightfully earns its description as a “mirror and lamp.” The author explains the sedimentary, residual, and emergent literary practices to construct an attractive theory of Kannada literary tradition. The text was a major actor in the process it was trying to theorize. To explain the importance of this text in categories of the cosmopolitan and the vernacular: it is the first Kannada work, next only to the Tamil grammar

---

Tolkāppiyam, that registers a complex process of negotiation and exchange between the two. In many ways the work exhibits a more acute consciousness of certain key problems in the making of vernacular literary cultures than either the Tolkāppiyam or the Lilātilakam, a grammar of Malayalam from fourteenth-century Kerala.13

The Kavirājamārga has traditionally been described as a translation of Daṇḍin’s Kavyādarśa, but one would have to expand to the breaking point the scope of the idea of translation to cover the range of objectives of the Kavirājamārga. Śrīvijaya was a theorist of literature at the court of the Rāṣṭrakūta king Nṛpatunga, a court that can be described as the perfect model of courtly culture. It is the court that lies at the very heart of this text and fixes the outer limits for its theoretical enterprise.

Some cultures, such as one finds in the West, are fortunate in writing confidently about the making of their literatures. They revel in the excessive clarity and availability of the material. Kannada and other such cultures are fascinating in part precisely because of the fuzziness of their worlds. Why are some works and genres lost in the darkness of history? Was it moths, fire, water, dust, or simple negligence or indifference that physically destroyed the manuscripts and drove them out of circulation, erasing their presence? Natural causes certainly have to be taken into account, but something more historical and cultural was also at work. The disappearances were no doubt due in part to the orthopraxis of others. They have a pattern. In the context of ancient Indian thought, let us recall, the texts of Bādari—who argued that the Shudras are also entitled to institute the Vedic fires and to share in all the privileges that follow—are simply not available. The texts of the materialist philosophers known as the Lokāyatas have also disappeared, almost without trace. We are fortunate that their philosophical rivals chose to present us with the gist of the vanished texts in an intelligible if truncated form.

The absent and the invisible have to be taken as parties in the construction of the literary cultures in South Asia. Many a time they are present outside the system, like lower castes, waiting their turn. In the following, I offer a brief discussion of what is absent in the construction of Kannada literature. The early theorists of literature, including Śrīvijaya, tried to exorcise certain forms, but the ghosts of these forms have returned to haunt the living. The meaning of these metaphorical statements becomes clear in the course of my tale of Kannada literature. I aim, first, to link the question of the forms—if not the authors—that have disappeared to a genealogy of the literary tradition of Kannada, and second, to offer a critique of the conflicts that have shaped the tradition. These two problems can be explored only in the context of a larger theory of cultural formations of premodern India.

13. See Cutler (chapter 4) and Freeman (chapter 7) in this volume.
As things stand now, any initiative to explore the beginnings of Kannada literature takes on the character of a search for missing authors and genres. The literary historian has to behave like a detective, for the missing works have vanished in a process of formalizing and privileging certain literary practices. The *Kavirājamārga* lists authors and forms that have disappeared—or have been removed—from the formal discourse of literature, and hereby shows us that poetics is nothing if not an attempt to negotiate with the political. The *Kavirājamārga* is a fascinating text inviting global comparisons, perhaps especially in its demonstration of the intimate tie between power and culture. It can be treated as a paradoxical occasion for both mourning and celebration: it is at once the statist rejection of certain indigenous forms and the beginning of a magisterial institution called literature. In many languages besides Kannada—including Telugu, Malayalam, and Tamil—the institutional beginnings of literature pose a major problem with reference to the relationship between poetry as a “natural” activity and its formalization as a component of courtly culture. One of the procedures of legitimation of kingship in the Sanskrit thought-world was to invoke the presence of a highly sophisticated literary culture. Codes of power such as one finds in inscriptions also had to be products of a highly developed literary culture. But where does this leave the desi, or more localized, literary practices?

The *Kavirājamārga* does seek throughout to offer some analysis of local Kannada poetries, though its attitude is sometimes harsh:

> It is difficult to measure the lapses in the multiplicity of forms of Kannadas. Even Vasuki, the thousand-headed serpent god, would find it frustrating. . . . Poets required the power of the āgama [scripture or theory], and without it they consistently pollute Old Kannada.

If Śrīvijaya was sometimes overly faultfinding, or worse, subordinated local practices to high theory, many prominent literary theorists of Kannada feel grateful for his critical genius, since he tried to address the problem of desi

---

14. Speculation on the literary forms that existed before the ninth century in Kannada literature are offered in Kalaburgi 1973.

15. Among those authors who have disappeared are Asaga, Guṇanandi, Naṅgārjuna, and Vimalādaya. Examples of the literary forms of lower castes such as bedrude and rātīsāva—which appear to be modes of pīṭhugabha (song verse)—are also no longer extant.

16. Saigūta Śivamara, an author-king who wrote on the eve of the *Kavirājamārga*, had written a gojasātaka (Hundred verses on the elephant) that was sung as a pestle-song. Many popular genres such as this were abundant yet did not gain entry into Kannada court literature. See Veṅkaṭācala Sastrī 1978: 484–90.

17. Literary formations are seen as peaceful and even harmonious processes in a culture. Even scholarly treatises on Kannada metrics see nothing unusual about the disappearance of many desi forms. For an example of this naïve complacency, see Karki 1992 (one of the most popular texts on Kannada metrics, by the way).

in a decisive fashion for the tradition. In fundamental ways, dési is one of the defining features of Indian literatures—but what exactly is dési? A simple or straightforward answer is just not possible, and an informed response itself will be a theoretical position on the problem. Is dési everyday speech? Yes, but dési is also a cluster of metrical forms and poetic structures. What exactly is the relationship between everyday speech and poetic forms? To translate this question into familiar Western categories, we might refer to oral poetry and poetics.

The theme of dési can perhaps best be discussed by specifying it at the level of the formal relationship between folk, or oral, and literary epics. If one takes the examples of folk epics like the Manṭesvāmī and Madēsvāra kāvyas—two important later works each dealing with the life story of a lower-caste Śaiva rebel-mystic—and compares them to other literary epics, some clear differences in formal processes come to light. First, the folk epic is basically in the form of the āñampū, a mixture of prose and poetry, but the folk āñampū is radically different from its mainstream literary counterpart. The folk narrative has its own forms of self-consciousness and self-reflexivity, but the Sanskrit cultural order is hardly present as a force with which to negotiate. In the case of mainstream literary culture, Sanskrit is a major factor to reckon with: it has to be contested or accommodated. By contrast, folk epics employ everyday speech. In literary epics, everyday speech is under the generic control of a disciplined metrical form, and the dési meters, essentially various song forms, are transmuted by the active presence of a trained literary mind. It is clear that in the Kavirājamārga, Śrīvijaya treated dési both as a form of everyday speech and also as a repertoire of poetic forms. And at both these levels dési presented a problem that Kannada literature had to solve in the first stage of its history. This the Kavirājamārga sought to do in a decisive manner.

The literary historian, who, as I said, has to double as a detective in cases of texts that have disappeared, should also function as a rights activist. He can use the same lamp to search for what has disappeared and to find out the reason why. Read in this spirit, the Kavirājamārga may be charged with having caused the disappearance of multiple forms of folk literary practices, denying them their right to exist in the space of the new literary culture. The imperial redefinition of poetics, such as was effected by the Kavirājamārga, sought to restructure the mode of the relationship between literary imagination and forms. Any policy statement about the future also implies a specific way of indexing the past; the Kavirājamārga makes such a statement with a judicious mixture of liberalism and conservatism in the context of the Sanskrit cultural order. The whole project of the Kavirājamārga has to be situated against the background of the emergence of this order and the efforts of the indigenous Kannada literary culture to come to terms with it.

The case of Kannada offers an interesting contrast with Malayalam, as is
evident from a close reading of the first Malayali text of poetics, the *Lilātilakam*. Malayalam had to define an identity of its own over against two rivals—Sanskrit and Tamil—unlike Kannada, which had only the one. The emergence of a new literary tradition from the womb of an old power structure is one of the fascinating themes of Indian history. The notion of a universalizing cultural order such as that of Sanskrit has played a crucial role in the making of vernacular literary traditions. The structure of this order is overdetermined by a complex interplay of a variety of forces, foremost among them the forces of political power. The *Kavirājamārga* tried to build an independent literary tradition that could accommodate both the cosmopolitan and the vernacular. The process of organizing a literary culture in Kannada has many parallels with that of other traditions, such as Malayalam. The form and practice of *Pattu*—songs in non-Sanskrit but also non-Tamil meters—for example, signifies the altered presence of *dēśi* forms in the history of Malayalam.

The author of the *Kavirājamārga* sought to represent the vernacular in the image of the Sanskrit cosmopolitan. Sanskrit was not only the language of the gods, it also behaved like a god itself. By the time the *Kavirājamārga* appeared on the scene, the attempt to create a vernacular double of Sanskrit was at its peak—or so the theorists of poetry would have us think. In fact, Kannada poetry yielded and obeyed its theorists only partially; its self-representations through poetic theory cannot always be taken at face value. Here lies the specificity of the Kannada literary culture. This resistance also suggests that the categories of cosmopolitan and vernacular, functioning as dichotomous opposites, may not be adequate for treating Indian literatures. For the vernacular itself is an act of concealment; in the *Kavirājamārga* we are given only a partial representation of a whole range of other forms that cannot be accommodated in the literary canon. This is so because the vernacular itself mirrors the mirror, so to speak. Śrīvijaya had to recreate Daṇḍin’s *Kāvyadāraśa* in order to chart a new journey. If Daṇḍin had not existed, Śrīvijaya would have had to invent him.

We need to question, accordingly, the belief that a certain kind of consensus exists in the making of a vernacular literary culture. In the world of Kannada a conflict—one that was real if ultimately indecisive—is perceptible between the worldviews of different traditions. Jain polemical texts in Kannada from the tenth and eleventh centuries, for example, deal with the problem of preserving the purity and uniqueness of Jain religious identities. The fact that all rivals used the same vernacular to fight their wars does not

19. Freeman’s essay (chapter 7) in this volume throws light on this process.
20. I have drawn on Sheldon Pollock’s work on the cosmopolitan and the vernacular in this section; see Pollock 1998.
21. Three authors—Nayasēna, Brahmaśīva, and Vṛttavilāsa—merit special mention here.
reduce the intensity of antagonism. An experience of intimate enmity existed between the *vaidika*, or Brahmanical, forces and the anti-*vaidika* forces, which we may identify by the name anciently given them, the *śramaṇas*, or renouncers (in this essay the term is used largely in reference to the Jains). And this experience is one of the shaping forces of Kannada literary culture. Except in the case of the *vacanakāras*, the “makers of utterances” who exploded the continuum of history in the twelfth century as the voice of the Viraśaivas, or “militant devotees of the god Śiva,” conditions of textual production remained the same for both sets of forces. What has as yet to be theorized in this enmity and the literary cultures that variously embodied it is the role of ideology, seen here as religious vision, and its relationship to literary imagination.

Literature as an institution in Kannada was a product of consensus regarding the sanctity of literary forms reached by *vaidika* culture and its adversaries. Every text of poetics is a code of literary conduct mutually assented to. The secular traditions of poetics in Sanskrit and other Indian languages signify an agreement to carry on the war on other battlefields. But ideological differences are the last ones to disappear from the life of the mind, whose habit is to generate mental constructs endlessly.

The only consensus that was reached concerned the rules of the literary game, and correspondences in this domain—uniformity at the level of genres and forms—were little more than matters of family resemblance. Formal consensus is decisive, no doubt, but it can never be total. What contributed to the survival of the vernacular and its uniqueness was not formal consensus but the search for sectarian motifs and meanings. The *śramaṇas* and the *vaidikas* tried to transform each other; each learned literary techniques and strategies from the other. But at the level of motifs, they sought to retain their distinct identities. A poet’s identity is conditioned by his capacity to transform a common theme to yield a specific motif. Identities are shaped by writer-specific motifs and meanings. And at this level—beneath that of form—where a kind of consensual peace reigned, there raged a search for difference and uniqueness for which religious-specific worldviews mattered a great deal.

Along with exchanges and negotiations in the sphere of ideologies, the birth, death, exile, and disguise of metrical genres continued to shape the history of Kannada literature in the early centuries and even beyond. Some of these meters were organically born into Kannada and others were borrowed from Sanskrit and Prakrit. The despised folk forms reappeared as *śaṅgatyas* and other verse songs. In addition to negotiations around the phenomenon of metrical systems and forms, the accord linking the vernacular

22. The *śaṅgatyas* is a metrical form of four lines in which alliteration of the second syllable of each line is a constant and the so-called *amisa* prosodic unit is predominant.
to the Sanskrit cultural order was also related to the rejection of a third category. For lack of a better word, I call this category the pluriverse, an unclassifiable grab bag of cultural practices that embraces everything from what is called the folk to the dissident signifying acts one finds in any linguistic community. What in particular I mean by “pluriverse” here is that in the interstices of a speech community there exist realms of linguistic practice that remain outside the normative sphere of a textualizing literary culture. The songs of the Śaiva mendicant-minstrels, for instance, have a presence in the world of folk poetry but they may not find a place in either the Sanskrit cosmopolitan or the Kannada vernacular orders. It is only by prohibiting or at least regulating the entry of such forms into institutional structures that a vernacular literary culture seems able to come into existence.

The unsettling implications of the dissension behind what we often perceive as a unanimity in forming vernacular literature as a polity-related institution can perhaps be made clearer by a comparative point. Vernacular normative texts like the Kavirājāmārga have prevented, as if by fiat, the making of a fully realized oral epic—a Homeric epic, if you will—in Kannada. The aural-oral forms of poetry had some legitimacy in the traditions of poetry prior to the imperial vision of culture promulgated in the Kavirājāmārga; the author of the work admits as much himself. But a new historical necessity called all this into doubt. When polities take to literary writing, those outside the centers of power choose to remain in orality. When a literary treatise chooses to dwell on lapses—the third category that I have referred to as the pluriverse—the streets choose to lapse into song. They stay out of the institution called literature. The literary imagination of the streets and the grammar of literature do not go well together.

The Kannada literature constructed as such by the Kavirājāmārga represents not so much a product of geopolitical territoriality as it does a territoriality of admissible forms. What lies in the landmass between the Kaveri and the Godavari, as the Kavirājāmārga describes “the region of Kannada,” is a mosaic of certain metrical structures. But in the period under consideration a privileged linguistic space had emerged: The speech of the area covering the towns of Kisuvoḷal, Mahākopaṇa, Puligere, and Okkunda was the ideal literary language according to the Kavirājāmārga—a position endorsed by other poets.23

Only a metaphorical space such as the Kavirājāmārga delineated could include and link together authors who were spread over different regions. For instance: Pampa and Ponna (both tenth century) were identified with the Telugu-speaking region of Andhra country; Ranna (late tenth century) and Kumāra Vyāsa (fifteenth century) were from northern Karnataka; Lakṣmīśa

(sixteenth century) and Ṣaḍakṣari (seventeenth century) were from southern Karnataka, and a whole range of authors were dispersed all over the present-day state of Karnataka. Except for the Śaiva vacanakāras of the twelfth century, who had a radically different understanding of the possibilities of the literary in Kannada, all other poets were enthusiastic participants in the literary cultures of the mainstream, irrespective of their regions.

Even the vacanakāras, however—in particular Allama Prabhu (twelfth century)—were keenly aware of the existence of the consecrated literary tradition. Allama Prabhu refers to the poets of the past as parrots perched on the three-tiered space of the vastukas and varṇakas, two respected genres practiced by all writers.  

The vacanakāra critique was also a formal revolt; the free-flowing indigenous traditions of orality asserted themselves against the excessive formal disciplines of metrical structures. The basis of the vacana, a near-prose form, was in the genre of inspired orality, which even today is a living folk practice.

The indigenous genius was hard to contain. It defied the dictates of the theorists and evolved into new, respectable forms. The history of Kannada prosody (a theme I return to in the next section) is a dazzling story of this struggle, but it is usually told in a very dull way. The mārga-dēśi debate, which has seen many remarkable turns in its career, also reaffirms both the exegetical cunning of the canonical masters and the equally deft reappearance of the local, the untutorable indigenous, in a different garb. Further, the survival of local indigenous forms leads us to reflect on the nature of the relationship between the “folk” and “classical” forms of Kannada literature. The very distinction here, though it holds good up to a certain point, has to be defined carefully. In the long narrative poems of the lower castes, for example, we see the creative use of forms that come into prominence at the hands of classical poets.

At the level of stories and themes, two typologies emerge in the context of Kannada literature: the monodimensional classical and the multidimensional classical. In the first category, the śrāmanas are the most important group, since their stories remain within the confines of high literary culture; there is very little Jain folk literature. The second category is represented by Brahmans and Śaivas, whose folk forms have both produced and reproduced the classical material with certain variations. Particularly in the case of the latter, the folk epics bring to light what is ignored or hidden by the textual or institutional centers of religion. There is a third category of folk narrative, in addition to the Brahmanical and Śaiva, sung by those communities that have stayed outside the framework of the caste system, like forest cowherds and

25. On the idea of mārga-dēśi see Narayana Rao (chapter 6) and Pollock (chapter 1) in this volume.
forest shepherds, whose experiences have not been part of the formalization and canonization process of literature. In other words, the stories and themes of these groups have not found formal expression in the history of Kannada literature. These communities have preserved some of the primordial metrical forms of the Kannada language; the process of policing metrical forms by the consensual institution called literature did not affect them.

Theories of Prosody as Sites of Negotiation

Many of the themes so far touched upon are brought to light when we consider the relationship between the science of prosody (chandussaśana) and the living metrical forms of the "common folk." 26 Nāgavarma’s Chandombudhi (Ocean of meters; tenth century), the first text on prosody in ancient Kannada, and several other works of more or less the same period, can help to illuminate the process of reformation of local literary practices according to the standards of the emergent literary culture. Chandombudhi came into existence at a historical moment when the Sanskrit cultural order had established hegemony in literary canonization. 27 There is inscriptive evidence to show that the high priests of Sanskrit literary culture were held in great esteem even in Karnataka. 28 Not surprisingly, there is also evidence that desī, or vernacular, forms, too, were used to measure the popularity of a work. The Chandombudhi seeks to effect a synthesis of these two forces—the universalizing Sanskrit and the localized and particular Kannada—envisioning the emergence of consensus as the base of a self-conscious literary tradition. Nāgavarma’s is a proposal to submerge differences at the level of theory, a phenomenon that had assumed multiple dimensions when Sanskrit poetics descended on the Kannada scene. 29 And

26. Jayakārī, a theoretician of the eleventh century, apparently felt that the rules of prosody for Kannada and Sanskrit are one and the same. The list of Sanskrit texts that have influenced the theories of prosody in Kannada is long; especially important are Pingala’s Chandahsūtra, Hemacandra’s Chandōnasūṣṭa, and Kedāra Bhaṭṭa’s Vṛttaratnākara. The last (c. 1100) was especially popular with the Kannada Jain theorists.

27. Chandombudhi and Nāgavarma’s Kannada Chandussa (titled Nāgavarma’s Canarese Prosody) were both edited by Kittel in 1875.

28. Nāgavarma speaks of the “proper ancient way of writing and systems of wording” (uciptapurāṇamārgopadpadādhāti). He also asserts that his work would command the respect of even Kalidāsa. Nāgavarma II (twelfth century) clearly names those he regarded as his peers in poetics: Vāmana, Rudrata, Bhamaha, and Daṇḍin (Narasinhācārya 1967: x).

29. Literary theorists in India have taken seriously the possibility of reconstructing a non-Sanskrit poetics. Not surprisingly, for reasons of cultural politics—inspired by the anti-Brahman movement—Tamil writers are working on this project seriously. For a discussion of Tamil poetics, see Carlos 1993. An additional problem in this area is that of tracing the origin of non-Sanskritic ideas and their journey to the Sanskrit cosmopolis. Carlos, a leading Tamil theorist, argues in the aforementioned work that dhvani was originally a Dravidian idea.
he seeks to do this in a critical domain, that of chandas, prosody and metrics, mastery of which by this epoch had became synonymous with literary sophistication. As Nāgavarma puts it, “The bad poet, who roams wearily in the profession of poetry without learning chandas, is verily a blind man.” Sanskrit had penetrated the Kannada literary imagination quite deeply at the metrical level; most of the Sanskrit syllabic-quantitative verse forms (tattta), including the most complicated, had become quite popular with the classical poets of Kannada. Hence Nāgavarma devotes a substantial section of his treatise to a discussion on samaavytta, which in this context refers to forms that are common to both Kannada and Sanskrit. We should add that Nāgavarma was negotiating not only with pure Sanskrit traditions per se; another tradition demanding recognition was Prakrit, both as a literary language and as a body of other metrical forms and theoretical positions on prosody. Kannada scholarship has treated this as the problem of the influence of two metrical authorities both named Piṅgala, one Sanskrit and the other Prakrit.

The most important part of Chandombudhi for the purpose of this essay is a special section that deals with the Kannada-specific metrical forms, which Nāgavarma calls kannadavisayayajati. This term is in keeping with the habit found in Sanskrit poetics of defining styles as belonging to regions, for instance, vaidarbhi and gaudī. Nāgavarma’s success lies in his mode of approximation. He graphically describes the presence of Sanskrit metrical forms in Kannada while at the same time successfully grafting Prakrit metrics onto Kannada. At the level of theory, his propositions sound credible and plausible; what he actually does, however, is redescribe certain Kannada forms in the vocabulary of Prakrit sources. Forms, like ragale, that were to be made hugely popular by the Śaiva poet Harihara in the thirteenth century were traced to Prakrit; this was also true of forms like the dandaka.

31. For a discussion of the presence of the Sanskrit canon in Kannada inscriptions, see Cidānandamūrti 1966a. The majority of the authors in ancient Kannada believed in the notion of sarvabhāṣāsāmyapraṇāyita (an all-pervading language tendency), which also became a euphemism for endorsing the canonical values of the Sanskrit literary culture. Only recently have traditional scholars, in the face of the findings of Dravidian linguistics, accepted that Kannada has an origin independent of Sanskrit.
32. There are differences of opinion about the time of the Prākṛta Piṅgala. Some scholars date him to the fourteenth century, others deny his historical existence altogether. See Winternitz 1981–1985, 3: 33; and Keith 1928: 35. Kittel (1875: xvi) says that no trace of Piṅgala’s influence can be detected in the work of Nāgavarma.
35. On ragale, see Kittel 1875: xxii. If one takes the evidence available in other literatures, Kannada-specific forms like ragale and tripadi have important siblings in Apabhramsha. The style of the Cāryagītikosa reads very much like ragale. In sune suna militta jabe / sāla dhama uia tabe, for
This suggests two possibilities: First, contrary to the experience with the highly intricate Sanskrit quantitative meters (vyātta), the forms from Prakrit may have naturally integrated themselves with the linguistic genius of the Kannada language. Second, the pure dēsi forms may have lent themselves to description in terms of Prakrit. Piṅgala helped dēsi forms acquire literary respectability—something denied them in the Sanskrit cultural order. What was difficult to achieve in the context of the Sanskrit universe may have been possible using Prakrit models.

The Prakrit scholar Piṅgala was more useful to Kannada as an idea than as a historically verifiable person. The process of re-formalization was complete, though the dēsi forms survived in disguise. But in the history of Kannada prosody, the trinity of Sanskrit, Prakrit, and dēsi–Kannada was established permanently. And the Kannada literary tradition as such was seen as a synthesis of Kannada, Sanskrit, and Prakrit. The dēsi forms, which became the subject of theorization and canonization, had no self-reflexive theory of their own; they were conceptualized within a cognitive framework alien to them. This marked a crucial moment in their life—the choice between re-formalization and exile. In either case, they would never be the same again.

In other words, metrical forms that were passed off as flowing forth from Prakrit sources may have been not Prakrit at all but instead truly indigenous to Kannada. Prakrit provided these forms with royal insignia, as it were, so they might gain entry and an audience in the court of literature. The category of the so-called kannadaviṣayajāti may thus be yet another attempt by the consensual, dominant cultural order to present a respectable version of literary forms that were otherwise held inadmissible.

On the basis of phenomena found in the domain of prosody, then, the following general proposition can be proposed: Kannada literary culture as an institution may be seen as comprising three concentric circles. The tension-ridden yet complementary Brahman and śramaṇa groups form the first, core region; the second consists of Śaiva communities; the third is the outer circle, which mainly consists of communities that remained outside the core of the agrarian and artisanal social structures. The last circle comprises the world of what are popularly called “tribal” and “folk” cultures; it is organically linked to the other circles by the co-optation and incorporation of their aesthetic forms, as we see at the level of metrics. It is only by this process of re-formalization—which is alien to these tribal and folk cultures themselves—that they were able to attain “literary” status.

example, the prosodic structure bears close comparison with both rāgā and triṇḍi. See Sen 1977: xxxv. The dandaka, a form found in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Kannada, was a species of dance-poetry seen as belonging to the common people, though in Kannada it has features not shared with the other languages. See Shetty 1989: 17–23.
In the making of Kannada literary culture, the interaction of the empire with the paradigms of secular poetics played a major role. Broadly viewed, this interaction can also be described as the conjunction of the courts, the common people, and the nonstatist religious discourse at the level of both themes and forms.

Literary cultures acquire a particular sort of material practice when royal courts are involved in a significant way. In the context of Kannada literature the court had a magisterial conception of literature, one radically different from the practices of poetry from below. The courtly practice of literature was linked to the emergence of the Sanskrit cultural order and to Sanskrit’s role in defining the forms of cultural power. The *Kavirājāmārga* was the product of an intense negotiation with this order—a theme I return to shortly.

Empire was more effective as an idea than as a political reality in the institutional making of Kannada literature. The Rāṣṭrāṇgas and the Cālukyas of Kalyāna were two of the more important dynasties that promoted the ideal of the empire between the ninth and twelfth centuries, and they both were preoccupied with concerns about the inconstancy of Śrī and Rājyalakṣmi, the goddesses of the state. Dynasties were trapped in a state of constant warfare in their ambition to build empires; many a time they were involved in petty wars that had no apparent significance. The formation of the state in Karnataka had elements of a “hollow crown,” but there also seems to have been a dimension of make-believe in this category. The “state” sometimes seems to have been like an intensely practiced and necessary ritual lying at the heart of the political imagination. If “empire” means the consolidation of power and consequent phases of peace and tranquility, then empires did not exist in the early centuries of the second millennium. Wars had become an end in themselves. As a result, the historical period we are discussing (the ninth through twelfth centuries) was marked with political violence that shaped the sensibilities of the major poets of the day. The heroic endorsement of war as a political necessity and ideal went hand-in-hand with a certain metaphysical

---

36. For a listing of the dynasties that offered patronage to Kannada poets until the nineteenth century, see Narasimhacārya 1961.

37. The notion of the hollow crown, a metaphor for the substance or the lack of it in state formation, is used in Dirks 1987 with reference to the small kingdom of Pudukottai, south India. A more interesting metaphorical treatment of the making of the state is presented in Geertz 1980. Interestingly, historians who have worked on south India and Karnataka have written like premodern Kannada poets. Their belief in the actual grandeur of the empire has always been quite surprising. The conflict between two visions of state—centrifugal and centripetal—has not acted as a corrective. See Nilakanta Sastri 1955 and Venkata Ramanayya 1935, two texts that were the major influences on the writings of Karnataka historians until recently. Now the work of Stein, Ludden, and Karashima, among others, has replaced that of the Indian scholars.
nausea in the face of violence. The celebration of the ideal of the empire by
the statist political discourse and the intense distrust of the same by the reli-
gioliterary sensibility are often woven together in the work of a single author.

The division of poetry by the Jains into laukika and agamika was one way
of negotiating with this hard existential reality. It is almost as if the Jain mind
chose to split itself to retain its sanity. The dependency on the state was not
only a material necessity for the Jain authors; it also constituted, at the site
of textual production, a relation of intimate enmity with all of the ideologi-
cal, mythical, and epic paraphernalia that formed integral parts of the em-
pire. In the history of Jainism, which has celebrated nonviolence as no other
tradition in India has, the ideal of the Jain warrior eventually came to be ac-
cepted as normal and even desirable.\(^{38}\) To be able to digest this cruel irony,
the figure of Śrī, Vedic goddess though she was, emerged as an important
symbol. Particularly in the work of Pampa and Ranna (second half of the tenth
century), Śrī provides a context for commenting on the fickle-mindedness
of temporal power. In the Sāhasabhākṣamavijaya (Victory of the bold Bhīma) of
Ranna, who was at the court of the Cāḷukya Irivābeṇaṅga Satyāśraya (late tenth
century), Śrī is seen as an unethical woman and is bitterly satirized.

Even the sāmantas, or feudatories, had internalized the idea of the em-
pire; they saw themselves as emperors in the making. After all, Ariṅksari, the
patron of Pampa, was only a sāmanda of the Rāṣṭrakūtas, but the poet treats
him as an emperor. The petty vassals also reproduced the ideology of em-
pire on a miniature scale. The reality of any particular political hierarchy
was apparently treated only as a stage transitional to some other configura-
tion. And the political inscriptions of the time suggest that there operated
an optimism of the will having little to do with the reversals in fortune that
seem to have really marked the period. If the sword failed to build their em-
pires, the word was a fitting substitute.

Jain writers saw the state as essentially a secular structure, and thus per-
petually on the brink of irrationality—a condition almost like inebriation.
Multiple dependencies on its institutions seemed to generate in many a de-
sire for the death of all forms of temporal power. Some of the most profound
insights of the Kannada poets of the epoch under consideration here were
a product of this ambivalence. Pampa, for example, links the body that de-
generates with the state that suffers the same fate.\(^{39}\)

Important changes were occurring in the various religions of the epoch,
and literary works of the time were shaped by these tensions. The conflict be-
 tween śramaṇa and vaidika belief systems had entered an interesting phase,
as the polemical texts of the period show. The uncertainty of political pa-
tonage had become an accepted fact on both sides. For the Jains, it was a


\(^{39}\) Adipanāma (Basavaraju 1976) 14.25.
question of preserving their own purity: infiltration by the other was the single most important fear. Brahmaśāva’s *Samayaparīkṣe* (Analysis of the doctrine) is a document that powerfully registers this fear. A fundamentalist urge to return to the original state of purity provides it with a satirical tone, but the satire conceals a deep anxiety about the behavior of the community.  

Until the twelfth or thirteen century—that is, for the first four or five centuries of its existence—Kannada literature was dominated by a mixed prose-verse literary form called *campū*. This was a truly royal genre, the discursive equivalent of a crown; the poets who practiced it were in fact often those awarded the state title of “poet emperor” as was the case with Ponna, Pampa, and Ranna, three tenth-century poets who were also called “poet-jewels” and who elevated the genre to its glory. The formal complexity of this genre, which consists largely of grand, Sanskrit-derived verses interspersed with often very convoluted art-prose, demonstrates how far the literary had distanced itself from everyday speech. During the age of the *campū*, the poets’ attitudes toward the power of Sanskrit meter and the power of the state seem to have almost reproduced each other; whereas the presence of the other, dēśi metrical structures and everyday language, quietly distributed among the Sanskritic forms, suggests something of the unease that poets, as a class, felt with court patronage. There was a submerged layer of doubt, even contempt, enveloping the glorification of kingship that was their principal objective—a doubt and contempt that were soon to manifest themselves in the historic transformation of both literary culture and political culture that took place in the late twelfth century.

Against this background it is useful to reflect further on the division of literary production instituted by Jain poets: the *laukika*, or worldly, and the āgāmika, or scriptural. The *laukika* was basically an allegorical mode, which gave artistic license to poets to merge the epic hero with the poet’s patron-king. Pampa made his king, Arikēsari, the Arjuna of his *Bhārata*; in Ranna’s work the king became Bhīma. This mode, a kind of symbolic fragmentation of the literary imagination, brings into focus the pattern of complex negotiation involving the Vedic mythic, epic, and historical universes that the Jain poets practiced. These negotiations turned, above all, on the problem of the ethics and aesthetics of representing violence.

Let us examine this problem in the cases of Pampa and Ranna. The clas-

---

40. For the *Samayaparīkṣe* of Brahmaśāva, see Kulkarni 1958, and, for the second most important Jain polemical work of the period, Vyattavāsā’s *Dharmaparīkṣe*, see Rāghavendrārāo 1982. Brahmaśāva in particular detests the presence of folk gods among the Jains and declares that “those who organize festivals for folk gods are not Jains but kīlōs [rogues]” (*Samayaparīkṣe* [Kulkarni 1958] 4.123).  

41. The classical Jain poets of the tenth century generally attempted to conceal the embarrassment of dependence on court patronage. As Pampa puts it, *peravivudem perarindappudem* (What can others give, what can others do to me?) (*Asippūraṇa* [Basavaraju 1976] 1.36).
sical vaidika poets had no difficulty in dealing with the great Indian epic the Mahābhārata even if it meant extolling the virtues of violence. In the heroic epic the literary imagination is not excited if it refuses to celebrate violence at the level of imagery; in fact the real tension in the genre is between a certain philosophical and emotional tiredness about violence and the aesthetic celebration of it. Considering the centrality of nonviolence in śrāmanda religiosity, Jain poets like Pampa ought to have experienced emotional, ethical, and philosophical difficulties in accepting the political logic of the Mahābhārata. The metaphor-making strategy of Pampa is conditioned by this dilemma. Kṛṣṇa, a god for the vaidikas, cannot be accepted as a god by Jains. So Pampa transforms the religious associations into purely aesthetic ones. The sacred is turned into visual beauty; Kṛṣṇa is described as one “who sleeps on the white-foam mattress of the sea.” A Jain cannot endorse violence in either ethical or theological terms, but the symbolic fragmentation of the imagination solved this dilemma by placing literary creativity beyond theological considerations. In laukika kāvyas the world is dealt with as the world in fact is, but in the āgamika texts the repressed problems return. Some of the most moving passages in Pampa deal with the metaphysics of violence and their relation to the state and kingship. In his Adipurāṇa the two brothers Bharata and Bāhubali fight each other for the crown; at the end of the war Bāhubali meditates on the nature of Rājaśri, the goddess of the state:

Bāhubali, the brave and chivalrous hero, saw the wheel that stood to his right.

“Bharata has made a foolhardy attempt of fighting me with this,” he thought.

“Curse this, the kingdom of the earth; its cravings, its obsessions drove my brother, the jewel of mankind, to madness. How could it spare the other villains—kings?

It makes brothers fight each other, drives sons from fathers, kindles the fire of anger—

how to live with this Rājaśri?”

Disgusted with the evil passions aroused by the quest for political power, Bāhubali decides on renunciation. Bharata becomes the king. The tragic irony of the whole situation is that Bharata is permanently trapped in history, yet Pampa does not pass moral judgment on him. Or to see it differently, it is Bharata who is the hero of Pampa’s Mahābhārata. The mode of symbolic fragmentation of the literary imagination solved many dilemmas.

42. Pampa Bhāratam (Veṅkaṭaṅkaraṇappa 1926: 225).
43. Adipurāṇa (Basavaraju 1976) 14.119.
for Pampa and Ranna, true, but it was also disputed. Later Jain poets, such as Nemicandra and Janna in the thirteenth century, did not approve of this mode and abandoned it.

Pampa and other Jain poets of his era resolved the problem of the relationship between ideology and aesthetics by accepting secular poetics, thus removing the conflicts between dharma (duty as such; social and political duty) and kavyadharma (poetic duty). The courtly institution of poetry was constructed in such a way as to facilitate the smooth practice of such a poetics. It also made cross-linguistic borrowing, influences, and imitation possible. However, the fact that the conflict between ideology and aesthetics could be resolved did not mean that larger areas of dissent disappeared from the site of literature. For Kannada poets, Sanskrit poetics on the whole became the most useful model for the secularization of literature. Even at the pan-Indian level, all the fierce internal debates on language, notions of reality, and verifiability of religious experience were dissolved, by about the tenth century, in rasa theory. Compared to the śramaṇas, vaidika poets did not experience larger tensions of the kind related to theology and poetry. They did not have to resort to symbolic fragmentation—though the very absence of such tensions, it can be argued, made their works fragile and dull.

An interesting contrast to Pampa is the case of Ranna, his contemporary, who evolved a subversive strategy to retain the Jain endorsement of nonviolence. There has been a debate in Kannada scholarship on the nature of the central aesthetic emotion in Ranna’s version of the Mahābhārata. Devout Jain that he was, how could he celebrate viṣṇa, or the heroic sentiment—violence, in fact—as the main aesthetic experience? It seems far likelier that it is rauḍra, or rage, that constitutes the organizing rasa of his epic; for the śramaṇa poet uses all the analytical strategies of his religious discourse to explore the dark world of human beings and the primal moments of defeat in war, revenge, and bloodythirstiness. Ranna had to tackle another contradiction: as a poet working within the framework of poetic convention he was obliged to celebrate Bhima and his deeds of violence; as noted earlier, it is with Bhima that he identifies his patron-king. But the internal possibilities of the story of the war between Bhima and Duryodhana, and the poet’s spiritual propensity to doubt and distrust violence, led him to elevate the status of Duryodhana. The curious artistic strategy of counteridentification that he employs produces a tension that runs throughout his extraordinary campū.

THE MAKING AND RECONTEXTUALIZATION OF RADICAL EPISTEMES

New Forms and Alternative Spaces

One of the most important problematics of the history of Kannada literary culture is the emergence of radically new epistemes—core notions about the social and cultural order—and the reformulation of these epistemes over
time. A dramatic instance of such emergence occurred in the twelfth century, when an entirely new communicative form appeared, along with a new religious practice. The movement is popularly referred to by this literary form, which was named, with disarming simplicity, the *vacana* (which means utterance, statement, discourse; an author in the genre was called a *vacanakāra*, or maker of a *vacana*). It is often called also the Vīraśāva movement, in acknowledgment of the religious group that adopted the *vacana* as one of its principal genres. Along with this new literary form and religious practice, a whole range of new images and radical propositions came into being, marking this moment as one of profound discontinuity. The abrupt appearance of these images and propositions and the new form in which they were embodied suggests that they were born from nothing and nowhere. Any effort to trace the genealogy of the *vacana* form necessarily ends up in offering only possibilities, not certainties. On the other hand, the later reworking of the original twelfth-century epistemes and imagery resulted in their not-so-subtle relocation. In other words, there emerged a rupture between the originary moment and the subsequent processes of recontextualization, when the ideas of the twelfth century were reworked for new social and political contexts in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Rebel *vacanakāras* were thereby transposed into a part of the very structure they had opposed. The religious tropes and categories that once signified uncompromising rebellion came to convey, in the wake of recontextualization, a very different set of ideals and positions. These divergent historical moments seem to merge to produce an illusion of historical continuity; the great critical moment of the origin appears like an anomaly in an otherwise smooth and unbroken tale. The present-day intellectual practices of the religious community that considers itself the heir of the *vacanakāras*, if they are to be rightly interpreted, need to be placed in the context of the same hermeneutical exercise, one that began long ago.

The twelfth-century movement and its subsequent recontextualizations indeed constitute a complex phenomenon. Scholars have generally sought to present it as the Karnataka version of a pan-Indian religioliterary movement called *bhakti* (devotion). Yet the complexity and the polyphonic character of the Kannada movement defy the simplistic nature of such readings. Certainly, it has some elements of *bhakti* in it, but the presence of positions opposed to *bhakti* makes such a familiarizing reading untenable. This fact also entails a reexamination of the intellectual use of the category of *bhakti* itself, which is employed naively as an umbrella to cover what are in fact disparate tendencies. I return to this problem later in this essay.

The *vacana* movement was an impassioned revolt against the dominant organized religious institutions and practices of the period and their excessive dependence on the charity of the state and elite. This movement occurred in the last days of the weakened Cāḷukya dynasty, which ruled from
the city of Kalyāṇa. The ruler, Taila III (1149–1162), was executed by Bijjala, an overlord of the Kālacūri lineage, who declared himself emperor in 1162. Basavaṇṇa, a senior official in charge of the treasury in the court of Bijjala, was a Śaiva Brahman by birth who revolted against Brahmanism, threw away the sacred thread, and identified himself with a newly arisen reformist cult within Shaivism whose nature remains as yet unclear to scholars. Basavaṇṇa was undoubtedly the chief organizer of the vacana movement, and because of his presence there, the city of Kalyāṇa became its center. Other key leaders besides Basavaṇṇa were Allama Prabhu, Cennabasavaṇṇa, Akka Mahādevī, and Siddharāma. More than two hundred authors from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—mostly from the lower castes, and including more than forty women—are known to have composed vacanas.

One major problem impeding efforts to provide a satisfactory historical account of the movement is its genealogy. Who were its ancestors? Where did it begin? What was its relationship to other forms of Shaivism? The answers to these questions offered by Kannada scholars are typically conditioned by their ideological orientations, which fall into two groups. One is the integrationists, who mercilessly trace each and every notion of the twelfth-century vacanakaras to some Sanskrit source. The second group, the indigenists, finds the roots of the movement in Kannada-specific contexts. Each approach is only partially useful. The integrationists, represented by one of the best modern scholars of Kannada, are right to locate the key propositions in the intellectual universe that conditioned the growth of Shaivism in general. But source criticism alone cannot explain the uniqueness of the birth of a movement. The evidence supplied by the integrationists using ancient historical texts, for instance, as also the presence of equally radical Śaiva intellectuals in the neighboring Telugu regions as senior contemporaries of Basavaṇṇa, convinces the contemporary student that there was a larger circulation of some sort of radical Śaiva energy. But the integrationists cannot answer the question why such a movement did not erupt at an earlier stage, or in the contemporaneous Telugu-speaking region.

The indigenists have yet to sufficiently theorize the uniqueness of the vacana gesture. What made the movement possible was the coherence of the existential response to the contemporary situation, such that the participants were transformed into a community. The vacanakaras were not simply a text-

44. The scholar is L. Basavaraju, who has edited a collection of vacanas and published a very important book on the question of the Sanskrit ancestry of the vacana movement (Basavaraju 1963). In the introduction he forcefully argues that all the major positions of the twelfth-century rebellion can be located in the Upaniṣads and āgamas.

45. Gādanandamūrti, M. M. Kalaburgi, and G. S. Shivarudrappa are the major thinkers of the indigenist school.
tual community; the readings of both schools of interpretation impose this construction on them. Ideas and categories alone cannot produce a radical movement of that intensity. If the same materials were available in other geocultural regions as well, how does one explain the fact that it was only in Kannada that they were appropriated and used to transform literary—and spiritual—life? The answer to this question may lie in the history of subjectivity in a language. After all, to take a Heideggerian view, human beings have their habitats in language. The history of Kannada literary culture shows that by the eleventh century the influence of the Sanskrit cosmopolitan order had reached scandalous proportions. In the realm of public poetry, the polity and temple-based religion had established a monopoly over the literary uses of Kannada. The subjective self of the poet had to negotiate with a wide range of mediating conventions and tropes to make even a simple statement. The seriousness of the crisis can be gauged by a cursory glance at the dictionary produced by Ranna, the Rannakanda, where pure Kannada words, spoken in the streets, are translated back into Sanskrit. Whatever the intellectual contexts for which it was produced, this text serves to substantiate the hypothesis that everyday speech did not enjoy wide currency among the intelligentsia for discursive or artistic purposes.

Against this background it can be argued that the vacanakaras’ choice to create the form of the vacana was primarily an aesthetic one. This position goes against the grain of most Kannada scholarship, however, which holds that for the vacanakaras literature was a mere by-product of a larger social and political project. It has been repeatedly asserted that life hurt them into poetry. But the twelfth century was a historical epoch when an exclusive concern with language and forms could act as a moment of overdetermination. The vacanakaras had no other option but to write in Kannada. The choice of Kannada had once been largely an intellectual gesture, it seems; to compose vacanas in Kannada, however, encompassed other and far more radical positions. Such moments of overdetermination are common in the history of a vernacular, when it can suddenly become a vehicle of protest and a carrier of inexplicable aesthetic and social energy. In such contexts, the bhāṣas even seem to appropriate to themselves the role of Sanskrit, in its claim to speak with ultimate authority. It is in their internal spaces, in the vernacular, that radical groups now conducted their struggles.

The real source of the radical energy of the vacana movement lay in its ability to keep other socioreligious forces in a state of flux. These forces included the guru, or teacher-priest; the jāṅgama, or wandering ascetic; and the linga itself, the aniconic form of Śiva. Only the subjective self of the devotee, called the sarana (lit. the refuge) was real, and it was interchangeable with all the other three. The major vacanakaras saw in themselves and in each other a unified state of all three. The strong nondualist current that ran
through the movement superadded a much-needed philosophical justification to treat all the other institutional components—guru and so on—as the differential manifestations of a single force.

The fundamental signification of the categories of guru, linga, and jaṅgama becomes clear only in the poetry of the vacanakāras. In other words, vacanas translate the abstract categories of the vacanakāras into radical reality. Poetry then acts as an agent for decoding the primary signification of certain religious symbols. The Śaiva categories achieve a stunning transformation because of the way they are embedded in the thick layers of poetic images. The metaphors that surround them make the apolitical categories burn like fire. Poetry makes theology radical in this context. The historicity of poetry provides the context for the conversion of neutral symbols into something more problematic and politically interesting. For instance, the difference between the vacanas of Jėdara Dāsimai (fl. 1040), who is said to have been the first vacanakāra, and those of Basavaṇṇa brings this phenomenon into sharp relief. In terms of formal features, Jėdara Dāsimai, whose values had an affinity with those of the twelfth-century poets, more or less prepared the vacana for its use by the future masters of the genre. But the making of the new subjectivity is not felt in his works with all the anxiety, tension, transparency, and self-doubt that it carries in Basavaṇṇa, for instance. One cannot escape the specific, primal thrust of the idea of the jaṅgama in the context of a poem by Basavaṇṇa that argues that whereas the rich build temples, the śaraṇa presents his own body as a temple:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{The rich} \\
\text{will make temples for Śiva.} \\
\text{What shall I,} \\
\text{a poor man,} \\
\text{do?} \\
\text{My legs are pillars,} \\
\text{the body the shrine,} \\
\text{the head a cupola} \\
\text{of gold.} \\
\text{Listen, O lord of the meeting rivers,} \\
\text{things standing shall fall,} \\
\text{but the moving ever shall stay.}\text{46}
\end{align*}
\]

For the historically minded reader these lines evoke a series of images, of the sort often recorded in inscriptions, that relate to the arrogant display of material power through the construction of temples, the sthāvara, or “immobile,” which Basavaṇṇa here juxtaposes to the jaṅgama, or the “moving”

\footnote{46. Ramanujan 1973: 88.}
spirit. Many temple inscriptions of the times tellingly record the agent’s pride in achieving worldly success through his special gifts to the god. It often seems as though the god were the beneficiary of the generosity of mortals; often the names of the god and the donor are the same, and one is left wondering who is named after whom. Temple building was no longer an act of gratitude or the signature of a humbled being, as it had been before; it had turned into an assertion of wealth and authority. Basavanṇa does not see God in temples; instead, he transforms the human body into a temple. The narrative technique of the poem uses the metaphor of the body to convey humility and then transforms this humility into power.

Such states of ideological paradise cannot last forever. Within a century or so all three crucial categories that made themselves available for the purpose of effecting profound transformation had come to reside comfortably with older conventional practices. The radical phase began to look like a deviation. When did this process of correcting the apparent aberration start? When did the first effort to recontextualize the episteme begin? If one takes the history of literature as evidence, then Harihara (thirteenth century) can be described as the first author to begin the process of revision. But other evidence, including inscriptional narratives, brings hidden actors to light, such as the spiritual master Śivadēva (fl. 1265). There are several narratives with Śivadēva as the hero, preserved in stone inscriptions, to substantiate the claim of his primacy in the history of redirecting the powerful energies of the first vacanakaras.

An inscription from Coudadānapura in Dharwar district is a case in point. Śivadēva was a major Śaiva leader not only in the geopolitical territory of Banavasi but in the neighboring areas as well. The context of this inscription—erected by King Mahādeva of the Yadava dynasty, referred to as the newly risen family—is also crucial to understanding the relationship between Viṣṇuashaivism and ascendant local ruler lineages that were to become increasingly important after the collapse of the Vijayanagara empire three centuries later. Viṣṇuashaivism helped such dynasties gain cultural legitimacy. Mahādeva was keen to woo Śivadēva, and he was treated like any other powerful guru affiliated with the Kāḷamukha Śaiva sect. Śivadēva’s confusion and embarrassment are clear in the narrative; the poet of the stone inscription unexpectedly dramatizes the encounter and presents the scene between Śivadēva and a representative of the king with admirable precision and economy:

Viceroy of the king: “The best among the caste of kings has ordered me to gift one village to you.” Śivadēva laughed and replied, “The whole of three worlds is ours, not just one village.”

In the juxtaposition of tribhuvana (the three worlds) and pālli (village) lies a harsh dismissal of royal power. But then the representative of the king is also quite clever: in the lines that follow he argues that one can reject the gifts of god, but it is certainly not in accordance with dharma to reject kingly gifts. The poet dramatizes this statement further by adding the comment: “In this one sentence the entire essence and all the meanings of the śāstras and the Vedas came and took up residence.”

Even though Śivādeva still “doubted it in himself,” he finally resolved to accept the gifts of the king.49 The doubt harbored by Śivādeva was not the first of its kind. In this great moment of ambivalence he was linked to Bāsa-vaṇṇa, Allama Prabhu, and Akka Mahādevi, none of whom had any use for royal gifts or association with the state. And it would not be the last of its kind; on the contrary, doubts about the proper relation to royal power would return intermittently to haunt the Viśāśaiva imagination.

When Śivādeva felt that all the three worlds were his, he was close to the spirit of the “originary moment.” But by refusing autonomy in the complex transaction between forms of temporal power and religiosity, Śivādeva removed himself at once from the conceptual conditions of possibility of the vacanas; the mutual reproduction of the poetics of the vacana and the politics of a new religious subjectivity ended here. He had been thrown into a moment that offered an opportunity, however anxiety-ridden, to extend a process of change, but old Shaivism’s long-familiar, historic way of being took him into its embrace. The tension between Shaivism and Viśāśaivism on the moral questions confronting him escaped Śivādeva’s understanding entirely.

The vacana should be seen not so much as an external form but rather as the convergence of a style of language and an attitude toward authority both religious and secular. It is reasonably clear that the vacanakāraṇas did have a different conception of literature from, and rejected many of the practices of, the dominant literary culture. But any adequate analysis of the vacanas requires understanding the kinds of connection literature has with other forms of symbolic production. The self-understanding of the vacanakāraṇas was predicated upon the radical difference between their own discourses and practices in the social, religious, and indeed literary spheres, and the discourses and practices of their contemporary adversaries.

The Śaiva socioreligious structures in pre-twelfth-century India acted as the ideological support system for the royal courts, and these were strict followers of the model of society based on varnāśramadharma (the rules of castes and life stages). The emergence of the Viśāśaiva movement accordingly has to be analyzed in terms of a combination of class and caste forces. To be precise, the service castes of the temples, as well as certain urban groups, acted

as the vanguard of the movement. If one goes by the inscriptions that were erected in the name of the *vacanakāras* and the Vīraśaiva saints, a definite difference from established Śaiva structures is evident, especially in the absence of the language of the polity, at least court-related polity. This should not lead us to believe that the Vīraśaiva movement and its later recontextualization were in a state of constant antagonism with the dominant forces and centers of cultural production. Later efforts to reintegrate the Vīraśaiva discourse into the dominant structures of the times were probably undertaken in awareness of the anomaly between the ideals of the *vacanakāra* rebellion and hegemonic forces. My argument here, in essence, is that the later efforts at recontextualization sought to sanitize the twelfth-century movement and present it as yet another, if more authentic, version of the macro-Śaiva discourse. Whenever any large-scale unity of Shaivism is invoked, it certainly works against the specific visions and positions of the twelfth century.

It is in examining the movement’s revolt against secular poetics that we capture something of the specificity of its moral vision and political position. Scholarly discussion of the definition of poetry or its ideals as enunciated in premodern Kannada texts has not made the conditions of literary production an important problematic. Instead, it has provided mostly descriptions, which are quite good on their own, and treatment of the states of mind of the poet. No organic relation between the inner life of a literary work and its conditions of production is ever posited, or at least ever theorized. To ask such questions of the *vacana* genre is essentially to start from scratch.

The *vacana* movement defined literary activity in the context of service to the god; at the same time, it eliminated the hegemonic presence of the king from the domain of literature. Basavaṇṇa offers the definition of an ideal poem and its function; he uses the word *nudi*, or “speech,” to talk about poetry.

If one speaks, it should be like a necklace of pearls,
If one speaks, it should be like a dagger of “crystal.”

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

If one speaks, the *tiniga* should nod its head in appreciation, yes, yes,
Lord of the Meeting Rivers.\(^50\)

It is obvious that this statement specifically addresses contemporaneous literary practices, which centered on the king and the court. Basavaṇṇa defines the central feature of the new subjective lyric that he and his colleagues were producing. His definition contains a veiled reference to the royal form of *campū*, which can never be direct and simple. The fact that the *vacanakāras* did not touch the genre at all speaks volumes about their liter-

---

ary politics, for the campā derived its authority not only from its imperial use of the native forms but also from its position in the court. Nor can the vacana be derived from any familiar genre of the literary culture of the times, though one can describe it roughly as belonging to the indigenous group. It is a kind of animated prose with regular but very subtle rhythms; it comes quite close to tripadi (a three-line verse form comprised of eleven genas, or prosodic units). It has many resonances with the twentieth-century practice of poetry, particularly in its commitment to the use of prose rhythms.

In ideological terms, the revolt embodied in the vacana can basically be conceived in terms of its opposition to the nexus of the court, temple, monasteries, and to the elite that formed the basis of this imposing combination. Basavaṇṇa was himself a minister in the court of the Kālacūri king, Bijjala, but some of his vacanas refer to the very institution of kingship in a cynical, at times disparaging, tone. The only way to explain this tone is to say that he invokes a higher authority, the god himself, to ridicule kingship; but no amount of spiritual language can erase the definite thrust of the antiroyal images. The tone and the tenor of these vacanas are directed against the eulogies perfected by the inscriptions of the courts. Aside from Basavaṇṇa, no other vacanakāra was connected with the court; and it was Basavaṇṇa, in fact, who emerged as a parallel center of power.

The conception of the literary evident in the creations of the vacanakāras comprises above all an unrestrained subjective expression of the self. They wanted to sing as they pleased. They foregrounded their subjective self before everything else in literary practice, which signifies a firm resolve to stay outside the perimeters of institutionalized poetry and any other form of court-related intellectual activity.

The Image of the Corpse of the King and Its Spin-Offs

One important achievement of the vacanakāras was to expunge the king from the discourse of literature—to slay the king in poetry (as Basavaṇṇa did in fact), and so to bring the image of the king’s corpse to the center of the Kannada literary imagination. It had far deeper implications than contemporary scholarship has yet been able to perceive. The corpse of the king signified the utter barrenness of the institutions of kingly authority, but it also gestured toward the soullessness of the religious structures that support such institutions. The temple, the king, and the rajaguru (the king’s priest-teacher) formed an evil triumvirate, according to the vacanakāras, and any literary culture that needed them was equally evil and degenerate.

We have no contemporary records of the responses of other religions or any other secular agencies to the vacana movement. We encounter an eerie yet perhaps understandable silence about it in the inscriptions of the twelfth century. By the time the vacanakāras became the subjects of inscriptional
narratives, a century later, the process of recasting their image had already started.\textsuperscript{51} We cannot conclude that the rebellion that had brought about new forms of reasoning and metaphor-making went unnoticed. Notwithstanding the layers of insulation that envelop the literary cultures of the court, this new challenge had some impact on the writing of other authors; even the Jains had to respond to the unprecedented challenge.

This response is suddenly apparent in the works of late-thirteenth-century Jain poets. One can perceive in their \textit{laukika k\=avya} a new wariness about the old aesthetic mode of approximation, which had equated the hero of the epic with the patron king.\textsuperscript{52} With N\=emicandra in the thirteenth century this kind of political allegory would cease to be produced, in favor of new explorations of the human psyche. What made this Jain poet, who was also an important figure at the Hoysala court, transform the nature of courtly writing? Certainly there were no protests inside Jain discourse against such literary practice on the grounds of either literary theory or spirituality. At that time in Karnataka, Jainism had no internal intellectual resources with which to criticize the nexus between the court, organized religions, and the production of cultural texts. Obviously, N\=emicandra’s innovation cannot be explained in terms of achieving originality, since such ideals were quite alien then. Yet the poet chose to write on the theme of love, and he extolled the virtues of imagination. He sought to celebrate the working of the poetic imagination: the \textit{vacanak\=aras} had glorified religious subjectivity, and N\=emicandra substituted for it a subjectivity of the literary kind.

The monkeys might or might not have built the bridge to the sea,
the feet of V\=amana, the Cosmic Dwarf, might or might not have touched the sky,
a mortal might or might not have put his feet on \textit{\=iva}’s neck—
poets created all these in their works.
What glory then for poets!\textsuperscript{53}

The \textit{vacanak\=aras} had forced the question of the relationship of imagination to the structures of power. The issue of the fashioning of subjectivity was made central to the function of literary creativity, and coupled with this was the problem of the ethics of imagination. The \textit{vacanak\=aras} had trans-

\textsuperscript{51} Kalaburgi has published an important study on references to \textit{\=asa\=nas} in inscriptions (1970) that, however, suffers from perceiving the \textit{\=asa\=na} movement as a single, unified narrative. The reworking of Vira\=saiva history in the Vijayanagara period forms the subject of a University of Chicago dissertation in progress by Prithvidatta Chandrashobhi.

\textsuperscript{52} For the Jain poet, the king was the very personification of history; the poet’s literary creativity was inconceivable without such history. He could always seek to subvert history from within by introducing inexplicable knots into either the plot or the imagery, but history nevertheless remained at the center of his writing project.

\textsuperscript{53} Quoted in \textit{\=ivarudrappa et al. 1974–}, 3: 431.
lated the ideal of the moral economy of literature into reality by taking the very act of poetry away from the court and relocating it among religious intellectuals who were not absorbed into established institutions.

Quite often in south Indian history the Jains and the Śaivas have shed blood in the name of their faiths, but this time it was through a battle of images that they tried to settle scores. Nēmicandra is important in the history of Kannada literature because he was the first poet to negotiate with the problems created by the vacanakāras. He rose to the vacanakāras’ challenge, but he had to do so within the traditions that court culture would allow. He chose to write on the enemy of Śiva, Manmatha, the god of love, who had turned Śiva into a half-woman. Nēmicandra could not have hoped for a better story to take revenge against the Śaivas. His creativity bears all the marks of an invisible battle; he could not make vīra (the heroic) the basic rasa of his epic. Śṛṅgāra (the erotic) became the central emotion; sānta (the quiescent) is also addressed, though more as an ideological requirement than as a deeply felt artistic necessity. Nēmicandra’s work exhibits numerous paradoxes, which emerged in response to the ideological sorcery practiced by the vacanakāras.

The Jain mode of creativity had to give up its renunciatory origins and resort to a theme of love and sex; from the theme of war it swung as on a pendulum to the theme of love. For after the vacanakāras, the celebration of kingship had lost its ethical moorings as an activity of the imagination. It is hardly coincidental that after about the twelfth century no great campūs that couple the patron-king and the hero ever appeared again in Kannada literature. An entire genre and all its connotations were eliminated.

The impact of this image of the king’s corpse, metaphorically speaking, changed the landscape of Kannada literature completely. The tone and tenor of this image, which expressed contempt of kingship, posed a deep challenge to courtly literary practices, and an alternative space was made available. The reign of the campū had been unsettled by the challenge of a new form, the vacana, a form without any credentials in terms of the history of prosody. As noted earlier, vacana is a stylized version of the ordinary spoken language form, a style that is still alive today in folk epics. The vacanakāras had raised their revolt at the level of literary theory through the practice of a holistic literary imagination that did not accept fragmentation. The word had to be in the service of the god, who has no history or death. History as a theme was rejected, and all the heavy royal forms that went with history were rejected along with it.

At this juncture, it is useful to try to discriminate among the literary forms discussed under the umbrella category of bhakti, a term often used in scholarly discourse in a quite unhistorical and undifferentiated way to refer to a wide range of expressions of protest against orthodoxy that found literary embodiment. Sometimes included in the category of bhakti is the yogamārga
(path of bodily discipline), which was followed by the nāṭhas, siddhas, and many esoteric sects. This tradition produced rich and profound poetry, but with characteristics differing strikingly from most bhakti literature. Saraha and Allama Prabhu are not bhakti poets; their insistence on opaque and mysterious modes of metaphor is in stark contrast with the emotionally transparent model of bhakti. The aesthetic of bhakti poetry is close to the Western romantic poem; the emotional states of either śringāra or vātsalya (maternal love) find lyric expression. Yoga poetry, by contrast, rests on the principles of paradox and irony. Its imagery can swing from the abstract to the concrete and back. Many a time it is a combination of bhakti and the esoteric yogic streams that produces mystic poetry.

*Bhakti* was neither a homogeneous nor a unified movement; not all who are typically described as *bhakti* poets shared radical positions on questions of equality or adopted the same kind of *rasa*-centered aesthetics. For instance, many Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* Kannada poets, particularly of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, cannot be considered radicals; they betray a conservative indifference toward questions of equality. The point to be noted is that in the context of the twelfth-century Viraśaiva movement, two tendencies contest each other in many ways. The first, represented by Basavaṇa and Akka Mahādevi, is traditional *bhakti*; the second, represented by Allama Prabhu, differs fundamentally from the first. Allama wrote in a highly esoteric and individualized mode that was a product of his multiple interactions with other traditions of mystical experience. The unity of the two tendencies rests at one level on a common perception of social issues, and at another, on common forms of worship and religious symbolism.

Allama Prabhu is unique in the history of Indian literature because of his mode of conceptualization, which interrogates the *rasa* theory. To understand the importance of his contribution, we have to place him in the context of the evolution of *rasa* theory. At one stage, most powerfully expressed by Bhoja in the eleventh century, it was argued that the primal, indeed the only, *rasa* was śringāra. Later in the history of Sanskrit poetry, after the composition of the Sanskrit *Bhāgavata purāṇa* (tenth century) and the rise of the various *bhakti* movements, śringāra was considered a suitable medium to explore the nature of divine experience. Allama’s dissent is specifically directed against the use of the mode of śringāra to capture and explore experiences

---

54. Among Indian theorists of literature I have found only two Hindi writers, Hazārī Prasād Dwivedi and Gopināth Kavirāj, who have been aware of the crucial differences that separate the bhakti and yoga mārgas. See Dwivedi 1970 and Kavirāj 1964.

55. For a discussion of Saraha, see Sāṅkṛtyāyana 1957.

56. Allama Prabhu’s theories of poetry and religious experience are discussed in Nagaraj 1999, where it is argued that they were a product of an intense debate he conducted with Abhinava-gupta, Gorakhanāth, and other Śaiva mystics.
of the divine. Like the yōgamārgī theorists, he converted philosophical categories and positions into symbols.\footnote{Allama Prabhu would have wholeheartedly agreed with Terry Eagleton’s formulation that “aesthetics is born as a discourse on the body” (see Eagleton 1990: 13). My concern here, however, is to study the ideological undercurrents that have shaped aesthetics in the context of ancient Kannada poetry.} Consider these lines:

The elders went to the pond on the Hill,
with the onion of the Absolute.
They are trying to make a curry.
The Hill cannot boil,
the curry cannot be cooked,
and hence there can be no offering.\footnote{Basavaraju 1960: 38 (v. 251). “Onion,” or corn; “the Absolute,” svara, or more specifically, the Primal Sound; “offering,” prasāda, with a play on the Sanskrit literary category “clarity.”}

This poem cannot be understood in isolation; it is a part of the vast philosophical arguments that Allama had with the other Śaiva modes developed, above all, by Abhinavagupta, the great Kashmiri philosopher (fl. 1000). It is built on a series of allusive intellectual propositions, a method rarely used by the followers of the bhakti path. The poem is evidently alluding to the rasa theory, since Bharata, the acknowledged originator of that theory, uses a culinary metaphor to expound his doctrine. Also, in Bharata’s theory prasāda (translated here as “offering”) is one of the categories of style. In the Śaiva mystical-tantric tradition, the hill is a metaphor for the god, and the pond is a technical metaphor. In his convoluted way, Allama is essentially attacking the notion that śṛṅgāra can be the modality of experiencing the divine. Unlike Bhoja, he cannot accept that śṛṅgāra can become a vehicle of prakāśa, a Śaiva technical category for the Absolute. Allama is not only quarreling with Abhinavagupta and other champions of rasa theory, he is also objecting to the poetic practices of his own contemporary, Akka Mahādēvi. She was the first poet to perfect the model of śṛṅgāra bhakti, and later even male poets used this image, imagining themselves to be female. But Allama refutes such feminization of the self as the mode of memory and desire.

The Kashmiri Śaiva school, as interpreted by Abhinavagupta, offers a critique of the metaphysics of memory and “recognition,” the theory of praty-abhijñāna, and Allama refutes it by scrutinizing its implications on two levels, spiritual and aesthetic. At the same time, the political implications of Allama’s critique of śṛṅgāra bhakti and its basis in the rasa theory are far-reaching; they add a new dimension to the radical energies of the Vīraśaiva movement.

Perhaps there was in fact a widely shared disquiet and self-doubt in the traditional and conservative practices of the courtly literary culture of the twelfth century. Even without the active intervention of the vacanākāras, the self-
negation of courtly culture had already begun. The important question from the viewpoint of the positivist-historicist method is the verifiability of the vacanakāras’ impact on their contemporaries. For instance, Nēmicandra, who in my view provides important evidence of this influence, lived between 1170 and 1190, and the extent to which his new moves can be traced to his responses to the rebels remains problematic. In one of his verses, defining the traits of the Jain anuvratas, Nēmicandra writes kolalāgadu kalalāgadu . . . pusiyalagadu—“you cannot kill, cannot steal, cannot lie,” making inevitable the comparison with Basavaṇṇa, who uses the same words in an identical context. Not just the ideas, but the words themselves demand our attention.

After the vacanakāras negated the centrality of kingship and history, it was difficult for even the Jains to cleave to the mode of symbolic fragmentation. The vacanakāras forced a theory of holistic creativity on Kannada literary culture. Jainism in Karnataka around the tenth century had seen a radical resurgence internally in the form of a reformist movement on the part of a group called the yāpaniyas. The defining features of this movement were fear of infiltration by Brahman values and intense self-interrogation. Nayasēna (tenth century) in his Dharmāmya explored the nature of such contamination; he ridiculed, almost in a fundamentalist vein, each and every religion of his times.59 He saw the state of degradation into which his own religion had sunk, and he raised the question of the ethics of representing violence in religious practices. Jainism had internalized many values, especially from the Mimāṃsakas (scholars of the Vedas), in terms of violent rituals and the appeasing of lower gods with bloody sacrifices, and this horrified Nayasēna.60 He once again made the question of violence central to the Jain philosophical and literary imagination, and took upon himself the task of redefining the central features of the śramaṇa sensibility. He was distressed that Jainism had accepted the caste ideology and endorsed untouchability, since this signified a state of utter degeneration of the original ideals of Jainism. The mentality of Pampa himself, which had internalized the Brahmanical forms, had become deeply resented.

Multiple Dēsis: Pampa, Basavaṇṇa, and Harihara

The literary-cultural significance of the vacanakāras can emerge only if we analyze their activity in the larger historical context of Kannada literature. Their conflictual relationship with their immediate predecessors was in fact one of the central tensions that formed Kannada literary culture in premodern


60. The Jain attempt to internalize vaidika motifs and metaphors sometimes assumed curious forms. One Jain philosopher even tried to give a Jain slant to the Gāyatri mantra of the Vedas.
times. We have already noticed that in terms of genre, the *vacanakāras* produced something entirely new and caused certain major forms such as the *campū* to fall into disuse. Not all previous forms and genres disappeared, of course. Here, as in many epochs of literary history—which can be described as moments of differential simultaneity—a plurality of literary practices continued to exist. But a question larger than genre needs to be asked: In what sense can Pampa and Basavaṇṇa both be said to have participated in one Kannada literary culture?

Pampa and Basavaṇṇa were both dēsi writers, to be sure, but only in comparison with Sanskrit. Otherwise, the two seem to have shared little beyond the kernel of Puligere speech—the “essence of Kannada,” according to the *Kavirājāmārga*—that is common to both. The mode of Pampa’s writing may be called universal dēsi, whereas Basavaṇṇa and his school represent a regional dēsi mode. The universal dēsi has deep correspondences with the Sanskrit cosmopolitan style; it is, as we have seen, on entirely intimate terms with Sanskrit models. The grammatical category of *samāṣamskṛta* (that which is equal to *samaskṛta*), used by premodern theorists of grammar, can to a great extent accommodate its achievements. At the level of nonliterary ideological models, the universal dēsi has sufficient variety to emulate and imitate.

The regional dēsi, by contrast, registered its beginnings through the *vacanakāras*, and it shared very little with the universal dēsi. Even if it did not make any oppositional statements directly, the regional dēsi as such was radically oppositional. The two kinds of texts were produced and circulated in different social sites altogether. Further, at the moment of its origin the regional dēsi—as I have noted—held radical positions on caste, state, and organized religion, though these were moderated after their initial, dynamic appearance. The universal dēsi managed to keep deeper ideological or religious dissidence under tight control by the mechanism of consensus on the question of what constitutes the literary; that was how Brahman and śramaṇa practices achieved a peaceful coexistence, whenever it was possible.

The idea of “regional dēsi” should not be taken to imply that this form of literary culture had no larger networks of meanings and images. It, too, invoked for its legitimation other supra-authorities, though these rarely found institutional embodiment. Certain Sanskrit idioms are undeniably present, but these need to be understood more as signaling ethical values as such than as appealing to their Vedic authority. If statements from the Upaniṣads appear in the work of the *vacanakāras* of the twelfth century, it is on the basis of their moral imagination and not because of their textual status. The regional dēsi considered no text sacred; the living word of the śaraṇa was given paramount importance. The universal dēsi was subjected to ridicule by the *vacanakāras* because of its slavish obedience to tradition. The *vacanakāras* tried to build a tradition by opposing the very idea of tradition.

Allama Prabhu provides an interesting insight into the relationship be-
tween poets and the literary tradition when he dismisses the poets as a “bunch of parrots” perched on the top of a tree called tradition. The metaphor of parrots is important because it points toward the central dynamic in the survival of any tradition: reproduction or repetition, creative or otherwise. Tradition requires a strenuous and rigorous observance of rules and procedures; Sanskrit literary culture in particular cannot be imagined without rule-bound practices. For Allama this vital activity of reproducing culture appears like parroting. An act of critical interpretation, like Allama’s perspective on tradition, has the potential to release a new kind of aesthetic energy, which, according to Allama, is also spiritual.

One crucial element of their transformation of Kannada literary culture that helped the twelfth-century vacanakāras maintain their autonomy vis-à-vis structures of power and dominance was their reliance on near-folk practices. The word vacana could also signify “prose” in earlier Kannada; the prose that appears in folk campūs is in fact referred to as vacana. At the level of cultural politics, the very use of such prose represented the poet’s liberation from a humiliating dependence on the state with its courtly pomp. The prose form may be said, without too much exaggeration, to have given them the freedom to imagine what was unimaginable in the context of royal power. Even at a later epoch, when Virashaivism became a major force in the production of cultural texts at court or in powerful monasteries, the vacana’s approximation to the simple song-form never disappeared. This, the most popular form associated with Virashaivism, could achieve its liberation from the literary practices of any establishment instantly; it did not need to be embedded in a scholarly sphere, as was the case with majestic forms like the campū.

The shift from the writerly practices of a secular literary culture to a holistic conception of literary creativity could occur most easily at the noninstitutional site of religion. It has often been noted how long this conception of literary creativity lasted; it is alive even today in Viraśaiva memory as an ideal. But it eventually lost its oppositional stance and tried to insinuate itself into the regular structures of the court. And so the succeeding history of Kannada literary culture finds the Viraśaiva literary imagination caught between two competing centers of power: the palace and the monastery. The significance of the vacanakāras lies in their stubborn insistence on bringing the forms of the common folk into literary culture and using them for sophisticated intellectual purposes—sophisticated enough, that even the courtly culture slowly entered into a process of exchange with such practices. It is difficult to say whether this exchange meant the vacanakāras’ defeat or—in the long run—their victory.

The *vacanakāras* had a highly sophisticated yet enigmatic and metaphorical theory of language: a metaphysics of doubt based on the abilities of language to mask and camouflage. They are, generally, wary of the deceitful quality of linguistic practices that claim to capture the truth. When Siddharāma (twelfth century) describes language as impotent, he is really speaking for the majority of the *vacanakāras* of his time. But his profound doubt does not discourage them from exploring the resources that language has at its command. Allama ascribes to human language a basic quality: its ability to narrate. If contemporary Western language theory reflects on language’s fundamental metaphoricity, Allama focuses on another equally important trait: the narrative instinct. The *vacanakāras*’ distrust of formal rhetoric was also quite deep-seated. It was a rejection of both the context and the texts that the previous, or dominant, literary culture had produced. This only shows that the major poets of the movement were aware of the pedagogical training that goes into the making of poetry; they simply chose not to write in those modes.

The major problem confronted by the *vacanakāras* was the need to unlearn, and they could unlearn only by following one of two strategies. The first was by taking a clear stand on the nature of learning and pedantry. Their contemptuous reading of traditional knowledge reinforced their conviction that there was a need to build a religious kind of subjectivity in the *śaraṇa*. The second was the choice of *vacana* as a form that gave them freedom to display traditional learning on their own terms. Tradition could be beckoned at will, but only in the form of cynical propositions and most often only to be repudiated. The *vacanakāras* considered neither the Vedas nor their ancillary texts (grammar and the rest of the “six limbs of the Veda”) central to their spiritual search; on the contrary, many a time they considered them a hindrance. “The Vedas are a matter of recitation, *śāstras* are the chatter of the marketplace, *purāṇas* are only a meeting of goons”\(^\text{62}\) —such remarks provided the movement with moments of excess, but they were also its moments of truth.

In terms of the history of literary culture, the process of recontextualizing the epistemes of the originary moment reached its first major stage in the works of Harihara (1180–1250). At the level of technical competence, he was capable of handling the campū with considerable sophistication; he even wrote a *Girijākalyāṇa* (Marriage of the mountain-born goddess), which has a special narrative affinity with Kālidāsa’s great *Kumārasambhava* (Birth of the divine prince Kumāra), though the motif of *bhakti* is more densely interwoven into the Kannada text. Harihara came into his own by making new literature from the older “folk” verse-form called the *ragale*, in which he com-

posed poetry of great lyrical force and beauty, though it cannot be called kāvya in the traditional sense of the category. He did not write poetry of the courtly sort; instead, he elevated the vraga to narrate the tales of the Vīraśaiva sarvanās.

More than a formal innovation, Harihara’s Sarvanakāraṇacaritamānasā (The holy lake of the lives of the sarvanās) marks the first phase of the recontextualization of the Vīraśaiva movement, or rather, it is one component of a larger reintegration of their revolt against the grand narrative of Shaivism. Inscriptions of the period create a genealogy of the vacanakāras by placing them alongside the great Sanskrit writers of the past, Bāṇa, for example, or Kālidāsa. Harihara’s narrative smuggled in something else again, legitimating the Vīraśaiva bhaktas by merging the stories of their deeds with those of the sixty-three ancients of the Tamil Śaiva tradition as found most powerfully in the Periyapurāṇa (they would later transit once more into Telugu to create a new narrative of southern Shaivism). In his style and substance, Harihara came to represent a third stream of creativity in Kannada, which might be described as religious dēśi. Writers of diverse faiths, like Cāmarasa, Śaḍaksāri, Ratnākaravarṇi, and Kanaka Dāsa, can be included in this category. They have certain characteristics in common: They excelled in their use of classical forms like the campu and sataka (linked sequence of a hundred or so poems), for example, but their command over the metrical intricacies of traditional forms was the very burden they want to shake off. They were deeply inspired by the ascetic ideals of their religious traditions, and they wanted to use their poetic talent to celebrate the god precisely by sacrificing their literary training.

THE LITERARY INTELLIGENTSIA AND THEIR TRAJECTORIES

Strategies of Liberal Theorists

An anthology of poetry, the Sūktisudhārnava, was compiled by Mallikārjuna in the thirteenth century at the court of the Hoysalas. The text was put together for the “pleasure and curiosity” of the king, Sōvidēvarāya. This was an important event in the history of Kannada literature. Anthologies in premodern contexts are not only records of the literary tastes of the period but also have prescriptive functions. Moreover, they constitute a significant stage in the growth of the reflexivity of a literary tradition. The Sūktisudhārnava represents an assertive gesture on the part of the courtly literary culture, acting as a model text for the exchange of modes of description between literary narratives and public poetry. Not all that surprisingly, poems de-

65. Śivarudrappa et al. 1974–, 3: 582.
picting various kings are included in it wherever possible. The work acts like a textbook for poets; but, equally unsurprisingly, there are no selections whatever from the works of the twelfth-century *vacanakaras*, an omission confirming what is elsewhere suggested: that professional intellectuals did not consider the *vacanas* literature. The majority of the selections betray a bias toward the practice of literature as a matter of technical perfection in the handling of conventions and tropes. For Mallikārjuna, poetic excellence meant skill in transforming *vyutpatti*, or scholarship, into striking images, similes, and metaphors.

The real surprise in the work, however, and what makes Mallikārjuna’s project more complex and interesting than it might otherwise be, is the presence of Harihara’s work among the selections. Seen in this light, the *Sūktisudhārṇava* appears to be an effort to rebuild the critical consensus that was shattered during the twelfth century. Although the texts of the *vacanakaras* themselves were beyond compromise, the partial accommodation of Harihara was an effort to negotiate with the rebels. Mallikārjuna was a liberal who tried to accommodate the *vacanakaras* by creating a certain representative model for them. One’s heart goes out to the theorist—whose self-description was *sarasakaviśvara* (lord of sensitive poets)—for his ambitious efforts. For the secular literary sensibility, poetry was a gesture of friendship with the world; even pain and suffering were to culminate in the pleasures of reading. The *Sūktisudhārṇava* saw itself as a handbook for the sentimentalist; the goddess of poetry cannot be touched by the evil of change or the madness of the real world—though the anthologist was no doubt also aware of the storms of change that had enveloped his literary world.

Mallikārjuna is important for yet another reason. He came from a typical family of the professional literary intelligentsia, whose ideological unity had come under serious threat because of the challenge of the *vacanakaras*. Mallikārjuna’s family boasted some of the major literary intellectuals of his times: Kesiraja, the greatest theorist of Kannada grammar, was his son; Janna, the prominent Jain poet, his brother-in-law. The family had both Jain and *vaidika* vocations, without any conflict between them. This kind of literary ecumenism, practiced by the professional literary intelligentsia, could not be repeated in the context of another equally important family of writers—the Śaiva family of Harihara and Raghavānka. Harihara, the celebrated poet of the Saivas, physically abused his cousin Raghavānka (fl. 1225) for having written an epic on the legendary king Hariścandra; one ought not waste one’s poetic talent on mortals, he argued, even if they are kings. For Harihara it was not a question of the technical excellence that his ward had attained.

64. *Sūktisudhārṇava* 1.25 (Anantarāṅgacār 1972: 5).
Mallikārjuna, on the other hand, would no doubt have seen Rāghavānka’s work from the viewpoint of an aesthete.

A definite sense of poetry and notions of excellence were formed through a learned and sophisticated understanding of literature. What mattered to Mallikārjuna was the beauty that is produced by intricate works of style and elaborate aesthetic strategies to portray emotions. The ultimate achievement of ecumenical poetics may lie in its removal of an ethical core from sites of beauty; it even strives to eliminate larger narratives, which invariably requires some kind of conceptual unity. Mallikārjuna had organized his anthology as though it were an independent epic, or mahākāvya, with the standard eighteen topics of description. He was writing an imaginary epic, the magnum opus of the Kannada language, to which poets of all periods, faiths, and ideologies would contribute from their works. The implicit whole was imaginary, true, but the parts that were physically present in the text were real.

Mallikārjuna’s work can also help us understand the notion of the history of literature as practiced in premodern contexts. Anthologies like the Sūktisudhārvana are in a way histories of literatures, written from a different perspective of history. They are constructed according to specific criteria concerning the constituents of the literary, the function and status of a work in the site of cultural production, and the norms of critical evaluation. In his introductory verses Mallikārjuna explains his theoretical premises: only the reinscription of the literary tradition in a work qualifies it for the status of the literary. The history of literature conceived of in the usual Western sense posits a causal relationship between the literature and history of a given society. Such an organizing principle for his text is inconceivable to Mallikārjuna; for him, literary history is the spatial arrangement of formal achievements. Literature is one long unbroken narrative. The Vīraśaiva editors and compilers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, however, produced radically different anthologies of vacanas, doing away with the ecumenical conception of literary history practiced by Mallikārjuna.

Let me delineate more precisely the contours of the crisis that the literary intelligentsia experienced during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The authors who carried the symptoms of the crisis include Harihara and Rāghavānka among the Vīraśaivas, and Andāiah (fl. 1217) and Janna (fl. 1225) among the Jains. The crisis was felt in terms of defining the nature of both literary language and literature itself and was expressed in certain excessive practices that marked the literary transaction over these two centuries. The two problems were linked in determining the major theme of a literary work.

Up to the twelfth century, the ideal of samasamaskṛta (equal with Sanskrit) was accepted as mandatory; that was renounced in the twelfth century. On
the issue of literary language, Āṇḍaih took a militant—if somewhat absurd—vow to write only in “pure Kannada,” without using any Sanskrit at all. He declares that his intention to write in Kannada “without flashy Sanskrit” is to help realize a long-felt desire of poets. He even uses the word sakkada, a Prakrit-derived rather than Sanskrit-derived word, for Sanskrit. Āṇḍaih does not appear to have a fundamental difficulty with the literary practices of Pampa and his tradition, but he wants to reach the same goal by taking a completely different route.

Āṇḍaih shows that he was fully aware of the crisis I am characterizing. He could no longer write with confidence in the old mode of public poetry and had to resort instead to the allegorical mode to show his affiliation with that poetry. The story of Kāma that he tells has a longer history, for Jains before him had written of the god of sex and had composed mythological tales in which he defeats the great god Śiva. Now, once again, mythological tales were made to convey the recently intensified conflict between Vīraśāivas and Jains. Āṇḍaih was certainly self-conscious in the deployment of his strategy of narrative concealment; at the very outset of his work he prays for the enrichment of his “witty style” (jannudi). The witty style comprises traits of a complex strategy, not just a clever use of words; it is not punning or the suggestion of a double meaning. Precisely for this reason, Āṇḍaih’s Kabbigarakāva (The love-god, protector of poets) does not belong to the category of slesa epics (those constructed on the principle of thorough-going double entendre), though he achieves the same effect through more subtle ways of handling the suggestive quality of the words. The witty strategy comprises the creation of tropes based on the details of the author’s own historical context; wit sparkles through the construction of unusual connections. With the disappearance of the knowledge of the historical worlds to which he refers, the narrative has become more opaque. Not all traditional theorists criticized opacity, of course; it only meant restricted access to the inner core of the text. The literary intelligentsia took great pride in their ability to decode the meanings of an opaque text. But it requires exceptional abilities to decipher that Kāva, or the god of sex, is actually supposed to signify Arhanta, the Jain god!

One feels some sympathy with Āṇḍaih. He was caught between the new modes of celebrating religiosity developed by Harihara, on the one side, and on the other, the majestic achievements of the campū at the hands of Pampa and his contemporaries. He could not sing or write like Harihara, let alone like the vacanakāras. Harihara had a new constituency of committed readers who did not really concern themselves with technical skill. With Hari-

---

66. _Kabbigarakāva_ (Jawaregauḍa 1964) 1.1.
67. Kāva (Kāmadeva) almost certainly also refers to the Kadamba king of that name who was the poet’s patron.
hara and Rāghavānka there was no tension between form and content; Harihara’s works in particular may be read as passionate prayers.

Andaiah, too, wanted to pray. Bendre, the modern Kannada poet, argues that the Kabbigarakāvya has a deep religious content but the writer’s commitment to the campū did not allow him the necessary simplicity for prayer. Andaiah was clearly influenced by Harihara, which becomes evident from his large-scale borrowings of the latter’s style. The literary intelligentsia of the times had tried to connect their religiosity and the professional lives. The modes of the consensual anthology and the witty style carry all the tensions of this effort to connect and become authentic. Mallikārjuna, too, had sought to enhance the horizons of literary culture; he even accommodated Harihara. His son, the grammarian Kēśirāja, admired the efforts of Andaiah, whom he cites in his grammar. The lives of the professional intelligentsia were haunted by the vagaries of history. If differences at the level of religious ideology had separated writers from each other, liberals like Mallikārjuna offered to mediate. His efforts did not succeed, for no anthology with so wide a vision and range ever appeared again in the history of Kannada literature. The birth of Mallikārjuna’s anthology shows that the old world was dead. Mallikārjuna thought he could arrange some kind of compromise between the writers of public poetry, the poets of stone, and the ascetic imagination. Harihara and Rāghavānka had satirized the very dichotomy: “Ours is the moving inscription, not the stationary inscription on stone.”

The experiences of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries invite us to explore the nature of the choices that the intelligentsia was forced to make. Under the moss of cultural exuberance that we see in the inscriptions of this epoch was buried an intense crisis of identity faced by writers in literary and other disciplines. The Vīraśaiva intelligentsia was decidedly both religious and literary; they had a great stake in producing texts that could challenge the intellectual discourses of the times. Everyday life and the useful sciences hardly mattered to them. Although their social base mainly consisted of artisan and other service castes, they never tried to produce any texts of the “useful arts.” On the other hand, the Jain intelligentsia turned to everyday life and compiled works of practical knowledge, like Arhaddāsa’s Raṭṭa-mathaśāstra (On the science of the rains or clouds; c. 1300). Another text on the science of poisons offers a fascinating taxonomy of eighteen kinds of rats and poisons appropriate to them.

In contrast to other intellectual groups, the Vīraśaiva theorists were exclusively concerned with their relationship to the polity and the politics of knowledge, and in their theories we witness the fascinating process of the

making of a new politicocultural community. The medium that made this process possible was language, and the procedure was their intense critical engagement with the dominant practices in the domain of literature and religious discourses. By the end of the fifteenth century they had firmly established a new kind of literary intelligentsia, one that owed its allegiance more to centers of religious power than to secular authorities (a model that gradually influenced other groups of the religious intelligentsia). Nor did they have an alternative, for the two newly established states and courts, Vijayanagara and the Bahmanis, had no special use for them. Many authors were associated with Vijayanagara throughout its history, but that court did not produce even a single important Kannada poet of any persuasion. For quite inexplicable reasons, the Kannada authorial imagination at work in Vijayanagara was then at its weakest. It looks as though the maximum cultural energy was spent in producing exegetical literature on shastric texts, thereby serving the ideological consolidation of conservative Hinduism.

The Split in the Literary Intelligentsia

The most important development of the Vijayanagara period (c. 1340–1565) was the amorphous but decisive split in the intelligentsia as a whole, cutting across religious identities. As a rule, one group identified itself with Vijayanagara and actively worked with the state’s projects of legitimation, whereas the other tried to attach its sectarian projects to the state and the court. The Brahman commentators, on the one hand, and the bhakti poets of the Vaiśṇava Mādhva sect, on the other, are a classical example of this division. Between the two groups there was hardly any creative exchange. Bhakti poets like Purandara Dāsa and Kanaka Dāsa did not share the Brahman intelligentsia’s enthusiastic endorsement of the state or king. Moreover, these and other Vaiśṇava poets avoided the imperial literary forms like the campū, and instead made use of the dēsi forms, as had the vacanākārās before them.

The split suffered after the twelfth century by the Viraśaiva intelligentsia, for its part, was subtle and is more difficult to theorize. One group, of which Kallumāṭhada Prabhudēva and Māyidēva (fifteenth to sixteenth centuries) are important figures, realized that coming to terms with the Sanskrit cultural order was crucial to the success of the Viraśaiva project within the sphere of the cultural production of the Vijayanagara empire—an idea perhaps always present, if only latent, in the Viraśaiva imagination. They began an ambitious project to translate Viraśaiva texts into Sanskrit. A second group was keen on building parallel but not necessarily oppositional institutions for the production and circulation of literary texts. To this end they focused on creating a new narrative whereby the vacanas circulating in the oral medium were collected and organized within a loose fictional frame-
work. One of their most important works is the Śūnyasampādane (Attainment of emptiness).\(^{70}\)

It is not easy to find parallels in the history of Indian literatures for the process by which the Śūnyasampādane was brought into being. The compilers or editors of the text had to create a hero who would justify their ideological and literary choices. Interestingly, it was Allama Prabhu who became the central figure in their narrative, although he himself had disliked all forms of fictional practice. The Vīraśaiva imagination of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it appears, was rehearsing all of the conflicts in its memory, trying to arrive at a consensual position about the larger implications of these issues for the making of a new textual community. It is likely that these later editors even created some issues that had not existed in the twelfth century. A palpable kind of conservatism is increasingly apparent over the course of the four recensions of the Śūnyasampādane, which appeared in the century and a half between about 1420 and 1580. Predictably, perhaps, the last in the series was the most conservative, going so far as to introduce some Brahmanical views on the caste system in a positive light. Allama Prabhu became a symbol of the autonomous imagination of the Vīraśaivas vis-à-vis the court and the king, but the compilers sought to contain the oppositional element that informs his vacanas in the pedagogy of the institutionalized religion.

The compilers of the Śūnyasampādane knew that the material they were dealing with would not easily be woven into a unified narrative. The first editor, Śivagaṇaprasādī Mahādēvaya, was quite sensitive to the positions of the vacana texts that had been handed down. He was also a liberal within the newly consolidated institution of Virashaivism. The question of initiation, which was already becoming the most important criterion for determining the identity of Virashaivism’s followers, was used as a unifying narrative theme. Macrointegration with other Śaiva sects was already an everyday reality, but the self-conscious representatives of the Vīraśaiva movement still had to take a definite position on it. Thus Siddhārāma, an early-twelfth-century figure of Maharashtra and the most important precursor of the Vīraśaiva movement, was problematized. He had gradually been merged with the new religious movement, but during the fifteenth century the question of his identity was reopened. The first compiler recorded an imaginary (or perhaps traditionally transmitted) discussion between Siddhārāma and Allama Prabhu, and concluded that for a man of Siddhārāma’s stature the ritual of initiation was unnecessary. But the issue was far from settled, and the subsequent editors made Allama retreat from his previous position and required Siddhārāma to receive initiation. Virashaivism was trying to develop new abilities as a net-

work of religious and literary intelligentsia. The experience of the Kālamukhas was certainly available to them as a historical precedent, but they were also different from this earlier Śaiva sect. The Vīraśaivas had a new agenda and directed themselves to a new class that was keen to establish its claims on the public sphere on its own terms.

After the seventeenth century, the centers of Vīraśaiva textual production were located mainly in southern Karnataka, and the process of establishing an ideological reconciliation with Brahmanical institutions assumed far more significance than before. Studies of the Vedas and the āgamas from a Śaiva perspective gained renewed force, although within the Vīraśaiva discourse itself the old conflict between the Basava-centered positions and the ancient Śaiva agencies continued. Each needed the other to define its tradition, and surprisingly, the Vīraśaiva institutions had not lost their radical energy.

With the fall of the Vijayanagara empire in 1565, many lower-caste chiefs asserted their independence and declared their kingship; there was a sudden rise in inscriptive declarations establishing cultural legitimacy by conversion to Virashaivism. The religion of the rebels provided legitimacy for lower-caste army-unit chiefs, the pāḷegaṇas. Throughout Karnataka there emerged powerful kingdoms led by Bēda-Vīraśaivas, (in present-day terms identifiable as scheduled-tribe Śaivas), and they, too, tried to create and sustain the old and essential cultural aura for their kingships. It did not work; we do not have a single important work or author in any genre from these courts. The best intellectuals and writers of the times lived and worked outside of these Bēda-Vīraśaiva kingdoms. The intelligentsia needed something other than the material incentives available at the courts to be attracted toward a center of power. The Vīraśaiva monasteries had achieved more symbolic power and authority than most of the contemporary courts. They had become centers of textual production and a source of power on their own.

The Keḷadi kingdom seemed to be the one exception, but that, too, faded quickly. The Wodeyars of Mysore were, at one point in time, far below Keḷadi in terms of sheer political power, but they continued to grow and so passed into the colonial phase with some staying power. The Mysore court possessed a social mechanism that facilitated its transition through a complex period. No doubt, the intelligentsia played the decisive role; and its interests were in building bridges simultaneously with the Wodeyars and the colonizers. They wanted to be on good terms with both structures of power, but in terms of their intellectual projects they were keen on reconstituting the familiar conditions of court culture. At Mysore, for the first time, the intelligentsia among the Śrīvaiṣṇavas came into predominance, and they became the leaders of the political and intellectual sphere. Historians of Karnataka record with some dismay the emergence of this new group. Śrīvaiṣṇavas had been
present in Karnataka from the thirteenth century onward, but they had produced no literature whatsoever in Kannada. The emergence and consolidation of their intellectual projects is one of the enigmas of the late-medieval history of Mysore. I return to it later.

The Textual Basis of Political Power

Centers of textual production at the court, and alternative structures as well, do not necessarily employ a language for its intrinsic effectiveness as a vehicle for wider communication. Other, internal logics and compulsions determine their choice of language. On the other hand, languages are not passive spectators in the complex negotiations among polity, networks of culture, and civil society. As noted earlier, after the death of Rāghavānka around the middle of the thirteenth century, the fortune of the Kannada language experienced a strange split between its wide visibility and dynamism outside the court and its restricted uses and energies within the Vijayanagara polity. This raises an important question about the language policy of Vijayanagara and the fate of Dravidian languages during the Vijayanagara era. The general impression among scholars is that it was a period of variety and achievement, a phase of enthusiastic royal support for Kannada, Telugu, Tamil, and Sanskrit. Only Sanskrit was something of a lingua franca of the empire.

When did the era of difficult and complex relationships between the court and the alternative spaces of temple or monastery end in Kannada literature? Answering this question is crucial because these two sites—court and monastery—virtually to the exclusion of all others, conditioned the modes of literary production and reception. Notions of the literary had also been crystallized into two specific positions, represented by Pampa on one side and Harihara on the other, though these were in constant interaction. The ascetic exclusivism practiced by Harihara was quite influential in history; he had inscribed the opposition between god and king as dichotomous states of creativity too deep to be erased. To escape from the all-pervading ideological presence of the monastic panopticon, the literary culture developed certain narrative strategies. One was to make the hero or the king himself devoutly religious. This strategy rarely worked, however, since the conventions of the classical courtly epic required the king to enter certain quarters of the city (such as the prostitutes’ quarters) and to do certain things (such as hunt) that hardly fit the role of religious hero. Such deep ambiguities mark works like Mallikārjuna’s Imnadi Cikkhāhutpāla Sāngatya (1603). Here the Viraśāiva prince Tōjendra has to indulge in the obligatory narrative scene of hunting. Since this is not appropriate behavior for a Viraśāiva, Mallikārjuna adopts a curious narrative strategy: members of the hunters’ caste go with the prince and do all the gory and violent acts. The prince’s hands re-
main, by and large, unsoiled by the blood of the innocent prey. The poet goes all out to celebrate the skills of hunters:

The excited hunters gathered;
Prince Totendra mounted a decorated horse
and went hunting.
The wound caused by the bear’s bite,
the wound of the tiger’s paws,
the wound caused by the pouncing boar,
the wound of the elephant’s tusk: the scars
are the titles of the hunters.

The poet brings the prince before a guru, who is sitting among a group of devotees of Śiva and who is well-versed in Veda, Vedānta, Śaivasiddānta, and the words of Basava and other śaranas.

The guru touched the prince’s head
and said, “My son, you have changed for the worse.
Is it proper faith for good men
to join with evil and go hunting?
“For the men of faith who worship
the feet of Śiva Rājaśekhara, Crown of kings,
is it correct to indulge in such vices
as gambling and hunting?
“Pain is common to all living creatures;
so is death.
Can one kill those beings who are like
the self though they do not look like it?
“The old word has declared,
raising its hands in supplication:
nonviolence is the ultimate dharma,
which is also sivadharma, and its devotees should adhere to it.”

Such techniques of circumvention brought a certain awkwardness to the work of poets who held the ascetic mode in high esteem. They had to come to terms with two different worldviews and conceptions of poetry. The poet Nañjunda did not suffer from such ethical qualms. He thought he could escape the tension between worldviews by giving the hero a higher moral character and calling. If two sets of values—mokṣa (liberation) and dharma (duty)—are juxtaposed in his mind, Nañjunda can take the side of the latter either because it easily merges with the shastric declaration that the king is the very embodiment of god on earth, the very manifestation of dharma,
or, indeed, because ultimately the difference between the two values is non-contradictory. But poets like Nañjunda had to justify to themselves their choice of theme and their conventional modes of treating it; they could not possibly have handled it in a crude secular way. They were certainly aware that one of the powerful streams in the culture would evaluate them negatively, but this might be minimized if the historical-political narrative were embedded in the larger context of dharma. (By contrast, Pampa and Ranna did not have the problem of defending their heroes in this fashion; they were Kshatriyas, in any case.) After Nañjunda, at least four or five other such royal narratives were produced up to the eighteenth century. The overriding concern in these texts is with ideological justification, and their dense conservatism excludes from their imagination any traces of tension, the resolution of which could have given them some vitality. These works were written in forms like campū and saṅgatya, but they did not rise to the level of the high classical period.

The problem with poets working exclusively within the alternative spaces of mokṣa or dharma is that the range of experiences they try to cover in their works is too narrow. The impure elements of life, which give poetry its irreplaceable quality, are addressed only to be rejected as ethical aberration. The ascetic mentality tried to abolish the critical distance between the self and the literary imagination; the ethical world sought to constrain the working of the imagination. But a monological conditioning of poetic creativity results in drab and dull religious verse—an exercise in what T.S. Eliot calls the genre of minor poetry—“minor” because major realms of human existence are left out of consideration.

With reasonable certainty one can say that the life and work of the Jain poet Ratnākaravarni (fl. 1565) marked the end of this tension between the ascetic and courtly literary cultures. With him one era ended and a new one made its tentative beginnings. Ratnākaravarni is important because his work seems to abolish the distinction between physical experiences and their ethical-ideological implications. His poetry has been considered a “synthesis of pleasure and asceticism”—a synthesis that marked the beginning of a new negotiation between two contestations. He is the only poet in the history of Kannada literature who confesses that religious meditation bores him:

Heed this request, guru: when I am bored by meditation,

72. These include the Cihkadēvarājāvijaya, Kānṭhāravanasanājāvijaya, Kedānapāvijaya, and Aprameyaśacara, all of them belonging to the seventeenth century. The last is of special significance because it is a treatise on poetics, which links the categories of literary art with the life of a king of the Wodeyar dynasty of Mysore.

I would like to tell a story in Kannada, with your permission, my lord, placing you at the very beginning.\textsuperscript{74}

A number of complex psychological processes, which have a direct bearing on literary activity, are at work here. The very idea of the poet’s bold admission that meditation is tedious is scandalously radical, for the basis of religious life is the conviction that meditation is a state of conscious bliss and peace. Through his protagonist, Bharatēśa, Ratnākaravarnī asserts that he is bored with bliss and peace; he wants to experience other states of being, which are accessible only through fiction. He invites all of the impurities of life into his fiction, but he is not a dilettante, indulging in them as a form of escapism. On another occasion, he reflects, through a series of slippery, double-cutting images, on the nature of meditation itself:

A decorated elephant is dancing to the tunes of drums and music; it has a pot on its head—its meditation.
The kite-flier focuses his concentration on the kite flying in the sky.

These similes do not convey a sense of solidity; rather, they suggest fragility and uncertainty: the disasters of the pot falling off the head and the kite disappearing into the emptiness of the sky are real possibilities. Ratnākaravarnī does not offer the images of stability and confidence that religious-minded readers expect. In other words, Ratnākaravarnī’s most important strategy is to play with the very structure of the collaborative production of the meaning of the text. The slippery quality of the imagery makes his readers vulnerable to doubt and indecision. A new, critical moment thus emerged in the history of the relationship between the reader and the poet, one in which the latter had become slightly weary of the former in his capacity of ideological critic.

In the history of Kannada literary culture, the ideological reader has been an important presence. In the precolonial period, readers of this kind had substantial influence in both court and monastery, and innovative poets were necessarily respectful and fearful of them. Such dogmatic readers had well-formed values, backed up by a conservative reading of tradition, regarding the nature of the literary and the moral economy of literature. They were accordingly sources of dismay. In making Bharatēśa the hero of an apparently religious epic Ratnākaravarnī had to tread carefully; he could not afford to antagonize the dogmatic reader. The introduction and celebration of erotica were not major problems because such descriptions were already available. The conflict between the principles of eros (smaratattva) and renunciation (jinatattva) was conveniently resolved in the time of Āṇḍāiah; one was integrated into the other. Interestingly, even for the most religious-
minded author, sex was not taboo. Janna (thirteenth century), author of an exceedingly grim yet profound work that deals with the merger of sex and violence, also wrote a treatise on erotica, the Anubhavamukhura, theorizing on the delightful experiences of lovemaking. This work was part of a long tradition of Kannada literature on the science of sexual pleasures.\footnote{Important works include Candraräja’s Mudanatilaka (1079), Kavikama’s Śrīpūrayat-nākara (1200), Kavimalla’s Mamasthāvijaya (fourteenth to sixteenth century), and Dēvarāya’s Amaruśataka (c. 1410). Many other poets taught the learned reader what to expect from writing on śrīgātra. As Kallarasa (1467) declared, “If one doesn’t dance according to the tunes of the flower-arrow, he is certainly a sheep” (quoted in Śivarudrappa et al. 1974–: vol. 4, pt. 2: 694). This is not an irresponsible endorsement of sex; it is a part of the dharma of the householder.}  

An interesting topic for study would be the exchanges that go on between the tropes of sex as codified in an objective science and in a literary epic, which is supposed to document the same as subjective experience. In the work of many poets they appear to be easily exchangeable, for in much poetry, as in Śśāstra, women are treated as types: the padmāni (lotus-woman) and the like. The dogmatic reader expects an endorsement of these conventional tropes, which are dead yet constantly available to the moments of both production and reception. Texts of erotica are thus crucial to understanding the challenges faced by poets like Ratnākaravarṇi, who were committed to taking their artistic journey beyond the confines of convention. They had to make the familiar unfamiliar. 

The aesthetic challenges facing Ratnākaravarṇi were directly related to the events of his life. According to the brief biography of him in Dēvacandra’s Rājāvalikathāśāstra (Essential history of [Karnataka] kings; early nineteenth century), Ratnākaravarṇi was better known to contemporary society as an erotic poet and an authority on the science of sex. Any claims he may have made to spiritual mastery were not taken seriously and he was treated with disdain: 

The poet became famous at the court of Bhairasa Wodeyar of the Lunar lineage as a śrīgārakavi or poet of erotic love. He excelled others as a scholar. Yōga Ratnakāra had mastered the ten winds through shastric learning.

The daughter of Bhairasa fell in love with him. He, too, became infatuated with her. To join her he climbed to the top of the palace and by his special wind technique entered the bedroom and made love.

The king came to know of this and attempted to capture him. That very night Ratnākara went to his guru, Mahendrakirti, and took the anvukīrti vow and became an expert in the scriptures. He was immersed in spirituality day and night.\footnote{Quoted in Śivarudrappa et al. 1974–: vol. 4, pt. 2: 568–69.}  

Such a conversion and change in lifestyle did not solve the problem for Ratnākaravarṇi the writer. The rest of this episode is worth describing be-
cause it illuminates the importance of the dogmatic reader in Kannada literary culture. It was decided that Ratnākara’s work, the Bharatēśvararātrite, would be carried by an elephant in a procession. But one Vijayakirti took objection to the book—“Three sentences in the text are opposed to the pu-rāṇas,” he declared—and did not accept the poet’s defense. It appears that the poet was even refused food. Ratnākara finally ate at his sister’s home, but he remained lost in fury. Remembering that “for someone who has achieved knowledge of the self, all castes and communities are one and the same,” he became a Vīraśaiva and wrote its sūtras and the Basavapurāṇa (Lore of Basava). Later he repented and produced Jain works, including, in 1557, three sātakas (sequences of a hundred verses) to different Jain deities: the Ratnākarasātaka, the Aparājitēśvarasātaka, and the Trilōkyaśātaka.

There is no need to accept this story in toto, but in the analysis of literary cultures, tales like this have an important function: they reveal the criteria affecting the reception of an author or a work. In fact, detailed analysis of the stories about poets in premodernity gives us a reasonably precise picture of the unarticulated assumptions that rule a literary culture. The story of Ratnākaravarnī, full of many significant themes, illustrates the truth of this. That a Jain pontiff (paṭṭacārya) objected to just three sentences in his work gives us a clue to the working of the evaluative practices accepted by textual cultures of the time, when the religious and literary-critical authorities were often one and the same. More important, Ratnākaravarnī exemplifies the birth of what can be called modern subjectivity, in that there is a direct connection between personal life and poetic expression:

I got caught up in the senses, I am wounded.
My guru, Mahēndrakirti, tree of pity, protect me.
For the pleasure of the eye I flew everywhere,
I desired a young woman, hallucination went to my head,
I suffered intolerable pain,
I am a faded, dingy man now. Save me!78

Guru Mahēndrakirti is a historical figure; the poem, accordingly, is autobiographical. The real point of the biographical story is not the freedom Ratnākaravarnī exercised in leaving his original faith; it lies, rather, in the later exploration of his experiences. He wrote some of the most moving autobiographical poems in the history of the Kannada language with a great deal of spiritual reflexivity. Ratnākaravarnī was the last poet who had a deep interaction with both sites of literary production, the courtly and the monastic, and he had a tension-ridden relationship with both. Though Ratnākara’s hero, Bharatēśa, is more convincing in his search for and gratification of phys-

77. Śivarudrappa et al. 1974– vol. 4, pt. 2: 569 for this and the previous quotation.
ical pleasures than in his spiritual quest, externally the text appears to give more importance to the ascetic side of his hero. Ratnākarāvarṇi was following the codes of the collaborative production of textual meaning and subverting them from within.

Did Ratnākarāvarṇi have any other readers besides Jains? The answer is yes, because his influence on the Vīraśāiva and Vaiṣṇava saṅgātya poets of the next century is evident. His texts clearly circulated widely among readers of other faiths, who must have found it easy to ignore their Jain theological trappings. They responded to it from the perspective of an aesthete or secular scholar. This conversion of the self of the premodern reader is important, too; a reader who might be a dogmatic critic in the context of his religious identity could be a purely literary reader for another work. He cannot be described as the unaffiliated reader of modernity, yet he was sufficiently free from religious narrowness to ensure the transsectarian popularity of a writer like Ratnākarāvarṇi, and so to constitute an important class in the history of Kannada literary culture.

The monopoly of the courtly and monastic centers of literary production over creative writing came to an end with the appearance in the seventeenth century of a new kind of intellectual represented by Sarvajñā, who was not really a poet in the traditional sense of the word. He is often compared with Vēmāna of the Telugu tradition, and the two do in fact have a great deal in common. Sarvajñā is said to have been an illegitimate child, and the consequent humiliation may have contributed to his turning into a radical. His works, referred to as vacanas, are in the tripadi form. His wit, satire, humanist values, and anticaste positions have made him available to progressive projects throughout Karnataka. Sarvajñā brought creativity and social criticism back to poetry when all centers of literary production had lost them.

The transition from Ratnākarāvarṇi to Sarvajñā signals the emergence of a literary culture where the phenomenon of the individual author, with its almost modern implications, had come to stay. From Sarvajñā onward the social conscience of the “community,” that is, an amorphous group cutting across the boundaries of the class of traditional readers, presented itself to the “poet.” Not that other traditional sites of literary production were inactive or dead; on the contrary, they were bubbling with new enthusiasm, at least in the case of courtly cultures. At least two courts, which have been mentioned earlier—Keladi (1500–1765) and Mysore (1610–1947)—had organized around themselves a cultural intelligentsia capable of writing on diverse subjects.

At the Mysore court, the presence and the production of texts in several languages—Kannada, Telugu, and Sanskrit, mainly—show that some writers were multilingual. For instance, Kalale Nañjarāja (1739–1759) wrote works in Telugu and Kannada. This phenomenon is understandable because after the disintegration of the Vijayanagara empire, the court-centered lit-
erary cultures of Telugu dispersed to Tañjavûr, Madurai, and Mysore. But even writers from purely Kannada-speaking communities took to writing in Telugu, which raises questions again on the relationship between writerly choices and languages. Kempegowda (1513–1569), the builder of the city of Bangalore, wrote Gaṅgâaurîvîlāsa (The play of Gaṅgâ and Gauri), a yaksagâna (verse-play) in Telugu.

Some authors wrote in all three languages—Kannada, Telugu, and Sanskrit. And incidentally, many of these were Vîraivas. Clearly, a sense of religious responsibility made them write in several languages; even Tamil became a part of the enterprise. The textual universe of the Vîraiva imagination was no longer confined to Kannada, as it sought to sustain a larger south Indian network. Such ambition on the part of Vîraiva monastic institutions throws more light on the authority that rested in centers of textual production. Involvement with textual production was evidently one important way of securing power and influence in the public sphere. But why did someone like Kempegowda choose to write in Telugu?

Telugu had certainly been more privileged than Kannada as a language of the courtly culture during the reign of the last Vijayanagara kings, especially Kṛṣṇadēvarāya (d. 1529). Was a certain residual glamour still associated with it? How does this textual power translate itself into sociopolitical authority? One has to focus on southern Karnataka in general and the Mysore district in particular to understand this process. The texts produced at the court of Mysore consist mostly of encyclopedias, epics, religious commentaries, and other śastras, whereas those at Keladi included works on the Vîraiva tenets of the faith: the Vîraivadharmasirîmanî (Crest-jewel of the moral order of the Vîraivas) and the Vîraivānandacandrikâ (Moonlight to delight the Vîraivas). Ironically, it seems that even new converts to Virashaivism from the lower castes, like the pâlegâras of Hâgalavâdi, dedicated themselves to the production of Sanskrit texts—a desperate effort to revive the spirit of the Sanskrit cosmopolis as a way of gaining cultural legitimacy for their rule.

From the sixteenth century onward, supralocal Vîraiva monasteries emerged in the districts of Mysore, Bangalore, Tumkur, and Chitradurga. For the most part they became important players in the efforts small courts were making to establish hegemony over their regions. These institutions gained visibility and cultural clout, mainly because of the authors and texts they produced. Affairs in the Mysore district, however, were rather different.

The Mysore king Cikkadēvarāja Wodeyar (1674–1704) radically reorganized the internal revenue system of the land. The peasants were adversely affected by the new taxes. And to compound the misery, there came a drought. Peasants rose in rebellion. The slogan was:

Basavaṇṇa the Bull tills the forest land; Dēvendra [Indra] gives the rains; why should we, the ones who grow crops through hard labor, pay taxes to the king?
The court decided that the root of this unrest was the Vīraśaiva monasteries and their religious professionals, and a secret decision was made to put down the unrest and rebellion. In 1684 a grand feast for the jaṅgamas was arranged at Nañjanagūḍu, the famous Śaiva center and home to the Nañjundēśvara temple; after the meal the jaṅgamas were given gifts and money. They had to exit the hall one-by-one through a narrow lane; the professional wrestlers of the court murdered each one of them, putting four hundred jaṅgamas to death. Later, seven hundred monasteries were destroyed. Astonishingly, this important episode finds no resonance whatever in the Vīraśaiva literature; a strange silence about it seems to be maintained. Why were the monasteries and jaṅgamas considered the agents and vanguards of a larger societal unrest? What was the source of the authority of these groups? They were solely engaged in the production and circulation of literary and religious texts. It was clearly that activity that had given them ascendancy, and they were seen, rightly, as the center of an alternative to the court. The production of texts had given these local and supralocal monasteries enormous symbolic power that transformed itself into sociopolitical power.

At the other end of the religious continuum, the predominance of Śrīvaishnava writers—who competed with other Telugu and Sanskrit rivals at the Wodeyars’ court in the seventeenth century and who continued as a liaison group with the new forces of Hyder’s court at Śrīraṅgapāṭṭaṇa and of colonialism at the end of the eighteenth century—shows that a new mechanism had arisen in Karnataka. The cultural elite as a class had also become the agency responsible for a new kind of intellectual and political negotiation with the forces of colonialism. Meanwhile, a new brand of writer, in the class of Ratnākaraśrīvarṇa and Sarvajña—one that was unaffiliated with any established monastery—was wandering throughout north Karnataka writing a vital kind of lyric; with few exceptions, these authors were very unconventional in their lifestyle. The most notable among them were Muppina Śaḍakṣari, Śiṣunāla Sherif, Navalagundada Nāgaliṅgāyōgi, and Kadakolada Maṉiḷappā. They composed poetry, remarkable for its style, that served as a curtain raiser to modern Kannada poetry. The class of writers that produced poetry at and for the Mysore court, by contrast, was not only conventional in its literary tastes but also socially conservative. The Mysore court poets were secure in their lifestyles, clear about their conception of literature, and confident about the circulation of their texts. The new authors were not fortunate enough to enjoy that, but as they wandered they initiated an unprecedented kind of Kannada writing. The privileged class that kept on producing old texts with more archaic themes and ancient tales was left behind in history; to the contemporary reader, at least, they look boring and dull. The centers of textual production in both the court and monasteries had lost their social energy. New players—the colonial institutions—had entered history, and consequently, new paradigms of cre-
ativity and centers of literary culture had come into being. But that is a separate story altogether.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


History presupposes a narrative, a story of a process motivated by a causality. And as we have come to realize, such a story sometimes creates the object it purports to merely describe. There was no such a thing as “Telugu literature” as we now understand it before literary historians produced its history in the early decades of the twentieth century for the purpose of teaching it in colleges or to fill a perceived gap in knowledge. A history of Telugu literature required a beginning, dates for poets and their patrons, a geography of literary production, and a connected narrative, which scholars have worked hard to construct. In this essay I try to avoid such construction. I do not tell a story of events by narrating them chronologically, but instead I give a somewhat loosely connected but interrelated configuration of what this volume calls literary culture as it manifested itself in the geographical area of south India. The gaps that I leave are deliberate.

LINGUISTIC AND GEOGRAPHICAL BOUNDARIES OF TELUGU LITERARY CULTURES

Modern political and linguistic boundaries can create confusion when we talk of literary cultures that predate them. It is therefore necessary to remind ourselves that during the premodern period, which is my primary focus in this essay, in many of the geographical locations discussed here Telugu was one of several languages in which literature was being produced. Poets who wrote in Telugu read and interacted with other languages widely used among scholars of their time. Among these languages, three had a direct impact on the making of literary texts in Telugu: Sanskrit, Tamil, and Kannada. Knowledge of Sanskrit was required for a person to be literary in Telugu—the Sanskrit of purāṇa and kāvya, if not the Sanskrit of sāstra and Veda. Tamil
was a canonical language for Vaiṣṇava Telugu poets, just as Kannada was for those who were Vīraśaivas. Although its influence is not clearly visible on the surface, Persian did have an impact on Telugu literary culture, especially during the late sixteenth century. However, with the significant exception of Pālkuriki Śomanāṭhuḍu, who wrote in both Telugu and Kannada, every one of the poets I discuss here wrote only in Telugu.

Also, all poets seem to have been aware that they were participating in an enterprise of writing in Telugu. One of the earliest of these poets, Nannaya (eleventh century), expressly stated that he was writing “in Tenugu” for the welfare of the world (apparently meaning the Telugu world). Nannecoḍuḍu (twelfth century) spoke of the Cāḷukya kings who established “literature in Telugu.” In the following generation, Tikkana (thirteenth century) had in view a people he called āndhrāvāli (Andhra people). The poets who established literary traditions different from Nannaya’s also expressed a clear awareness of belonging to the Telugu language, even as they were conscious of their own traditions with their own intertextual underpinnings and shared cultural discourse. Such an awareness made them participants in a common activity of writing in Telugu, even though their literary traditions varied. These disparate traditions were later reformulated as if they belonged to a linear and continuous story, and acquired the name Telugu literature.

The geography of these literary traditions is not as unified as the conceptual area of Telugu literature. Present-day Andhra gives the secure impression that the literary geography of Telugu is easily definable as the area we call Andhra Pradesh. The history of Telugu literary production gives the lie to this assumption, showing both that Andhra did not always correspond to Andhra Pradesh and that Telugu literature was produced in many areas that are not included in the Andhra Pradesh of today. Tikkana, writing from Nellore in the thirteenth century, had a concept of Andhra that included coastal Andhra and Rajahmundry, from where Nannaya had written a couple of centuries earlier. But Śrīnāṭhuḍu, writing in the late fourteenth century from the same Rajahmundry, had a much narrower concept of Andhra. For him, the center of the Andhra country was the Godāvari delta. During

1. After Ponnikaṇṭi Telaganārya wrote Yāyātī Carītramū (c. 1574–1585) in an artificial Telugu known as acceṭelugu (pure Telugu, devoid of all words derived from Sanskrit), a number of poets followed him and wrote acceṭelugu poems. Telaganārya and his followers were influenced by contemporary Persian poets who tried to eliminate all Arabic words from their works. But see also Nagaraj, chapter 5 this volume, on the early-thirteenth-century Kannada poet, Andāiaha, and his Kabbigarakāvā.


3. Bhīmēvīrvapūrīramū 3.50 (Śrīnāṭhuḍu 1958). Interpreting literary statements such as this in a strictly geographical way is problematic. The idea is presented here only to show variations in geographical conceptualizations of Andhra in premodern times.
the reign of Kṛṣṇadēvarāya, who called himself a Kannada king (kannadarāya), sixteenth-century Hampi, now located in the state of Karnataka, was the center of Telugu literary activity. Later, when the Telugu Nāyaka kings ruled the southern kingdoms of Madurai and Tańjāvūr, the center of Telugu literary production was located in the far south, where the predominant spoken language was Tamil. Telugu continued to be a language of literature in the Tamil-speaking south long after the decline of the Nāyakas. Even when Telugu literature was produced in areas that are now in Andhra Pradesh, Telugu was not always the only language of importance. For instance, during the reign of the sultans of Golconda, the language of administration was Persian, but Telugu poets flourished in the court and Telugu was accepted as a language of culture as well. The northwestern temple town of Śrīśailam, where Pālkuriki Sōmanāthudu wrote in the thirteenth century, was a multilingual center where Śaiva devotees spoke Telugu, Kannada, Tamil, and Marathi; and southeastern Tirupati, where Annamayya and his family members wrote in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, was a center for at least two major languages, Telugu and Tamil.

In contrast, the kings of the Kākatya dynasty ruling from Warangal and the Reḍḍi kings ruling from Koṇḍavidu, Rajahmundry, and Addanki—all of which were right in the thick of the Telugu speaking area—did not evince much interest in encouraging Telugu poetry. They favored Sanskrit poetry instead. The Kākatyas honored the Sanskrit poet Vidyānātha as their court poet, and the Reḍḍis celebrated Vāmana Bhaṭṭa Bāṇa as theirs. Meanwhile, the greatest Telugu poet of the time, Śrīnāthudu, was traveling from king to king and patron to patron all over the region including Kannada- and Tamil-speaking areas, receiving honors as well as audience for his poetry before finally being invited by Virabhadra Reḍḍi, the ruler of Rajahmundry, to dedicate his Kāśikhaṇḍamu to him.

Clearly, language boundaries were much more porous in premodern south India than they are now, and literary production was not always associated with the majority language spoken in the area. Nor can we arrive at a neat, chronologically connected narrative of Telugu literary developments. We might love to imagine a definite, Aristotelian beginning, middle, and end for a narrative of literary history, such that this mass of events from Andhra would not frustrate us and appear wholly uncharted. But the search for chronology, the bulwark of positivist literary historians, frustrates even the most dedicated scholars as book after book turns up without a definite date of its composition or precise biographical details of its author.

Indeed, in this foggy chronological domain, finding a single author who gives a precise date for the composition of his book is cause for celebration. Appakavi, who we know decided to write one of his books on an evening in the year 1656 (Śaka 1578) in the village of Kāmepalḷi (probably in Guntur
District), is just such an author. I begin my essay with him—and not just because he gives us this precious bit of chronological information (which, as we will see, is immediately followed by a story of an altogether different historical order). Appakavi gives us a rich literary-cultural discourse and provides a vantage point from which to look back in time as well as forward.

First, the story: One night the god Viṣṇu appeared to Appakavi in a dream, along with his insignia (the conch and the wheel) and his two wives, Lakṣmī and Bhūdēvi. The god formally introduced himself and his wives, and he told Appakavi that he should write, in the Telugu language, the great grammar that Nannaya, the first poet, had composed in Sanskrit sūtras. These sūtras had been lost for centuries because Bhimakavi, Nannaya’s rival, threw the only copy into the Godāvari river in retaliation for Nannaya’s suppression of Bhimakavi’s own book on meter. Fortunately, however, Nannaya’s student, Śāraṅgadharā, had memorized every verse of the book before Bhimakavi threw it away and thus had preserved it. This Śāraṅgadharā was none other than the son of Rājarājānārēndra, the patron king of Nannaya. According to a story well known in Appakavi’s time, to which the poet refers, this king had married a young wife in his old age. The young wife fell in love with her stepson, Śāraṅgadharā, and enticed him to her palace. When Śāraṅgadharā refused to reciprocate her affection, the queen spoke false charges against him to the king, who hastily ordered his son’s arms and legs to be cut off and the young man cast into the wilderness. But Śāraṅgadharā miraculously survived with the aid of a siddha (perfected being), Matsyendranātha, and he became a siddha himself, hence immortal. Having saved Nannaya’s book from extinction, Śāraṅgadharā even gave a written copy of it to Bālasarasvati—a contemporary of Appakavi, who recorded this chain of transmission. Bālasarasvati had also written a gloss on the lost text.

Now the god was asking Appakavi to write an elaborate commentary on this first Telugu grammar of Nannaya’s. But how would Appakavi get a copy of this book? This problem of the missing text was neatly solved by the god’s promise that the next day a certain Brahman from Mataṅga Hill (near Hampi) would personally deliver a copy to Appakavi.

There is more to the story. But let us pause to ask why anybody would even need this grammar, since for centuries poets had managed quite well with-

4. This book, Appakaviyamu, popularly called after the author’s name, does not have a title of its own. Appakavi intended this as a commentary to Nannaya’s Āndhraśabdacintāmaṇi. The extant text covers only the first two chapters of Nannaya’s work.

5. Though not as precise as Appakavi regarding dates, the poets who wrote prefaces to their works provide us with substantial descriptions of the cultures in which they and their patrons lived, the symbolic statuses they and their predecessors attained in the society of their time, and interesting data about their own families, their patrons, and their families as well.
out it. In the absence of the rules of an authoritative grammar, says the god, a certain kavirakṣasudu—a fierce and powerful poet—had made a rule that no poet could ever use a Telugu word unattested in Nannaya’s Telugu retelling of the Sanskrit Mahābhārata. Because of the lack of a grammar, the earliest poet’s text itself had come to serve as an empirical source for ordering the language. Now, however, Appakavi’s new Telugu version of the absent grammar would open up the generative resources of the language and also confer authority.

An earlier grammar, Āndrabhasabhasanamu by Kētana (thirteenth century), had no prescriptive authority. Kētana even modestly requests poets to bless his efforts and, if they find errors in his work, to kindly correct them. He is far from assuming the authority of legislator of language, the title by which Appakavi recognizes Nannaya. Clearly, Appakavi found himself in a new situation, marked by an urgent need to establish the authority of grammar over poetry. And indeed, Appakavi exhibits a profound sense of confidence. He states that his book is as basic to Telugu as Paninī’s Saṅgīna is to Sanskrit. This is not just poetic license; he is relying on a tradition of several hundred years of linguistic creativity, during which Telugu literary culture had established for itself a certain social presence. Now Appakavi proceeds to give voice to an anthropology of poetry, to its power of producing political and social reality, and its role in ordering its own universe.

In Appakavi’s words, a poem received by a patron brings him good luck or bad luck depending on its “marks,” in the same way that a horse, a gem, or a woman acquired by him would. These things, if properly chosen for their lucky marks, could turn him into a rich man or, alternately, leave him a beggar. In the case of poems, lucky marks are features of the correctness of the language and meter used by the poet. The power of the language used in a poem has a long prehistory, which has been ingrained in the minds of literate people. Building on this belief, Appakavi relates another belief, at least as old as the twelfth century, that a poem is one of the seven “children” a person could have. A son, a water tank, a poem, an endowment, a temple, a grove, and a Brahman settlement—these seven insure life after death for the patron. Six of the seven fall into ruin in the course of time; poetry is the sole exception. So Appakavi recommends poetry as the most praiseworthy item for all patrons to acquire. But there is something even more valuable

6. Āndrabhasabhasanamu 9–11 (Kētana 1953).
7. Nannecōdu (twelfth century) was the first poet to relate the indigenous belief of acquiring saptasantīna, seven kinds of “children,” to insure a secure place in heaven. In addition to a son, they are: agraḥāramu (Brahman colony), devatālayamu (temple), udānamu (garden), taṭākamu (tank), salkymu (poem), nidhānamu (source of money). This belief was restated in a number of poems over many centuries. Kumārasambhavamu 1.46 (Nannecōdu 1968).
in poetry: However bad a patron’s life might be, the poet can make him good. Just as drainage water from the city flows into the Godavari river and becomes pure, even a person who has lived a bad life can be rendered pure in the poet’s depiction. The illustrations Appakavi presents as evidence for this image-building transform the Sanskrit poets Valmiki and Vyāsa into court poets who served their patrons: Valmiki made Rāma known, and Vyāsa made the Pāṇḍavas known, by writing their lives into poetry.

Underlying Appakavi’s entire presentation, though left unmentioned, are the grammarian and the scholar-interpreter of grammar. The poet creates his poem within the rules set by the major grammar texts, which were written by ancient givers of laws of grammar. In this case, Nannaya is such a lawgiver and Appakavi is the commentator who interprets this old text. The commentator and the lawgiver form the world in which the poet works, so that it functions according to rules. The patron flourishes only if the poet executes the poem strictly within this rule-bound world.

The world of poetry that Appakavi imagines is remarkably analogous to the Brahmanical social world. In the human world, the Veda and śāstra dictate the law; the Brahman purohita, or ritual specialist, interprets the law; and the king administers it for the benefit of his subjects. In the literary world, similarly, the ancient texts on grammar and poetics give the law of language and poetic rules, the grammarian interprets the rules, and the poet executes the poem according to the rules for the enjoyment of cultivated readers. The following diagram represents the homology:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>World of People (laukikajagat)</th>
<th>World of Poetry (kavyajagat)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>Vedic texts (Veda and śāstra)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreter</td>
<td>Brahman (purohita)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executor</td>
<td>king (rāja)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recipient</td>
<td>subjects (prajā)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, the literary world did not behave according to Appakavi’s imagination. That Appakavi had to visit the remote past of Nannaya’s time and invent a whole grammar that had been lost until now, and that he needed the immortal Śrāvaṇagadha and the god Viśṇu to arrange for the delivery of that grammar, clearly suggest that he needed a power structure to confer the authority necessary to create a new literary world. To understand this more clearly, let us briefly take a look at the world of Telugu literary culture during Appakavi’s time and in the centuries immediately preceding it.

In the century before Appakavi, a profound shift in the world of poetry had made the patron of poetry, the king, completely independent of the poet. He no longer needed the Brahman as poet to elevate his status, to make him king. The king now assumed the position of the god himself. The
most that a poet could do was to serve the king by celebrating his glory. I elaborate on this situation later, in the section on the Nāyaka courts; stated briefly, in preference to Brahman men, courtesans and non-Brahman men were now chosen as court poets. These poets did not feel superior to the king and therefore did not have any problem serving him. Not too long before Appakavi we find an unusual complaint in the words of Dhūṛjaṭi, who lamented:

Town after town  
every street singer becomes a poet.  
They go to these two-bit kings who cannot tell good from bad  
and praise them as the best connoisseurs of arts.  
Poetry is cheap.  
God of Kālahasti,  
where do good poets go?  

Clearly, Appakavi wished to restore a world he thought was lost or had degenerated, but he unwittingly presented a world of mean competition, personal jealousies, and unethical acts, like destroying a rival poet’s work (almost as if it was a routine occurrence since the beginnings of Telugu literature). Nannaya himself, who was held in high reverence by Appakavi and was respected by the god, participated in such acts. However, this detail was lost on Appakavi, as well as on his readers, who were taken by the glory in which Appakavi presents Nannaya and his grammar. In a way, Appakavi was not inventing this glory. Nannaya was already recognized as the first poet, the inaugurator of Telugu poetry, by a number of poets previous to Appakavi. We find a Telugu literary world articulated as early as the sixteenth century. The following poem by Rāmarājābhubaṇudu, author of Vasucaritramu, addresses the Goddess of Speech, mentioning a “universe of Telugu words” (āndhroktimyaṇaṇpaṇcu) — in other words, Telugu literature.

You are created by the Maker of Speech  
and nurtured by the Master of Worlds;  
The Moon and the Sun brighten you  
and the Lord of Wealth protects you;  
I celebrate your glory  
in the universe of Telugu words.  

Through a series of somewhat constrained puns, the verse invokes both a genealogy of poets and the major Hindu deities. References are to the Maker of Speech (Brahmā as well as Nannaya, who is credited with creating

a literary language in Telugu), the Lord of the World (Śiva and also Errāprāgaḍa, who is called the supreme master of poetic compositions, or prabandha-paramēśvaru), the Moon (Sōma and also Nacana Sōmuḍu, who wrote a Harivamśamu), the Sun (Bhāskara along with Hulaki Bhāskarudu, who composed a Rāma story, popularly known as Bhāskararāmāyanamu, in Telugu), and the Lord of Wealth (Viṣṇu as well as Śrīnāṭhudu, the great poet of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries). This is indeed an interesting list of poets, and the tone of the poem suggests an authoritative structure of the literary past, indeed, a canon of great poets.

However, what Appakavi seeks to express is not just the greatness of the poet as a creator of literary texts; he wants the poet to be subjected to the superior authority of the grammarian and the maker of the rules of meter—the poet should be only the executor of literary texts within the rules of grammar and metrical texts. To see Appakavi’s worldview in perspective, we should pursue the main strands of competing literary cultures that preceded Appakavi and were in some ways still active during Appakavi’s time.

THE FIRST POET AND THE PRODUCTION OF A BRAHMANICAL/PURANIC LITERARY CULTURE

Contrary to the conventional picture of the reader and the poet detailed earlier, and the ideological support articulated by Appakavi, Telugu did have multiple literary traditions and cultures, sometimes competing with each other but most of the time continuing in relative independence, each with its own poetics and aesthetics, and often with its own audience. I focus here on four of these, which I will call the Brahmanical/puranic, anti-Brahmanical, courtly, and temple traditions. I discuss as the major poets of these literary cultures Nannaya (eleventh century) for the Brahmanical tradition; Sōmanāṭhudu (thirteenth century) for the anti-Brahmanical tradition; Nan necododu (twelfth century), Śrīnāṭhudu (fourteenth century), Peddanna, and Rāmārājabhusanudu (both sixteenth century) for the courtly tradition; and Potana (fourteenth century) and Annamayya (fifteenth century) for the temple tradition. Throughout my discussion, using both written texts and catūs (oral verses circulated among literate people), I outline some of the main features of these traditions, which lead up to the popular perception of Telugu poetry and poets as reflected in seventeenth-century legends about them. Then I consider issues relevant to each of these literary cultures, such as choice of literary language, questions of translation and authenticity, and styles of orality and literacy. At the end of my account, I return to Appakavi.

I begin with Nannaya, since from at least the sixteenth century he has been repeatedly identified as the first poet in Telugu. The very idea that there should be one first poet in a language that has had more than one literary culture from early on is problematic and obviously stems from a homoge-
nization of Telugu literature in the early-twentieth-century literary histories. In fact, only the poets of the Brahmanical courtly tradition recognized Nannaya as the first poet; others, especially those who were aware of their literary culture as distinct and even opposed to the dominant traditions, did not mention his name.

The credit for creating a courtly literary culture, in fact, does clearly belong to Nannaya. Writing a *purāṇa* narrative in *campū* (a Sanskrit-based genre of metrical stanzas interspersed by prose), and the convention of addressing the poem to the patron by making him the listener to the entire narrative, are Nannaya’s inventions. The patron’s name is evoked at the beginning and the end of each of the chapters, and the context in which the patron commissioned the poem and the family history of the patron are described in some detail. The poet also takes the occasion to describe his own qualifications for composing such a poem. This style of contextualizing the narrative with the speaker and the listener embedded in the text found great favor with the courtly poets of the sixteenth century, who embellished and improved on Nannaya’s invention. In the practice of the later courtly poets the patron is called the *kṛtipati*, the husband of the poem, and the poem itself is called the virgin poem, *kavyakanya*, who is married to the patron. Even the temple poet Pōtanna adopts this style and addresses his *Bhāgavatam* to his god, Rāma, calling him Rāmanṛpāla, King Rāma. The courtly poets used this style to accommodate the social and political aspirations not only of ruling kings but of a range of personalities including heads of the army and treasury, rich merchants, and landowners. The poets described the patron’s extended family, including his grandfather, father, uncles, brothers, and their wives, in terms appropriate to the status to which the patron aspired.

Let us see in some detail how Nannaya, at the beginning of his *Mahābhārata*nu, gives a glorious description of the context leading to the composition of the work. The poet describes King Rājarājanṛṇḍruḍu, the Veṅgi Caḷukya king of the eleventh century:

> Ravishing as the moon, he alone adorns the class of kings,  
> outshines the splendor of other rulers; a true warrior,  
> he illumines all worlds like pure moonlight on an autumn night.  
> He, Rājarāṇḍra, has put his enemies to rest  
> with his indomitable arm—a honed sword—  
> as a shower of rain settles dust.\(^{10}\)

Nannaya also produces a complementary image of himself as a Brahman family priest, devoted to the king and given to sacrifice and prayer. He is an ex-

pert on language (*vipulaśabdaśasanuḍu*), he is learned in the *parāṇas*, and most significantly of all, he never tells a lie.

Towards the end comes a description of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, which the king loves dearly. It is one of the five things he never gets tired of (the other four are pleasing the Brahmans, worshipping Śiva, keeping the company of good people, and giving gifts). The king wants the *Mahābhārata* to be written in Telugu because, he says:

- My lineage begins with the moon, and then proceeds through Puru, Bharata, Kuru, and King Pāṇḍu.
- The stories of Pāṇḍu’s famous sons, virtuous and beyond blame are ever close to my heart.¹¹

We can see that the preamble by Nannaya has all the ingredients of a courtly poem: a noble king, a learned poet, and a great text. While it served as a major model in the formation of courtly patronage for literary compositions, Nannaya’s text also responds to the way he saw the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* of Vyāsa. Introducing Vyāsa’s work to his Telugu listeners, Nannaya demonstrates a highly individual understanding of the Sanskrit text. Perceiving it as a work that falls under many descriptions, he writes in the preface to his own *Mahābhārata*:

Those who understand the order of things think it is a book about order.
Counselors read it as a book about conduct.
Good poets treat it as a great poem.
Grammarians find here usage for every rule.
Narrators of the past see it as ancient record.
Storytellers know it to be a rich collection of stories.
Vyāsa, the first sage, who knew the meaning of all the Vedas, Parāśara’s son, equal to Lord Viṣṇu, made the *Mahābhārata* a universal text.¹²

Obviously, Nannaya likewise designed his poem to be all things to his listeners. And the later tradition shows that Nannaya’s Telugu text did answer most of the demands made on it. We know that Nannaya was seen as a great poet and that he was regarded a sage—a combination of Vālmiki and Vyāsa for the Telugu literary tradition. His poem also served as an illustration for all the rules of a grammar, which he was supposed to have composed, but


which was lost, as noted earlier. In addition, Nannaya was appropriated by later kāvya poets as a kāvya writer, hence the tribute paid by Rāmarājabhūṣaṇa (a kāvya poet himself) in the poem already quoted. All this was possible because there was an organized literary cultural patronage, which continued over centuries though with significant breaks, and which Appakavi sought to reinvent in his century.

Beginnings of traditions are always authorized as such after the event. That Telugu literature began with Nannaya’s Mahābhāratamu in the eleventh century has been part of a well-established tradition for several centuries now. But to all available evidence, Nannaya’s own intention was only to compose a Telugu work—not to begin anything, let alone a tradition. Even in the thirteenth century Nannaya was not called the first poet. Tikkana, who picked up the Telugu Mahābhāratamu almost where Nannaya had left it a century earlier, pays a handsome tribute to his predecessor. He calls Nannaya the master of Telugu poetry (āndhrakavitvaviśāradunḍu), but he stops short of calling him the first poet in Telugu. Apparently, Tikkana knew other Telugu poets who wrote before Nannaya, and if he did not give us their names, it could be because he was only interested in the man who had written the first part of the text he was to continue.

To Tikkana goes the credit of imagining a Telugu community (āndhravālī) and a strong Brahmanical orientation for Telugu elite culture. Tikkana lived an active life. He wrote fifteen volumes to complete the Telugu version of the voluminous Sanskrit Mahābhārata; he was adviser and minister to the ruler of a small Telugu kingdom, Manumasiddhi of Nellore; and he was mentor to other Telugu poets, who looked up to him for advice and inspiration. Kētana, a student of Tikkana, wrote a grammar of Telugu (Andhra-bhūṣabhūṣaṇam), a dharmaśāstra work in Telugu (Vijñānavāriyam), and a book from the tale (katha) tradition (Daśakumāracaritram). The great kingdom of the Kākatiyas was not too far from where Tikkana worked. However, the Kākatiya kings were busy seeking elevation to the status of Kṣatriyas, a service only Sanskrit poets could perform for them. It is not surprising, then, that the beginning of the Telugu canon of Brahmanical poetry and the self-conscious orientation of an Andhra literary tradition should start in less powerful Nellore, rather than in the Sanskritized Kākatiya capital of Warangal.

Nannaya produced his Mahābhāratamu in the mixed prose-verse campū form—a narrative composition with poems in Sanskrit and indigenous meters interspersed with heightened prose (gadya). The meters themselves were already in use, as evidenced by the extant fragments in inscriptive and San-
skrit literary sources. What is striking, however, is the extraordinary brilliance shown in his use of the meters and the magical, almost mantra-like power achieved in his composition. One is compelled to say that it is Nannaya’s talent as a great poet that alone accounts for the recognition he received from the later generations; no political, social, or linguistic context could explain this achievement, which established for Telugu a level of poetic excellence it had never had before. The literary for Telugu was determined in favor of the campū primarily because Nannaya created a grand narrative in that genre. The varieties of meters Nannaya chose—some from Sanskrit sources and others from regional sources—gave his text a dynamism no other texts in either Telugu or Sanskrit offered.

Furthermore, the campū was excellently suited for public exposition. In a typical purāna performance, a trained performer of the text selects an episode or a section of the narrative, makes an opening statement in his own words, prepares the audience by relating the narrative context, reads one verse or a cluster of verses from the text, and comments on them in his discourse. The campū genre, with its mixture of verse and prose, allows the performer to read the verses, then take a break and add his own prose exposition on the narrative, incorporating as he finds appropriate such topical references that would make the discourse interesting to his audience. The structure of the text, in fact, has a built-in role for the performer, without whose improvisation it sounds somewhat incomplete.14

In writing campū, Nannaya created a genre that presupposes a community of listeners who sit at a distance from the performer and who receive the text as it is delivered to them as part of a public discourse. The text is not immediately intelligible to all listeners. Even to those few people well educated in Sanskritized Telugu it fails to appeal if they try to read it for themselves. It needs an interpreting performer for its very literary existence. This was new in Telugu experience. Until then, there had been only two types of texts—those sung in a group and those read privately by an individual. (Apparently all reading was reading aloud.)

Furthermore, Nannaya’s style of adapting from Sanskrit established the practice of not only rendering Sanskrit texts into Telugu but making them aesthetically and even ideologically independent of the Sanskrit originals. In this last aspect lies the success of those literary cultures that are generally Sanskritic, that is, the Brahmanical, puranic, and courtly cultures. In particular, Nannaya’s way of handling meters became a model for all later poets who adopted Sanskritic meters and the campū genre. Unlike in a Sanskrit stanza, where words have to end at the end of the line and at the caesura within the line, in Telugu a word may extend beyond the line and across

14. For a comprehensive treatment of this point, see chapter 2, “Purāṇa Viplavam,” in my Telugulo Kavítaveiplávita Svarátpam (Narayana Rao 1978).
the caesura. This convention, which Nannaya established, made it possible for Telugu poets to borrow a four-line Sanskrit meter, such as śārdūla or mat-tebha, and play with it in a variety of intricate syntactic twists not allowable in Sanskrit.

To illustrate this point, let us look at a couple of verses from Nannaya’s Mahābhāratamu, from the episode of the rājasūya (royal sacrifice) by Dharmarāja in the Book of the Assembly Hall. Śiśupāla, an enemy of Kṛṣṇa, was upset that Dharmarāja should honor this cowherd at such a glorious event in the presence of all the nobles and kings. Dharmarāja, the eldest of the Pāṇḍava brothers, tries to pacify Śiśupāla with gentle words:

Kṛṣṇa was the very source of the first born, Brahmā;
all the ancient texts sing of him
and people in all three worlds worship him.
Bhīṣma knows this and that’s why he advised
that Kṛṣṇa be honored here.
Listen to me—he is right.15

Dharmarāja’s sentences, which contain a series of words with long vowels, are slow-moving and drawn out. Even the name he uses for Kṛṣṇa—Dāmodāra—has two long vowels in it. The total effect of the verse is one of thoughtful and nonconfrontational explanation. But when all the gentle arguments offered by the senior Dharmarāja in favor of honoring Kṛṣṇa at the sacrifice fail to persuade Śiśupāla to allow the matter to be settled in peace, Sahadeva, the fourth of the five Pāṇḍava brothers, aggressively lifts his foot to crush his opponent and says:

“Yes, we honored Kṛṣṇa,
and we did so without
a trace of doubt in our minds.
You say you don’t agree.
So be it. But if any one of you has a problem with it,
here is what you get.”
And he furiously lifted his foot in the assembly.
Everyone fell silent in total fear.16

The original verse, in campakamāla, a four-line Sanskritic meter with twenty-one syllables on each line, fixed in a sequence of ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ , goes like this in Nannaya’s Telugu:

Unlike in Sanskrit, the Telugu use of this meter includes the regulation that the consonant of the second syllable on each line—in this case the consonant $d$, which is underscored—should be the same in all four lines. The caesura occurs at the thirteenth syllable on each line (represented here with syllables in roman font), which should agree with the first syllable on the line (also in roman font). Also unlike in Sanskrit, the caesura is not a place for a new word to begin.

This four-line verse includes two full sentences spoken by Sahadēva and a sentence in the voice of the narrator. The first sentence ends in the middle of the first line of the stanza and the second sentence continues into the second line. The long narrative sentence that comes after runs through the last two lines. The metrical structure of the verse does little more than hold the composition in a general pattern, allowing for a rich syntactic and phonotactic drama to play itself out in the verse. In oral rendition the verse has breaks at the end of its semantic units, rather than at the end of its metrical units as its Sanskrit cousin would. The following arrangement of lines graphically represents the way in which the verse is read:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{e} & \text{d} \text{apaka} \\
\text{n} & \text{arghya} \\
\text{m'} & \text{ac} \text{yutuna} \\
\text{k'} & \text{i} \text{cciti} \\
\text{m'} & \text{i} \text{ccina} \\
\text{d} & \text{ini} \text{k'} \text{em'} \text{odam-b} \text{adami} \text{ani} \\
\text{d} & \text{urjana-tvamuna} \text{palke} \text{d} \text{iri} \text{v} \text{irula} \text{mastakam} \text{bupa} \text{pain} \\
\text{id} \text{iyedan'} \text{a} \text{n} \text{cu} & \text{t} \text{a} \text{cara} \text{na} \\
\text{m'} & \text{ette-sabhan-sahad} \text{evu-} \\
\text{d} & \text{atticon} \\
\text{u} & \text{digi} \text{shah} \text{asadul-palukak'} \text{u} \text{n} \text{iri} \text{taddayu-bhita} \text{tulai}. \\
\end{align*}
\]

The line breaks here indicate several short and snappy units. The dominant sound in the first unit is the retroflex $d$, uttered with a plosive force. The next two units have the consonantal clusters $ghya$ and $cya$ uttered one after the other, followed in the third and fourth units by identical clusters of $cci$. The short lines express an aggressive, attacking voice, while the long line that follows demonstrates with its breathless frenzy of words the threat that is delivered. The last line collapses into itself with a series of short vowels, almost as if it is afraid of expanding fully—suggesting the fear generated in the assembly by Sahadēva’s show of aggression. This is a poem that is difficult to read slowly—every word chases the preceding word at a breath-
less speed until the last line, which is too quiet to be fast. The meaning of
the poem is captured in the contours of its sounds.\textsuperscript{17}

By using Sanskrit meters in ways that Sanskrit does not use them, and so
allowing a large variety of syntactic structures to be contained within the verse,
Nannaya gave the Telugu poem a performative richness unparalleled in San-
skrit texts. Nearly every poet after Nannaya followed his style of crafting verses,
making Telugu versification an independent craft in itself. Furthermore, Nan-
naya, and more particularly Tikkana, brought to the Telugu \textit{Mahābhāratamu}
an atmosphere closer to Telugu social life. The people in Andhra had long
believed that the original Sanskrit text should not be read inside the home
or from beginning to end in linear fashion, and that anyone who did so would
die. The text was felt to generate a disturbing power (\textit{ojās}) that needed to be
brought under control through appropriate rituals of pacification.\textsuperscript{18} In Nan-
naya’s measured voice and disciplined diction, and later in Tikkana’s repre-
sentation of the epic events in Telugu native idiom, the Telugu \textit{Mahābhāra-
tamu} found a wholesome reception as a text that communicated peace and
wisdom at home or in assembly or wherever people read it.

This vast transformation did not happen in a day, however. It wasn’t un-
til a hundred years after Nannaya that Tikkana addressed the fact that Nan-
naya left the Telugu \textit{Mahābhāratamu} incomplete. Moreover, evidence suggests
that not all Telugu poets were ready to accept Nannaya’s experiment in $\text{\textit{campū}}$. With intense vigor, Pālkuriki Sōmanāthudu, writing from Śrīśailam
in northwestern Andhra in the thirteenth century, set about producing a
text that presented an anti-Brahmanical, anti-caste, militant Šaiva ideology.

\textsc{The Literary Culture of Šaivabhakti}

\textit{Śaivabhakti} (devotion to Šiva), popularly known as Virashaivism or militant
Shaivism, was a combative, egalitarian religious movement along the lines
of Basavēśvara’s twelfth-century teachings in Kannada.\textsuperscript{19} Following Basavē-
śvara’s philosophy, Paṇḍitārādhyaḍu and Pālkuriki Sōmanāṭhuddu converted
people to a religion devoted to Šiva in his form as the mobile \textit{linga} (the phal-
lie form of Šiva). The adherents to this religion believed that they were re-
born when they were initiated to Shaivism. Once reborn, they denied their

\textsuperscript{17} I am indebted to the great Telugu poet Viswanatha Satyanarayana for his insight in reading
this verse. My recollection is from a talk he gave in Eluru on Nannaya around 1960.

\textsuperscript{18} Modern literary scholars speculate that Nannaya might have died before he completed
his Telugu rendering of the Sanskrit \textit{Mahābhārata} because he broke the taboo: he began his
translation from the beginning and wanted to reach the end. They also suggest that Tikkana,
who wrote fifteen \textit{parvov} (books), did not touch the small section of one half of the second
book left incomplete by Nannaya because he feared the same fate. Finally, Errāpragāda (four-
teenth century) completed the half of the second book left by Nannaya.

\textsuperscript{19} See Nagaraj, chapter 5, this volume.
caste and their birth parents, and they believed that every initiate belonged to the same high social status, irrespective of their previous identity. The Viraśaiva initiates rejected the god in the temple, the king who supported the temples, and the Brahman priests who served the temples. They carried their own god, the personal Śiva in the tinīga form, around their neck.

Sōmanāṭhūṛu, who preached an uncompromising and militant form of Virashaivism, preferred to use the dvipada (lit. two lines) genre, which is composed in two-line metrical units that can continue without any change in meter for as long as the poet chooses. A competent poet using this meter can create a variety of moods with a choice of diction and a change of tone. A dvipada text also allows a single reader to perform it for a group of listeners, or a group of readers to read it together for themselves; it does not require an interpreting performer. The experience that a dvipada reading gives its listeners is immediate, direct, and collective. The text does not create two distinct identities, a reader and a listener; it forces a merger of such identities and creates a community of singer-listeners. Obviously, Nannaya’s campū form, which presupposes a hierarchy of performer and audience, was structurally unsuitable to the egalitarian interests of the Viraśaiva religion.

Sōmanāṭhūṛu knew full well that he was creating a counter literary culture, one that was opposed to the campū both as an aesthetic and as an ideological form. He did not mention Nannaya by name, and therefore we cannot be certain whether he was responding to Nannaya per se or contesting a campū literary practice that might have been fairly well established by his time. In any case, Sōmanāṭhūṛu was determined to strike out on a different path.

In the two major works Sōmanāṭhūṛu composed in dvipada, the Basavapurāṇamu (The story of Basava) and Paṇḍītārādhya caritramu (Life history of Paṇḍītārādhya), he offers explanation for his choice of this genre and rejection of campū. In the Basavapurāṇamu he writes:

Common Telugu is sweet
and easier
than those high-sounding compositions
in prose and verse.
I will compose dvipadas—please do not
complain they are but
Telugu. Treat them as the Veda.\(^\text{20}\)

Again, in his Paṇḍītārādhya caritramu, Sōmanāṭhūṛu expresses his opposition to campū texts:

Texts written in prose and verse
dense with Sanskrit

are not suited for the people.

Common Telugu is lucid.

But then he realizes that campû has already established its superiority in literature. He wants to compete with it and write dvipada that can stand comparison with it:

I will compose dvipada equal in power
to those texts in prose and verse,
It is no less competent poetry.21

Somanâthuḍu not only aims at making a popular Viraśaiva narrative in dvipada; a close look at the metapoetic statements in his Paṇḍitârdhyacaritramu gives us a picture of a poet who aims for an alternative poetics, one based on a combination of Daṇḍin’s poetics and his own indigenous forms.22

He intends his composition to function as a kâśya according to Daṇḍin’s prescription for mahâkâśya: with all eighteen descriptive sections, all thirty-six figures of speech, all seventy-two emotional states.

There is not enough historical data for us to ascertain whether Somanâthuḍu succeeded during his time in his attempt to give Telugu literature a new definition. All we know is that dvipada remained a parallel tradition to campû, and that rarely did the same poet write a campû as well as dvipada poem. We also know that no other poet controlled dvipada meter with the dynamism and vigor, variety and strength, that Somanâthuḍu demonstrated in his Basavaprâṇam. In the hands of lesser poets it tended to be monotonous and repetitive.

As I discuss later, dvipada became a kind of second-class literature, practiced mostly by women and less learned, non-Brahman authors. It gained some recognition at the time of the Nâyaka courts of the seventeenth century, possibly because non-Brahmanical poetry reemerged during this period. But the Brahmical tradition had rejected dvipada over the four-century period preceding the Nâyakas. An oft-quoted legend illustrates the Brahmical resistance to dvipada. As told by Piduparti Somanâthuḍu (a close follower of Pâlkuriki Somanâthuḍu who preferred to rewrite the Basavaprâṇam in campû), King Pratâparudra, who ruled over Orugallu (present-day Warangal), noticed a group of Śâiva devotees reading the Basavaprâṇam in a Śiva temple. When he wanted to know more about it, they told him that the sinner Pâlkuriki Somanâthuḍu had written at length in dvipada with poor caesura. This was not standard and indeed had never been done before. Listening to their advice, the king left without paying attention to the reading. Other in-

22. See Paṇḍitârdhyacaritramu 5–6 (Somanâthuḍu 1990). Also see Pollock, chapter 1, this volume.
stances of Brahmanical disrespect toward *dvipada* include a statement by an eighteenth-century poet who likened *dvipada* to an old whore (*mudi lañja*).\(^{23}\) Sômanâthudu’s elegant pun on *dvi-pada* (two feet; also, two locations)—it keeps one foot on the earth and the other in heaven, and therefore assures a good position for its readers in both places—was soon forgotten.

Why did *dvipada* lose its status? We might speculate on some of the reasons. Apart from the reported Brahmanical opposition, which may indicate loss of royal patronage for *dvipada* but does not fully explain its loss of status, the Virâsâivas failed to sustain themselves as a community in Andhra, and their message of a casteless, egalitarian society did not long endure. The structure of caste order was more resilient than they imagined, and their revolution was too romantic to understand the social imperatives of endogamy and hierarchy that caste society comprised. Viewed from this perspective, the failure of Sômanâthudu’s literary invention was a failure of the community for which it was intended. His text needed an egalitarian, congregational community to use it, and when such a community disintegrated, the text fell into disuse too. The work served as an effective rhetorical device to keep a community together, but such a text does not communicate effectively to an individual listener or reader.

Earlier in this chapter we acquainted ourselves with the qualities and qualifications of a Brahmanical *purâna* poet. The *purâna* poet borrowed his theme from a Sanskrit source, and he legitimized himself by the authority of Sanskrit texts. Sômanâthudu did not indulge in any of these activities. His text was derived from the oral sources of his (Śaïva) community, the authority to compose the text was bestowed on him by his teachers, and his listeners were his friends—all of them were from his particular religious tradition, and not one of them participated in courtly culture. Under favorable conditions, the text would gain the acceptance of the community of devotees, who would elevate the poet to the status of a guru. It is clear that Sômanâthudu had conceived of an entirely different literary culture in which he as a poet, and his text as literature, would survive.

**POETRY FOR PLEASURE: KÂVYA CULTURE**

Nannecōдуду, who was perhaps a later contemporary of Nannaya, though we do not have hard evidence to determine his dates, represents the third strand, the *kâvya*, of early literary culture in Telugu. His *Kumârasambhavamu* is the earliest extant Telugu *kâvya*. But before examining *kâvya* as a genre in Telugu, let us follow what Nannecōдуду has to say about Telugu literature itself.

To Nannecōдуду we owe the clearest statement concerning the origin of

\(^{23}\) *Venugopalaśatakamu* 55 (Śaraŋgapāṇi n.d.).
Telugu literature, which also introduces the major classificatory distinction of literary cultures into marga (Sanskrit) and deshi (Telugu). To quote from his introduction to Kumārasambhavamu:

Earlier, while there was the marga poetry,
the Cāṇukya king and many others caused deshi poetry to be born
and fixed it in place in the Andhra land.24

A direct statement like this strongly suggests that the beginning of Telugu poetry can be marked with a specific date. Even though Nannecōḍu does not identify Nannaya or any other Telugu poet who preceded him, it is entirely possible that the Cāṇukya king he mentions is none other than Rājarājanarāṇḍra, Nannaya’s patron. However, what is more important in this statement is that for Nannecōḍu, all Sanskrit poetry is marga and all Telugu poetry is deshi. In contrast, for Sōmanāthudu, Telugu poetry that follows the Sanskritized forms of campū is marga and his dvipada is deshi. The two different ways of perceiving deshi, which I discuss later in this essay, are significant.

Nannecōḍu sees a distinct Telugu literary tradition, with its own purāṇas and other genres—as opposed to the Sanskrit purāṇas of Vyāsa and the kāvya of Kālidāsa, Bhavabhūti, Bhāravi, and others of that class.

Nannecōḍu sees himself as continuing that deshi literary culture by producing a deshi kāvya. He discusses his kāvya poetics in the Kumārasambhavamu; it is worth presenting them here in some detail:

But when ideas come together smoothly in good Telugu
without any slack, and description achieves a style,
and there are layers of meaning, and the syllables
are soft and alive with sweetness, and the words
sing to the ear and gently delight the mind,
and what is finest brings joy, and certain flashes
dazzle the eye, while the poem glows like moonlight,
and the images are the very image of perfection,
and there is a brilliant flow of flavor,
and both marga and deshi become the native idiom,
and figures truly transfigure, so that people of taste
love to listen and are enriched
by the fullness of meaning—
that is how poetry works, when crafted
by all real poets.

Skilled words, charming movements,
ornaments, luminous feelings, elevated thoughts,
the taste of life—connoisseurs find all these
in poetry, as in women.

24. Kumārasambhavamu 1.23 (Nannecōḍu 1968).
An arrow shot by an archer
or a poem made by a poet
should cut through your heart,
jolting the head.
If it doesn’t, it’s no arrow,
it’s no poem.  

This is indeed the most complete treatise on Telugu kāvya poetics one can find for the period. Nannecōḍuṭu is clearly presenting a poetics different from the literary interests of Nannaya or Sōmanāṭuṭu—both of whom had religious agendas. In contrast, Nannecōḍuṭu’s poetics are aimed at the aesthetic success of the poem. His theme in Kumārasamhavam is religious, but the text is primarily aimed at working as a poem, free from religious preaching. For Nannecōḍuṭu, poetry is an end in itself.

Again, for reasons that have still to be identified, no full-fledged kāvya such as Nannecōḍuṭu wrote appeared again in Telugu until Peddanna in the sixteenth century. Šrīnāṭuṭu made an attempt, two centuries after Nannecōḍuṭu, with his Telugu rendering of Śrīhaṭa’s Sanskrit Naṁsadhiyacartta (The life of Nala, Prince of Niṣadha). But as I discuss later in relation to problems of translation, he did not receive any recognition for this work. Or to put it more bluntly, his attempt was not acceptable to the literary community or to the community of patrons on whom he depended for support.

The group of upwardly mobile village heads and lesser chiefs in his vicinity were bent upon sponsoring religious purāṇa texts, which would elevate their status. Šrīnāṭuṭu kept advertising himself as the maker of Naṁsadham in Telugu, but to no avail. The work was apparently too secular to be of interest to his patrons. He resorted to writing purāṇas, the original versions of which could be traced to Vyāṣa.

COURT POETRY

Once kāvya found its mature expression in Telugu with Peddanna’s Manu- 
caritram (The story of Manu), the literary culture reorganized itself to accommodate the aesthetics of pleasure rather than of religious merit. 

26. Unfortunately, Nannecōḍuṭu was lost to Telugu scholars for a long period, until Manavallī Ramakṛṣṇa Kavi discovered him and brought the text to light in 1910. Discontinuity in scholarly tradition has resulted in loss of memory—many of the words Nannecōḍuṭu used fell into disuse, and their meanings are yet to be fully reconstructed.
27. One plausible reason is that during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries an elite leisure class had not yet taken shape.
28. Modern Telugu critics call this courtly kāvya genre prabandham. 
caritramu opened the way for an entirely new kind of poetry in Telugu. This is the poetry of refined composition, of a carefully worked texture of words chosen for their musical effect. Borrowed from the Marakandaeyapurana, the story of the Manucaritramu is a long and somewhat complicated affair, taking many twists and turns. However, Peddanna’s interest was not in telling a story. The story exists for the sake of his style, which is a matter of language and the various ways of enhancing the pleasure a reader may find in language. Peddanna in his exquisite composition creates a world of human pleasure so superior that the gods’ women themselves desire it: for Manucaritramu includes the story of Varuthini, a female gandharva (a class of divine dancing girls) who fell in love with a human, a Brahman man named Pravaruḍu.

In this story, Pravaruḍu, who suffers from wanderlust, is given a magic ointment for his feet that allows him to fly to the Himalayas. When the ointment is washed off in the snow, Pravaruḍu finds himself stranded. In this unhappy predicament, Pravaruḍu encounters Varūthini, who falls in love with him. Her attempt to attract Pravaruḍu’s attention ends in frustration: Pravaruḍu is clearly aware of Varūthini’s charms, but being committed to his life of rites and prayers, he rejects her advances and eventually makes his way home with the help of the god of fire, Agni.

The following verses describe Pravaruḍu’s meeting with Varūthini. Throughout this section Peddanna makes the erotic feelings of Varūthini explicit but deftly leaves Pravaruḍu’s feelings to the reader’s imagination, and even deliberately masks them. Pravaruḍu is first made aware that he is not alone in the remote mountain landscape by a characteristic fragrance:

One part musk enhanced by two parts camphor:
densely packed betel sent its fragrance,
masking all others, to announce
the presence of a woman.29

The fragrance is clearly indicative of a woman’s presence, but, in the next verse, Pravaruḍu apparently interprets it only as sign of the presence of people. The neutral surface meaning of janānvitamu (“there are people here”) allows Pravaruḍu the required cover not to exhibit his interest in women. But Peddanna follows this with a relentlessly provocative description of Varūthini.

He followed the fragrance
carried by the breeze, wave after wave,
thinking, “There are people here.”
Then he saw her,
a body gleaming like lightning,
eyes unfolding like a flower,

29. Women chewed betel nut compounded with musk and camphor in these proportions.
long hair black as bees,
a face lit up with beauty,
proudly curved breasts,
a deep navel—
a woman, but from another world.

By now it is clear that Peddanna’s description of Varūthini is what Pravaruḍu actually saw; the verse’s enchanting words indicate that Pravaruḍu, after all, notices every detail to the last curve of Varūthini’s body. Peddanna follows this beautifully refined verse—which moves with long lines, one metrical foot seamlessly flowing into the next—with a verse of short and quick lines creating a dramatic staccato effect.

She saw him. Stood up
and walked towards him, the music
of her anklets marking the rhythm,
her breasts, her hair, her delicate waist
trembling. Stood by a smooth areca tree
as waves of light from her eyes
flooded the path that he was walking.

Rarely do we find in purāṇa poetry such a sensuous delineation of the internal feelings of a woman in love as in the following verses, which gently but surely follow the mental movements of Varūthini:

First there was doubt,
a certain hesitation,
then a widening joy
as desires raced within her:
her mind was crying “Yes!”
her eyelids blinking,
for she was close to him now
and nearly paralyzed,
as her eyes, wide as the open lotus,
enfolded him in burning moonbeams.
Fluttering glances healed
her inability to blink,
and for the first time
she was sweating;
even her surpassing understanding
was healed by the new
confusion of desire.30
Like the beetle that, from concentrating

30. Being a goddess, Varūthini cannot blink, nor is she capable of sweating. Here she is transformed, in a movement seen as positive, from this divine state to a human mode of being.
on the bee, becomes a bee,\textsuperscript{31}
by taking in that human being
she achieved humanity
with her own body.

This remarkable passage suggests that being human is superior to the dull and unchanging state of the gods, who are forever young, do not blink or perspire, and of course do not die. In a later passage, Varūthini even regrets her inability to die and considers her immortality a punishment, and she envies human women who can kill themselves when they fail in love.\textsuperscript{32} But to continue with the present narrative: Varūthini gives a playful description of her life by way of introducing herself, but Pravaruḍu is not impressed. His mind still set on his wife and children, he only asks her for directions to go home; he must return to see to his fire rites and sun worship. Varūthini is desperate: she wants him in her embrace rather than in his village. Finally, Varūthini unfolds her philosophy of life, love, and ultimate bliss. In one of Peddanna’s memorable verses, she states:

When the heart unfolds
in love, when it finds release from within
in undivided oneness, like a steady flame
 glowing in a pot, when the senses attain
unwavering delight—
only that joy
is ultimately real.
Think about the ancient words:
\textit{ānandō brahma}, God
is joyfulness.\textsuperscript{33}

Peddanna’s delightful treatment of this love story eclipses the rest of the long narrative, which tells of the birth of Manu, ostensibly the focus of the book; and ever since its composition, \textit{Manucaritramu} has been read mainly for the story of Pravaruḍu and Varūthini. Peddanna’s text was emulated as the greatest example of \textit{kāvya} and served as a model for poets such as his near contemporary Rāmarājadūṣṣānuḍu. Critics claim, however, that Rāmarājadūṣṣānuḍu exceeded Peddanna in the refinement and musical quality of his language.

After Rāmarājadūṣṣānuḍu’s \textit{Vasucaritramu}, \textit{kāvya} entered the realm of pure language, a world made of sounds and their meanings, independent of material reality. Creating a language that splits its meaning and envelops

\textsuperscript{31} A proverbial statement of transformation through mental obsession (\textit{bhramarakītāyā}).
\textsuperscript{32} On this theme and for a richer study of Peddanna’s text, see Shulman 1995a.
multiple meanings in one set of words in an elaborate, sustained pun is a special feature of a new kind of kāvya, called śleṣa, that developed during the late sixteenth century. Such a text can be read as two or even three different narratives. Pingali Sūranna’s Rāghavaṇḍaṇyamu, a kāvya that tells the story of the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata simultaneously in one text, is the most famous of this genre.

We know that Nannaya and Tikkana professed religious purity: Nannaya described himself as one who never told a lie, and Tikkana is said to have performed a Vedic sacrifice to attain a level of personal perfection. But the kāvya poet is free from the burden of morality. All the legends of the kāvya poets show them as enjoying the pleasures of wealth, food, and women—especially women. These legends extol the poets’ sexual joy and even suggest that they were good poets because they were good lovers. For instance, the patron-king Kṛṣṇadevarāya of Vijayanagara (r. 1509–1529) reputedly once asked in his court:

Why do Dhūrjāti’s Telugu poems overflow with sweetness incomparable?—

The court jester, Tenāli Rāśmaliṅgaṇu replied:

I know why. It comes from constant drinking to quench his pain at the honeyed lips of wild young courtesans who drive the world insane.34

Respect for the poet in society was high, and he earned the right to enjoy a leisurely and comfortable life. In fact, he needed one. The following poem, attributed to Peddanna, lists the comforts a poet needs to write a poem:

Without a quiet place, without a betel nut flavored with camphor sent by my lover through her dear friend as messenger, without a good meal that I find delicious, and a swinging cot, and men of sensibility who can tell what is good from what is bad, and the best of scribes and performers who will understand the intent of my work—unless I have all of these—can anyone possibly ask me to compose poetry?35

Such images created a glorious impression of the court poet as a creator of pleasure and beauty, which also freed him from the normal rules of mun-

dane life. His control of language gave him a power over the world equal only to the power of the creator god—if anything, the poet’s creation was better than the god’s because it was entirely pleasurable. The kāvya poet inherited from the purāṇa poet the power of the word to alter reality, which he used to protect and elevate the status of his patron. Yet he was not just a storyteller like the purāṇa poets who came before him; he was a story maker. He created with his words an edifice of extravagant grandeur that excited his listeners, who spent hours reflecting on each exquisitely crafted verse the poet produced. The kāvya poet was also realistic in his descriptions. Under the pretext of the eighteen different descriptions prescribed for a kāvya, the Telugu poet explored the life around him like an anthropologist giving a thick description of an event. By way of illustration, I quote a few verses from Śrīnāthuḍu’s Śivarātrimāhātmyamu. Here the poet describes the state of pregnancy:

Day by day, her pregnancy advanced,  
to everyone’s delight—though she was  
getting tired. Yawn followed yawn,  
her eyes grew languid and unsteady.  
From time to time she was reminded  
of the fatigue she used to get  
from making love on top.  
She moved slowly, heavy  
with the child, like a raincloud  
that has drunk the waters of the sea  
just before the monsoon.

The description of the pregnancy is followed by the celebration of a rite to protect the pregnancy, a description of the childbirth, and then, a description of the delivery room in the household:

In the birth chamber, still impure from the birth,  
the women were busy: putting a pot with white marks  
at the head of the bed, drawing designs from white ashes,  
sprinkling white mustard, preparing offerings,  
mixing salt with neem leaves, setting up a fresh bed  
out of rattan, burning buffalo horn,  
blessing, applying sandal and oil,  
cooking the kāyamu balls36 for the new mother,  
singing and making jokes.

One woman slapped on the wall a mixture of camphor and sandal.  
Another held a frog upside down outside the birth chamber.

36. A concoction of pepper and other ingredients that mothers who had recently delivered ate for several days after the birth.
Wearing a yellow sari, a woman worshiped the goddess of poverty. With fresh paint of lime and turmeric, a lovely girl drew the sun and the moon on cloth. Another draped an aging ram with a snakelike garland, a head on either end. One sprinkled ghee. One set fire to a snake’s discarded skin.

Similarly, Peddanna’s description of the royal hunt in his Manucaritramu elaborately portrays the kinds, pedigrees, and names of dogs used in hunting; the hunting methods; and the style of cooking meat in the middle of the forest. With extraordinary realism in content and a meticulous formalism in style, kāvyā produced a literary world simultaneously close to life and distanced from it. This kāvyā world was suitable to create, authenticate, and sustain a glorified image of a real person. While purāṇa was essential to elevate the status of emerging chiefs, kāvyā delighted the more established courts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Kāvyā, however, continued the purāṇa style of addressing the patron and describing the patron’s family in terms appropriate to their status. In fact, kāvyā glorified the patron to such a degree that he became more than a sponsor or a supporter of the poet; he became an integral part of the poem.

Their sustained scholarly competence, grammatical and metrical skills, and especially their erudition in the Sanskrit texts gave the kāvyā poets both a stature and a symbolic power that enabled them to attain the high status Sanskrit poets had enjoyed all along. Gradually, Telugu kāvyā poetry replaced its Sanskrit equivalent and acquired a legitimizing power of its own. Kāvyā became synonymous with poetry, and unless one composed a kāvyā, one was not a poet. Purāṇa poetry continued to be composed, but kāvyā ruled the world of poetry to the extent that it became inseparable from the court. Even when there was no real court, kāvyā created it in poetry. In fact, kāvyā poetry elevated the small patron to the imagined status of a king. Perhaps this is a special feature of Telugu literary culture, not achieved to quite the same degree in other South Asian literatures, where bhakti, or devotional, poetry more often took and held center stage.

POETRY IN THE TEMPLE

An entirely different literary culture began with Annamaya (1424–1503), a poet associated with the Venkatašvara temple at Tirupati. Apparently patronized by a rich, stable god—perhaps richer and definitely more stable than

37. The inauspicious and threatening Jyeṣṭhādēvī, the goddess of poverty and the elder sister of Lakṣmi, was worshiped to avert her influence over the baby.

38. All of these acts were intended to protect the mother and child from evil. Śivarātrimahātmyamu 2.50–51, 70–71 (Śrināthudū 1993); translation, Narayana Rao and Shulman 2002: 129, 132.
any king of the period—Annamayya enjoyed a quiet, long life. According to
the copperplates on which his songs were inscribed and preserved in the
temple, Annamayya sang one song a day to his deity. The entire corpus of his
padams (songs) was grouped into two sections, śṛṅgāra (erotic) and adhyātma
(spiritual). While it is very possible that the grouping reflects an editorial
decision made by his son—who apparently paid for the expensive inscrip-
tions of his father’s songs—it still has an internal logic.

The literary culture surrounding the Annamayya tradition of songwriting
bears an entirely different ethos from the courtly poetry, which created
a patron in the process of its production. Located in the insulated atmos-
phere of the temple, Annamayya was unaffected by, if not uninterested in,
the political atmosphere around him. He was not dependent on ascendant
rulers and military leaders to support his literary work. He was also shielded
from the courtly intrigues and personal politics of competing poets. His sit-
uation allowed him freedom in literary composition. For one thing, he sang
in a meter of his own creation. His language was also free from the strict
grammatical regulations of kāvya poetry (which were later made even stricter
by Appakavi). Without a patron who sought social and political status from
the act of sponsoring poetry, Annamayya was his own grammarian, his own
literary theorist, and his own master. His legitimacy as a poet did not depend
upon the mention of a great poet, grammarian, or guru of the past. In fact,
a sāstra (a book of rules for later poets to follow while making padams) was
later produced in Annamayya’s name by his grandson, who along with other
members of the Annamayya family helped institutionalize Annamayya as
the master of the padam tradition in Telugu.39

Annamayya’s family members—his son, his grandson, and others—con-
tinued the padam genre, but due to its performative nature, padam gradu-
ally came to be absorbed in the musical tradition of south India, rendering
it unavailable for literature and literary theory. Not until recently, when mod-
ern scholars began to discuss Annamayya as a poet, has the literary world in-
corporated his work into its vision of Telugu poetry. Premodern literary cul-
ture considered Annamayya a singer-composer rather than a poet. However,
the texts of Annamayya’s large number of songs and his grandson’s biogra-
phy of him written in dvipada meter, as well as Annamayya’s own songs,
strongly suggest that Annamayya and his followers were actually attempting
to create a parallel literary culture based on the temple and not the court.

A story told about Annamayya clearly classifies him as poet of a new tra-
dition, which in retrospect we call the temple tradition. Sāluva Narasim-
harāya, a king of Vijayanagar (r. 1487–1490), commanded Annamayya to

39. In his Sankritanalaṃsana, Tālānapaka Cīnatūrūmālācāryulu, the grandson of Anna-
mayya, claims that his work is a translation of a Sanskrit original that Annamayya wrote. See
Sankritanalaṃsana 13–17 (Cīnatūrūmālācāryulu 1935).
compose a song for him similar to the ones he had sung for the god Veṅkaṭeśvara. When the poet refused, the king had him chained and thrown into prison. Annamayya, the legend says, appealed to the god in song, and the chains miraculously fell away.40

An opposition between courtly poets and temple poets finds a striking articulation by about the sixteenth century and continues unabated into the nineteenth century. Probably the best illustration of this opposition comes down to us in the legends about Pōtana. Legends are created about this poet who belonged to the fourteenth century to fit him into the discourse of temple versus court. Pōtana wrote in the campū genre, a style in which the court poets specialized. There is no hard evidence that he had antagonistic relations of any kind or that he was pressured by any king to dedicate his book to him. Nonetheless, legends about this poet represent him as one who steadfastly resisted a local king’s request for the dedication of his Bhāgavatamu. When Pōtana refused the demand, legend has it, the king had the poet’s manuscript buried in the ground. Later the manuscript was excavated; partly worm-eaten, it was completed by two of Pōtana’s disciples. A verse in oral circulation states the popular esteem in which Pōtana was held for his moral strength in standing up to a king’s power and insisting on dedicating his poetry to Hari, the god Viśṇu:

Rather than giving his poems to lowly kings
and receiving money and mounts and dwellings,
then aging and dying and suffering
the hammer blows of the God of Death
this man, Bammera Pōtarāju, has, of his own will,
uttered his poem to be given to Śrī Hari
for the sake of the welfare of the world.41

Yet another legend about Pōtana tells that while he composed his Bhāgavatamu, Sarasvati, the goddess of poetry, appeared before him with tears in her eyes, fearing that he might, like all other poets, sell her to kings. An oral verse describes how Pōtana reassured her:

Beloved daughter-in-law of Viśṇu! Wife of Brahmā!
O my mother! Why do you weep so that the tears
fall to your breasts from your eyes dark with collyrium?
I will not, out of hunger, sell you, neither in thought
nor word nor action, to these meager kings of Karnataka
who are nothing but merchants. Trust me, Sarasvati!42

40. See the afterword by Narayana Rao in Heifetz and Narayana Rao 1987.
These stories also portray Śrīnāthuḍu, the prototypical court poet living in luxury, attempting to persuade Pōtana, who lives in poverty and tills the earth, to dedicate his poem to the king and get good rewards in return. To enhance the melodrama in these legends, Pōtana is represented as the husband of Śrīnāthuḍu’s sister. Pōtana is said to have responded to Śrīnāthuḍu in perfect verse:

Instead of giving the virgin poem, tender as the fresh buds
of a young mango tree, to evil men, rather than eat
food earned through trade in women, what does it matter
if good poets become peasants, what does it matter if they
dig up roots in the depths of the forest so that they may
feed themselves and their wives and their children?\textsuperscript{43}

In the tradition of temple poetry, the poet was not only pious and poor, but also modest. Unlike the court poet, who proudly announced his greatness in literary arts, the temple poet humbly presented himself as a servant of the god, not very learned, who prayed to the god to speak through him. A temple poet’s poem was the god’s work; it was blessed by the god. A legend about Pōtana says that when he was stuck in the middle of writing a poem, he took a break and went out for a walk. When he returned, he found that the god himself had come, disguised as Pōtana, and completed the poem. A similar legend is told about Yathāvākkula Annamayya, the author of a Śaiva devotional text, \textit{Sarvēśvaraśatakamu} (Hundred verses for the god of all). Yathāvākkula Annamayya wrote each verse on a palm leaf and threw it into the river; when a poem came back against the current, he understood it had been accepted by Śiva. Yathāvākkula Annamayya made a vow to himself that if any poem did not return from the current, he would kill himself. Inevitably, a palm leaf he threw into the water did not return. As he got ready to commit suicide, a shepherd boy came bearing a palm leaf and announced that it had just come floating in. The leaf did have a poem on it, but not the one Yathāvākkula Annamayya had written. The poet realized that the god was blessing his work by contributing a verse of his own to the collection.

Legends such as these elevate the temple poets to a level of religious piety that is beyond human fault. The poets are revered as the chosen voices of the deity and their works are read for a devotional experience and not aesthetic pleasure alone. Temple poets typically even denied that they were making poetry; simile, metaphor, or other figure of speech, and aesthetic mood (\textit{rasa})—man-made as they are—are incapable of capturing the essence of the ultimate. For instance, Dhūrjaṭi says:

\textsuperscript{43} Heifetz and Narayana Rao 1987: 151.
How can you be praised in elaborate language, similes, conceits, overtones, secondary meanings, or textures of sound? They can not contain your form. Enough of them! More than enough. Can poetry hold out before the face of truth?

Ah, but we poets, O God of Kalahasti, why don’t we feel any shame?  

Pōtana even denied any respectability to poems unless they include praise of the deity:

A poem that praises god
is pleasant like the lake in heaven
with golden lotuses and geese.
A poem that does not praise god
is like a gutter in hell filled with dirty water—never mind if it is written well.

As we have observed in the case of Annamayya himself, in the culture of temple poetry, the distinctions of patron, grammarian, and reader do not exist. The poem is the poet’s direct communication to the deity; the poet sings to his god and to no one else. In this highly simplified mode, everything collapses into a devotional utterance. The narrative in such texts as Pōtana’s Bhāggavatamu loses its story value; it is utilized as one more occasion to remember the name of the god and his deeds. All the characters of the story get reduced to two: the god and his devotee, the poet. The reader/listener enjoys the text only to the extent that he or she can identify with the poet’s voice. In the purāṇa and kāvya cultures, by comparison, the reader/listener is associated with the patron, to whom the poem is addressed.

When the poet has the almighty god himself as his patron, he finds protection beyond what any earthly power can provide. This situation also allows the poet an opportunity for reflection and nourishes a subjectivity not available in a courtly narrative. The poet is now an individual looking deeply into himself and exploring himself, often in a confessional mode, with the god as listener. A genre that allows for such an expression of the self is the śataka (lit. one hundred), a loose collection of approximately one hundred verses in a single meter, tied together with a vocative, usually the name of the deity to whom the verses are addressed. Śātakas became popular after the sixteenth century, and we find countless poets composing them. In addition to providing a subjective space for introspection and self-criticism, this

45. Pōtana 1964: 1.96.
genre also gave poets a certain freedom to voice criticism of society, kings, and other politically powerful people. With his Kālāhastiśvarasatākamu (Hundred verses for the god of Kālāhasti), Dhūrjaṭi led the way with respect to both. The result is amazing: The poet emerges as a free individual, confessing his sins and censuring the sins of the society, playing alternately the sinner and the sage.

Temple poetry as a literary culture that gave rise to opposition to kings and other worldly patrons, to grammarians and court poets, each of which developed into a regular trope, has yet to be seriously studied. I briefly situate the broad features of these tropes in the larger context of a cultural politics in which the king who ruled the land was perceived as inseparable from the deity in the Viṣṇu temple of the area. Viṣṇu was viewed as the sovereign of the land, the ultimate sārvabhuma, or universal emperor. In opposition to this conceptualization stands the Brahmanical king, the king according to the discourses in the Brahmanical texts on moral order (dharmaśāstra). These texts say that the king only shares an aspect of Viṣṇu, that he belongs to the class of the Kshatriyas, who are a notch below the Brahmans in ritual status. The two modes of power, one stating that the king is the deity Viṣṇu and the other saying that the king embodies only an aspect of Viṣṇu, have important ramifications for the status of Brahmans. In a world where the king is Viṣṇu himself, the Brahman becomes the servant of the king; whereas the Brahman is ritually superior to the king if the latter is a human being viewed as an aspect of Viṣṇu. The differences between these two views of kingship, fundamentally unresolvable, occasionally surfaced in the court kārṣyas during the reign of Kṛṣṇadēvarāya but came into sharp focus in the seventeenth century, when warriors/traders from the Bālija caste acquired kingship of the southern kingdoms of Madurai and Taṇjavūr.

LITERATURE FOR THE GOD-KING IN HIS COURT-TEMPLE

During the height of the Nāyaka empire in Madurai and Taṇjavūr in the early seventeenth century, it was a common practice for the king’s son to compose a dvīpada poem equating his father with Viṣṇu. Among these works were Acyutābhyudayamu (The victory of Acyuta), written by Raghunātha Nāyaka about the life of Acyuta Nāyaka; Raghunāthanāyakābhyudayamu, by Vijayarāghava Nāyaka, Raghunātha’s son; and Vijayarāgahavābhyudayamu, by Vijayarāghava’s son. In describing the father/king as the god himself, the son was able to depict the king’s love life, a topic that a son would never otherwise discuss. Once the king was equated with Viṣṇu, courtesans who

---


47. Of these three, only the Raghunāthanāyakābhyudayamu is available now.
served the king followed with their own compositions praising him. In a universe where king and god were assimilated into one person, the poet's one role was to devotedly serve him. This development opened up new possibilities for literary patronage. For one thing, a king could be both a ruler and a poet, writing about his own father who was also king; that is to say, the king could be both the patron and the hero of the poem. The hierarchy within the literary world was now:

god-king
poet as servant-devotee
readers who are also servant-devotees

Such a dramatic redefinition of the status of the king led to sweeping changes in the ideological order of social classes. To begin with, the poet as servant-devotee of the god-king no longer needed to be a Brahman, or a man, either. The Brahman male scholar-poet, who took pride in his learning in Sanskrit and who had earlier elevated the low-caste status of the king to the varṇa status of Kshatriya or its equivalent, that of a clean Shudra, by dedicating his kāvya text to the king, was now marginalized. In his place, accordingly, we find non-Brahman male poets and courtesans elevated to the status of court poets. The dividing line between temple and court was erased, and so also the opposition between the temple poet and the court poet. The subject of the court poem was now the king himself, whose love-life was described in courtly kāvya style, except that it was now kāvya composed in the non-Brahman dwīpada meter rather than the grand, protean structures of the campu favored by the Brahman poets of earlier courts.

The revolutionary reconceptualization of king as the god Viṣṇu gained even more significance because the Nāyaka king also happened to be a Balija, a left-hand caste of traders/warriors, according to the local south-Indian social order. This caste, according to the Brahmanical conceptualization of social order, is Shudra, the lowest of the four varṇas—Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra.

LITERATURE IN PUBLIC SPACE: THE CÂTU WORLD

So far we have examined the roles of the poet, the patron, and the different genres of texts in different literary cultures in Telugu. But what can we say about the role of the listeners and readers, those who enjoyed the texts? What was their image of the poet? What do we know about their understanding of poetry, their evaluation of various poets, and their criticism? A rare and valuable source for reader response to Telugu literature is offered by the cÂTU, the occasional verse independently circulated in oral tradition and quoted in conversations among literary communities. This new development began
to crystallize around the seventeenth century. By this time, Sanskrit was accessible to literary communities not as a language of gods, devabhāsa, but as one more language of poetry, in addition to Telugu. The cāṭu poems related to imagined stories around great kings and poets who adorned their courts in remembered history: Kṛṣṇadēvarāya and Peddanna for Telugu; King Bhōja and Kālidāsa for Sanskrit. Other Telugu and Sanskrit poets, such as Dhūrjaṭi and Bhavabhūti, parade across these poems along with other kings, courtesans, and ministers. The people who quoted these verses did not belong to the courts, nor were they superior scholars; they were ordinary educated people in cities, towns, and villages. They were intelligent, sensitive, and well-informed readers who reflected upon a rich literary body of texts. Verses in this tradition are available in the hundreds, many of them thematizing the popular understanding of a given poet’s work. These verses best illustrate the role of poetry in what might be called a public space.

We considered earlier the scholar-poet as defined by Appakavi and described in the kārya tradition. We are familiar now, too, with the bhakti poet as defined in the temple tradition. The cāṭu tradition built on both of these concepts of poets and created a distinctly different kind of poet who had the power to make and unmake reality, who was superior to both the king and the grammarian, and most of all, could see things no one else has seen. The following story about Bhimakavi, popular in the cāṭu tradition, describes the cāṭu poet richly.48

Bhimakavi’s mother was a childless widow living at her parents’ home. One day she went with a group of pilgrims to the Śivarātri festival at Dakṣārāma, the temple to Bhimēśvara Śiva. She saw her fellow pilgrims praying to the god for boons. Skeptical, she said to the god, “If you give me a son like you, I will give you a tank of water as oil for your lamps and four tons of sand for your food.” The god was pleased at this challenge and visited the widow that night; he slept with her and promised her a son, whom she was instructed to name after him.

She had a son and called the boy Bhima. One day his playmates mocked him for being a bastard. He ran to his mother and threatened to hit her with a rock if she did not reveal the name of his father. She said, “That rock in the temple [the līṅga] is your father; go ask him.” So the boy went into the temple and threatened to hit the god with a rock. Bhimēśvara Śiva, afraid, appeared before him in his true form and announced that he was, indeed, the boy’s father. “In that case,” said the boy, “from now on, whatever I say must come true.” The god granted him that boon.

One day there was a Brahman feast in the village, held behind locked doors. Bhimakavi was not invited. He cursed the Brahmans in the following verse:

Full of their own greatness, these lousy Brahmins insulted me and threw me out of their feast. I’ll turn their fried cakes into frogs, their rice into lice, and all the side dishes into fishes.

When the Brahmans, witnessing these transformations, begged his forgiveness, Bhimakavi sang a second verse:

I’m Bhimanna, son of Lord Bhima himself, born into the great Vemulavāda clan. Now these Brahmans know me, and look at me with respect. I take back my curse: let their food become food. 49

Famed in the cātu tradition as “capable of cursing and blessing” (sapānugraḥa-samarthuḍu), Bhimakavi is said to have cursed kings and destroyed and restored thrones. He also made trees dry up and dry wood sprout. The word of the cātu poet is never empty of effect; it changes, or indeed creates, a reality in conformity with the vision implicit in the poet’s speech.

The cātu world is also playful and funny, as is evident from the many stories told about Kṛṣṇadēvarāya and his court poets. According to one story, Kṛṣṇadēvarāya caught sight of his beloved queen Cinnadevi as she was drying her hair after a bath. Her beauty was irresistible to the king, who sneaked up from behind to kiss her. As he moved her hair to bring her face close to him her sari fell off and she shyly tried to cover herself with her hand, which was adorned with gem-studded bracelets and rings. Arriving late to the court, the king presented to his poets the following samasya (puzzle) in the form of one line in a possible four-line verse:

\[\text{visphurita-phaṇā-mani-dyutula polpāgu nāga-kumāruḍōy anan}\]

as a Cobra-Prince might spread his great gem-encrusted hood to guard a hidden trove

Mukku Timmana, the poet famed as having been sent as a wedding-gift to the king by Cinnadevi’s family, completed the verse and resolved the puzzle.

\[\text{varudu ceruṇa paṭṭinamu valo' aṭu viḍīna kāṇta sīguśeṇ urutara-ratna-didhitulan' oppedū dāpali kēla mīyagū karam’ amaren karamb’ apūḍu kāmanidhānamu gāciyunna vi-}
\[\text{spūrīta-phayā-mani-dyutula polpāgu nāga-kumāruḍōy yanam.}\]

When the lover pulled her sari and it came loose,

in sudden shyness she moved to hide
her treasure-house of love
with her left hand, luminous with vivid stones—
as a Cobra-Prince might spread
his great gem-encrusted hood
to guard a hidden trove.50

True to the ċātu aphorism that a poet sees things that even the sun’s rays can
not penetrate (ravi gāñcanīkā kavi gāñcunē kada), the poet saw the events in
the royal bedroom without being there and skillfully converted them into a
universal love poem without mentioning names.

Another feature of the ċātu world is that the poet defies authority and
ridicules pomp and pride—especially if it is overbearing. According to one
story, Peddanna, who was Kṛṣṇadēvarāya’s court poet and proudly wore the
victory anklet (gandapendēramu) given by the king himself in recognition of
the poet’s unparalleled excellence, asked Tenāḷī Rāmāṇḍādu:

vadalaka mr̥yun āndharakavi vāmapodambuna hēmanātpuramb’
uditamayiraṇkaṇṭhanadāktulam ēmani pālku pālkurā.

What does the golden anklet say that never stops jingling
on the left foot of the poet of Andhra and its voice is like
a lofty peacock? You! Tell me what does it say?

The king had a concubine, Gudiyala Śani, to whom he gave lavish gifts for her
skills—more lavish than he gave to any of his poets. Tenāḷī Rāmāṇḍādu an-
swered Peddanna in a verse that precisely captures the tone of the question:

gudiyalasānī nunnani trikōṇamun ‘andali bhāgyarēkha ni-
nuduṭanu lēdu lē’d’anucu nūru vidhambula nokki pālkurā.

It says in a hundred ways, that the line of fortune
which crosses the soft moans of Gudiyala the whore
isn’t there for you on your forehead, it’s not there!51

The ċātu culture paid close attention to the quality of language and the
nuances of its uses and misuses even by the great poets of the time. Peddanna,
it is said, used a rather inelegant phrase, amavasaniṣī (dark moonless night),
instead of the usual amavasyanīṣī, apparently because the meter required a
phrase with all short syllables. Tenāḷī Rāmāṇḍādu parodied the poet with
the following verse:

emi tini septivi kapitamu
bama pāḍi veri ṭuccakaya vadi tini sepitō

umetah kaya tini sepitō
amavasa nisī yanina māta alasani pedanā.

What did you have for breakfast,
Alasani Pedana,
before you made this verse?
Probably the squash
that makes poetry into mush.\textsuperscript{52}

This verse comically removes long syllables and consonant clusters right through—including the poet’s name at the end, which it changes from Alasani Peddanna to Alasani Pedana—to ridicule the poet for his use of one compound without its usual long vowels and consonant cluster.

Tenali Rāmaḷingaḍu is an imagined poet created by the cātu world. Modern literary scholars, unmindful of the nature of cātu tradition, mistakenly thought this poet really existed and began to identify him with the late-sixteenth-century poet Tenali Rāmakṛṣṇaḍu. The stories told about Rāmaḷingaḍu’s outrageous literary pranks in Kṛṣṇadēvarāya’s court show that the cātu tradition was acutely aware of the vanity, verbosity and greed of the court poets.

In the imagination of the cātu world, King Kṛṣṇadēvarāya emerges as a full-time literary patron with eight poets, the aṣṭadīgajas (Guardian-elephants of the eight directions), seated around him in his court. The aṣṭadīgaja legend has grown so strong that it even survived the critical eyes of modern historians, who began listing the possible members of this group. Although the aṣṭadīgajas did not exist in history, they are nonetheless real and enduring products of this literary culture.

In the cātu world, to sum up, the poet has a superhuman access to knowledge and the creative control to alter reality at will. The king in this world is a creation of the poet and remains in power only so long as he continues to respect, appreciate, and patronize the poets. The hierarchy of the literary universe is redrawn as follows:

\begin{verbatim}
    poet
    king
    admiring readers
\end{verbatim}

Because the poet rules this world as a nīrāṅkuṣa—an elephant that no goad can restrain—the grand, controlling role of the grammarian, as Appakavi envisaged it, is thrown out. The poet sees everything, knows everything, and can envision past, present, and future. The poet does not suffer any opposition from the scholar, or even from the king.

\textsuperscript{52} Narayana Rao and Shulman 1998: 123–24.
THE QUESTION OF LITERARY LANGUAGE

Śaivabhakti poet Pālkuriki Sōmanāṭhulu had raised the question of the opposition of Telugu and Sanskrit—an issue in Telugu literary culture that continued for a long time. In the skillful hands of a court poet like Śrīnāṭhulu, Telugu comfortably accommodated a heavy input of Sanskrit words, even large Sanskrit compounds—larger than any commonly used by Sanskrit poets themselves. The sudden appearance of Sanskrit and Sanskritic purāṇas in Telugu during Śrīnāṭhulu’s period (mid-fourteenth to mid-fifteenth century)—after a serious Teluguizing attempt by a major poet like Tikkana—is a phenomenon that is still to be explained. Part of the story may lie in the contemporary impact of the wars with the armies of the Delhi sultanate and the fall of the Kākatiya empire in the mid-fourteenth century. The Brahmanical reaction to this historical dislocation was to return to the religious past and revive Sanskrit, in response to the Persian that was used by Śrīnāṭhulu’s time as the court language of the Bahmanī sultans in the Deccan, as well as the sultans of Delhi. This was perhaps less a confrontational stance than it was a sympathetic reaction to the emergence of Persian as the new elite’s language of culture, irrespective of their religious affiliation. We know that at least one of the Brahman patrons of Śrīnāṭhulu, Beṇḍapūḍi Annamantri, was a competent scribe in Persian.

The kāśyapa poets, especially Śrīnāṭhulu and Peddanna, made the use of Sanskrit the hallmark of a learned poet. In this they were following a path laid down by Nannaya himself, but they extended the expressive range of Sanskrit beyond the limits of a narrative text. Given to the joy of composing and relishing each verse individually, extracted from narrative sequence, the kāśyapa poets constructed monumental compositions of skill and scholarship. Here, for example, is Peddanna describing the Himalaya mountains in his Manucaritramu. The text in italics is Sanskrit; the Telugu is limited to the few words and suffixes in roman font.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ata jani kaṅcē bhūṃisaruḍ ambara-cumbi-śiras-sarjharī-} \\
\text{pāṭala-mukumarḥur-luṭḥad abhāṅga-tanrāṅga-myrtāṅga-nisvāna-} \\
\text{sphūta-naṭanāṃstṛīpa-paripḥulla-kālāpa-kalāpi-jalamun} \\
\text{kaṭaka-carat-karuṇu-kara-kampita-sālamu śīṭa-sailamun.}
\end{align*}
\]

The prose passages of campū compositions, among which the verses are interspersed, the poets packed densely with breathtaking, jaw-breaking San-

54. Manucaritramu 2.3 (Peddanna 1984).
skrit words, unlimited as to length. Apparently the kāvya intended for scholars requires a demanding style.⁵⁵

The old opposition to the Sanskritic mārga, inaugurated by Pālkuri Sōmanātha, had lost its edge: now the question of Sanskrit versus Telugu was to be settled on the basis of style rather than the opposition between dēśī and mārga. Poets who used dēśī genres, like dvipada and padam, also used Sanskrit words extensively; and poets who adopted mārga genres, like the campū, began to reflect on the problems of using heavy Sanskrit words in their works. However, the perception remained that dēśī is all Telugu and mārga is Sanskritic; and the styles are sometimes so different that one wonders if both were truly written in the same language. This example from Annamayya, written in the dēśī genre of padam, is worth contrasting with the campū verse by his contemporary Peddanna, just quoted:

\[
\begin{align*}
  \text{kadal \ 'udīpi \ niv'adāgū \ talacu \ virālaka} \\
  \text{kadalēni \ manasuku \ kālam \ ekkaḍādi.} \\
  \text{dāham \ ānaguna \ venuka} \\
  \text{tattvam 'e'rigedan \ anna} \\
  \text{dāham \ ā'nagu \ tā} \\
  \text{tattvam \ 'e'm'erugu.}
\end{align*}
\]

You say you want to bathe when the waves subside.
Where is there an end to the endless mind?
You say, "Let me quench my thirst, and then I'll find the truth."
You cannot quench your thirst.
How can you know truth?
Is there an end?⁵⁶

In this padam only seven words have Sanskrit origin—four of which, niru, manasu, dehamu, and tattvamu, are in the first stanza, which is quoted here—yet all five of them are so well known in Telugu that the average speaker thinks of them as Telugu words. The padam is accessible without commentary and without gloss, which makes its reception immediate. Annamayya wrote just a few padams in Sanskrit, but even these are not beyond the capacity of an educated Telugu audience. The opposition is not between Sanskrit and Telugu, as it is often perceived to be, but between arcane and ac-

⁵⁵. The kāvya poets in Telugu clearly followed Śrīharṣa, who states towards the end of the proverbially difficult Nāsadhiyacarita: “Deliberately I placed / tight knots in places / so no fool enters here with a false pride / to deny the worth of my work. / May it be a joy to float on the waves of comfort / this poem provides / for the good student for whom / a well-served teacher unties the knots.”

cessible diction. Poets who enjoyed making their works available only to the very learned chose arcane diction, be it Sanskrit or Telugu, while other poets made their writings available to the average educated person by choosing well-known words of both Sanskrit and Telugu origin. The court poets, for instance, always tried to present themselves as scholars and wrote learned (praudha) poems, while the temple poets wrote unpretentious and accessible compositions.

THE POLITICS OF TRANSLATION

It is curious that in a language used to “translate” a large number of Sanskrit texts, there is no word equivalent to “translation.” The Sanskrit-derived anuvādamu, now popular in modern Telugu, is itself a loan translation and was never used in this sense before the twentieth century. Nannaya, in rendering Vyāsa’s Mahābhārata into Telugu, did not claim to be “translating” the Sanskrit text. The poet reports that his patron, the eastern Cāñkya king Rājarājanarāndruḍu, said to him:

With all your learning, compose in Telugu a book that makes clear what Kṛṣṇa Dvāipayana spoke — the proven meaning bound to the Mahābhārata text.57

Even a cursory comparison of the Sanskrit and Telugu texts will show that Nannaya did not follow the original in detail: he left out large sections and condensed others, and it is a matter of opinion whether or not he always captured the meaning of the original. From the internal perspective of the tradition, the question of translation, in the modern sense, never arises. Tikkana, who completed Nannaya’s Mahābhāratamu, calls his predecessor the creator of Telugu poetry, not a translator of a Sanskrit text into Telugu:

The one who produced, so skillfully, the first three books, starting at the beginning, was Nannaya Bhaṭṭu—the master of Telugu poetry, the Creator himself, great in spirit.58

As the tradition developed, poet after poet retold Sanskrit texts in Telugu. Styles changed, meters changed, genres changed, and narrative gave way to descriptive texts, but the presence of a Sanskrit source remained nearly constant, providing a legitimacy that a wholly new work might lack. (Perhaps here we have one definition of a tradition.) Rāmarājahūsanuḍu uses a fas-

The idea that a theme of the poet’s own making is not as valuable as one borrowed from an ancient source has an aesthetic justification. Old themes acquire a depth and fullness from their sustained life in the collective awareness of the community. Mythological and historical themes (ṣīthaṣa and purāṇa), and also tales and legends, have the advantage of having grown in the culture where the audience has invested its imagination for generations. While this advantage is common to any story of the past, the marga literary culture in Telugu further stipulated that the source should be Sanskrit.

By the eleventh century, when literature in Telugu began to take shape, Sanskrit already had three well-established textual categories: Veda, puraṇa (which included ṣīthaṣa and sāstra), and kārṣya. Based on the binary division of sound, śabda, and meaning, artha, of the word, literary convention assigned these three categories to three different classes: Veda is classified as śabdapradhāna, a sound-primary text, that is, it is valued primarily for its phonic value. Purāṇa and sāstra are classified as arthapradhāna, meaning-primary texts, valued for their meaning alone. In contrast, kārṣya is classified as śabdārthapradhāna, a text that shows an inseparable union of sound and meaning, each critical in its own right. The implications for translation are clear: Veda by definition cannot be translated or even retold, while kārṣya, too, is completely resistant to translation. Only sāstra, ṣīthaṣa, and purāṇa are available for translation; indeed, since their meaning can be constituted in different ways, they may be thought of as requiring repeated telling and reinterpretation. By the eleventh century, such an understanding of the textual world in Sanskrit was generally accepted and shared by elite scholars in Telugu.

It is in this context that we should understand the fact that a large number of ṣīthaṣa and purāṇa retellings in Telugu have appeared since the eleventh century, while, with one major exception, no Sanskrit kārṣya has been translated. The exception is Śrīnāṭhuḍu’s Śṛṇgāranaisadhama (The prince of Niṣadha in love). A translation of Śrīharṣa’s Sanskrit Naisadhiyacarita, Śrī-

60. See Pollock, chapter 1, this volume.
nāṭhuḍu’s work is a magnificent accomplishment, in that it translates a poem considered in theory to be untranslatable. Śrīnāṭhuḍu appears to be aware of the difficulty. In a rare statement of his method of translation, unfortunately misread by recent literary scholars, Śrīnāṭhuḍu eloquently states the problem of translating poetry. It is worth quoting in full:

The erotic poem made by the great poet Bhaṭṭa Harṣa, the poet who traveled through paths unseen by other poets, is here rendered into Telugu in a way that makes use of the special features of the language to touch the hearts of great minds: following the sound (śabda) of the text, aiming at the poet’s intention (abhīprāya), keeping the poetic feeling (bhāva) in view, supporting the mood (rasa), embellishing the figures of speech (alakāra), taking care of propriety (aucitya) and eliminating impropriety (anaucitya), closely obeying the original. 61

The most crucial words in the statement are “following the sound of the text.” When the original words in the text are kept—that is, if the texture of the original is retained—problems crop up in translation. Sanskrit words, and even compounds, can be imported into Telugu with little change except for the final case suffixes, as we can see in Śrīnāṭhuḍu’s large-scale incorporation of Śrīharṣa’s phrases. For example:

Sanskrit: vicitra-vākeitra-śikhaṇḍi-nandana
Telugu: vicitra-vākeitra-śikhaṇḍi-nandana

Sanskrit: suvarṇa-daṇḍaiṇa-sitāpatrīta-jvalat-protāpavali-kirti-maṇḍitaḥ
Telugu: tapanīya-daṇḍaiḥa-dhavalatapatrītoddanda-ṭejaḥ-kirti-maṇḍalunuḍu

The first phrase is incorporated verbatim into Telugu with only a change in the final case suffix—u plus ṇdu—to grammatically assimilate it. In the second example, the substitutions of the words tapanīya for suvarṇa and dhavalā for sitā, as well as the rewriting of jvalat-protāpavali as uddanda-ṭejaḥ, are apparently intended to serve the metrical requirements of Telugu verse. Note, however, that the substituted words are close Sanskrit equivalents to the words in the original Sanskrit compound. It is this re-Sanskritization of the original Sanskrit text that makes Śrīnāṭhuḍu’s translation subtle and deftly original. The replacement of one Sanskrit phrase for another makes the Telugu text different from the original and also close to it.

The sound sequences of one language may (and often do) produce unacceptable meanings when reused in another language. The alternative, restating the meaning of one language in the words of another language, has its problems too: whether the meaning “restated” was really the same as the one in the original language, or whether a different language “creates” a different meaning. Even in the case of such closely interacting languages as San-

61. Śyāṣṭirānāsaṇadhamu 8.202 (Śrīnāṭhuḍu 1967).
Sanskrit and Telugu, where a large body of Sanskrit vocabulary has been directly brought into Telugu, there are inevitable problems in reproducing words as they are. For a somewhat simple example, let us take a line from the Sanskrit poem *Gītagovinda* (1.38), rich in verbal density.

\[\text{candana-carcita-nilakalebara-pita-vasana-vana-mali}.\]

Sandal paste adorns his dark-blue body, yellow clothes, and forest flowers.\(^{62}\)

The line may be directly imported into Telugu by shortening the final vowel of the compound that forms the entire line. But there is a problem of taste: the Sanskrit word *kalebara* means body, but in Telugu it means the body of a dead animal, a carcass. It is difficult to prevent the well-established Telugu connotation from seeping into this compound in a Telugu context. A good poet would want to change the word for an equivalent.

Śrīnāthudu refers to his *Śīngarānaisadhamu* as an original poem, not a translation. He calls himself the creator of the poem in Telugu and lists this work as the foremost of his achievements in literature. The modern literary critical establishment treats his work as a masterly creation of great scholarship and incomparable creative skill. However, legends in oral literary tradition tell us a different story. Although rejected by recent literary historians as historically unreliable, these legends, honored by tradition, have a value similar to literary criticism, and they are worth considering as serious representations of the collective wisdom of the literary community. One of these legends tells us that when Śrīnāthudu showed his translation to Sanskrit pandits, they laughed at him and said, “Take your *du, mu, vu, and lu* [Telugu nominative case endings] and give our Sanskrit text back to us.”

Why would the literary-critical tradition reject and ridicule such a brilliant text, written by one of the established masters of Telugu literature? Before we answer this question we should note that the oral legend about Śrīnāthudu was not, as is naively held in popular belief, contemporaneous with Śrīnāthudu but belongs to a seventeenth-century *cātu* tradition. We should also refer to the discussion earlier in this chapter of the two conventional divisions of literature in Sanskrit and Telugu into *mārga* and *dēśi* as presented by Nannecōḍdu and Pālkuriki Sōmanāṭhu. Sanskrit pandits wanted to retain the special status of Sanskrit by maintaining, as Nannecōḍdu did some five hundred years earlier, that all Sanskrit literature is *mārga* and all Telugu literature is *dēśi*. They would have had no problem if Telugu poets had followed Pālkuriki Sōmanāṭhu and developed an internal hierarchy among themselves, elevating the Telugu poets who followed Sanskritic meters to *mārga* status. However, times had changed and the boundaries of *mārga* and

\(^{62}\) Note that the lexical question at issue here arises only because of the eastern Indian spelling (*kalebara*) of the Sanskrit word *kalevara* (which does not appear in Telugu).
deśī are not defined by language anymore. Up until this time Telugu poets had stayed within the Telugu tradition, borrowing from Sanskrit texts that were classified as meaning-primary, their claims to marga status within the Telugu tradition had not been objectionable to Sanskrit pandits. But now Śrīnāṭhūdū was presented as not only having violated a taboo and entered a realm of Sanskrit kept beyond the limits of regional language traditions, but also having sought the approval of Sanskrit pandits for his audacity. This legend symbolizes a new conflict between Sanskrit and Telugu that emerged around the seventeenth century and an effort on the part of Telugu poets to break the language-based boundaries of marga and deśī. It is this new claim to status—the claim that a Telugu text can be marga in its own right, not just within a Telugu literary context—that is objected to in the oral legends about Śrīnāṭhūdū’s Telugu rendering of Śrīharṣa’s Naśadhiya-carita.

However, texts that were translated were not limited to Sanskrit sources alone. In premodern South Asia, with its multiplicity of literary traditions and languages, multilingual scholarship, and contacts between poets of different regions and languages, texts moved across languages and poets borrowed from other poets in countless instances. Elsewhere I have suggested that the concept of a mother tongue is a foreign, post-nineteenth-century idea in India, and that the opposition between languages in premodern India was hierarchical rather than regional. All other languages were desabhāsās (languages of regions), and Sanskrit was devabhāsā (language of the gods).63 The nationalist identification of languages with regional populations, and the positing of language boundaries for regions, have produced the category of Telugu people, a category that ignores the fact that people living in the area now known as Andhra spoke and/or read other languages, such as Kannada, Tamil, Oriya, Persian, and Urdu, as well. An extreme form of this language nationalism is reflected in the disappearance of multilingual literati. Very few scholars, if any, are literate in other regional languages, and it has become a common practice among regional scholars to take a nationalistic pride in the superiority and originality of the poets of their own literary tradition, even though a closer examination would reveal a lively mutual borrowing and translation from one regional language to the other.

Nowhere is the politics of language so clearly visible as in the area of translation. While a large number of premodern Telugu poets cited their source as one or another Sanskrit text, almost none acknowledged a non-Sanskrit source. We know, however, that many Telugu poets borrowed from Tamil, Kannada, and perhaps other regional language sources, as well as from other traditions within Telugu. Having a Sanskrit source elevated a regional-language text and the borrowing poet to a higher status and therefore was

invariably mentioned, while a regional language source never was. Illustrious examples are from Dhūrja, who used Tamil Śaiva narratives from caṅkam sources in his Kālahastisvaramāhātmyamu (The greatness of the god of Kāla-
hausti), and Kṛṣṇadēvarāya, who borrowed from Tamil Vaiṣṇava narratives for his Āmuktamālāda (The girl who gave her garland to God). Neither of
them ever mentioned their sources. It is the absence of identification of non-
Sanskrit sources that led to the mistaken impression that Telugu literature
was an independent island, uninfluenced by other regional languages, with
only Sanskrit as its originating source.

The practice of not mentioning a non-Sanskritic source extends also to
telugu poets who borrowed from other Telugu sources. When Telugu poets
who wrote in the mārga tradition translated from dēsī Telugu poets, they
did not mention their sources. For example, for his mārga text Haravilāsamu
Śrīnāthuḍu translated Sriyaḷa’s story from Pākuriki Sōmanāthuḍu’s dēsī text
Basaavpurāṇamu but did not mention his source. However, when Piduparti
Sōmanāthuḍu translated Pākuriki Sōmanāthuḍu’s Basavaapurāṇamu into a
mārga text with the same title, because, for him, it was a sacred text, he metic-
ulously mentioned the name of the original author and paid respect to him,
confirming the general practice that a poet mentions his source when the
text he borrows from comes from a higher tradition. There are a few minor
instances of a verse or two that
Śrīnāthuḍu translated from famous Sanskrit
authors without mentioning their names, but the question here is not about
such minor instances.

There is another interesting instance that we might call masked transla-
tion. This is best illustrated by Śrīnāthuḍu’s Bhimēsvarapurāṇamu, which the
poet claims to have retold from the “Godāvariṇaṇḍa” of the Sanskrit Skān-
dupurāṇa. Recent scholarship has argued that the extant Sanskrit “God-
āvariṇaṇḍa” is in fact a translation of Śrīnāthuḍu’s Telugu text, whether
by Śrīnāthuḍu himself or by some other poet of his time. It is not possible
to determine the truth of Śrīnāthuḍu’s claim that this text is the original from
which he had produced his own version. It is equally plausible that the San-
skrit text used by Śrīnāthuḍu was lost, and that some time later a new “ori-
ginal” was created that was based on Śrīnāthuḍu’s Telugu text. Certainly such
masked translations of other Telugu works into Sanskrit do exist, and they
have invariably been claimed as the sources for the Telugu works. One can
understand the motivation for such claims in the context of the legitimizing
power of Sanskrit and the lack of status for regional language works. Notably,
this practice prevails only with texts that are held in reverence by one reli-
gious community or the other. The Śrīnāthuḍu text, for instance, is revered
as the foundation story of the great Śiva temple known as Dākṣārāma, in the
present-day East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh. Apparently Śrīnā-
thuḍu’s Telugu version of the story would not have attained the same status
as a Sanskrit version attributed to Vyāsa.
The need to find a Sanskrit original for every Telugu literary work in the mārga tradition reached absurd proportions in premodern Andhra. We find in Vallabharāyaṇa’s Kṛdābhīramamu (The joy of sex), a satirical play from the fifteenth century, that the author invents a Sanskrit play called Premābhīram (The joy of love), attributes it to a second-rate poet (Rāvipati Tripurāntaka), and claims that his Kṛdābhīramamu is a Telugu rendering of that Sanskrit original. The intention, obviously, is to ridicule the convention of finding a Sanskrit original for every Telugu literary creation.

Once a translation was made, however, the originals themselves ceased to be read as much as the Telugu renderings. Before the twentieth century, no literary critic compared the translation with the original in order to comment on the quality of the translation. Faithfulness to the original was never an issue. Sanskrit originals apparently provided legitimacy, while Telugu renderings were actually read. As Appakavi quotes from a Sanskrit text he attributes to Nannaya:

> Learned people love the language and dress of the region where they live; given to the pleasure of poetry, they enjoy poetry in their own language and do not care much for other languages.

64

It seems an appropriate acknowledgment of the complex language situation that when Appakavi makes this statement, he needs the authority of the Sanskrit language and of Nannaya’s name.

Two points emerge from this discussion: First, faithful rendering of a text is not a requirement for a good translation. It is the meaning of the text that is reconstructed, and no attempt is made to follow the original slavishly. A good poem, translation or not, is original by definition. The author (kavi) of the poem is the maker (kartā). Second, and closely related to the question of translation, is the accusation of plagiarism that has infested modern conceptions of premodern literary traditions in Telugu. In fact, in premodern traditions originality was never deemed to reside in the theme or the narrative outline of a text. Instead, it consisted in the skill exhibited in making a new variation on available material.

THE CULTURE OF WRITING AND THE PROPAGATION OF BOOKS

In a remarkable historical statement, Nannecōḍuḍu asserted that the Cāḻukya kings “caused [Telugu poetry] to be born [puṭṭiṇci]” at a time when there was only Sanskrit poetry in the world. We know now that there was enough Telugu poetry around in the form of oral songs and metrical poems (recorded in inscriptions), but we have to conclude that Nannecōḍuḍu did not recognize any of this as literature. For him, only a composition by a poet made

available in writing was literature, and he marked the beginning of Telugu literature with the Cāḷukya king (probably Rājarājanārēndrāṇu) because the court poet (probably Nannaya) wrote poems. In keeping with his values, he exhorts at the end of his kāvyā:

Read my poem, listen to it, copy it;
god Śiva, goddess Pārvatī and their son Kumāra
will grant your wishes.65

Pālkuriki Sōmanāthuḍu adds a similar request at the end of his dvīpada poem Panḍitārādhyaarcarīramu (Biography of Panḍitārādhyaaru), clearly suggesting that even a poem in dvīpada, which was primarily meant to be sung, was written, preserved, and propagated as a book. So also, epic narratives like Bhāskararāmāyaṇam, which were meant to be read out before an audience, include, as acts meriting the god’s grace (phalaśṛuti) the copying and saving of the work in book form, along with its reading. The reception of poetry still took place in the oral-aural mode, and a poet most often read out his poem in performance; but literary status was reserved only for a poet who was literate, and written compositions alone attained the status of literature.

A general diction of orality continued in literary discourse for a long time, until almost the twentieth century. The verb “to write” (vrāyu) meant to copy a text, and a scribe was called vrāyasakāḍu, writer. Poets made (cēppu), spoke (ceppu), constructed (nirmiñcu), built (kaṭṭu), and even wove (allu) texts, but only copyists “wrote” them. Chapters of books were called uchhvāsa or āśvāsa, after the word for breath, śvāsa. A well-read person was called a bahuśruta, one who listened (that is, learned) a lot. An illiterate person was derogatorily called a nirakṣarakukṣi, one who doesn’t have syllables in his belly. Poets asked the goddess of speech, Sarasvatī, to stay on their tongue. Even the literary-critical terms belonged to an oral tradition, for example the emphasis on dhārā, a free-flowing style, which was in the first instance a value in oral composition.

Nannaya’s written style was already one that required a reflective reading to appreciate the inner meaning of a tightly structured narrative, and not one that appealed to an immediate understanding, helped by repetitive lines, as oral-based styles did. But the surface texture of his verse appealed to the ear that was used to a flowing, harmonious style. His statement about his own poetry insightfully distinguishes and names these two levels: prasannakathākalitalārthāyukti, an expressive narrative embedded with meaning, and aksara-ramyatā, harmony of syllables. The first of these, he said, appealed to learned people (kavīndrulu) of good mind (sāramati), and the second to the others (itarulu).

After Nannaya, the contest was not between orality and literacy, but between two kinds of orality—the orality of the literate, scholarly poet (pandita), and the orality of the nonliterate or barely literate poet (pamara). We can see the contrast keenly in Tikkana, whose verses do not usually sing. In a way, he was a very different poet, with a strictly written style in which only an occasional verse really flows. Indeed, the tradition itself recognized and commented upon this feature. According to legend, Tikkana made a pact with his scribe, Gurunátha: the scribe would write without stopping or asking the poet to repeat what he had said, and the poet would dictate without pausing to think. If the scribe should fail, his hand would be cut off, and if the poet were to fail, his tongue would be cut off. The arrangement worked smoothly until a point in the text where the internal narrator, Sañjaya, was describing the epic battle of the Bhäratas to Dhrărśra. Here Tikkana became stuck in the middle of a verse, unable to complete it. In despair, he cried out to his scribe, “What can I say, Gurunátha?” (ēmi seppudun gurunátha). The scribe kept writing without pause, as usual, and the poem worked: the poet’s cry completed the verse precisely according to the meter and meaning. The nasal ending of the verb, seppudun, requires that kurunátha (lord of the Kurus; i.e., Dhrărśra) become gurunátha—but only in written Telugu. Tikkana reached for his sword to cut off his tongue when the scribe explained to him that all was well with the verse.

This story, disarmingly simple in appearance, offers powerful commentary on the further transition from oral to written that Tikkana represents. The narrative seeks, on the one hand, to rehabilitate him, making him look like an oral poet—since at this time poetry was still required to have a flowing quality (dhāra) to it. Tikkana’s verses actually do not have this quality; on the contrary, he was extending the literariness (the stylistic feature of a written poem) beyond Nannaya. On the one hand, this story attempts to make Tikkana one of the oral poets, dictating his verses to a scribe without taking a break. Gurunátha’s origins in the potters’ caste reinforce this claim, since the potters are closely linked to the singing of texts. On the other hand, it also implies a recognition of the innovation that Tikkana had introduced into the tradition. The verse in question works only when sung; in writing, kurunátha becomes gurunátha, the cry of despair to the scribe; in recitation, it remains kurunátha, an address to the Kuru lord. One can see, in this vignette, the whole burden of the transition that Tikkana articulates for this tradition.56

But the transition did not stop with Tikkana. Poets through the centuries appear to have negotiated between oral performance and literate composition. The totally oral style of versification—in which the texture is loose and

56. Adapted from the preface to Narayana Rao and Shulman 2002: 17–18.
replete with filler words to accommodate metrical necessities—began to be rejected as bad composition. A legend from the cāṭu tradition tells how Brahmān scholar-poet Tenāli Rāmalingaṇḍu dismissed Mollā, a potter woman, when she presented her poetry to him.

You make poems as if weaving a basket to hold fish
out of any old bamboo strips.
Could any Brahmin put up with
your howlers?\(^\text{67}\)

Śrīnāṭhūdu denounced oral poets by including them in the category of bad poets who are conventionally censured in the preface of ḷāvyas:

Some poets become addicted: they write poems
as if their tongue is a stylus,
their mouth a blank palm leaf,
and whatever they know
is black ink stirred in the inkpot of their minds.\(^\text{68}\)

Oral poetry still had its appeal, especially for its performance value in public. In a world of intense competition for the attention of the patron, oral versification was a powerful skill that gained fast recognition. Poets prided themselves on spontaneously composing for the occasion perfectly acceptable metrical verses, and a poet who could not come up with a verse in the moment often did not win the day. A long extemporaneous poem by Peddanna in the court of Kṣṇadēvārāyaṇa, which demonstrates how poetry should be composed in Telugu as well as in Sanskrit, is said to have earned for the poet a golden anklet from the king, symbolizing the poet’s victory over all the rival poets. The entire cāṭu culture of poetry celebrated oral versification and even ridiculed scribes who claimed perfect writing skills. However, Appakavi strongly favored the written poem when he declared that a good poem requires well-thought-out words and meaning, which an oral composition does not have. His dictum “a poem cannot be rushed” (nilukaḍa vaḷaḷu kṛti\(^\text{69}\)) drove the last nail into the coffin of orality.

An entirely non-oral poetry, which we might call concrete poetry, became popular as the literary culture swung toward graphic literacy, adoring the power of the inscribed syllable. Poems worked into interesting visual shapes, known as citrakavītram, acquired the favor of poets. Illustrations of verses shaped as a conch, a sword, a cow’s tail, and other forms were elaborately

\(^{67}\) Narayana Rao and Shulman 1998: 181–82.
\(^{68}\) Bhimēçvaparāyana\(^\text{1.12}\) (Śrīnāṭhūdu 1958); Narayana Rao and Shulman 2002: 120.
described in texts on meter. This is the culmination of a scholarly trend that began as early as Nannecōḍudu, who wrote the first concrete poems in his Kumārasambhavamu. This trend encouraged poets to make verses with more than one meaning; verses that could be read as Telugu from beginning to end but would be Sanskrit if they were read backwards; verses that contained other verses in a different meter; and verses that were shaped like a coiled snake (kuṇḍalināga), sword (khadga), bracelet (kanākana), a pair of drums (mardala), the marks made on the earth by a urinating cow (gōmutrika), and so on. Such skills were regarded as the hallmark of a competent poet. Appakavi included in his work a large number of examples of concrete poems. Figure 6.1 is of a kuṇḍalināgabandhamu, a poem written in the form of a coiled snake. A prayer to Kṛṣṇa, the poem reads from the head of the snake to the tail, with the syllables separated by spaces. When written out, the poem contains eighty-four syllables, but in the figure we see only sixty-four, since twenty of them are where the snake crosses itself, and therefore are to be read twice.

We have come full circle. Appakavi made a valiant effort to establish a literary culture that he imagined was sanctioned by the first poet, Nannaya. Competing literary cultures of śaivabhakti, temple, cātu, and oral varieties were rejected in favor of constructing a canon of courtly poetry subjected to the strict standards of the texts on metrics and grammar. To be more exact, Appakavi did not reject those varieties of poetry totally—he accepted them if they conformed to the exacting standards of the grammar and meter. Appakavi held sway for about two hundred years. His influence grew stronger as more and more prescriptive texts on metrics and grammar were written. The label “poet” now invariably implied the scholar and was rarely applied to a nonscholarly poet, as may be seen in the title kavi (poet) at the end of Appakavi’s name. Grammars and books on meter were written with a view to establishing standards in the literary use, but not other uses, of language. How such a uniform, authoritarian literary standard sustained itself through the works of scholars emerging from small villages and towns, during a period when no major political formation exerted its influence and there were no royal patrons of literature, is one of the puzzles that remains to be solved. The fact remains, however, that modern Telugu literature, which

began during the early decades of the nineteenth century, was able to estab-
lish itself only after successfully critiquing and denouncing Appakavi.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Histories of Literature and Biographies of Poets

House.
Chenchayya, Pandipedi, and M. Bhuja. Rao Bahadur. 1928. A History of Telugu
Krishnamurthi, Salva. 1994. History of Telugu Literature from Early Times to 1100 A.D.
author.

Laksmikantam, Pingali. 1974. Āndhra Sāhiyā Caritra. Hyderabad: Andhra Pradesh
Sahitya Akademi.
Laksmikantamstri, Siṣṭa. N.d. Vijayanagarāndhra Kavulu. Vijayavada: Nirmala Pub-
lishers.


Laksmirajānana, Khaiṇāvalli. 1958. Āndhra Sāhiyā Caritra Saṅgrahamu. Hyderabad:
Venkataramana Publications.
Nāgayya, G. 1983. Telugu Sāhiyā Samiṣa. 2 vols. Tirupati: Niyaparisothaka Pracu-
ranalu.

Rajaniṇāṇa Rāvu, Bāḷāṇtrapu. 1975. Āndhra Vāggėyakāra Caritramu. 2d ed. Vijayavada:
Visalandhra Publishing House.

Sēṣayya, Cagaṭi. N.d. Āndhramakavitaranigini. 14 vols. Kapilaswarapuramu: Hindu Dhar-
masastra Grantha Nilayamu.

Akademi.

Srinivasacarya, Bommaṇaṭi, and Bāḷāṇtrapu Naṅnikāṇa Rao. 1983. Telugu Cātuvu,
Puṭṭu Paṅsottarālu. Madras: Kalyani Pracuranalu.

Śtriṃamūrti, Gurujāda. 1913. Kavi jivitamulu. 3d ed. Madras: Vavilla Ramaswamy
Sastrulu and Sons.

by author.

Akademi.

University Press.

Ramaswamy Sastrulu and Sons.

Vireśaliṅgam, Kandukuri. 1917. Āndhra Kavula Caritramu. Vol. 1. Rajahmundry: pub-
lished by author.
**Primary Sources**

[Names of Telugu authors appear with the Telugu nominative case endings.]


Errāprاغāda. See Nannaya.  


Tikkana. See Nannaya.


Secondary Sources


Genre and Society

The Literary Culture of Premodern Kerala

Rich Freeman

This essay rethinks aspects of the literary culture of premodern Kerala through anthropological reflection on the social and pragmatic contexts in which those genres of textual practices we today call Malayalam literature were apparently produced. I characterize my project in this way because the Kerala materials I survey have led me to reconsider some of the basic assumptions of existing literary histories. Therefore, by way of introduction, I sketch a quick inventory of some problems that Kerala literature raises and the theoretical concerns that inform my reasoning.

The writings that concern me here were produced in what is now the modern linguistic state of Kerala from roughly the twelfth to the eighteenth centuries C.E. While this body of work is treated in the literary histories as “Malayalam literature,” it is in fact not at all clear that composers of these works saw themselves as contributing to a primarily written corpus of canonical works, nor that they regarded the language varieties and hybrids in which they composed as aspiring toward a regionally standardized and uniform language medium. Until the gradually stabilizing emergence of the term “Mala-
yalam” over the last few centuries, there was in fact no distinctive name for
the local language; it was just bhāṣā, “speech,” in its many varieties.

While models for high literature (kāvya) were certainly available from Sanskrit, and some genres of vernacular textual production apparently aspired to
these, others clearly did not. Yet many of these latter genres, more reliant
on local Dravidian language and meter, seem just as evidently literary in their
crafting of artfully formalized language registers as their Sanskritic coun-
terparts. What they apparently lacked were the metatreatises of grammars
and poetics that made some Sanskritized genres the special objects of sec-
ondary, learned discourse. The rootedness of these Dravidian works in the
wider and more popular institutions of Kerala society, however, gave them
perhaps as much force in advancing their own aesthetic and social values as
the more self-consciously Sanskritic productions had in advancing theirs. We
thus encounter, on the one hand, marked disjunctions in the aesthetics, form,
language, and cultural outlook that defined certain extremes of literary ac-
tivity in this society; on the other hand, we find that these very differences
triggered experiments in mediation and synthesis that generated, through
time, an array of intervening linguistic and poetic forms. This seems to me
to require an analytic perspective in which the assumed unity of an established
literary corpus, “Malayalam literature,” is rendered problematic, along with
the essentialized model of language that underwrites it. Rather than assum-
ing the unity of this literature at the outset, I therefore propose instead to
proceed through differently constituted and socially positioned genres of tex-
tual practice, charting their trajectories and interactions through the differ-
ent contexts and evaluative forums that I hold to comprise literary culture.

The forums of literary culture (or cultures) in Kerala were mainly per-
formative, and while my preference for talking of textual practices (rather
than just texts) is theoretically motivated, there are also substantive grounds
for enjoining this approach in the Kerala setting. It would, in fact, misre-
present the historical facts of the production and self-representation of Ker-
ala’s textual cultures to confine them to the modern West’s ideology of the
text as an inscriptions object designed for silently individual consumption.
Most of the “texts” (the actual artifacts) that constitute the region’s “litera-
ture” (the artifactual assemblage) seem not to have been primarily intended
as objects for contemplation through private reading, but rather as scripts
designed to guide and motivate cultural performances. While this thorough
entanglement of Kerala’s literary history with its performance arts has been
generally acknowledged, I believe there is more of theoretical importance
here than is usually realized. Of crucial methodological significance is the
way this reconfigures our grasp of the literary and what constitutes it.

Most immediately, modern default assumptions concerning the relation and boundaries between written and oral literatures need to be seriously re-considered. But I regard this as just one, surface aspect of the need for profounder reflection on the relation of text (as textual practice) to context. I cannot elaborate on this issue here.\(^2\) A fundamental implication of my approach, however, is that texts do not just reflect or represent the extratextual activities of their surrounding culture; rather, texts are immanent activities and practices of that culture, and work to constitute it as well.\(^3\) Textual practices, and the genres that order them, may thus alternately maintain, refigure, or actively change their social contexts.\(^4\)

One of the dominant forms of social context in which the literary cultures of Kerala functioned was, of course, the institution of caste. Caste was articulated through the intersection of religious institutions with performative ones at both the elite and popular levels. Given this articulation, and the creative potential that textual performances had, genres in this literary culture could alternately support and contest the social order of caste, both subtly and overtly, and might do so in partly religious terms. This social hierarchy and its contests were further mapped across the earlier-noted disjuncture in literary aesthetics, where the values of a Sanskritically scholasticized Brahmanism both confronted and accommodated the more Dravidian complex of popular forms. The shifting and hybrid formations of language and genre that emerged through time could thus mark the oscillations of cultural contest and synthesis in local social relations.

Similarly, at the level of the political relations between Kerala’s constituent realms, genres of literary practice helped define and articulate a wider cultural sphere. The same creative powers of texts to shape literary context in local domains of performance might, through successfully replicated enactments across a region, establish a network of forums and institutions for successive performances. Where texts implicated or gave expression to political power, as they often did, they would tend to enhance their own value in widening regimes of territorial circulation. In this way, genres that figured their own circuits of performance—the messenger poems are a prime example—might actively project a literary culture of considerable political extent. At a more general level, this suggests viewing the territorial extent of Kerala’s literary culture, and the language varieties it bore, as the aggregate outcome of all the layered literary circuits comprising it. What is needed is to probe these layerings of literary culture in historical perspec-

---

2. The literature on linguistic ideologies, reflexivity, and context has been crucial to my thinking, but the issues are too technical to elucidate here (cf. Enkvist 1994; Goodwin and Duranti 1992; Lucy 1993; Silverstein 1979; Woolard and Schiefelin 1994).
tive, reading the textual remnants as indicators of the contextual social relations that informed them.\(^5\)

My main tasks in this chapter are thus to indicate where features of literary culture seem to tie crucially into notions of people, territory, and the politics of social identity, and to suggest how we might rethink existing depictions of these relationships and the literary facts that illumine them. This effort involves considerable triangulating among my own anthropological reading of Kerala’s cultural history, the indigenous categorizations evidenced in the textual record itself, and the constructions of contemporary local scholarship. I proceed by sketching out, over the next six sections, the broad historical and literary terrain in an overview and accompanying critique of the way certain linguistic, territorial, sociopolitical, and literary findings have been configured into the standing narratives of Kerala’s literary history. The remainder of the essay then charts a roughly chronological course through significant literary texts and genres, highlighting the complexities of sociocultural and historical forces that shaped this literary culture but whose detailed exposition awaits a more thoroughgoing analysis in a future study. The temporal confines of this chapter run from the documented emergence of Kerala-based speech forms to the brink of modernity, when the modern form of the Malayalam language was established but the genres and contexts of literary production were still rooted in traditional institutions.

LITERARY CULTURE IN THE LANGUAGE REGION OF KERALA

In contrast to the transregional languages like Sanskrit and the Prakrits, which formed such important standards for modeling literariness in South Asia, the literature surviving in the language we today call Malayalam seems to have always been tied to speech communities defined by the geographical boundaries of Kerala. As a narrow strip of territory hemmed between the high ranges of the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea, Kerala is both naturally bounded from neighboring realms along most of its length and characterized throughout by an environmentally distinctive subsistence and settlement pattern. This has led directly and indirectly to rather unique patterns of political economy and social organization throughout its known history. To the extent that these features have conditioned the linguistic and

---

5. The recent articles of historian M.R. Raghava Varīyar (1990, and the final two articles in 1997) make significant strides in attempting to correlate stages of literary production in Kerala with historical context. I have benefited greatly from the schematic overview these essays provide. Where my approach differs from his is in my insistence on working out what I see as the mediating forces of cultural forms and practices, whereas he seems more wedded to an ultimately “materialist” explanation.
literary culture, they have been largely shared within the region and have formed patterns recognizably distinct from those across Kerala’s borders.

The notion of a literature, of course, presupposes the determinate identity of the language in which it is composed. It also presupposes some organizational coherence, if not in comprising a formal canon, then at least in having a named categorical taxon (usually bearing the name of that language) in which its constituent works are grouped. A real conundrum in treating the literary culture of Malayalam is just this problem of identifying the literature in terms of what the language is—what its diagnostic features are, when their presence is authentically attested in history, and the temporal and geographic boundaries of its prevalence and works. This is not merely an academic question, but one that has been vital to the people of Kerala themselves in terms of the modernist imperative that they should demonstrate the singular coherency of a linguistic, literary, and cultural-regional identity in the matrix of the nation-state. They are flanked both by peoples who have preeminently excelled at this modernist project, the Tamils, and by those who have conspicuously failed, the Tulus and the Coorgis. To succeed in this project is to gain your own literature that goes with your own territorial state; to fail is to have neither. Kerala has succeeded, in spite of conditions that—but for the grace of the muse, grammarian, and scribe—might have sent them the way of the Tulus and Coorgis.

The first and biggest problem in finessing the antiquity of “Malayalam” literature is that despite the existence of works in the regional language reaching back to perhaps the twelfth century, this named identity of the language seems to have come into use only around the sixteenth century, under variant forms like “Malayāmya” or “Malayāmya.” Even at this later date, however, these terms seem to refer indifferently to both the land and a script used for writing the local language in the southern part of Kerala. The fact

6. For example, three major histories of Malayalam literature in English are concerned with setting out the identification of the language with the land and people in this way (Krishna Chaitanya 1971; George 1968; Parameswaran Nair 1967), as are those in Malayalam, from the earliest (Govindappillai [1886] 1965) down to the most famous (Paramēvarayyar 1953).

7. The Portuguese referred to the local language by this name in the seventeenth century (I. Kuññanpillai [1953] 1984a: 21, 25), and although some scholars write as though this usage were common much earlier, the earliest instance I have found is from a manuscript dated 1595 (Ramaswami Aiyar 1938: 131). While the term “Malayāli” does occur at least once for inhabitants of the Kerala land several centuries earlier in the Unniyāticaritam, gadyam 19), we cannot infer that this term similarly designated a unified speech-community, nor that the proper noun, “Malayālam,” was used at this time with its later linguistic attribution (pace Raghava Varīyar 1997: 119).

8. For the land called by these names, see Padmanabha Menon [1924] 1982: 6, and Paramēvarayyar 1953: 38–39. The script by this name is not, however, the one that is ancestral to the modern Malayalam script, which evolved out of the Tamil form of Grantha script used for Sanskrit widely across south India (Mangalam 1988).
that the inhabitants of this territory lacked a distinctive name for their language until the brink of the colonial period should give pause to anyone seeking protonational roots in the linguistic or literary articulation of a Kerala ethnic or regional identity. Prior to this relatively modern coining of “Malayalam” (Malayālam), the identity issue is even more fraught, for Kerala folk more usually referred to their language as “Tamil” (Tamil), just as those in the dominant kingdoms of Tamilnadu, east of the Western Ghats, had from the early centuries c.e. Use of the label “Tamil” continued to overlap with that of “Malayalam” into the colonial period. It was paralleled in Sanskritic registers by the generic, bhaṣā, meaning any local spoken language, which continues as a commonplace proper noun for the language even today.

The use of “Tamil” as a designation for the language of Kerala for most of the premodern period has been ideologically troubling for many early scholars of the language and literature. In terms of the identity politics that rides on nationalist concepts of the natural unity of a people, their language, and their literature, this clearly suggests a pervasive and longstanding subsumption of Kerala’s regional identity under Tamilian hegemony. In terms of the more foundational assumption of linguistic nationalism, it also underscores how identity itself may be a discursive mantle and not the index of an underlying essence. In any case, historically, there was a gradual linguistic and literary drift out of dialect status into eventual language autonomy, even while the common name for the Kerala language remained “Tamil.” It was not until the above-mentioned full shift to the usage “Malayalam” that the name caught up with the facts of linguistic change, which points up the problematic relation between the actual discursive content of a literature and the ideological features of its metadiscursive shaping and perception.

Simultaneously with this mutating Kerala Tamil, however, there were other registers of language in use in Kerala, heavily and explicitly indebted to Sanskrit, that coined for themselves the designation “Manipravalam.” Interestingly, the use of this name did not distinguish between the language forms and the literature written in it; both literature and literary media were called Manipravalam. The only surviving descriptive metatext on this linguistic mode, a fourteenth-century grammar-cum-poetic text called the Lilātilakam (Diadem of poetry),9 has become the matrix in which the very terms of debate for modern discussions of Malayalam are cast. As I discuss later, the metalinguage of the Lilātilakam has been rather uncritically adopted by many

---

9. Gopikuttan 1986; I. Kuṇñanpiḷḷā [1955] 1985a. The translation of the work’s title I have given here follows the construal of the final verse which equates the tilakam with the phāl-abhāṣanam (forehead ornament) that shines on the brow of Bhārati (= Līlā), the goddess who personifies speech or poetic composition.
modern Kerala scholars to read certain ideologically driven dichotomies into the history of their language. The *Lilātilakam*’s representational relation to the past is all the more troubling when we realize that only two (or possibly, three) original manuscripts seem to be attested and that this work is never referred to in any other premodern source.

The legitimacy of its descriptive claims notwithstanding, the *Lilātilakam* does clearly chart the close relation of literary ideologies to the formation of language as a creative project of social identity. As I have argued at length elsewhere, this text reveals elaborate strategies on the part of its author to position his brand of Manipravalam as the medium especially fit for the high style of Sanskritic poetry (*kāvya*), at the top of a variety of competing language forms then current in Kerala.¹⁰ These competing forms ranged from those that were highly dependent on classically Tamil models of grammar and poetry to those that were unacceptably rustic in language content or unliterary in their formal organization as texts from a Sanskrit perspective. A most important historical fact that the *Lilātilakam* thus provides is that there was a spectrum of language styles (and languages) available for different genres that mixed local Kerala-speech (*Kēraya-bhāṣā*) both with Sanskrit and with literary Tamil in various ways. (I return later to how modern scholarship has used this text to read vectors of an ethnic or communal order out of its typologies of language and literature.) Equally important, the *Lilātilakam* argues the existence of a spoken variety of Kerala-speech underlying these literary forms (even if it was called “Tamil”) that could be contrasted with the Tamil of the other regions over the mountains to the east. How unifying this language might actually have been in sociolinguistic terms, though, is thrown into some doubt by this very text’s own recognition that low castes (*hina-jāti*) had a phonologically divergent speech form.

THE TERRITORY AND POLITY OF THE KĒRALAS

If the identity of Kerala’s literary language shows a certain heterogeneity and instability at the very moment of trying to define itself, what about those to whom it might pertain—the people of this land—and what about the land itself as a territorial concept? Here the historical record is again rather uncertain. In my reading of the sources, the notion of a single, bounded territory belonging to a politically united people bonded by language and a consequent shared sense of identity does not seem clearly articulated before modernity. This notion, however, has been consistently projected back onto the historical record from the vantage point of its modern achievement.

There are early myths from Kerala (perhaps from the thirteenth century)

showing an awareness of the geophysical features of India’s southwest coast under the common premodern name of Malanāṭu (the mountain country). But this does not seem to yield decisively to the routine use of the proper place-name “Kerala” (Kēram) for this notional territory until the appearance of the Kēralōpattī (Origins of Kerala) texts of a number of centuries later, and even then the usage might recall the earlier inclusion of the Tulu country to Kerala’s north. In the Lilātilakam and many other such texts, the lexical element “Kēra-” occurs as an isolated, proper noun only with plural personal terminations—“the Kēralas”—consistent with its primary derivation from various legendary kings with the personal name Kēraṇ. The use of “Kēra-” as an attributive in such compounds as the Lilātilakam’s “Kēralabhāṣā” may thus serve primarily to designate a people eponymously related to a line of kings (as with the corresponding use of “Cōḷaś” and “Pāṇḍyas”), rather than to denote a clearly circumscribed territory.

The lineage of the Kērālas itself seems to be the projection of an ideology dependent on the recollection of the Cēras as a line of kings who were in a cultural-literary partnership with the other Tamils. This construction goes back to the early centuries C.E., in the period of the caṅkam literature of classical Tamil (see Cutler, chapter 4, this volume). This is a literary tradition in which bards within Kerala clearly participated on behalf of their local chieftains. It seems relatively clear, however, that the actual political conditions then were more a pastiche of chiefly territories, with the Three Kings (Muvēntar)—the Cēras, Cōḷas, and Pāṇḍyas—functioning as paramount chiefs rather than as heads of integrated state formations. The corpus of this literature and its projected polities seem a bardic creation, largely composed in hyperbolic celebration of these kings and allied chiefs.

What is intriguing, given the practical loss of this literary corpus until its modern rediscovery, is the long folk memory in Kerala of the Cēra kingship as a notional model of polity. This persists down to the present, when historians of Kerala have reconstructed (invented, some would argue) a second Cēra empire (from the ninth to the twelfth centuries) to rival the glories of the imperial Cōḷas in Tamilnadu. This has become textbook history in Kerala and is widely accepted in the literary histories of Malayalam, despite a disturbing absence of physical or historical remains to support the claims of a Cēra dynasty.

13. This occurs, for instance, in what is possibly the earliest poem (maybe thirteenth century) in the language of Kerala, the Tirunilalm (Puruṣottamamnāyar 1981: 35–36 and note), and still occurs as late as the sixteenth century in the Teikaielāthodayam (Nilakanṭhakavi 1990: 42).
for Cēra imperium. These historical issues are too complex (and murky) to recount in detail here, but the debate itself is critical to how we construe the developmental intersection of language, literature, and regional identity in Kerala. The interpretation of the ambiguous inscriptive record from the early ninth through the twelfth centuries runs the gamut from claims for a centrally integrated, dynastic Cēra kingdom to a fragmented array of local chiefdoms, either anarchically jostling with each other or held in check by a loose Tamil hegemony.

Whatever the historical realities behind the variously conceived Cēra era, the language at an official level was certainly a variety of Tamil, and there is no literature preserved from this period that significantly marks out a linguistically or literarily independent Kerala-based identity. So if this era was indeed “the key period in Kerala history since it was the formative period of all that is distinctive in Kerala society and culture,” one might expect to find preserved from these three centuries of glory some literary expression from the local language. Instead, all we find are a scattering of Sanskrit works affiliated with Kerala courts, a handful of devotional works in the contemporary literary Tamil attributed to Kerala kings (but surviving only in Tamilnadu), and the language of the local inscriptions, which looks a lot like a diverging dialect of Tamil.

17. The best and only case for such an integrated and relatively continuous political formation can be worked out with difficulty and creative imagination from the inscriptions. Narayanan is the most optimistic in this regard (1996), but see the more guarded assessment of the same materials by Rajan Gurukkal (1992), as well as Narayanan’s recasting of his own work’s significance in a recent retrospective account (2001).

18. The historical question really becomes that of what the major dynamics of literary-cultural transformation were in Kerala and when their effects were manifest. Narayanan’s recent synoptic article (1999) seems to still emphasize as most culturally significant an early Brahman hegemony established during the second Cēra dynasty, followed by a late (sixteenth century) bhakti “liberation” of the Shudras. Raghava Varir (1990, 1997), however, would seem to focus more on the post-dynastic period of breakdown into “feudal” polities as that during which Kerala’s linguistic and literary patterns gradually took shape. See the discussion over the following paragraphs.


20. Treatments of the inscriptive language with variable comparison with the literary sources can be found in Ramaswami Aiyar [1936] 1983; Sekhar 1953; and Ratnamma 1994a and 1994b. While I have attempted in the present essay to cleave as closely as possible to the “literary cultures” theme of our volume, a more complete anthropological assessment of the larger culture of language and literacy behind the literary practices remains a desideratum. The existing treatments of the inscriptions are narrowly linguistic and generally lack a critical sociocultural perspective. The treatments of prose tend to focus on the literary varieties, rather than the mundane, and tend to assume the unity of their object of study (e.g., Gopālakṛṣṇan 1999); an intriguing exception to this remains the controversial theory of socially stratified literary registers (to put it in modern parlance) by C.L. Aṇṭaṇi [1958] 1984.
Whether we accept a period of centralization as characterizing the existence of a great Céra imperium or not, there is no dispute that the actual later medieval Kerala that gave rise to Manipravalam and Keralabhasha literary works was one of fractionated territories, ruled over by kings or chiefs whose powers extended only over their local holdings.21 As suggested earlier, what I find especially interesting is that in the absence of any unified polity, a cultural formation could and did emerge over most of what we today consider Kerala, expressed in an amalgam of literary and cultural institutions whose larger structures encompassed the rise, fall, fission, and fusion of political constituents. Much of this had to do with the role of Brahmanical culture in this milieu and the peculiar and special role that temples and their culture came to play in the creation and circulation of the literature we have come to call Malayalam.22

Politically, courtly centers seem for the most part to have been weak and unstable. Ruling families were weakened from their outset by a series of constituent lineages that held territories in their own names. Furthermore, the so-called palaces tended to shift locale across the generations as age-rules of succession threw first one, then another, junior lineage into office. It was the patchwork of socially and ritually linked temples that seem to have provided the more stable grid around which cultural life, including courtly life itself, was arrayed.23 This is not to suggest that religious values rather than political power held sway, but rather that both were intertwined in ways that challenge our usual secular, material thinking about power. The result of this tangled formation—where kings might regularly be patrons of temples in each others’ territories, and where some Brahmans ruled temple amalgams as virtually sovereign kingdoms—was the emergence of a larger sphere of suprapolitical interaction, a kind of federation between temple institutions and their courtly supporters at the level of literary and religious culture.

IDIOMS OF SCHOLARLY CONSTRUCTION: THE FAMILIAL AND THE FLUVIAL

The imperative to construe the history of language and literature in Kerala as the story of the indigenous medium and genius of Malayalam, despite recognition of its thorough imbrication with Tamil, has led modern local scholars to search for tropes around which to organize their master narratives. The missionary grammarians had suggested that Tamil was the parent language of the Dravidian family and that Malayalam was one of its offspring. Given the tendency to feminize the languages of South Asia, Malayalam was

referred to as the daughter of Tamil, and the latter was viewed as Malayalam’s mother.²⁴

This familial model brings me back to the *Lilātilakam*, for this text provides the only premodern metadiscourse on these linguistic relations. Following its modern rediscovery and publishing, it has thus been used to frame the terms of debate in which all subsequent discussion of Malayalam has grown. In this text the recognition of the discreteness of Keralabhasha, developed through a sophisticated grammatical demonstration, is posed in explicit contrast with the Tamil of the Pāṇḍya and Cōla kingdoms. This demonstration was seized upon by modern Kerala scholars to counter both the conclusions of missionary-linguists that Malayalam was merely a late offshoot and little more than a degraded dialect of Tamil, and those of Tamil revivalists who caricatured Malayalam as an absurdly nasalized dialect that had sold out its Tamil heritage to the forces of Brahmanical Sanskrit. The project thus became one of both shoring up and proving the discreteness of Malayalam announced in the *Lilātilakam*, and tracing these patterns as far back in time as possible through the literature to lend as great an antiquity as possible to the project of a Kerala identity.

With the positioning of Malayalam in a triangular relation with Tamil and Sanskrit—to one of which it was genetically related and to one of which it was not—a more fluid image of the relationship seemed desirable. In answer to this need, the fluvial metaphor of the “three streams” emerged as a narrative trope that has come to dominate modern Malayalam literary histories. This narrative seeks to substantiate how, despite its initial literary invisibility, Malayalam had an ancient, popular existence among the people of Kerala. Though historically it flowed between or within the other, more literarily visible streams of Tamil and Sanskrit, Malayalam eventually emerged in its own shimmering genius as the others ebbed away in the Kerala land. The Tamil and Sanskrit streams are sometimes used to refer to these languages themselves, but more often they refer to Tamil-like or Sanskrit-influenced Kerala language forms.

The three streams model directs us to view everything that is positively evaluated as the index of those authentically Malayalam features submerged within the Tamil and Sanskrit streams of Kerala literature, waiting to surface in their own right. In addition to this back-reading of prefigured traits out of the texts themselves, the principal corroborating evidence for this third stream is contemporary folklore. Since this folklore is undatable, it is taken as historically ancient and thus representative *in the past* of the same distinctly and essentially Kerala identity it signifies *in the present*. This particular use of

folklore and the whole notion of the folk are both clearly traceable to Western discourses that center on a similar configuration of nationalist and modernist concerns with establishing authenticity. Such quests for authenticity have also been tied to the generally populist intellectual movements that see themselves as the vanguard of Kerala’s radical politics, championing the masses. It is through this amalgam of issues and their construal that the literary history of Kerala has most often been narratively fashioned.

A PROJECTED DICHOTOMY: MANIPRAVALAM AND PATTU

Less imagistically evocative and more seriously analytical investigations of Kerala literature than those touched on so far have certainly been carried out as well (mostly by linguists), although often still cast within the earlier frameworks. However, these too have resorted necessarily to the *Lilātilakam* as the only premodern discourse on the nature of Kerala language and the literary uses to which it was put. The result is frequently a dichotomous analysis of linguistic and literary form, sometimes in caste or even ethnic terms, that too often just remaps the division into “streams” through the mechanics of language.

Structurally, the *Lilātilakam* is a series of aphoristic *sūtras* in Sanskrit with an autocommentary, also in Sanskrit, exemplified by verses in the language it sets out to establish: Manipravalam. The text takes great pains to define this language and its literature as consisting of the proper union (*yoga*) of Sanskrit and Keralabhasha, where under the term “union” it applies all of the technical apparatus of Sanskrit literary treatises that processes mundane language into poetry (*kāvya*).

From the large body of poetry that the *Lilātilakam* draws upon in its citations, it is clear that it was inventing neither a new mode of literary expression nor the language in which it was composed. The text was, however, trying to intervene legislatively in the creative process; and it in fact announces itself as the first and only disciplinary treatise (*sāstra*) on this language form. Given that there were a number of other language mixtures, having different proportions and blends of Tamil, Sanskrit, Keralabhasha, and the Prakrits, put together on different principles, one can sense the anxiety with which the *Lilātilakam* sought to exclude all of these from Manipravalam and celebrate itself as a vitally required regulatory text.

The special place that Tamil occupied, with regard to both Kerala’s political history and the uniqueness of Tamil’s classical, scholarly, and grammatical production, earned it a special construct in the *Lilātilakam*. At the end of the work’s first chapter there is a brief characterization of a form called “Pattu” (Pāṭṭu), which the text also admits to being a union of Sanskrit and Keralabhasha, but which it contrasts with its own Manipravalam by a few stipulations. These seem to broadly typify Tamil literature, including the phono-
logical transformations of Sanskrit words into their Dravidian equivalents and the invoking of some markers of Tamil prosody and metrics. The scant features listed, however, hardly serve as an adequate indicator, let alone a definition, of Tamil poetic form. What Kerala scholars have done is to create of this genre designation (if that is what it is) a school or a movement, the “Pattu school,” pit it against the “Manipravalam school,” and attempt to read these two forward as a great dualism between which all works of Malayalam sought to define themselves. From a historical perspective, however, pūṭu means simply “song,” and many of the subsequent works and forms of Kerala literature bear this name in their titles. These many later texts clearly had no aspirations to Tamil classicality at all, but rather followed local trends in metrical composition, style, and content. Moreover, all of them made full use of Sanskrit phonology, freely borrowing lexical and occasionally even grammatical elements from that language as well. In addition, the Rāmacaritam, until recently the only work that even roughly fit the Līlālilākām’s Pattu taxon, does not designate itself as such, and neither does the other, recently discovered work, the Tirunīḷalāmāla.

There is, then, a basic asymmetry between the designations “Manipravalam” and “Pattu.” Most of the works (excepting some technical treatises) that describe themselves as Manipravalam conform to the metrics and poetics of Sanskrit. “Pattu,” however, seems not to have been analogously used, and those works classed as such by contemporary scholarship have in common only their composition in non-Sanskritic, though also non-Tamil, meters. Furthermore, Manipravalam works also made extensive use of these same non-Sanskrit local meters, under the guise of prose (gadyam). I thus would contend that there is little historical basis for positing Pattu as a self-designated and conscious movement of literary production, that its descriptive basis is largely in negative contrast with Manipravalam, and that its real function is only to reify contemporary narratives of indigenism by providing them with a categorical taxon. This is not to deny the whole field of extra- or even counter-Sanskritic literary production; rather, it is to suggest that a far stronger descriptive basis needs to be established in demonstrating how these works either cohere or diverge from each other and from those works comprising the supposedly disjunctive category of Manipravalam.

25. The use of “Dravidian” (dramida) here is not anachronistic; the text itself uses the term in a number of cross-cutting references, including relating the phonology of Tamil to Pattu (Freeman 1998).

26. In keeping with the “three streams” idiom, the scholar C.A. Menon suggested positing a third school, the Paccal Malāyalam school, or “Pure Malāyalam school,” which he saw represented by the folk literature (George 1968: 16). Most scholars have not followed him in reading this into the earlier literature as an analytic tool, though there have been recurrent attempts in modern poetry and prose to create a paccal (lit. green, or fresh) or tami (pure) Malāyalam, shorn of Sanskrit metrics and vocabulary (Paramēvarayyar 1953b: 458–461, 546–548).
While the instance of Pattu forms the main contrastive type for modern scholarship, in the Ṭilaṭilakam itself more energy is expended over other types of mixed language (bhaṣaṃśīra) in use that do not conform to the text’s stipulations. On the one hand, there is clear reference to all those performative forms of hybrid language that were popularized through the temple arts—forms that, as I argue later, were far more central to the actual propagation and spread of innovations in the language (including a massive Sanskritization) than were the more pedantically literary concerns with scholarly standards evidenced in the Ṭilaṭilakam. In fact, these performative genres are undoubtedly central to and constitutive of most of what we would chart today as Malayalam literature, though the Ṭilaṭilakam would exclude these on taxonomic grounds. On the other hand—and quite against the usual divide in the Sanskritic world between literary and nonliterary language forms—the Ṭilaṭilakam must defend the inclusion of purely mundane and technical treatises (i.e., works in both verse and prose on astrology, medicine, etc.) on the grounds that they bear the name Manipravalam in their title.

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF CASTE

The peculiarities of Kerala’s medieval sociopolitical system produced an equally unique inflection of the pan-Indian caste system, whose importance for the literary culture of this region was underscored in the introduction to this chapter. The major structural oddity, largely shared across south India, was that the four-fold varṇa system that ranked the nonpolluting castes elsewhere in India was here collapsed into the two categories at each end: the Brahmans and the rest of the “clean” castes, who were in some notional sense Shudras. Nambūtiri Brahmans, the only indigenous Brahmans of Kerala, had a peculiar system of primogeniture to prevent partition of their holdings through natural increase: only the eldest male could legitimately marry a Nambūtiri woman and produce Nambūtiri heirs. The younger males all had casual sexual liaisons with a variety of Shudra women. The offspring belonged legitimately to the women’s families, most of whom reckoned descent matrilineally but were excluded from any claims on their genitors or their estates.

Intervening between the Nambūtiris and Shudras, however, and marking the social prominence of the temple in Kerala, was a small but culturally important caste category special to Kerala, the Ambalavāsī. As their name (lit. temple-dwellers) suggests, these were special temple-servant castes, whose livelihoods derived from a variety of services to these institutions. Their women had the same sort of sexual arrangements with Nambūtiris as did the regular Shudras, but their attachment to temples meant that the children had much more regular and sustained contact with Brahmanical culture.
Among these castes were the Cākyārs, who performed Sanskrit plays and other artistic genres in the temple theaters, and the Nambyārs, musician accompanists to the Cākyārs, whose women were actresses with whom the Cākyār males also had liaisons. Other Ambalavāsis were castes such as Vāriyars and Piṣāroṭis, among whom were reckoned numbers of accomplished Sanskritists as well.

The dominant Shudra caste—and the politically and economically dominant caste-grouping in Kerala—was the soldiery, called Nāyars. They were permitted entry to temples but were not as intimately involved in the Nambūtiri cultural formation as were the temple servants. Below the Shudras were the avarṇas, those polluting castes without vṛṇa status who formed close to half the Hindu population, were banned from proximity to the temple, and whose touch and even approach within fixed scales of distance polluted the clean castes. Their parallel system of shrines and festivals was the vibrant arena for indigenous, Dravidian cultural forms. The Nāyars dominated and managed these polluting castes, who were the productive agricultural labor force, and often their religious and cultural activities as well. On the one hand, the Nāyars gave their women to Brahmans, were often sired by them, and participated significantly in the high cultural functions of the temple; on the other hand, their practical involvement with the lower castes led them to adopt or retain many of the cultural customs of these latter groups. In many ways they thus mediated between the Sanskrit institutions of Brahmanism and the Dravidian institutions in which their linguistic and cultural identities were firmly rooted.

THE CLAIMS FOR AN ANTIQUE FOLKLORE

We have seen that one of the genre constructs used in charting and differentiating the historically constituent strata of Malayalam is folk literature and its claims to an unsullied antiquity at some essential level, despite its imbrication with Sanskrit and Tamil. There can of course be no direct linguistic or historical attestation of this, given that the very category depends on its content being unrecorded. Instead, there can only be indirect suppositions construed in light of the patterns of current oral literature and read from the kinds and trajectories of changes in the recorded literature, suggesting such influences at work outside the inscriptive culture. At its extreme, this entails reading contemporary folklore as harboring the earliest Malayalam.²⁷

Aside from the obvious problems of a timeless essentialism rooted in a regional-nationalist folklore, a methodological problem arises concerning which features of language—ranging from phonemes to literary themes—

one chooses as essentially indicative of language identity, persisting through
the variability of other features. And this again clearly impinges on the prob-
lems of genre.

Once we reject the notion of a single language in favor of an array of lan-
guage varieties anchored to different social communities and working in dif-
ferent contexts, whose production and relations to each other shift through
time, we are able to recuperate aspects of the folkloric model for our re-
constructive project under a more sociohistorically informed semiotic. The
following are, in brief, instances of literate and nonliterate interactions, one
around a specific text and another around a whole cultural complex I have
researched in ethnohistorical terms.

Herman Gundert, the great nineteenth-century lexicographer and gram-
marian of Malayalam, considered the Payyānur Pāṭṭu one of the earliest
specimens of the language. This partially recovered text, dated now to per-
haps the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries, is a devotional ballad to a lo-
cal goddess.28 A unique feature of the text’s social identity is its setting in
a merchant community. Equally unique at the linguistic level is its compos-
ition in highly nonstandard conventions of inscription, wherein the vow-
els seem promiscuously lengthened and shortened, and many features look
like the transcription of an oral recitation. Metrically, this vowel deviance
seems to mark a beat (tālam), suggesting that this was a performance text,
probably used for a festival celebrating as a goddess the narrative’s appar-
ently apotheosized heroine. Even more intriguing, scholars have long
lamented that the text is incomplete, since it breaks off well before the story
of the goddess’s human origins from a girl of the merchant caste concludes;
it has recently been discovered, however, that the remainder of the story is
taken up and completed in a version preserved as oral literature in an ex-
orcism rite among a washerman caste of the region. Members of this same
caste are performers of the possessed dance rituals of teyyaṭṭam, the most
popular mode of worshipping local deities in this region of northern Ker-
ala,29 which clearly suggests that the washermen’s preservation of this god-
dess and her story dates back to a time when they performed her rituals for
this merchant community. This case exemplifies not only the feedback be-
tween oral and written textuality—the Payyānur Pāṭṭu standing formally as
a historical hybrid between the two—but the kind of community-based and
relational authorship that can persist in the construction of such literature
across centuries.

28. This text was reported and excerpted by Gundert in publications of the last part of the
nineteenth century, but Kerala scholars subsequently lost track of it. Though it was clearly de-
scribed and catalogued as part of the Gundert archive at Tübingen, it was only recently redis-
covered there by Scaria Zacharia and published (Antani 1994).
I would further assert, however, that even in the absence of such written documentation it is methodologically possible to correlate characteristic patterns of language use with different social constituencies, and that an ethnohistorical reconstruction of the social relations mapped into folklore can be highly pertinent to our understanding of textualized production. I have worked for many years with this lower-caste possession cult of *teyyattam*, which preserves in the liturgies of the local gods it celebrates a remarkably rich corpus of earlier forms of folk literature. In a number of these corpora, higher-caste and Sanskrit-learned patrons apparently composed original works for these deities that were incorporated into the liturgies. Often these are amalgamated with other strata of texts that are clearly earlier, in terms of logical narrative and contextual relations, and are linguistically marked as being in lower-caste dialects. Thus we have good evidence for how some of the productions from elite circles could find their way across the caste barrier and into a wider sphere of circulation. Moreover, low-caste performers apparently learned in this way to imitate higher compositional styles in the production of their own texts, though often the mimetic aspects remain linguistically or thematically apparent.

Movement also went the other way, however, as the very existence of Manipravalam and its use for literature by the higher castes shows. There can be little doubt that a persisting interaction between literate and nonliterate textual practices characterized the entire development of Malayalam literature, but it is only through recognizing this influence as mutual and by historicizing specific interactions that folklore can provide any significant data. Aside from these specific concerns with the use of folklore, however, such cases are useful in alerting us to the complexity of differently positioned interests, voices, and access to cultural resources at play through the shifting genres of Kerala’s literary history.

In the remainder of this chapter I attempt to chart these genres in a roughly chronological framework, keeping in mind that the multiple and sometimes discrete lines of development across social strata and region may not always conform to a nearly stadial temporal progression.

VAIŚIKATANTRAM AND COURTESAN CULTURE

The *Lilātilakam*’s attempts at the close of the fourteenth century to lay out a comprehensive grammatical and poetic apparatus for defining and stipulating the structure of Manipravalam seem to have been mounted only after a couple of centuries of literary production in this medium. It is difficult to tell how much normative regulation was exercised over this literature be-

fore the _Lilātilakam_, or how the standards therein were established, but I am certain there was more variability and experimentation both before and after the _Lilātilakam_ than the typological imperatives of modernist scholarship recognize. Since my approach to reconstructing a literary culture is modeled on ethnography, one of my principal interests is to get at the socially situated intentions of authors and audiences. In thus attempting to read what I can of the historical circumstances that find their way into historical inscription, I hope to illuminate the cultural motivations that made certain narrative and literary themes part of the life-world of these works.

The embarrassment that the life-world of Manipravalam texts occasions today has been one of the major stumbling blocks for the contemporary constructions of Kerala’s literary history. From the earliest works through the height of its finest productions, much of Manipravalam literature was devoted to the culture of courtesans. Indeed, the first work we have is the most direct in this regard, being instructions from a courtesan to her daughter. It is not clear how coherent a single work this collection of stanzas, titled _Vaiśikatantram_ (The courtesan’s treatise), actually was, for it has been assembled as such by modern editors from several scattered sources and transcriptions of fragmentary manuscripts. While there is no narrative structure per se, most of these verses were probably ordered more or less as reconstructed, since the work is in the voice of a single named narrator to her daughter. It has been dated anywhere from the eleventh to the thirteenth century, the latter being more likely. The _Lilātilakam_ cites the _Vaiśikatantram_ several times, and its verses were apparently in wide circulation, cropping up in several different works.

Aside from the problems it raises for modern Indian sexual sensibilities, the text’s context brings up a number of interesting historical issues. The existence of this courtesan milieu itself should give us some insights into the culture in which this text circulated, not just regionally but perhaps in the wider Sanskrit cosmopolis, for the text reportedly draws upon traditions that preceded it in Karnāṭaka in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. These traditions were represented by such works as Nemicandran’s _Lilāvati_, Kavikaman’s _Stanastakam_, Jannan’s _Samaratrantram_, and Āndayya’s _Madanavijayam_. These, in turn, recall Dāmodaragupta’s _Kuṭṭānimagha_ of early ninth-century Kashmir, which perhaps goes back to developments out of the _Kāmasūtra_ and _Nātyaśāstra_. To contextualize Kerala’s regional realization of these urbane models, we will have to await what promises to be a fine-grained study of this Manipravalam literature by historian M. R. Raghava Varyiar and one of his students, who are currently at work on this project.

As an anthropologist, however, I do wish to remark on some rather evi-

dent continua in social relations that seemed to characterize many medieval
south Indian societies, including that of Kerala. As Dumont noted long ago,
there do seem to be continuities between patterns of hypergamous marriage
in Dravidian kinship and the ritual marriages to gods that religiously sanctify
the amalgam of devadāsi traditions. The most famous of these routinized
systems of ritual marriage was in fact the sambandham relations between Nāyar
women and Brahman men in Kerala. These were characterized by a woman
first undergoing a ritual marriage, after which she was free to exercise her
sexual prerogatives among any number of Brahman and other high-caste
men as she wished. This clearly maps the similar ritual-connubial trajectory
we find under devadāsi systems. Considering, moreover, that the women cele-
brated in Mani pravala lam were accomplished artists in association with temples,
and that they were termed a cci, the same word used for Nāvar women, we
can reasonably posit that the sambandham relations known to ethnography
are domesticated transforms of the devadāsi system.

In terms of the literary culture and its creative role in shaping these so-
ciorial relations, an evident function of this literature was to praise the in-
te stitutions of courtesanship and the women who comprised it, and to celebrate
as well their lineage in royal families and their connections with famous tem-
 ples, Brahman, and other wealthy notables. The Vaishikatntram in fact opens
with the young girl’s mother expressing her pride in their fine lineage and
tradition.

If there is indeed an integral connection between Mani pravalam as a form
of language and the themes of courtesan relations, as a later anthology (the
Pudyaratnam) claims, then the Vaishikatantram does exemplify this correlation
fairly well. For the most part, the language is grammatically good Mani-
pravalam as described by the Lilātilakam, though there are a number of
interesting divergences on stylistic grounds. For instance, while a number
of Sanskrit grammatical forms are employed, the proportion of Sanskrit lex-
ical items used in comparison with later Mani pravalam works is fairly mea-
ger. In fact, one verse contains no proper Sanskrit word at all, a case that the
Lilātilakam specially addresses in terms of the requisite mixture of Sanskrit
and Keralabhasha that defines Mani pravalam. There are also cases where
phonological deviations from Sanskrit of the Tamil type (a riyaccitau) that
are forbidden by the Lilātilakam occur. Lexically, there are many common
Malayalam words that seem neither Tamilized nor archaic but, rather, seem
to be indigenous forms in daily use. Correspondingly, almost all the im-
agery and scenarios are taken from the Kerala landscape and social setting,
without puranic allusions or Sanskrit figures of speech or sense:

34. Velayudhan Pillai 1966: 76.
One can’t draw a livelihood from those who are poor;  
A tank is not filled by the falling of dew.\textsuperscript{36}

These features lead a prominent scholar on this text to conclude that the  
author may have been not a Brahman but a member of another of the upper three castes.\textsuperscript{37} There is a central focus on wealth running through the  
\textit{Vaiśikatantram}, in keeping, of course, with the professional bias of the text,  
yet this also suggests that perhaps the clientele were primarily not agriculturalists but a mercantile segment of society. As also in the works considered  
in the next section, recurrent scenarios of bustling markets and all their commodities and persons, unwholesome from the Brahmanical point of view,  
are wrought in loving detail through the courtesan pieces. I find attractive the suggestion that there was perhaps a mercantile hand in this literature,  
in addition to the elements contributed by the other elite sectors of society.

THE EARLY COURTESAN \textit{CAMPU}

Three works of Manipravalam spanning the late thirteenth to late fourteenth  
centuries are usually grouped together because of their common theme and style. They are included in the more extensive genre known in Malayalam  
as \textit{campu} and, as in the Sanskrit \textit{campū} (from which the genre derives), are  
formally constructed of mixed poetry and prose passages. Contemporary scholarship knows these three works collectively as the \textit{accicaritams}, the “stories of \textit{acci},” for they are dedicated to the courtesans after which they are  
named, and one of them, the \textit{Unniyaccicaritam} (Story of Unniyacci), contains  
the social designation \textit{acci} in the woman’s name. As mentioned earlier, \textit{acci} means, or has come to mean, a woman of the Nāyar caste, a point to which  
I return shortly.

Professionally, the women to whom these works are dedicated were dancers and courtesans, apparently connected to temples as \textit{devadāsis}, “servants of the deity.” Prominent in these compositions are poetic descriptions  
of the heroines’ beauty and attributes, though these descriptive celebrations  
are embedded in narratives that weave divine beings into the plot as interlocutors and participants. The plots, thin and contrived as they seem, are  
evertheless original to these works and do not seem to draw upon epic, puranic, or existing dramatic models from the Sanskrit tradition. In fact, they  
seem to be modeled closely on each other, which indicates that there were shared narrative and thematic standards as part of the literary culture in and  
through which these works circulated.

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Vēlayudhan Piḷḷa} 1966: 85. All translations from the Malayalam or Sanskrit, unless otherwise noted, are my own.  
\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Vēlayudhan Piḷḷa} 1966: 86.
The plots usually prompt complaint from scholars. They seem merely the pretext for travel in and around the courtesans’ locales, yielding elaborate descriptions of routes, local communities, and so on. Assuming that the eulogy of the damsel is the principal objective of these pieces, critics note that “while attempting to analyze the structural pattern of these works one is baffled by the profusion of extraneous elements the authors bring in.” If we compare these elements across the texts, however, the continuities among these “extraneous elements” and their thematization become clear. It indeed appears that one of the very points of this literature is to figure territory, to lay out a series of places in relation to each other. The places featured most prominently, besides the homestead of the heroine, are temples, palaces, and markets. While the settlement pattern of Kerala disfavors the dense centralizations we would usually call urban, the areas that come closest in cultural capital feature prominently in these works. The various communities and groups associated with these settings are conspicuously presented as well: local chiefs, religious leaders attached to temples and Brahman settlements, the soldiery, and the merchants who throng the marketplaces, in addition to the courtesans and their families. It seems reasonable that the sets of elements shared across these works served to represent the patronage base of this literature itself and the spatial locales marking the terrain over which this base was distributed.

While the institutional relations between Brahmanical temples, royal palaces, and the sexual politics of courtesans define a general problematic in Kerala’s cultural history to which I later return, these three early courtesan poems serve to additionally highlight the importance of mercantile life in the region. Whereas the major anthropological debates on the nature and constitution of caste society have concerned the relative importance of priestly religion versus courtly power, these works lend an additional emphasis to the marketplace. The accent of the VaṣiṣṬantaṇtram thus support the observation made around the VaiṣṬantaṇtram to suggest that against the usually exclusive attribution of this literature and its milieu to Brahmanical licentiousness, there may have been considerable mercantile influence present in the courtesan culture as well. This prominence is in keeping with what we have always known of Kerala as a trading society with longstanding links both to other regions of India and, through maritime trade, to the rest of the world.

THE EARLIEST PATTUS: TIRUNILMALĀ AND RĀMACARITAM

At this point we need to backtrack a century or so to pick up works that have fallen in the other “stream” of Malayalam, if we choose to accept the desig-
nation of Pattu as subsuming what is assigned to it. In certain respects it seems fairly easy to dismiss this taxon, since until very recently there was only one known work to justify its existence: the famous Rāmacaritam (Story of Rāma). This text has been a central battleground on which the issues of language membership and affiliation have been contested. It has been variously declared the oldest poem in Malayalam, dismissed as a work of Tamil, and analyzed as an artificial Tamil-Malayalam hybrid peculiar to the southern region of Kerala and so not really representative of Malayalam. The eventual consensus, however, is that this thirteenth-to-fourteenth-century work is the paragon of the Līlātīlakam’s description of Pattu. Most prominently, it uses only Dravidian graphology (of the Vaṭṭeluttu script), thereby turning its Sanskrit lexical borrowings into phonologically Dravidian forms. Despite the fact that in certain other respects the text does not conform very well to the Līlātīlakam’s description, its paradigmatic status allows other features of this single text to be extrapolated into speculations about what the nature of the whole genre of Pattu must have been.

The exclusive membership of the Rāmacaritam in the category of Pattu allowed it to define the content of Pattu works thematically: they all must have been renditions of the Sanskrit epics and pūrāṇas. This is indeed the thematic criterion by which all subsequent works in local meters came to be called Pattu in the histories of the literature, though they conformed in few if any other respects to the Līlātīlakam’s criteria. This thematic pertinence to puranic religion, especially against the morally scandalous courtesan culture of most early Manipravalam works, has further been embraced as the true indigenous Kerala or Dravidian literary aspiration, in contrast to the lascivious imperatives of Brahmanical debauchery.

The long and solitary reign of the Rāmacaritam should have been broken in 1980, when Puruṣottaman Nayar discovered and published a work solidly in the Pattu style, complete with local meters and an exclusively Dravidian orthography, that probably predates the Rāmacaritam by a century or so. Oddly, however, this work, called the Tirunīlalmāla (Garland of the sacred shade)—of enormous significance for the rethinkig of Malayalam literature—has gone relatively uncelebrated, and it may take some years for its true import to be registered. Most significant thematically, perhaps, is that its central topic is not Sanskritic at all, but is descriptive of the ritual life of a local temple. What is ethnohistorically so remarkable is that it focuses on the rituals of what are later a polluting caste, the Malayar. For an anthropologist this

41. It is gratifying to find that M. Līlāvati’s new edition of her history devotes some space to this work and its importance (1996: 26–30) and that at least one scholar other than the editor of this work has undertaken a serious analysis of its language (Vijayappan 1995).
makes the Tirunīḷalāmāḷa one of the most significant works in the history of Kerala literature, since with the recently rediscovered Payyānum Pāṭṭuvel now have two major works whose social settings provide textually grounded vantage points into the subaltern communities of premodernity.

But if the Tirunīḷalāmāḷa is in some sense about subalterns, it is almost certainly not by them. While it seems lexically even less Sanskritic than the Rāmacaritam, there are a number of motifs and invocations that suggest a high-caste if not Brahmanical authorship. Of course, even where present, the Sanskrit lexicon is masked by its remapping into Dravidian phonology implemented through the script. On the other hand, many Sanskrit letters crop up intermittently in the manuscripts, suggesting that a process of substitution may have been under way in transcription, and showing that copyists knew the “correct” Sanskrit forms and had begun replacing what the Sanskrit calls tadbhavas and the Tamil tradition (and Lilātilakam, once) calls āriyaccitavu (deviations from the Āryan).

While at the narrative level this text is largely independent of any puranic models of imitation, the religious attribution of Pattu is perhaps thematically more powerful, given its construction around temple rituals and regional relations of worship. Indeed, with its pronounced Vaiṣṇava focus on temples, it appears rather as we would expect a Kerala version of a Tamil-inspired bhakti text of that period to look. This indeed gains some support by the work’s mention of the famous Tamil poet, Kamban (Kampanāṭen), as one of its exemplars. At the microlevel of its thematics, however, the Tirunīḷalāmāḷa does show a high degree of puranic embeddedness in its worldview, for it contains the earliest instance in Kerala language of the myth of Paraśurāma founding Malanāṭu, linked with the associated puranic geography of India and the sixty-four communities of Kerala Brahmans. The claim for divine settlement of Brahmans in Kerala thus has a deeper antiquity than was formerly thought to obtain on the basis of the later Kēralātpatti tradition. The view of missionary scholars, followed ever since by anti-Brahmanical commentators, is that these charter myths were the eighteenth-century invention of wily priests writing in decadent medieval courts to secure their hold over Kerala’s lands.

The focus of the Tirunīḷalāmāḷa itself is on the Ārānmula temple, which, with its nearby, affiliated temples, includes five of the thirteen sacred places

42. I base my surmise on the developed presence of puranic and Sanskritic allusions; the editor of the work similarly concludes that the poet traces his lineage through Brahmans (Puruṣottamāṇya 1981: 33). Another scholar of this text, however, opines that the text’s celebration of sacrificial rites by the Malayan caste precludes the author from high-caste status (Vijayappan 1995: 63–64).
43. Puruṣottamāṇya 1981: 32; and see Cutler, chapter 4, this volume.
(divyādeśa) of Kerala as celebrated in the Tamil Vaiṣṇava bhakti canon. The main rites described, though, are neither Sanskrit nor those of the Tamil āgamas, but rather are folk rites to remove the various impurities (dōṣa) of the deities performed by a caste that is now prominently found only in the northern end of Kerala. Interestingly, this is also where the manuscripts came from, despite Aranmula’s location in south-central Kerala.

In the text there are not only extended descriptions of the temple and its environs, but also elaborations on the families of the temple-villages’ owners (ūrālar) and the protecting soldiery. Though in a highly literary idiom, these aggregate themes seem very much like ritual texts I know from the folk literature, and my overall impression of this text is that it marks the defining instance of a typically Kerala-Tamil religiosity rooted in the rites of localized temples mutating under the influence of a Sanskritically Brahmanical paradigm.

Indeed, in the text’s own reflections on the genesis of its literary culture, we find a conscious awareness of the fusing of Sanskrit and Tamil traditions in the image of a poetic harvest:

In the land of Jambu, which is surrounded and washed by the four oceans,
There in the fields rich with beauty [or “speech”] came the plowman, Vālmīki.
And in his beneficence he sowed the seed of poetry in plenty.
And when these had variously sprouted and grown up, flourishing in their spread,
Vyāsa saw to it that they were severally divided into the purāṇas.
Then the earth’s surface was suitably cordoned off with fencing,
And when the grain came to fruition, Kālidāsa arrived,
And there arose great kings of poetry on the scene, one after another.
Here and there from among these rice plants, plucking and gathering these together,
The well-equipped Agastya declared the tradition for his Tamil poetry.
That very Tamil poetry was used by the beautiful Kamban,
Who composed that which is the most valuable in this whole wide world.
And then that Tamil poetry, which had risen to its highest level,
Was established in Malanāṭu, among those of Kūṟumūṟ Paḻḷi.
Those great ones, when they composed in it, found its fulfillment.45

In this evident charter for the poet-author’s school, the Sanskrit tradition has fused with the Tamil tradition and found manifestation in a line of Kūṟumūṟ Paḻḷi gurus (of whom we know nothing) in the land of Malanāṭu, which we now call Kerala. I have written at greater length about the regional and class politics of negotiating this fusion within the elite space of grammatical

poetics laid out in the later Lilātilakam. As the earliest explicit instance of blurring language and poetic boundaries in Kerala, however, worked out in a substantively creative work of great social significance, the Tirunilālmaṇa deserves a whole monograph in itself, a project that I hope to take up in the future.

Since the Rāmacaritam and Tirunilālmaṇa are the earliest, purest exemplars of the so-called Pattu works, and both are dedicated to the celebration of Vaiṣṇava bhakti, we might expect them to show close generic affinities to each other; instead, there are significant thematic divergences between them. First, while the Rāmacaritam is an evident adaptation of the Valmiki’s pan-Indic epic, the Tirunilālmaṇa, like the accī poems, takes up imaginatively descriptive scenes and activities that are locally rooted in Kerala. The sentimental structure of bhakti in the Rāmacaritam is rather different from that of the Tirunilālmaṇa as well. Though the entirety of the Rāmāyaṇa narrative is related through the course of the Rāmacaritam, this is accomplished through flashbacks and fill-ins that are woven through a recasting of the whole epic in the framework of the single chapter of war (the Yuddhakāṇḍa) of the original. Thus the ethos of militant combat tends to be heightened as a central expression of devotion in an aesthetic that is obvious from the following verses, describing the effects of Rāma’s arrows on his demonic enemies:

Many shining arrows went swiftly and continuously
To plunge into the bodies of those foes who surrounded him to fight.
They were terrorized, as on every side of the battlefield
The gore and corpses mounted through their great destruction.
The earth was thickly adorned with corpses and gore,
And as the great warriors advanced, striving to search him out and do battle with him,
They could not even glimpse him without being struck by this King of king’s arrows. . . .
Numbers of corpses, severed of their heads, entwined with each other in a fine, frenzied dance. . . .
As their lives were spent on the field of battle,
And the bodies of those forces were rent in destruction, one on top of another,
Wherever one turned the river of blood sent its courses in numbers beyond reckoning.
The bow’s sound reverberated ceaselessly, and like the fire of lightning that spreads through a forest, grief made its way everywhere through their ranks.
With anguish in their hearts, the demons were in every direction overwhelmed.

A common surmise has been that the *Rāmacaritam* was written to inspire a Kerala soldiery to battle. While we are not sure how popular the work was, there is evidence that it was ritually recited in northern Kerala. In thematic terms, the text serves to expound that militant spirit of *bhakti* that could be wedded to a glorification of war, in partial contrast to the ritualistic, temple pursuits of the *Tirunilalmāla*. Both sets of concerns, however, though differently positioned in society, seem expressions of a fundamentally Dravidian religious culture of *bhakti*, and neither seems expressive of Sanskritically Brahmanic pursuits. While a similar poetics of war is certainly present in classical Sanskrit (consider passages from Kālidāsa’s *Raghuvaṃśa*, for instance), the sheer revelry in gore, and many of the particular images, are more reminiscent of the Tamil *caṇkam* tradition or later Tamil *parani* literature than of Sanskrit *kaśya*. This fact seems to be reflected in the linguistic constitution as well. If we take the last of the verses just cited as an example, we can see how few Sanskritically derived words (in roman font in what follows) there are in this piece:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{a-ppōr-kkala-il uyir-arrutan pilant-ē} \\
\text{y-appōl paṭe-kk-alvū vant-alavū mēn-mēl} \\
\text{epp-pāka-v-um tirintu cen-kuruti-y-ār-āyi} \\
\text{y-enna-ppeṭō-vali nanantana-yanēkam} \\
\text{eppō-um vill-ali mukkavum tī-tī} \\
\text{yenik-um paṭant-atavi-nēr paṭai-y-ūtē pāt} \\
\text{e-ppēt-um vanta vaṭi kaṇḍ-ūṭ-āl alaḥ kōṇḍ-} \\
\text{en-ḍik-kl-um kulāint-it-an-nici-caran-mār.}
\end{align*}
\]

**ANANTAPURAVARNANAM AND THE PROBLEM OF RELIGION VERSUS EROTICS**

If religiosity is supposed to be the exclusive hallmark of Pattu, against the erotics of early Manipravalam, then the next most ancient work of Manipravalam after the *Vaiṣṇavatantram* presents a clear countercase. This is the *Anantapuravarṇanam* (Portrayal of Anantapuram), a descriptive poem centered around the great Viṣṇu temple at what is today Thiruvanathapuram. This work, dating from the first part of fourteenth century, has no direct relation to the courtesan culture and seems in its religious thematics to be of a piece with the earlier *Tirunilalmāla*, with which, however, it shares little either lin-

48. On the *Rāmacaritam* as inspiration to do battle, see George 1956; on ritual recitation in northern Kerala, see Ḍuṇṇā Nāayar 1979: ix-xii.

49. Since not just lexicon but also morphology is critical, I have parsed the verse for both bound and unbound morphological elements.

50. Ś. Kuṇṇānpiḷḷa [1953] 1971; Ratnamma 1986. This work is not alone in showing that poems focused on religion were regularly composed in high Manipravalam. Another poem,
guistically or poetically. It is a classic piece of lexically and metrically Sanskrit Manipravalam, yet, devoid of any erotic engagements, it is ostensibly a devotional piece to the god of this temple, being mostly given over to descriptions of the temple’s sacred structures, festivals, and surrounding shrines. In fact it contains what is probably the earliest description of Manipravalam itself in the clear idiom of a religious offering:

Picking from those blossoms called Tamil and Sanskrit,
I weave this *inda*-garland for the worship of the Lotus-Eyed [Viṣṇu].

The garland called *inda* is made of variegated red and white blossoms (like the interspersed pearls [mani] and coral [pravālam] in the image of Manipravalam as a necklace) and is especially favored by the god Viṣṇu. The *Lilātilakam* cites this verse, in fact, as an example of mistaken interpretation of the image entailed in the term “Manipravalam,” favoring its own reading of *mani* as red rubies, so that the colors, that is, the blending of the languages, will seem of one hue. The *Lilātilakam* almost certainly comes from the same political region of Thiruvananthapuram and falls in the same century as the *Anantaṭparaṟaṟṟṇanam*, so its citation of this text as holding a mistaken view of the very image underlying the name of its literary medium is intriguing.

While the *Lilātilakam* attacks the formal definition of Manipravalam, at the thematic level there is a more direct assault on the religious interpretation of what “Manipravalam” implies in the fourteenth-to-fifteenth-century anthology of short erotic sketches of courtesans now styled the *Padyaratnam* (Gem of verse). In contrast to the imagery of the devotional offering in the *Anantaṭparaṟaṟṟṇanam*, the *Padyaratnam* states point-blank that “This knowledge of Manipravalam . . . has its main concern with bevies of women.” My point in citing these divergences in theme and characterization of the language is to demonstrate the significant disagreements even among the small samples of early Manipravalam that are preserved. Very likely, there were significantly different registers and styles of language and aesthetic intent, and the diversity of these forms was much greater than back-reading through the singular extant descriptive work of the *Lilātilakam* has suggested. Indeed, the only other surviving treatise on poetic figures, the *Alankāra-

which I have not managed to inspect, is the roughly contemporaneous *Vāsuśravastavam*, a work of praise on the god Kṛṣṇa (Vāsudeva); there are numerous other such works as well (Līlāvati 1996: 54).

51. 
	*tamisamsketan engalā suṣmanassu ка́l konḍoru
	indaṃāluk toṭukkingēn puṇvārkhākṣopajaya.*

52. I have discussed the significance of this imagery at length in Freeman 1998.

samksepa, gives a different list and description of these figures than the Lilati-
lakam, despite the likelihood that it was composed in the same realm only a few decades later.\textsuperscript{54}

In terms of the Pattu-Manipravalam relation, I have noted the consider-
able overlap in religious themes between the Tirunilalmala and the Ananta-
paravarnnamam. On the other hand, erotic themes also find their way into the piety of religious works: the Tirunilalmala opens, just as the accicaritams do, with a sensually lush panegyric to the bisexual deity Ardhanarësvari. A more general thematic interchange subsequently appears among genres, in that the so-called later Pattu literature loses any anchorage to specific religious locales in Kerala as it shifts over to epic or puranic narrations from Sanskrit, while the later campu literature of Manipravalam takes up the eulogizing of local temples in a big way. To a considerable extent, then, reflection on these trends makes the coherence of the bifurcation into the macro-
genres of Pattu and Manipravalam through time seem highly doubtful when this is based on the thematic contrasts between religious versus erotic intent. While we do find certain distinctive cohesions of descriptive and thematic elements across poems (as among the accicaritams, etc.), my most general conclusion is that the various levels of language and poetic constituency—from phonology through grammar to lexicon, themes, and metric structure—could and did vary independently of each other across what local scholarship terms the various “movements” (prasthamam) of Kerala literature, which I read as experiments tied to diverse or historically shifting social identities.\textsuperscript{55}

On the other hand, some microthemes of the Anantapurava
ranamam point up certain pragmatic linkages of literary works to their social contexts that do seem fairly consistent across texts. In the descriptions and praises of the local rulers and their festival processions, and in the elaborate and themat-
ically tangential description of the marketplace, its diverse communities, and the range of commodities they offer (highly reminiscent of the markets described in the accicaritams), I think we find a common denominator of in-
dexical ties to the patronage base in the political economy. Even the later works in the epic and puranic mode, which engage with pan-Indic characters, inevitably create the occasion to reference a lineage of gurus or suggestively invoke the audience or praise the local and regional kings and chief-
tains, as we shall see. These references are often oblique because they are effected through subtle poetic allusions that were internal to the milieu of

\textsuperscript{54} Ramacandran Nayar 1971: 177.

\textsuperscript{55} Modern Malayalam literary histories use the term prasthanam, which they translate as “movement” in English, as the nearest analogue to what I think of as genre, as a form of social practice, rather than mere literary form (cf. Hanks 1987). The diagnostic features of such move-
ments in Malayalam literary studies, however, may range from the use of a particular meter to a whole thematic social-literary complex, like the “Romantic movement.”
production. While some of these allusions have been preserved for posterity through parallel evidence as to their specific historical referents, we can see that without preservation of this contextual information, we would innocently read over the allusions as natural or incidental aspects of the work.

THE NIRAŅAM POETS

The work of the Niraṇam, or Kaṇṇaśan, poets, a family of authors working across three generations in middle Travancore from the late fourteenth century and into the fifteenth century, is another example of how the various strata of language and narrative can work independently of each other into a new “movement.” At the level of content, these works are rather straightforward adaptations of Sanskrit epic and puranic works. While a certain restructuring of the narrative occurs in parts of several of these, these poets were unquestionably following the Sanskrit originals rather closely. The novel plots and local descriptions characteristic of the accīcarītas, the Ananta-pravaranṛṇanam, and the sandēsakāvyas of earlier and later Manipravalam are absent.

On grounds of both theme and meter, modern scholars unanimously assign these works to the Pattu taxon. On the other hand, because the restrictions to Dravidian phonology enjoined by the Lilātilakam for Pattu are dropped and the entire Sanskrit lexicon is thus opened up in its original, or ātasaṃ, forms, certain scholars treat these works by comparing them with Manipravalam works. The major divergence, aside from meter, is that despite the heavy use of Sanskrit vocabulary, the Niraṇam works generally eschew the use of Sanskrit grammatical forms, which on the other hand thoroughly permeated other, contemporary Manipravalam texts. This is evident in the examples that follow. The first selection is from the late-fourteenth-century Uṇṇunilisandēsam, in high Manipravalam style; the second is from the Niraṇam poet Mādhavappanikkār’s Bhagavadgītā of roughly the same period. (Sanskrit lexical items are in roman font; those with Sanskrit grammatical forms are additionally underlined):

\[\text{tanḍār-māt-ānd-ālaku-poljum mika munḍekkal mēvum}\\ \text{vanḍār-kolak-kufjikal sikham Uṇnu-nilin udārām}\\ \text{kōnd-aip-puṇḍ-aruna-mani-vā kōndu-kōndattā-rāgam}\\ \text{pandē pōle param anubhavam ko’pi kāmi jagāmā.}^{57}\]

\[\text{atbhūtam-aśy āmṛtam-aśy maṇa nālinu}\\ \text{maṇi-v-v ākhila-jagat-pūrṇa-v-um-āyi}\\ \text{udbhava-marāṇādi-kāj karaṇādi-kāj}^{57}\]

56. Ś. Kuṇñanpillar 1979: 10–12. For an example of the assignment of these works to the Pattu taxon, see Purusottamannayar 1980: 23–34.
In contemporary Kerala scholarship this move away from Sanskrit grammatical incorporations is seen as an attempt to save the integrity and naturalness of Malayalam while simultaneously enriching it through Sanskrit lexical contributions. Of course, whether this was indeed a winning back of Dravidian grammar from the Sanskrit colonization represented in Manipravalam, or it represented yet a further stage in selling out Dravidian through embracing Sanskrit orthography and lexicon, depends on which variety of language is the point of comparison for viewing these poets.

Interestingly, the Niraṇām poets themselves simply called the language in which they wrote "bhāṣāmīśram, “mixed language,” which is exactly how the writers of technical, prose treatises referred to their own linguistic medium. It seems quite likely that this language represents just another linguistic register that appeared to be the natural idiom for combining Sanskrit with the “Tamil” of this social stratum. On the other hand, the language form is described as highly disciplined, in keeping with the celebrated accomplishment of the great guru of the Niraṇām lineage as a “lordly poet of both [Sanskrit and Tamil].”

What does seem certain from these authors’ own declarations is that these works were intended primarily for the devotional inspiration of their audiences, legitimizing the relatively greater degree of vernacularization. Regarding this devotional purpose as uppermost, “anyone with bhakti for Śiva” would “not be contemptuous of this as mixed language.” This bhakti notion of the salvational properties of even unmixed “Tamil” goes back to the Rāmacaritam and clearly reflects the bhakti ideology of eastern Tamil poets from the earlier medieval period. Regarding the salvific properties of the vernacular, the last verse of the Rāmacaritam declares that “Those who study the Tamil poetry recited in devotion by [the poet] Śri Rāman in whose inner heart the primal Lord resides . . . attain the lotus feet of Viṣṇu.”

58. Ś. Kuṇñanpillā 1979: 75.
59. mahāgururvarnānyahakhatvāvaran. From the Uttarakāṇḍam of the Kaṇṇaśī Ramāyaṇam, cited in Warrior 1977: 106 n. 5.
61. āttēvanil asīṣata manakāmpataya cirīman ampi-nayampana tamāvai vali . . . pokapokacayavan cāraṇa tāmāvaivarāṇe. (Krṣṇa Nāyār 1979: 1076)
While I know of no self-references to the meters in which the Niraṇāṇam works are composed, these poets are popularly said to have invented the prominent meter in which the bulk of their corpus is composed, the taranginī. In fact the meter was employed earlier in couplets in the “prose” sections of the accicaritāms, and even earlier in the Rāmacaritam and Tirunilāmāla. But in the present context we cannot rule out that the commonly accessible nature of the meter, the “mixed” quality of the language, and the bhakti uses for which these works were intended form a complex. This is almost certainly why most contemporary scholarship in Kerala places these works within the Pattu “movement.”

The caste title of the Kāṇṇāśāṇ group of poets was Paṇikkar, which places them almost certainly in the Nāyār caste grade. This is significant in terms of these poets’ claim to mastery of Sanskrit, since as Nāyārs they would have been reckoned as Shudras in the Brahmanical order. When the Līlātilakam was written, at the end of the fourteenth century, the local language was said to be bifurcated into distinctively refined (utkṛṣṭa) and crude (apakṛṣṭa) varieties, the former belonging to the upper three varṇas, thus excluding Shudras, and the latter belonging to the ignorant (pāṃara), who were low-caste (hīna-jāti). So about the same time this typification was held by certain, presumably Brahmanical, sectors of society, the Kāṇṇāśāṇs were claiming mastery of Sanskrit and producing their own “mixed language” versions of great Sanskrit religious texts.

This clearly shows that there were martial-grade castes who were not just Sanskrit literate by this time, but were confident enough to improvise in their own language styles and genres under the ideology of bhakti. In such a context, an interesting question thus arises: If the Niraṇāṇam poets were so learned in Sanskrit, why were they not producing Manipravalam? In the general absence of information on authorship for the earlier Manipravalam texts, the authors are usually assumed to have been Brahmans. For the last of the accicaritāms, the Uṇṇiyāṭicaritam, however, we know that the author was a Cākṣyā, one of the temple-servant castes responsible for the vast majority of performative arts composed for the temple theaters and other sacred forums. Women of these castes might legitimately form sexual liaisons with Brahman men, and their offspring were likely to receive some education in Sanskrit through their genitors.

Connubium with Brahmans was widely practiced with Nāyar women as well, systematized in the (in)famous institution of sambandham discussed earlier. We know that in recent history many a “Shudra” youth (as they were reckoned by Brahmans) was exposed to Sanskrit learning through their Brahman fathers. So if the Paṇikkars were genuinely learned in Sanskrit and hence potentially able to compose in Manipravalam, perhaps they did not do so because their audience and purposes were differently constituted. Linking these speculations with the structure of religious communities in Kerala on
which we have information preserved from the medieval period, it seems most likely that these different textual registers were differently placed in the partly disjunctive interactional strata of the palaces, temples, and shrines for which these divergent works were produced and circulated. I consider later the forums in which literary works were performed. For now, I will close these observations on the ideological relation to Brahmans in these works with a verse from the very beginning of Rāmappaṇikkar’s Rāmāyaṇam:

Discarding egotism and such through ascetic meditation, and compassionately given over to peacefulness, restraint, and joy in their dedication to the Veda, considering such incomparable lords on earth [i.e., Brahmans] to be my very divinity, by the grace of these Vedic Brahmans will all that I contemplate here be accomplished.62

**CERŪŚŠERI: THE KĀVYA POETICS OF A BHĀṢĀ BRAHMAN**

If the poetry of the Niraṇam school represents the vocabulary of Sanskrit mapped into Dravidian grammatical and poetic structures, and seems socially tied to a group of Shudra poets who resorted explicitly to a Brahmanical normative order, then the next major “movement” to consider presents some interesting contrasts. It was inaugurated by one man—Cerūśšeri, who seems to have composed in the fifteenth century—through one work, his Kṣṇagātha. All the ambient legends and apparent secondary references confirm that he was a Brahman of northern Kerala. Politically, he was the dependent of a Kōlattiri rāja of the same region, and the Sanskrit verses that close each chapter of his work declare that it was composed at the order of this king.63

Poetically, the Kṣṇagātha represents a breakthrough experiment, in that it uses a simple Dravidian meter (the mañjari, or gātha, after this work) with a preponderance of Dravidian vocabulary, and although it completely eschews Sanskrit grammatical forms, it maps into these an ingenuity of Sanskrit poetic figures of sound and sense that transforms this humble matrix into virtual kāvya.

The social provenance of this experiment may be preserved in the legend that recounts its invention, for the king apparently commanded that it be based not on a high poetic model but on the rustic rhythm of one of his queen’s lullabies.64 What is done with this poetically, however, is quite re-

---

63. ājñayā kālabhājacya
pājñayasyodayavaramavah
kṣṇagāthāṃ kṣṇagāthāyām.
markable. Not only are the Sanskrit figures of sense like upamā, rūpaka, and utprēkṣa worked out beautifully in the simplest of vocabulary, but figures of form or sound or their interaction, like yamaka, various kinds of prāsa, and śleṣa, grace the work as well. This is perhaps the most extreme example of the medium of Malayalam and the poetics of Sanskrit cohabiting the same genre. The result is that a verse can be grasped, discursively and auditorily, as readily intelligible and pleasing, yet the trained aesthete can also savor it on reflection.

On the surface, the Kṛṣṇagāthai is a relatively straightforward adaptation of the Bhāgavatapurāṇa, relating the life of Kṛṣṇa. Yet thematically it contains a degree of complexity. A good deal of humor is woven through the work, and, more troubling for many modern readers, a liberal dose of erotics as well. Indeed, in places one finds a thematic continuity with the descriptions of courtesans from the accicaritams—in the chapters on the gopis’ pining for union with Kṛṣṇa, for instance, or in the lush and fancifully sweeping absorption in describing Rukmini’s body. This interweaving of bhakti with erotics, encountered readily in the early Manipravalam works but notionally not in Pattu or in mainstream late Manipravalam, continues to invite apologies or condemnation from contemporary critics. When condemned, the erotics are linked up with the Brahmanical decadence of medieval Kerala as a blight in an otherwise fine work. But since the erotic in this case has invaded the heart of Pattu in an overtly devotional work of high stature, other attempts to reconcile the dilemma emerge. A recent analysis, for instance, attempts to posit that the erotics are allegorical and bent to the higher and more encompassing purposes of bhakti.

Perhaps the most interesting element of this “genre” (which includes only a couple of other works written in apparent imitation) is, once again, its hybridity, both at the formal levels of meshing language and poetics, and in the thematics, in which a lower, folk form is raised to the aesthetic sensibilities of the elite sphere of Manipravalam. Socially, it seems to be the production of a Brahman at play among the Shudras, dallying with the forms of their poetry as he might with those of their women.

MESSENGER POEMS: FROM SANSKRIT TO MANIPRAVALAM

The genre of the sandeśakāvyas, the “messenger poem,” is a firmly localized form in Kerala but is far better represented in Sanskrit production than in Manipravalam. While others certainly must have been composed and circu-

---

lated in Manipravalam, only one complete poem (from the fourteenth century) and the first half of another (from the fifteenth) still survive—compared with the dozens of Kerala’s messenger poems in Sanskrit. The Sanskrit poems evidently enjoyed popularity primarily among pandit and royal circles, starting with the Sukasandesa of the late thirteenth or early fourteenth centuries and continuing into the modern period.

While the Kerala sandesakayas in Sanskrit overtly conform in their plot structures and poetics to the model of Kalidas’s Meghaduta (Cloud messenger), the general motif of sending animate and inanimate messengers between lovers is of long standing in south India and seems relatively independent of Sanskrit influence. Tamil literature includes a well-documented continuity of messenger motifs from the earliest caikam literature of the first few centuries C.E. through the medieval bhakti hymnists and into the fourteenth-century beginnings of full-blown tutu (Skt. duta) works, of which some fifty-eight are attested. Despite clear inspiration from the Sanskritic model in the later tutu literature, marked differences of convention and treatment in these poems distinguish them from their Sanskrit counterparts. Correspondingly, there is at least one folk composition from the lower caste of Washerman (Vannan) in Kerala that relies on the messenger motif and likely reaches back to an indigenous rather than a Sanskritic model.

In certain formal properties, the two surviving Manipravalam messenger poems seem clearly to aspire to the established Sanskrit prototype. The two display the same overall organization, and both are long poems composed exclusively in Sanskrit meters, relying heavily on Sanskrit lexicon, and even occasionally resorting to its grammatical terminations. In much of their thematic matter and its treatment, however, they might just as readily appear as a further development of the accicaritams. These, it will be recalled, are the earliest metrically mixed works (campu) in Manipravalam and, like the Kerala sandesakayas, are ostensibly in praise of courtesan-dancers. The acci-

68. The Lilatithakam, the fourteenth-century poetic-grammatical treatise of Manipravalam noted earlier, gives a number of citations from works that were apparently sandesakayas but are no longer extant. The citations are listed in Gopikuttan 1996: 15–16. The Unnayaccicaritam, from the latter half of the thirteenth century, contains a passage that refers to the singing of apparently vernacular “sandes songs” (Appukuttanayar 1979: 76–77, 123 n. 3).

69. The most exhaustive work in Malayalam on the Sanskrit and Malayalam (or Manipravalam) sandesakayas is Appukuttanayar 1979. Summaries of thirty-one of these works in Sanskrit from Kerala can be found in English in Unni 1985: 7–32.

70. Twelve or thirteen genre features at the level of plot or thematics for the sandesakarya were formally stipulated in the Varavarnini, a widely cited Kerala commentary on the Sukasandesa, which was itself a Kerala work (Unni 1985: 52–55; Gopikuttan 1996: 14–15; Appukuttanayar, 1979: 8–10).


caritams’ mode of setting out a kind of amorous traveler’s descriptive account anticipates in many particulars the principal thematics of the Manipravalam messenger-poem: roving over the landscape and social locales of markets, palaces, and temples to eventually arrive at the heroine’s house; the subsequent description of the heroine, her attributes, and abode; as well as the erotic sentiments that saturate these descriptions. The acci poems do not, however, exhibit the corresponding imperative to adopt either the formal features or the plotting of the Sanskrit genre, and they lack its most characteristic feature—namely, the messenger. In certain respects both kinds of works also recall the genre of the guide poem (arrupatāi) in caṅkam Tamil—the travel description of the bard’s route over the landscape to visit a generous and beneficent royal patron. This motif continues clearly from the accicaritams into the messenger poems of Manipravalam, which praise the realms, palaces, and personages of various named kings as part of the patronage circuit over which the poet’s description moves. There are also clear resonances in all these works of the descriptive aspects of social and natural geography found in temple-focused praise poems, like the Tirunīṭalalā or Anantaśahīrayaṇanam.

In summary, while at the formal level the two sandēśakāvyas in Manipravalam are unquestionably modeled on the Sanskrit messenger genre after which they are named, they, as well as their Sanskrit counterparts within Kerala, also seem to carry forward the themes and concerns of earlier Dravidian genres that have no obvious equivalents in Sanskrit but have likely antecedents in Tamil literary conventions, rooted to concerns of local culture.

Scanning from Kālidāsa’s Meghadiṭa, as a pan-Indic Sanskrit ideal, to the Sanskrit messenger poems of Kerala and finally to those composed in Manipravalam, modern critics usually comment on a certain aesthetic decline: the loss of that generality in Kālidāsa wherein universalized sentiments of longing-in-separation (viraha) are mapped into features of nature, and every descriptive move across the landscape is reportedly bent to this larger artistic purpose. In the Kerala productions, as the complaint goes, we are instead given pointless praises of the skills and erotic attributes of specific dancing girls, embedded in descriptions of persons and places devoid of any Sanskritically aesthetic savor (rasa). Turning this critique around to a positive engagement, I prefer to read in these texts a shift away from an aesthetic of pan-Indic pretensions toward one that is progressively tied into local interests. The thematic concerns with travel and description, which I suggest

74. These genre convergences were confirmed for me in discussions with Professor M. R. Raghava Varīyar in Kottayam in the summer of 1997. See the discussion of the convergences between the campu and sandēśakāvyas genres in Raghava Varīyar and Rajan Gurukkal 1992: 262–63.
have roots in earlier Kerala forms, find their substantive content in persons and locales that become not just the objects but the very motives of literary depiction.

This geosocial specificity is clear from the earliest attested Sanskrit Sandeśakārya from the Kerala country, the highly influential Śūkasandēśa (Parrot messenger) of Lakṣmidāsa, on which numerous commentaries were written, and on which the first Manipravalam messenger poem, the fourteenth-century Unnumilisandēśam (Message to Unnunili) clearly modeled itself.76 While the Śūkasandēśa’s descriptive journey begins in the Tamil country, its focus moves progressively and dominantly to locales and persons in Kerala. What clearly places it in the Manipravalam milieu is the target of its message: a dancing girl of great fame who attracts all the luminaries of Kerala to her mansion. This is, as we have seen, the theme of both the earliest Manipravalam verses preserved in the Vaiśikatantram and the last great erotic piece of courtly Manipravalam, the fifteenth-century Candrotsavam. Also shared across the Śūkasandēśa and other travelogue works that preceded or followed it, whether in Manipravalam or Sanskrit, is a twin focus on the kingly and Brahmanical orders. Capital cities, palaces, and their chiefs come in for praise, but so do the temple centers and estate-manors (illam) of great Brahman dignitaries, whether of ritual, scholarly, or poetic stature. As noted of the courtesan milieu earlier, the social landscape is centered literally on the erotic-artistic consumption of an entertainer class of women by a consortium of the military, intellectual, and religious elite. Add to this assemblage the markets so regularly depicted, and the portrayal seems to amount to a celebration by this elite of itself and its own bases of socioeconomic power.

While the Kerala messenger poems in Sanskrit and Manipravalam share a general milieu, there are also several features of note that seem typical of the shift out of Sanskrit and into Manipravalam. First, in keeping with the critics’ complaints noted earlier, the naming of individual places and persons becomes more specific. In the Sanskrit works there is a tendency to refer indirectly, to use family or locale to allude to persons, and to construct Sanskrit calques or phonetic mutations when advertizing to local or individual names. Not only do such usages lift particular places partway toward generalization of their descriptive or allusional attributes (referring to a city, for instance, as “the Kailāsa of the south”), but they also loosen the temporal placement of particular individuals by invoking them through their family lines (e.g., “lord of the kings of Mātām”). By comparison, the Manipravalam pieces are more clearly anchored to historical times and places. For instance, the Unnumilisandēśam is titled after the recipient of the love message—the spec-

76. Pattabiraman 1984: 92–94; Unni 1985: 48–64. There are ten or more passages in which the ideas and wording of the Śūkasandēśa are so closely paralleled by the Unnumilisandēśam as to leave little doubt that the latter was indebted to the Sanskrit poem (Appukkuṭāmāyir 1979: 97).
ifically named dancing girl, Uṇṇunili, of a specifically named manor—against the Sanskrit convention of titling such poems by the messenger-vehicle (Kālidāsa’s *Cloud Messenger*, Lakṣmidāsa’s *Parrot Messenger*, etc.). Moreover, the messenger in *Uṇṇunilisandēsam* is not some inanimate or supernatural entity but a named prince of Vēṇāṭu, who is dispatched on the errand as the poet’s friend and patron. That this trend toward specification was recognized as problematic is clear from the *Lilātilakam*, which debates the issue of whether courtesan-heroines should be named by family, locale, or personal name, as against giving them contrived and generic pseudonyms (e.g., “Jasmine Moonlight”) that evoke a supposedly higher aesthetic.\(^77\)

In keeping with the rise of locally prominent persons and places in these works, I have also noticed a significant pattern in the restriction of territorial scope. Many of the circuits covered in the Sanskrit *sandēsavāyas* of Kerala begin in or entail travel outside of Kerala, particularly in the Tamil country (though also in Andhra, Karnāṭaka, and elsewhere). The routes of messenger poems in Manipravalam, however, begin and pass only through kingdoms that were part of today’s Kerala, in a language sphere presumably confined to early Malayalam. For instance, the *Sūkasandēsa* (fourteenth century) and *Kōkilesandēsa* (fifteenth century)—respectively the earliest and the most famous of these Kerala works in Sanskrit—both begin in the Tamil country; while the former enters Kerala by the traditional southern route into Travancore, the latter enters Kerala from the northern route, via Mysore and into Calicut. This doubtless reflects the Tamil origins of a number of prominent Kerala court poets, who lost their patronage bases in the former kingdoms, commencing with the northern Muslim invasions of the early fourteenth century, and culminating in conquests by Vijayanagara and the formation of successor Nāyaka kingdoms.\(^78\) By contrast, the Manipravalam pieces are confined to Kerala: the fourteenth-century Manipravalam *Uṇṇunilisandēsam* moves across four discrete kingdoms in southern Kerala, while the movement of the *Kōkilesandēsam* (or *Cakrakesandēsam*) of the following century is from the territory of Calicut through central Kerala (Cochin) and into northern Travancore.

In terms of these respective literary languages and their cultures, it is thus clear that the medium of Sanskrit was commensurate with the depiction of

---

77. Numbers of Kerala scholars attempt to chart the recurrence of named courtesans across the works of Manipravalam literature, but it is not clear that these names specify the same individuals historically, and in many cases the chronology would be impossible. It seems likely that names of originally famous women may have become legendary and thus popular in subsequent generations, where their popularity was propagated through the literature itself. The same applies to famous poets, who are made characters in later works and legends.

78. Kunjunni Raja [1958] 1980 gives a historical survey of Sanskrit literati in Kerala, detailing how a number of them originally came from outside of the region and how they found patronage in various Kerala courts.
a cultural sphere (and actual movement of its literati) across political and linguistic borders. The same genre, when adapted into the medium of Manipravalam, underwent a corresponding restriction of scope. But just as the Sanskrit pieces evidence pretensions to a literary culture that is transpolitical between Kerala and Tamil kingdoms, so the two Manipravalam pieces reach across local polities within Kerala. If these two works were commissioned, as it would seem, by kings of Vēṇāṭu and of the Calicut region, respectively, then either these patrons or their poets had pretensions to an expanded cultural sphere beyond their immediate polities in explicitly marked and incorporative territorial terms. The adaptation of Sanskrit and its genres to the Manipravalam milieu of Kerala thus seems to mirror the same intensified regionalization and parallels quite well Pollock’s charting of a similar process in the Kannada country whereby the Sanskrit cosmopolis is writ small within the regional compass.79

There is one major thematic difference between the earlier Manipravalam poem, the Unnūnulisandēśam, and the somewhat later (perhaps by half a century) Kōkasandēśam. While the first is given over to erotic praise not just of the heroine but of numerous other courtesans and dancing girls along the route, this celebration of physical charms is virtually absent in the second work, which indeed fails, in the extant first half, even to mention the name of the heroine in whose quest the messenger is dispatched. The descriptions of women and their sexual charms gives way to greater space for praise of temples and their resident deities. The prominence accorded to kings, however, does seem to remain consistent across these works; many of the verses lauding kings and princes again hearken back to the accīcaritams and earlier works.

The erotic aesthetics of courtesan culture has vexed modern scholars and critics of these high Manipravalam works, leading to several exegetical tactics. These have ranged from ingenious attempts to claim that the courtesans were actually chaste wives, when the literature is taken as composed in artistic earnest, to claims that the literary representations were not serious but were comedic or farcical in intent. Part of the vexation seems fueled by communal sentiments in light of Kerala’s social history. The openly acknowledged and routinized sexual liaisons of Brahman men with women of the upper castes, and the celebration of this fact in much of the medieval literature, have carried an imputation of moral laxity that the caste communities of these women have worked hard to overcome through modern reform movements and organizations. Accompanying this is a politics of literary interpretation that has led to both cruder and subtler back-readings of Kerala literature in communal-ethnicist terms. At root, there is a claim

that works expressive of an eroticized elite culture are the products of Aryan, Brahmanical decadence, mapped into a Sanskritized Manipravalam, while those that take up the themes of puranic and epic religious literature, in the Pattu genres of native language forms, represent the genuine aesthetic of Kerala’s pious and heroic Dravidian indigenes. Subtler variants and modifications of this stark formulation are still commonplace, and it remains a task of interdisciplinary literary and social historical scholarship to work out the tangled relations between religious institutions, sexual and caste politics, regional powers, and literary mediums and themes in Kerala’s shifting historical matrix. Here I can only reiterate the changing historical contingency of these relationships that the heterogeneous nature of the literary record itself makes apparent through time.

Interestingly, the Līlātilakam itself has something to say on the artistic legitimacy and genuineness of romantic relations with courtesans (gaṇikā),80 at least registering indirectly their potential conflict with normative, wedded connubium. When an objection is raised to the effect that romantic involvement with courtesans cannot be an aesthetically valid case of love, since it entails a mere monetary relationship, a long (and otherwise unknown) Sanskrit passage is cited in rebuttal. The defense is that the issue of livelihood is discrete from otherwise genuinely romantic possibilities, so that the two can coexist; the further riposte is that even wedlock and family relations are subject to cynical assessments of financial and other considerations, which render them hardly fit as an arena for true romantic love.

THE LATER CAMPU AS TEMPLE PERFORMANCE

Tracking the course of both formal and thematic genre features within Manipravalam, and between it and Sanskrit, we have seen that from the perspective of form the sandeśakāryas in Manipravalam appear as fairly direct adaptations from the Sanskrit. In subject and treatment, however, they seem a continuation of the indigenous campus, the accīcaritams (recalling that even the ostensibly Sanskrit form of the campus in Kerala incorporates Dravidian meters). And finally, even between the two Manipravalam messenger poems there is a decided shift from an aesthetics of erotics to one of temples and praise of their gods. The next major generic movement to consider represents yet another variation on these possibilities by carrying forward the thematic shift to religious themes from Sanskrit purāṇas and local temple cele-

80. Tellingly, I think, many modern Malayalam translators tend to gloss the Sanskrit word for an accomplished courtesan, gaṇikā, with the Malayalam vēṣya, which means a common prostitute. The two categories are distinguished in Sanskrit erotic treatises, however; I think this verbal transition recapitulates the colonial demotion of courtesan culture into a progressively delegitimated and finally criminalized prostitution.
brations, but now in the form of the campu, which had earlier been used only for the courtesan genre.

The most famous of these later campus, the great Rāmāyaṇa Campu of Punam Nambūtiri, dates from the early fifteenth century. Like others of this genre, it not only seems modeled in many respects on the Sanskrit campus of authors like Bhoja, but it actually incorporates many verses in pure Sanskrit right out of these sources.\(^\text{81}\) This in no way detracts, however, from the bulk of original verses in heavily Sanskritic Manipravalam, interspersed with lively prose passages in Sanskrit and Manipravalam, which all fit together in a highly effective and original narrative architecture. Works like the Rāmāyaṇa Campu reveal a major shift toward the prose patterns found in Sanskrit campus, which are characterized by lengthy compounding and complex play of alliterative sound patterning. The earlier Dravidian meters, under the guise of prose, correspondingly diminish in those works that seem more extensively modeled on Sanskrit forms. There are, however, many campu works that also freely incorporate large stretches of Dravidian “prose” meters, like the old taraṇgini that resurfaces in the genre of tullāl. Even the Sanskritically formal campus make use of later dandaka stanzas, a kind of hybrid form of Dravidian meter that later becomes a staple of kathakali. In some cases even prose passages that are entirely of lexically and grammatically correct Sanskrit are cast in the indigenous taraṇgini meter.\(^\text{82}\)

Though the later campu genre enjoyed enormous popularity, as reflected in the number of surviving works, there is debate as to which groups in society used these compositions and for what purposes. Whether they were performed by the Cākyārs, who had earlier, and traditionally, staged Kerala’s Sanskrit dramas; the Nambyārs, the slightly lower caste of temple musicians; or Brahmans, in recitation for temple festivals, remains unclear.\(^\text{83}\) Structurally, there is no doubt as to their primarily performative nature. Intertextually, many verses are liberally borrowed and transposed across pieces attributed to different authors, giving the sense of a floating pool of compositional stretches tailored to individual needs and performances yet often adapted and woven together with great artistry. Each section of a text has opening and closing verses that either introduce the plot or encapsulate it up to that point and that contain other clues as to the context of use. The pretext for these verses is to address a friend, possibly copresent on the stage (or else in the reciter-poet’s mind?). These lines provide an indexical self-reference into a context that makes clear the performative nature of these works:


\(^{82}\) Līlavati 1996: 85–86.

\(^{83}\) Malayalam Improvement Committee 1968: 1–2; Līlavati 1996: 80–81; Rāmacandra Pilla 1987: 1–2.
O Friend! Here on the stage of this resplendent assembly the time has come quickly upon us. The great joy that shimmers in my stage-frightened mind is like that in the assembly of gods long ago when, overwhelmed with their troubles from Rāvana, they heard the direct word of Nārāyaṇa as they approached him on the Milk-Sea.84

Similar references to the audience in the Rāmāyaṇa Campu make clear that it was comprised of nobles (mālikar), including kings and Brahmans, and that the occasion was a festival of the incarnation of Rāma (rāmāvatārōt- savam).85 Putting these clues together in the Kerala context almost certainly implies that this work, and others like it, were composed for performance at festivals in temples of the higher castes.

The majority of other Manipravalam campus are similarly implicated with religious culture as performance texts, since nearly all are adaptations of stories from Sanskrit religious narratives of the epic and puranic literatures, and since they all employ the same convention of address to a copresent listener, often indexed to an implicitly attending audience. Even more instructive in terms of reflexive indexing of the patronage base is a set of three campus whose story lines rather exceptionally depart from the pattern of Sanskrit derivation. All three of these poems—all by the same author, Nīlakanṭhakavi—are explicitly composed to celebrate the mythical origins and festivals of three specifically named historical temples. Moreover, these temples were in different political realms in Kerala, reflecting the migration of the author as he worked under different patrons through the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. From the occasion of composing the last of these poems, the Teṅkaiḷanāṭhōdayam (Arisal of the lord of southern Kālāsa), we get some sense for how the entextualization of performance context could work historically and reflexively to garner cultural capital for both poet and patron. This work, composed for the famous Vaṭakkunāṭha temple at Trichur, then newly under the patronage of the Cochin king, explicitly invokes the force of Nīlakanṭha’s earlier compositions, the Cellūnāṭhōdayam and Nārāyaṇīyam. This reflects not only on the accumulated glories of the poet, but also on the potential for this king, Vīra Kēraḷa, to cumulatively build on these earlier acts of religious-cum-literary patronage by going his rivals one better. The poem reports that when the king arrived at the Trichur temple during its sacred festival, he called upon the poet before the entire assembly:

Bull of Knowledge! Good poet Nīlakanṭha! Long ago you wrought the wonderful Cellūnāṭhōdayam; and again, the Nārāyaṇīyam was composed by you. Now,

by my word, please begin immediately to compose the ultimate work [prabandham], charming, and with the new name of Teñkailanñithódayam!86

Earlier works from other regions are thus indexed to the present context to extol the greater glory of the poet as wedded now to the competitive aspirations of his new royal patron under the mantle of praise for the temple deity. In this way a chain of transregional temples, chiefly patrons, and poets were linked into competitively comparative networks, paralleling in literary media the similarly configured spheres of periodic warfare, tribute, marital alliances, and trading networks that made up the social fabric of medieval Kerala. Moreover, paralleling the reflexivity of the genre in hailing the friend before the assembly in performance, here the poet reports the king’s own report of the poet along with the sovereign’s instructions to compose the very composition that is being performed—all as part of the text of performance!

The sentiments of various classes and factions of Brahmans in competition with each other comes through as well in both Nilakantha’s poems and earlier campus like Punam’s Rāmāyaṇam from which he draws. It has been argued, with some evidence, that Nilakantha was himself from a non-Nambutiri caste of Śākta quasi Brahmans (generally called Mūsatu) who lost their entitlement in the Cellūr temple of northern Kerala, on which Nilakantha composed his first campu.87 This may account for the rollicking prose sections of his later two works, ridiculing the gluttony and unseemliness of various professional classes and divisions of Kerala Brahmans as they descend on the temple festivals, which are again reflexively depicted in his work. In content, and in the very tarangini meter, such passages anticipate the later genre of tulja and the biting satire of eighteenth-century poet Kuñcan Nambyār. Whatever the specific history of Nilakantha’s community affiliation, however, the verbatim repetition of such passages in earlier campus of varied authorship suggests that the competitively satirical spirit was widespread among poets, various other groups of Brahmans, and their high-caste rivals in Kerala.

The recurrence and liberal borrowing of passages across the entire campus corpus raises again the topic of the nature of Kerala’s “literature” and our understanding of “the text” as an inscriptive artifact. The campus seem to have been composed for performance, and the manuscript remains that we have seem to be scripts that served as memory aids and props for partly improvisational public readings. I think the textuality of these works hovers between what we tend to think of—in an unnecessary dichotomy—as oral and written literature. One vignette from the latest of the accicaritams, the Ûnniyā-

86. Nilakantha kavi 1990: vs. 17.
ticaritam, is particularly valuable in this regard for its depiction of a manuscript in use as a performance text.

In the poem two strangers (supernatural gandharvas in disguise) arrive in a town seeking the courtesan Uṇṇiyāṭi, and they enter the local temple to pray for guidance. They find the temple thronging with an assembly of high-born folk (jenādhye) and, seated before them all, a handsome man, spotlessly attired, with a tuft and an auspicious unguent-mark (tilakam) on his brow. He is

an eminent person, reciting [nigadan] with a distinguished, sonorous voice, sweetly melodious, his own work [nijakṛti], set down in letters on the lengths of shining palm leaves, which he turns through the lovely rippling of the bejeweled fingers of his two blossomlike hands.88

The work that the gandharvas describe him as singing—three verses of which are immediately cited in the poem itself—turns out to be in praise of the very heroine the strangers seek, and their author-performer turns out to be none other than Dāmōdaran Cākār, the author of our poem itself. Through the rather immodest double-voicing of the appreciative audience, we learn his identity: a “preceptor of the arts, named Dāmōdaran, who has attained the ultimate insight into all the disciplines of knowledge.” Thus in a case that once again demonstrates these texts’ reflexive potential, we are afforded a rare instance of an author depicting himself at work, using a manuscript of his own composition in performance.

DOMESTICIZED RELIGIOUS TEXTUALITY: THE ELUṬTACCHAN MOVEMENT

The shift of Kerala literary production in the sixteenth century to a largely Sanskrititic, puranic religiosity is variously attributed to one or more bhakti movements in the region. While an earlier scholarship attributed this to a reaction to the European presence on the coasts and elsewhere in south India, this interpretation is now out of favor, and writers currently see in the Kerala bhakti literature an endogenous collective revulsion to Brahmanical excesses and a general revolt against the moral and political decadence of later medieval society.89 Often such narratives link into the earlier-mentioned ethnicized notions of an indigenous “Dravidian” spirituality finally breaking through Aryan or Brahman impositions. I have seen nothing to convince me that there are historical grounds to substantiate this speculation. There is no doubt, however, that the movement around the bhakti literature later attributed to one Eluttacchan did represent a new kind of literary expression spreading through different sectors of society in a new context of its own creation.

Though there is no firm historical evidence for Eluttacchan the author, or even for which works were really his—aside from his Bhāratam and his most famous work, the Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇam—he does seem to have been associated with an institutional line of gurus whose locale and lineage are historically verified. The name “Eluttacchan” is a generic title for any village schoolteacher, generally of Shudra caste, who in documented times imparted a basic literacy in Malayalam to children of other Shudra-grade castes, like the dominant martial caste of the Nāyars. It is true that the Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇam spread with a phenomenal popularity in manuscript form from one end of Kerala to the other in Nāyar and other middle-caste homes, where it seems to have served as the principal text for domestic devotional recitation down to the present. Eluttacchan’s principal work is a translation into nearly modern Malayalam of the Sanskrit Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇam, a fourteenth-century north Indian devotional text often connected with the Rāmanandi sect. Lexically, the text is heavily Sanskritic with many Sanskrit nominal terminations but virtually no Sanskrit verbal forms or long compounds. Metrically, however, there is real innovation in putting together a particular set of Dravidian meters (though eschewing the earlier taraṇīgī of the Kamaśāsana), all of which are in couplet form, clearly intended for recitation or singing. This genre is called kilīpattu, or “parrot’s song,” in keeping with the thematic frame story of the text: that it was recited to the poet by a parrot. The content of the Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇam acknowledgedly lacks much by way of artistic or intellectual challenge and at many junctures veers into sections of liturgy-like praise. It seems designed for recitational use, as the text itself virtually announces. The kilīpattu genre, apparently originally charted out by this text in the late sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries, sparked the production of many similar translations and adaptations of the Sanskrit purāṇas and epic sources over the following centuries and into modernity.

The genre of kilīpattu exhibits yet another hybridization between Sanskrit and Kerala-Tamil prototypes. While, on the one hand, these works’ thematic focus on the epic and puranic tradition of Sanskrit is reflected in the extensively Sanskritized lexicon, on the other hand, the bulk of the grammatical structures are Malayalam, and both the frame of the parrot-narrator and the constituent meters can be readily traced to earlier Tamil literature. The latter are of special interest, since different sections and chapters are cast in discretely segregated Dravidian meters. Though none of these meters was ever explicitly referred to, named, or described before modern scholars turned to them, they had evidently risen to a level of discriminating and conscious deployment by the time of Eluttacchan. This is further proven by the appearance of compositions explicitly named for their pastiche of me-

ters, such as the *Twenty-Four Meters* (*Irupattinālu-vṛttam*), an abbreviated *Rā-ṃyaṇam* spuriously attributed to Eḻuttacchan, followed by others with names such as *Fourteen Meters, Sixteen Meters*, and so on. This development suggests that without apparent metatreatises legislating such metrical arrays, these performative traditions had generated their own learned forums or schools for the conscious formalization of such compositional styles, largely outside the province of Sanskrit norms.

One of the many legends clustering around Eḻuttacchan is that he was responsible for the introduction of the modern Malayalam script, the Āryan script (Aryalipi), into Kerala. Though the claim is manifestly false, in that the script preceded him by many centuries, the legend is telling in other respects. This modern script is, first of all, not a direct development out of Vatteluttu, the phonetic Dravidian script that had been used for centuries in local inscriptions and manuscripts, but rather a development of Grantha, which was phonetically developed for writing Sanskrit in south India. Indeed the ethnonymsic attribute “Āryan” in Malayalam is used almost exclusively to refer to the Brahman community in Kerala. Putting Eḻuttacchan’s claim on the script, together with his occupational title—meaning a kind of rustic Shudra literate—the nature and recitational use of his adaptations from Sanskrit into popular form, and the fact that the number and circulation of his manuscripts far exceeds that of any other author in premodern Kerala, provides pretty good evidence for a major shift toward popular non-Brahman literary consumption attributable to the school or movement Eḻuttacchan was later said to have founded. At the close of Eḻuttacchan’s *Adhyātma Rāṃyaṇam*, in the *phalaśruti* section which celebrates the text’s beneficent effects, we are told that the work is to be “read and recited,” and that “with the agreement of the accomplished Āryan people [i.e., Brahmans], those desiring knowledge may become greatly learned.”

While it is no longer fashionable to give credence to the legend of Eḻuttacchan’s mixed parentage from a lower-caste mother and a Nambūtiri father, the historical and internal evidence of his works does suggest a powerful Shudra-Brahman alliance in literary, ritual, and institutional terms. The historical facts are vague, but it does seem fairly certain that from his lineage home of Tuñcattu, on the Kerala coast near Ponmani south of Calicut, Eḻuttacchan or his followers moved inland to the forested hills of Palghat at Cīṟūr, where a Brahmanical residence (*agrahāraṃ*) and a religious hermitage (*matham*) were established under his patronage at a site bearing the name Ramānanda. The only quasi-historical verses referring to Eḻuttacchan that we have apparently come from this institutional setting. One oral verse preserves a line of gurus, beginning with one Tuñcattu Guru, and an inscrip-

tion gives details of the founding of the residence, hermitage, and temples under the direction of one of the later gurus in the oral list, Sūryanārayana, with the support of the territory’s chiefs. Verses from the Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇam itself (1.71–75) place Ēḻuttacchan under an elder brother who was one of a number of the author’s gurus and among other co-disciples of this and possibly other lineages. Whatever the particular lines of origin or succession, however, it does seem certain that Ēḻuttacchan’s sectarian life was intertwined with the lives of Brahmans. Despite strained attempts to link the succession to Śrī Vaiśṇavas in the line of the twelfth-century Brahman Viśiṣṭādvaita philosopher Rāmānuja, I would take the evident name chosen for their religious settlement, “Rāmānanda,” along with the signature work, the Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇam, and suspect Rāmāndi affiliation. In any case, various Ēḻuttacchan families of uncertain historical relation to our author do come up in legend as gurus of the Calicut kings and as Śākta priests and teachers, attesting to the supporting success in political and ritual spheres of this formation of Shudra literati. Furthermore, the Palghat settlement was clearly established with royal patronage, and also as part of a scheme for entitling a Brahmanical lineage, showing that the ritual-literary alliance had official political backing.

The interpretation of Ēḻuttacchan’s project as fundamentally anti-Brahmanical—a welling up of the popular Dravidian spirituality of bhakti in resistance to the social order—is clearly a strained back-reading. Note how Ēḻuttacchan situates himself and his work in relation to Brahmanical authority:

The very basis for the Lord, Bhagavān, who constitutes all the worlds, is the Veda, as my Lord Guru himself has graciously declared.

And the very basis of the Veda is the eminent Gods on Earth [i.e., the Brahmanas] we see here, whose boons, curses, and such are binding even for the principal gods: Brahma, Śiva, and Viṣṇu.

Who can declare the majesty of these supernal knowers of the Veda? As the devoted slave who serves at their feet, one born from the feet of Brahma [i.e., a Shudra], and first among the ignorant,

I will recite the Rāmāyaṇam, which is equal to the Veda, in a way that can be known by the dull-witted.

I would not at all rule out a level of critique of the prevailing religious order of society, though only implicit and certainly not overtly pitched in caste or class terms, in Ēḻuttacchan’s sectarian teachings. It is quite possible, for

instance, for Eluttacchan to have been defending the religious potency of his literary form against those who might be deaf to its message, without thereby singling out Brahmanical Sanskritic and priestly religious forms for attack. We have seen that divisions within Brahmanism in Kerala were evident in the predominantly Brahmanical later campu literature, and these divisions could certainly be exploited by those outside this social order with an eye to advancing their own socioreligious status. This potential, however, is not developed until after Eluttacchan, when works of a synthetically religious nature (some spuriously attributed back to him) in simple Dravidian meters made their appearance. Numbers of these works were by upper-caste authors, and some even by Nambūṭiri Brahmans.

The most famous of these post-Eluttacchan bhakti works are in simple song-form—like the pāṇa, which was used in popular lower-caste temple festivals for hymns to the deities—or in one or more of the other folk meters such as Eluttacchan used. From the sixteenth century onwards these forms were picked up and often infused with esoteric religious content in an explicit attempt to popularize such doctrines among lower castes and women. The Cintārātanam (Jewel of reflection), for instance, a work in the single kīḻpattu meter later called kēka, casts itself as a guru’s teaching to his female disciple in order to impart the truths of Vedānta to her in a form she can grasp. Similarly, the Harināmakirtanam (Praise of Hari’s name), as the title suggests, imparts its religious content of Vedānta fused with bhakti in the form of praise verses (kirtanam) to deities in a temple, each verse ending with the stock invocation of the name of Hari-Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu).

That a social split between Sanskrit and local language texts might be articulated even in the devotional mode itself is suggested from the most famous contemporaneous work of Sanskrit bhakti in Kerala, Mēḻputṭūr Nārāyaṇa Bhāṭṭāṭirī’s Nārāyaṇiyam, composed in praise of the god Kṛṣṇa as worshipped in the Guruvāyūr temple. In that work the Nambūṭiri Brahman author states (canto 92, verse 3) that women and Shudras are worthy of sympathy, since they cannot hear the recitations of Kṛṣṇa’s life story and similar religious performances, (presumably because of their ignorance of Sanskrit, their exclusion from certain temple institutions, or both). He does not suggest that this should be otherwise, and thus seems at least tacitly to accept this state of affairs as appropriate to these classes. In contrast to this sequestering of bhakti writings within the exclusive world of Sanskrit and the temple arts, another Brahman writing at the same time, Pūntanam Nampūṭirī, rendered

the Sanskrit _Kṣṇakarnāmytam_ into Malayalam (_bhāṣā_) explicitly at the prompting of his friend of the non-Brahman Vāriyar caste.  

Pūntānam’s most famous work, the _Jñānappāna_, is an independent treatise that casts an _advaita_ and _bhakti_ fusion into the simple song-form of the _pāṇa_ chant. Legend has it that Pūntānam himself was not learned in Sanskrit and that he came from a lower division of Brahmans not entitled to Vedic learning. In keeping with this social placement and the deliberately broad scope of his religious message, there are pointed verses on the social degradation of Brahmans in their competition for courtly honors, their wayward life in the temple, their hunger for women, and the greed that drives their Vedic cult (lines 203–30). That this message had broad appeal is clear from the manuscript’s widespread circulation and the great variance that the text itself underwent in a semi-oral form. The large chunks interpolated into it and the various readings of coherent alternate forms attest to its active life as a recitational piece. Some verses are reportedly chanted even today in Kerala temples.

From the variety of this _bhakti_ literature we must conclude that it was highly varied in scope and social provenience. There were purely Sanskritic registers, exclusionary of non-Brahmans; texts written by upwardly mobile non-Brahmans as part of Brahmanically dominated formations; other texts seemingly produced by déclassé Brahmans who may have felt greater solidarity with Shudra religious society; and finally, an entire raft of folk literature crafted by and for the lower castes, only fragments of which found their way into inscription. The hybrid nature of this varied literature attests to the complex stratification of Kerala society and its intimately entangled hierarchies.

**THE THEATER COMPLEX**

At the same period that the _bhakti_ literature was developing in domestic contexts, the temple theater was undergoing its final transformations into the form known as _kathakali_ (lit. story play), after passing through some earlier, intermediate stages. The plays, as they are called, on analogy to their Western counterparts, are actually song-texts performed by ensembles of vocal and percussion musicians to the rear of the stage, while elaborately costumed and made-up actors mime parts of the discursive content through an elaborate vocabulary of gestural language. The scripts of these plays are gen-

---

erally regarded as some of the finest works of Malayalam literature, though linguistically they are a pastiche of naturalized Malayalam, Manipravalam, and Sanskrit.

While Western notions of literature might question whether lifting such song-scripts out of their performative context as free-standing literary works is warranted, I suggest that this very uncertainty follows many other genres of Malayalam literature. (It has even been argued recently that the very early and most non-Sanskritic Rāmacaritam was composed for staging.)

Though in this essay I cannot go into the complexities of this theatrical literature itself, I wish to trace some of its developmental parallels and overlaps with other genres to suggest something of the social transformations and complexities of performative context that underlay the theater as a communicative forum.

The Sanskrit theater in Kerala is one of only a few surviving traditions of staging Sanskrit dramas in South Asia, reaching back to at least the tenth century C.E. At that time Sanskrit drama was already a multilingual sphere, wherein characters were socially differentiated by whether they spoke Sanskrit or the various artificial Prakrits that had developed from Indo-Aryan vernacular languages, and recitational verses in metric form were interspersed with dialogue in prose. As a literary form the Sanskrit play itself was a kind of polyglot campu, and I would hazard that this pan-Indic configuration was a structural adaptation to the very kinds of performative multiplexity that continued in Kerala.

In the earliest staging tradition preserved in Kerala, that of the Cākyār caste, this multilingualism was expanded to include slots for the insertion of Malayalam prose as improvisational commentary. Initially introduced through the character of the comedic Brahman-minister, the vidūṣaka, this commentarial form eventually lifted the actor’s role in the “group-play,” or kutiyāṭam, of Sanskrit theater to the solo genre of cākyārkuttu (Cākyār’s dance), where earlier explanatory interpolations became free-standing dramatic and declamatory performances in their own right. The earlier comedic content was partly registered through the Cākyār’s parody of the main character’s verses (śloka) in Sanskrit or vernacular counterverses (pratiśloka), and this carried over into improvisational satire and lampooning of the audience in the vernacular portions of the cākyārkuttu.

While the ostensible narrative frames were always from the staged Sanskrit play, I have shown elsewhere how in fact early Dravidian legends, known from other literary sources in Tamil, came to surface as ancillary compositions inserted within these performances. A most notable local development

is the pēkatha, or “demon’s stories,” told in the drama’s interludes.\textsuperscript{111} The other, and most striking, feature for comparison with Western theater is the costuming and make-up. These do not aim for realism in representation but use vivid paints and appendages, which transform the actors’ faces into veritable masks, and elaborately bizarre and outlandish costumes that had no counterpart in daily life. Kerala scholars have routinely noted the evident models for these forms in the possession dances of local deities in folk shrines, such as in teyyāṭṭam or mūtįēṟṟu, for example.\textsuperscript{112} In high theater, by contrast, the elements of make-up and costume were codified into a formal semiotic in keeping with the natures of the different characters, a convention that carried over into the later kathakali.\textsuperscript{113}

Between the Cākyārs, the high temple-servant caste of non-Brahmans who wore the sacred thread, and their lower-status musical accompanists, the Nambyārs, we find differently marked varieties of literary genre. Around the epic and puranic stories that framed Sanskrit plays, numbers of literary works called prabandhams (compositions), such as the Tripuradahanam, survive.\textsuperscript{114} These are in high Manipravalam and take generally the same form as the campus treated earlier, with which there is much overlap, if not identity. These prabandhams, however, seem to be more compact than the campus and lack the campus’ long sections in Sanskrit prose and verse borrowed from other sources. General consensus is that they were developed for the theatrical genre of cākyārkūttu for performance on temple stages, rather than for pathakam (recitation) at festivals—as the Rāmāyaṇa Campu, for instance, seems to have been used. Another temple theater genre, however, seems keyed to the Nambyār accompanists, who developed a simpler linguistic mode for telling audiences the stories in a non-Manipravalam prose form at interludes in the Cākyār performances. This form, known as drummer’s Tamil (mārdangika-tamil) in the Lilātilakam, lacks any Sanskrit terminations and falls into syntactically natural prose. The surviving compositions in this genre are usually known simply as gadyams (lit. prose; e.g., Brahmana-purāna-gadyam).\textsuperscript{115}

While the emergence and development of kathakali as a purely Kerala and largely vernacular dramatic tradition of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries can undoubtedly be traced back into the Sanskrit theater, scholars usually chart the impetus for this process through allied performative genres as well. Given that the principal dramatic forms in Kerala were sacred arts, per-

\textsuperscript{111} Nārāyaṇan Nampyār 1980: 209 ff. For some reflections on the incorporation of other Dravidian legends in the Kerala theater tradition, see Freeman 2000.

\textsuperscript{112} Kṣanakkaimal 1980: 25–38.

\textsuperscript{113} Vēnu 1994.

\textsuperscript{114} Malayalam Improvement Committee [1936] 1990.

\textsuperscript{115} Vēḷāyudhan Pillā 1977.
formed in the consecrated space of the temple, these other genres similarly emerged in the ritual life of the temple. A major stream of influence seems to have come out of the Sanskrit Kṛṣṇa worship of the poet Jayadeva, with the importation of his highly influential Gitagovinda into Kerala. While the form of this original Sanskrit work itself has suggested that it was a performance piece, it was certainly put to this function in Kerala, where the work was known as the Aṣṭapadi. It was apparently adopted in this form by the kings of Calicut for performance in Guruvāyūr and other Kṛṣṇa temples, where it developed from songs sung by temple servants before the stairs leading to the sanctum (hence, stair-song, sōpāna-giti) into a performance genre called aṣṭapadiyāttam (dancing of the Aṣṭapadi) presented by Ďakyārs using the gestural language (mudra) adapted from the theater. The best guess is that this genre was developed in the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries, when the Caitanya movement in Bengal (which had direct ties to south India) may have given an impetus to the Kṛṣṇa cult in Kerala. In any case, in the middle of the seventeenth century the Calicut king instituted an enduring staged version of the Kṛṣṇa saga, called kṛṣṇāttam, using the Sanskrit work he commissioned for the purpose, the Kṛṣṇagīti, as its script.¹¹⁶

The fame of this permanent ritual form apparently set off rivalries in other kingdoms, for within a few years, the rāja of Koṭṭārakkara, in southern Kerala, instituted a similar dramatic form called rāmanāttam, which comprised a repertoire of plays devoted to the god Rāma. Legend has it that this was the direct outcome of his being disparaged by the Calicut king for lacking a form like kṛṣṇāttam. The big difference, however, was that these plays were not in Sanskrit but in Keralabhasha, and in an innovation taken from another Malabar king, the discursive content was taken up by a background chorus of musicians, freeing up the actor for more vigorous dance and gestural displays. Both kṛṣṇāttam and rāmanāttam were performed in the same venue, probably competitively, at the great interregional festival of the Māmāṅkam, in the later years of the seventeenth century.¹¹⁷

By the turn of that century, kathakāli proper had emerged under another Malabar chieftain, Koṭṭayattu Tampurān, and by the first decades of the eighteenth century his plays were being staged far south of his realm, in Trivandrum. The variant contributions of different regions in Kerala, fusing and stabilizing in this way into the regionally shared form of kathakāli (with subregional variants remaining), attests to the kind of interactive aesthetic politics that prevailed from north to south. In terms of caste, kathakāli marks the full “Nayarization” of the temple theater form. Linguistically, while the introductory stanzas of sections remained in Sanskrit, the language of the main “dialogues” (sung by the accompanists) could veer into quite colloquial

Malayalam. The actors themselves were regularly drafted from the martial castes, and the recruitment base of kathakali were the military gymnasia known as kalaris. This enhanced the overlapping role kalaris had always held between the ritual arts and martial arts among the warrior castes, and gurus of these institutions circulated among the palaces of Kerala as their royal patrons intermarried and took them along into new alliances. The social provenance of kathakali is finally seen in the themes of the plays themselves, for the authors and audiences of plays are drawn from martial and other Shudra-grade castes, as well as from Brahmans. Not only do stories of warfare and murder, including the staging of battle and even simulated disembowelments, rise to prominence, but the role and even heroism of demonic characters expands, bringing a clearly antinomian tension from the lifeworld of Shudra society into the temple precincts.

In summary, the development of dramatic traditions reveals a dynamic that tended both to disseminate Sanskrit language culture into the wider vernacular society and to bring forms and themes from that society into new hybrid genres of performance and literary inscription. From the outset, the Sanskrit theater of kāṭiyāṭam entailed a multilingual mediation, but that mediation was eventually transformed into the free-standing vernacular drama of kathakali. For lack of space, I cannot discuss here how the textuality of kathakali works was constituted through the interweaving of those works with other performative-textual genres. The gestural language of the mudras (a true discursive form with its own supporting texts), the embedded commentary that shifted into written forms for enactment, the theatrical manuals that could devolve into their own literature—all of these were an inseparable part of the performative life of the principal text, the “dance-story” (āṭṭa-katha), which moderns equate with the literary text of the play, the “script” of Western theater. To fix on this inscribed form alone, however, would be to impose a narrowly reified notion of text on a much wider circuit of semiotic practices. For kathakali, as for its temple-art precursors, performative intertextuality, gestural “speech,” and other such semiotic modes mediated across the strata of language and register that partly mapped the social gradients of upper-caste society that came together in the temple theater. These literary formations, however, were inherently unstable, being driven by the dynamic of the socially disjoined hierarchies they worked to sub-

118. For the most recent and comprehensive study of the Kerala martial art kalarippayattu, practiced in these gymnasia, see Zarrilli 1998.
120. Cf. Zarrilli’s treatment of kathakali’s “play-text” in contrast to the more encompassing “performance score” (2000: 39 ff.).
sume. This resulted in successively more inclusive moves from kūṭiyāṭṭam, with its vidūṣaka, to the campu forms of cākyarkuttu and prabhandham to the prose recitations of the Nambyārs to the shift into kṣyanaṭṭam, rāmanāṭṭam, and kathakali, culminating in a historical trajectory that finally reached outside the temple in Kuṅcan Namyār’s tuḷal.

NAMBYĀR AND THE TULLAL

In considering Kuṅcan Nambyār—the final poet discussed here—and his genre of tuḷal, we are brought right to the brink of modernity. This genre represents in many ways the culmination of the hybridizing movements between performance and text that are, as we have seen, indicative of the caste and class tensions historically built into Kerala’s literary practices. Nambyār and tuḷal brought together the content of Sanskrit literary and religious works with the performance meters, modes, and songs of purely local festival forms in what remain highly regarded works of Malayalam literature today. The status of this corpus as literature, however, is probably a back-reading from a perspective that was itself shaped by Nambyār’s own efforts. His tuḷals were all performance texts written for a narrational mode that was sung and danced, and that perhaps brought the content of literary form as close to a context of mass consumption as it could come before the advent of printing. He explicitly appealed to his audience by addressing them as “the people” (janañna), and particularly anchored their identity as such to the accessibility of his linguistic form. For instance, he invoked the common soldier as those who would take to their heels when confronted with “tortuously harsh and knotty Sanskrit” as opposed to their “lovely Kerala speech.”

In the crafting of his texts we find the skill of the litterateur who has mastered Sanskrit and Manipravalam but deliberately exploits them for their effect within a vernacular frame.

Nambyār lived through the heart of the eighteenth century (perhaps 1705–1770) and navigated the transition in his patronage base from a shifting pastiche of local chieftains to the early modern state of Travancore which crushed and absorbed those chiefs under the reign of Martāṇḍa Varma and his successors. What is known of his life suggests that he was tutored in Sanskrit under a Brahman guru and trained as well under Shudra-grade teachers in the popular and martial arts of the military gymnasium. He seems to have traveled widely in Kerala and to have sought patronage in a variety of courts, from Kōlam in the far north to Travancore near Kerala’s south-

123. Gaṅeś 1996: 167; Lilavati 1996: 121. It has even been suggested—and defended by no less than Ulūr Paramēśvarayar—that Kuṅcan Nambyār was the same person as the famous Sanskrit scholar Rāmapāṇivādar (Paramēśvarayar 1955a: 509ff.).
ern limit. Aside from the *tul̄ḷal* corpus of his later years, he is attributed with a number of other works, some in the *kilippāṭṭu* genre of El̄uttacchan and one explicitly in high Manipravalam style, perhaps the first and only extant premodern attempt at the long poem form (*mahākavya*) in the Kerala language. Whether or not this poem, the *Kṣṇacaritam Maniūpavalam*, was really the poor specimen it has been judged by modern Sanskrit pandits (it was in any case chanted by elders at dawn and learned in village schools), it does attest to Nambyār’s mastery of Sanskrit vocabulary and grammatical forms, which is borne out in his other works as well. This is of great importance when we consider his move to the *tul̄ḷal*, the genre which he is traditionally thought to have created and on which his fame most securely rests.

As with most legends of origins in Kerala, that of *tul̄ḷal* need not be historically accurate to have nevertheless captured the social dynamic behind this art form. The legend of Kuñcan Nambyār’s invention of *tul̄ḷal* ties it to his original employment as a temple drummer, an accompanist for Cākyār Sanskrit theater. As described earlier, the Cākyārs were the higher-caste actors on the temple stage. The lower-caste Nambyārs did the drumming (a somewhat polluting profession because of its association with hides) and supplied the actresses (Naṇṇiyārs, who might also be consorts of the Cākyārs) and also recited their own de-Sanskritized prose genres during the interludes to get the story across to the audience. While working as a drummer, we are told, Nambyār once dozed off during an all-night performance. He awoke to find he was being made the butt of jokes in the satirical mode of the Cākyār’s *kuṭṭu* before the mirthful audience. Humiliated, he resolved to avenge his slighted honor. During the next evening’s performance he vacated the temple theater, moved into the outer compound, and enacted his own new mode of singing recitation and costumed dance to a simple drummed accompaniment. He stole the show—and the Cākyār’s audience. Thus *tul̄ḷal* was supposedly invented by Kuñcan Nambyār in the course of a day.

The word *tul̄ḷal* refers to any of a variety of folk dances practiced in Kerala, most notably the spirit possession dances performed by ritualists at lower-caste shrine festivals. Kerala scholarship agrees that these *tul̄ḷals* were already ancient and widespread when Nambyār adapted some of them for his new performance genres. Nambyār himself refers to his audience as gathered for *paṭṭayani* (lit. battle-array), one of the dominant folk genres that included various *tul̄ḷals*. Nambyār cast each of his *tul̄ḷal* works into one of three distinctive rhythmic schemes that corresponded to three subgenres of costumed dance: these were the *paṭṭayani*, *śitaṅkan*, and *ōṭtāṅ-tul̄ḷals*. The first two were

also named genres of the paṭayani—the paṭayan called after the polluting caste who performed it, and the ṣitaṅkan associated with another polluting caste, the Pulayans. The third type is also said to be a folk form of the Vēlan and Kanīyān castes.127

Without a doubt, Nambyār was deliberately reaching into the forms of lower-caste arts that were excluded from the precincts of the high temple and elevating them through adaptation to a performance mode that captured part of the ethos of temple theater but brought it to a widened public. This was still not a universal public, as it is almost certain that those very lower castes whose forms he appropriated were probably not among his usual audience. His forum would most likely have been the semipublic compound outside of the temples, where on festival occasions all those middle-range castes who did not pollute by their mere approach could gather, along with those who might normally enter the temple but mingled with their inferiors at festival time.128

Had Nambyār’s tulḷals simply given written form to the usual content of festival folk songs, with their themes of purely local gods, heroes, and demons, he might be interpreted as just a failed member of the temple artist establishment who found his natural level among the masses. But as historian K. N. Gāneś has argued persuasively, there was an implicit politics in the very bringing together of discrepant form and content in this festival forum.129 For the materials Nambyār brought into his hybrid festival folk frame were precisely all the high literature of the Sanskrit epic and puranic traditions from the temple theater and campū literature, which was normally inaccessible to the middle and lower castes. I think we can make the case that Nambyār was thus practicing a kind of deliberate folklorization of high Sanskritic culture, parading it around in folk forms for public scrutiny. And when this is linked to the well-recognized satiric content of his work—a clear extension of the Cākyār commentarial mode—one cannot but recognize a pervasively implicit, and sometimes pointedly explicit, critique of the reigning cultural authorities in late medieval Kerala.

To harness the low is not to embrace it in its own life-world but to appropriate it for use against the higher-ups that Nambyār lampooned. In his pre-tulḷal days Nambyār embraced the devotional mode and kilippāṭṭu genre of Eḻuttacchan, and in the Śivapurāṇam, one of his last works before he began composing tulḷal, he explicitly enjoined the way of Śiva worship as open to

128. There is good internal textual and contextually indexed evidence to support the nature of the audience and forum, since Nambyār often refers to his surroundings and assembled audience as a prelude to his main story text. On the exclusion of the lower castes, see Gāneś (1996: 168).
even the Shudras and polluting castes (Cāndālas).\textsuperscript{130} The modern editor of this work notes that it is this bhakti mood that yielded to the more vigorous engagement of themes in the \textit{tuñjal} and that this shift was prefigured in parts of the \textit{Śivapurāṇam}.\textsuperscript{131} My larger point is that the veiled critique of caste, temple, and courtly life implicit in the works of certain bhakti poets became more pointedly this-worldly and socially focused in Nambyār, and that this transition seems evident in the corpus of his own literary development, which remained within an overtly Sanskritic discourse.

Where Sanskrit itself was used in \textit{tuñjal} (and it was used interestingly and effectively) the derivations and usages were lexically and grammatically correct and could be understood by those with the requisite knowledge. But I think Gaṇeś is again correct in asserting that one of Nambyār’s principal intentions in deploying Sanskritic language was for its sound qualities and performative effect.\textsuperscript{132} Strings of attributive terms could pile one on another to give a running description of, say, a royal procession, where the very form of the quasi-intelligible verbiage would serve as a metacommentary not only on the pomp of the event but on the use and pretensions of Sanskrit itself. Here again, we can see in Nambyār’s new forum a continuation of the running Sanskritic prose of the earlier \textit{campus}, which were often similarly employed for satiric effect.

Kuñcan Nambyār’s nearly exclusive use of Sanskrit plots and themes from the epics and \textit{purāṇas} worked not just to bring these materials down to earth but also to reshape them as vehicles for active reflection on his contemporary society. This recalibration of the puranic materials worked through at least two levels of correlation. In the first level of semiotic shifts, the courts, soldiers, castes, institutions, clothing, food, and implements of Sanskrit mythic realms are all described and arrayed exactly as they appeared in Nambyār’s contemporary Kerala. The Brahmans attending a festival in the puranic narrative are the Nambūtīri or Paṭṭar Brahmans that Nambyār’s audience could see among them as he narrated their traits; the mythic king was a Kerala chieftain, and his retainers were the Nāyār soldiers. This set of indexical links keyed the frame of the narrative to the contemporary context of the telling, where it served at a second and higher level for comparing the depicted world with the actual one, or its projected transformation. The basis of comparison could work in different logical relations: the ills of this world might be transparently present in the mythical one or made prominent by their pointed absence in a better, mythic setting; alternately, they might be highlighted through their exaggerated presence in a demonic realm, or implicitly registered through the positive presence of their logical

\textsuperscript{130} From line 11 of the chapter “Śanipradōṣamāhātmyam” (Paramēśvaran 1986: 19).
\textsuperscript{131} Paramēśvaran 1986: 12.
\textsuperscript{132} Ganēś 1996: 16–17.
opposite (e.g., generosity or equitability) in a utopian age and place. In this way Nambyār tacitly signaled to his audience his evaluation of subjects ranging from the abstractions of religious virtue (dharma) to the sexual mores of temple priests to the rates and terms of land tenures to the behavior and character of agents of the state.

Where this framing might be missed in its application to Kerala, Nambyār sometimes invented and nested mediating narrative frames and characters. A number of tullāls, for instance, give the context of performance as addressing the needs of a certain non-puranic king, Ulakute Perumāḷ (World chieftain). In the tullāl treating the story of the epic prince Naḷa, for example, the whole recitation is framed around removing a supernatural affliction (kalidōsam) from this Perumāḷ’s realm. This king is clearly fictively modeled on an exemplary Kerala chieftain, and the frame provides a prototypical context in which a tullāl would be performed, along with the warrant for its ritual efficaciousness as part of the epic story of Naḷa. In this way the distance between the Sanskritic world of myth and the ritual context of performance is further bridged by deploying a local mini-puranic character who is close to the needs and activities of Nambyār’s actual forum and audience.

This local framing also affirms that these works were religious and ritually performative pieces that retained the older festival context of the tullāls as possession dances in fulfillment of vows and offerings. Numerous references in Nambyār’s tullāls should caution us against setting aside the seriousness of the religious theme and content just because we might think of religion as piously disjunctive of political critique and even satire. This warning should apply with equal force to the earlier, more Sanskritic genres as well, where temple theater, whether Sanskrit or vernacular, as well as the enactment of cAMPUS, were all apparently religiously dedicated, and where the very construction of their textuality, in the expanded sense I lend to that term, was by design for performance in temple precincts.

THE POLITICS IN PERFORMING LITERATURE

The peregrinations of Nambyār’s professional life across Kerala’s shifting political landscape confirms both the interlinkage, if not identity, between much of what we might term literary and religious culture, and the transpolitical reach of this cultural sphere—taking “political” here in the sense of territorial polity. It has long been noted that south Indian kings, rather peculiarly, might patronize the deities of temples in the realms of other kings, even their rivals. The consensus is that this was certainly the case in Kerala, where the community of worship for any major temple might be larger than

or cut across the boundaries of any given polity. Moreover, in Kerala the temples were also the cultural institutional forums for learning, composing, maintaining, and propagating the literary arts.\(^{134}\) It was accordingly at this supra-political level that the spheres of literary practice that made up the literary culture of Kerala emerged.

Kuñcan Nambyār’s work provides an excellent vantage point for considering the segmental nature of territorial affiliation and identity, as well as the notion that these segments are encompassed by a supervening identity now explicitly labeled as Malayali. This primarily linguistic designation is only vaguely territorial, for it contrasts with growing numbers of “foreigners” (both from elsewhere in India and from Europe) whom the growing mercantile world of the early modern state attracted. It was likely an impending sense of crisis, of looking back on the medieval order (epitomized in Ulakuṭe Peṟumāl) from the changing perspective of an early modern state, that heightened the social tensions built into Kerala’s literary culture of performance.

If this religiously articulated literary culture was not markedly political in the territorial sense, it was certainly political in the sense of power relations and the hierarchies these mapped. And here again, the organization of the temple was central. In Kerala, high temples were constructed according to internal and external zones of pollution keyed to caste. The placement of the temple theater (küttampalam) within the temple walls disallowed even the approach to its domain by a near majority of those we would today call Hindus. Within these walls, the social structuring of the upper-caste hierarchy around Nambūṭiri ritual and material privileges, their dominance in Sanskrit education and scholarship, and the consort status of temple-servants (e.g., Cākyār and Nambyār) and Nāyār women in their service, made for a literary, religious, and sexual politics of knowledge in the temple arts. Outside of the Brahmanical temple, some of these same castes had their own shrines where their own festival compounds harbored different vernacular arts, overlapping in part with all of those excluded castes who necessarily had their caste-based shrines and local genres of largely oral liturgies of artful worship. The overlap and interpenetration of these various genres in certain coordinated and simultaneous festivals was variable by region and through time, but the result was a kind of partly mimetic, partly reactive articulation of knowledge forms in literature that was discretely marked along caste bloc boundaries and was power-laden across them. This structuring of Malayalam’s heteroglossic relations along the gradient of Kerala’s social hierarchy has become apparent through my researches at both ends of the caste spectrum. While literary languages, registers, and themes were contrastively articulated at either end of this spectrum, they were interactively reshaped

---

through mediating castes and cultural institutions. This is how and why the language of literature was itself broken down into constituent levels (phonological, lexical, metrical, grammatical, and literary-pragmatic) and reconstituted in shifting contests through time. These reconstitutions, sometimes uneven and irresolute in their features, I have treated under the rubric of genre—what the secondary literature in Kerala calls “movements” (prasthānam). But as our repeated encounter with Kerala’s literary works as ritually enacted events should convince us, the artifacts from which Kerala’s regional-nationalist scholarship has constructed its literature are remnants of more encompassing (and perhaps more critical) performative practices. The polyphonic potentials are perhaps most apparent in their contestatory display in Nambyār. He was aware that his new forms of language use might make him enemies, for he refers to opponents who will defame him and warns them that the audience may set on them and break their legs! The carnival that Bakhtin used as a trope to capture the volatile potential of heteroglossic forms is still apparent in Nambyār’s textual remains. But in stressing the performative life of his textuality I mean to stress as well that this potential was only rendered actual in enactment of the artistic event, where contextual factors put into play certain energies of the text while it suppressed others.

We return, then, to where we started, with the realization that if all language is demonstrably and pragmatically multifunctional, then that crafting of language we call literary is multiply so. I have argued at the opening of this essay that the modern West’s textual culture of privately consumed text-artifacts under the regimes of print capitalism is mistaken in its pretensions to universality. It is a folk model whose ideology may be writ increasingly large under colonialism, nationalism, and global capitalism, but its ideological status has been increasingly revealed through attention to the facts of actual language use in other, dynamically open textualizing processes. These facts are especially evident in the case of premodern Kerala, where texts were performances at their very inception and throughout their social lives, and where these social contexts of their production and circulation were not masked under the form of artifactual commodities. That the Western transformation of texts into commodities was mimicked in the twentieth century through the construction of a regional-nationalist literature and language called Malayalam remains, I believe, a secondary rather than a primary affair, for literature and poetry still have a life in Kerala that defies Western impositions. In any case, the approach developed through the analysis of works represented in this essay has convinced me of this—that the alterity of this literature’s creative matrix can continue to yield new insights into lit-

erary cultures, especially when read as the registry of socially interested and positioned performances in historical process. And my sense is that this would be equally true for surrounding Indian languages and perhaps even for that great and seemingly monolithic edifice called Sanskrit, which Nambyār, like his kindred vernacular spirits elsewhere in southern India, playfully fractured for the fashioning of his novel social project.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


PART 3

The Centrality of Borderlands
The Two Histories of Literary Culture in Bengal

Sudipta Kaviraj

INTRODUCTION
A general reading of the history of a particular literature requires, first of all, a principle of organization. Histories of Bangla literature usually offer a narrative of continuity: they seek to show, quite legitimately, how the literary culture develops through successive stages—how literary works of one period become the stock on which later stages carry out their productive operations. These studies are less interested in asking how literary mentalities come to be transformed or how a continuing tradition can be interrupted, or in speculating on possible reasons behind these significant literary turns. In an attempt to move away from these conventional histories, which record unproblematically the sequential narrative of the production of texts and their authors, this essay gives attention primarily to two questions. The first is: What were the major historical “literary cultures,” that is, the sensibilities or mentalities constructed around a common core of tastes, methods of textual production, paratextual activities (like performance, recitation, or other use in religious, nonliterary contexts), reception, and the social composition of audiences? The second question, closely related to the first, is: How do literary cultures, especially deeply entrenched literary cultures, change?

The treatment of Bangla literary history in this essay, therefore, focuses more on textualities or text types than on individual texts, and it offers hardly any literary-critical analysis of major canonical works. A figure like Rabindranath Tagore is treated with relative neglect, since he does not represent a phase of serious interpretative contention or rupture in literary production.

I thank Sheldon Pollock for detailed comments on this paper at different stages of its preparation. I have benefited greatly from discussions with Alok Rai, Francesca Orsini, and Dipesh Chakrabarty on various themes that have gone into its writing.
or taste, although his work dominates modern Bangla literary sensibility. The struggles of the generation immediately following Tagore to challenge and replace his aesthetics with a more modern one that tried to come to grips with the problem of evil, are given greater attention.

This essay looks at two types of questions about literary transformation: the first concerns chronological changes in sensibilities or styles of literary production; the second, which cannot be ignored in any history of Bangla literature, is the problem of inclusion and exclusion of different social groups within this literary culture. The literature each group produces, receives, and enjoys contains internal structures of language, mythical content, imagery, or iconic systems that tend to include some Bangla readers and exclude others. It is important to note at the outset that even the question “What is Bangla literature?” is not an innocent or noncontentious one. Writing the history of Bangla literature was part of the project of literary modernity, and since this was entirely dominated by a Hindu upper stratum of society, the initial historical accounts tended to ignore Islamic elements by suggesting either that they belonged to a separate cultural strand (called Musalmání Bámlá) or that these texts were not of sufficient literary quality to find a place in an exalted history of literary art. This is the central question of the complex “place” of Islamic culture in Bangla literature.¹ Comparisons with literary cultures from neighboring regions of northern India, especially the Hindi, Urdu, and Gujarati regions, might yield interesting themes for further understanding of the relation between the Islamic and the Sanskritic in Indian literary tradition as a whole.

Two Approaches to the Past: Tradition and History

The history of Bangla literature has two beginnings, and some of the most significant problems of its historiography stem from the problematic relations between these two separate historical stages. For the history of Bangla literature can have two equally plausible narratives, each with its own internal coherence and problems. In conventional critical discussions on the history of Bangla literature, its origin is placed in the tenth century, when Buddhist religious compositions known as caryápadas were being written in a language recognizable as the first ancestor of modern Bangla.² This narra-

¹. There has been a good deal of writing and analysis on the exclusion of Muslims from modern Bangla literature. We must, however, maintain a distinction between a large “political” point that asserts the fact of this exclusion and deplores it for moral and political reasons, and a more textual and literary question about exactly how this exclusion works in the body of the literary texts. See for example, Shibaji Bandyopadhyay’s recent lectures (Bandyopadhyay 1986).

². The word “ancestor” here does not connote unproblematic descent. Because the caryápadas are also claimed as the point of origin by other eastern Indian languages, several lan-
tive of Bangla literature is parallel and comparable to those of other north Indian languages, many of which emerged in a typical evolutionary pattern from Sanskrit. Classical Sanskrit developed several distinctive literary styles of composition. The Apabhramsha form diversified into various styles and eventually created the distinctive individual vernaculars. Gradually, the Bangla vernacular crystallized into its particular linguistic shape and came to have an identifiable distinct literature. Even after its linguistic differentiation, Bangla continued to bear an interesting, fluctuating relationship with the canons of Sanskrit high literature, as Bangla writers sometimes tried to emulate the forms and delicacies of Sanskrit, and sometimes tried to consciously move away from the values of the Sanskrit universe and create independent literary criteria of their own. Historically, this literature gave rise to several corpora with peculiar cultural, religious, and literary sensibilities. It is impossible to analyze all of them in detail in this interpretative essay, but as the chapter proceeds I shall flag the major phases and forms.

The literary historian Sukumar Sen considers the advent of the great religious personality Caitanya (1486–1534) a significant watershed in Bangla literary history, and he divides the tradition preceding Caitanya plausibly into three major sections, each with its own internally coherent literary concerns, forms, and styles. The first segment consists primarily of renditions and translations from the high Sanskrit canon. Its major texts are the Rāmāyana of Kṛttibās and the Mahābhārata by Kāśirāmdās (both of uncertain date, perhaps fifteenth century), though these two texts are surrounded by a large literature seeking to translate Sanskrit texts into Bangla. The second segment consists of the large corpus of the maṅgalkāvyas inspired by popular religious sects. Each strand of worship developed its own series of these texts, which had wholly original narrative lines celebrating the powers of popular deities in the context of a specific, local literary geography. Third, a considerable body of distinctive literature, often of great poetic sophistication, emerged in the pre-Caitanya era through the Vaiṣṇava sensibility (of devotion to the god Viṣṇu), associated with the works of Vidyāpati and Caṇḍīdās, the two

---

3. For the diversification of different styles of Sanskrit, of which Magadhi and Gaudī were the generally acknowledged east Indian forms, see Pollock, chapter 1 in this volume.

4. One of the most influential views about the linguistic differentiation of Bangla from Sanskrit and Prakrit can be found in Dinesh Chandra Sen 1950: 10–20. He notes the particular features of the Gauḍīya rīti in Sanskrit as being full of samāsa (compounds) and sandhi (euphonic combination), and marked by sāhāsidambara (erudite ornamentation, devoid of fluidity and grace).

great early composers of *padāvalī* (sequences of devotional lyrics). These poems worked primarily within the general narrative structure of the popular story of Kṛṣṇa and Radha, the divine couple in Vaiṣṇava culture.

After Caitanya, these primary currents of Bangla literary culture continued. But there was an enormous influx of strength and sophistication into the Vaiṣṇava tradition, which produced a new literary genre that Sen felicitously calls *caritaśākha*, the “biographic branch,” specializing in presenting Caitanya’s life as a divine narrative through a skilled combination of the mythical and the historical. The literary impulse associated with Caitanya’s religion dominated Bangla literary production for nearly two centuries.

In the eighteenth century, as modern historians have pointed out, it is possible to detect the emergence of a new cultural sensibility that moved away from typical themes of mystical eroticism found in the literary culture of the Gauḍiya Vaiṣṇavas (Bengali devotees of Viṣṇu) and gives rise to a new, more diverse and catholic, literary taste. This is reflected in the works of the major eighteenth-century poet, Bhāratcandra, whose large corpus of texts includes narrative *kavyas* like *Annadāmaṅgal* (a devotional poem on the goddess Annadā, bestower of food) and the enormously popular *Vidyāsundar* (Vidyā and Sundar), but also many freestanding poetic works of a less traditional variety. The first history of Bangla literature must end in the eighteenth century with this literary culture.

The second history of Bangla literature begins in the nineteenth century with the coming of colonial modernity and the introduction of modern forms and themes, making Bangla the first distinctively modern literature in India. For the study of Bangla literary cultures, the early modern period is one of the most interesting, since there is a fundamental transformation of the literary world—from the definition of literary writing itself to the struggles to incorporate modern forms of narration and performance borrowed from the West, such as the novel or the sonnet, to the overarching problem of how to produce a literature that accepts the “disenchanted” scientific view of the world. Yet this modern Bengali culture of the nineteenth century also made use of the basic repertoire of earlier literary traditions, and it eventually produced a literature that is distinctly modern yet has not lost its strong aesthetic connections with traditional techniques and forms. One of the challenges in the literary history of Bangla is to make sense of the relation between these two histories—the one that ends with the eighteenth century and the one that begins with the nineteenth—and the partial continuities and ruptures that comprise their complex relations.

With the rise of modern consciousness, of which the historical sense is an integral part, there was among nineteenth-century Bengalis an understandable historiographical concern with the origins of their language. The “first beginning,” marked by the *caryāpadas*, like all such beginnings, was naïve, not tortured by the specifically modern anxieties of reflexivity or ac-
companied by historical curiosity. After the “second beginning” in the nine-
teenth century, the entire disparate, as well as temporally and spatially dis-
persed, corpus of texts and literary practices spanning the period from the
tenth century to the eighteenth century was perceived as a single historical
narrative, with a beginning and a characteristically provisional end in modern-
ity. Naturally, this nineteenth-century exercise used implicit definitional
criteria based on perceptions of identity. And curiously, in the early histo-
ries of Bangla literature, while Vidyāpati (who wrote in Sanskrit, Maithili,
and Avahattha) and Jayadeva (who wrote in Sanskrit) were seen to be firmly
part of the basic definition of Bangla literary history, Islamic texts were often
silently excluded.

The Conception of Literary Tradition

In any literary tradition there is always at least a minimal sense of the past.
But the past is not a pretheoretical thing that exists independently of liter-
ary conceptualization; the past is formed by concepts, and concepts of the
past can differ from one culture to another, as also between different peri-
ods of the same literary culture. Evidently, modernity introduces a sharp
break with previous concepts of the past; but it is important to understand
exactly the nature of this break and not passively follow the trend that ab-
solutizes this rupture. To absolutize is to argue that something that earlier
did not exist at all came into existence—in this case, that “something” is a
new consciousness of history.\(^6\) If we take this to refer to a historical con-
sciousness in the narrow sense, this is true; but if we mean by this a certain
theoretical attitude about how to use the past, this is false. It is true that be-
fore the nineteenth century a strict historical consciousness involving linear
and calibrated notions of time—with calendrical indexing, which involved
techniques of exact dating of events and texts that together constituted the
essential ingredients of a modern historical sensibility—did not exist in
literary-critical discussions in Bangla. But there was a strong sense of the pres-
ence of the past conceived as tradition. Since with modernity the concept
of “the past as history” gradually replaced the concept of “the past as tradi-
tion,” it is useful to analyze the differences between them.\(^7\)

There is a radical difference in the significance of the temporal order of
texts and literary sensibilities between these two senses of the past. Tradition
uses the facts of the past as evidence for the continuance of practices, sug-

\(^6\) For a strong argument about the newness of modern time consciousness, see Koselleck
1981, especially chapter 3.

\(^7\) There are some powerful arguments suggesting that all societies, including the modern,
require a tradition that is independent of “scientific” history, and that history in this narrower
sense cannot perform the functions of tradition. See, for instance, Gadamer 1981.
gusting that a particular way of doing things is still relevant precisely because it has existed for a long time. By contrast, the modern sensibility infuses its concept of the past with a strong sense of the discontinuity of practices, indicating that a certain way of doing things is no longer possible or appropriate. Significantly, the concept of the past as tradition was quite adequate for the purposes of the practical literary moves for which it was commonly invoked. A “literature” (śāhitya) was seen as a unitary field of texts that existed in a differentiated time, with those composed in the past living in a certain relation with those composed in the present.

For literary practice, living in a tradition meant two different things. At one level, there was a sense of a large and loose tradition that was given to “everybody” in the literary world by virtue of their literacy: they had to be educated technically in the sciences of figures, metrics (alāṅkāraśāstra, chandaśāstra), and the like to be able to appreciate the major texts of Sanskrit literature. Literary cultivation of this general kind would consist in a set of technical competencies—knowing, for instance, the difference between simile and poetic fantasy (ūpama and utpreksā), the rules of alliteration (anuprāsa), and the various kinds of chandaḥ—that gave the cultivated a capacity to recognize, discern, and enjoy these elements in the texts. Usually, there was a simultaneous initiation into a narrower, more specific tradition, in most cases related to a sect—Shaktism, Vaishnavism, Shaivism—which constrained the tastes of writers and their audiences into a more limited horizon.

At the second level, authors had to know and relate their work to a recognized body of symbolic or iconic combinatory, narrative structures or conventionalized narrative lines. Medieval Bangla literature, for example, includes a celebrated tradition of Vaiṣṇava bhakti poetry, generally known now by the name literary historians gave it in the nineteenth century: the Vaiṣṇava padavali, or devotional verses relating to the god Viṣṇu. These used a familiar narrative combinatory: compositions elaborated on the story structure around Kṛṣṇa—not just any story, but ones drawn from the Bhāgavata complex of texts, which emphasize the erotic interpretation of his life. Compositions, moreover, had to invoke certain continuities in literary themes (viśaya), moods (rasa), and theologies in order to be recognized as parts of that tradition. Yet because of the gradual shift in Vaiṣṇava theology toward the use of sexual union as a metaphor, and the slow legitimation of this metaphor as a vehicle for allegedly deep doctrinal meanings, these compositions could borrow from the luxuriant erotic tradition of classical Sanskrit, which was entirely secular and doctrinally indifferent—for instance, the wittily erotic ambience in Kālidāsa, or the deeply sensuous play of language and sexuality in Bhartṛhari or Amaru.8

8. Vaiṣṇava commentaries on sacred texts would often explicitly acknowledge such influence, especially the inexhaustible conceit of the commentators at being able to bring out liter-
This kind of deployment of past texts and literary resources evidently involved both knowledge of those texts and an implicit theory about how to relate to them for practical use. Obviously, this argument can be given a strongly structuralist form by suggesting that the structures of performed narratives or texts could be broken down into literary lexemes, which formed an underlying combinatory from which poets drew elements they required. The stretch of past time from Kālidāsa to Bhāratacandra, or from the ancient Sanskrit Mahābhārata and Rāmāyana to the recent Annadāman-gal and Vidyāsundar, is vast, and we can see at work the logic of what Pollock has called “vedicization” in the case of literary texts as well.\footnote{Pollock 1989.}

There are two interesting features in this traditional conception of a literary tradition. There is a certain element of gratuitous reverence for simple antiquity, and more recent compositions claim this value by a suppression of chronological indexing and a pretense of antiquity. Clearly, this constitutes a deft operation on temporality, primarily to stifle it or to erase its sense of linearity. This trick with time is in some ways exactly contrary to the modern orientation to time and its effects. To treat traditional literary doctrines as lacking a sense of the past, or a sense of what to do with the past, is thus false and unnecessarily patronizing. It is more worthwhile to bring out what they could and could not do with the past, given the way they conceptualized its existence.

The traditional literary sense of time was fuzzy and approximate, which made certain types of composing and reception practices possible. Authors or critics would not have been able to tell exactly when the Mehadīṭa was composed, and would not have been excessively bothered if they failed. Even more intriguing, a text like the Mehadīṭa would have come down to them from a generalized past as part of an aśā, a practice that tended to break down or efface the layers of time and in a sense placed literary texts in a common horizon of literary contemporaneity, or better, atemporality. It is important to distinguish between historicist contemporaneity (according to which a text is continuously refracted through a long succession of literary cultures, as, for instance, in the case of Greek tragedies in the contemporary West), and atemporality (which creates a kind of calendrically unstratified time in which all classical texts coexist in a temporally undifferentiated “past”).\footnote{See Gadamer’s interesting discussion of textual temporality in Gadamer 1981: 356 ff.} Texts lack an ordinal sense of pastness. The meaning of something becoming a classic is precisely its rising above the indexing specificity of local culture and taste, thereby conquering the localizing and
decaying effects of time—a meaning that still subsists in the English use of
the term “classic.” The concept of tradition, *parampara* (one after another)—a
sense of things, texts, tastes being handed down in an unbroken chain of
reception (not necessarily repetition)—therefore, contains an implicit theo-
retical understanding of the pastness of literary texts. In this way of think-
ing linear succession is not progress, which makes it impossible to change
order, but is turned into formal difference, which can be endlessly emulated
and played upon as a repertoire. The most significant difference with the
modern sense of time is that pastness does not lead to obsolescence; if any-
thing, the hierarchy goes in the opposite direction, and a text tends to ac-
quire greater value simply because of its alleged antiquity.\(^{11}\) Kālidāsa’s ex-
cellence might be recognized as something impossible to repeat, but not
because it is obsolete.

**Literary Territoriality**

In studying literary traditions in South Asia, the problem of historical
anachronism assumes a form quite different from the problems concerning
historical anachronism analyzed in recent discussions on social theory cen-
tered elsewhere.\(^{12}\) This is illustrated by difficulties that arise regarding the
notion of space—an obvious and unavoidable concern in this discussion—
when we look for relations that tie bounded forms of territoriality to cul-
tural and literary processes. Where does Bangla literary history take place?
If we accept the anachronistic teleology normally implicit in the writing of
modern Bangla literary history, that the main purpose of all previous his-
tory was to produce the present, then the answer becomes simple. Viewing
the entire past of Bangla literature from the vantage point of the modern lit-
erature that arose in the nineteenth century, historians of Bangla literature
often assume that the purpose of the whole of earlier cultural evolution was
to “produce” that literature. Given that teleological vision, the intriguing
question of space or territoriality of literary culture—“How is the medieval
structure or geographic spread of literature different from the modern?”—
dissolves. It is replaced by a story of undeveloped, inadequate forms in a lit-
erary space that is left indeterminate, encouraging the casual assumption
that it was the same as modern Bengal and that a long time is required for
a literature to mature and take the modern form of a territorial linguistic
identity. Teleological historical reasoning, especially popular with national-

\(^{11}\) This is reflected, for instance, in the traditional dichotomy of *prāćina/avvāćina* rather
than the modern *prāćina/navāṇa*.

\(^{12}\) The most relevant in this context are the critical discussions about anachronistic read-
ing in the works of Quentin Skinner, John Dunn, and J.G.A. Pocock, and the resulting con-
ist writers, thus obstructs the asking of some interesting structural questions.\footnote{13} Absolutizing a single territorial configuration—the one that the modern period demonstrates—turns all other previous evidence into a “tendency toward” or a “waiting for” that configuration. This often makes us forget that there was a different configuration of the territorial in earlier times that needs to be spelled out.\footnote{14}

Still, identifying the exact territorial boundaries of Bangla literary reception is a question for which it might be difficult to find a satisfying answer, given the state of knowledge about readerships or audiences of listeners in premodern Bengal. I have wondered about the lack of territoriality in premodern cultural structures, which appears so strange to modern observers because we consider such territorial grounding so utterly natural and necessary—almost an ontological condition for the existence of all cultural objects. Evidently, in precolonial times there were people who understood a clearly differentiated, identifiable Bangla language and had the necessary skills to recognize, read, write, and carry on literary practices in it. But the “unity” of this language is itself an interesting concept. Unity of a language, Bhúdev Mukhopadhyay observed perceptively, can mean two different things: a single language that a group of people speak, or one that they understand.\footnote{15} The structure of the linguistic world is often marked by the interplay between these two. In contemporary India, for example, there is a functional Bombay-based Hindi that is easily understandable to people in most parts of the country where these vernaculars are spoken (demonstrated with incontrovertible certainty by the vast popularity of Hindi films). However, more stylized and purified forms of Hindi or Hindustani used by native speakers of the language, which have greater overlap with Sanskrit or Persianized Urdu, are not as easily intelligible to others.\footnote{16}

In considering premodern Bengal, similarly, there are clearly discernible variations between the languages used by the Mañgalkāvyas and by the Vaiș-

\footnote{13} I have tried to analyze the most common forms of this kind of argument in Kaviraj 1991.\footnote{14} Recently, some of these issues have been discussed with great perceptiveness and scholarship in the special millennium issue (sahasrāyan sankhyā) of Dei (2000).\footnote{15} Mukhopádhyáy [1892] 1981. I have discussed his views in Kaviraj 1995a. Bhúdev Mukhopádhyáy is of course concerned with a different question: What can be a common language for India? His argument is that Hindustani is already a common language because it is the language the largest number of people in all parts of India would find intelligible, though this does not mean that they would be able to speak it. He distinguishes between a commonly spoken language and a commonly intelligible language.\footnote{16} I have heard complaints that the Hindi used in All India Radio broadcasts is too artificially Sanskritized and therefore often inaccessible to Muslims and common people. Critics say that this Hindi is intended to create a speech community from which Muslims and subalterns are excluded. By contrast, the Hindi used in Bombay popular films has to find a level understandable to both Hindi- and non-Hindi-speakers. For an excellent analysis of the recent history of Hindi, see Alok Rai, Hindi Nationalism (Delhi: Orient Longman, 2000).
avadavali. Yet at another level, the two show a commonness not just in the words and their meanings but in the more complex registers of alaṅkārīk forms, iconic images, and the structure of rasas evoked. Another feature of the traditional culture helps literary intelligibility, based on these common attributes. In the premodern linguistic structure, Sanskrit was the universal high language, and understanding Sanskrit requires training in its grammatical rules. Sentences formed in proper Sanskrit are not immediately accessible to ordinary vernacular speakers. But Sanskrit has a more complex and subtler cultural function. The vocabulary of the literary vernaculars are based on Sanskrit, composed of words either identical to (tatsama) or derived from (tadbhava) words in Sanskrit. Sentences formed primarily with tatsama words, minimizing the use of verbs and drawing the poetic play as much as possible from the use of nouns and adjectives, makes the vernacular closer to Sanskrit and widely understandable. I suspect that one of the most interesting features of Vaiṣṇava poetry was its use of that kind of “dual” language, a kind of inexplicit Sanskrit standing behind the Bangla or Maithili, precisely because the region through which it circulated was much larger than present Bengal. It could be received as a Sanskrit-Bangla transverse composition, just as it could be received as Sanskrit-Oriya. It would ideally have had to be intelligible to the entire space of eastern Vaishnavism, which included Mithila and Orissa (and possibly also Manipur, through the extended influence of Gauḍiya Vaishnavism). Take as an example Jayadeva’s famous lines:

{lalita-lavaṅga-lata-pariśilana-komala-malaya-samīre
madhukara-nikara-karambha-kokila-kojita-kuiṇja-kuṭīre.}

This is evidently Sanskrit, but each word here can also be read as a Bangla tatsama of the same meaning. The undecidability of this ambilingual writing is enhanced for Bangla-speakers by the final words of the lines, samīre (where the wind) and kuṭīre (in the hut), which can also be Bangla words with roughly identical meanings as locative singular. That is how a modern Bangla literary audience would hear these lines. This is an example of a Sanskrit composition that, paradoxically, can be read in Bangla. Compare, as an obverse example—that is, a Bangla verse that is almost entirely composed of Sanskrit words—a poem from the Vaiṣṇava poet Jagadānanda:

{maṇḍu-vikaca-kusuma-puṇja maḍhupa-sādha gaṇji guṇija
kuṇjara-gati gaṇji gamana maṇḍula-kula-nāri
ghana-gaṇijana cikara-puṇja mālata-phula-māla-ranja
aṅjaṇa-jula kuṇja-nayani khaṇjana-gati-hari.}

In this stanza the Bangla language has already settled considerably, if we look closely at the rhetorical devices. For instance, in a later line (lalitādhāre milita hāsa deha dipati timiranāśa) the two words hāsa and nāśa would not rhyme in Sanskrit, but would in Bangla (where s and ś are pronounced more or less
the same), and that is clearly intended. Similarly, there are alliterative passages that would work only with a Bangla pronunciation.

daśana kundakusumanindu badana jitala sarada indu
bindu bindu śarame gharame premasindhu-pyāri.

A recognizable literary culture exists here, but it stretches out on several planes. It is not merely a Bangla culture but is also inextricably associated with the universalizing presence of Sanskrit. First of all, there is a unity imparted by the appreciation of the high Sanskrit canon, ranging from religious texts like the Bhagavadgītā to literary classics such as those by Kālidāsa and Jayadeva. All those educated in Sanskrit would be able to relate to this canonical tradition. Below that overarching cosmopolitan culture, and with a more restricted spatial spread, is another literary culture based on eastern Vaishnavism. Within this culture, historically, the literary center shifted geographically with the power of exemplary performances. Jayadeva had the apparent advantage of writing in Sanskrit; but Vidyāpati wrote his padāvati compositions in Maithili. Interestingly, however, this did not restrict Vidyāpati’s audience to the Mithila region. He had a vast and respectful audience in Bangla-speaking areas, where his verses were perfectly understandable, down to the modern period. In fact, his poetry was also actively imitated, which could not have happened without some element of overlap or indeterminacy. A whole group of accomplished Bangla poets composed padāvati under the explicit influence of Vidyāpati’s compositions. This canon was so strong that the young Tagore in the late nineteenth century composed a whole book of poetic songs in Brajabuli (supposedly the mellifluous language of mythical Braja; actually, a passable imitation of Vidyāpati), which are still sung with undiminished ardor in commercial musical performances in Kolkata. At school, historical collections of Bangla poetry for children, clearly intended to provide them with a poetic genealogy, standardly begin with famous verses by Vidyāpati.¹⁷

This medieval Vaiṣṇava literary culture was evidently held together by a combined configuration of religious devotion and literary forms. Court patronage must have been an additional source of sustenance. Royal patronage, however, was a fickle and unreliable support, undependable if the religious persuasion of the ruler or his successors changed. The tastes of ordi-

---

¹⁷ For instance: mādhava bahuta minati kari toyā/ deyi tulasī tile e deha samāpata dayā janu chodaḥ moyā (Mādhava, I implore you, I have offered this body to you with basil leaf and sesame seed; please rescue me, in your mercy). This came in the school collection Kavitānājali, edited by a well-known modern poet, Kalidas Ray. This collection was widely used as a “rapid reader” in lower secondary schools (in class 7 or 8) in the early 1960s. Standard collections of Bangla poetry might formally begin with a perfunctory reference to caryāpadaverse, but the real business of appreciable literature starts with Vaiṣṇava padāvati.
nary householders were more reliable and more widespread. Stories told about lives of poets, even if exaggerated or wholly apocryphal, illustrate that the frontiers of principalities and religious cultures did not in fact coincide, and this helped literary figures or styles to escape excessively obtrusive supervision by political power. Poets often escaped the disfavor of their notoriously fickle patrons by moving to a competing court or another part of the same religious region. Competition between courts or dynasties also restrained capricious royal treatment of celebrated artists.

Schematically, there are two salient features of the structure of premodern literary space. One is that the “sense of space” of each vernacular is quite distinct from those of others, yet it is also organized in a different way from bounded modern spatiality. A territorial configuration contains certain points, such as holy cities, birthplaces of saints, locations of important events, and sites of pilgrimage and festivals. From either single or multiple centers it radiates outward, and as one goes toward the outside, the sense of this particular space grows fainter and then changes into a strange space, no longer familiar. Distinctions come on slowly, not dramatically. The significant mark of this conception of spatiality is probably the use of broad distinctions between near and far, familiar and strange—different from the sense of a bounded, meticulously calibrated space to which we are accustomed. The latter, it must be noted, requires both a contiguity of space and a corresponding homogeneity of the cultural community—the “we” who would call this space their own. The other feature of premodern literary space is that it is not a single plane on which all types of cultural practices take place. It has several layers, and the configuration of the space on one layer, say, Sanskrit, does not coincide perfectly with the others. The mappings are quite different on different planes, the ends and beginnings are divergent; yet it is a single lived world of literary cultivation. Modern thinking tends to split this into a Sanskrit literary map and a Bangla literary map, but people would have experienced it as a single literary culture.

PREMODERN LITERARY CULTURES IN BENGAL

It appears that in many parts of India the rise of the vernacular literatures had a great deal to do with two primary factors: deep changes in religious sensibility and alterations in political authority, both of which sought a new language of cultural expression. The earliest form of the Bangla language separated off from the general north Indian linguistic form of late Middle Indo-Aryan known as Avahattha.18 The first extant specimens of Bangla texts, 18. The standard work on the linguistic origins of the Bangla language and the technicalities of its slow process of separation from the Avahattha is by the late Suniti Kumar Chatterji (1970–1972).
discovered in the late nineteenth century by Haraprasād Śāstrī in Nepal and the lower Tarai areas, are primarily Buddhist poetical compositions, caryāpadas. Buddhist religion had long showed an acute consciousness of the question of popular language, starting from the use of Pali and Prakrit, and it was entirely consistent with that tradition of religious sensibility for caryāpada poets to compose their doctrinal songs in the emerging vernaculars. Written primarily by religious mystics, these expressed popular Buddhist ideas about conduct, occasionally in a symbolic and esoteric language. The Buddhist tantras made abundant use of such special linguistic codes, referred to as sandhyā bhāṣā, enigmatic or elusive speech. Like other forms of technical jargon, the mastery of this symbolic language served to distinguish insiders from the uninitiated. Among Buddhist tantric adepts, sandhyā bhāṣā provided a means to articulate esoteric knowledge that was thought to be inexpressible in ordinary terms.

This religious context for the early use of Bangla points to a peculiar feature of the cultural development of Bengal. From the time of the caryāpadas themselves, the religious sensibility that has carried Bangla literature forward through successive stages has very often been associated with a non-Brahmanic strand, possibly because of the strong connection between Brahmanism and the ritual use of Sanskrit. It is not surprising, then, that all the major strands of early and medieval Bangla literature are associated with dissent traditions: Buddhism (caryāpadas); cults of the lesser goddesses (the maṅgalkāryas, dedicated to goddesses like Mānasa or Caṇḍī); and the reformist Vaiṣṇava religious sects, which remained within the general limits of Hinduism, but occupied heterodox positions (padāvalis). This trend was to continue throughout the history of the literature, with the emergence of practically every new literary sensibility being tied to some form of anti-Brahmanical religious experiment. A transformation of religious sentiment through doctrines of bhakti produced a split in linguistic and literary expressions of devotion as well. The theology of Hindu sects changed, creating a different aesthetic conception of divinity, one that emphasized kindness, compassion, and accessibility that required expression in a different linguistic register. Bhakti images necessitated a shift from a language of distance, which could give appropriate expression to the aśovya, the inconceivable and ineffable splendor, of the divine, to a language of mādhurya, or emotional gentleness and sweetness, which could express intimacy with the deity.

19. Caryāpada refers to caryā, meaning conduct. There is considerable scholarly debate about the caryāpadas: whether the language they are written in should be called primitive Bangla (see Suniti Kumar Chatterji and Sukumar Sen) or something else. For the state of this debate, see Kvaerne 1977.

20. For a detailed and scholarly discussion, see Dasgupta 1966.
The World of the Maṅgalāvyaṣ

One of the primary strands of medieval Bangla literary culture is the genre known as maṅgalāvyaṣ: legends composed in celebration of deities that were meant to bring religious merit to the lives of their devotees. The maṅgalāvyaṣ is clearly demarcated from other genres by its narrative form, literary stylistics, and peculiar brand of religiosity and representation of the social world. Maṅgalāvyaṣ were intimately connected with large-scale religious changes, most probably a slow incorporation of lower-caste cults of non-Brahmanical deities into the orthodox tradition. The narratives normally suggest some kinship between the new deities (which were most often female) and well-known figures in the Hindu pantheon. The goddesses Manasā and Cāndi were the most popular subjects of maṅgalāvya composition, though there were instances of hāvyas of the same genre to the glory of Dharma and other gods. The genre enjoyed a surprisingly long life, continuing down to the eighteenth century: Mukundārām Cakravarti’s Caṇḍīmaṅgal, the masterpiece of the form, was composed in the mid-sixteenth century, and Bhāratcandra composed the Annadāmaṅgal in the eighteenth century.

Though the narrative structure of the maṅgalāvyaṣ is known for its social role in championing relatively unknown, subaltern deities, it is also significant for its internal literary features. In Manasāmaṅgal, for instance, the merchant Cāndsāgar, a devotee of Śiva, is unwilling to offer worship to Manasā, the goddess of snakes. He goes through a string of misfortunes due to Manasā’s curse: fourteen of his trading ships laden with wealth capsize in storms; six of his sons die prematurely; and his last son, Lakhindar, dies of snakebite on his wedding night. His new daughter-in-law, Behulā, a rural and subaltern Sāvitrī, eventually brings the son back from the dead, forcing the reluctant merchant to accept Manasā’s divinity. In Weberian terms, the religious spirit animating the maṅgalāvyaṣ stories leans toward the magical, in contrast to the more intellectual and rationalized preoccupations of orthodox or developed bhakti doctrines. The narrative crises are mostly resolved by explicitly supernatural means, and there is little effort at elaboration of philosophical doctrine: the stories’ authors appear content to win a place for their divine protagonists in the Hindu divine order.

Maṅgalāvyaṣ are primarily written in a rustic vernacular style, with a predominance of desī vocabulary over tatsama words, matched by relatively unambitious, uncomplicated metric composition. Dialogues often approximate the grammatical laxity of ordinary conversation. In the internal narrative economy of the genre, female characters acquire an entirely unaccustomed prominence, and often their behavior is much less constrained than the social restrictiveness of the feminine roles of high Brahmanical tales: Behulā and Sanakā in the Manasāmaṅgal stories, and Phullarā in Caṇḍimāṅgal, of-
fer a far more pronounced subaltern feminine than the classical images of Radhā or Sītā in the Bangla versions of the epics.

It is generally acknowledged that the *mangalkāvya* tradition offers a detailed and reliable picture of a lower-class social world, reflected in the activities performed by the main characters, and so brings startlingly realistic depictions of everyday life into the highly stylized world of conventional literatures. It is entirely possible for *maṅgalkāvya* characters to have uproarious domestic quarrels, and their colorful language makes use of forceful expletives—a linguistic order unimaginable in exchanges between characters of the *Rāmāyaṇa* or the *Kṛṣṇa* stories of the Vaiṣṇavas. From the aesthetic point of view, too, the *maṅgalkāvya*, though often emotionally rich, present a world far apart from the more formal *rasa* conventions of classical literature. The *maṅgalkāvya*, therefore, represented a highly significant complex of literary sensibility—combining a distinctly subaltern religious spirit with the depiction of a peasant world of want and domestic troubles. Some sections of this tradition show a great awareness and representation of an Islamic social world, or at least a clear recognition of the mixed religious character of Bengali society.

The *maṅgalkāvya* tradition might not be more impressive than others in purely aesthetic terms, but from the point of view of a social history of literature, its significance is incalculable. The *maṅgalkāvya* contain in an understated way a complete reconstruction of the conventional aesthetic world and its narrative economy. In nearly all significant respects, the classical order based on a Brahmanical view of the world—both social and narrative—is left behind, replaced by an order that rejects some of its most sacred conventions. The deities worshipped, the human characters portrayed, the story lines, the forms of fabulation, the nature and implements of literary and aesthetic enchantment, the implied audience—everything is different.

In conventional narratives, the central characters are individuals empowered by either ritual status or political authority: narrative exchanges are normally between Kshatriyas and Brahmans, and there are a number of side characters. In the *maṅgalkāvya*, by contrast, the central characters often belong to lower castes or inferior professions: Dhanapati and Cāndrasadāgar are wealthy, but they are *sadāgars*, traders, who are not conventional objects of poetic celebration. Kālketu is a *vṛādha*, a hunter who kills animals for profit—a low, polluting profession. But by a combination of Cāndi’s blessings and his own premiraculous qualities of strength and honesty, he earns the right to be ruler of a kingdom. In traditional narratives, adventure is the exclusive preserve of the Kshatriya warriors: as they travel to unknown lands on military expeditions or personal journeys they meet and win beautiful women and fame. In the *maṅgalkāvya*, somewhat like the Sinbad stories, however, some of these same elements are centered on the *vanīk*, the seafaring
As the merchant-heroes take over the Kshatriya qualities of bravery, however, they add to it a new element of seafaring adventure, a kind of subtle intelligence, the curiosity of the explorer. They, not the Kshatriyas, are the masters of space.

In these narrative moves, the maṅgalkārṇya tradition seems to disregard the Brahmanical hierarchy of virtues. The stable, unworried system of equation between castes and individual qualities and their professions is set aside, and boundaries are breached by a more radical imagination of possibilities. It takes the narratively significant qualities of bravery, steadfastness, resourcefulness, and subtlety and redistributes them among members of different castes and genders. The feminine characters of the maṅgalkārṇyas are often subtle, intelligent, and masterful in the management of their households and their world, as they are often gifted with a more penetrating awareness of the world’s complexities than their husbands. Characters like Phullarā and Khullanā exude a much greater assertive femininity than the inhabitants of the upper-caste antahpur, or women’s quarters. They often assist their husbands outside the home (for example, the hunter’s wife sells the hide in the market); they loudly assert their disagreements on important domestic decisions; they fend off rivals in love—even Caṇḍi herself—by the simple force of their chastity mixed with some slyness; and at times of crisis they give excellent counsel to their headstrong or unsubtle husbands. The maṅgalkārṇya tradition therefore shifts the narrative world to a different social universe; the life of lower-caste society is brought into the sacred sphere of literature.

The Caitanyacaritāmṛta

A parallel process of growth of a new vernacular literary form can be found in the Gauḍiya Vaiṣṇava tradition, in a text poised between two moments of its historical development. All the three great religious biographies of Caitanya—those by Vṛndāvandas, Locandās, and Jayacandra—underscore Caitanya’s divinity by telling with a sense of incredulous wonder how he made the miraculous happen. However, Kṛṣṇadās’s Caitanyacaritāmṛta, the great philosophical text of the Gauḍiya Vaiṣṇavas, is filled with a different sense of Caitanya’s divinity. At the time of this text, Caitanya was already in the process of being canonized. The Brahmanical tradition, which he defied so wonderfully, already recognized the need for reconciliation with his canonization; and reciprocally, his disciples acknowledged the advantages of accepting the high Sanskritic language and iconicity, and of transferring those techniques to a celebration of Caitanya’s personality.21 Thus, the evident hu-
manity of the biographies—the narrative tension of which lies, for instance, in waiting to see what would happen in his contest with the qāzi (civil judge), the symbol of political authority—is replaced by a text of a very different type. The narration of the same episode in the Caitanyacaritāmṛta is calm, not tense. Unlike Vṛndāvandā, its narrator is not conveying an unbearable anxiety through this unprecedented contest, but is entirely assured of the eventual victory of his lord. The episode becomes his play, literally, his līlā.

The Caitanyacaritāmṛta is an astonishing document, situated between several literary models and written in a mixture of languages. It is still a biographic narrative of Caitanya’s life, written with the evident claim of testimonial authenticity. Like Caitanya’s other biographers, Kṛṣṇadās recounts what the master said after invoking the exact situational context. However, compared to the others, Kṛṣṇadās is far more interested in Caitanya’s religious philosophy. Consequently, a great deal of attention is paid to Caitanya’s sermons, to the intricate disputations with religious scholars who preferred other modes of bhakti worship or other strands of Vaishnavism, and occasionally to Caitanya’s glosses of literary texts from the wider tradition of classical poetry. The historical-biographic narration throughout the text, including the master’s dialogues, is in Bangla. Kṛṣṇadās rarely portrays him breaking into Sanskrit in ordinary situations, though it is generally acknowledged that Caitanya was one of the great scholars of the language in his time. So Kṛṣṇadās’s decision to dilute his language into Bangla rather than retain a pristine Sanskrit medium is a denial of Brahmanical orthodoxy; it is a way of doing religion, a way of inviting people who are usually excluded from a high religious experience into its center.

In Kṛṣṇadās’s work we can see the workings of a philosophical reinterpretation of Caitanya’s life. He recounts the tales of Caitanya’s life in Bangla but is always careful to frame them in theological terms, providing first a preparation for the great event to be narrated and following up with a commentary that separates out the divine from the mundane, so that no unwary reader misses the cosmic significance in the apparently human drama. The

of Caitanya’s religion is complex. Several distinct types of associates and devotees were drawn to Caitanya. Nityānanda was drawn from an avadhu background, contemptuous of normal Hindu observances; on the other hand, there were sedate householders like Śrīnīvaśa Aćārya who sought to bring Caitanya’s doctrines back into the solid bases of respectability. Consequently, after Caitanya’s death his religion gave rise to several sometimes mutually incompatible strands, all of which, however, treated the vernacular Caitanyacaritāmṛta as their main religious text rather than the more esoteric and Sanskrit texts of the gosvāmis from Vṛndāvan. By reabsorption into Brahmanism I refer primarily to such cultural practices as the use of Sanskrit; the condensing of ideas into relatively esoteric sūtras, which require learned commentaries; and the general use of an exclusivist literate apparatus. It is a cultural rather than a strictly religious Brahmanism that is at issue here.
commentary is in a heavy, because more technical, Bangla style, but the doctrinal framing is always in Sanskrit, using the entire apparatus of classical Sanskrit, from the learned exoticism of its vocabulary to the lofty skill of fashioning verses in complex meters like *mandākrāntā*.

The mixed composition of the *Caitanyacaritāmṛta*—it is at once a biography and a doctrinal treatise, an account and a commentary, incorporating Sanskrit and Bangla, high and low—helps us understand what medieval authors were attempting to achieve by writing in Bangla. Every time a religious movement had to widen its circle of followers, it had recourse to this linguistic technique. Thus, the historical process by which Bengalis became a people in a linguistic sense must be related to these periodic extensions, these successive “democratizing” movements of religious ideas. At the same time, the linguistic texture of the *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* shows that the traditional structure of linguistic practice, in which individuals knew and used several languages, especially Sanskrit and Bangla, continued. Associated with these movements was the creation of a kind of bridge language, a form of Sanskrit that could be read from both sides. Accessibility from the Sanskrit side ensured that these compositions would have a wide circulation and make sense to those who understood Sanskrit or neighboring vernacular languages; accessibility to Bangla meant that the works could also circulate among Bengalis who knew little or no Sanskrit. This kind of mixed competence continued, certainly down to the work of poets like Bhāratcandra in the eighteenth century.

The topic of mixed literary modes becomes more interesting and complex when the focus turns to literary practice: when we move from the question of what language the poets wrote in to what aesthetic structures were typically associated with each literary field. Was the act of writing in Bangla merely the translation of Sanskrit aesthetic processes, structures, feelings (*rasas*) into a lower, more accessible language? Or was the language shift the condition for writing an aesthetics that began to be different? Obviously, this question is closely related to a fascinating and awkward larger question: If the shift to writing in Bangla marks a rupture with the literary sensibility of early medieval times, should we treat it as the beginning of a certain kind of modernity?

There is a particularly intriguing aspect of Caitanya’s religious teaching that might connect significantly with this question. Caitanya constantly em-

22. As for example *Caitanyacaritāmṛta*, Ādiḥkāṇḍa 1, Sūka 5.

23. Many popular stotras (hymns) would seem to have this status: like the Rāma stotras by Tulsidās, or the Vallabhācārya stotra to Kṛṣṇa.

Many versions of the *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* were found outside Bengal, in north India, and Tara-pada Mukherjee argues that the text itself shows the use of Hindi terms. See his editorial introduction to the *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* in Kṣṇadās Kavirāj 1986.
phasized the metaphorical quality of the transgressive principle at the heart of his new doctrine: parakīyātātva, love for God with the intensity of a lover’s desire for a loved one to whom he or she is denied social access—for instance, because the loved one is married to another, as in the case of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā. The emphasis on metaphoricity was taken up with great seriousness by Caitanya’s later interpreters, such as the Vṛndāvan gosvāmis. (The classical text that expounds the theory of parakīya love is Rūpa Gosvāmi’s Ujjvalanilāmāṇī [The blazing sapphire], c. 1550.) This interpretive strategy ensured that the doctrinal innovation could be immense without being socially disruptive. And turning supernatural or otherwise rationally inadmissible ideas into metaphorical keys is often a mark of a modern religious sensibility.

The World of the Vaiṣṇava Padāvali

Medieval Bangla literary cultures reveal two rather different, in some ways contradictory, aspects. Socially, the Hindu religious system was pervasively and punctiliously hierarchical. Yet culturally there was considerable scope for improvisation and innovation—a feature of much of Indian high culture, which allowed new religious figures and their followers to claim that they were trying to extend or explore ideas that were already part of the received tradition (āgama). Loosely terming these as vertical and lateral relations, respectively, we can say that there was practically no tolerance for revisions of vertical relationships but considerable tolerance for lateral experimentation. For this reason many reformist trends started off with a disingenuous or at least misleading claim that they were engaging in a lateral extension of doctrine and religious experiment. A remarkable example from medieval north India is Tulsidas and his remaking of Rāma in an image that is significantly different from Vālmiki’s.

There are partial parallels to this kind of reformism in the Bangla texts of the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata by Kṛttibās and Kāśirāmdās, respectively. Though these texts are conventionally called translations (anuvād), what they do to the originals is actually more complex. They retell the story freely in Bangla verse—quite a different literary enterprise from what translation means in modern contexts. (In fact, a translation of this literal sort had to wait until Kālīprasanna Sinha produced his famous version of the Mahābhārata in the mid-nineteenth century.) Because they are free translations, they provide their authors with ample opportunity for recreating, often quite dramatically, the narrative, literary, and rasa structures of the text. The tight structure of the narrative becomes loose and unfocused, and at times narrative complexity is sacrificed for a clearly linear popular story. The verse forms, though usually unadorned yet graceful in the Sanskrit original (as for instance the anushṭubh meter), are sometimes excessively simplified and one-dimensional, as in the simplest Bangla metric form of payār (a fourteen-
syl\text{\texttimes}able rhymed couplet). Culturally, this accomplishes something quite significant: it brings the high epic text closer to people precisely by destroying its distancing grandeur. But it is doubtful that these adapted texts bring into being anything of great consequence aesthetically.

More interpretively intriguing from the point of view of aesthetic history, as well as more historically noteworthy, was the \textit{pad\text{\texttimes}vali} poetry of the \textit{Vai\texttimes}n\textit{ava} tradition. Medieval \textit{Vai\texttimes}n\textit{avas} in Bengal had a stock of resources to draw upon—a large, disparate earlier tradition of Hindu religious literature whose elements were dispersed across the texts and religious thought of the \textit{Mah\text{\texttimes}bh\text{\texttimes}arata}, the \textit{Bhagavatapur\texttimes}ana (which it relied upon more than either of the great epics), and the more popular fabulist traditions around R\textit{adh\texttimes} and K\texttimes\text{\texttimes}a. They also had available to them the riches of the Maithili \textit{Vai\texttimes}n\textit{ava} poetry of Vidy\texttimes\text{\texttimes}ati. But the specific configuration of images and narratives, along with the registers of aesthetic emotions, that the \textit{pad\text{\texttimes}vali} gradually produced, is quite unique. Elsewhere, I have explored the nature of this transformation of the \textit{rasa} register of \textit{Vai\texttimes}n\textit{ava} poetry, since it is so crucial to understanding modern Bangla.\textsuperscript{24} It provided, in a sense, the template from which modern Bangla writers of the nineteenth century were to break away. Yet even while rupturing the \textit{pad\text{\texttimes}vali}’s aesthetic template, the modern writers continued to value and deploy its elements so as not to let them disappear and become unobtainable. They used them constantly in their own literature as “material”—as, for instance, in Tagore’s famous interpretative poem, “\textit{Vai\texttimes}n\textit{avak\texttimes}ita}.”

The most striking transformation affected the literary character of R\textit{adh\texttimes}, the central erotic figure of the Gau\texttimes\text{\texttimes}ya \textit{Vai\texttimes}n\textit{ava} cult. In the works of earlier \textit{Vai\texttimes}n\textit{ava} traditions, she seems to be very close to some of the images from earlier literary traditions, such as \textit{prak\texttimes}ti, or primal nature—utterly indomitable, impossible to deflect from her decided “natural” course of love. In earlier \textit{Vai\texttimes}n\textit{ava} texts, R\textit{adh\texttimes} has the irrepressible quality of nature’s great generative power, not merely in the crude sense of an endless willingness in love play, but also in the unconquerable lust for life that she represents in her resplendent sexuality. Ordinarily, conventional religious sensibility is coy and prudish, unwilling to speak openly about erotic enjoyment, but the early figure of R\textit{adh\texttimes} turns this upside down in the most remarkable fashion. Her existence is focused on sexuality; she seems to exist for nothing else. And her sexuality is so utterly open and uninhibited that it becomes, in an ironic but undeniable sublimation, strangely pure (the \textit{Ujjvalanil\texttimes}amani makes this point doctrinally). In her disloyalty to her husband and family, and to her social entanglements, there is a finality and power that can only be regarded as destiny. Ordinary mortals can only see her great spectacle

\textsuperscript{24}. See Kaviraj 1995b, chapter 3.
and rejoice and hope that their own lives may be touched by a waft of this divine breeze.

The Rādhā of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition—not necessarily in religious doctrine but definitely in literature—still shows a struggle between two very powerful tendencies. One reflects and carries forward the Bhāgavata icon of joyous abandon, and interestingly, whenever this aesthetic configuration is invoked there is a propensity toward rhetorical embellishment. When this Rādhā is going into the dark forest on a full-moon night, we must hear the jingle of her restrained anklets; the entire descriptive tradition of the abhīsārīkā (the woman who braves the night to meet her lover), expressed in a grammar well understood from Kālidāsa onward, is condensed in the depiction of Rādhā’s bodily movements and gestures. The mandatory anuprāsa (alliteration) and utpreksā (poetic fantasy)—the connection between literary ornamentation and this description of beauty, symmetry, fullness—is retained in the poetry of Vaiṣṇava authors like Govindadās. But there is an unmistakable new contrasting tendency in the representation of femininity in the Rādhā of the padāvalī. This femininity is much less assertive; she is weak, constrained, caged, simply bewailing her fate and enlarging on her own vulnerability and misfortunes in love. At the same time, there is a distinctive new development of character, an unconventional attention to the poetic exploration of inner mental states. Intricate, conventionalized mental states did form part of the traditional representational repertoire, but the stirrings of individual subjective states in the Vaiṣṇava padāvalī literature is of an entirely different kind: it avoids conventional typologies and begins to explore individual consciousness and its infinite, unpredictable variability. Accordingly, the tone of speech in the Vaiṣṇava padāvalī texts changes significantly. They become primarily Rādhā’s speech, but her speech has a strange character. It tries, in a sense, to take revenge on a new kind of incarceration through an interminability of speech. A second strand of Vaiṣṇava padāvalī poetry, inaugurated by Caṇḍidās and continued by Jñānadas, which differentiates itself from the Vidyāpati strand, developed an entire metaphysic of loss and suffering that was represented primarily through feminine perception and metaphor. The representational, iconic figure of Rādhā signals a real transformation of the rasa aesthetics of this strand of padāvalī literature.

This new Vaiṣṇava padāvalī poetry gave rise to a new canon of poetic performances, and some “great poets” were selected among others less worthy

25. Detailed discussion can be found in Rūpa Gosvāmi’s Ujjvalanilamani, chapters 9, 10, 11, and 15.
26. The Ujjvalanilamani, for instance, follows up its ninth chapter on harivallabh-prakaranam with three immensely elaborate sections on the components of rasa analysis: anubhāva, vyabhīcārībhāva, and sthāyībhāva.
of eminence. Its iconic material affilates it to the story of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa derived from the Bhāgavata and, in part, ultimately from the Mahābhārata; its more directly literary ancestry is drawn from Jayadeva’s Gita govinda and Vidyapati’s verses. But the aesthetics of this literature are completely distinctive. The structure of rasa it developed was unique—close to the range of emotions ordinary people experienced in their ordinary lives, and thus transforming the everyday with a touch of the divine.

From a literary-historical perspective, therefore, the Vaiṣṇava corpus carried much greater significance than the adaptations of the epics. The Bangla versions of the epics, in my view, made an important sociological contribution by making the stories accessible in a written vernacular form to common people, but they gave up the heroic aesthetics of the original Sanskrit texts without discovering an aesthetic structure of their own. The pādavālī poetry, on the other hand, continued to work with elements of the Kṛṣṇa narratives from past Vaiṣṇava traditions, but it focused on the unheroic narratives of the episode in Mathurā as a new axis around which all elements of the narrative economy could be rearranged, and a unique structure of rasa sensibility developed. Sociologically, this aesthetic structure enjoyed wide popularity and was continually performed in pālākirtans in local temples in Bengal and major theaters of eastern Vaishnavism down to the 1950s.27

Through this particular instance, we might be able to grasp what the literary meant in this culture. Clearly, the literary was a sphere split into multiple layers, each requiring distinctive types of skills of composition and appreciation. The high Sanskrit level did not remain constant and unchanged. Precisely because it continued for such a long time, there was an incessant accretion of texts and textual materials. Because of its continuity and the constant need to cater to different tastes and skills, the Sanskrit layer was in some ways the most extensive and also the most internally differentiated. It vacillated through time between a tight, high Sanskrit corpus and a more accessible popular corpus meant for enunciative uses (e.g., chanting, which does not require pedantic grammatical mastery over the passages or stanzas). The lower levels of this Sanskrit stratum touched the boundaries of the Bangla stratum, which performed a different function. Bangla was used to produce a new form of literariness, closer and more accessible to popular sensibility, and exemplifying something of the doctrine of universality implicit in Caitanya’s religious thinking. It at once brought the sense of the high religious

27. The pālākirtan, recitation of the story of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā through a series of evenings to a group of devotees gathered in a specific temple, is an innovative form of religious practice that diverges from more traditional kinds of Hindu worship. It is interesting to note that the inventiveness of Caitanya’s religion spread to all spheres. It developed not merely a new literary sensibility centered on a new story but also a far more communal form of the use of these literary forms in religious rituals than ordinary Hinduism.
within the reach of ordinary people and lifted everyday, ordinary life into contact with the divine—a distinctive feature of all bhakti movements.

This literary culture implies the existence of a circle of oral competencies, but we should guard against the usual, imitative superstition that the oral is always “lower” than the written. At least one kind of literary orality is based on the idea that all texts necessarily have a representative function. Texts contain a possibility of meaning, but this meaning often waits on something that exists even before meaning begins—the sensuous, presemantic attractiveness of the aural or the musical. This stratum of the text must be brought into presentation (i.e., into aural presence) by means of oral mediation. In functions like the chanting of mantras in household worship or the enunciation of the padāvalī in a hymn (kirtan) performance, oral skills are crucial and aesthetically vital for bringing the right sound to a śloka or a song.

Vaiṣṇava literature eventually broke down and reformed boundaries between literary languages in a radical fashion. Sanskrit was no longer the only prestige language, and the newly developed poetic Bangla tried imperceptibly to slide into a high status alongside it. In Vaiṣṇava religious practices the use of Sanskrit for ceremonial purposes remained, but the new compositions in Bangla came to occupy a place of aesthetic prestige. A portion of Caitanya’s enormous importance in history is that he taught the Bangla language to speak the divine.

The late-medieval Vaiṣṇava rupture with traditional high culture was in one respect more radical than modernity’s break with tradition in the nineteenth century. The nineteenth-century literary language enlisted Sanskrit on its side; it is very Sanskrit-near. The poetic language of the strand of medieval Vaiṣṇava literature of Candīdās and Jñānandās, however, is often consciously Sanskrit-distant. From the standpoint of a comparative sociology of literature, the Vaiṣṇava break with tradition contained elements similar to the ruptures with traditional forms and literary practices that led to the early-modern turn in Western literature: it was based on a crucial intervention in the religious sensibility of the society and was associated with fundamental religious and social reform. The congregation of the new religion provided its particular audience. A religion with a deep democratic impulse temporarily undermined the established authorities of orthodoxy and forced orthodoxy on the defensive. Acutely conscious of its newness, this religion sought a different aesthetic as well as a language appropriate for its anti-Brahmanical message. It used traditional aesthetic and literary constructs, like Sanskrit texts and anthologies (for example, Mammaṭa’s eleventh-century Kavya-prakāśa was a favorite of Caitanya’s and he returned to favorite verses for constant reinterpretation), but the cultural process at work was strikingly similar to what Pollock describes in his accounts of early Kannada. Use of Sanskrit cosmopolitanism is not surprising, because the new vernacular was created by a bicultural intelligentsia, and the Sanskrit world was a constant
reference—either positive or negative—as a cultural structure to be emulated or abjured. Significantly, the vernacular culture that the new religion sought to establish, partly in competition with the Sanskrit, was meant to be cosmopolitan, not parochial. It boldly innovated popular and collective aesthetic forms like the sankirtan (congregational singing, usually in a procession), where the musical performance did not happen in a specified, restricted space—in a temple, or a house—but moved through the streets of Navadvip in a new, open-ended “public” spectacle. It also produced a literature that shifted the emphasis in the narrative discourse to the feminine subject in an astonishing inversion of conventions. Most significantly, it started to speak about the individual’s state of mind in a new language of self-exploration. Yet there is no doubt that this stage in the history of literature passed without establishing durable institutions or leading to permanent modifications of the social world. The reforming energies of the social movement and the innovativeness of the literary forms were contained, eventually lost their way, and ultimately succumbed to orthodox restoration.

There is an apparent pattern in the history of relatively defined literary cultures like the Vaiṣṇava structure. They periodically shake up the traditions of social and cultural orthodoxy without decisively destroying them. As a literary culture gradually becomes cut off from the social process that generated it in the first place and gave it vitality, its active cultivation and continuation as a “serious” literature suffer and degenerate, often falling into endless uncreative repetitiveness and pointless exhibition of skills. Jagadananda’s stanza quoted earlier is a good example of this kind of literary mannerism. As a composition, it demonstrates undoubted rhetorical skill, but its concern with formal features such as alliteration is obsessive, and its poetic imagination is feeble. Its most significant feature historically is its slippage from the distinctive aesthetic structure of the Vaiṣṇava padavali toward reabsorption into the sterile prosodic technicality of the standard Brahmanical erudition.

28. See Pollock 1998. Although I do not find an exact parallel in Bengal to the role of patronage of political power in literary developments Pollock demonstrates in the case of south India, there are strong parallels in other regards. Caitanya is clearly a cosmopolitan figure, having exemplary control of the Sanskrit corpus; and his travels in south and north India, particularly his disputations with other Vaiṣṇava schools, is crucially facilitated by this. The religious sensibility he intends to set up is also clearly cosmopolitan in character—intelligible to southern Vaishnavism as well as to northern devotees based at Vṛndāvana. Clearly, the redactions of the Caitanyakaritāmṛta that its editors, Sen and Mukherjee, analyze show a vernacular cosmopolitanism—with versions collected from areas as distant as Rajasthan, the Braj region, and Orissa. See Mukherjee’s introduction to Caitanyakaritāmṛta in Krishnadas Kaviraj 1986.

29. As in this nyatireka from the same Jagadananda poem, which is utterly standardized and unsurprising: dasina kundakusumanindu / vudana jitala sarada indu (Her teeth put the kunda flower to shame, and her face is superior in beauty to the autumn moon).
It would be entirely wrong, however, to conclude from the social decline of Vaishnavism that the *padāvalī* literary culture was erased without a trace. The peculiar intelligence of a tradition often prevents that eventuality, and its important creations are stored away in a kind of inactive inventory in the literary-cultural memory. They survive not as living literature but within the living anthology of the tradition, available to be played upon by a new literary sensibility or a historically recreated consciousness. A tradition perhaps always exists as an archive for effective literary history, though the exact manner in which it produces these effects needs to be elucidated.  

There is evidence of a widespread anthological practice associated with the *padāvalī*, though materials were probably not collected in standardized, written anthologies. Thus a canon was formed that, though weak, still exhibited an internal coherence. Certainly, high points of performance were recognized, implying that some standards of judgment were applied by the collective spirit, which used these cultural items iconically. Compositions of Jayadeva and Vidyāpati were treated as models by aspiring composers, though not by the more Sanskrit-distant writers, like Candīdas and Jñānadās. The new poetry of emotion appeared to appeal increasingly to a more diffuse, undefined, and unorganized popular taste with a new criterion of accessibility. Beautiful poetry, it was realized, could be created by a string of mundane words, consciously abjuring the pedantic, rhetorical conceits of the erudite. Yet when the creative and social vitality of the Vaiṣṇava culture waned, the strand that retained greater literary coherence was the one closer to the standard Brahmanical practices and pedagogies—which emphasized the sound (*śabda*) or the technical element, rather than the distinctiveness of meaning (*ārtha*) that characterized the less academic style. The Sanskrit or Sanskrit-derived segment could securely defend its literary place precisely because it could go back to the strongly rehearsed pedagogy of the Sanskrit schools (*tol*) and their teaching of poetics.

To state a large and risky hypothesis: The movement of literary language in Bengal seems to have paralleled the movement of social, particularly religious, reform.  

---

30. If we look at nineteenth- and twentieth-century Bangla appropriations of the Vaiṣṇava *padāvalī* texts, it is clear that interpreters could invest them with a modern romantic sensibility and read them through a strikingly fruitful “fusion of horizons.” This is quite self-conscious in Tagore’s famous poem on the *padāvalī*, “Vaiṣṇavkavītā.”

31. This is not meant to be a general statement about Indian vernaculars. I am sure Sheldon Pollock is right that this line of argument has been used uncritically and often erroneously. In certain vernacular regions there is an obvious connection between the rise of new political power and the appreciation of the power of the vernacular, though in Bengal it is difficult to find such a direct connection. But two other lines of thought need to be explored more fully. First, the political ascendancy of Islamic rulers may have been associated with the writing of texts that used an Islamic cosmopolitanism. Secondly, religious reform is itself, in important
experimentation in literary technique and aesthetic structure continued. When that impulse died down, literary forms—like the religion itself—tended to be reabsorbed into orthodoxy. It appears unfair to characterize the forms of Vaiśṇava poetry like the padāvali as medieval except in a purely chronological sense, since they display some elements of early modern literature; yet their eventual demise indicates that modernity is a matter not simply of sensibility but much more emphatically of institutions. If these sensibilities do not enable the crystallization of institutions that can provide them with practical, material form, they tend to decay, disperse, and eventually succumb to the silent but immensely powerful undertow of orthodoxy.

*The Eighteenth Century: The Last of the Premodern*

An analysis of the literary culture of the eighteenth century is important not because that culture produced a distinctive new literature but for understanding the nature of colonialism’s impact. The works of Bhāratcandra Raygunākar, one of that century’s foremost writers, display the cultural forms that marked that period and show what it lacked in comparison with the forms of literary modernity introduced through Western contact. Bhāratcandra’s corpus is amazingly varied and full of technical virtuosity, starting from his early Rasamañjarī to his three best-known works, *Annadāmaṅgal*, *Mānsinha*, and *Vidyāsundar*, which form parts of a single poetic structure. These three texts together illustrate the strange geometry of literary culture in precolonial Bengal.

The *Annadāmaṅgal* continues the tradition of medieval maṅgalkāvya, but its focus on Annāda, or Annapūrṇā, divine figure from the central Śākta canon, rather than on a relatively marginal goddess, reflects its adaptation to the high Brahmanical religion. The *Mānsinha* recognizes the mixed social world of Muslims and Hindus, and, more crucially, the political supremacy of the Muslim elite. It portrays a world of Muslim political power in which Hindus like Majumādar, Annāda’s exemplary devotee, live by a combination of loyalty, cunning, and when all else fails, miraculous assistance from Annapūrṇā herself. In the *Vidyāsundar* a romance takes place in the city of Bardhamān, which represents an urban context with a strong commercial element. The work’s celebration of the power of money (*kadā*) confirms suggestions from recent historical research that the eighteenth century was a period of

ways, related to shifts in social power; so it might be prudent to avoid saying that religious reform involves religious but not political changes. Instead, we could perhaps argue that these changes are political through being religious. In that case, the boundary between a religious and a political explanation would have to be modified.
intense commercial expansion.\textsuperscript{32} An old woman with privileged access to the princess in the forbidden space of the royal antahpur (harem) consoles Sundar, the hero, by singing the praises of money as the main implement in the pursuit of happiness:

Money buys what we eat; there is no friend except money. Money can buy tiger’s milk, and get an old man married. People die for the love of it; it helps seduce respectable married women.\textsuperscript{33}

Bhāratcandra was highly skilled in the use of meter and rhetoric, and he experimented with producing in Bangla, with miraculous virtuosity, the most difficult forms of classical Sanskrit prosody.\textsuperscript{34} Yet these experiments remain within the formal conventions and rasa structure of a decidedly traditional literary sensibility; they are a world apart from the struggles that were to convulse Bangla literary culture in the next century.

Islamic Aspects of Bangla Literary Culture

A complex and contentious problem in the historical evolution of Bangla literary culture is the place of Islam. Bengal as a region had a long and continuous history of religious heterodoxy in which one anti-Brahmanical movement followed another. After the decline of Buddhism in Bengal, other strands of religious practice hostile to orthodox Brahmanism found considerable support. Some commentators suggest that Caitanya’s followers were clearly divided into several groups, and one of these, centered on the figure of Nityānanda, tried to carry on practices of heterodoxy abhorrent to the ideologically timid mainstream, which wished to maintain the respectability of the normal householder. Eventually, Brahmanical Hinduism had major contenders in Islam on one side and in reform or heterodox sects like the Vaiṣṇavas on the other. The historical relation between Bangla literary culture and Islam is a question of immense complexity.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{32} The extent of the exploration of new routes to social power in eighteenth-century India, after the collapse of the Mughal empire, is described in Bayly 1988, and Subrahmanyam 1990 and 1994. For a general discussion, though now somewhat dated, of this revisionist literature see Washbrook 1988. A readable translation of Vidyāsundar is available in Dimock 1963.

\textsuperscript{33} Bhāratcandra 1950c: 202. The original reads: \textit{kadī phatā khā chūḍā dai bandhu nāi kadī bai / kadīte bāgher dūghtā mile / kadīte budar bīyā kadī lūbbe mārī gīyā / kulabadhu bhāle kadī dile.}

\textsuperscript{34} Writing Bangla verse to the exacting specifications of some Sanskrit chandas was considered technically difficult. Bhāratcandra showed off his skills by composing verses in meters like \textit{bhujangapratyayā}. In modern Bangla, similar skills were displayed by Satyendranath Datta, who composed in \textit{mandākrānta}, albeit with some awkwardness.

\textsuperscript{35} For reasons of space, it is impossible to analyze the scholarly literature on Bangla literary history in terms of their relative emphasis on Hindu and Muslim authors here. A com-
Islamic courts often patronized composers of Vaiṣṇava padavali, and there is considerable evidence of a slow extension of Islamic influence into various branches of Bangla literary culture. The Islamic strand of literary composition that developed, in turn, elaborated a cosmopolitanism parallel to the Sanskritic literary universe. Critical analyses of Islamic composition in Bengal point out that the language was full of loan words not only from Arabic and Persian but also from the north Indian vernaculars with which Islamic high culture bore a particularly close connection. Just as for Hindu literature Sanskrit was a vehicle for a high cosmopolitan culture from which vernaculars drew many of their literary principles, this Islamic literature shows a similarly transregional culture that gave its intellectuals access to an equally varied Islamic cosmopolis. They were the bearers of a second and parallel vernacular cosmopolitanism.

Other branches of late medieval literature carried obvious marks of a lively transaction between the Hindu and Islamic parts of late medieval Bengali civilization. Some observers consider it possible that Caitanya (who died in 1534) came into contact with Sufi ideas through some of his early associates, though the literary culture associated with him, at least in the form in which it was eventually canonized by the gosvāmis of Vṛndāvana, shows little direct influence of Islamic language or forms. By contrast, both the language and the narrative content of Mukundarām Cakravarti’s Candimangal (its first recitation, according to internal textual evidence, took place in 1555–1556) shows an intimate knowledge of Islamic locutions and social practices. Bhāratcandra’s Māṁsinha presented an Islamic side of the social and political universe with fluent familiarity. Mukundarām and Bhāratcandra are eloquent examples of Bhūdev Mukhopādhyāy’s judgment at the end of the nineteenth century that orthodox Hindus should consider Muslims their svajāti (own race or people) because the two, if divided by religion, were joined together by participation in a single material and social world. In texts written by Hindu authors Muslim individuals and groups were seen, with increasing frequency and decisiveness, as part of a mixed social world—in Caitanya’s biographies, the hostile qaẓī who was won over by his new religious dispensation; the mixed language of the Candimangal, which tells the story of the establishment of a Muslim area in the capital of Kālketu’s kingdom; and the frequent appearance of Muslim characters in Bhāratcandra’s writings.

Comparison of standard history texts from West Bengal and from East Pakistan or Bangladesh would show the obvious difference in emphasis between the Hindu and Islamic sides of Bangla literary culture. It is interesting, however, to compare differences between the histories published in East Bengal before and after Bangladeshi independence in 1971.

It is by its contrast to this history of continuous and expanding transaction with Islam that the turn of events in the later part of the nineteenth century appears astonishing. The great Sanskrit and Bangla scholar of the second half of the nineteenth century Haraprasād Śāstri, with his keen sociolinguistic sensitivity, put the situation of Bangla linguistic culture before the coming of colonialism quite accurately:

In our country in those times three types of language were current in cultivated circles. Those bhadrlok who had to deal with Muslim Nawabs and Omarahs used a Bangla with a great many Urdu words mixed in it. The language of those who studied the śāstras contained a large number of Sanskrit words. There were many other people of substance apart from these two small groups. Both Urdu and Sanskrit words were mixed in their language. Poets and composers of pāñcālis composed their songs in this language. Broadly, there were three types of language for three groups: the Brahman pandits, people who dealt with courts, and ordinary men of property.39

More important than this linguistic taxonomy was the structure of linguistic and literary culture as a whole. It appears that through their respective forms of hyperglossia—Sanskrit and Arabic-Persian—the two sides of the Bangla vernacular had access to vast cosmopolitan literary spheres. These two cosmopolitanisms were not entirely exclusive; rather, people of high education acquired an asymmetric proficiency in both. Thus cosmopolitanism was not newly discovered by the modern intelligentsia; they were merely rearranging and redirecting a much older tradition of linguistic and cultural versatility.

In the age of Rammohan Roy (1774–1833), cultivation of an upper-class Bengali included a mandatory initiation into Islamic culture and a fluent grasp of Persian. By the time of Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), roughly a century later, literary high culture had gone through a striking conversion to become a more solidly Hindu sphere. The cultural processes that brought on this transformation were driven by Western influences of all kinds, ranging from political liberalism, rationalist epistemology, and positivist sociology to modernist conceptions of culture.

Although a small Muslim political aristocracy had established itself in Bengali society through the distant and ever-weakening support of the Mughal empire, the Muslims constituted the bulk of the peasantry. Literacy skills were largely confined to the Hindu upper castes, who were the first to respond to opportunities offered by colonial rule. Certainly, this group of willing and

39. Šāstri 1956, 1: 199. For a serious exploration of the class and cultural definitions of the Bengali bhadrlok, or "gentle persons," see Bhattacharyya 2000. Pāñcālis were popular poetic compositions celebrating the glory of deities. They were used mnemonically by common people but were also read more formally in religious ceremonies, particularly in women’s rituals.
enthusiastic collaborators did not represent the whole of Hindu society; their collaborative and reformist efforts faced stiff opposition from more traditional opinion. But it is significant that the conflict between the Brahmo Samaj (the “society of Brahma,” a religious reform group founded by Rammohan Roy in 1828) and Hindu conservatism was in some ways an internal affair of an elite that had learned to use the modern cultural apparatus—including schooling in the colonial education system, developing the skill of articulate debate in a literary public sphere, and highly intelligent use of the colonial legal system. The Muslim participation in the early stages of this new modern culture was accordingly disproportionately small. It is to this new culture that we must now turn, for it constitutes one of the most fate ful, complex, and contradictory transformations in the history of Bengal: the arrival of a colonial modernity in which formal principles were often universalistic but social practices involved enormous exclusions.

LITERARY CULTURES OF MODERN BENGAL

Colonialism and Linguistic Change

Undoubtedly, the greatest change in the history of Bengali literary culture happened after the firm establishment of colonial authority from the late eighteenth century. The entry of colonialism into Bengali society had a peculiar character that determined the manner in which Western intellectual influence spread in Bengali culture. It is wrong to portray the cultural impact of colonialism as exclusively coercive. The society into which competing European merchants and military adventurers entered was complex, and the defeat of the nawab of Bengal, Mir Kasim, in 1764 was not seen as a collective indignity. Some revisionist histories claim, not implausibly, that the eighteenth century saw the rise of powerful indigenous mercantile interests, who might not have been displeased at the defeat of greedy and capricious local rulers. The British entered Bengali society slowly, as one set of players among many others in an arena of political turmoil. Their eventual victory over other contenders and establishment of their authority led to the imposition of several new institutions. A significant feature of the Bengali response to colonialism was the remarkable enthusiasm shown by a section of the elite for the new institutions and knowledges coming from the West. Although the relations between a colonial authority and a subject people could never be free of tensions, the modernist elite, produced by early colonial processes in Bengal, developed surprisingly congenial relations with British authority.

In a development with important consequences for Bangla literary cul-

ture, Europeans early on started the process of framing grammatical rules for the Bangla language, copying and editing culturally significant texts and introducing a culture of print. More detailed attention than is possible here should be given to the production of standard grammars by the British missionaries at Serampore (Carey and Halhead), and the creation of the Bangla print script. Print culture immediately created pressures toward standardization in two fields. Print culture tends to privilege a particular dialect among the variety of regional forms that have traditionally flourished side by side. In this case, high Bangla was based partly on Calcutta speech but relied heavily on the style of the Nadiya-Santipur region, which was regarded as “pleasant” but not necessarily cultivated, language. The transformation of this dialect into “standard” Bangla met surprisingly little opposition—despite the fact that within a short time other speech forms were ascribed a subordinate status, and in literary texts, dialogue in these dialects was soon marked as a “low” form. A parallel pressure toward script standardization transformed the new print faces into models for writing, displacing the traditional diversity of calligraphic styles.

Out of this combination of intellectual influences, an entirely new kind of high Bangla was created, transforming the earlier, far less structured linguistic economy. And one of its most significant features was the deliberate adoption of the modified Sanskrit version of precolonial Bangla, out of the three forms delineated by Haraprasāda Sāstrī and mentioned earlier. As Bangla tried to negotiate the intellectual demands of modern culture, the two modular languages with which it initially developed a strangely mixed relation of contention and emulation were Sanskrit and English. Sanskrit, after all, was the high language of the Hindu society’s “internal” practices, such as worship, marriage, and literary cultivation. English, by contrast, was the language of a new kind of external practice, immediately associated with modern forms of power: law, administration, and new opportunities for external trade.

41. For searching analyses of these transformations by a near contemporary, see Sāstrī, “Bāṅgālā Sāhitya,” and his three presidential addresses, all of which deal in detail with institutional changes in Bangla literary culture (Sāstrī 1956, 1: 171–96, 211–83.)

42. I am opposed to the casual, undiscriminating acceptance of Benedict Anderson’s idea of “print capitalism.” While this idea applies to European historical examples, it is doubtful that the connection between print and capitalism is equally strong or invariable in Asia. In the Bengali case, it appears that print increased the accessibility of both traditional and newly composed texts, in principle. In practice, however, it did not increase accessibility immediately. Initially, printed texts were not very cheap. The establishment of printing presses produced a flourishing business in chapbooks and cheap pamphlets on diverse subjects, and these were consumed primarily by the newly emerging urban lower-middle class.

43. Ghulām Murshed has provided a detailed historical analysis of how this “Sanskritization” of Bangla prose took place. See Murshed 1992.
The Search for a Modern Aesthetic

Changes in literary practice, as distinct from language, were also fast and radical. The entire sphere of culture was powerfully affected by a new emulative imagination prompted by English education. This is clearly discernible in techniques of poetic composition. Traditional poetry had followed widely acknowledged and fairly stringent criteria concerning meter and style. These explicitly rhetorical elements gradually begin to fade from the serious attention of poets. Iśvarcandra Gupta (1812–1849), whose compositions exemplify the transition in poetic aesthetics, still worked with traditional norms of rhetorical virtuosity, remarkably similar to those of Bhāratcandra, but an astonishing change is revealed in his choice of literary subjects, which were mostly drawn from the urban life of colonial Calcutta. Gupta had found the secret of writing poetry about the ordinary, though doing so brought charges of frivolity, occasional obscenity, and lack of dignified themes (he wrote verses on entirely untraditional topics, like the gastronomic celebration of pineapples and tapse fish). But it is clear that his application of traditional forms to an urban, colonial, modern subject was already transient and unstable. The forms were inadequate for the subjects and were rapidly left behind in the search for more complex solutions.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824–1873), by contrast, emulated the aesthetic forms of the sonnet and the Miltonian epic in an attempt to create a high “classical” atmosphere. In Madhusudan, as in many of his contemporaries, we find the potent and unprecedented combination of elements from Sanskrit and English that marks the serious advent of modern literature: his narratives and characters are primarily drawn from the Sanskrit high classical tradition—Indrajit, Lakṣmaṇa, Pramilā, Ravaṇa, and so on from the Rāmāyaṇa; Tilottama and Śarmiṣṭhā from the Mahābhārata. But his great dramatic poem, Meghnādbadh, is a defiant declaration of independence from the traditional Sanskrit poetry.

Madhusudan’s language is highly Sanskritic with several innovative elements, particularly in the use of verbs, that led to bitter debates in the Bangla critical world—his supporters considering them enhancements of the language, his opponents viewing them as travesties. Above all, Meghnādbadh is an excellent document of the paradoxical conjuncture in Bangla intellectual culture in early modernity. In one sense, Meghnādbadh was a radically new creation that turned all the values of the traditional epic upside down. It inverts the relation between Indrajit and Lakṣmaṇa—and more indirectly, between Ravaṇa and Rāma—by treating the rāksasa (demonic) figures as heroes and Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa as morally and practically devious. Yet seen

44. On Dutt see also Dharwadker, chapter 3 in this volume.
from an alternative and equally plausible angle, it is a cultural artifact of the most dedicated imitation—an adaptation of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* into Bangla culture, copying not only the narrative theme but also the metric form of blank verse (called in Bangla *amitraka chanda*, verse of “unfriendly” or nonharmonizing syllables).

Poetic excellence was now measured by the poet’s skill in producing sonnets (*caturdasyapadi*) rather than stately quatrains in quantitative-syllabic verse forms such as the *mandakranta*. In a remarkably short time, elite pastimes such as *kavigan*—occasions, usually spectacular in nature, in which poets gathered to compose impromptu poems and passages, sometimes in competition with each other—were fatally undermined by a more introspective literary culture, marking a fundamental shift in the nature of the literary itself.

*Kavigan* was a poetic exercise that showed the conventional associations of poetry. It was performative, instant, part of a public spectacle, and it required a ready intelligence and quick-wittedness from its composers. Its performance was exactly like that of music: the creator did not get a chance to revise, reflect, redraft, and present to the audience the product of an introspective and reflective private craft. Normally not written down, the compositions had no ambitions of permanence, though the most popular ones gained a form of oral immortality. Compositions by Madhusudan or Rabindranath, on the other hand, stood at the opposite end of the continuum of poetic forms. These were attentively crafted products, meant to be enjoyed primarily by a private reader. Above all, the culture of reading was fundamentally transformed. The presupposition of the silent reader introduced a series of interesting changes in poetry’s technical structure, the most significant of which was the slow decline of the aural in favor of semantic delectation. This is reflected in the restrained, often almost embarrassed, alliterations in Tagore’s poetry. The overt representationality of performative poetry—its theatrical aspect—was entirely lost. Poetry now came to be enshrouded in a great silence of refinement.

Shifts of the kind evidenced in poetry formed part of a larger cultural change that instituted a new kind of boundary between everyday practices and crafts and the exalted sphere of the high arts. Recitation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* or the singing of *pādevālī* as part of the seasonal and daily *kirtans* had intertwined that poetry with the unremarkable rounds of everyday activities, a re-

45. Tagore is again an interesting example here; he has undoubted mastery of metrics and figures of speech, and sometimes his use of this technical repertoire is strikingly original. But there is no demonstrativeness about it. Unlike traditional poetry, his works invite literary assessment not primarily on this terrain, but on others. Nevertheless, it is not surprising that standard Bangla discussions of *chandas* use Tagore’s poetic corpus almost as much as canonical Sanskrit examples. For a highly complex and deeply sympathetic appreciation of Tagore’s metric originality, see Sen 1974.
relationship reflected quite often in the declamatory manner of reciting (often such recitation would be carried on alongside a mundane activity, such as doing everyday chores). The new poetry could not be used in this way—as part of religious ritual or community gatherings, or for inattentive mnemonic incantation in the household. Moreover, inasmuch as high literacy was a prerequisite, the new poetry was not equally available across gender.

Unlike some high poetry in north India that customarily functioned as part of sophisticated conversation, this poetry was unsuited for use in even the most elevated normal dialogue. It could not be approached without the inescapable sense that it was high art and thus separated from all other mundane pursuits.

Further transformations in literary culture came about as authorial practices changed in relation to reception practices. What had been a local, participatory, communal collectivity, often gathered at a public spectacle, became for the first time an impersonal “audience” of readers sitting and perusing texts in private, where the simultaneous enjoyment of others did not interfere with or determine their assessment of the text. As literature was turned into a primarily lonely pleasure a series of institutional changes followed. Appreciation of literary objects (poetry in particular) changed form from the instant applause or coolness of the face-to-face audience to the scrutiny of modern criticism, which elaborately dissects the text at leisure and enhances both the prestige and the enjoyment of the text by a commentary that is itself literary, a literature supplementing literature.

A literary public sphere formed in the early nineteenth century around a group of journals, some of which were short-lived but immensely influential (like Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay’s Banigadarśan, established in 1872), and the disputations in their pages determined the formation of canonical criteria for literary production. Literature now worked through a dialogue between the literary activity of poets and writers and the critical activity that offered aesthetic commentary and encouraged or inhibited various performative trends.

The creation of this literary modernity in Bengal, through the dissemi-

---

46. I do not mean there was something intrinsically gender-biased in these writings, but rather that modern education was initially almost entirely a male preserve. Subsequently, reading novels was often seen as a specially female literate activity, with many popular magazines directing their wares to a female audience.

47. Significantly, this also affects the appreciation of traditional Sanskrit texts. Formerly, the only aids to the study of texts like those by Kālidāsa were well-known commentaries; in the modern era, important literary figures wrote highly individual assessments of current works. This type of literary criticism produced a literary sense of taste that was far more individualistic, exploratory, and subject to periodic change than the heavy conventionality of the commentary tradition.
nation processes of printing and the creation of an impersonal literary public, was related to movements of political power in a fundamental way. In premodern India, political authority had a relatively marginal role to play in such important parts of life as economic activity, which was governed primarily by the rules of the caste order. It is not surprising that fundamental structures and institutions that helped cultural reproduction or commanded constitutive power over cultural form were also by and large outside the direct influence of rulers. Those who ruled were routinely praised, and they reciprocated primarily by providing patronage; this culture continued down to Bhāratcandra’s stay at the court of King Kṛṣṇacandra of Kṛṣṇanagar in the Nadiyā region. By contrast, the colonial state, using the modern conception of politics brought from the rationalistic phase of European culture, lay claim to its territory and space in a radically new way, represented in its theory of state sovereignty.

The British administration was naturally negligent about cultural life in its empire. The British did introduce cultural forms, which they saw as part of the civilizing processes of modernity, but they were hardly interested in producing in their imperial dominions something similar to the cultural homogeneity of nationalist Europe. From the late eighteenth century British power expanded with astonishing rapidity, and this prompted the question of clearly defined territorial structures to demarcate the jurisdictions of the British and the native princes’ political authority. This habituated Indians to living in a stable, politically bounded space; but the connection between this space and its cultural content was still entirely accidental. As British rule extended westward, extensive Hindustani-speaking territories were added to the Bengal presidency. Bengalis duly developed subimperialistic delusions about themselves and considered other groups within the larger territory of the presidency their natural inferiors (these attitudes are reflected with particular clarity in the extensive travel literature produced by the Bengali elite). Except in a few extreme cases, they did not propose inclusion of these groups in the exalted realm of Bengali culture. Other linguistic groups could regard the lighted circle of Bangla literary culture with admiration or resent-

48. However, in the light of the evidence Pollock (1998) puts forward, it appears that the relation between political power and cultural forms can be varied and complex: in contrast to the Bengali case, royal patronage obviously affected the direction of literary production in the case of south Indian empires. Wherever literature bore a strong connection with a polity through a common language, such pressures must have existed. Persian and Urdu writing had strong connections with north Indian courts. See the contributions by Alam and Faruqi, chapters 2 and 14, respectively, in this volume.

49. Modern historians who have analyzed the nature of premodern political authority have suggested the term “segmentary state” to mark this difference, though not without controversy. See Kulke 1995.
ment, but they were not serious interlocutors. The delineation of the cultural boundaries of Bengal was the work, therefore, not of the colonial state but of the new Bengali intelligentsia.  

Separating Bangla from Other Languages

By the early nineteenth century, a separate modern linguistic identity was clearly discernible in Bengal. Naturally, what this language was and how its purely linguistic frontiers were drawn were major questions of internal contention in this early modern period. If we take early-nineteenth-century Bangla writing as an example of the state of thinking about the Bangla language, we find a remarkably complex ordering in the structure of linguistic practice. Speaking and doing things in Bangla had to make a place for itself in a world of many languages. An ordinary Bengali householder would speak to his family and friends and in the bazaar in one of the local Bangla dialects (these dialects are usually specific to relatively small regions, but they are framed in a more general division between western and eastern speech, referred to in Bangla colloquial usage as ghaṭi and bānāl). But dealings with political authority, for instance regarding landholding or revenue, called for the consistent and skillful use of Persian. Religious ceremonies—a constant part the household routine—involved the mandatory use of Sanskrit, though the average householder might have an insecure grasp over its grammatical intricacies. Any transaction with colonial power required knowledge of English. It was thus not uncommon for an educated Bengali to know all these languages with reasonable degrees of fluency. Each language performed clearly designated functions. If we classify these functions as high and low, then, interestingly, in the early nineteenth century Bangla was used for distinctly low functions. Serious business—concerning gods or kings or property—was dealt with in other languages.

The entrenchment of British power and spread of Western education had the effect of simplifying this complicated triple hyperglossia with astonishing rapidity. English took over Persian’s administrative function as records

50. But one should not put too benevolent a construction on this process of delineation of the boundaries of the Bangla cultural space. Some sections of the early Bengali intelligentsia claimed, for instance, that Oriya was not a separate language but a degenerate version of Bangla, and it would be better for the “civilization” of Oriyas to learn and write standardized Bangla. There were serious suggestions that Oriya teaching should be abolished in schools in Orissa and replaced by Bangla. For details, see Mohanty 1986. Not merely cultural chauvinism but also hard calculation of material advantage were involved in making such aggressive subimperialist claims.

51. For a fascinating collection of old Bangla letters, see Sen 1961. Not surprisingly, a large number of these letters discuss land transactions, and consequently, their Bangla language is heavily laden with Arabic-Persian terms.
were converted into English, though record-keeping practices passed through a long period of administrative diglossia, and an otherwise English administrative discourse bristled with terms like ‘tālukā, moujā, and pattā. The term zamindārī remained in good semantic health until Independence, after which the institution was ceremonially abolished by legislation. Terms like ‘rāja and mahārāja were severed from the original practice of rulership, which had been fatally undermined by the expansion of British rule, and became free-floating and available for adoption under British permanent settlement by middling zamindārs without the faintest aspiration toward independent political authority. Earlier this would have been preposterously illegitimate as a social practice. A title like “the Mahārāja of Cossimbāzār”—worn by a considerable player in factional politics in colonial Bengal—would have appeared completely ungrammatical in the context of the earlier map of social practice. (Appropriately, the ultimate resting place for the term mahārāja is as a sign for a particular lifestyle, vaguely suggesting opulence, indolence, and geniality, in the famous advertisement for the national airline, Air India.)

It is a significant, if neglected, fact that the historical contact with colonialism was very uneven across the whole of South Asia. The Bengali contact with colonialism was peculiar for at least three reasons. First, Bengalis simply had the longest-running contact with modern British culture, and probably also had the longest time to devise a complex range of differential responses to British culture. Second, the nature of that contact differed in the case of Bengal. Since the British did not initially establish themselves with an unambiguous claim to state power, it was possible to see them as simply one force in a society in which several powers were jostling for position. The party of reform, led by people like Rammohan Roy, therefore could enlist British support without moral scruples about surrendering to an alien civilization. Third, the entrenchment of British colonial power in India afforded upper-class Bengalis a great opportunity for subimperialist expansion and made them even more eager and inclined to ingest the Western cultural model. Consequently, the emulative enthusiasm of Bengali culture became particularly intense. From the start of the nineteenth century Bangla intellectuals were under enormous pressure to reinvent their intellectualism in a modern form, which altered the entire definition of what it meant to be an intellectual. Literariness played a specially significant role in this process. Not merely were creation and knowledge of literary texts in both English and Bangla essential skills for the cultivated; a certain clarity of syntax, chaste-ness of vocabulary, refinement of pronunciation—all operations influenced by literary texts—became mandatory constituents of the modern Bengali sense of cultivation.

One of the most striking features of literary modernity in Bengal was the rapidity with which the culture changed. There was an urgency to different-
tiate the modern period from the past, which was now seen as “traditional” (that is, in the sense in which I used the term earlier: not as āgama, or what is received from the past, but as part of atīta, or the past itself). But although through its various stages of change—represented by Īśvarendra Vidyāsāgar (1820–1891), Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838–1894), and Rabindranath Tagore, respectively—Bangla literature quickly became modern, it did not establish a stable, unworried pattern of either verse or prose writing, or of aesthetic structure.

Rammohan Roy is significant for two reasons. First, he exhibited in his own life a model of what Bangla education or cultivation meant during his time, particularly the almost mandatory inclusion of Persian skills and Islamic culture. The entire project of the putative upgrading of Bangla and the creation of a “high” language was to erase this Islamic element in a surprisingly brief span of time. Within two generations, Bangla literary culture would become far more solidly Hindu—though in a rather complex way. Second, Roy is immensely important for the nature of his cultural project. He established the relatively liberal, strongly reformist Brahmo Samaj. Its principles, seen as a set of basic ideas or religious resources that would include metaphysical, philosophical, doctrinal beliefs, stocks of images, and iconography, stood in a very interesting relation to Hinduism. The Samaj played a foundational role in the creation of modern Bengali culture—from the devising of rules of ordinary bhadralok etiquette and the refashioning of the whole world of literary language through the works of Rabindranath to a revolution in women’s dress. If Hinduism is viewed in the structuralist fashion as a combinatorial of elements, Brahmo improvisation responded to the challenges of the West, Christianity, and modernity by using with wonderful deftness some specific elements of this repertoire.

Hindu caste customs, rooted in texts like the Manusmṛti, were utterly repugnant to progressive Brahmos, but they replaced those canonical texts with the equally canonical Upaniṣads. The Brahmos disliked the mutilation of classical Sanskrit by half-educated officiating priests and the utter aural disorder of worship in Hindu temples, but they replaced it all with the singing of appropriately solemn songs called brahmasāṅgīt (congregational singing of Brahma), and the adaptation of Vedic hymns. Doctrinally, it would be wholly unfair to accuse Brahmos of being more averse to Muslims than traditional Hindus. They were certainly seeking a more liberal religion, free

52. The introduction of the blouse to go with a new style of wearing the sari made it easier for women to come out of the antahpur. The traditional attire, though inviting romantic descriptions like Dusyanta’s wonder at Sakuntalā’s appearance—iyam adikamanojñā vaikalenāpi tarvi (this slender girl looks even more beautiful dressed in bark cloth)—would not have promoted women’s activity in the public sphere. On the historical transformation of dress, see Tarlo 1994.
from fanaticism. Yet their project for the creation of a high Bengali culture and literature looked entirely toward the repertoire of classical Hinduism for its resources. The high culture of modern Bengal, created through the stunning originality of the nineteenth century, thus became a generally Hindu affair. And this slow but decisive equation of the modern Bengali self with a cultural gestalt associated with Hinduism was a fundamental reason for the gradual alienation of Muslims. One strand of nineteenth-century literary culture even showed explicit hostility to Muslims and, with the growing interest in history, began to represent Islamic rule as “foreign” domination. References to Islamic rule as foreign are quite widespread and can be found in many Brahmo writings, apart from the unsurprising presence of this idea among more conservative Hindu texts. And hostility to Muslims in the works of highly influential writers like Bankimchandra played a significant role in this story. But to illustrate the crucial underlying problem I quote an extended passage from the famous essay, “Indian History,” by Rabindranath Tagore, who would not be suspected of communalism:

Countries that are fortunate find the essence of their land in the history of their country; the reading of history introduces their people to their country from infancy. With us the opposite is the case. It is the history of our country that hides the essence of this land from us. Whatever historical records exist from Mahmud’s invasion to the arrogant imperial pronouncements of Lord Curzon, these constitute a strange mirage for India; this does not help our sight into our country, but covers it with a screen. It casts a strong artificial light on one part in such a way that the other side, in which our country lies, becomes covered in darkness to our eyes. In that darkness the diamonds on the tiaras of the dancers flash in the light of the dancing halls of the nawabs; the red foam in the tumblers in the Badshahs’ hands appears like red, sleepless, maddened eyes; ancient holy temples cover their heads in that darkness, and the high spires of the jeweled marble mausoleums of the emperors’ lovers try to kiss the stars. In that darkness the sound of horses’ hooves, the trumpeting of elephants, the jangle of weapons, the paleness of tents stretching into the distance, the golden glow of silk curtains, the stone bubbles of mosques, the mysterious silence of the palaces guarded by eunuchs—all these produce a huge magical illusion with their amazing sounds and colors. But why should

---

53. The Muslim responses to this new form of cultivation constitute a complex and large question. One kind of response was to acknowledge this culture as a historical given and acquire it: the language of many Muslim writers who adopted this solution is hardly different from that of their Hindu peers. But others felt the exclusion more sharply and suggested developing a “Musalmāni Bāṃlā” whose predominant feature would be the frequent use of Arabic and Persian words to mark it off from the Hindu high Bangla. After Partition, the efforts of the Pakistani authority to impose Urdu brought on a strong reaction and a tendency to use a more Sanskrit-based high Bangla.
we call this India’s history? It has covered the punthi of India’s holy mantras by a fascinating Arabian Nights tale. No one opens that punthi. [But] children learn every line of that Arabian Nights tale by heart.\footnote{Tagore 1968: 3–4. Punthi refers to a genre of Bangla literature centered on themes of ritual and myth. My intention in adducing this passage is not to revise the general opinion about Tagore but to illustrate a widely used rhetoric. Tagore went on to write some of the most radically anticommunal and anti-Brahmanical poems in nationalist literature, generating a rare form of self-critical nationalism. In some of his late correspondence he recognized that his own earlier patriotic poems often shared a nationalist imagery that was revisionist by implication.}

This striking passage presents a field of signs in which all the symbolic markers of the self are securely tied to Hindu culture and what is not of “the essence of this land” is associated with Islamic and British history. The entire problem with modern Indian nationalism was that this way of representing history was not the preserve of Hindu communalists but was part of a far more common and casually commonsensical language.

\textit{The Making of Modern Prose}

If Bangla was to be the basis for a restructured linguistic economy, it had to show itself capable of performing the high cultural functions, which at this historical juncture were divisible into two mutually opposed types. Some were connected to religious practice and were normally performed in Sanskrit. Others were associated with modern culture: the practices of science, law, and administration that had come to be associated with English by the late eighteenth century. The challenge facing Bangla was further complicated by the philosophical contradiction between these two spheres of high functions: acceptance of a “scientific” view of the world was widely held as undermining orthodox Hindu religious life. To acquire a place of value, however, Bangla, incongruous as it seemed, had to be able to do both: It had to become a language capable of the high recitative solemnity of Sanskrit conventionally used at worship (pūjā) or ceremonials (replacing Sanskrit), and it had to acquire sufficient complexity and subtlety to become a language of law and science (replacing English). Finally, as a decisive mark of modernity, it had to acquire the capacity to produce a high literature (like both Sanskrit and English). Interestingly, the question of turning Bangla into a language of property-related jurisprudence was given less attention, illustrating that modern Bengalis, though poetically inclined, are characteristically negligent about pecuniary matters. Instead, a certain amount of Persianized language persisted in the practices of the revenue administration.

To perform all these functions successfully, Bangla had to enter into a peculiar relation of transaction with both Sanskrit and English. With the rise of early modern literature, two contradictory trends became immediately
apparent. One sought the fluidity, lilt, suppleness, and liveliness of colloquial speech; the other resolutely faced the other way, toward borrowing maximally from Sanskrit vocabulary. Consider the opening sentences from Iśvaracandra Vidyāsāgar’s Sitār Vanabās, a major text in the founding of modern Bangla literature:

ei sei janasthānamadhyavartī prasravanaṃgaṛi, ihār śikharadē satatasaṅcaramān jala-dharapatélasanyoge nirantar nibid nilimā anāṅkta.  

Grammatically, this is Bangla, but the words are almost entirely Sanskrit—a string of tātsamas, or words borrowed directly out of Sanskrit. In the quotation, Sanskrit-equivalent words are italicized; if the sandhis and samāsas were uncoupled, the number would be higher. The sentence structure is such that the main verb is hidden, which accentuates its similarity with Sanskrit.

Vidyāsāgar was engaged in a process of “classicization” of Bangla. Indeed, in his writings the politics of the grammatical past is particularly intense and clear. He wished to create a Bangla that denied the language’s somewhat mean and mixed medieval ancestry by making Sanskrit more internal to the Bangla linguistic structure. He supplemented this effort with his choice of the narratives that this newly formed “high” Bangla was to present to its modern audience through institutionalized educational curricula. Vidyāsāgar’s selection follows an impeccable syllabus of early proto-nationalist culture—a combination of high Sanskrit tales like the Rāmāyana of Vālmiki, Raghuvāṃśa and Śūkuntala of Kālidāsa, Uttarārāmacarita of the seventh-century playwright Bhavabhūti (all of which leave their traces on Vidyāsāgar’s own storytelling), and Shakespeare (Comedy of Errors retold under the title Bhrānti-vilās). Given this reading list, the new Bangla civilizing process simply could not fail.

Vidyāsāgar’s cultural strategy contained an important element of politics. Against the colonial argument that Indian traditional literature was vulgar and degenerate it asserted the exemplary character of the Sanskrit classical canon, which, however, was subtly reconstructed in a discernibly Western style through the surreptitious filter of “modern” taste. There was clearly an en-

56. Haraprasad Śastri wrote a perspicuous essay on the strange hybridity of what passed for Bangla grammar, showing that what vākaraṇa meant in Sanskrit was different from the meaning of “grammar” in English. Recent writers, he argued, made elementary mistakes by, for example, confusing “parts of speech” with vibhakti (Śastri 1956, 1: 203–10). Although it is not central to my analysis here, I cannot resist noting that the casual celebration of “hybridity” today sometimes tries to appropriate the creativity of the culture in nineteenth-century Bengal. I consider this totally illegitimate and thoughtless, perhaps prompted by a lack of familiarity with that culture in detail. People of Śastri’s culture would have made a sharp and indignant distinction between cultural self-making and hybridity, and would have regarded the latter with some contempt.
terprise to construct a past for Bangla that replicated the high classical past of the Italian Renaissance and ancient Greece that the British appropriated to their own literary culture. Vidyāsāgar’s suggestion about what modern Bangla should be proceeded in the right modern direction: reinvented through the deliberate Sanskritization of its vocabulary, this new Bangla was capable of performing all the specialized functions expected of a modern high culture. It could easily perform the function of religious solemnity and worship precisely because these practices had traditionally been done in Sanskrit. And by borrowing from the enormous wealth of Sanskrit’s vocabulary and grammatical operations, it could also perform efficiently as a language of science, legality, and serious reflection.

In the period between Bankimchandra and Rabindranath Tagore there was intense and sophisticated discussion about what a “genuine” high Bangla should be. The literary result of this discussion is seen in the grace, limpidity, and spontaneity of Tagore’s mature language. But a purely literary reading of this process hides the highly interesting theoretical reflection on the nature of a modern language that continued for nearly half a century. A key figure in this discussion was the linguist and scholar Haraprasād Sāstri, who was given the affectionate title Mahāmahopādhyāy for his seminal contribution to a scientific study of the Bangla language. Sāstri’s linguistics were not merely technically excellent; they were also astonishingly alert to sociological contexts. In one of his influential essays, “Bāmlā Bhāṣā” (The Bangla language), Sāstri sharply criticized the high Sanskrit style of two venerated figures of the earlier generation, Vidyāsāgar and Akṣayakumār Datta, the editor of the prestigious journal Tattvabodhini Patrika: “The fact is, those who have taken up the pen in the Bangla language have never learned the Bangla language properly.”

Excessive Sanskritization affected what was perceived to be the natural, spontaneous rhythm of the language, and soon faced serious criticism. Sāstri scorned the “Vidyāsāgarī” style as “translation,” not “creative writing”: “His Bangla is understood only by himself and his followers, no one else. How could they? After all, it was not a regional [desiya] language. It was a linguistic leftovers [ucchitamātra] imagined by some translators.”

Subsequently, the excessive Sanskritization of the Vidyāsāgar style was abandoned in favor of a more complex and versatile form developed by Bankimchandra, who wrote a spirited defense of the use of a mixed language

57. Brahmos were the only group that carried this logic through to its end. Others normally performed their pujās and marriage ceremonies in Sanskrit, but the Brahmos used Bangla translations of conventional slokas even for marriage ceremonies. They were also often the most particular about the purity of their language, taking enormous care not to slip English words into common speech—something that requires excruciating alertness.


for literature. Bankimchandra’s Bangla was still full of Sanskrit words, but it was not defensive or ashamed of showing, through the verbs, that it was Bangla. This innovation freed written Bangla from the woodenness (jadiatā) of Vidyāsāgar’s style; made it supple and sprightly; and allowed it to draw on the very different resources of colloquial, slang, and typically feminine speech. By the time of Tagore we find a fully developed and highly complex language, though in my view it was still weak as a vehicle of serious reflective prose compared to the strength of its ability to express sentiment. But precisely by going through this short period of experimentation Bangla had, as it were, created for itself a history in capsule form: a high, sonorous, unpractical classicism that through modern influences was gradually unfrozen into the recognizable cadences of an ironic modern prose (to echo Bakhtin’s idea that irony is a mark of all modern literature).

A second process in the creation of modern high Bangla had to do with English. Since Bangla is largely a Sanskrit-derived language, vocabulary could be taken unproblematically from that source. But a modern language expresses a world—material, social, intellectual, and aesthetic—that is structured by a different kind of complexity from that of premordernity. A significant element in this new sensibility is the determining, yet often subterranean, presence of science. This new rationalistic sensibility is often called in Bangla pāscātya bhāv (Western sensibility). Bangla intellectuals understood quite early science’s ability to produce a dramatic disenchantment with the world. In the Bangla context, the process of disenchantment was particularly brutal and dramatic; for unlike in Europe, it did not occur over a long period through an internal dialogue within European culture, often within Christianity, through which religion slowly ceded intellectual problems and fields to scientific reasoning. The total effect of intellectual changes in Europe over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was utterly revolutionary, but the actual experience was often incremental. In India, by contrast, this disjuncture occurred as a political clash between two civilizations, and any acceptance of modern science could immediately be denounced by conservatives as capitulation to alien ideas. Although Bangla modern culture was guided for about a century by religious and literary performances

60. There is considerable debate and reflection among writers of prose who, given the poetic obsession of the Bengalis, are often poets attempting a different mode of writing in their spare time. But the charge that the language Tagore used with incomparable grace was adept at sentiment yet weak on expressing serious, complex ideas is fairly common. In their various ways, writers like Pramatha Chaudhuri (primarily a prose writer), and Sudhin Dutta and Bishnu De (both poets and creators of deliberately “complex” styles) experimented with prose forms that were self-consciously distinct from Tagore’s often mellifluous but weak later prose. Tagore’s own prose went through what appears to me a regressive transformation.

rather than scientific ones, science was clearly a subtle and ubiquitous presence.\textsuperscript{62} Acceptance of the scientific, disenchanted view of the world, even if implicit, made the practice of traditional literature impossible. Those who accepted this sensibility had to accept by implication a new map of the frontier between literature and scientific discourse.\textsuperscript{63}

\textit{Science and Syntax}

In modern cultures, science comes to have a paradoxical relation with literature. While it is differentiated from literature as a field of intellectual activity, it supplies in a sense the boundaries of literature, forcing literature to become more self-consciously aesthetic. The distinction between modern science, with its high and querulously sharp self-definition, and literature/aesthetics was thus another determining influence on the making of modern Bangla literary culture, especially prose.

Prose has become, in modern times, the privileged vehicle of science; and although literature can exclude itself from the strict regimes of expression required by science, by invoking that dichotomy it declares itself, after all, a literature in an irreversibly (if not entirely) disenchanted world. Prose, and generally all modern literature, carries this mark of disenchantment, which makes statements fallible and exudes a general sense of cognitive skepticism.\textsuperscript{64} To effect this, in the case of Bangla, required new kinds of sentences expressing a provisionality entirely untypical in traditional syntax. For example, sentences beginning with \textit{yehetu} (since/because), indicating a strong relation of causality, were required for expressing inductive generalizations

\textsuperscript{62}. For a recent discussion of the contradictions of colonial science, see Prakash 1999.

\textsuperscript{63}. Originally, the Brahmo critique of orthodox Brahmanical Hinduism was developed on the basis of rationalist arguments: modern Hindus should only entertain ideas compatible with modern rationalism, it was argued, and therefore it was essential to reject traditional superstitious beliefs. A striking example of this belief in scientific reason was Tagore’s famous rebuke of Gandhi for his claim that a devastating earthquake in Bihar was God’s punishment for the practice of untouchability. See Tagore 1996.

While most writers and opinion-makers agreed about the crucial importance of science, views differed about the best means of acquiring it. In addition to reading the latest scientific material, extensive translation and writing of general science texts were greatly encouraged. Bhûdev Mukhopâdhyây, who as an inspector of schools had special title to speak on these matters, pointed out with characteristic perceptiveness that the spread of science required a true laicization of knowledge, as in modern Europe. It was unlikely, in his view, that this could happen without imparting science education in the vernacular. To him, it appeared that Bengalis were learning not science itself but “stories of science”—a much inferior substitute. See Mukhopâdhyây [1892] 1981.

\textsuperscript{64}. It would be wrong to say that earlier secular literature did not, at times, show a highly refined sense similar to rationalist skepticism. One of the best examples would be Ghalib’s famous couplet: \textit{ham ko miltuun hai jinnat ke haqiqat llekin dil ke bahlane ke lye yah hkyal acha hai} (I know the real truth about paradise, but for beguiling the human mind it is an excellent idea).
or subsuming particulars under general laws; *yadio*, or in earlier versions the more Sanskritic *yādy api* (while/although), indicated an open-endedness of judgment, registered a contradiction, or indicated a measured sense of qualification.65 Though initially authors felt a certain awkwardness with these syntactic forms and sometimes used them as flags of stylistic rebellion, within a short time, as the nature of discursive practices changed, they became commonplace. By Tagore’s time, at the turn of the century, they were being used with great ease and style, as in Tagore’s famous poem “Duḥsamay.”66

Probably the most striking use of the kind of syntactic structure at issue, applied with a deliberateness impossible to ignore, was in the conscious urbanity of Sudhindranath Dutta (1901–1961), who was famous precisely for the excess (to some) or the fluency (to others) of his mixture of obscure Sanskrit terms with obtrusively English syntactic form (a style that is also seen in striking forms in the poetry of Bishnu De). This combination, and especially the internalization of these syntactic structures, became the mark of both the maturity and the modernity in all types of writers, irrespective of political or artistic positions. Other, subtler uses of the element of surprise in language occurred in poetry. To take a random example, in two apparently simple lines of Jibanānanda Dā’s’s (1899–1954) famous poem “Cīl” (The kite), there is a startling use of a possessive case, creating a delectable effect of inversion:

\[
\text{hāy cil, sonāli dānār cil, ei bhije megher dupure} \\
tumi ā r kendo nāko ule ule dhānsi nādiṭr pāse.
\]

The second phrase in the first line, *sonāli dānār cil*, inverts the normal relation of possession: instead of *ciler dānā*—the kite’s unproblematic possession of its wings—the poem chooses to speak of *dānār cil*, the golden wing’s relation (possession/metonymy) with the kite. The phrase *bhije megher dupure* (the afternoon of wet clouds) in the next phrase has a similar, though weaker, effect.67

65. The obvious exception to this was the esoteric language of technical philosophy.

66. *yadio sandhyā āsiche manda manthane*  
*sab saṅgīt geche ingite thāmiyā*  
*yadio saṅgī nahi ananta ambare*  
*yadio kluṁt āsiche ange nāmiyā.*  
Though the dusk is approaching in slow steps,  
All singing has stopped at some strange signal,  
Though there is no companion in the unending sky,  
Though weariness is slowly numbing your limbs.

67. Because English admits phrases of this kind, their effect when rendered in English is considerably diluted. Fortunately, there is an excellent study of Dā’s poetic art available in English: Seely 1990.
Disenchantment and the Prose of the World

Self-consciously artistic prose writing led to the slow discovery of the poetics of prose. Traditionally, most compositions aspiring to attention and claiming intellectual seriousness were composed in verse, no doubt partly because the mnemonic element supported the pedagogy. As the conception of knowledge became more secular such mnemonic devices were less required, though the importance of memory in Indian learning continues even today. With the breakdown of the caste-based order with regard to occupation, arrangements for storing and imparting knowledge needed to be more impersonal. There was a shift from the tightly controlled system of Brahmanic pedagogy to a written, impersonal, accessible knowledge.

For analyzing the world in a disenchanting manner, whether in everyday or scientific discourse, prose was increasingly seen to be the “natural” form. Prose assisted a calm, unexcited, and exact recording of things. Prose was also the language of sober and recursive reflection. As the general picture of the world became more scientific and was rendered increasingly prosaic, the character of the literary was affected in a process similar to transformations occurring in the world of useful objects. It is often suggested that in the traditional world, art and craft were not separated by a definitional distinction but existed at two points of a continuum. A certain kind of artistic craft could be encountered everywhere: from the appliqué work on kānthās made from old rags to carvings on ordinary household utensils. Modernity, however, tends to divest useful things of this additional gratuitous artistic dimension and subject them to a minimalist, utilitarian design. Crafts become increasingly functional, while high art is given a more formalized presence. The general map of cultural practices is fundamentally altered.

So also, as the literary world was given over to prose, and an underlying, commonsense scientific criterion came to govern prose writing, literature gained at once a more restricted and a more exalted place. Literature could no longer happen unexpectedly and anywhere: it became highly formalized, prized, precious precisely because it was made the subject of an increasingly specialized profession. Though authors in the nineteenth century could not survive by taking literature as an exclusive profession, as Michael Madhusudan Dutt’s tragic fate demonstrated (he lived out his days in abject poverty, depending entirely on support from his friends), literary writing was clearly seen as a extraordinary activity. Its task was to recreate enchantment in a world that had finally been desacralized and disenchanted. In social terms, this development paralleled the rise of a new concept of entertainment—in a lifestyle increasingly dominated by temporal regimes driven by work.68

68. There is unfortunately not much systematic study of the distinction between work time and leisure time under conditions of modernity, but some provocative thoughts on the signifi-
Disenchantment and the Transformation of the Fantastic

Nothing reveals the enormous and ineradicable impact of science on literature—how science imperceptibly determines the conditions of possibility for literary forms—better than the fate of the fantastic. A major constituent of literary enchantment is the work of the fantastic, in the form of the wondrous affairs of the supernatural. In classical literature, interventions by the supernatural are common and often occur in ways that appear gratuitous to modern literary taste. At times, the intervention of the supernatural plays an astonishingly complex role, as, I think, in the climactic point of the Mahābhārata, the disrobing of Draupadi. In common traditional stories, especially in the mangalkavya tradition, supernatural intervention is often the most necessary point of the plot, as the relevant deity magically dispels an inevitable disaster. With the goddesses Manasa and Candi, accomplishing supernatural miracles was almost routine. And Annadā unleashed her goblin army to terrorize Delhi’s inhabitants and force Jahāngīr to recognize the merits of her devotee, Majumdar.

A modern sensibility immediately brings embarrassment, if not straightforward disrepute, to such literary conventions. Within the short span of a century, Hindu deities completely lost their abundant capacity of interfering with natural causality—particularly their proneness to appear theatrically in order to invert the narrative scene. Now they could only come to Calcutta within the clearly protected formal space of humor, as in the famous popular story Desganer Martye Āgaman by Durga Charan Ray (1886), in which the gods plead their inability to help the goddess Gaṅgā against British technology, which has humiliatingly spanned her with the steel arches of the Howrah Bridge.

The civilizing process of modern culture included the formation of a specialized literature for children, and the fantastic, driven from adult stories, found refuge in that literary space. However, even the children required scientific, rationalistic education, and the traditional stories of goblins were increasingly replaced by a different kind of fantasy, one associated with the mythical and historical past. Tagore arranged for publication of a collection of “grandmothers’ tales” (Daksināraṇī Jan Mitra Majumdar’s Thakurmar Jhuli)

---

69. This is one of the most difficult and complex episodes of the epic to interpret. Is Kṛṣṇa’s intervention—rescuing Draupadi and scornig the efforts of Duḥśasana—to be taken literally, or does it show that because of the magnitude of its immorality, the episode is impossible to bring to words and literary representation?

to prevent the disappearance of that tradition. And children’s literature came
to be dominated by the writing of Sukumar Ray—most notably his nonsense
verse in \textit{Abaltabal}—and the wonderfully colorful recreations of the past by
Abanindranāth Thākur, the celebrated painter, in Thākur’s \textit{Rajkahini}. The
only place where the fantastic could find a secure sanctuary, entirely pro-
tected from the charge of being antiscientific, was in a hugely popular and
expanding literature of science fiction, because here fantasy could in fact
ride on science itself.\textsuperscript{71}

\textit{Technologies and Transactions}

Not surprisingly, the coming of the new high literature altered the nature
of the audience for literary productions. Some traditional texts, like any writ-
ten narrative, were meant for huge, partially anonymous audiences—like the
two adaptations of the \textit{Rāmāyaṇa} and the \textit{Mahābhārata} mentioned earlier, or
the \textit{maṅgalākāryas}—but their sense of audience was clearly quite different
from that of modern literature. Indeed, extending and modifying Gadamers’s
theory of textual representation in \textit{Truth and Method}, it could be argued that
a text like the \textit{Rāmāyaṇa}, even when translated and written down, could not
find its appropriate audience without going through various procedures of
representative mediation.\textsuperscript{72} The \textit{Rāmāyaṇa} would not be read at one sitting
or in a series of sequential occasions, the way a modern story is read. Parts
of it would be either collectively read by communal audiences or enacted
by mediating poets or performers, who would draw on their own narrative
imagination in the theatrical depiction, the selection of words, and the com-
position of dialogues. The story could not “come to life” without their re-
presentation on each narrative occasion.

At a level lower than the “universal” literature of the epics were entirely
episodic creative forms. One example would be the \textit{kaviṅgins} mentioned
earlier—contests of extempore verse composition, which people enjoyed imm-
ensely, but which were also entirely ephemeral. The compositions were not
meant to survive the day and therefore did not face the kind of scrutiny of
form, substance, and style that a written text-object would face in a primar-
ily written culture. There was no way of retrieving them except in unreliable
reports from memory, and the performance was appreciated for the aston-

\textsuperscript{71} Arguably, the act of putting Dakśināraṁjana Mitra Majumdar’s tales into the textually
inflexible format of a modern book was itself a fundamental change. It dispensed with the es-
oteric knowledge of the grandmother—and in most cases, with the grandmother herself—since
literate children could now read the stories straight from the book.

Children’s science fiction made a triumphant start with \textit{Ghannādar Galpa}, by the well-known
writer Premendra Mitra, and was pursued by a distinguished string of front-ranking writers, down
to the stories by Satyajit Ray.

ishingly spontaneous creativity of the versifiers. Obviously, the kavīgān was a total experience for the audience, who could appreciate it only firsthand; and they had to be familiar with the utter contingency of occasions to which much of the humor would refer.

Some premodern texts were of course canonized, but with such strong associations between the authors and the gods they praised that the authors were turned into mythical figures. Somewhat like Vyāsa or Vālmiki, they were not individualized precisely because their achievements were so immense. Although we can certainly detect personal styles among the Vaiṣṇava poets—for instance, the very different styles of Caṇḍidās (who emphasized the semantic and the emotional) and Govindadās (who stressed the aural and technical craft)—the authors were not individuated in the modern sense. This was partly because the finished literary product did not reach directly from the author to the reader (another reason, of course, is the paucity of information we have about these authors). These songs, poems, and stories formed parts of padavali kirtan recitals, where the narrative could be inflected by the improvisations of the narrator (kathak), who would exploit the immediate surroundings to enhance his presentation. The text in the strict, written sense was thus a core structure on which the narrator would build his personal rendition of the tale.

This improvisational performativity was entirely removed from the modern text, which was fixed, nonperformative, and supposed to reflect, in the European style, the author’s individual sense of life. In other words, the earlier texts allowed—and in some cases required—the representation of the textual content by a mediating performer, exactly like the mediation of a dramatic text by actors. Modern texts, on the other hand (like lyric poems or novels, the two literary forms considered paradigmatic of a modern cultural sensibility, centered around a cult of “authenticity,” such as the one that quickly dominated Bangla), created a unified, singular authorship in place of such secondary authorly functions; by their very form, these did not allow any other subjectivity to interpose itself in the private exchange between the author and his reader. The best and most perverse example is perhaps the imposition of an utterly fixed performative structure on Tagore’s songs, on the grounds of a largely spurious sovereignty of supposed authorial intention. It would create utter consternation among the Bangla bhadralok audience if the rendering of Tagore songs deviated from the musical notation (svaralipi), while in the case of many other songs of comparably recent origin, singers were allowed a great deal of performative liberty.

Thus the meaning of the literary, as also of the community of readers, was significantly transformed: it shifted from an event performed face-to-face
before a relatively intimate community, to an abstract, objective textual ob-
ject, emphasizing the individuality of both author and reader and the im-
personal nature of that relation.

In modern Bangla culture, for reasons that ought to be explored socio-
logically, literary work—often generically referred to as “writing” (lekha)—
soon came to be especially valued among modern intellectual practices. Harap-
rasād Šāstri, observant as ever, noted that to place Bangla literature on a
firm foundation writers had to become professionals (in other words, work
as full-time writers), though paradoxically, in the nineteenth and early twen-
tieth centuries, this was possible only for aristocrats. Successful early writers
of those days belonged to the colonial elite. Bankimchandra was a deputy
magistrate, and Tagore came from a zamindar family and was happily ex-
empted from the need to earn a common living. But even Tagore, one of
the most celebrated writers worldwide in the early twentieth century, found
difficulty financing his university at Shantiniketan through royalties.

Only in the 1940s did serious literary writing descend socially to become
primarily the work of petty bourgeois individuals living on small office jobs.
Saratchandra Chattopādhāy’s unprecedented popular success as a novelist
allowed him to become a professional author, but in his time this was still an
exception. Jibānānanda Dās, perhaps the most remarkable and distinctive
poetic voice after Tagore, was shadowed by lack of professional success his
whole life, and he worked as a college lecturer in obscure institutions in Cal-
cutta and rural Bengal.74 He died in a tram accident that was as heart-
breakingly urban as some of his poetry. After his time, the modern associa-
tions of Bangla high literature, in which the subject and object are both petty
bourgeois and its predominant theme is an oppressive, unfulfilling urban
modernity, were firmly established.

Cultural traditions are hard to obliterate, however. Although they were
dislodged from the high grounds of literature, some of the older, oral
processes of literary delectation were preserved in the great Bangla institu-
tion of the āddā, an informal gathering typically devoted to conversation on
matters of literature and culture that became the source and seat of judg-
ment of much literary production. The āddā was not an impersonal public
sphere; rather, it was an unstructured and private literary association, access
to which was controlled by common taste, technical style, or political ideol-
one. The āddā itself was predictably degraded after the 1940s, turning into
a mandatory activity for aspiring young writers, often focused on radical de-
partures in little magazines.

74. See Seely 1990, which contains—besides critical appreciation and biography—ad-
mirably translated passages from Dās’s most important poems.

Amazingly, Dās was dismissed from his position as college lecturer in Calcutta because of
uncomprehending and unfair reviews of his poetic work (Sen 1965: 330).
Reminiscences of literary personalities show a clear change of location, style, and context of the literary *adda*. Initially, important writers attracted groups of admirers and collaborators around them. Haraprasad Shastri reminisced about conversations with Bankimchandra in his house at Kanthapara during which drafts of Bankim’s novels in progress were read out and discussed. Similarly, a large and varied circle of literary and artistic personalities gathered around Tagore, the institutional setting of Shantiniketan giving the group a particular stability. Subsequently, important trends in poetic writing, like the post-Tagore iconoclasm of the group associated with the journal *Kallol* or the attempt to fashion a radical left-wing literature around the journal *Paricay*, came out of literary *addas*. These groups were complex and heterogeneous, consisting of creative writers, literary critics, and ordinary men of literary taste—a kind of inner and privileged audience. The writers themselves were often quite a mixed group, including poets, novelists, and short story writers. Later, when some groups became affiliated with political ideologies, they expanded to include writers of political commentary. The first *addas* were held in the opulent and quiet interiors of upper-class homes. Access to and membership in these gatherings were therefore rigorously restricted. Literary friends gathered in the houses of eminent poets or writers and discussed literary works by way of unstructured conversation. By the forties, non-elite versions of such things were already in place—for instance, in the offices of the Communist Party or the Progressive Writers’ Association, or in editorial offices of journals like *Paricay*, where access was not socially restricted yet was largely ideologically determined.

By the 1960s, literary *addas* also spilled over into more public places, like roadside cafes or the famous Calcutta Coffee House in the College Street area, which single-handedly housed the editorial boards of hundreds of highly interesting though ephemeral journals. By that time, literary careers went hand in hand with the unemployment of the educated lower-middle-class youth, or in cases of the more talented or fortunate, with a turn to professionalism usually supported by publishing groups that marketed popular magazines of huge circulation.

As Bangla literature established itself, it became part of a wide world of cultural transactions. Surrounding the “death of Sanskrit,” of which Pollock has written, there were other subtle deaths, one of them being the death of medieval Bangla. Most significantly, the medieval tradition of literary cosmopolitanism, in which Bangla had ingeniously selected elements out of Sanskrit culture and recombined them into something of its own, was replaced

---

75. Datta [1985].
76. *Paricay* was started around 1931 by a group of literary aesthetes, but was taken over later by Communist and left-wing writers.
by a modern version, in which Bangla began to imitate Western bourgeois forms. It also imitated Western forms of canonicity. As modern Bangla literature established itself, it became part of a wide world of cultural transactions within the cultural space of South Asia. Bangla began to have immense influence over literatures of adjacent regional languages, though not surprisingly this was a rather fraught and ambiguous relationship of emulation and resentment. The works of Bankimchandra, Rabindranath, and Sarat chandra were translated in huge waves all across India. In this brief early phase, Bangla contentedly accepted its position as a “hegemonic” literature in India, casually presuming its preeminence among other vernacular literatures. But even in this context Bangla placed itself in a clearly recognizable cosmopolitan hierarchy ranging from the local to the global.

Bangla was seen as positioned in the middle of a literary “world” in which European literatures—English and French especially—stood at the top, above Bangla in some sense, and the other Indian literatures stretched away below. This helps us understand the flow of traffic in translations. Very little from other Indian literatures was translated into Bangla, and little of what was translated became popular. In this condition of relative isolation Bangla resembles English, with its sense of being privileged and having little to learn from others. For instance, a Bengali child given a fairly careful literary education could grow up in the 1950s without hearing a reference to Godāin, the great Hindi novel by Premchand; however, Bangla versions of even minor European novels of adventure or romance were quite plentiful. A children’s writer, Nripendra Krishna Chattopadhyay, almost single-handedly presented the entire canon of European classics to the young Bengali reader. An average middle-class child in a small town could easily grow up with his imaginative world populated on the one side by characters from Sanskrit story collections Kathāsaṁvādaśāra (Ocean of stories) and Vītāla pānicāvīmsa (Twenty-five tales of the undead), and on the other, Ivanhoe and The Three Musketeers. Children’s editions of both kinds of texts were equally popular as gifts in school prize distribution ceremonies.

Until the 1950s, cultivation did not sever connection with the high classical past. Kālidāsa at least, and some common classical literary texts, were mandatory parts of a fastidious literary education. From the 1940s, due to radical influences, there were attempts to accord literary recognition to folk traditions, which had been treated with indifference if not contempt by the early creators of a high Bangla. This is reflected in an interest in the recovery and inventorization of Bāul songs and tales told by grandmothers.

It is interesting to consider what the divergent values embedded in this literary cosmopolitanism produced in terms of the Bengali “habits of the heart.” In the 1950s, there was a wave of translations from Western literatures other than English. But these translations had a metaliterary purpose. They were meant not only for simple delectation but also to assist in reflec-
tion on the nature of literary modernity in the context of a debate about what was modern poetry and whether Tagore’s poetry qualified. One of the most striking documents of this discussion was Buddhadev Basu’s essay justifying his translation of Baudelaire as an example of what modern poetry, with its vision of a city of “steeples and chimneys,” should be. Radical left-wing political influence regarded this strand as degenerate and balanced it with equally energetic translations of poetry from an astonishingly cosmopolitan spread of sources from Pablo Neruda to Nazim Hikmet (the latter was translated by Subhās Mukhopādhyāy, at the time a young and promising poet with the Communist Party). In the 1960s came a second wave of translations, which focused on European drama—Chekhov’s Cherry Orchard, Pirandello’s Six Characters in Search of an Author, Brecht’s Three Penny Opera—intended not for a reading public but for a very appreciative theater-going audience with highly eclectic taste. All these translations have since played to consistently full houses in Calcutta’s theater district. What the Bengali inhabitant of a declining modern Calcutta has found so absorbing in these plays is an interesting question for the understanding of cultural translation.

Tagore and the Problem of the Modernity of Literature

Early-modern Bangla literary practice—the second “origin” of Bangla literary culture—raised a set of questions: What was the meaning of modernity in the literary field? Was it simply a temporal marker, indicating merely that this literature existed effortlessly in the “present”? Or did modernity have some substantive content: acceptance of a general cultural sensibility, a background understanding of the world taken from modern science, or some literary principle like individuality and rejection of convention? Since the work of the early-modern writers developed in the context of an implicit contest with colonialism and the prestige of English, they had to claim that Bangla possessed the dual distinctions of having a classical past and being able to produce a high literature in the present. In Vidyāsāgar’s time it was easy to claim the first by reinventing a Bangla artificially proximate to Sanskrit; but the second task was obviously more difficult. There was a growing sense of a strange historical chasm between the pasts of Bangla literature and its present, an uncomfortable but inescapable feeling that those pasts were enabling factors for the growth of modern literature yet were aesthetically discontinuous from the modern literary enterprise. Quite often the solution was daring and ingenious: instead of finding modern subjects for aesthetic presentation, authors chose ancient narratives, but handled them in distinctly modern ways.78 By the time Bankimchandra wrote his prose works to com-

78. This important question calls for careful and separate analysis. But the main point can be illustrated by Madhusudan’s choice of themes: the stories about Meghnād, Tilottamā, and
plement the considerable riches of Madhusudan’s poetry (mid-nineteenth century), modern Bangla could claim a distinctive and distinguished body of new literature. It was the works of these two writers in particular that became the “classical” texts of modern literature, occupying the strangely dual status of “modern classics.” The more modern literature evolved, reaching a mature stage in the later works of Rabindranath Tagore (in the first part of the twentieth century), the more its difference from traditional literature became transparent.

The entire line of Bangla literature from Bankim to Tagore was modern in some ways, but its central aesthetic ideals and principles remained “classical.” The ideas and techniques that animated that literature were similar to the principles underlying Shakespearean drama, nineteenth-century English romantic poetry, or the Victorian novel. From the 1940s onward, however, a new intellectual anxiety forced more reflection on what constituted modernity in literature. Exposure to contemporary European art led to the birth of a new, more complex form of modernism. It became evident by this time that the principle of “modernity” was curious; it represented not a single set of literary criteria but rather the principles of motion, displacement, and openness toward transformation and experimentation in literary values. However modern a form of literature was, it was not immune from challenge by forms that spoke in the name of modernity against any existing body of texts. Many “modern” writers and critics found this aspect of literary modernity deeply unsettling. Modernity turned into a problem because of the rapidity with which both poetic and prose conventions were threatened with what some considered undeserved obsolescence.

By this time, one peculiarity of the literary modern must have been clear to its more perceptive practitioners. In traditional literature, temporality had a clearly different form. In ancient and medieval literature in Sanskrit the making of new classics at a later period did not cancel out, transcend, or more significantly, “make impossible” writing in an earlier style. Jayadeva in the twelfth century and Vidyāpati in the fifteenth did not make their predecessor Kālidāsa obsolete; in fact, Kālidāsa’s style was a canonical option for later poets. Classic texts, once they were admitted to this exalted status, shared a common immortality. Clearly, this kind of temporalization was not

Šarmištā; and Tagore’s reworkings of classical moral dilemmas in his long narrative poems in Kathā O Kāhinī (1900), discussed later in this chapter.

79. Interestingly, Haraprasād Sāstrī made the astonishingly chauvinistic claim that the historical situation of modern Bangla was unparalleled in the world. He believed that modern Bangla writers’ access to the traditions of both Western and Indian antiquity as well as the great variety of modern European literature would spawn a literature of unequaled glory. In other words, literary writers for the first time had before them the dual ideals of Kālidāsa and Shakespeare.
happening to modern Bangla. The classicism of Bankim and Madhusudan was highly individual, in that other authors could not follow them without appearing unoriginal, and their works became stylistically or aesthetically obsolete relatively quickly. Although Madhusudan’s poetry and Bankim’s fiction and satires had already achieved the status of “classics,” they lacked some of the attributes possessed by acknowledged classics in traditional literature.

True, modern Bangla literature slowly developed a canon of “great texts,” but these texts and their concerns and styles soon became unrepeatable. Classics failed to become conventionalized as literary practice—as parts of a repertoire of acknowledged styles in which literary writing could be carried on for the indefinite future. Even Bankimchandra’s admiring contemporaries apparently found it impossible to write like him; so it is not surprising that his concerns with Indian, Hindu, and Bengali history, his powerful Sanskritic language with its great internal differentiation, the manner in which his characters conducted themselves, the dramatic structure of his novels, the sketchiness of the world depicted inside his stories were all inimitable to Tagore’s generation. This was so not merely because of the power of his imagination and its peculiar individuality, but also because of the subtle sliding away of his aesthetic world—a double obsolescence of both that world and its aesthetic forms.

Tagore’s pervasive influence on modern Bangla literature was subtly present even in work that strove to break away from him. His younger contemporaries, including rebellious poets associated with the iconoclastic urges of the Kallol group (formed in 1924), could not deny that the language they used had been fashioned by him. Yet even Tagore was not immune to the accelerated obsolescence that haunted modern “classicism.” Critical discussions about Bangla poetry gave compelling reasons why it was impossible to “write like Tagore” any longer, and by the 1940s, even Tagore was firmly, irrevocably in the past. In fact, the novel Šešer Kavita—his brilliant attempt to find an answer to the insidious challenge of literary modernity, his refusal to belong to a literary past during his own lifetime—in a paradoxical fashion, tragically illustrated his failure. The craft of the novel shows his unparalleled skill with words, proving that he could write colloquial prose if he chose with a poetic fluidity far surpassing the young writers. He could portray youthful, “modern” characters whose romantic sensibility was quite different from the usual figures in his own mature writing. Yet Šešer Kavita was the best refutation of his own claim that he was, by the standards of the gritty and melancholy forties, a literary contemporary. It represented a magnificent failure to be modern by the current criteria. By contrast, a single line of Jibanânanda Dâš’s gloomy poem in which he quickly sketches the habituation of despair in the posture of an Anglo-Indian prostitute puffing smoke under a dim street light while waiting for some indefinite American soldier in Calcutta’s twilight contains a deeper expression of the moods of postwar
urban despair and its awkward demand for an aesthetic that could make poetry out of degradation. This was beyond the moral possibilities of Tagore’s aesthetic, despite his extraordinary technical virtuosity. What had been demanded was a change not in style but in the fundamental aesthetic itself.

After Tagore, this kind of historical obsolescence, as if by definition now part of the modern literary condition, was routinely acknowledged. Accomplishment in poetic or novelistic writing was noted for the individuality of style but was never expected to be conventionalized in the manner of traditional literature. There was an underlying critical sense that the movement of literature consisted in bringing each new literary aesthetic to its limits and then crossing them by making literature take account of subjects that had been impossible to talk about in a literary way before. The claim of novelty among the post-Tagore poetic generation was focused entirely on this problem.

Modernity presented writers with two different literary worlds, one drawn from Indian traditions, the other from the West. Authors improvised by using elements from both aesthetic alphabets and produced new forms that were irreducible to either. Numerous examples can be drawn from Tagore’s poetic work to illustrate this and to show that what he eventually produced was not an imitation of Western forms, but a distinctively Indian/Bangla species of the literary modern. However, it would be wrongheaded to celebrate this as a case of aesthetic “hybridity,” in line with current postmodern appropriations. In fact, poets like Tagore had a well-articulated conception of what hybridity was and believed that aesthetically hybrid forms were produced by a fundamental failure to reconcile contradictory traditions. This can be shown by reference to several aspects of Tagore’s work. Under the pressure of modern intellectual influences, Tagore fashioned a language that could express the complex urges of modern subjectivity. In several poems, he reflects on the nature of the unity of his self—a question forced on him clearly by the pressure of a modern conception of the subject coming from Western literature—but he answers through a complex combination of themes and elements drawn from Indian literary-philosophical sources.80

80. Several of Tagore’s poems are titled “Ami” (I). One of these, in his Pariśes, asks with exemplary precision:

I wonder today if I know this person
whose speaking makes me speak,
whose movement makes me move,
whose art is in my painting,
whose tunes ring out in my songs,
in this my heart of strange happiness and sorrows.
I thought he was tied to me.
I thought all my laughter and tears
The same virtuosity is shown in Tagore’s handling of the past. In a group of poems written in his middle period and gathered into a book called Kathā o Kāhini he takes up poignant occasions or scenes from ancient Indian literature, like the conversation between Karna and Kunti, the mother Karna never knew, on the night before the battle of Kuruksetra; the appeal by Gandhāri to her husband Dhrtyarṣa against her son Duryodhana; and an astonishingly intense inquiry into the nature of moral responsibility for one’s acts through an encounter in hell between King Somaka and the priest who had advised him to sacrifice his small child in a putreṣṭya jñā (sacrifice for obtaining a son).81 A third example is Tagore’s artistic reflection on suffering and evil in the world, which required both Western ideas of the tragic and Hindu/Buddhist conceptions of dukkha as theoretical preconditions, though they were not direct sources of his thinking.

A mark of modernity is the increasing reflexivity of its literature. Artists and writers think more self-consciously about what they are doing; interpretation of form enters into writing itself. It became clear as time passed that Tagore represented a form of the modern in sharp contrast to everything that had gone before. Yet there was simultaneously a gathering sense of dissatisfaction precisely with Tagore’s literary immensity, and an attempt, faltering at first but increasingly more assertive, to find ways of going beyond him.

Two tendencies, discernible from the 1940s, attempted to escape Tagore’s limits—which were also the limits of Bangla literature—and to start questioning the nature of modern aesthetics.82 The first was reflected in the style of poetry associated with the journal Kallol, which began to carry the works of some of the best post-Tagore writers; the second was linked to the political radicalism of the Communist cultural movement. At the time, these two strands treated each other with the ruthlessness reserved for the ideological enemy, in a grotesque local reenactment of the Cold War. Yet, in historical retrospect, there was a strange complementarity in their distinct efforts to take literature beyond Tagore’s overwhelming but limiting presence. Aesthetic critics of Tagore experimented with formal properties of poetry that went beyond his art, absorbing the most diverse cosmopolitan influences—

81. The relevant poems are “Karna kuntisamvād,” “Gandhāri Abedan,” and “Narakbās”; all figure in Sānyāstā (Tagore 1972)
82. Some of the most intellectually searching discussions on why Tagore was indispensable and at the same time had to be gone beyond can be found in Buddhadev Basu’s essays (Basu 1966).
Buddhadev Basu looking at Baudelaire, for instance, or Jibanananda Das using surrealist imagery. An example of the latter is Das’s famous line, harinerā khelā kare tārā ār hirār alore—“Deer play in the light of stars and diamonds”; even a prosaic translation shows how utterly different this is from any contemporary poetic idiom in Bangla writing. Radical writers sought a literature that transcended Tagore by crossing social boundaries, by making the poor, the marginal, and the disheartened legitimate objects of literary enunciation. But both trends critiqued Tagore on the same significant point: his art looked away from the everyday slovenliness, degradation, and the problem of evil in modern life, an evil that was mundane, banal, inescapable.

A major task emerging from this aesthetic and sociological criticism of the limitations of Tagore’s immensity was the search for an aesthetic in the increasingly grimy city life of Calcutta. Tagore wrote two famous poems on Calcutta as a sign of modernity: “Nagarsangit” (Song of the city) in his relatively early phase, and “Bansī” (The flute), his late attempt at capturing poetically the everyday bleakness in the life of the average clerk. But in both his face is averted; he despairs of Calcutta being in any possible sense an aesthetic object. Therefore, among post-Tagore writers, finding an aesthetic of the indigent, restricted life of the urban lower-middle class became the center of artistic contention.

Some of the most interesting arguments about modernity and its aesthetic expression turned on the reading of Baudelaire’s poetry, which had been translated into Bangla, with a defiant and insightful introduction, by Buddhadev Basu. This brought into Bangla literary debates one of the central

---

83. In “Aikatān” (Orchestra), one of his most historically perceptive late poems, Tagore sought to give a preemptive answer to these arguments. He listed what his poetry had failed to cover and, with great regretful honesty, said that he had at times stood outside the courtyard of the next neighborhood but had entirely ( rehabār) lacked the strength to step inside ( majhē majhe gechā ami a-polār prājñaner dhāre / bhītāre prāheī kāri se sākī chīla na rehabāre). But he warned against what he saw as “a fashionable working-class-ness”: “to steal literary fame without paying the price of real experience” ( satya mūya na diyei sāhityer khyōtā kārā curī / bhālo nay, bhālo nay, nakal se saukhīn maḍturi). He also presciently invoked the poet of a lower order of human experience, which had escaped him:

eso kabi akhyāta janer nirbāk maner
marner badanā rta kariyo uddhār
gāhnī e-deite praśhīn yētā cārīdhār
abajīnār tāpe śuṣka nirvānandā eī marubhāmi
rase pārva kāri ātā tumī.

Come, O poet who would recover the deep pain in the speechless minds of unfamed men, this songless land where it is lifeless all around, this joyless desert dried by the heat of neglect/ignominy, fill it with enjoyment. (“Aikatān, Janmadine,” Tagore 1972, 823–24)

questions of literary modernity: Can evil be at the center of an entire aesthetic? A seriously reflective rejoinder to this argument—which preferred Baudelaire’s engagement with evil over Tagore’s detachment—was offered in Abu Sayid Ayub’s essay Adhunikata o Rabindranath (Modernity and Rabindranath). Ayub deplored the tendency of modern literature to center its artistic reflection on the problem of evil. Ayub translated the concept “evil,” with an instructive awkwardness, as amaṅgalbodh, but this was entirely appropriate: Tagore in his “Song of the City” called the earth outside of the city sundar (beautiful) and śūba (auspicious), indicating the fundamental internal relation between these two concepts in his aesthetic. The poem almost implies that the city is external to what the earth normally is. Ayub restated this philosophy of art, claiming that two features of modern literature are especially significant: first, “the intense attention to the literary form” (kāryadeha; lit. the external or formal “body” of literary art) and second, “the excessive consciousness about the presence of evil in the world.” Ayub conceded that Baudelaire was a poet not in a mere formalistic sense but in a “vedic” (i.e., philosophic) sense: he was satyadraṣṭā, a seer of truth. “Particularly, when those gifted with subtle and sympathetic understanding observe the helplessness of the human condition, their imaginative minds come under the shadow of limitless despair and sadness. Baudelaire has given form to this shadow in his poetry. . . . All this is acceptable. Still I would like to state that Baudelaire is an incomparable poet of a certain mood, a certain rasa, not more.” “My greatest complaint against Baudelaire is that he is a talented poet, but he has used his amazing genius to bring himself and all of us to perdition.” Ayub then went on to prove that Tagore’s poetic world does not show a naive denial of evil, but places its unquestionable presence in the more complex pattern of an ultimately metaphysical optimism.

Despite the intricacy and subtlety of this debate between critics and defenders of Tagore, and Ayub’s attempt to argue the continued relevance of Tagore’s aesthetic, the subsequent evolution of Bangla poetry shows that historically the verdict went against Ayub. Bangla literature eventually found an answer to the problem of evil in another way. In certain respects this solution is reminiscent of Baudelaire himself, because it too is a poetry of a soiled, degraded world, a poetry in which chimneys and drains outnumber steeples, or temple spires. But it is also quite different. The Calcutta of post-

85. If rendered with pedantic accuracy, amaṅgalbodh could mean a sense (bodh) of the inauspicious, which raises an interesting problem of Begriffsgeschichte in literature. The duality of good and evil could be rendered in more colloquial Bangla as bhālo and manda; but when authors sought a more philosophical term, they tended to opt for the more religiously laden distinction of maṅgal and amaṅgal.
87. Ayub 1968: 8, 12.
Tagore poetry is not just a faint copy of Baudelaire’s Paris; its evils and provocations are not derived but authentic—like the poets’ voices that eventually speak about it. In Baudelaire there is still a vestigial classicism in the heroism of the poet’s loneliness. He faces an evil that is grand and metaphysical without assistance from anyone, least of all from the women who poison him and help him forget. Baudelaire’s poetry offers a subtle monumentalization of evil, which Jibanananda’s poetry utterly lacks. Even this consolation—the grandeur of the evil that is the poet’s eternal enemy—is denied to the tired, lower-middle-class worker of Calcutta, who, unlike the upper-middle class professional, does not come home at “the violet hour.” His life has no violet hour. His life faces an evil that comes in small, unavoidable pieces—indefinable insults and disappointments that become routine, the attrition of everyday life. To paraphrase a famous line, life ebbs like water dripping from a dirty, leaking tap. It is the repetitiveness and unremarkableness of this destiny that makes it so difficult to turn into poetry: but this precisely constituted the aesthetic challenge that Bangla literature after Tagore tried to address. A wonderful poetic statement of this melancholy is the title of Sunil Gangopadhyay’s recent title poem: “The Beautiful Is Depressed, and the Sweet Is Feeling Feverish” (sundarer mankhārāp madhurer jvar).

Practical Contexts of Literary Practice

My discussion of literary traditions would not be complete without some analysis of the social contexts of literary practice: journals, societies, coffee-houses and tea shops, and the ubiquitous addás—places characterized by an inextricable mix of unemployment, literary ambition, subtle taste, and loafing. Though this topic warrants a whole discussion by itself, some points can be made briefly.

At its earliest stage, the new literature relied on two types of support. First, many writers came from the upper crust of the colonial elite and had the means to publish their own work. Their efforts were assisted by a kind of social collegiality of class, and since the elite collectively longed for a high Bangla literature, they felt it was their social responsibility to support this literature by becoming its audience. Financial support for commercially unviable literary enterprises came through donations, subscriptions, and at later periods, through influential supporters securing highly profitable advertisements. Eventually, as Bangla literature developed in variety and confidence, a market for it grew. But it is significant that as late as Tagore’s mature period

88. On the significance of addá for Bangla literature, with some persuasive and a few startlingly excessive claims, see Datta [1985]. A more general, and perceptive, analysis is offered by Chakrabarty 1999.
literature was not profitable. Even Tagore’s literary earnings—phenomenal compared to other contemporaries—were too meager to support a substantial institution.

It appeared for some time that the imitativeness of modern Bangla literature would lead to the emergence of literary institutions along British or European lines, in the form of sāhitya sabhās (literary societies) and the formalization of university and school syllabi. But the law of early and rapid decay in Bengal’s travestic modernity ensured that such institutions rapidly declined. Even august bodies meant to represent the interests of Bangla literature or native learning, like the Bangiya Sāhitya Pariṣad (Bengal Literary Society) or the Asiatic Society, appear to have gone into terminal decline from the 1960s. Only the addās and the inclination of young intellectuals to publish small magazines have survived; individual projects have tended to sink quickly, but the authors have consistently regrouped into new journals and genres.

Two other developments that have affected the literary scene since the 1950s are the coming of the modern newspaper market and, subsequently, of the film narrative. With the rise of popular journals with large circulation, like the legendary weekly literary magazine Deś, popular novelists started writing serialized novels and stories especially for the annual pūjā saṃkhyā (the autumn festival number). This affected the structure of the stories: formless length was more readily tolerated, and the stories could be cut up into small episodes like television serials. The criteria for judging these stories, which were often bestsellers, were also utterly different from those applied to the self-consciously artistic prose compositions of earlier times. The effect of film aesthetics on literature is an important potential area for analysis, since the transaction of influences is reciprocal. Just as films depend heavily on the narrative resources of literature, so literature is affected by the presence of film. As literary culture turns into an interactive element in a very different cultural economy it enters into yet a new phase. It appears that since the 1960s, Bangla literary culture has been in a serious process of restructuring, of which only the broad terms can be specified. First, the linguistic economy that emerged through the nationalist movement with its political diglossia has been seriously modified by the structural developments after Independence. People at high levels under both national capitalism and state socialism prefer to speak in English, and through the increasing power of the state and the market, English has found a much wider domain of use compared to the linguistic economy of the 1960s. A new middle-class elite has developed that uses English as its only serious language, and the literary production of this social group has tended to be in English. The relation between vernacular literatures and this new domain of literary English is being gradually negotiated, displacing in some significant ways the earlier
relation between nationalism and vernacular writing. It affects the claims of vernacular cosmopolitanism particularly seriously. Cultural changes have also restructured the audiences for the various vernacular literatures.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


From Hemacandra to *Hind Svarāj*

*Region and Power in Gujarati Literary Culture*

Sitamshu Yashaschandra

**POLITICAL AND CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY**

In the twelfth century in Gurjaradeśa, “the place of the Gurjars,” as the area was increasingly called, Ācārya Hemacandra (1106–1173), a Jain monk endowed with great erudition and held in high esteem in the court of the Chaulukya (or Solaṅki) dynasty, wrote a treatise on poetics, the *Kāvyānuśāsana* (The doctrine of literature), in which he observed that literature is written in Sanskrit, Prakrit, or Apabhramsha. Hemacandra was following a convention as old as the beginnings of Indian literary culture, which held that literature should only be composed in these transregional languages.  

Eight centuries later, in 1960, the State of Gujarat was founded by an act of the Parliament of India. Although this act of law was instrumental, the real power base of this new formation was linguistic, not political: the provinces of India had been demarcated on a linguistic basis between 1956 and 1960. In 1942 Mahatma Gandhi had written in his weekly newspaper, *Harijan*: “I believe that the linguistic basis is the correct basis for demarcating provinces.” He added: “I do believe that there should be such [provincial] universities if . . . rich provincial languages and the people who speak them are to attain their full height. . . . The first step should be linguistic political redistribution of provinces.”  

He had himself founded such a university, Gujarat Vidyāpith, in Ahmedabad in November of 1920.  

In the span of eight centuries—from *Kāvyānuśāsana* to Gujarat Vidyāpith,  

1. On the three literary languages, see Pollock, chapter 1, this volume.  
from Gurjaradeśa to the State of Gujarat, from the state-supported Hema-
candra to the state-punished Gandhi—the position of the regional language, Gujarati, within the region’s culture had undergone a radical transforma-
tion. From the margins of significance (or perhaps even beyond those mar-
gins) it had moved to the center of that culture and was thought capable of
establishing a political boundary to the State of Gujarat and imparting a ba-
sic identity to the people who live there. This essay aims to study this shift in
the position of Gujarati between the twelfth and the twentieth centuries and
to throw some light on the complex sociocultural network woven by Gujarati
and that network’s capacity to produce a new meaning for India as a trans-
regional entity.

The shift of the regional language to the center of the power-generating
and meaning-producing network of a regional culture is related to two ways
of conceiving of the boundaries of a region. One way is in terms of a domi-
nant political power—whether an old, internal power, like that of the Chau-
lukya dynasty of Gujarat, or a new, external power, like that of the Khalji dy-
nasty of Delhi, which conquered Gujarat in the early fourteenth century and
redrew its map. Alternatively, the boundaries of the region could be drawn on
entirely different principles, not political but derived from some other source
of social or cultural power, that would also ground the region’s self-identity
and language, but according to other, less familiar, principles. We understand
reasonably well the first—the political—type of boundary; but we need to
take special care to document and grasp the forces that might have helped
in drawing the second type of boundary in the region called Gujarat and
the possible forms of self-identity that would come to be associated with it.

The names of the regional languages of India are apparently linked closely
to their respective regions: Kashmiri and Kashmir, Bangla and Bengal,
Sindhi and Sindh, and so on. This schema looks attractively clear at first sight,
especially today, when each Indian state neatly possesses its own language
and also its own literary academy. But it begins to show more and more cul-
tural, geographical, and historical cracks the closer we look. The relation-
ship among native forms of speech, premodern regional languages, and post-
Independence regional languages is a complex one, and it raises a number
of interesting questions. When we consider the more familiar case of India’s
new national language, Hindi, in relation to its so-called dialects such as
Avadhi, Brajbhasha, and Maithili, we are confronted with the curious image
of a thirty-year-old mother combing the hair of her sixty-year-old daughters;
so, too, in the case of Rajasthani—a language codified and named by the Brit-
ish linguist George Grierson in the early part of the twentieth century—in
relation to Mevadi, Mevati, Marvadi, and Jaypuri.

We may figure the principal questions according to four different rela-
tionships: (1) between the regional language and the forms of speech of
the different communities within the regional society; (2) between the re-
regional language and the politically sponsored state language, if and when in the region’s cultural history the two were not the same; (3) between the regionality of the region and its statehood; and, finally, (4) between the self-identity of a region and the region’s understanding of what counts as literature and in which language it should be produced.

These questions apply to most of the regions and states of India, with some modification. In the case of Gujarat, they invite us to examine (1) how what we now think of as the Gujarati language has related to its so-called subregional dialects—ranging from Surati in the south to Kacchi (Cutchy) in the west—as well as to the speech forms of nomadic pastoral peoples such as the Bhil or other kinds of communities (defined by religious, artisanal, or other criteria) such as the Parsi, Bohra, Khoja, Kathi, Cānaṅ, and Dūba; (2) how Gujarati as a literary language related to Sanskrit during the period of the region’s political independence, to Persian and Urdu during the period of Mughal rule, and to English during the colonial period; (3) how, during the different phases of the region’s political history—as Gurjaradeśa (ninth to thirteenth centuries), as the suba and sultanate of Gujarat (fourteenth to seventeenth centuries), and as the British province of Gujarat (eighteenth to early twentieth centuries)—the regionality of Gurjaradeśa manifested itself; and (4) how far and in what ways literary production in the Gujarati language contributed to such self-identity as a cultural-political entity.

This approach to literary culture clearly risks unsettling such basic notions and terms as the region of Gujarat, the Gujarati language, Gujarati literature, and literature as such—terms employed as entirely stable signifiers in every existing historical account of Gujarat and its literature. The risk, however, is just as clearly worth taking because it promises to help us investigate, for this region and perhaps elsewhere, the complex processes through which language becomes what is taken as literature and in the process produces different social identities.

An eager search to discover a primeval Gujarati identity has led to uncritical assumptions on the part of even some of the most distinguished cultural historians. Thus, for example, K.M. Munshi, a distinguished novelist, keen student of Indian cultural history, and important nationalist, believed that the basis of demarcation of the boundaries of Gurjaradeśa during the Chaulukya period was “one people speaking one language, as distinguished from the people of Mahārāṣṭra on the one hand and Madhyadeśa on the other.” It is difficult to find any historical evidence in support of this view, however useful it might have seemed to the author in the service of the sociopolitical needs of his day. Other scholars, reflecting on the major poli-

dia, point the way toward a more sober assessment of the origins of the regional identity of Gujarat. Hansmukhlal Sankalia recounts the history of these upheavals:

The Gurjara-Pratihāra empire was destroyed in the north, as well as the Rastrakūta in the south, and several new powers sprang up. In Karnataka the Cālukyas came back, whereas in Northern Gujarat, Mūḷārāja, a general probably of the Gurjara-Pratihāras, but one of the Čālukya [i.e., Solanki] family, uprooted the small Cāpa family which was ruling at Anhilwad, and started an independent career. . . . His descendents gradually extended the sway of the dynasty over Lāṭa, then over Kathiawad and Cutch, and finally over Malwa and further northwards in Rajputana. 4

These few centuries around the turn of the millennium were, like the years from 1947 to 1960, a time of historic geopolitical reorganization in southern Asia. But there is a significant difference between these two forms of geopolitical change. The latter, the transformation of the British-Indian provinces in the years after Indian Independence, was made on the basis of the regional languages. The former, the reorganization of both the regionalities that succeeded the Gurjara-Pratihāra empire in northern India and the Rastrakūtas in southern India, was based on political power derived mainly from military strength. The spoken language was still largely irrelevant, and the dominant literary language remained Sanskrit, which had long been written and read throughout the subcontinent.

Historical works such as those by Sankalia and others record the changes in the region’s political boundaries brought about by the shifting fortunes of successive dynasties. 5 From this point of view the regionality of Gujarat is often seen in terms of dynasty. This approach to cultural geography and cultural history defines regionality in a way that renders the culture of the people, their forms of speech, and their oral texts virtually silent. Further, the details and the meaning of the rise of the regional language and its written texts escape such a narrative. To tell the story of a region by the history of its successive dynasties is typically to ignore the people of the region themselves, who survive the dynasties and who generate within themselves the power to fashion various sorts of geocultural identities. Against this kind of account, which dominates the scholarly literature, I offer here a counternarrative, one attuned to the nuances of societies and texts, and capable of capturing the interactive relations between a society and the oral and written texts produced in the speech forms and the language of its people.


In sixteenth-century Gujarat such a narrative, oriented toward social formations and texts, was constructed, albeit indirectly, by a Jain monk. Though his real name has not been recorded, he was given the sobriquet Samayasundar (the name likely refers to his brilliance in doctrinal knowledge) when he was ordained as a renunciate. In a poem, “Sitārāmcopāi” (Quatrains on Sītā and Rām), which he composed between 1621 and 1624, he records the name of his native town as Sācor. He was born in a family of simple shopkeepers of the Porvad Bania caste; his parents, Līlādevī and Rūpasīn, are mentioned in one of his poems. But beyond this we know nothing of his family. For these simple people we have no monument, inscription, or panegyric in their honor. In his early youth, the boy was ordained into a well-known order of the Jain tradition, the Kharatara gaccha (monastic lineage), by Jīnacandra, himself a well-known monk, and was assigned to Jīnacandra’s disciple Sakalacandra to be trained according to the traditions of that order. He studied Jain scriptures under Sakalacandra’s guidance, but he also studied poetics and literature in the pan-Indian literary languages—Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Apabhramsha—under two scholarly monks, Mahimarāja and Samayarāja. In 1585, Samayasundar was thought to have received sufficient training in Jain religious studies as well as in Sanskrit literature and poetics to be permitted to write his first book, the Bhāvasataka (One hundred intended meanings), in Sanskrit. Bhāvasataka was a commentary on certain aspects of the Kāvyaprakāśa (Light on literature), the well-known treatise on Sanskrit poetics and prosody by Mammat, a Kashmirian of the mid-eleventh century.7 Samayasundar went on to win renown as a scholar and to compose about fifty books in Sanskrit. When Jīnacandra was invited to the Mughal court by Emperor Akbar in 1592, Samayasundar was asked to accompany him to Lahore, where he ably defended the philosophical relativism (anekāntavāda) of Jainism and was honored by the emperor.8

But there was more to Samayasundar than this. He composed in the regional language of Gujarati also, writing over thirty such works. These were poems in the different genres and meters prevalent in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, mostly rāso and copāi (or caupai, a quatrain), employing meters never used in Sanskrit poetry nor even listed in Sanskrit prosodical compendia.9 The themes of his Gujarati poems are noteworthy. In 1631, there was a severe famine in Gujarat, and people suffered terribly. Samaya-

---

7. The commentary is unpublished but is cited in Shah 1979b: 169. The name is odd for a commentary; an alternative was apparently Bhāvasatka.
9. The rāso is a long narrative poem, historical or devotional. The term was often used interchangeably with prabandha by medieval Gujarati poets. Rāso is to be distinguished from rās, which is a short lyrical poem set to song and dance.
sundar wrote a *chatrīsī*, a poem of thirty-six stanzas, on their hardships. In a memorable verse, he addresses Famine Time, personified as the victimizer, saying:

Samayasundar dares tell you to your face, O [Year of] Eighty-Seven!
You have denounced and destroyed me—but the sin is yours.10

As a Jain monk, Samayasundar traveled on foot from place to place to preach to and guide people who belonged to his religious tradition. Like all Jain monks he never halted at a place for more than a day, except during the four months of rains, when traveling at such a pace was not possible. This practice, which Jain monks follow to this day, is called *vihāra*, literally “a stroll” but in practice an arduous journey that begins at dawn or even earlier and is entirely on foot—no vehicle is ever used. Samayasundar walked—often alone—for hours on end every day, for years that turned into decades. He would compose a long narrative poem or a short lyrical one, a philosophical treatise or a commentary on poetics, when he stopped at a town for his four-month sojourn (*caturmāsa*) every year.

When Samayasundar composed a piece, he would mention at its end the year and the place where the work was completed. Such colophons yield the following itinerary of the poet’s *vihāra* in the region: Khambhāṭ (in today’s Gujarat, 1587 [v.s. 1644]); Śatrūñjaya-Pālītānā (Gujarat, 1588); Lahore (Panjab, in today’s Pakistan, 1590 and 1592–1593); Khambhāṭ (Cambay, Gujarat, 1595–1596); Ilādūrg (Gujarat, 1597); Jaisalmer (in today’s Rajasthan, 1600); Ābu (Rajasthan, 1601); Śatrūñjaya-Ahmādābād (Gujarat, 1602); Bikāner (Rajasthan, 1603); Nāgor (Rajasthan, 1608); Agra (in today’s U.P., 1609); Marōt (Sindh, 1611); Multān (in today’s Sindh, Pakistan, 1612); Siddhāpur (Gujarat, 1613); Bikāner (Rajasthan, 1615); Meḍātā (Rajasthan, 1616–1617); Jałor (Rajasthan, 1619); Rāṇakpur (Rajasthan, 1620); Sācōr (Rajasthan, 1621); Lodrāvpur (Rajasthan, 1625); Nāgor (Rajasthan, 1626); Jaisalmer (Rajasthan, 1627); Lūṅkaraṇasar (Rajasthan, 1628); Ahmādābād (Gujarat, 1631–1633); Khambhāṭ (Gujarat, 1634); Ahmādābād (Gujarat, 1637); Jałor (Rajasthan, 1638); Candred-Pālaṇpur (Gujarat, 1639); and finally Ahmādābād (Gujarat, 1640–1648).11

The *vihāra* of Samayasundar marks a cultural boundary, different from that charted by the power boundaries of kingdoms, sultanates, and the Mughal empire. The region so mapped has a cohesion of its own—resulting from the spread of Jainism, to be sure, but also from a shared cultural sensibility. The works Samayasundar composed were not all sectarian; a good number were poems, which he must have performed before his followers and oth-

10. Shah 1979a: 83–86. Samayasundar named the famine after the year of the local Vikrama era, 1687.
ers in the different towns just listed and also at other, smaller places on his route. The shared sensibility, then, is a literary one—that of a literature in Gujarati. This was a literature for listeners as well as for readers. The poems use meters like *copāi* and *duhā* (or *dohā*, a couplet), which are usually recited or sung out. But as the manuscripts of Samayasundar’s works preserved in different Jain library collections even today indicate, his poems must have also been read by those who cared to do so and who could pay for a manuscript copy. What emerges from this evidence is the presence of regional literary community, one located in a space not of power but of culture, marked by Samayasundar’s own *vihāra* boundaries.

Samayasundar’s texts and their manuscript histories tell us something important about language and readership, too. In his travels he covered a very wide area, even within Gujarat. Stretching from Pālānpur to Pāṭan, Ahmadābād, and Kambhāṭ, this domain ranges from the extreme north of present-day Gujarat to the tip of central Gujarat, and from very close to Mount Ābu and the Rajasthan desert to the shore of the Arabian Sea. Even today, after the intense linguistic standardization of the twentieth century, the forms of local speech in north Gujarat remain strikingly different from those in central Gujarat. In Samayasundar’s time the differences must have been even greater. Yet the language in all his Gujarati poems is uniform. His readers and listeners, judging from the distribution of his manuscripts, must have understood that language all along the route of the *vihāra*.

In places like Lahore and Agra, where the Mughal emperor invited Samayasundar’s teachers for a philosophic exchange, the poet must have presented his views in Sanskrit. But at other places, from Pāṭan to Kambhāṭ, he used as the language of his poems a single form of Old Gujarati.

What does the composition of Samayasundar’s readership tell us? By the early seventeenth century, literary Gujarati had been sufficiently distinguished from local speech forms, standardized and disseminated so as to be intelligible to a readership spread over a wide cultural region. It also suggests that it is incorrect to present Gujarati and other regional languages—the so-called *desi bhākhās*—as local speeches in the narrow sense in contrast to the more global literary languages, especially Sanskrit. Even in a poem like the *chatrīsī* on the famine of *samvat* 1687, which may especially attract theorists of nativism (*desivād*) today, the language, though not Sanskrit, is not a *bhākhā* specific to a single local place. The language of that *chatrīsī* poem is a standardized, literary Gujarati, clearly intelligible to readers across the monk-poet’s vast *vihāra* region.

It was this regional language, which was nonlocal—even transregional in its own way—to which Mohandas Gandhi would turn in the colonial period for a counterpower to challenge the boundaries of the British-Indian provinces that had been artificially imposed upon the cultural geography of India. He was able to perceive the vital difference between the regional lan-
guages of India like Gujarati, which were languages of both literature and translocal nonliterary exchanges, and the subregional, localized, and immobile forms of speech—however much capacity the latter had for the expression of literature, both lyrical as well as longer narrative genres. In a statement that resonates with long-term precolonial realities, Gandhi asserted that “The bane of our life is our exclusive provincialism, whereas my province must be co-extensive with the Indian boundary so that ultimately it extends to the boundary of the earth. Else it perishes.”

Samayasundar did not invent a new literature in Gujarati; this was something that had come into being some three centuries earlier. But it had done so through a careful negotiation between the provincial language, in Gandhi’s sense, and the boundary of some larger space—if not Gandhi’s India, perhaps something equally large.

FROM TRANSREGIONAL TO REGIONAL LITERARY CULTURE
The earliest available literary text in the Gujarati language dates to the twelfth century. It is a rāsa, a long narrative poem, on the battle between Bharateśvara and Bāhubali, sons of King Rṣabhadeva, who upon renouncing his kingdom attained omniscience (kevalajñāna) and became a tīrthankara, a founder of the Jain religion. The poem is called Bharateśvarabāhubalighor, the last word suggesting a fierce (ghora) battle. It was composed by Vajrasensūri, a Jain monk, not later than 1170, according to internal textual evidence. Vajrasen probably belonged to the order of Jain monks called Tapa gaccha.

The second earliest available text is also a rāsa on the same theme and also by a Jain monk, Śālibhadrasūri, a disciple of a Vajrasensūri (probably not the same as the author of the Ghor). It is called Bharateśvarabāhubalirāsa, which, as the poet has noted in the text, was composed in 1185. Śālibhadra belonged to the Rāja gaccha.

Because these two texts are on the same theme, belong to the same genre, and have as their author contemporary Jain monks living in the same region, and since both seem to pioneer a new practice of writing literature in a hitherto unused, nonglobal, nonliterary regional speech, it is very likely that the author of the later text had known the earlier text and had decided to elaborate on it. It is interesting, in any case, to see how the two texts compare. The comparison may enable us to discern some elements of the freshly emerging literary culture of the Gujarati language of the time (termed Old

---
12. Young India, September 21, 1947, p. 333. (From May 7, 1919, this English language periodical was published under Mahatma Gandhi’s supervision twice a week from Bombay; from October 18, 1919, Gandhi edited it as a weekly from Ahmedabad. It ran until 1932.) See also Prabhu and Rao 1987: 386.
Gujarati, Maru-Gurjar, or Old Western Rajasthani, according to the different fashions of modern scholarship).

Vajrasen’s text is a narrative in forty-eight stanzas. In the first segment each of the ten stanzas is composed of three lines, the first two in ṭayta meter and the third in duhā meter. Its style is uniform, simple, and easy to set to song. Sālihadrā’s version is a longer narrative of 203 stanzas in which each stanza has two lines. Čopāi and duhā meters are used, but also vastu, caraṇakul, and rola meters. Its style, through a weave of these various metrical forms, is varied, less simple than the Ghor, and, especially in its narration of the battle between the two princes, suitable not only for singing but also for recitation in what is called the ḍīṅgal style.

Ḍīṅgal, a term of central importance to Rajasthani literature of a later period and to the bardic tradition of the Saurashtra region (the cāranisāhitya), is sometimes called a language. It is, more precisely, a style or a “special manner of recitation” used in historical, martial narratives and aimed at producing valorous sentiment in the listener.14 It uses meters—vastu being one of them—distinct from the meters specific to the other great tradition of prosody, pīṅgal, which includes verse-forms like the čopāi and the duhā.15 ḍīṅgal links Rajasthan with Gujarat, whereas pīṅgal emphasizes Gujarat’s links with the Vraja (or Brija) tradition, located in regions to the east of both Rajasthan and Gujarat.

What do the constitutive features of these two texts tell us about the larger context and details of the newly emerging regional literature? Rāso, the genre of both poems, was a popular form with the poets of Apabhramsha literature and was not unknown to poets of Prakrit. In the Kuvalayamālā, composed in Prakrit by Uddyotanasūri in 779 c.e. at Jālor in the old Gurjaradesa, the author uses the terms rāsā and rāsāya to signify a type of dance accompanied by song. In the Sāndesarasāka, composed in Apabhramsha by Abdalā Rahamāna in the late thirteenth century, the author self-consciously uses the term rāsaka as a generic term in the very title of his poem. It is a messenger poem (diṭakārīya), like Kālidāsa’s Sanskrit Meghadūta, yet the author says of the genre:

The rāsā, woven by [performing artists capable of assuming] multiple forms, is spoken out or performed.16

Apabhramsha works on prosody give systematic and extensive descriptions of meters used in the rāsakah genre. These include duhā, roḷā, ulā, rāsā, vastu, madanāvatār, and dumūlā, which are arranged in triṇḍi (a three-line unit), paṇḍatādi (a five-line unit), or śatṛṇḍi (a six-line unit) form. Thus, in terms

---

of prosody, too, both Bharatēśvarabāhubalīghor and Bharatēśvarabāhubalīrās have borrowed significantly from Apabhramsha. K. K. Śastri has rightly identified the rāsa meter of Bharatēśvarabāhubalīrās with the abhaṇaka meter depicted in Svayambhūchandāh and other Apabhramsha works on prosody.\(^{17}\)

The theme of the two poems is a traditional one for Jain literature in the Prakrit and Apabhramsha traditions. Moreover, the rāsas (the sentiments, mainly vīra, bhayānaka, and sānta—or heroic, terrifying, and tranquil, respectively); figures of sense such as simile, poetic fantasy, and metaphor; as well as various figures of sound that Vajrasen and Śalibhadra use clearly derive from Sanskrit poetics. Indeed, Jain monks were trained in Sanskrit poetics, as we have seen in the case of the later poet Samayasundar. In Vajrasen’s time, Hemacandra’s patron, the Chaulukya king Śiddharāja Jayasimha, provided the renowned scholar with works on Sanskrit rhetoric from across India (most crucially, Bhoja’s Śrīgāraprakāśa) for the composition of his Kāvyāṇuṣāsana.

The change in the medium of literary expression from the transregional languages (Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Apabhramsha) to the regional, Gujarati, though a momentous rupture in the very long tradition of Indian poetics, seems not to have altered the notion of literature—that is, the definition of the literary text—at all. The prosody, the thematics, the poetics, and the genres of the texts in the new literary language were the same as those of the texts in the old literary languages, as we have seen with Bharatēśvarabāhubalīghor and Bharatēśvarabāhubalīrās. Early Jain scholar-poets introduced a new, regional literary language, but not a new literature of the region. It is as if the body that danced was new, but the mimetic gestures and stylized movements that it displayed were carefully and skillfully the same. A new dancer, but dancing an old dance. It was left to the bhakti poets, beginning with Narasimha Mahetā in the fifteenth century, to produce the new regional literature—new in its very mode of being—in the new regional language.

Evidence thus suggests that between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries literature emerged in the space of the speech varieties, so to put it, of the Māru-Gurjara region. It would be less true to say that a regional literature emerged in the literary-cultural space of an older tradition, for what the regional literature of Gurjaradeśa principally did was to change the speeches of the region, consolidating them into a more or less unified literary language (thereby uniting it, in one important sense, as a region). This emergence had little effect on the notion of literature itself or the nature of literary texts; it is the linguistic field of the region that changed. From out of the numerous native dialects of the large area of the Chaulukya kingdom and beyond, a single literary regional language, intelligible to readers and

---

listeners all over the region, was fashioned (in part through the mediation of Apabhramsha) into a vehicle for new literary activity.

Thus the emergence of the literary culture of Gujarat can be seen as having two distinct, though interrelated, aspects. One is the rise of a regional literary language, alongside the three traditional transregional languages and distinct from the various microlocalized speech varieties confined to the numerous subregions of the place. The other is the rise of a new understanding among the region’s authors and readers—the producers and consumers of literature—as to what might function as a vehicle for literature. This new posture for literature’s very being altered for the poets and the public the answers to the basic questions: What counts as poetry? Who is a poet? How does one recognize and read or listen to a poem?

Prior to the fifteenth century, the poet in Gujarat used the regional language to write in a manner specified by older works on prosody and poetics; he was trained to do so. From Hemacandra and Vādi Devasūri in the twelfth century to Vastupaḷ, Harihara, and Someśvara in the thirteenth and beyond, a large number of authors in Gurjaradeśa with handsome royal patronage composed works in Sanskrit on prosody, poetics, and grammar, as well as literary texts in all the genres known to Sanskrit literary culture, including courtly epic and lyric (mahākāvya and muktaka) and the different dramatic genres (from the one-act vrāvyoga to the full-scale prakaraṇa). Sanskrit texts on poetics and every other area that were required for kaviśikā (the training of poets, especially in metrics and the art of literary ornamentation) were brought into the royal and religious libraries (bhāṇḍāra) of the kings, ministers, and monks from all over India, from places as close as neighboring Mālav and as distant as Kashmir.

This Sanskrit literary culture provided the basis for the religious and literary-cultural training that young, freshly ordained Jain monks received in their different gacchas. Each gaccha tried to outshine the other, as, after due training, young monks wrote Sanskrit commentaries on traditional texts on poetics, grammar, prosody, logic, metaphysics, and medicine.18 Hence during and after this period, when some of the authors began to write literature in the regional language, they tended to be bilingual authors whose early works were in Sanskrit and later works were in Gujarati. Their training was

18. Hemacandra’s three well-known anuśasanā texts, Śabdānusāsana, Kāvyānusāsana, and Chandonusāsana, are milestones in the same process. Many other scholarly Jain monks produced handbooks for students, presenting theories of Sanskrit poetics in a simple, systematic way known as bhūtāvabodhī (lit. child instruction, meaning a handbook for beginners). Merusundar of the Kharatara gaccha wrote Vāgbhaṭaśaṅkarabhalavabodha, a handbook on a famous work on Sanskrit poetics by Vāgbhaṭa, in 1479. In the first half of the same century, Jinarājasūri (1591–1643) wrote a long commentary in Sanskrit on the Sanskrit epic Naśadhamahākāvya.
in the older literary culture; their work, partly, in a new sociolinguistic milieu. Thus, for example, Jaya ēkharasūri (fourteenth century) translated his own Sanskrit poem, Prabodhacintāmaṇi (Philosopher’s stone of awakening), as the Gujarati Tribhuvanadīpakaprabandha (The light of the triple world; c. 1406). Jinavardhanasūri (early fifteenth century), of the Kharatara gačha, wrote Sanskrit commentaries on a rhetorical treatise (Vāgbhatālāṅkāra) and on a work on metaphysics (the Saśapatārthi of Śivāditya). He also wrote a poem of thirty-two stanzas in Gujarati entitled Pūrvadesātirthamālā (The garland of holy places of the east).

Such literary biculturalism marks an important inaugural stage in Gujarati literary history, when Sanskrit conventions conditioned the production of a bilingual Gujarati author. This was to be replaced later by the strong monolinguality of bhakti poets like Narasimha Mahētā and, even later, Mitho (d. 1872), who was from the lowest caste of dhaḍhi Dalits (formerly “untouchables”), and Dhiro (d. 1825), to mention only a few. Poets like Narasimha and Akho (seventeenth century) were anxious to mention in their poems that they were not a product of the tradition of kavi. As Narasimha puts it:

Everyone is pleased by the taste of the tongue; they knit together [verbal patterns about] the Divine without true knowledge given by a preceptor. In this verbal sport [vānīvilas] the heart is not colored [by devotion to God]. Such people forsake the cloth and hasten after the rags. They collect many words, learn all the arts, [and believe that] they alone seek the metaphysical experience. . . . They have mastered all the disciplines [yet] they are lost in the night.

Or Akho:

There are many scholars, wise and pious, good in logic and knowledgeable in music, capable of remembering eight things at a time and [known as] poets skilled in metrics [piṅgalakavi], knowledgeable in mantra-chants and experienced in medical herbs. [But] Akha, if they have not obtained God, then they have progressed in vain. One boulder may be finely sculptured and another, rough and dirty, but if you throw both in deep waters, they prove similar when it comes to floating . . . The scholar-poets [paṇḍitkavi] babble in their sleep . . . but, Akha, they don’t understand their own Self.19

19. Mahētā 1981: 387 (see also p. 4 on inspiration from Śiva), and Akho 1962: 74. Akho also ridicules the trope of intellectual self-deprecation as a form of arrogance.

Such poems . . . tell us at the beginning of their works, “We are ignorant of the units of prosody and we don’t bring in your figures of speech not having mastered them.” Through such sniveling disclaimers, they merely establish their self-importance and beg for our pity. I, too, if I consider myself to be a poet, would like to say [just] this much: “I am only like that doll made of wood, which makes so many gestures. But there is nothing in that piece of wood. It is the entertainer holding the strings who presses the levers [to make the dolls dance].” (1967: 3)
The tradition of bilinguality, which mediated all the conventions and skills of Sanskrit poetics in poetry composed in the Gujarati language, was retained by many learned Jain monks and by some scholarly Brahman poets. This bilinguality is best exemplified by two poets, Mānīkyacandrasūri (known also as Mānīkyasundarasūri), a Jain poet of the first half of the fifteenth century, and Bhāлан, a Modha Brahman from Pātan, who lived in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

Mānīkyacandra was a Jain monk of the Añcala gaccha and a second-generation pupil of Merutuñgasūri, the learned author of two books of Sanskrit grammar. The training that Mānīkyacandra must have received early on in the gaccha is readily perceived in the scholarship embedded in his remarkable Sanskrit $\text{rīdharacaritra}$ (1407), a courtly epic in nine chapters (totaling 1685 stanzas), and in $\text{Ya4odharacarita}$, another mahākāvya in fourteen chapters. Around 1428 he wrote $\text{Catuhparvicampu}$, a Sanskrit narrative that uses both verse and prose, as well as Sanskrit commentaries on the $\text{Jaina Kumāra-samābhava}$ and $\text{Jaina Meghadūta}$.21

The scope of Mānīkyacandrasūri’s work suggests the extent to which Sanskrit literature and literary criticism must have shaped his literary sensibility. In 1422, in the midst of his work in Sanskrit (he was writing a minor Sanskrit narrative, $\text{Candradhavaladharmadattakathā}$), he produced a remarkable narrative in Gujarati, the $\text{Pithvīcandracaritra}$, subtitled $\text{Vāgovilāsa}$ (The sport of language). The book is based on a section of the Sanskrit story collection $\text{Kathāsaritsagāra}$. It also makes use of several other Sanskrit-Prakrit tales, based on $\text{Kathāsaritsagāra}$, about King Pithvīcandra, or Pṛthvirāj of Paithānpur “in Marahathpradeś in the south,” as the author puts it. The work is unique in the early history of Gujarati literature in part because of its masterly prose style in an era when literary prose was altogether uncommon in the language. In its theme, as well as in the narrative techniques it employs, it bears little relation to Gujarati literary texts before or after.22 $\text{Pithvīcandracaritra}$ reads like the personal $\text{vāgovilāsa}$ of a mind trained extensively in the Sanskrit prose style of Baṇa, rather than like a cultural product of the region in whose language it was composed. Indeed, though his theme derives from the Sanskrit kathā tradition, the narrative style of this all-too-erudite, almost overskilled author moves away from that of the original and into proximity with Baṇa’s

20. Namely, $\text{Vyākaranacatuskabhāvabodha}$ and $\text{Tuddhitakabhāvabodha}$.

21. $\text{Jaina Kumārasamābhava}$ is a mahākāvya (courtly epic) written in Sanskrit by Jayaśekha-rast śi, Mānīkyacandra’s guru. Jaina Meghadūta is a khaṇḍakāvya (smaller narrative poem) by Merutuñgasūri, Jayaśekhara’s guru (Mānīkyacandrasūri 1951: 4–5).

22. Not that there is no further treatment of the theme so popularized by the learned Mānīkyacandra. In fact, there are two similarly titled Sanskrit works by Jain monk-authors inspired by Mānīkyacandra’s Gujarati text: one, a prose work composed by Rūpavijayāgani in 1826; the other, a poem composed in 1850 by Labdhisāgarsūri. Mānīkyacandra’s work in Gujarati inspired others to compose on the same theme in Sanskrit.
Māṇikyacandra’s language here is Gujarati, but his literary culture is that of the later period of Sanskrit literature.

Bhālaṇ, who adapted Bāṇa’s Kādambari into Gujarati, was both closer to and farther from Bāṇa than was Māṇikyacandra: closer because he translated Bāṇa’s text, farther because of the manner in which he did so. Bhālaṇ’s works exhibit an interesting and significant variation in the relationship between regional and transregional languages. Bhālaṇ was not a bilingual author in a strict sense; he was a scholar of Sanskrit and translated from Sanskrit into Gujarati. Being a Brahman, not a Jain renunciate, he was not a member of a gaccha tradition. And since many rulers during the Gujarat sultanate were more hostile to Brahmanical institutions of religion and culture than to those of the Jains, Bhālaṇ must have been on his own, in a sense, in accessing Sanskrit literary texts and the normative tradition.

Bhālaṇ adapted Kādambari from Sanskrit to Gujarati by changing not only the language but also the genre and the tale itself. He took his story and the characters from Bāṇa, but the narrative he developed was distinctly his own and was specifically Gujarati in tone. As for genre, Bhālaṇ transformed the katha of Sanskrit into the kadavabaddha akhyān. The akhyān is a long devotional narrative poem, displaying in its mature phase a narrative structure comprised of interlinked and specifically structured units called kadavu (lit. a link in a chain). It is sung out by the poet himself or by a professional religious singer, accompanied by a musical instrument called the mana, a copper pitcher with a narrow neck that is struck by metal rings worn on the fingers of the narrator’s hands. This emergent genre of akhyān was to develop both historically and organically in Gujarati literary culture, with its own manner of composition, presentation, and reception, evolving into a form unlike anything available in Sanskrit literary culture. It grew out of pada (stanzaic) lyrics, in which a series of padas tell a single story. But Bhālaṇ modified each pada into a unit of not only lyricality but also narrativity called kadavu. What he produced was culture-specific as a genre as well as with respect to the modes of composition and consumption that go with it. Bhālaṇ everywhere exhibits a certain self-awareness about being a poet of the new literary culture through his efforts to fashion a genre with a new narrative structure. He also indicates that he knew his readers/hearers to be of a new and different sort. He calls them mugāla rasik (untutored connoisseurs), in noteworthy contrast to the highly trained (and hence highly conditioned) sahydayaśiroman, the “crest-jewel of the sensitive,” referring to the poet-patron Vastupal, minister at the Vaghela court in the monolingual literary culture of twelfth-century Chaulukya Gurjaradeśa. It makes sense, accordingly, that it was Bhālaṇ who, in his Naḷākhyān (Tale of Nala), was the first to use the word gujarabhāṣā (Gujarati language) to describe, self-consciously, the language of his poetry. In these elements of his literary practice Bhālaṇ points away from the past—even away from recent predecessors like Māṇikyacandra—
and toward the future to writers yet to come, such as Premānand (seventeenth century), who took up the genre and developed it further by adding more narrative-lyrical features to the *kādavā* unit.

### THE PRODUCTION OF THE REGIONAL IN A REGIONAL LITERARY CULTURE

This early phase of Gujarati literary culture, where a certain kind of trans-regionality would continue to be claimed, was to be prolonged even as new developments in regionality were arising. The tension between these two tendencies came to be coded in various new understandings of the relationship between Sanskrit and Gujarati, on the one hand, and between Gujarati and other regional languages, on the other. Akho, a Vedantic poet of the seventeenth century, metaphorically addressed the first issue. He observes in one of his poems that “Sanskrit is studied with the help of Prakrit [i.e., Gujarati]. Just as pieces of wood, tied together in a large bunch, cannot be used in a stove without untying them, so Sanskrit is of no use without Prakrit.” He adds another simile: “A merchant can use round-figure currency for writing down some accounts; but in actual commercial transactions he cannot do without small change.” No writer, so Akho implies, can do without the spoken language.23

The metaphors here are instructive. Neither the wood stove nor the commercial transaction can handle large amounts. Hence the need for small pieces of wood and small change. But what precisely is the poet driving at? For what purposes is Sanskrit too large? Clearly it is too large—that is, too difficult—for the uncultivated (*mugdha*) minds of the emergent regional readers. If those minds are not trained, that is, not cultivated (*vidagdha*) enough, to understand what Sanskrit literary culture has to offer, what should be offered to them? If the stove cannot take big bundles of wood, do not put something else in it instead. Rather, unite the bundle and put the same wood into the stove, but in smaller, digestible amounts. Similarly, if the marketplace is capable of small business only, large-denomination gold coins cannot be used; but neither can one invent some altogether new monetary system. Instead, use small change within the same system. For Akho, who worked for some time as the superintendent of the Ahmadābād mint, this was an apt image.

With these metaphors Akho seems to suggest that regionality should contain a sense of the larger world, and vice versa. Gujarati and Sanskrit are related to each other not as two sets of currency from two different systems—unlike, say, Gujarati and English, or the rupee and the dollar—but as two denominations of the same system of currency: as an *ānā* (*1/16* of a rupee in the old currency system) to a rupee.

A similar monetary metaphor comes to be used to articulate the emergent relationship between Gujarati and other regional languages. A duhā—widely known in Gujarat and elsewhere in western India—proposed an evaluation of Hindi, Marvadi, Marathi, and Gujarati in terms of currency relations between rupee, anna, and paisa (which is ¼ of an anna):

idharudhar kā solahi ānā atheikathei kā bār
ikadamtikadam āṭhahī ānā sū-sā paisā cār.

[In exchange] idharudhar [Hindi for “here and there”] gets sixteen annas [an entire rupee],
atheikathei [Marvadi for “here and somewhere”] gets twelve [annas],
ikadamtikadam [Marathi for “here and there”] gets eight [annas],

In nineteenth-century this duhā was incorporated in a story that sheds light on how the Gujarati readers of the time had come to view the regional alliance of a premodern poet whom they could adore. The story tells how Premānand (second half of the seventeenth century), who wrote the finest ākhyān narratives in Gujarati and presented them as far as Nandurbar and other places in Khandeṣṭra, was stung when he heard this duhā from a Hindi-speaking or Marvadi-speaking person. As a sign of protest, he vowed that he would not tie up his Brahmanical topknot until he was able to prove through his ākhyān poems that Gujarati, too, was worth a full sixteen annas.

This duhā contains much else that is pertinent to a study of literary culture. For one thing, it reveals a sense of complementarity among literatures in Indian languages in the premodern period. This is something that, sadly and ironically, has diminished in the modern period, when exchange among readers and writers of the different Indian literatures seems increasingly merely ceremonial and formally correct. The warm, if sometimes hurtful, intimacy among four regional literatures within a single panregionality that the duhā reflects has been replaced in the contemporary period by increasingly isolationist trends.

Moreover, the verse brings out something of the premodern sense of literary judgment and implied standards of literary criticism, which were transregional in scope. This presupposes a community of multilingual consumers of literary products. As the tone of the duhā suggests, the speaker of Hindi who also knows Marvadi, Marathi, and Gujarati and who has privileged his own language is not a serious, objective scholar. He is, rather, boisterous and assertive and does not mind caricaturing Marathi and Gujarati word-sounds like ikadamtikadam and sū-sā; still, he does include them in his overall picture of the literary scene. We may contrast this with most post-1850 histories of Hindi, Rajasthani, Marathi, and Gujarati literature, especially since Independence, where the historical narrative of each has no space at all for the others.
A new conception of Gujarati literary culture, very much at odds with Akho’s concerns, was inaugurated by the bhakti poet Narasimha Maheta, an entirely monolingual Gujarati poet. Although he lived in the fifteenth century, with more than two hundred years of literary production in the regional language before him, Narasimha is regarded by literary historians as Gujarat’s ādikavi, “first poet.” Persistent use of this epithet for Narasimha—by such eminent researchers and critics as K.K. Śaōstri, Umāśāṅkar Jośi, and Jayant Gadit—long after the works of twelfth-, thirteenth-, and fourteenth-century Gujarati poets had become known, edited, and published, raises a number of questions.

Since the term ēdi (first) is obviously not used here in its strictly chronological sense, does it mean that a later moment is considered more decisive than the beginning? And, if so, in which way? Is the term kavi (poet) employed here in some sense different from its earlier, traditional use? In short, how exactly has the moment of Narasimha’s poetic work become the originary moment in the history of Gujarati literary culture?

No scholar of Gujarati literature has ever considered it correct to use the term ādikavi for any of the numerous poets who preceded Narasimha. At the same time, none has ever tried to pinpoint when the term was first applied to Narasimha or by whom. K.K. Śaōstri has pointed out in his Kavicaritra (1952) that in 1565, Isardas Barot, who wrote in the oral-narrative tradition of cārāni literature, and in 1593, Kalyāṇraja, the grandson of Śri Vallabhācārya (founder of the important Vaishnava bhakti sect Puṣṭimārg), refer to Narasimha as a great bhāktakavi (devotional poet). Viṣṇudāś, a poet from central Gujarat, composed two poems on Narasimha’s life (Māmerū and Hūndī) between about 1568 and 1600. Vasto Dodia, a Dharala tribal poet of the seventeenth century, wrote on Narasimha’s life in his Śādhucarita.

Narasimha is the only poet whose life has been used as a subject for poems by later Gujarati poets. There was clearly a premodern sentiment that Narasimha had done something primal in his work. Yet it is significant, too, that the earliest recorded use of the term “first poet” to mark this primacy in reference to Narasimha is found no earlier than the first modern literary historiography of Gujarati—also one of the earliest literary histories in India—Narmadāśāṅkar Dave’s Kavicarita (Poets’ lives; 1865). Narmad begins his celebrated work with these words: “Like Vālmiki in Sanskrit or Chaucer in English, Narasimha Maheta is called the ādikavi of Gujarati.” The phrase “Chaucer in English” is a fruit of Narmad’s English education at the Elphinstone Institute in the 1850s. More significant, however, is the phrase “like Vālmiki in Sanskrit.” Narasimha is considered Gujarati’s first poet in

25. See Dave 1975.
the same sense in which Vālmiki was Sanskrit’s first poet: he defines “poetry” in some decisive manner, he demonstrates the mode (mudrā) of a poet’s being. His definition and his demonstration become the cultural norm for his own time and for times to come. As adikavis, both Vālmiki and Narasimha mark originary moments, informing the unique sense of what it means to be “literary” or “poetic” in their respective languages.27 The methodology and the criteria that Hemacandra adopted in the twelfth century to understand the primacy of Vālmiki are the same ones that Narmad used with respect to Narasimha in the nineteenth. Both imply that the term is not used simplistically to indicate who is chronologically the earliest poet of a language. The term has much more depth and complexity to it; it signifies major cultural-literary shifts in the traditionally settled literary culture.

If the term adikavi is so understood, then it becomes clear that Narasimha came to be regarded as the first poet because, unlike the poets who wrote “Sanskrit poems” in Gujarati, he began the practice of writing “Gujarati poems” in Gujarati. Implicitly recognizing the effects of this move, the great literary historian Umāśāṅkar Jośi may have come the closest to the truth of the matter. Putting a greater emphasis on the word kavi than on the word ādi, he argues that unlike the works of the earlier poets, which were stored in the archival vaults of Jain religious places, Narasimha’s poems achieved truly wide dissemination: “How distant are the hills of Aravalli on the northern boundaries of Gujarat from the land at the foot of Mount Girnār, the native land of Narasimha. Yet, even in those hills words from Narasimha’s poems can still be found on the lips of the common and illiterate men and women of the lowest social strata.”28 The lyrics of Narasimha, which have been recited by innumerable Gujarati people in towns and villages for centuries, are called prabhātiyā, literally “songs of the dawn,” a genre unknown to the Sanskrit/Prakrit/Apabhramsha literary culture. Narasimha’s audience—those who came to listen to him sing through the night “till it was dawn,” as he says in a poem narrating one such occasion—including the Dalits, the dheda varan as they were called, who, in Narasimha’s eyes had “unshakable bhakti [devotion] for Hari [God].” Narasimha was a Nagar Brahman, the highest subgroup of the caste. Yet he went to the locality in which the untouchable, casteless men and women lived and sang his devotional pada poems “till it was dawn.”29

In the literary circle of the twelfth-century patron Vastupāl, the readers belonged to the upper strata of society, with access to state-patronized literary events. The readers/listeners in the literary gatherings of the Jain scholar-poet monks were drawn from not only the court circle but also the middle-

27. On Vālmiki as the first poet, see Pollock, chapter 1, this volume.
class mercantile communities among whom *yatis* such as Samayasundar performed their ceaseless *vihāra*. By contrast, Narasiṁha, at considerable personal risk, made a conscious decision to include the lowest strata of society among his audience. In fact, he included the casteless people of Junāgad near Mount Girnār, the very town where he lived. They not only listened to but also participated in the singing of his *bhajan*-poems. And he took care to record their participation in a poem every Gujarati man and woman is able to recite even today.  

Narasiṁha achieved and registered another equally important relocation of the reader. In the age of royal patronage during the Chaulukya period (and later, in the Muslim epoch, when support was extended to Gujarati’s music and painting as well as to Urdu and Persian poetry), patronage was based on a standardized judgment of literature (and other arts) presented before the court. Hence, the reader—at least the official judge-reader (and, in general, the court collectively)—assumed a decisive critical position vis-à-vis the text, the performance, and the poet (or artist). It is small wonder that Vastupāl was known as *sakhdayacādāmani* (crest-jewel of connoisseurs), alluding to his supreme position among all the literary men in the court. As patron-consumer, Vastupāl occupied a superior status vis-à-vis not only other consumers but also the texts and the poets before him.

The new reader of a poet like Narasiṁha, however, was no longer the patron-judge, a crest-jewel located above other readers, the text, and the poet himself. He occupied a place of equality with all others, as Narasiṁha’s verse on the *kirtana* (congregational singing) with the Dalits reveals. Or perhaps he was positioned as an adoring admirer, as when the poet elsewhere has the god Kṛṣṇa himself proclaim:

> If the poet sings his poem sitting down,  
> I listen to him standing up.  
> If he sings standing up,  
> I listen to him dancing on my feet.  
> Not for one moment am I apart  
> from such a devotee, says Narasiṁha truly.  

Narasiṁha decisively changed the location of his audience by assuming a different orientation toward the political power of the region. His relationship with the state was not one of client and patron, but rather one of victim and victimizer, as he explains in his *Hārsamenā Pado* (Poems narrating the event concerning the necklace). This work tells of a test to which

---

30. For the text, see Mahetā 1981: 64. One is reminded of Gandhi’s account of the inclusion of the first Harijān family to his newly established Satyagraha Ashram at Sabarmati in Ahmedabad. See Gandhi 1947: 424–27.  
Narasiṃha was put by the king Rā Maṇḍalik at Junāgaḍh. Encouraged by conservative Brahmans, the king asked the devotee-poet to demonstrate the intimate relation with Kṛṣṇa that he claimed to enjoy in his poems. The only proof that would count, the king insisted, was if the necklace on the neck of the idol of Kṛṣṇa in a temple in the town was transferred to the neck of Narasiṃha by the deity himself, without any external help. If this did not happen before the next dawn, the poet would be beheaded. Harsamena Pado narrates the poet’s anxious night of supplications, expressing the entire range of human emotions, from doubt and anger to trust and joy. Kṛṣṇa in the end protects the poet against the victimizer. Through this narrative Narasiṃha expresses the newfound independence of the poet and the realignment of his position with the state.

In the same way that Narasiṃha resituated the poet in relation to the state and the readers in relation to the poem, he also relocated the poet-devotee in relation to social and economic authority. Among the six poems that tell of events that tested his faith as a devotee, two are especially revealing. One of these concerns his social obligations on the occasion of his daughter’s first pregnancy; the other, his economic obligations as he entered into a monetary transaction.

In the first, called Māmerū (The gift from the new mother’s side of the family), Narasiṃha narrates with both sympathy and humor his plight in the presence of his daughter Kuvarbai. During her first pregnancy, he went with her to the town of her in-laws—along with fellow chanters of hymns. Because of his poverty he carried, in place of the prescribed precious gifts for his in-laws, an open basket filled with sacred basil leaves (tulasi). Kṛṣṇa then appeared, in the guise of a wealthy Gujarati merchant, to save the poet—and how splendidly!32

The second, Hundī (Letter of credit), imparts a new significance to the financial network of Gujarati culture through a seriocomic narrative. It tells how Narasiṃha accepted cash from some travelers, giving them a letter against which they would be paid money at the town of their destination. Not surprisingly, the town happened to be Dvārakā, the hometown of Kṛṣṇa, in which a famous Kṛṣṇa temple was situated then as now. According to the rule governing letters of credit, only a rich merchant who has an arrangement with other such merchants in other towns is allowed to accept deposits in his own town for payment to the depositor in another. The travelers were sent to Narasiṃha by some mischievous men, who advised them that the best person to accept their deposit would be “the great merchant” Narasiṃha. It was not as an irresponsible gesture of mindless defiance that the poet accepted the deposit; the issue for him was the challenge from the governing

32. Text in Mahetā 1981.
rules of the financial world to the authority of Kṛṣṇa, or more specifically, to the inclusiveness of the relationship of mortal man and divinity. The world of finance demanded an exclusive space for itself, where the rules would be laid down by its own master voice. But it was not for this voice, represented in the narrative by the mocking townsmen, to declare that Narasinha was or was not “a great merchant.” Narasimha did accept the deposit of cash and, as the narrative tells, the banker’s check given by him to the trusting travelers was indeed honored in Dwārakā by another “great merchant”—none other than the Lord of Dwārakā, Kṛṣṇa. This is not so much a poem of the god’s miracles but a poem of inclusiveness—one that, as is so often the case in Narasimha’s poetry, defies the master voices of exclusion. Moreover, the poem also serves to relocate the figure of the poet within a transfigured economic matrix. No longer economically dependent on the patronage of the state, the poet depends only on Kṛṣṇa. The financial independence of the poet is a recurring theme of Gujarat’s bhakti-poetry and is especially foregrounded in the work of Narmad, the pioneering modern poet of mid-nineteenth-century Gujarat.

By relocating the poet and the reader in the overall design of the culture, and by reorganizing the relationship between the poet and the centers of authority in society, economy, and the state through his seemingly lyrical narratives, Narasimha destabilized the entire power structure of the culture into which he was born—just as Gandhi was to do in turn. What is fundamental here, as in all the related tales, is Narasimha’s narrative of the genesis of the new poet. With characteristic humility he presents this grand theme most powerfully in two groups of simple, humorous, autobiographical poems. One is called Putravivahānā Pado (Poems narrating his son’s marriage), and the other Rāsasaahasrapoḍi (A thousand pūḍa-poems narrating the event of the divine rāsa dance).

In Putravivahānā Pado Narasimha begins with an account of the early days of his marriage, telling how in the extended family in which he lived under his elder brother’s protection he was constantly scolded by his elder sister-in-law. She called him a good-for-nothing loafer, unable to win bread for himself. The young man—stung, as he tells us—left home and “went to Śiva,” journeying to the Gopanāth Mahādev temple (near the sea coast in Saurāṣṭra), which is still standing today, “and meditated for seven days, with a single-minded devotion.” Śiva, who was pleased, appeared before the young devotee and offered to grant him a boon—but “with a lump in my throat I could not speak,” the poet declares. In Narasimha’s new literary culture, a poet’s genesis is located not in acquired prosody or poetics but in this manner of confrontation with his own inability to speak. The poet is no longer the vidyādha, the well-trained learned scholar of the earlier literary culture, but rather a mugdha, an innocent—interestingly, a term that Bhālan also uses, as we have seen, for the new reader/listener of poetry (where he means pre-
cisely “untrained”). Narasimha writes: “Knowing that I was all innocent, Śiva put his hand over my head.” This had its intended effect:

> From insensate [a-ceta], I became sensate [cetana].
> And primeval speech [ādya vāṇi] woke in me from its sleep.\(^{33}\)

Whereas, as we saw earlier, Bhālān calls the language of his narrative poetry gujarabhāṣā,\(^{34}\) and Premānand in the seventeenth century would call his Prakrit (that is, simply, non-Sanskrit), Narasimha describes things differently. He names his language simply ādya vāṇi. He does not contrast it with Sanskrit, as Akho and Premānand do later, but describes it as merely waking up from sleep. It is clear that Narasimha sees the language of his poetry as a personal speech; significantly, he avoids all reference to parā vāk (ultimate language)—a favorite of all Indian metaphysical writings on language.

The culmination of Narasimha’s account of the genesis of the poet comes in Rāsasahasrapadī. Śiva, pleased, granted the young man a boon, and after initial hedging, Narasimha was taken to divya vrāja, the divine land of Vraja, as distinct from the earthly vrājabhūmi so popular in Narasimha’s time with all bhakta-poets. There, Narasimha found Kṛṣṇa dancing with his divine consort, Rādhā, who upon seeing a mere mortal in their midst, was offended. Kṛṣṇa placated her, saying that the bhakta meant no disrespect but would gladly hold a lighted torch to facilitate their dancing. Kṛṣṇa lit a torch and asked Narasimha to hold it aloft in his hand. He did as he was told and was completely lost in watching the divine dance. The torch burnt down to its handle and Narasimha’s hand caught fire. The poet did not even notice, but kept watching the dance as the light still came forth from the torch. Now, indeed, the light was coming forth from the poet’s own hand. Rādhā was astonished to witness this and asked Kṛṣṇa to save his bhakta. Kṛṣṇa, smiling, replied that if it did not matter to the young man, why should it matter to her? Rādhā then understood the bhakta’s deep devotion.

In these narratives Narasimha describes realistically what seems to be a personal experience, while also bringing forth a new poetics and a new perception of reality. In the narrative of the burning hand, if the hand-as-torch is a signifier, then the signified is what Kṛṣṇa shows to Rādhā, who seems to have missed it. And if the reader, like Rādhā, has missed it, then Narasimha shows it to the reader also. The image suggests that the bhakta-poet sees the narrated reality of his poem through a light that originates within himself.

Narasimha’s intrusion into divya vrāja, and his ability to generate his own light, out of himself, to see that place, provide a perfect image of a second moment of emergence in Gujarati literary culture, when a regional culture,

\(^{33}\) My translation. For the original text, see Mahetā 1981: 3.

\(^{34}\) guru pad pankajane praṇamā, brahma sītane dhyāne guṇār bhāṣae nala vaṇa guṇa manohara goś (Bhālān 1924: 1).
more strictly construed, arose in the sociocultural space of the transregional one. In the first moment of emergence, a quasi-transregional literary culture was produced in a regional linguistic space, in large part by the Sanskritizing practices employed by the first poets to write in Gujarati. At that point it was the larger culture that shaped the smaller, as regional literary languages were fashioned out of that encounter. In the second emergence, by contrast, it was the regional literature that was the intruder and transformed the transregional. This process, which occurred in many other places in late-medieval South Asia, should perhaps be thought of not as a fragmentation of Indian culture but rather as a reorganization, one that greatly expanded the culture’s scope and depth.

These two processes of emergence, which took place from the thirteenth to the nineteenth centuries (and later in some cases), suggest how precolonial South Asians learned how to be regional and transregional simultaneously—place-specific and place-transcending at the same time and through the same texts. The new poets were, in this sense, both propagators and modifiers of the domain of the old literary culture. The frontier that the bhakta-poets expanded was a pilgrimage frontier, a monastic circuit, one that empowered those whom it included rather than subjugating them, as had the power boundaries of the political orders.

RELOCATING A REGIONAL LITERATURE

The early bilingual poets, from Vajrasen to Māṇikyacandra, found a place for the regional language in the basically transregional literary culture of Gurjaradeśa. But the terms and conditions for the existence of literature in the regional language were dictated, as we have seen, by the literary culture of the transregional languages. The language of poetry was allowed to be regional, but the prosody, poetics, and thematics of poetry remained largely identical to what they were in the older literary culture. In this sense the regional literature was assigned, ironically, a somewhat subordinate place within the region’s literary culture.

The first decisive move to relocate Gujarati literature was made, as we have seen, by Narasiṃha Mahetā in the fifteenth century. How Narasiṃha initiated this relocation, and how he as a poet negotiated with the dominant traditional forces and factors, are illustrated in a pada-poem of his that was made widely known through Gandhi’s inclusion of it in his daily prayers. The pada begins with the lines:

vaiṣṇava jana to tene kahīe
e piḍ parai jane re.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{35}. Mahetā 1981: 289.
If the monosyllabic word to is bracketed, the lines may be translated as: “Call him a man of God who knows another’s pain.” But the indeclinable to—a particle at once restrictive and emphatic, meaning something like “only”—modifies the meaning of the sentence subtly: “[Do not call him who pretends to be a man of God, as you have mistakenly been doing for so long], but call him alone a man of God who knows another’s pain.”

Narasiṃha is not repeating here in Gujarati what had been said in the transregional literary languages before him, either by himself or by others. If he is joining an ongoing conversation, he is doing so with a note of dissent. And that single note, which is heard in the monosyllabic to, has multiple significance. It tells us, for one thing, that the regional poet has put forward a new meaning of the phrase vaiṣṇava jana—different from its traditional, sectarian meaning (person who is a devotee of Viṣṇu [Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva]). But it also tells us that the poet feels he can—perhaps must—express his dissent through a sentence structure that is unique to the regional language in which he writes.

To pay close attention to the word to in Narasiṁha’s poem is not to suggest that there were no earlier works attempting to characterize a devotee of Viṣṇu. Attributes similar to those found in Narasiṁha’s poem were expressed by earlier Sanskrit writers.36 Māva’s poem of 1531, Viṣṇubhagat (Devotee of Viṣṇu), comprises fifty-one stanzas of three lines in which terms like anāhata sabda and rūndhi pavan refer to “the external sound” and “the breath control” that are typical concepts of the Nāth, or Siddha, sect. Poets of this sect, like Sarahapāda, who composed duha poems in Apabhramsha protesting ritualistic religious practices, have greatly influenced writers across the regional languages. These include, in Gujarati, Akho in the seventeenth century, and before him the lesser-known Māvo, in whose works the description of a vaiṣṇava comes as a neutral listing of virtues. Narasiṁha, however, presents the vaiṣṇava’s qualities as an alternative, emphasizing that he is rejecting one assessment in favor of another. And the pada that Gandhi popularized is not an isolated instance among Narasiṁha’s works. He wrote several similar poems, some even more explicit in their self-conscious protest. In one he asks:

36. A useful study of such works in Sanskrit and Gujarati is available in Bhayani 1986. As Bhayani and others have shown, the Sanskrit Viṣṇupurāṇa lists attributes (to quote from a verse) such as samamatiṣṭiṁ ātmakaṁ yādīvopakṣaṁ (having the same attitude towards one’s friends and opponents), łyṣṭaṁ yva yah samavaicti vasi parvamas (who considers others’ possessions [as insignificant as] grass), and śucicaritaṁ khalasattvaṁmitrabhitah (having purity of character and being a friend to all creatures) that are pertinent to Narasiṁha; the refrain in the purāṇa, tam avehi viṣṇubhaktaṁ (know him to be a devotee of Viṣṇu), corresponds to Narasiṁha’s vaiṣṇava jana to. See Viṣṇupurāṇa 3.7. 20–29.
What is gained by observing the ritualistic bath [snāna], obeisance [sevā], and worship [pūjā]?

These are nothing but strategies for filling up one’s belly.\(^{37}\)

Here, too, Narasiṃha makes use of the indeclinable to: e to parpañe sahu pet bharavit tanā (These though [you may present them as qualities of a vaiṣṇava] are mere strategies for filling the belly).

Thus there is a double deviation in the opening line of Narasiṃha’s verse that Gandhi, with his ear for both sense and sound, is likely to have noticed: Narasiṃha deviates from both the perception and the narration (daśāna and varṇāna) of the older, transregional literary culture. Through such a complete note of dissent he negotiates his way through the dictates of the powerful traditional culture to find a new location for Gujarati poetry. From this place poets could no longer simply produce Sanskrit-imitative verbal structures in Gujarati (Gujarati vāñmaya), but would write new and authentic literature in that language (Gujarati sahitya). Especially in the five poems examined already—Hār, Hundī, Rās, Vivāh, and Māmeri (poems on the events related to the necklace, the letter of credit, the divine dance, the son’s marriage, and the gift from the new mother’s family)—Narasiṃha takes on, with the typical nonchalance of a bhakta, the many types of hegemonies that impinged upon him, and he asserts his own vision of reality through the power of his poetic language.

Another author who negotiated his way to independence and a new location for his verbal art was a man of the theater, Asāıt Thākur (second half of the fourteenth century). In his case, both the interactions with a new and unfamiliar political power and the relocation of Gujarati theater were concrete and actual. Asāıt, like Narasiṃha, was an accomplished musician, a singer of classical rāgas. One day, the legend goes, he came to know that a local farmer’s daughter had been abducted by the army chieftain of the sultan, who was camping near Asāıt’s hometown of Uñjā in north Gujarat (the ancient Ānartta). Asāıt was a Brahman (in fact, of the high subcaste known as Audicya Śrimal Brahmans), and the girl, Gaṅgā, was of the third caste, a Patel. But, again like Narasiṃha, Asāıt’s sympathy was not limited by such received categories, and he decided to rescue Gaṅgā from the army camp. He went to the camp and by his singing won the goodwill of the chieftain, who apparently had an ear for music. Asāıt was granted a favor, and he asked for the release of his “daughter” Gaṅgā. Made suspicious by his counselors, the chief asked Asāıt to eat food from the same dish as Gaṅgā in order to prove that they belonged to the same caste and were indeed father and daughter. Asāıt did this without hesitation. On returning to Uñjā with

\(^{37}\) Mahetā 1981: 386.
Gaṅgā, however, Asāit was expelled from his caste for breaking the prohibition against eating with lower-caste people. He now found it difficult to sustain himself as an outcaste Brahman, because he could find no sustenance either as a Brahman (who traditionally lived on pious donations) or as the traditional religious singer-storyteller that he most likely was.\(^{38}\)

Asāit at this point turned to composing plays in Gujarati and performing them in the open on makeshift stages, with men, women, and children of all castes and all social standing for his audience.\(^{39}\) He also put his musical skills to this new use. His plays, called veśās (he wrote 365 in all, it is said), and his theater, known as bhāvā, were immensely successful. The bhāvā became Gujarat’s own theater, its own dramatic genre, the likes of which had never before been seen in Chaulukya Gurjaradeśa.\(^{40}\)

Theater in Gurjaradeśa had long been housed inside its impressive temples. The temples and other temple-related structures had spacious auditoriums decorated with sculpture, known as rangamāṇḍapa. The famous Śiva temple of Rudramahālāya at Anhilapur Pāṭān boasted a large raṅgamāṇḍapa with tall pillars; the Navalakhā temple at Sejakpur had one forty-five feet long; one with twenty-two pillars and a split-level stage graced the famous Ghumlī temple (dating from the Chaulukya period); and the Jain structure Līṭa-vasahi, built by the minister-poet Tejpal at Mount Abū in 1231, had a raṅgamāṇḍapa extensively decorated with sculptures of dancing women and men.\(^{41}\) The period from 1150 to 1250 has rightly been described as a “century of drama” in Gurjaradeśa. Yet almost all the plays were written in Sanskrit, and the rules for their performance were in accordance with the Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharata.

With the arrival of the Khaljī rule from Delhi in 1304 after the defeat of the last Chaulukya-Vāghela king, Karṇadeva, all this changed. The new power destroyed a large number of temples, including the Rudramahālāya. The destruction continued under the governors appointed by the Khaljīs to control Gujarat, and later under some of the rulers of the Gujarāt sultanate (1409–1573) as well. The new court at Ahmadābād, which had become the seat of the Sultanate of Gujarat, developed into a center of literary activity for authors from across India and as far away as Iran and Iraq. Writers who found patronage at the court, numerous as they were, composed exclusively

---


\(^{39}\) These stages were called cacāt cok (lit. “a square” where “four roads meet”) derived from the Sanskrit words čatuṣranga and caturṣkha, which, however, are never used together in Sanskrit, to suggest the Sanskrit raṅgamāṇḍapa theater.

\(^{40}\) See Nilkānt 1911 for bhāvā texts. The veśā (lit. costume, and hence, imitation) was a short drama. The bhāvā is the generic name of the traditional Gujarāti theater. Popular etymology for the term, given by traditional actors, derives the word from bhāvavahi, the book of life.

\(^{41}\) See Majumdar 1965: 279.
in Persian and Arabic. Not a single author writing in Gujarati was a participant in the literary culture of the Gujarat sultanate, though some Muslim authors had already begun to write in their regional language. I mentioned earlier Abdala Rahamāna, author of the late-thirteenth-century Sandesavāsaka, who was the earliest, and today is the most well-known, among them.

While the temples, along with the raṅgamandapas they housed, were sporadically destroyed in the fifteenth century and even later at the dictate of the political rulers, the theater initiated by Asāit continued to thrive in the streets and other open public places in the villages and towns of Gujarat, influencing the sociocultural life of all segments of the Gujarati population—men, women, and children of all religious beliefs and from different socioeconomic strata. The veṣa plays staged by the bhavāī theater were not religious in their theme or orientation. Unlike other regional dramatic forms such as the jāṭra of Bengal, the āṅkānąt of Assam, the yaksagāṇa of Karnataka, and the kathakali and Kūṭiyāṭṭam of Kerala, the Gujarati plays were satirical works on social and political themes. Characters depicted in the veṣa plays included Brahmans and Muslims, men and women, merchants and farmers, all scrutinized in the cold gaze of the ironic humorist. The raṅgalo, a uniquely Gujarati version of the Sanskrit fool (vidūṣaka), shared the latter’s qualities as a fearless, ironic, and sympathetic witness to the happenings on the stage and in the society.

Thus, Gujarati authors like Narasimha and Asāit found ways to negotiate a modus vivendi with the dominant authorities: both the literary-cultural authorities of the earlier transregional literary culture and the political-economic authorities of their contemporary Gujarat. They, and others like Premānand (seventeenth century), Śāmal (eighteenth century), and Dayārām (nineteenth century), helped Gujarati literature to assert its own identity at the level of language—as Gujarati vāṁmaya—and also as a literature, sāhitya. But a new challenge from a power that was much more subtle and intrusive than the brutalizing though limited power of the Khaljīs and the sultans was round the corner.

HIND SVARĀJ: THE ULTIMATE NEGOTIATION AND ASSERTION OF REGIONAL LITERARY CULTURE

In his memoirs, Śmaraṇānaukura (Mirror of memory), Narsimhrāo Divatiā (1859–1937), a polyglot and a pioneer in Gujarati linguistics and one of the early masters of Gujarati prose, narrates an anecdote about two clerks and a newspaper, which he had heard from his father.42 The father, Bholānāth Sarabhai, a native officer in the British administration in the Kheḍa district of central Gujarat and himself a writer and social reformer, had two junior

42. An earlier version of this section appeared in Pollock 1995.
clerks working in his office. Publication of Gujarati newspapers had just begun in the region, and, working as they were in a government office where such things were subtly encouraged, the clerks had their own subscriptions to the newspaper. The author tells us how upon receiving the weekly newspaper on a Wednesday afternoon, the two clerks retired to the potable-water room of the office, each with his copy of the newspaper in hand. One read aloud from his own newspaper, while the other compared it with the printed words in his copy. When they discovered that the two copies tallied, paragraph by paragraph, word by word, their amazement was boundless. “Wonderful! Word for word they tally! Not even the slightest error! Your copy is exactly the same as my copy!” Thus expressing their feeling of amazement and respect, they go back to their tables,” the author concludes.43

Today, more than a hundred years after the event and seven decades after the publication of the account, we may not be sure whether to smile with the native officer or to share the amazement of the incredulous clerks. If we restore the clerks from the position of caricature in the anecdote to the status of characters in a social history, we may also ask ourselves whether the open admiration of the clerks was not linked with a concealed skepticism, simultaneously felt.

We need to see the Smaraṇamukura anecdote in the context of several other events in the cultural life of Gujarat in the nineteenth century, including the rise of several new prose genres in the Gujarati language (newspaper accounts of sociopolitical reality being among them) and the simultaneous decline of many long-standing genres of narrative and lyrical verse. We may be prompted to observe how “amazement and respect” for duplicating technology concealed (and expressed) a caution and a doubt about the duplicity of the producer of that technology and of its products. The root problems of the cultural history of nineteenth-century Gujarat can be seen clearly only when we realize that the enthusiasm and the skepticism were simultaneously real.

Prose was never the dominant medium of expression in Gujarati literature before the nineteenth century. Many works were nonetheless composed in narrative-prose genres like caritra (Pythvīcandra caritra, 1422) and kathā (Samyaktvākathā, 1355; or, more famously, Kalahācaryakathā, 1494), and in the descriptive prose genre varṇaka. Prose in the genre of bālavodha (lit. instruction for children; a simple commentary on a text) was attractive even to beginning readers. The graphic prose of the eighteenth-century Vacana- mrta (Nectar of language), which emerged from a new Vaiṣṇava religious movement, the Śrāminarāyaṇ sect, included graceful descriptive, narrative, and dramatic elements, and was quite popular in many sections of nineteenth-

43. Divatia 1926: 18–19.
century Gujarati society. Legal and administrative prose had also begun to develop.44

The dominant mode of literary composition, however, had long been verse. Extensive and excellent work was available in a wide range of genres that developed over the centuries. These included many encountered already in this chapter and some that have had to be passed over: lyrical genres like pada, garbha, chhatā, bāramāsa, dhol, thāl, ārdh, ārati, and narrative genres like prabandha, kathā, vāso, caritra, akhyān vāratā, salako, pavado, and copāi.45 Poets who composed in these forms—from Narasiṃha Mahetā in the fifteenth century to Dayārām in the early nineteenth century—were read, sung, and revered.

There was considerable literary production more broadly conceived in philosophical verse compositions. Technically sophisticated accounts of ontological and epistemological systems of Advaitavedānta (both the kevalādvaita of Śaṅkara and the suddhādvaita of Vallabha) were provided in several verse compositions. The better-known among these are works by Akho in the seventeenth century and by Dayārām in the early nineteenth century. In addition, a critique of the stagnant elements of the native cultural tradition was presented by all these poets under direct or indirect influence of the ascetic movements loosely grouped under the rubric Nāthsampradāya, the tradition of the spiritual master Gorakhnāth (twelfth century?).

There was no aesthetic inadequacy in the tradition of Gujarati literature as it coursed its way down to the early part of the nineteenth century through seven centuries of memorable and sometimes profound expression in narrative verse and prose and lyrical poetry. It was a varied and strong literary tradition. Yet over a span of a mere two decades, from 1851 to 1870, a new epoch began and a new canon was constructed. And this phenomenon was greeted with unmistakable enthusiasm and respect by Gujarati authors, critics, and readers of the period.

The major literary and cultural innovations and events of the two decades from 1851 include the first Gujarati essay, “Maṇḍali Malvāthi thatā Lābh” (The advantages of forming forums [for social reforms]) in 1851 by the pioneer of Gujarati prose, Narmadāśaṅkar Lālāṅkar Dave; the first Gujarati novel, Karanaghelo (The mad Karaṇ) by Nandasaṅkar Mehta in 1868; publication (in a restricted edition of about five copies) of Narmadāśaṅkar’s autobiography, Mān Hakikat (My history) in 1866; composition of the personal

44. Jinavijaya 1931, gives an extensive but by no means an exhaustive collection of premodern Gujarati prose.

45. The garbha, for example, is a devotional lyric sung usually by men, often in praise of the Mother Goddess; the bāramāsa (lit. twelve months) is a lyric depicting the pain and longing of the beloved’s separation from her lover; thāl (lit. a plate of food) is a devotional lyric depicting offerings of choice food to a deity, often metaphorically referring to the devotee’s self.
diary *Nityanondh* (Daily notes) in the 1840s by Durgarām Mahetāji, a pioneering reformer and teacher, and of *Rajniśī* (Diary), from 1861 to 1882, by Bholānāth Sarabhai (published, but only partially, in 1888); and the publication of essays of literary criticism and other prose writings by the pioneering critic Navalrām Pāṇḍya in *Ṣātalpatra* (School-leaf, i.e., school journal), the journal of the regional board of education, from 1850 on.  This was followed in 1862 by the publication of the first comprehensive work on Gujarati prosody, *Dalpat Piṅgal*, by the pioneering and widely popular poet Dalpatrām.

In addition, several travelogues, in which a variety of prose styles and attitudes are discernible, were first published in Gujarati in this period. A sense of freedom, both of expression and of experience, was offered by the travel genre, which, along with journalism, long remained on the fringes of literature. In 1861, Dosabhāi Karaka, a Parsi, wrote his *Garet Baritianni Musāphari* (Travel to Great Britain). In 1864, another Parsi anonymously wrote *Ek Pārsī Gharahasthāni Amerikānī Musāphari* (A Parsi gentleman’s travel to America). Apart from travel accounts of Great Britain and America, Gujarati men and at least one woman, a native princess, traveled through and wrote about parts of Europe and other regions, such south India, Iran, China, and Japan. This genre seems, above all, to have opened up the pleasure of “writing our own prose” to many Gujaratis—Hindu, Parsi, and Muslim, men and women, alike.

Journalism and printing also participated in this process of dynamic transformation. Reviewing Gujarati literature of the six decades before 1911, a critic noted that in a relatively short period—from 1817 to 1867—as many as seventy-eight printing presses were started in Gujarat. He also lists ninety-four newspapers and socioliterary journals that began publication between 1831 and 1886.

With their defeat of the Marathas in the Third Maratha War in 1818, the British effectively took control of western India. In 1820 the British government of the Bombay province established the Bombay Education Society. New “English” schools were started in Bombay, Surat, and Bharukaccha (Broach), with Gujarati as the medium of instruction but with texts and teachers prepared according to British specifications. In 1825 the Native Education Society, with Colonel Jarvis as its director, appointed a young Gujarati, twenty-two-year-old Raṅchhodās Girdhardās Jhaveri, to undertake the production of Gujarati textbooks, produced according to the official guidelines. He was also to train native teachers to teach at the government schools. New

---

46. These essays were later collected in *Navalgranthāvali* in 1891 (Pāṇḍya 1891).
48. The woman was a native princess, H. E. Nandakuvarbā of Gondal, whose *Gomaṇḍal Parikram* (1902) squarely criticizes Europe on many counts.
49. Derasari 1911: 18.
schools were started at Bombay, Surat, Broach, Nadiad, Kheḍa, Dholka, and Rajkot as British power moved beyond Bombay, the Indian city it created, and brought its constructs to remote parts of Gujarat. In 1840 a new board of education was established, following the decision in 1835 to change the medium of instruction from Gujarati to English. In 1842 four more schools were started at Bombay and one at Surat; one more was added at Ahmedabad in 1846. In 1857 universities were opened at Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras.

Gujarat had lost its political independence with the defeat and death of its last Rajput king, Karan Vaghela, in the fourteenth century. After the decline of both the sultanate and the Mughul power in Gujarat, the region was mercilessly exploited by the Maratha rulers, the Peshwas, and the Sardars alike. Small local rulers, both Hindu and Muslim, had their bands of Arab, Afghan, Pathan, and Baloch mercenaries. When many parts of India rose against the British in the revolt of 1857, the political structures in Gujarat were too insignificant to contribute much to it. However, several Maratha leaders of the revolt sought and received shelter in Gujarat after the uprising was crushed. The seafaring Vaghers of Okhamaṇḍal in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat, however, fought the British in their own independence struggle. When between 1862 and 1865 the Civil War in America prevented the export of cotton from America to England, a sharp rise in cotton exports from Gujarat followed, and both cotton growers and enterprising middlemen of Gujarat experienced vast short-term profits, followed suddenly by devastating losses in 1865–1866.

These events form the socioeconomic background against which Nandasaṅkar Mehta wrote the first Gujarati novel, Karanaghelo, in 1866 (it was published in 1868). The making of the novel and the making of the man who wrote it are equally fascinating. Nandasaṅkar jīvancharitra (The life story of Nandasaṅkar; 1916), a well-documented biography written by the novelist’s son, Vinayak Nandasaṅkar, gives an excellent picture of the novelist’s life and times. It provides details of the warm, genuine relation young Nandasaṅkar had with his patron, Mr. Russell, an enlightened British administrator. Nandasaṅkar, who in his later years worked as a senior district-level official in the British administration in Gujarat and was also briefly divān (chief minister) of the native state of Kutch, was known in intimate circles as “Mastersaheb.” He had started his career as a teacher at an English school in Surat, his hometown. A product of the new educational system, he was “a bright pupil of Mr. Green, headmaster of the high school.” In 1865–1866, Nandasaṅkar was given preference over Navalram Pändya in his appointment as the headmaster of the Teacher’s Training College at Surat. He was a friend

50. A few details missing there are available in Smaranamukha; see Divatiā 1926.
of Bholānāth Sarabhai, father of the author of Smarānāmukura, and “when the storybook Karaṇaghelo was published, all the friends of the Master, including my father, were surprised how this quiet, soft-spoken man had secretly written such an excellent book!”\textsuperscript{51} Karaṇaghelo was the only book that Nandaśāṅkar produced.

Nandaśāṅkar wrote the novel with the encouragement of Mr. Russell. He determined the theme of his novel after some deliberation, though he seems not to have discussed this with his friends, Bholānāth Sarabhai and others.\textsuperscript{52} He chose from among three possible options: the defeat and death of Karan Vāghela, the last Hindu king of Gujarat; the defeat and downfall of Patāi Raval, the Hindu king of Champaner, at the hands of Muhammad Begdo; and the destruction of the Somnath temple by Muhammad Ghazni. Karaṇ was destroyed, the novel tells us, because of his moral, and especially sexual, degradation. He lusted after the wife of his minister, Mādhav. Patāi was also morally degraded, especially sexually: he had lusted after the goddess Kālī of the Pavagadh Hills. A pre-nineteenth-century garbo (a lyrical narrative) on Patāi Raval’s destruction was quite well known in Nandaśāṅkar’s time. That garbo gave a religious context to the Patāi Raval theme. One wonders if Mastersaheb had had any discussion with Russell on the relative merits of the story of Patāi, with its religious (rather than political) context, though it, too, told of the moral and sexual corruption of a Hindu king.

In the third theme under consideration, that of the destruction of the Somnath temple, there is no spectacular moral and sexual debasement that might have justified the defeat of the Chaulukya king. No causal connection is made between defeat and destruction, on one hand, and moral collapse on the other. But if the story fails to justify political defeat, it also fails to justify political victory. The story of Karan Vāghela, on the other hand, unfolds without any religious complications and shows neatly that the natives deserved to be defeated because they were morally corrupt.

If Nandaśāṅkar needed encouragement from Mr. Russell for the composition of Karaṇaghelo, his contemporary Narmadāśāṅkar Dave wrote the first essay of Gujarati literature in 1851 without encouragement from anyone. Narmadāśāṅkar, or simply Narmad (1833–1886), like Nandaśāṅkar, studied for a while at a premier English school, the Elphinstone Institute in Bombay, but he dropped out. He did not quit because he failed to make the grade; in fact he received scholarships through his scores on open tests. Rather, Narmad had gotten married long before he joined the school, and his young bride came of age while he was at the Elphinstone Institute. The girl was shifted from her father’s home to her in-laws’ home, and Narmad was asked to attend to his householder’s duties. Narmad gives details of all

\textsuperscript{51} Dīvāti 1926: 108.
\textsuperscript{52} Dīvāti 1926: 10.
this in his autobiography, adding, “At that time I had developed a keen desire to meet the woman.” He also informs us that he cited reasons of health for dropping out of school, and reprints the certificates in which Mr. Green and others had praised his knowledge of English and Indian history—but these were nothing comparable to the warm words Mr. Green had had for Nandaśaṅkar.

Narmad’s larger moral philosophy was as different from Nandaśaṅkar’s—this is hinted at here and there in his autobiography—as was his writerly ethos. In fact the latter difference reveals the pathways that connect Narmad with Dayārām, the last of the premodern Gujarati poets.

In 1865, Narmad collected his prose writing in a book titled simply Narmagadya (Narmad’s prose). Navalrām Pāṇḍya, the pioneering critic and Narmad’s contemporary, made an interesting observation about this work, comparing Narmagadya with the prose of Hope Vacanmāla (Hope’s readers), a set of well-known textbooks prepared for use in the new schools under the supervision of Theodore Hope, director of the board of education: “In the readers produced by Hopesaheb for Gujarati schools, the entire attention was fixed on simplicity of diction and hence in it the very native turn of the language was lost.” In contrast, those writing in the traditional way of the śāṣṭri, or religious scholar, “wrote pompous Sanskritized Gujarati.” But “Narmad’s prose,” the critic observed, “is as native as it is simple, as mature as it is native.” He added that the prose in Narmagadya “was equally dear to the educated and the uneducated.” It “earned the affection equally of scholars of English and the scholars of Sanskrit.”

Navalrām thus placed Narmad in a blissful and perfect region somewhere between the śāṣṭri, the scholar of the traditional variety, and the saheb, the new scholar of the colonial variety. In one sense, as he pointed out, it is a position of honor. But in another, this location between śāṣṭri and saheb could be a dangerous one of isolation.

Following the publication of Narmagadya, Narmad wrote Suratnī Mukhtesār Hakākat (A brief history of Surat, 1866), a sociopolitical history of his hometown. It was published as Narmagadya, book 2, issue 1. In the same year he wrote his autobiography, Mari Hakākat (My history), and published it as Narmagadya, book 2, issue 2, in an edition of about five copies. “I have written out these facts,” he observed, “not for others but for myself, not for renown, but for the purpose of receiving encouragement from the past for the future.” It was from his own relation—a critical relation—with a past both personal and cultural that he hoped to derive this encouragement.

In 1874 Narmad was introduced to Dr. Buller, director of the Department of Public Instruction of the Government of Bombay Province and a keen

53. Dave 1994: 38–39 (“I gave the excuse that I was down with cholera, though I had recovered fully from it”).
student of Indian languages. Narmad had by then become a renowned and beloved poet of Gujarat, and a bold social reformer. Dr. Buller suggested that a new edition of *Narmagadya* be prepared by the author, keeping in view the needs of the school system under Buller’s department. Narmad accepted the offer and accordingly prepared the second edition of *Narmagadya* in 1874. “Dr. Bullersaheb has made some important suggestions while reading through the (printer’s) proofs,” noted Narmad in his usual candid way. Narmad was flexible, but on his own terms. “Changes have been made [by me] in the ideas and language of the writings composed [by me] many years ago. The spelling has been kept as per the standard fixed for the Gujarati Government Schools.”

Two thousand copies of the 1874 edition of *Narmagadya* were printed. Before the copies could be sent to the schools, however, Dr. Buller was replaced as director of the Department of Public Instruction by K.M. Chatfield. Chatfield found it necessary to make certain additional changes in the text of the book. The department wrote to Narmad informing him of the necessary changes and asking his opinion; he did not acknowledge the letter. Chatfield’s action was recorded by Mahipatrām Nīlkanṭh, Gujarati translator in the Department of Education, who was asked by the director to make the emendations. Mahipatrām Nīlkanṭh noted: “Several essays [in *Narmagadya*] included writing that was not suitable for teaching at the school. When the Directorasaheb came to know of this, he had the printed pages of such parts destroyed.”

A new edition was prepared in 1875, with the original text considerably altered by Mahipatrām Nīlkanṭh at Chatfield’s insistence. The edition of 1874, prepared entirely by Narmad, on the other hand, does not seem to have been destroyed only in part by Mr. Chatfield: Of the two thousand copies printed, only two complete and bound copies have survived. This strongly suggests that Chatfield ordered the destruction of the entire print run of the 1874 edition, and not merely of selected chapters.

Mahipatrām Nīlkanṭh stated in his preface to the 1875 edition, “So far as possible the author’s writing has not been changed. And where it was necessary to make changes, the new writing has generally been added within brackets.” A detailed study of the two editions, however, undertaken in 1935 by the Gandhian poet-critic Rāmanārāyaṇ Pāthak (1945), shows how extensive were the changes, made at the director’s instruction, that were not enclosed in brackets. Navalrām Pāṇḍya, who worked as a teacher and administrator in the Department of Education, noted unequivocally: “[The edi-

---

57. One is at Gujarat Vidyāpith, Ahmedabad, and the other is in the personal collection of Gambhirsimh Gohel. No unbound or even partial copies are extant.
tion of Narmagadya] that is old, has been listed [by me] as ‘old’ so that the original writing of Narmadaśaṅkar [without the changes made by Mahipatram] could be recognized. These changes had been introduced through consideration for what is proper and improper for the schools. But the educated reader expects the original writing.”

One of the changes made in the 1875 edition concerns Narmad’s writing on Dayārām, the great bhakti poet who had died in 1852. In a sense, it concerns Narmad’s views on Gujarat’s entire cultural history, as well as on moral values and norms. Dayārām is said to have had a relationship with Ratanbai, a woman of the goldsmith caste, who lived with him as a disciple. The 1875 edition, prepared under Chatfield’s instructions, condemns this relationship and suggests that, although the poet was greatly respected by his readers, his lifestyle had left room for ethical improvement. It also adds the comment that Dayārām’s poems were mediocre. All this, of course, was without the square brackets of editorial intervention.

Narmad’s own views on Dayārām and his relationship with Ratanbai were quite different, as can be seen in the original Narmagadya. In a matter-of-fact style Narmad observes: “There are three main points worth noting from the period between the twentieth year of Dayārām’s life and his fortieth year. First, he undertook a long journey [across India]. Second, he became a follower of the Puṣṭi sect [of Vaishnavism]. And third, he became related to a beloved who never left his side.” Narmad noted that Ratanbai had been widowed when she was only seven and when she was eighteen had met Dayārām, who was then thirty-two years old. “The poet sent two Vaiṣṇava disciples to the goldsmith woman and inquired whether she would come to his house to fetch water”—a phrase well understood for what it did not say. “She replied, ‘How could I possibly fetch water?’ Yet he somehow or other convinced her.” Narmad concludes his narrative on Dayārām’s relation with Ratanbai with these simple words, “Then she lived with him till his death.”

The Chatfield edition replaces this with the following denunciation: “[Dayārām] had a widow of the goldsmith caste, Ratan, for sexual abuse. She served the poet until his death. . . . Had Dayārām married her instead of having illicit sex with her all the time, he would have had a much better reputation amongst gentlemen.” This substitution, too, appears without the square brackets of editorial intervention.

The point here is not merely the unethical manipulations on the part of Chatfield and Nilkanṭh in attributing to Narmad their own views on Dayārām. The larger issue is the way Indians were expected to relate to their past. Karaṇaṅghelo invited its readers to understand the fall of the last independent

king of Gujarat in a way that Mr. Green and Mr. Russell thought was right
for newly educated Gujaratis. By contrast, the original Narmagadya invited
its readers to understand the life of the last medieval poet of Gujarat in a
way that was not acceptable to Mr. Chatfield. Narmad’s way of deriving “en-
couragement from the past for the future” had no place in Chatfield’s scheme
of things. Dayārām had to be denounced, preferably in Narmad’s own words.
To this end, Chatfield put to good use his own native assistant and a well-
oiled printing press. From 1875 on, the Chatfield edition of Narmagadya was
taught and studied in the schools as if it had been Narmad’s own writing.

There are real complexities in the interactions of Mahipatrām, Narmad,
Navrām, Buller, and Chatfield, which no brief account is able to capture.
It is certainly the case that some English teacher-administrators bore a deep
and active love for Gujarat—men like Mr. Green or, more dramatically, Alex-
der Kinloch Forbes, author of the important chronicle of medieval Gu-
jarat, the Rāṣa Mālā (Garland of legends; 1856), and founder of a celebrated
literary society. But the thrust of the Narmad incident goes beyond ques-
tions of literary genre or the hermeneutics of a particular work to touch on
the ways in which the past and the present, the subjugated and the master,
the self and the other, interacted with each other and produced new social
and aesthetic meaning.

In the course of the nineteenth century the nature, structure, and func-
tioning of social, economic, and political power in Gujarat changed funda-
mentally. This power as it confronted poets from Narasiṁha to Dayārām was
basically different from the comparable power that confronted the nine-
teenth-century Gujarati writers of the novel, the essay, the diary, the travel-
ogue, and so on. The difference—the newness—of this power was produced
by the way it related to culture. Narmad was expected to alter his under-
standing of the world, and his refusal to interpret Dayārām in the manner
Chatfield asked indicates his will to freedom. That refusal, however, was only
the tentative beginning of an actual movement toward freedom.

The period between 1870 and 1909 saw the emergence of an entirely
new set of writers. The bright students of the new English school and the
well-trained teachers of the pre-1870 period were now replaced by the first
graduates of Bombay University, many of whom went on to become well-
known professors. Among these were Mahipatrām’s son, Rāmanbhai Nil-
kanṭh; Bholānāth’s son, Narasiṁhrāo Divāti; Dalpatrām’s rebellious son,
Nānāla; Maṇiśāṅkar Bhaṭṭa (who had the sobriquet “Kant”), who converted
to Christianity for a time; Anandaśāṅkar Dhṛuv, author of Āpano Dharmā
(Our dharma); Manilāl Dvivedi, who was invited to the International Con-
gress of Religions held in Chicago in 1893 and made memorable by Swami

62. Forbes founded the Gujarati Vernacular Society (now known as the Forbes/Farbas
Sabhā) in 1848. He also started a journal, Buddhīprakāś (Light of intelligence) in 1850.
Vivekananda; and above all, Govardhanrām Tripāthi, who also wrote in Sanskrit and in English, and who was the author of the epoch-making novel Sarasvatīcandra.

Govardhanrām Tripāthi’s writings, which include a “scrapbook” diary in English, an elegiac poem in Sanskrit, and a biography of his widowed daughter in Gujarati, are marked by a bold yet balanced way of inquiring into basic questions of contemporary Gujarati, modern European, and ancient Indian cultures. His writing evinces all the requisite powers of intelligence and artistry for encompassing the different elements—seemingly unrelated, contradictory, or ambiguous—of contemporary reality, and formulating from them a cohesive and comprehensive image. He refused to be satisfied with what he called an “eclectic combination” of contemporary Gujarati or Indian culture with contemporary Western culture, at the cost of excluding ancient Indian culture from the interaction.

Before Gandhi, it was Govardhanrām Tripāthi who attempted to provide a comprehensive critique of colonial India, presenting in his novel Sarasvatīcandra (published in four volumes between 1888 and 1904) a picture of the social decay, political confusion, and psychological and religious strains and strivings of nineteenth-century India, both native and British. A tragic love story at the microlevel is interwoven with a macrolevel analysis of the emergent commercial power of Bombay and the triumphant political power of the British, the decaying social and political structures of inland Gujarat, and the social-spiritual experiments in the hills of Sundaragiri, where the author provided his blueprint for a resurgent India.

There have been two principal debates about the Gujarati novel of the nineteenth century. The first is limited in scope and concerned with origins, asking whether it is Karanaghele, written in 1866 and published in 1868, that should be taken as the first novel or Mahipatrām Rūprām’s Sāsu Vahun Laḍāi, published likewise in 1868. The meticulous critic Vijayray Vaidya prefers Karanaghele, since he takes it as a “proper novel,” and describes the other book as a “mere story.” The criteria he and several other critics adopt are formal ones modeled on the European novel. The second debate, though focused on Sarasvatīcandra, the most talked-about Gujarati novel of the century, is conceptually larger. Surprisingly, it reverses the criteria of preference, abandoning both the formal criterion and the European model. The critic Nānālāl, while praising the book, forgoes the term navalkathā (new tale, i.e., the novel), which had always been used in Gujarati criticism, as it is now, and instead discusses (as the title of his 1933 book announces) “the place of Sarasvatīcandra among jagat-kādambario [world novels].” Marathi criticism employs the word kādambarī for novel, and by using it Nānālāl intends to evoke the

63. Vaidya 1939: 78.
ancient context of Bāṇa’s Sanskrit narrative form, thus deviating from the European novel as model.\(^6^4\) Another critic, Anandaśāṅkar Drīvuc, describes Sarasvatīcandra as a purāṇa, again putting forth a formal criterion very different from that of the European novel.\(^6^5\)

Govardhanrām is neither a Māṇikya-candra nor a Bhālā, and is thus attempting neither to bring a non-Bāṇa theme stylistically closer to Bāṇa, nor to take a Bāṇa-theme stylistically away from Bāṇa. In all Gujarati literary histories, Sarasvatīcandra is finally and rightly seen as a nāvalhathā and not, in any serious analytical way, as a narrative along the lines of either Bāṇa’s Kādambarī or the purāṇas. Each of these species has its own structure, which is quite unlike the narrative structure of Govardhanrām’s composition. What then is the point of this second debate? Perhaps it is this: It draws our attention to the way that the deviation in Sarasvatīcandra—away from both the Indian kathā and the Western novel—was seen as an achievement, while the deviation in Sāsu Vahuni Ladāi, in 1866, was seen as a shortcoming. Thus we return to Narmād’s observation about Narmād’s prose: that it is different from the prose of both the śāstri and the saheb, and yet is pleasing to both scholars of Sanskrit and scholars of English.

Perhaps an even more important achievement of Sarasvatīcandra than its formal or genre innovation resides in its larger signification. This derives in the first instance from the author’s ability to escape the confines of the “eclectic combination” demanded by the colonial power of the period. By crossing those limits the author achieves his freedom to relate, on his own terms, to both past and contemporary “images of Hindu society”—as Mahatma Gandhi put it in his literary reflections on the novel—and to the demands of political power. In this sense Sarasvatīcandra establishes an important historical link between the Narmagadya, on the one hand, and the Mahatma’s own epoch-making work of 1909, Hind Svarāj (Indian self-rule), on the other.\(^6^6\)

In an insightful book on colonial India the eminent Gujarati poet Niraṅjan Bhagat has described Hind Svarāj as a “revolt against the self” (pandani sāme band). He explains: “Both the objective and the method invoked by Gandhiji in Hind Svarāj were completely different from the objective and the method of those who were educated [in the British system of education in India].”\(^6^7\) In the early phase of his life, Gandhi himself was one of these educated Indians. But Hind Svarāj, which resulted from a period of intense read-

\(^6^4\) Kavi 1933: 1–6.
\(^6^5\) Kavi 1933.
\(^6^6\) The work was published in English translation in 1910, under the misleadingly narrow title Indian Home Rule, on which see later in the chapter. Gandhi’s reflections on Sarasvatīcandra are found in Desai 1948, vol. 1.
\(^6^7\) Bhagat 1975: 137–38.
ing, discussion, and self-searching in South Africa, marks Gandhi’s breaking away from his personal past and the past of his cultural milieu.

_Hinda Swarājya_ (the more exact pronunciation of the title of the work in Gujarati, in which Gandhi originally wrote the book; _Hind Swaraj_ is used in the English translation) is meant to lead India to _swarāj_. But, as Gandhi never tires of asking, what precisely is _swarāj_? For one thing, what kind of relationship with the West does it presuppose? The English translation of the original Gujarati uses the word “Western civilization” and condemns it in no uncertain terms. But is the author of _Hind Swarāj_ an isolationist and indigenist? What do the terms “civilization” and _swarājya_ mean within the text itself? How exactly does the book enable us to relate the Indian self to various others? Within the framework of colonialism, how does _swarājya_ address the questions of subjugation and revolt? In the context of these questions, two Gujarati terms and their use in the Gujarati prose of the nineteenth century claim our attention. Each of these was a keyword in Gandhi’s original Gujarati version of his masterpiece.

The first term is _sudhāro_. In the English translation, _sudhāro_ is translated as “civilization.” _Sudhāro_, however, literally means “improvement” or “reform” and was a central concept in a crucial debate that occupied nineteenth-century Gujarati literature from Narmad onward. The period from 1851 to 1875 is in fact known to historiographers of Gujarati literature as _sudhārak yug_, “the age of reform.” The Gujarati text of _Hinda Swarāj_ uses the words _sudhāro_ and _kudhāro_ — “a change for the better” and “a change for the worse”—in opposition, especially in chapters 5 and 6. While the word _sudhāro_ is consistently translated in the English version as “civilization,” _kudhāro_, used effectively and dialectically in the original, is not translated at all. The last paragraph of chapter 5, for example, would translate literally from the Gujarati original as follows:

> It is not due to any peculiar fault of the English people, but is due to the fault of their—or rather Europe’s—reforms [sudhāro]. Those changes for the better are [in reality] changes for the worse [kudhāro]. Under it the people of Europe are being ruined.

Gandhi’s own English translation reads:

> It is not due to any peculiar fault of the English people, but the condition is due to modern civilization. It is a civilization only in name. Under it the nations of Europe are becoming degraded and ruined day by day.


69. Gandhi 1939: 24. The complexity (if not confusion) is Gandhi’s own. He mentions Edward Carpenter’s _Civilization: Its Causes and Cure. And Other Essays_ (1891), which he had read just prior to writing _Hind Swaraj_. In the original Gujarati text Gandhi translated the title of Carpenter’s book as _Sudhāro, Tenī Karaso ane Tenī Davat_ (chapter 6). Notably, Gandhi does not
The word *svarājya* has been rendered as “home rule” in the subtitle of the English version, *Hind Swaraj, or, Indian Home Rule*. In 1921 Gandhi commented on this term: “But I would warn the reader against thinking that I am today aiming at swaraj” as described in *Hind Swaraj* itself, that is, as full political autonomy. He goes on to introduce two more terms that clarify this point: “I am individually working for the self-rule pictured in *Hind Swaraj*. But today my corporate activity is undoubtedly devoted to the attainment of parliamentary swaraj.”

Similarly, when we look closely at the use of the terms “Indian civilization” and “Western civilization” in the translated version, as well as *sudhāro* and *kudhāro* in the original, we can see how Gandhi perceives the source of the strengths and weaknesses of both India and England. He is not referring to any static, eternal structure of social organization, whether Indian or European. He is analyzing two processes of change, *sudhāro* and *kudhāro*. He explains how a certain process of change is better and preferable to another. Then he shows how power, especially political power, is generated through a specific process of change, *sudhāro*, which links up to sources of strength. Conversely, he shows how all power, including political power, has to be given up when one accepts the other process of change, *kudhāro*, which severs the links with those sources of strength. Those who want to subjugate others prompt them to give up their own power.

In chapter 7, “Why Was India Lost?” Gandhi explains, “The English have not taken India, we have given it to them. They are not in India on their own strength, but because we keep them.” Gandhi arrives at this understanding through his fearless and penetrating analysis of the sources of the power the British had over India and the structure through which they cultivated these sources. *Hind Swaraj* calls upon Indians to reject these structures—the educational systems, the railways, hospitals, the judiciary, and other institutions cleverly used by the British. Gandhi ultimately calls upon Indians to cease to be the source of British power. Thus were the mighty, nonviolent weapons of *satyagraha* (holding to truth) and *asahakāra* (noncooperation) fashioned by Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj* and other writings of the period. They brought Gujarati prose of the preceding fifty years to an epoch-making culmination of worldwide significance.

---

employ the word *rūdhi*, often found in nineteenth-century Gujarati prose along with *sudhāro* and *kudhāro*. While *rūdhi* expresses the sense of stagnating tradition in that context, it originally meant only “tradition.” Hence, one would imagine that Gandhi might have used *rūdhi* rather than *sudhāro* to translate “civilization.” But in the Gujarati text of *Hind Swaraj* the words *sudhāro* and *kudhāro* do all the work.

70. Prasad 1985: 5.
As noted earlier, Nirañjan Bhagat describes *Hind Swarāj* as a revolt against one’s own self. This is so in two ways. First, Gandhi radically changed his own views on the “reforms” introduced into India by Western education and technology. Before his period of intense reading and discussion, just prior to the writing of *Hind Swarāj* in 1909, Gandhi’s views of the reforms were not different from those of the educated elite of India. But *Hind Swarāj* was equally a revolt against the self-identity that India had cultivated and that made its people “give India to the British”—in other words, against whatever it was that had made India welcome British rule as a liberation from the oppressive regimes of its own rulers.

From this perspective *Karanaghele*, written two generations earlier, was an instrument in the hands of the hegemonic power, prompting Indians to assume a false, distorted self-image. The idea that the last Hindu king had deserved what he got runs through the discourse of the book, suggesting that British hegemony was a welcome correction for colonial India. *Hind Swarāj*, by contrast, focuses attention not on the British but on the Indians. Gandhi’s work is ultimately not a condemnation of the other, but a critique of the self. It is so because it reveals to Indians the futility of the reformist initiatives they had undertaken under the guidance of the British. And it reveals at the same time the equal futility of the anarchist. According to *Hind Swarāj*, both kinds of political and social action had produced a self that led to subjugation by the other: “It is not that India was taken by the British, we have given it to them.”

*Hind Swarāj* is a prose of the dialogical in several senses of the word. Many sorts of dialogic interaction had emerged as Gujarati prose unfolded during the nineteenth century, starting from the prose of journalism and travelogue, moving through the prose of diaries and memories, and arriving at the prose of fictional narrative. The public and the private, the realistic and the fictional, the inclusive and the exclusive—different types of prose evolved gradually, reflecting the simultaneity of India’s needs to accept the West and to expel it. The emerging Indian reality is a *pata* (cloth) woven of both of these *tantus* (threads) of conflicting hues, producing a fascinating Indian calico.

Gandhi’s masterpiece brings together conflicting elements of a century-long narrative of Gujarati prose. Even at the level of the different techniques of expression from journalism to fiction, *Hind Swarāj* embodies the efforts of the preceding hundred years. It was written during a voyage and thus evokes the memory of the early travelogues in Gujarati. It is a dialogue between the reader of the newspaper and its editor—it was in fact first published in *Indian Opinion*, the journal that Gandhi edited—and it thus reminds us of the dissociation of readers from their newspaper so subtly (if perhaps unintentionally) depicted in *Smaranamukura*. It recalls, as well, the utopian picture of the ways to freedom presented in the dream sequences of *Saras-
Narmad’s refusal to look at the past culture of Gujarat through the distorting eyes of colonial power finds its fully empowered analogue in Gandhi’s refusal to look at India’s past through those same eyes, now functioning in a much more subtle way. In Hind Svarāj Gujarati prose finally stepped out of the hesitant period of the nineteenth century and the limited geography of Gujarat to achieve—in the words Leo Tolstoy wrote upon his first encounter with this Gujarati book in English translation—the “highest significance for the entire human race.”

BIBLIOGRAPHY


———. 1988. Akhānī Kāvyakṛtī. Edited by Śivlāl Jesalpūra. Ahmedabad: Sahitya Sam-

sodhan Prakasan.


Vernacular Society.


Society.


Jubilee Printing Press.


Company.


dracarya Navam Janma Satabdi Smrīti Sīksan Samskar Nidhi.


Dalpatrām: see Travālī Dalpatrām Daḥyabhāī.


Depot.


Depot.


Depot.

Māṇikyasundarsūri: see Māṇikyacandrāstrī.
———. 1944. The Glory that was Gurjaradesa. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.
Nīlkantā, Mahāpātrām Rūprām, ed. 1911. Bhavōi Sangrah. Ahmedabad: Published by the editor.
Vaidya, Vijayrāy Kalyānraγ. 1959. *Gat Sataknā Sāhitya*. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bha-
van.
On account of its unique geographical position as a buffer zone between the Indic and the Iranian-Arab worlds, Sindh has been a place where different cultures have met and interacted with each other for many centuries. Consequently, its literary culture is characterized by convergences: between oral and written genres and forms, and between different languages, literatures, alphabets, scripts, systems of prosody, grammatical structures, and even literary symbols. Not surprisingly, Sindh has been a region where major religious traditions—Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam—have been in dialogue with one another, giving rise to rather unique forms of religious syncretism. Throughout its history Sindh has also been home to a variety of mystical movements, Indic and non-Indic. Many aspects of premodern Sindhi literary culture reflect this rapprochement between mystical traditions, resulting in the extraordinary situation in which literary works of Islamic mysticism have been understood and loved by Hindus as much as they have been by Muslims.

In its exploration of the literary culture of the Sindhi language, this chapter focuses mainly on the precolonial period, that is, before the imposition of British colonial rule over Sindh in the mid-nineteenth century. It discusses several related aspects of Sindhi literary culture: conceptions of literature and authorship; the significance of written traditions and scripts in defining literary as well as social identity; the role of oral literary traditions in the region’s religious and cultural life, and their interface with traditions of musical performance; and the intricate relationship between Sindhi and Persian—for several centuries the language of political and religious hegemony in premodern Sindh. At appropriate points in the discussion, the chapter also examines the manner in which contemporary constructions of religious and national identities have influenced Sindhi scholars in their interpretations of medieval Sindhi literary culture.
SINDH AND THE SINDHI LANGUAGE

The Sindhi language is spoken today by some 15 million people, the overwhelming majority of whom live in the province of Sindh, in Pakistan. In the aftermath of the subcontinent’s Partition in 1947, a small number of Sindhi speakers, Hindu by faith, moved to India, where they settled in the principal urban centers of north and northwestern India, including Bombay and New Delhi. Sindhis also live in diaspora in Southeast Asia, Africa, and, more recently, Britain and North America. Although the term “Sindh” is now used to refer to the southern province of Pakistan, historically it has been used more broadly to apply to the entire valley of the river Indus, extending northward into the foothills of the Himalayas. Geographically separated from neighboring areas by desert and hills in the east and west, the region of Sindh is so dependent on the river Indus, or Sindhu, as it is called indigenously, that it has been named after the river that sustains it. Indeed, the river Indus dominates all aspects of the region’s life, ranging from the economic to the religious and folkloric. Not surprisingly, the intimate relationship between the river and its bordering land prompted early British travelers to the region to compare Sindh and the Indus with Egypt and the river Nile, a comparison reinforced by the fact that the southern Indus Valley, like the Nile Valley, had also been home to an ancient civilization, that of Mohenjo Daro.

Over the centuries Sindh has served as a western gateway to South Asia. It has been exposed to waves of military invasions and cultural influences from west and southwest Asia. Consequently, its culture is eclectic. For instance, the Sindhi language, although linguistically classified as a new Indo-Aryan language, differs in several respects from the subcontinent’s other Indo-Aryan languages. It possesses four unique implosive sounds as well as a set of pronominal suffixes for verbs, certain nouns, and postpositions—a feature that it shares with neighboring Dardic (Kashmiri) and Iranian (Baluchi and Persian) languages.\(^1\) Again, unlike most other north Indian languages, the word-final short vowel in Sindhi is not only pronounced but also inflected for case. Such features, while puzzling to philologists, have led to much speculation about the origins of Sindhi. Sindhi patriots, inspired by linguistic pride, have variously proclaimed the language to be the direct descendant of the ancient language of Mohenjo Daro and hence the source of all Indian languages, the ancestor of classical Sanskrit, and even a Semitic language with heavy Iranian and Dardic influences.\(^2\)

\(^1\) For a description of these and other linguistic features of the Sindhi language, see Khubchandani 1969 and 1973b. The implosives to which I refer are \(h, \theta, \delta\), and \(\eta\); in sounding them the breath is inhaled instead of being expelled, as in the nonimplosives.

\(^2\) I refer, respectively, to al-Haq 1964: 27 (Sindhi as a descendant of the language of Mohenjo Daro); Siraj al-Haq and S. Kandappan, as cited in Hiranandani 1980: 6 (Sindhi as an an-
In recent years, Sindhi ethnonationalists, in their struggle for increased political autonomy for the province of Sindh within the state of Pakistan, have agitated for the use of Sindhi in the political domain instead of Urdu, the language promoted by the federal government as the official national language. They have acclaimed the Sindhi language and its literature as symbols of an ancient Sindhi cultural heritage, which they claim has roots extending many centuries into the past. Their claims may be justifiable to a certain extent, for the existence of a literary tradition in Sindhi can be discerned in at least the ninth century, if not earlier. Yet it can also be argued that consciousness of a distinct Sindhi literary culture is a relatively recent phenomenon—dating only to the eighteenth century—when with the collapse of the authority of the Mughals and their Persianate court culture in Sindh, there was a remarkable growth of all types of Sindhi literature. The establishment of British colonial rule in Sindh in the mid-nineteenth century also played a significant role in the development of this consciousness. It was the recognition of Sindhi as an official vernacular by the colonial government in 1851 and its use in administration and record-keeping that led to the subsequent standardization of the language and its orthography; the compilations of dictionaries, grammars, and literary histories; and the introduction of printing and print media. All of these developments were crucial to the large-scale dissemination of Sindhi language and literature and, through them, to pride in Sindh and its culture among contemporary Sindhis. In short, colonialism and modernity were pivotal to creating an “imagined community” among Sindhi speakers.3

ON LITERATURE, ORIGINS, AND AUTHORSHIP: WRITTEN LITERARY CULTURE VERSUS ORAL LITERARY CULTURE

Any discussion of the beginnings of the Sindhi literary culture has to take into account perceptions among Sindhi scholars concerning what constitutes...
literature and its function and role in a community. The first literary histories of Sindhi were compiled in the twentieth century in a political and social milieu marked by a strong British colonial presence. Consequently, Sindhi scholars were influenced by concepts of literature prevalent among British colonial officers and Orientalists, which included the idea that literature was the “complete” (totalized, totalizable) expression of the “character,” “spirit,” or “racial and cultural identity of a nation.” As Vinay Dharwadker has pointed out, this conception, which was common among late-eighteenth-century European literary thinkers, laid the foundations for the world-wide “tradition” of national literary histories, particularly in the postcolonial period of the twentieth century. Another important conception borrowed from the Europeans was that written texts, preferably composed in the ancient past, were the sources, standards, and markers of high culture and knowledge.4

It is therefore hardly surprising that the majority of Sindhi literary histories associate the beginning of Sindhi literature with the earliest available written texts reliably attributable to a scholarly personality. These are seven Sindhi verses recorded in the seventeenth-century Persian manuscript Bayān al-‘arifin (The description of the gnostics) and attributed to the religious scholar and mystic Qāzī Qādan (1463–1551). Literary critic and historian Lalsingh Ajwani, describing Qāzī Qādan as the “first authentic Sindhi poet,” laments that only seven gems should have been preserved from the treasury of verse written by him. Allama Daudpotā declares these seven verses, on account of their style and content, to be the “shining stars” of Sindhi literature; while Husam ad-Dīn Rāshdī asserts that the edifice of Sindhi literature rests on the foundations laid by Qāzī Qādan. In 1975, when an additional 118 verses attributed to Qāzī Qādan were found in a manuscript discovered in the state of Haryana, the Indian scholar Hiro Thakur, who later edited and published the newly found verses, announced ecstatically that “a chapter of Sindhi literary history, which was submerged in the ocean of the unseen, had suddenly come to light.”5

The proclamation of Qāzī Qādan as the first poet of Sindhi is, however, not a simple matter. There is evidence that poetic traditions in Sindhi go back to at least the ninth century. An Arabic chronicle records a verse recited by a visitor to Baghdad in praise of the Barmakid vazir (minister) Faḍl ibn Yāḥyā (d. 808). Although said to be in Sindhi, the verse is impossible to decipher because of distortions most likely resulting from it being recorded in Arabic script by a scribe who was not familiar with Sindhi. A Sindhi version of the Mahābhārata is believed to have existed in the eleventh century, but this, like

4. I refer, respectively, to Dharwadker 1993: 167 and Rocher 1993.
much early Sindhi literature, has not survived. What has survived from the period before the fifteenth century is a medley of texts, consisting mostly of ballads, epic romances, and religious poetry and songs believed to have been composed before Qa’i Qadan’s time—specifically during the reign of the Sumras, a dynasty that ruled Sindh between 1050 and 1350. Included in this motley corpus are fragmentary verses composed by various Sufi shaykhs (spiritual preceptors) to arouse spiritual ecstasy during the samâ’ (concert of mystical poetry and music popular among Sufi groups); religious poems, called ginâns, attributed to pirs (missionary-preachers), believed to have been active in propagating Ismâ’ili ideas in Sindh as well as Panjab and Gujarat from the twelfth century onwards; several folk romances, ballads, and panegyrics, notably the ballad of Dodo Chanesar narrating the conflict between two scions of the Sumra dynasty; the Panjras, or five-lined songs in praise of Oderolal, the warrior-saint greatly venerated by Sindhi Hindus; and the Mamui riddles in versified form, which were supposedly recited by seven headless faqirs (ascetics) after they had been beheaded in the reign of Jâm Nizâm ud-Din, or Jâm Tamâchi (d. 1509). Although aware of the existence of works predating Qa’i Qadan, most modern Sindhi literary historians nevertheless exclude them from the canon of classical literature on account of their folk or bardic character, their anonymous or questionable authorship, and their supposedly poor literary quality. For such scholars, influenced by the philological concern for original ur-texts and authentic manuscripts, the act of recording the written form plays a civilizational role by giving a literary work the stamp of authenticity. Qa’i Qadan’s seven verses play just such a role in Sindhi literary history. Thus, Memon ‘Abdu’l Majid Sindhi declares that since the verses of Qa’i Qadan are found in written form, they can be called “the foundation stone of the great building of Sindhi poetry.” Ajwani dismisses works such as the Dodo Chanesar ballad and the Mamui riddles as mere folklore and suggests that since we cannot authenticate the work attributed to earlier poets, “we might pass over their names and come to that of Qa’i Qadan, the first authentic Sindhi poet, and a bridge between the old folklore and the ‘classical’ Sindhi poetry which reached its highest point in the poetry of Shâh ‘Abdu’l La’tîf (1689–1752).” Hiro Thakur suggests that the local folk ballads, pane-

6. On the verse recited in praise of Fadl ibn Yahyâ, see Baloch 1962: 45–47. On a Sindhi version of the Mahâbhârata, see Chatterjee 1958, in which the author traces the origins of a Persian version of the Mahâbhârata by an Abu’l Hasan in 1026, via an Arabic version by Abî Salih, to a composition in Old Sindhi dating to approximately 1000 C.E.

7. The Sumra rulers are often hailed by modern Sindhi ethnonationalists because they were indigenous Sindhis who attained power after overthrowing foreign Arab rulers. See, for example, Allana 1991: 14, where the Sumra period is extolled for nationalism, patriotism, and self-sacrifice. On fragmentary verses by Sufi shaykh, see Rashdi n.d., 19–22; on ginâns, see Allana 1991: 8–14; on the ballad of Dodo Chanesar, see Schimmel 1974: 8; on the Mamui riddles, see Sindhi 1976: 35–38.
gyrics, and poetry used for religious propagation preceding Qâzî Qâdan’s poetic contributions did not possess sufficient literary quality to qualify as literature. He writes that Qâzî Qâdan raised Sindhi to a new literary standard by rescuing it from the “marshy swamp” of hyperbole that characterized the poetry of the bards and minstrels and transforming it into a mature vehicle for expressing thought and philosophy. Claiming that the Qâzî provided Sindhi with the foundation necessary for its later development as a classical language, Thakur writes that the Qâzî “removed Sindhi poetry from the hollowness of religious propagation and filled it with the pearls of deep spiritual secrets and meanings of Sufism and gnosis.”

At issue in this dismissive attitude towards the bardic and minstrel tradition (or the old folklore, as Ajwani terms it) is the definition of what constitutes literature. Works predating Qâzî Qâdan did not emanate from a scholarly milieu and were predominantly oral and performative in nature. As Albert Lord has shown, oral performative texts are synchronically and historically fluid, subject to being reformulated in performance and transmission. Since every performance results in a slightly different text, concepts from the written literary tradition, such as “author” or “original,” have no meaning at all in the oral tradition, or have a meaning quite different from the one originally assigned to them. Many of these performative texts remain solely in the realm of oral culture, being transmitted from one generation to the next. If they cease to be transmitted orally and are not recorded in writing, as seems to have occurred with many early Sindhi texts, they are rendered silent and are effectively lost for later generations.

When they were initially composed, Qâzî Qâdan’s poems were oral texts, meant to be sung or recited. What distinguished them from other Sindhi poetry of the period was their composition by an influential scholar and mystic—because of which they were recorded in a Persian manuscript. As his title indicates, Qâzî Qâdan was a man learned in Islamic law and a master of Islamic religious sciences. He was also famous for the excellence of his style of composition in Persian, the language of belles lettres in Sindh at the time. In the Tarikh-i Ma’sûmi (Ma’sûm’s chronicle), written in 1600, he is described as a person of great religious and political standing, an important advisor to Shâh Beg Arghûn, the ruler of Sindh at the time. On Shâh Beg’s

8. Thakur 1978: 71. In this paragraph I also refer to Sindhi 1972: 47–48 and Ajwani 1970: 43–44. Allana is perhaps the least dismissive of works predating Qâzî Qâdan. He calls for a “great amount of rethinking, consideration and study” of the Sumra period, which he says many critics regard as “the darkest period of Sindhi literature” because they cannot obtain any specimen of any form of literature (Allana 1991: 6–8). See also Allana 1960, in which he argues for the importance of the Sumra period for Sindhi literature, drawing examples from the gûnâms composed by early Ismâ‘îlî pîrs. He does not, however, take into account that the texts of the poems he cites may have changed during their transmission.

death in 1522, his son, Shāh Hassan, appointed Qāzī Qādan as chief Qāzī of Bhakkar, a town strategically located on the Indus and famed for its sanctuary of the legendary Zinda Pir. He held this position for twenty years.  

By ancestry and education Qāzī Qādan belonged to the intellectual elite of Sindh. He was obviously well-versed in classical Arabic and Persian, the languages customarily employed in Sindh at that time for administration, literature, and scholarship. In contrast, the use of the Sindhi language in official public circles was confined primarily to bards and minstrels, who praised through song the bravery and generosity of local rulers and heroes, or recounted local folk romances. Historical sources do not clearly indicate what may have prompted a person of the Qāzī’s status to take the bold and innovative step of composing poetry in Sindhi, employing it to express mystical and gnostic ideas. We can only surmise that it may have marked a dramatic change in his life. According to the Gulzār-i abrār (The garden of the pious), the celebrated biographical compendium of Sufis (composed between 1605 and 1610), Qāzī Qādan experienced a crisis of some sort after completing his formal education, and as a result he became more mystically inclined, capable of perceiving “the true realities underlying material objects.” The Bayān ul‘arifin mentions that for a brief time Qāzī Qādan lived in Dar Bela, where he came in contact with an ascetic (faqir) who initiated him into a new spiritual life. One of Qāzī Qādan’s Sindhi verses may in fact allude to this spiritual initiation:

I was asleep in a slumber, the jogi woke me up;  
He cleansed my heart of dirt and showed me the essence.  

Although the identity of this ascetic, who became Qāzī Qādan’s spiritual mentor, is not given in the text, he was most likely Sayyid Muḥammad Jaunpuri, the Mahdī of Jaunpur and leader of the popular chiliastic Mahdawi movement, whose reformist teachings had spread across Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Sindh to Qandahar and Herat, in what is now Afghanistan. The Mahdī’s ideas had even reached the court of the Mughal emperor Akbar through the emperor’s confidants Abū’l Fażl and Fayţī, whose father, Muḥammad Nagorī, was a prominent Mahdawi. According to the Tariḥ-i Muṣṭaḏī, Qāzī  

10. Maṣūm Bakkarī 1938: 200–201. A later chronicle, the Tuḥfat al-kirām (written in 1767–1768) throws further light on Qāzī Qādan’s family history: his great grandfather served as the Qāzī of Uch, the most important center of Sufi learning in medieval Sindh; his son, ‘Abdul Ghafīr, was a renowned scholar who earned the title asad ul‘ulamā (lion of the religious scholars); while a grandson, Muḥammad Zahir, was the Qāzī of Thatta and Lahore; his grandson through his daughter Bibi Faţima, was none other than Miān Mīr, the renowned Qadiri Sufi shaykh who was the spiritual preceptor of the Mughal prince Dārā Shikoh and his sister, Jahān Arā. See Thathawī 1959: 669–70.  
11. Thakur 1978: 18 (v. 35). The preceding details regarding Gulzār-i abrār and Bayān ul‘arifin are from, respectively, Ahmad 1909: 275 and Jotwani 1981: 47.
Qādan’s adherence to the Mahdī “brought on his head the criticism of the ‘ulamā [religious scholars] of the time,” who were bitterly opposed to this movement. However controversial it may have been, the Qāzi’s affiliation with the Mahdawi movement more than likely played a significant role in his decision to compose poetry in Sindhi; for the Mahdī and his followers frequently composed works in local dialects in order to popularize their religious revivalist message among the masses. The Gulzār-i əbrār suggests that after his initiation Qāzi Qādan took to composing mystical verses in his native Sindhi tongue. These verses were said to be so beautiful that they could not be adequately translated into other languages.\textsuperscript{12}

Thus Qāzi Qādan’s composition of mystical poetry in Sindhi, most likely inspired by his affiliation with the transnational Mahdawi movement, marks a moment of innovation in Sindhi literary history. However, Qāzi Qādan himself does not seem to have recorded his Sindhi poems in writing, very likely in keeping with the tendency among the Turko-Persian literati to consider the recording of compositions in Indic vernaculars unimportant, since these were not of the same status as Persian or Arabic works.\textsuperscript{13} The Qāzi’s poems may well have been lost to posterity if they had not made a strong impression on Shāh ‘Abdu’ll Karīm (1536–1624), a Sufi shaykh who, as I discuss later, was particularly fond of singing Sindhi poetry during the əsamā. It was only because Qāzi Qādan’s poems were quoted and recited by Shāh ‘Abdu’ll Karīm that they were recorded by the latter’s disciple Muhammad Əzā in the Bayān ul-ərifin. This text belongs to the genre called əlifzāt (oral discourses). A category of South Asian Sufi literature, the əlifzāt originated as records made by disciples of the actual words, sayings, and actions of their Sufi masters. As oral texts recorded in writing, they straddled “the boundary between text and speech.”\textsuperscript{14} Influenced in style by the Ḥadīth (tradition), a genre of Islamic religious literature that recorded the sayings and actions of the prophet Muḥammad, the purpose of the əlifzāt was to evoke the personal presence of the Sufi master. As symbolic representations of the Sufi master’s authority they eventually achieved canonical status among disciples. Thus it is only because of the fortuitous encounter of the oral Sindhi poetic tradition with the written Persian əlifzāt tradition that seven of Qāzi Qādan’s poems came to be recorded in writing and achieved their preeminent status in Sindhi literary history. Indeed, the written records of poems attributed to several Sindhi poets following Qāzi Qādan are directly or indirectly due to the əlifzāt tradition.

\textsuperscript{12} Quotation from Tārīkh-i Ma’sūmī is from Ma’sūm Bakkarī 1938: 201. On the Mahdawī movement, see Qamaruddin 1985: 184–200. The passage in the Gulzār-i əbrār to which I refer is in Ahmad 1909: 275.

\textsuperscript{13} See Asani 1988: 53–54.

\textsuperscript{14} Ernst 1992: 76.
The fame of Qāzī Qādan’s poetry was not limited to Sindh. In 1975, an additional 118 verses attributed to him were discovered in Haryana, India, in a two-hundred-year-old manuscript belonging to the Dādūpanthi sect. Soon, however, questions arose concerning the authenticity of the newly discovered verses, as not one of them indicated authorship by Qāzī Qādan through the conventional means employed in most medieval north Indian poetry, that is, the use of the poet’s pen name in the bhaṅgītā, or signature line, of a poem. Further doubts about their authorship were raised by the heading under which the poems appear in the manuscript, “Some Sindhi verses by Kāżī Kādan [sic] together with the verses of other sūdhūs [holy men],” clearly indicating that poems by other composers were included. Scholars of Sindhi literature held widely varying opinions concerning the authenticity of these verses, using different criteria to determine whether they were actually written by Qāzī Qādan. Nabi Bakhsh Khan Baloch, in a two-part article published in the Sindhi journal Mihrān, concluded, on the basis of detailed linguistic and stylistic analysis of the verses, that only seventy-eight verses are authentic, while the rest are attributable to the other poets. He used two criteria: the degree to which they conformed to standard forms of Sindhi as opposed to the colloquial dialects, and their conformity of the contents to the doctrines of Islam. These criteria envisage the existence of a “pure” Sindhi and a “pure” Islam as yardsticks of authenticity. Hiro Thakur, who published an edition of the verses under the title Qāzī Qādan jo kalām (Qāzī Qādan’s poetry), determines as many as 112 of the verses to be authentic. He identifies six verses as the work of other poets: three because they use the pen name Qāzī Maḥmūd whereas Qāzī Qādan, according to him, never used a pen name in his Sindhi poems; two because they have been attributed in other works to the poets Dādū and Shaykh Farīd; and one because its pen name refers to an unidentified poet “Harū.” Motilal Jotwani was of the opinion that with the exception of two verses, it was difficult to ascertain which of the verses were genuine and which were fraudulent.15 Girdhari Lal maintained that none of the verses were written by Qāzī Qādan; rather, they were the work of his grandson Miān Mir.

The issue of the authorship of these verses is further complicated by the fact that several of the verses attributed to him are almost identical to verses found in Shāh jo risālo (Shāh’s message). This famous poetic work is attributed to the later poet Shāh ‘Abdu’llā Hāfīz, universally acclaimed by Sindhis as the greatest of all Sindhi poets. Indeed, the Risālo also contains several verses that elsewhere have been attributed to Shāh ‘Abdu’llā Hāfīz’s grandfather, Shāh ‘Abdu’ll Karīm. Although the presence of these verses in the Risālo is frequently cited as evidence of the influence of these two poets on Shāh ‘Abdu’ll

15. I refer, respectively, to Baloch 1978 and 1979; Thakur 1978: 47, 46; and Jotwani 1981: 70.
Laṭīf, the question does arise as to why these verses appear in Shāh 'Abdu'l Laṭīf’s work in the first place. The fact that medieval Sindhi verses may be attributed to two authors simultaneously, prompting disagreement among literary scholars over the number of verses a particular poet, such as Qāzī Qādan, actually wrote, exemplifies the inadequacy of concepts such as authenticity and authorship in dealing with early Sindhi literature.

Indeed, John Hawley, in a ground-breaking study on north Indian bhakti (devotional) poetry, cautions against applying contemporary Western notions of authorship to certain types of medieval Indian devotional poetry. He convincingly demonstrates that when the pen names or proper names of poets appear in medieval Hindi poetry, they signify authorship in other ways than does “writer” as we commonly use the term. Citing definitions of the word “author” from the Oxford English Dictionary—“a person on whose authority a statement is made” and “a person who has authority over others”—Hawley argues that the occurrence of a poet’s name in a poem’s bhanitā points in the direction of authority rather than strict authorship. Analyzing the bhanitā in poems attributed to prominent north Indian bhakti poets-saints, he shows in every case that the authority of the poet in the signature verse is more significant than the actual fact of composition. For example, in the hymns of the Guru Granth Sahib, the sacred scripture of the Sikhs, one hears only the name of Guru Nanak, the first guru of the community, even in verses known to have been composed by later gurus. Guru Nanak’s name clearly serves as a symbol of authority rather than personal identity. When the gurus after him composed poetry, they did so in his name, invoking his authority. The bhanitā, Hawley points out, is frequently called čhap, meaning “stamp” or “seal”—a term that indicates its function authoritatively: what has been said is true and bears listening to. The issues that Hawley raises concerning medieval devotional Hindi poetry are clearly relevant to early Sindhi literature. We find the use of a master’s name in the bhanitā in the works of many poets, as evidenced by even a relatively recent Sindhi poet, Chainrāi Bachunal Dattaramani “Sāmi” (d. 1850), who used his mentor, Swāmī Menghraj’s, title as his nom de plume and as a way of identifying with him. Here we are dealing with traditions where not only is the distinction between writer and author, in the sense of authority, radically different from Western notions, but identification of the actual writer of a poem may be historically irretrievable. In this regard, Thomas de Bruijn makes the useful suggestion that we should consider medieval Sufi and bhakti poets not only as historical figures but also as “rhetorical personae” to whom poetry may be attributed with the growth of their “saintly image” in popular devotion.16

16. In this paragraph I draw on Hawley 1988 (quote is from 285–86); Ajwani 1970: 132 (on “Sāmi” and pen names); and Bruijn 1997: 1.
ON SCRIPTS, LITERARY CULTURE, AND IDENTITY

Although the earliest surviving Sindhi manuscripts date to only the seventeenth century, we have evidence that the language existed in a written form many centuries earlier. Various Arab geographers and travelers of the ninth and tenth centuries noted that the inhabitants of Sindh wrote their language in many different scripts. Unfortunately, they do not indicate what kind of texts were being recorded. Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 995) reports that two hundred scripts were employed in the region. Al-Bīrūnī (d. 1048) provides information concerning three specific scripts: a script called Malwari predominated in southern Sindh, the Ardhanagari in some unspecified areas, and the Saindhava in the ancient city of Bahmanwā, or al-Manṣūra. We can be reasonably certain that after the Arab conquests of the eighth century, one or more forms of the Arabic script were also current among this multitude of scripts. Indeed, on the basis of indirect evidence, Baloch suggests that the Saindhava script mentioned by al-Bīrūnī may be a Sindhi-ized Arabic script, with graphemes for the peculiarly Sindhi sounds created by adding dots to the corresponding Arabic letters. He points out that al-Bīrūnī, who was very particular in recording local culture accurately, used these improvised dotted letters in his famous work the Kitāb al-Hind (The book of India) when writing indigenous Sindhi terminology.17

Until relatively recently, there was little incentive for the development of a single uniform script for Sindhi, principally because the language was not used for official administrative or bureaucratic purposes. As a consequence, the use of multiple scripts for Sindhi prevailed well into the nineteenth century. In a paper on Sindhi alphabets presented at the July 1857 meeting of the Royal Asiatic Society (Bombay branch), Ernst Trumpp, the German Orientalist and author of a distinguished Sindhi grammar, noted the use of various alphabets and remarked that many Muslims preferred Arabic characters loaded "with a confusing heap of dots" while the Hindus employed a medley of alphabets known by the name "Baniya." The English adventurer Richard Burton also remarked that the "characters in which the Sindhi tongue is written are very numerous."18 George Stack, in his Grammar of the Sindhi Language (1849), tabulates thirteen script systems that were in use for transcribing Sindhi.

Stack’s table of Sindhi writing systems reveals not only that scripts used in Sindhi varied from one geographical region to another, but that different religious and caste groups favored distinctive script styles. For example, the Khuwajiko, or Khojki, script was used by the Khojah community, while Me-

maniko was the script of the Memans. The association of particular scripts with specific groups suggests that alphabets were important markers of identity in premodern Sindh. Most of the indigenous scripts for writing Sindhi, such as Khojki and Khudawadi, belong to a group of Indian scripts that have been classified by Grierson as Landa, or “clipped,” alphabets that were employed particularly by various trading castes in Sindh and Panjab for commercial purposes. In fact, in Sindhi, the Landa alphabets were called Baniyał or Waniko, both names being derived from nouns referring to traders. The Landa group, in turn, is related to the larger family of alphabets commonly employed by the subcontinent’s mercantile castes, showing particularly close affinity to two members of this family: Tankri (Takari), a crude system used in its many varieties by the uneducated in the lower ranges of the Himalayas and the Panjab hills, and Mahajani (Marwari), the script originating in Marwar and popularized among trading castes all over north India by the Marwari traders. Another noteworthy parallel to Landa exists also in Gujarat, where a type of script called Vaniai (from vañ̄ī, “shopkeeper”), Sarrafi (from sarrāf, “banker”), or Bodia (from bodī, “clipped” or “shorn”) is used exclusively by merchants and bankers.

Since the Landa alphabets were originally intended for commercial purposes, they were essentially a kind of a shorthand, imperfectly supplied with vowel signs. Moreover, since they lacked a comprehensive set of characters for all the sounds of the alphabet, they were liable to be misread. Burton comments that these alphabets are so useless that “a trader is scarcely able to read his own accounts, unless assisted by a tenacious memory.” A Sindhi proverb—wānikā akhara ḫuṭā, sukā payhaṇa-khān ḍhuṭā (The Waniko [i.e., Landa] letters are vowelless; [as soon as the ink is] dry, they are released from reading [i.e., illegible])—also recognizes the capriciousness of these scripts. A few of these alphabets, however, actually developed into full-fledged vehicles of literary expression through technical improvements in their vowel and consonant systems. The stimulus for this development was primarily the interest of particular groups in recording their religious literature in writing. The most prominent example of a Landa alphabet being transformed into the script of a religious community is Gurmukhi, the official script of the Sikhs. According to Sikh tradition, Guru Angad (1538–1552), the second Guru, made improvements in the Gurmukhi script when he found that the Sikh hymns written in the original Landa form were liable to be misread. This is why the alphabet is called Gurmukhi, for it came forth from the “mouth of the Guru.” The Khojki script of the Ismā‘īlī Khojah community of Sindh

also has its origin in the Landa family, its prototype being Lohanaki, or Lari, the alphabet of the Lohāna caste. Khojah tradition claims that the Hindu Lohānas comprised one of the communities among whom the Ismāʿili preacher Pir Šadr ad-Din (c. 1350–1400) most actively proselytized. Upon their conversion to the Ismāʿili tradition, the converts were given the title khojah (a popularization of the Persian khwajah, meaning “lord” or “master”) to replace the original Lohāna thākur, or thākkar, having the same meaning. The Lohanaki script used by the converts was eventually refined and polished, most likely by Pir Šadr ad-Din or one of his disciples, and given the name Khwajaki, or Khojki. It was extensively employed in the community to record a considerable corpus of religious literature, in particular the genre of the gināns.

Much more was involved in the emergence of scripts such as Gurmukhi and Khojki than recording religious literature. Since these scripts tended to be exclusive, their use contributed to the consolidation of communal or caste identity. S.S. Gandhi points out that the adoption of the Gurmukhi script was crucial for the Sikhs, as they could develop their distinctive religious culture only by adopting their own script, suited to their language. He asserts, further, that the popularization of Gurmukhi was a “well-calculated” move, designed to make its readers part from “Hindu compositions written in [Devanagari] Sanskrit.” Similarly, Khojki, by providing an exclusive means of written expression shared by followers of the Khojah pirs, was instrumental to the development of cohesion and self-identity within a widely scattered and linguistically diverse religious community.

The scriptural pluralism of precolonial Sindh, which allowed different groups, defined along caste and religious lines, to write Sindhi in their own alphabets was, however, gradually dismantled during British colonial rule. As Lachman Khubchandani has remarked, the emphasis on selecting a single writing system for Sindhi in the name of bringing order to “chaotic” diversity had its roots in Western influences. By 1851, the British had resolved to conduct their administration of Sindh in the Sindhi language. This decision created the urgent need to choose a single, uniform writing system for the language. Landa was rejected because it had too many imperfections, although it continued to be used in private circles for commercial, religious, and personal purposes. The two principal contenders for the role of an official script were the Perso-Arabic and Devanagari scripts. British officials themselves were divided on the issue: Burton advocated the adoption of a modified version of the Arabic script, while Stack pushed for a form of the

Devanagari. In 1852, as a result of effective lobbying by Muslim groups as well as Hindu scholars who were well-versed in the Persian literary tradition, the Arabic script prevailed, and B. T. Ellis, the British chairman of the Committee on Script, with the assistance of a team of native scholars, devised an alphabet of fifty-two characters based on various modifications of Arabic letters. The newly approved alphabet remained controversial, however, and was subject to attack by various parties. The German scholar Trumpp, who wrote the first grammar of Sindhi in a European language in 1872, criticized the official Arabic script and remarked: “No alphabet suits Sindhi better than the Sanskrit alphabet, Sindhi being the genuine daughter of Sanskrit and Prakrit.” Professional scribes continued to follow the earlier script traditions. Finally, half a century later, as the modified Arabic script recommended by Ellis was uniformly adopted in the schools and in official correspondence, it found universal acceptance in Sindh.

With the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, the issue of the most appropriate script for Sindhi surfaced once again. A movement for reviving Devanagari arose in India among the Hindu Sindhis, some of whom felt that the Devanagari script was more in resonance with their religious and national identity. Over the next several decades, conferences and meetings were held to debate the matter. The first one was sponsored by the Sindhi Sahitya Sabha and Sindh Hindu Seva at Bombay University in 1948. As is evident from the substantial and highly emotional literature written on this subject, the Hindu Sindhi community has remained sharply divided. Arguments for and against a particular script are closely intertwined with the larger concern for the preservation of Sindhi linguistic and cultural identity in India, thus resurrecting the ancient historical connection between script and identity among Sindhis. The group favoring the revival of Devanagari, to which belong many politicians, conflates script with religious identity. Identifying the Arabic script with “Islamicness,” they claim that Devanagari is the most perfect script in the world and the original script for the language “before it was buried underground by Muslim conquerors.” The author of a short booklet favoring the revivalist stance asks: “Should our language be inclined towards other Indian languages or foreign Arabia and Palestine?” Members of this group claim, furthermore, that since Devanagari is almost universal in India, it would be in the interest of the long-term survival of Sindhi in the country to use Devanagari. On the other hand, the small group of intellectuals and literary critics who constitute the Arabic-script lobby, contend that adoption of the Devanagari would be suicidal for the Sindhi language in India, for it would reinforce the hegemony that Hindi has over the younger generation.

and would complete the gradual absorption of young Sindhis into its literary culture. The Arabic script, they argue, would be a distinctive marker of Sindhi identity in India, serving as an important link between Indian and Pakistani Sindhis. It would also permit future generations of Hindu Sindhis to have access to the rich Sindhi literary heritage, most of which is available only in the Arabic script. A third, much smaller, group calls for the reestablishment of a modified form of the old Landa (Hatavanika) commercial alphabet, claiming that it is related to the writing system of the ancient civilization of Mohenjo Daro and thus, unlike Arabic or Devanagari scripts, is the unique and authentic heritage of Sindh. Its propagation, therefore, would be the most effective way of preserving “Sindhism” and Sindhi identity.26

THE VERNACULAR AND THE COSMOPOLITAN: SINDHI AND THE PERSIAN LITERARY TRADITION

The coming of the Arabs to Sindh in 711 C.E., followed in later centuries by the conquest of the region by Turko-Persian and Central Asian armies, had a profound and lasting impact on Sindhi civilization. With the establishment of a ruling and intellectual elite who participated in a transnational Turko-Persian literary and artistic culture, Sindh became part of a cosmopolitan world that encompassed not only other areas of north India but also Iran, Central Asia, and Ottoman Turkey. Within this cosmopolitan cultural nexus there was a steady exchange of poets, scholars, and artists, facilitated by a shared literary language—Persian. Under Mughal rule in Sindh, as elsewhere in India, the Persian language, as the official language of administration and record, was used to create, from heterogeneous religious and social groups, a class of allies who shared a common literary ethos.27 Well represented in this class were many local Muslims as well as Hindus, particularly Kayasthas and Khatris, who had acquired exceptional competence in Persian language and literature and served at the very highest levels of the imperial bureaucracy. The use of Persian became so widespread by the seventeenth century that even middle-level Hindu bureaucrats associated with the Mughal state appropriated and used Perso-Arabic expressions, such as bismillah (with the name of Allah), just as their Muslim counterparts did. As the sole language of historiography in premodern Sindh, Persian was used by bureaucrats and


27. For a detailed discussion of the significance of Turko-Persian culture, see Canfield 1991. For a discussion of the politics of Persian literary culture at the Mughal court and the participation of the Hindus, see Alam 1998.
scholars in writing a number of histories and biographies, which provide important information about the province, its rulers, and members of its elite classes. Among the most significant are the Chachnāma (The book of Chach), Tārikh-i Maṣūmī, Tārikh-i Tāhirī (Tāhir’s chronicle), Tuhfat ul-Kirām (The gift of the generous), and Bayān ul-ārifīn.

The ascendancy of Persian as the medium of intellectual and artistic expression as well as government administration had a profound impact on the Sindhi language. The hegemonic status of Persian impeded the development of Sindhi by limiting its function to a language of oral discourse and folk culture and discouraging its use among the elite for literary and scholarly purposes. Indeed in Sindh, as elsewhere in north India, the intelligentsia regarded only Persian and, to a lesser extent, Arabic as appropriate languages for literature. Consequently, they devoted much of their talent to composing nayrās (imitations), poems in Persian imitating the classical poems of renowned poets in the greater Persianate world and their peers, as a way of demonstrating their literary prowess. Their poetry was remarkable for drawing all of its symbols and metaphors from “the unseen and unexperienced sights, sounds and smells of Persia and Central Asia” while completely rejecting Indian life and landscape as poetic resources. Indeed, in their view, the indigenous north Indian vernaculars were not fit for the recording of literature. Thus, it was not at all unusual to find a semi-apologetic tone in the works of Sindhi poets, since they felt they were using an unworthy medium of speech.28

By the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, however, as a result of a complex combination of factors, including the collapse of the great patron of the Persian language—the Mughal state—and the emergence of independent dynasties in Sindh, the reluctance to use Sindhi as a literary vehicle was gradually overcome. In contrast to other regions of India, where the move toward the vernacular seems to have originated among individuals of lower socioeconomic status, the initiative in Sindh came from members of the elite classes. Qazī Qādan, Shāh Ḥabīl Karīm, Shāh Ḥabīl Latīf and Sachal Sarmast (d. 1829), commonly hailed in contemporary works of Sindhi literature as some of the greatest and most popular Sindhi poets, were members of the aṣhrāf (class of “honorable people,” aristocracy) who claimed an Arab, Persian, Turkish, or Afghan ancestry and were well-versed in both Persian and Arabic. Although historical and literary sources are remarkably silent about the reasons these poets chose to write much of their work in Sindhi, their social status and their position within the Persianate literary

tradition played a role in the acceptance of their Sindhi compositions as works of literature.29

The fact that these preeminent Sindhi poets were integral to the Persianate culture has led Ajwani to comment that Persian language and literature was, in fact, a catalyst in the formation of Sindhi literature. Although there is some justification for this assessment, the influence of the Persian tradition on the early Sindhi poets is not always evident. Qāız Qādan and Shāh ‘Abdu’l Karīm, in particular, employ in their verse a form of Sindhi that is virtually free from Persian or even Arabic influences—a remarkable fact given their extensive familiarity with both languages. Barely a handful of Arabic and Persian words occur in their verses, and they never incorporate Arabic verses from the Qur’an or allude to verses from Persian poems, as many later Sindhi poets were inclined to do. In terms of verse forms, they employed only traditional Sindhi ones, including the dāh (dohā), soraṭa, baro dāh, and tūneri dāh.30 These early poets appear to have consciously been keeping the local Sindhi tradition apart from the Persian tradition. This tendency became less pronounced in the work of later poets, particularly Shāh ‘Abdu’l Laṭif and Sachal Sarmast, who tended to draw freely from both traditions in their compositions, thus synthesizing them.

In fact, as time passed the influence of Persian on Sindhi poetry became more pronounced. By the late eighteenth century there was a noticeable Persianization of vocabulary and poetic forms, and in the nineteenth century the “language was made more pliable according to the exigencies of difficult Persian prosody.” The preference for Persian poetic forms such as the qaṣīdah, masnawi, and the ghazal became so widespread that compositions in traditional Sindhi poetic forms virtually ceased, causing critics to expound on the “tyranny of the Persian models that forces poets to imitate rather than initiate.”31

29. Shāh ‘Abdu’l Karīm and Shāh ‘Abdu’l Laṭif were sayyids, descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad, while Sachal’s genealogy has been traced to ‘Umar Faruq (d. 644), the second Islamic caliph.
30. On Persian as catalyst for Sindhi, see Ajwani 1970: 43. On verse forms, see Thakur 1978: 79–80 and Jotwani 1979: 34. The dāh (dohā) is a couplet in which each line contains twenty-four mātās, or metrical instants. Each of the two lines is subdivided into carans (hemistichs) of thirteen and eleven mātās. This results in a total of four carans in a dāh: the first and third carans consist of thirteen mātās while the second and fourth have eleven mātās. The rhyme occurs at the end of the hemistiches with eleven mātās.

The soraṭa is simply an inverted dāh. Its first and third carans contain eleven mātās, while the second and fourth carans contain thirteen. The rhyme retains its place at the end of the eleven-mātā carans, so it occurs in the middle of the verse rather than at the end. In the dāh the first and fourth have thirteen mātās each, while the second and third have eleven mātās, both eleven-mātā hemistichs rhyming at their close. The baro dāh is the inverse form of the tūneri dāh, with the first and fourth hemistichs containing eleven mātās each and bearing the rhyme.
Indeed Mirzâ Qalîch Beg (d. 1929), the indefatigable late-nineteenth-century Sindhi writer, in his poetic collection Amulha Mānîk (Priceless gem) applied to Sindhi verse every single meter and rhetorical device of the Persian tradition. That the process of Persianization was accompanied by the phenomenal growth in the use of Sindhi among the literati indicates that widespread acceptance of Sindhi among the Turko-Persian ḥashâfī was only possible if the language were Persianized—a phenomenon that is noticeable in the development of other Indo-Muslim languages as literary vehicles, specifically Urdu and, to a limited extent, Bangla. The Persianization of Sindhi is significant, since it transformed the language into a carrier of the Persian literary tradition even after it replaced Persian as the official language of record and lower-level administration during the British colonial period. In an era when their status was being challenged by British rule and Westernization, the Muslim elite could, through the Persianization of the Sindhi language, continue to preserve their cultural identity, which was closely tied to the Turko-Persian tradition. It was only with the rise of nationalist and patriotic poets in the early decades of the twentieth century that some poets broke with the Persian models and returned to the traditional Sindhi forms and themes of the early virtuosos. This change, both in form and content, was initiated by Kishinchand Tirathdas Khatri (d. 1947), popularly known by his pen name “Bewas,” who founded what has been called the modern school of poetry. Members of this school—which is comprised of several important poets of the contemporary period, including Shaykh Ayâz—focused their writings on Sindh, the Sindhi people, and their problems. In addition to reviving traditional Sindhi forms, they also created new ones, some of which were modeled after European forms, including free verse and the sonnet.  

THE ROLE OF SINDHI LITERARY TRADITIONS IN RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL LIFE

Poetry composed by individuals associated with various religious movements forms the most significant component of Sindhi literature in the pre-British period. A variety of religious personalities, ranging from Sufi shaykhs and saint poets to Ismā‘īlī fîrs and Mahdawi preachers, adopted Sindhi as a vehicle for communicating their ideas. Much of this verse was intended to undermine the authority and worldview of dominant religious institutions and the established hierarchy of ritual specialists (priests) and religious scholars of the learned traditions enshrined in Arabic and Sanskrit. Instead, as in the case of much medieval north Indian vernacular poetry, there is stress on an interiorized form of religion involving the search for salvation under the guidance of a master. In this personal search, formal learning is not only un-

necessary but may in fact be a hindrance. While many poets challenged established authorities and norms in varying degrees, perhaps the most startling example is Sachal Sarmast. Ajwani, in his book on Sindhi literature, subtitled the chapter on Sachal “Poet of Revolt.” Renowned for his lyrical kafis, Sachal was an outspoken critic of formal religion who harshly attacked all upholders of orthodoxy, both Hindu Brahmins (priests) and Muslim mullas (religious scholars). They, in turn, attempted on several occasions, though unsuccessfully, to have him condemned to the gallows for his heretical views. His criticisms of their ignorance, self-aggrandizement, and hypocrisy were particularly caustic. In the following verse he criticizes mullas who, he claims, offer prayers for the dead because they want to enjoy the rich dishes served to them after the funeral:

The Mullas offer prayers for the dead ardently for the sake of dishes;
With a staff in their hand, they are magnetized by cauldrons;
They settle down to dinner and fill their bellies to the full;
The Mullas say that they eat not, but they consume large vessels;
Sachu speaks the truth—they strut near the ovens.33

As his pen name, “Sarmast”—the Intoxicated One—appropriately indicates, Sachal was a proponent of the ecstatic variety of Sufism, which stresses passionate love as a means of approaching the Divine.

Divine knowledge is revealed to lovers,
What do Mullas and Kazis know of it?

Hear, O Kazi! the refuting argument of love.
We have love and you have knowledge,
How can you be reconciled with us?

We are strongly afflicted by love,
Strike hard the pate of the Mulla.34

Sindhi was used to express antiestablishment views and alternative conceptualizations of religiosity primarily because it promoted the wide spread of ideas, since the vernacular was understood by a broader segment of the population. The vernacular also provided a wealth of oral poetic forms, which were especially suitable for communicating with illiterate members of society. With the popularization of Sindhi as a literary medium in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the language was universally adopted by a wide spectrum of groups and writers, including those stressing the revival of religious orthodoxy and orthopraxy. In this regard, Miyan Abil Hassan’s Muqad-

dimat as-ṣalāt (An introduction to the Muslim ritual prayer), a long poem on Islamic ritual practice composed in 1700, ushered in a new style of didactic poetry that employed a very simple form of Sindhi. This style became especially popular among members of the conservative Naqshbandi Sufi order, who in response to the prevalence of what were perceived to be syncretistic and superstitious practices among Muslims, launched a campaign to reform the practice of Islam in Sindh. Concerned that most Muslims in Sindh were not familiar with the fundamentals of their faith, Naqshbandi authors produced over fifty instructional books on various Islamic matters in Sindhi.°

Makhdum Muhammad Hashim (d. 1761), who was among the most prolific of these writers, wrote many educational poems on the essentials of Islam in “unassuming verses with rhymes either in long a or in -n,” including one that dealt with 1,292 problems of Islamic law and behavior. In 1749 he also composed the Tafsir Hashimi (Hashim’s exegesis), a rhymed commentary in Sindhi on the last part of the Qur’an, which became immensely popular, for it made the Arabic scripture accessible in the vernacular.°° It was one of the first books printed in Sindhi in the mid-nineteenth century. According to Husam ad-Din Rashdi, the literary activities of the Naqshbandi reformers inspired other literati to write in Sindhi. As a result, a phenomenal number of books in Sindhi were produced on a variety of other subjects. Especially noteworthy were the enormous number of full and partial translations of the Qur’an by a spectrum of religious reformists. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as a result of the impact of British colonial rule, various prose genres imitating Western ones were also cultivated. With the establishment of the printing press and the spread of literacy, Sindhi prose was used to promote social reform on a wide variety of issues. Noteworthy in this regard were Kauromal Chandanmal Khilnani (d. 1916), reverentially referred to as the father of Sindhi prose, whose essay urging the education of women, Pako Pah, has been compared to Mill’s essay on liberty; and Mirza Qalich Beg, who wrote, among his many publications, Zinat, the first original novel in Sindhi. Through the novel’s idealized heroine Beg demonstrated that an improvement in general societal well-being cannot take place without the education of women.°°°

Although contemporary religious and social reformists have relied on the written or printed word to communicate their ideas, Sindhi literary culture has been overwhelmingly poetic in nature for most of its history, primarily functioning in aural and oral modes. Indeed, Sindhi poetry is so fused with musical traditions that to recite a verse inevitably means to sing and perform it, frequently with musical accompaniment. This is true even when a verse

is available in written form, for it needs to be recited or sung aloud to inspire listeners. That singing and music enhance the impact of Sindhi poetry on listeners is evident even today, when thanks to the advent of cassette culture in Sindh, there is a much wider dissemination of Sindhi mystical verse in the aural/oral format than through the printed text. The close connection of poetry and musical performance made it essential for a poet to know prosodic meter as well as the relationship between meter and melody. Thus Shâh 'Abdu'l Laṭîf is also renowned for his expert knowledge of Sindhi music and is said to have had professional singers accompanying him to help sing his poetry. His poetry, it is claimed, was not composed in the sense in which modern poetry is composed; rather “it was sung and the message emerged dressed in an oral word for those who heard it.” Shâh 'Abdu'l Laṭîf’s successor Sachal Sarmast set his verse to predetermined melodies. According to hagiographical accounts, music was his inspiration. When the sârângi (a stringed instrument played with a bow, similar to the fiddle) and the tabla (drum) were played together, he would fall into a trance and poetry “flowed from his lips like limpid rain water and his amanuenses plied fast their pens to collect the pearls of his divine utterances.” Furthermore, Sachal is said to have been initiated into the spiritual life by a dervish applying the bow of a sârângi to his chest, a tradition that clearly conceives of the poet as a musical instrument. Music is said to have similarly affected the early poet Shâh 'Abdu'l Karîm, who according to the Bayân ul-ârifîn, used to frequently experience wajd, or spiritual ecstasy, when he heard music. He also composed some of his poetry while in ecstasy. As a young man he used to sing Sindhi verses while working in the fields, thus “intoxicating” the workers.38

The close association of devotional poetry with music is a prominent feature of the Indian religious landscape. This relationship encouraged Sufi shaykhhs to compose in Sindhi and other vernaculars verses that could be used in the sama’, a ritual often involving ecstatic forms of singing and dancing. They recognized that vernacular languages were better suited for the purposes of the sama’ than Persian; for unlike the Persian, north Indian poetic traditions fused poetry, melody, and worship. Sufis throughout north India recognized the powerful impact of poetry in the vernaculars on listeners, especially when it was sung to musical accompaniment.39 Gesû Darâz, the famous fifteenth-century Chishti shaykh who wrote several works on Sufism in Persian, commented that each language is endowed with a unique


characteristic. For him, none was as effective as “Hindawi” (meaning the Indian vernacular) for mystical songs, since songs composed in it are “subtle and elegant, penetrating deeply into the heart and arousing humility and gentleness. When hearing them, people become more aware of their faults.” In the sixteenth century, Sindhi’s fame as a language for mystical poetry seems to have spread well beyond the borders of Sindh. Evidence from neighboring regions, such as Saurashtra and Gujarat, indicates that Sindhi performers were famed for the beauty and sweetness with which they sang mystical poetry. Badāūnī, the chronicler in the court of Akbar, writes that he experienced a spiritual state when he heard two Sindhi Sufis singing a melody in mournful tones. There are also records indicating that a group of Sindhi mystics had migrated in the mid-sixteenth century to Burhanpur, where they attained fame for their recitation of Sindhi verses during sama‘ sessions.\(^{40}\)

A distinctive feature of the relationship between poetry and music in the Sindhi tradition is the association of particular \textit{surs}, or melodies, with specific narrative themes, a development probably unique among north Indian languages.\(^{41}\) By tradition, once a melody had been identified with a particular theme or story, it could not be used for any other type of verse. Frequently the identification of a \textit{surs} with a particular theme was so close that the melody was named after the theme. Thus the \textit{surs} employed when singing songs of Maruī, the heroine of the folktale \textit{Umar-Maruī}, came to be called “Maruī” and was widely used for singing poems pertaining to sorrow and separation, since these were the central themes associated with Maruī as she longed to return to her ancestral village, Malir. Incidentally, Sindhi musicians of the sixteenth century had become so famous for their rendition of the \textit{Umar-Maruī} epic in \textit{surs} Maruī that Akbar commanded them to perform it in his presence.\(^{42}\)

The thematic relationship between musical mode and Sindhi mystical poetry is demonstrated explicitly in early manuscripts in which poems were arranged in chapters according to the \textit{surs} in which they were intended to be sung. The first collection to be so arranged was that of Miyān Shāh ‘Ināt (‘Ināyatullāh Rizwī), whose poems were grouped under nineteen \textit{surs}. The great classical compendium of Sindhi mystical poetry, Shāh ‘Abdu’l Laṭīf’s \textit{Risālā}, is arranged into thirty chapters, each devoted to a \textit{surs}; and most of these are associated with either a specific folktale or a certain theme. According to traditional hagiographical accounts, Shāh ‘Abdu’l Laṭīf, with the


\(^{41}\) Ishqī 1982: 47.

\(^{42}\) Baloch 1982: 52–53.
help of Cancal and Aṭal, two brothers who were professional musicians, standardized the entire Sindhi system of sur music while he was arranging and editing the Risalo. In the process, he was instrumental in improving and preserving traditional Sindhi music. Tradition claims that he also revised the performance of vocal music by discarding the solo performance and establishing the chorus in its place. In addition, he is credited with inventing the five-string tanbūrā, a drone instrument different from the four-string tanbūrā used elsewhere on the subcontinent and also from the similar instrument used in the Middle East and Iran. He is also said to have established a music academy at Bhītshāh, where modes of executing sur music were perfected by a trained group of musicians who performed mystical songs every evening after the ritual prayers. The tradition of these concerts has continued into the present day, although now they are usually held only on a Thursday night—which is called the night of Shāh’s rāga.43

Besides being performed during the samā, mystical Sindhi verse was often sung at other gatherings involving worship. For example, Qāzī Qādan’s verses are found in an eighteenth-century manuscript containing a repertoire of devotional poetry attributed to various north Indian bhaktas (devotees) and sants and sung by members of the Dādūpanthī sect during their assemblies. Over time, such liturgical use enhanced the status of the poetry and its authors. As the reciters came to understand the poetry as embodying spiritual truths, it began to play the role of a religious scripture. Such a transformation into scripture is particularly evident in the case of Shāh ‘Abdu’l Latīf’s Risalo, which has been described as the “sacred book of the Sindhis, admired and memorized by Hindus and Muslims equally.” Sindhis frequently quote the following verse by Shāh ‘Abdu’l Latīf supporting the claim that his poems are “messages from God, revealed to him, and so had to be proclaimed and communicated”:

Think not that these are mere couplets, they are signs.  
They bear you to your True Friend and inspire you with true love.44

Similar claims are made about Sachal Sarmast’s poems, which have been described as “divine utterances.” The scriptural status of these works is further enhanced by associating them with more conventional religious scriptures. Thus the Risalo has been regarded as a commentary on the Qur’ān in Sindhi and has been called the “Hindu’s Gita,” while Sāmī’s Slōkā have been described as “rendering the teaching of the Veda in the Sindhi language.” Significantly, this transformation of poetic genres into scripture is also manifest among poetic texts in neighboring vernacular traditions as evidenced

44. I quote, respectively, from Schimmel 1974: 14, Jotwani 1979: 62, and Burton 1851: 83.
by the Ādi Graṅth (The preeminent scripture) among the Sikhs of Panjab and the Dādū Bānī (Dādū’s voice) among the Dādūpanthi sect in Rajasthan.45

SINDHI LITERARY CULTURE AND THE FOLK/BARDIC TRADITION

Much premodern Sindhi literature drew heavily on the tradition of folktales and legends for its symbols and themes. Indeed, leading literary critic Ajwani comments that the bulk of Sindhi literature revolves around seven folk romances that provide the raw material for the lyrics, narrative poems, and philosophical dissertations of nearly every poet and some prose writers. He goes so far as to claim that “the student of Sindhi literature will have an imperfect understanding of even twentieth century Sindhi literature if he has no knowledge of these seven legends.”46

The central role that the folk/bardic tradition plays in Sindhi literature may be explained by the manner in which the literary tradition developed in the period of the classical poets, from approximately the mid-sixteenth century to the late eighteenth century. During this period, as we have seen, poets from the elite ashrāf class (such as Qāzī Qādan, Shāh ‘Abdu’l Karīm, Miyān Shāh ‘Ināt, Shāh ‘Abdu’l Laṭīf, and Sachal Sarmast), who were intimately familiar with the Persianate tradition, began to compose poetry in Sindhi. They turned to the indigenous nonliterate folk/bardic tradition for poetic forms, symbols, and metaphors that would provide their compositions with a distinctly Sindhi ethos as opposed to a Persian one. The crossing over of the oral folk tradition into the literate elite tradition effected a synthesis that had a long-lasting impact on Sindhi literary culture.

The rich tradition of folk romances was one of the most significant elements to be incorporated in this fusion. Most likely guided by the well-established convention in Persian poetry of expressing mystical ideas through esoteric interpretations of romantic epics (maqāna), these poets attempted to do the same for Sindhi material. Particularly significant in this regard was Shāh ‘Abdu’l Laṭīf, who built on the pioneering efforts of his predecessors, especially Miyān Shāh ‘Ināt, and developed a distinctively Sindhi style of assimilating folk romances into mystical poetry.47 These romances formed the framework for his magnum opus, the Risālo.

Unlike poets who composed mystical romantic epics in Persian or other Indian vernaculars, such as Hindi or Bangla, Shāh ‘Abdu’l Laṭīf does not retell the Sindhi tales in their entirety. Rather, he assumes that his audience is fa-

45. On Sachal’s poems as divine utterances, see Advani 1971: 4. On the Risālo as commentary on the Qur’an, see Brohi 1992: 106. The description of Sāmī’s Slokā is from Ajwani 1970: 132, 139.
47. See Asani 1993.
miliar with their plots. He is interested not so much in narrating the stories as in focusing on those dramatic moments and events whereby he can best convey Quranic and Sufi ideas on the spiritual significance of the human situation. He has structured the Risālo’s individual chapters so that segments expressing the feelings and thoughts of the main characters of the folktales alternate with verses containing his own exegetical remarks. These, for the most part, elaborate upon the elements in the story that explain the nature of the soul’s relationship to the Divine. His particular concern is the love and the suffering the soul must experience as it is transformed on the spiritual path and attains salvation through the vision of God.  

An important aspect of the technique adopted by Sindhi poets who impart mystical meaning to romances is their focus on the heroine. The heroine in these stories always searches for her lost beloved until she either finds him or dies of thirst and heat in the mountains or drowns in the Indus. The heroine represents the soul yearning for the Divine Beloved. In the skillful hands of these poets, especially Shāh 'Abdu'l Latīf, the yearning heroines of the folk romances become symbols of the soul, who is separated from her Divine Beloved and has to undergo great tribulation and painful purification in her quest:

My body burns. Though consumed
by a roasting fire, I make my quest
I am parched with the Beloved’s thirst
Yet in drinking I find no rest
Even if I were to drain the ocean wide
Not a single sip would grant me zest.

The poets ingeniously endow these heroines with interpretations that illustrate important Quranic and mystical concepts. Fundamental Sufi ideas concerning the transformation of the nafs (the lower self) are presented most effectively: Marui—the village damsel who, pining for her parental home, spurns the wealth and status offered her by her suitor, 'Umar—represents the soul ever yearning for the divine homeland in which it originated. The foolish queen Lila, who for the sake of a fabulous necklace “sold” her husband to her maid for the night, represents the “commanding lower self” (nafs-i ammara) (Qur'ān 12:53) attracted to the material world and needing to be purified and transformed into a “soul at peace” (nafs-i mutma'inna) (Qur'ān 89:27) before it can be accepted by God. The heroine Sassui, whose beloved,

48. Schimmel 1976: 182–84. H. T. Sorley feels that the constant interruptions in the narrative are unpleasant to European taste and make a truly effective translation unconvincing to European readers. The jerkiness and lack of continuity caused by breaks in narrative and thought are, according to him, defects that have to be tolerated. See Sorley 1966: 250.

49. Sorley 1966: 255. The rather archaic original translation by Sorley has been modernized.
Puñhuñ, was kidnapped while she slept peacefully, represents the soul in the “sleep of negligence” (khwāb-i ghaflat), ensnared in the material world and oblivious to God. She sings:

As I turned inwards and conversed with my soul,
There was no mountain to surpass and no Puñhuñ to care for;
I myself became Puñhuñ . . .

Only while Sassui did I experience grief.50

By interpreting the folk heroine as a symbol of the soul, Sindhi mystical poets incorporated into their poems the Indian literary convention of representing the soul as a virahini, a loving and longing woman, usually a young bride or bride-to-be who awaits her beloved or is involved in a long and arduous quest for him. Most likely originating in the plaintive songs sung by village women in periods of separation from their husbands, this symbolism and the associated concept of viraha, “longing in separation,” occur in almost all the vernacular literatures of north India. The virahini has enjoyed a great deal of popularity in a wide variety of South Asian religious contexts, where she is often identified as the symbol for the human soul who, according to convention, is always to be represented in the feminine mode before a deity who is male.51

Not surprisingly, the concept of the virahini and the representation of the soul as feminine led to the adoption of many elements from the women’s folk song traditions into Sindhi mystical poetry, though the poets were male.52

There is a significant quantity of Sindhi women’s vocabulary and idiom, including linguistic forms such as the diminutive for tender and affectionate address, and women’s spinning and weaving songs. Perhaps the most famous of these is in the chapter of the Risālu titled Kapā’iti (Spinning wheel) after the tunes sung by women during the spinning process. Shāh ‘Abdul Laṭif draws a parallel between the woman who is spinning and the soul occupied with the recollection of God. He cleverly extends the Quranic imagery of God as the purchaser of the soul (Qur’ān 9:111): Just as the thread has to be finely spun to fetch a good price from the buyer, so the human heart has to be refined and prepared with utmost care before the merchant-God can purchase it.53

51. See Hawley 1986: 231–56. The most renowned use of the virahini in Indian literature occurs in poetry dedicated to the deity Kṛṣṇa, in which the gopālas (cowmaids), in particular Rādhā, express their longings for their elusive beloved.
MEDIEVAL SINDHI POETS AND THEIR RELIGIOUS IDENTITY:
CONTEMPORARY PERCEPTIONS

Modern literary historians of Sindhi have intensely debated the religious identity of the great poets of medieval Sindh: were they Hindu or Muslim? Their own contemporary conceptions of what constitutes Hinduism and Islam, as well as nationalist discourses, have profoundly affected the framework and the context in which those poets and their works are interpreted. Pakistani Muslim (and some Western) writers stress the Islamic heritage and educational background of the major poets, highlighting their use of quotes from Islamic scriptural texts such as the Qur’an and the Hadith (traditions of the Prophet Muhammad) and the influence on their work of great Sufi personalities, such as Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī or ʿAttār. For example, H. T. Sorley writes in his book on Shāh ʿAbduʾl Laṭīf that “it would be a great mistake however to assume that the religion of the poet is anything but that of Islam.” For scholars of this camp, even the Hindu poet Śaṁi expresses virtually the same Sufi teachings as Muslim poets, notwithstanding his explicit statements that his verses are an interpretation of the Veda.\(^{54}\)

Indian Hindu historians, on the other hand, insist that the major Sindhi poets were Muslims in name only and that the type of Sufism they practiced was influenced by the Advaita (nondualistic) school of Hindu philosophy, thus claiming them for the Hindu tradition. Motilal Jotwani questions whether Sufism, which clearly had a profound impact on these poets, is Islamic in the first place: “Sufism as Islamic mysticism is a contradiction in terms, for Sufism never had a comfortable place in Islam.” According to him, the Indian type of Sufism that the Sindhi Muslim poets espoused was a “Sufism tempered with the thought of Vedanta and the emotion of Bhakti.” For him, therefore, the verse of these poets falls into the nirguna (attributeless) category of bhakti poetry. Likewise, L. H. Ajwani maintains that the influential factor affecting these poets was not Sufism but a brand of bhakti that evolved out of the “mingling of Iranian type of Sufism with Indian Vedantism” and became the “bedrock of Sindhi literature.” To really appreciate this poetry, he states, one must be equally conversant with the poetry of Indian sani poets and Persian Sufi poets, particularly Rūmī. Consequently, he takes issue with Sorley’s study of Shāh ʿAbduʾl Laṭīf for emphasizing the poet’s Islamic roots and refusing to recognize that he, as well as other poets after him, also inherited a legacy that included the Hindu Upaniṣads and the Vedas. Ajwani concludes his assessment of Shāh ʿAbduʾl Laṭīf’s religious identity by stating: “Were Shah really an Islamic poet, pure

and simple, he would not have made the appeal he has made to the Hindu mind and sentiment.”

Such conflicting interpretations are provoked not merely by the nationalist or religiously partisan agendas of contemporary writers. In fact, the difficulty of categorizing the religious identity of these mystic poets and the nature of their message can be traced to the premodern period, when their works also seem to have enjoyed an ecumenical appeal across sectarian boundaries. Notwithstanding the specific religious affiliations that the great mystic poets may or may not have claimed for themselves, their poetry was nevertheless commonly included in the corpus of devotional literature of several religious groups. Thus, for example, we find that the poetry of Qāżi Qādān, who by sectarian affiliation belonged to the chiliasm- Mahdawi movement, circulated among the Qādiri Sufis (as evidenced by its inclusion in the Bayān al-‘arīfīn), the Dādūpanthis (verses attributed to him are found in a manuscript discovered in a Dādūpanthis monastery in Haryana); and widely in non-Muslim circles in Rajasthan where a type of nirguna devotional poetry was recited. We can observe the identical phenomenon in the Panjab, where the Farīd Bānī (Farīd’s voice), a significant corpus of poetry traditionally attributed to the Muslim Sufi master Farīd al-Dīn Ganj-i Shakkar (d. 1265), was included in the Sikh scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, notwithstanding several centuries of Sikh-Muslim political strife. Indeed, in a recent study of the multiple contexts in which the Panjabi poet Bullhe Shāh’s verses are interpreted, Robin Rinehart calls this phenomenon “portability,” since Bullhe Shāh’s poems were “portable” into different frameworks—Sikh, Vedanta, and Sufi.

Portability is a result of the mystic poets mainly using symbols and metaphors that are not anchored doctrinally to any specific religious tradition and so lend themselves to an open system of interpretation. So also, interpreters of this poetry draw elements from the same source and carry them into different discursive spaces; thus this poetry can easily be interpreted in multiple, and even contradictory, ways. Since the poets often incorporated other elements intrinsic to Sindhi culture into their poetry, including folk romances and music, the literature they produced was able to appeal to lis-


56. See Callewaert and De Brabandere 1980: 28–48. Qāżi Qādān’s poetry appears in the following manuscripts: nos. 2 (dated 1672) and 12 (1636) at the Dadu Mahavidyalay, Jaipur; nos. 12 (1664) and 34 (1658) in the Vidya Bhusan Collection, Jaipur; and no. 875 (1675) in the film collection of the GND University in Amritsar.


58. Rinehart 1997: 34.
teners in a variety of religious contexts. Each listener could interpret a common core of thematic, symbolic, and cultural elements within his or her own religious framework. This explains why a compilation of Sindhi mystical poetry, such as the Risālo, has ecumenical appeal across religious boundaries today, being revered by both Muslim and Hindu Sindhis as a “sacred book”; or why the verse of the medieval Hindu poet Sāmī “delights all Sindhi hearts.”

EPILOGUE: SINDHI LANGUAGE, ETHNONATIONALISM, AND IDENTITY IN MODERN TIMES

This survey thus far has highlighted the various roles of Sindhi language and literature in the religious and cultural life of Sindh through the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century the consolidation of British colonial rule, and the accompanying spread of the English language and Western culture, had profound implications for Sindhi literary culture, revolutionizing patterns of thought and expression. The consequences of colonial rule and modernity, ranging from the spread of print media to the emergence of new literary forms, affected literary cultures across the subcontinent. Religiously and communally based nationalisms, which arose in reaction to colonial rule, also deeply impacted literary cultures in South Asia as languages were employed as symbols to mobilize group identity at a mass level. For Muslim nationalists Urdu, written in the Perso-Arabic script, became a symbol for Islam and Islamic identity, while Hindu groups advocated a Sanskritized form of Hindi, written in the Devanagari script, as representative of Hindu identity. Eventually, the encounter between competing nationalisms resulted in the partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan in 1947. The Partition and its aftermath had an especially powerful impact on Sindh. Sindh became one of the constituent provinces of the predominantly Muslim state of Pakistan, and many Hindu Sindhis sought refuge in India. Linguistically, Sindhi has been developing in different directions in the two countries. Sindhi in Pakistan has been heavily Perso-Arabized to project an Islamic identity, while Sindhi in India has drifted towards increased Sanskritization in conformity with general pan-Indian trends.

Since Partition, the fundamental issue for Sindhis in both Pakistan and India has been the preservation of Sindhi identity within the two newly established nation-states. In the interests of promoting a unified nationalism, these countries have sought to eliminate or at least not actively promote linguistic diversity among their populations. Consequently, for Sindhi ethnonationalists working to preserve Sindhi identity, promotion of the Sindhi language has become a major rallying point. In the pre-Partition period, the

Sindhi language had been used successfully to express a distinctive Sindhi identity: In the 1930s, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Ghulam Hussain Hidayatullah, Ghulam Murtaza Syed, and others had emphasized the social and linguistic distinctiveness of Sindhi culture from that of Bombay as a way of advocating the separation of Sindh from the Bombay Presidency. As a result, the colonial government recognized Sindh as a separate province in 1936, and Sindhi became the major language of schooling, official correspondence, and record-keeping at lower levels of administration in the province. An Office of Sindhi Translator was even established to translate all circulars, laws, and acts from English into Sindhi.

With Partition the position of Sindhi as the dominant language in the province of Sindh was threatened by the large influx of Urdu-speaking Muslim *muhajirs* (emigrants) from India. Eventually constituting over fifty percent of the population in Karachi and Hyderabad—the major cities of Sindh—the *muhajirs* began, through their education and wealth, to displace Sindhis economically. To exacerbate matters, the *muhajirs*, as well as the Panjabi elite who ruled the state of Pakistan, began promoting Urdu as a marker of Pakistani identity. Matters came to a head in 1957–1958, when students at the University of Karachi were forbidden to write exams in Sindhi, which was relegated, along with other languages spoken in Pakistan, to the status of a regional language. Urdu was promoted as the language unifying all Pakistanis under the one nation, one language policy. The growing sense of deprivation—cultural, sociopolitical, and political—felt by Sindhis of all classes, particularly in urban areas, fueled a Sindhi language movement, which became the vehicle to express all kinds of other grievances against the Panjabi-dominated Pakistani state and military. Tensions between Sindhi and Urdu speakers sparked off language riots in 1971–1972, supported by a Sindhi ethnonationalist movement, Jeay Sindh (Long Live Sindh), which was headed by G.M. Sayed. He demanded autonomy for Sindh and freedom from “Urdu imperialists who have pillaged the land and people of Sindh.” He also called for the restoration of the Sindhu Desh, which he claimed had existed as a separate entity on the subcontinent for thousands of years. In 1972, after the secession of Bangladesh from Pakistan, the chief minister of Sindh attempted to forestall such a movement in Sindh by introducing the Language Bill, which was specifically intended to promote the teaching and use of Sindhi by all residents of Sindh, including Urdu speakers. Knowledge of Sindhi became a prerequisite for a civil service job in Sindh. More riots followed, and even though a compromise was reached by granting Urdu-speaking *muhajirs* a twelve-year reprieve, a legacy of bitterness still survives.

---

61. Much of the following discussion on Sindhi in contemporary Pakistan is based on Rahman 1996.
Today, Sindh is a divided province with deep cleavages along linguistic, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines. It constantly hovers on the brink of a civil war between the Urdu-speaking muhajirs, who have formed their own political parties, the MQM and its faction, and ethnonationalist Sindhis, who refuse to accept the hegemony of Urdu and Urdu culture in their homeland.

Sindhis in India have also found it difficult to maintain their links with their mother tongue and literary heritage, largely because they do not have a state of their own to promote Sindhi culture. On arrival from Pakistan they were scattered in settlements in or near several large urban centers, where schools and colleges using Sindhi as a medium of instruction were established. Even though the government of India, after much political pressure from the Sindhi community, recognized Sindhi as one of the country’s official languages, the language does not have a solid utility base in India, especially in terms of procuring employment. Consequently, younger generations of Sindhis have increasingly switched to English or Hindi, and occasionally Marathi or Gujarati, as their primary language, resulting in low enrollments and eventual closure for Sindhi-medium institutions. Indeed, the Sindhi population in India has the highest percentage of people who have learned both Hindi and English of any linguistic group. Functionally, the use of Sindhi in India is restricted to domestic circles and cultural activities, especially among the older generations, who still feel nostalgic for Sindh.

The growth and intensity of Sindhi ethnonationalism in Pakistan, and to a limited extent in India, has greatly affected interpretations of Sindhi literary culture as writers search for essences of Sindhi identity in literature. Representations of and references to Sindh and Sindhi culture’s medieval texts have been reformulated in a homogenizing manner. Typically, premodern Sindhi poets and their works are interpreted in a contemporary nationalist-patriotic framework. This is especially the case with the greatest of classical Sindhi poets, Shāh ‘Abdu’l Latíf, who is extolled as a nationalist and a democrat, since his poetry is considered to reveal sympathy for the common man far in advance of his time. He is revered as the great patriot: “One has only to read Sur Marui [a chapter from the Risālo] to know what love Shah bore to the land of his birth.” Ajwani calls this love for Sindh and Sindhi culture Shāh’s essential sindhiyat, or Sindhism, which, he declares, is especially apparent when Shāh ‘Abdu’l Latíf’s lyrics are placed side by side with those of twentieth-century Sindhi poets, who have taken inspiration from foreign images and foreign scenes.

---

65. Ajwani 1970: 87, 107 (the quotation is from p. 87).
Shāh ‘Abdu’l Latīf’s patriotism is his famous benediction on Sindh, which incidentally occurs in the Risālā’s chapter “Sur Sarang” in a poem praising the Prophet Muḥammad. The Prophet is described as a cloud of mercy raining over a parched land: “O Lord! May Sindh be ever prosperous and fertile! Sweet beloved! May all humanity be of cheer.”

BIBLIOGRAPHY


PART 4

Buddhist Cultures and South Asian Literatures
What Is Literature in Pali?

Steven Collins

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes Pali literature, some of which is not well-known, and asks a question which has not, to my knowledge, been asked before: Why is it that Pali texts from the last few centuries B.C.E. contain some of the earliest examples of literature in the kāvya sense in South Asia, yet there is nothing more in this genre in Pali, with one partial exception (Mahāvamsa), until the start of the second millennium? There are, of course, modes of literary expression in South Asia other than those codified and defined by the Brahmanical Sanskritic tradition as kāvya. An outstanding Pali example is the Vessantarajñātaka (Birth story of Vessantara). I will argue that it arose from the same story-matrix as the Sanskrit Rāmāyana, which is widely regarded by Brahmans and (Sanskritic) Buddhists alike as the earliest work of kāvya. Many other Pali texts from all periods, including the earliest, contain various forms of expressive sophistication, although this aspect has received scarcely any attention in modern scholarship. But when monks in Sri Lanka began to compose kāvya in Pali again, more than a thousand years after Pali texts were first composed, they did so in a consciously high-literate, Sanskritized manner, deliberately adopting the specifically kāvya mode of literary expression. One might call this the problem of liter-

All dates are C.E. unless specified; abbreviations follow the Critical Pali Dictionary. I am grateful to all participants in the Literary Cultures in History project for comments on earlier versions, and especially to Charles Hallisey, Matthew Kapstein, and Sheldon Pollock. Andrew Huxley also made helpful criticisms and comments on an earlier draft.
ature in Pali. I will suggest avenues of thought which I hope are helpful, but nothing said here will resolve the issues definitively.

In describing Pali texts in the light of this history I begin with historical literature, in the vaṃsa genre, for two reasons: first, because many examples of later Pali kāvyā are in this genre; second, because recent discussions of historiography, narrative, and literariness allow an approach to these texts hitherto obscured by exclusive concentration on them as sources for writing modern event-history. Then I consider the Vessantarajātaka and the Rāmāyaṇa, for the reason just given. The distribution of versions in Pali, Sanskrit, and vernaculars shows something specific about these texts and also exemplifies the value of seeing that Pali texts were composed and circulated in a linguistically pluralist milieu. Next I give examples of Pali kāvyā, early and late; last, I offer some reflections on the historical and geographical specificity of its later production and distribution.

But first, some scene setting. Pali is a form of Middle Indo-Aryan, with features deriving from the Vedic language which preceded classical Sanskrit (Old Indo-Aryan), as classified by the grammarian Pāṇini in the fourth century b.c.e. It developed from a northwestern Indian dialect, but its extant form cannot have coincided with any spoken language, since there are elements of deliberate Sanskritization, including forms which could not have occurred historically in a speech community. For this reason it has been called an artificial language, or an ecclesiastical (written) koinē. Later literary Pali was also affected by the grammatical and lexicographical traditions, themselves very much under the influence of their Sanskrit counterparts.

Pali texts claim that their language preserves the original form and language of the Buddha’s teaching, in the language of Magadha. Pali as we have it, however, is not identical to the Magadhan dialect, either as it is inferred to have been at the time of the Buddha (now thought to be wholly within the fifth century b.c.e., as opposed to the traditional Western dating of 563–483 B.C.E.), or as it is known to have been from the time of Emperor Aśoka in the third century B.C.E. The texts in Pali which have survived until modern times—with one or two disputed exceptions—are exclusively derived from the Mahāvihāra monastery in Anurādhapura, the ancient capital of Sri Lanka. Buddhism came to Sri Lanka in the third century B.C.E., and it is from there that all our evidence comes for Pali texts until the second millennium. There must have been a Pali or Pali-like tradition of texts in India. Chinese pilgrims in the first millennium often speak of the Theravāda school in India, which usually appears in translations in

1. Scholars who have previously provided overviews of texts in Pali see no problem: “for the Indologist Pali literature means everything that is written in Pali” (Norman 1983, IX; cf. von Hinüber 1996).
its Sanskrit form, Sthaviravāda, and extant Sri Lankan texts suggest that Theravāda Buddhism and Pali texts existed in south India (with an important center in Kāñcipuram) up to the thirteenth century, after Buddhism had almost wholly disappeared from the rest of India. Some Pali texts, such as *Milindapāṇha* (The questions of King Milinda), seem to have derived from originals composed on the Indian mainland. But there are no extant Indian Pali texts.

During the first millennium the Mahāvihāra was a minority tradition alongside the Abhayagiri and Jetavana monastic fraternities. We know nothing directly about the latter lineages and their texts, but it is inferred that, while they used Pali texts, they were more open than the Mahāvihāra to texts in Sanskrit and to texts of the Mahāyāna. There is abundant evidence for the existence of Mahāyāna in Sri Lanka during this period. Part of the divergence between the Mahāvihāra and its rivals concerns attitudes toward canonicity. The Abhayagiri and Jetavana fraternities seem—this is by no means certain—to have taken the typically Mahāyānist view that the “Canon,” the Word of the Buddha, was an open category. The Mahāvihāra, conversely, developed a closed Canon during the first centuries C.E.—a process completed before the fifth and sixth centuries, the time of the Pali commentators Buddhaghosa and Dharmapāla. Buddhaghosa refers to various earlier commentaries and says he is translating them into Pali from Sinhala. After this time, textual production related to the Canon proceeded largely on the model of one commentary for one Canonical text, and one subcommentary on that commentary. There were also some short, summarizing texts, in the *Vinaya* (Monastic law) and the *Abhidhamma* (Higher teachings).

There are Pali inscriptions on mainland Southeast Asia dated to the first millennium, in what are now Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos. Some have been dated as early as the fourth century, and some indicate acquaintance with sophisticated Higher Teachings texts and commentaries. Our picture is still very sketchy, but it seems that the provenance of much if not all Pali at this time and place was south India rather than Sri Lanka. Pali texts were certainly part of what Skilling calls the “Theravādin renaissance” in this part of the world, which began with Pagan in Burma in the eleventh century and continued in subsequent centuries in all areas of mainland Southeast Asia (with the exception of Vietnam). Royal sponsorship of monastic lineages deriving from the Mahāvihāra in Sri Lanka and of Pali texts, however, seems not to have resulted in any significant production of Pali kāraya in these areas of Southeast Asia. Literature’s ancillary sciences—notably grammar and prosody—were certainly known, but little Pali literature seems to have been written in these areas and none has survived.

VA\textsc{msa} TEXTS

Texts in the \textit{vamsa} tradition of historiography vary widely in their sophistication and literariness.\textsuperscript{3} The earliest, the \textit{Dipavamsa} (Chronicle of the island)—i.e., Sri Lanka—is a clumsy verse composition with grammatical and other errors, made probably in the third or fourth century c.e. Others, such as the \textit{Mah\textsc{bodhi}vamsa} (History of the great Bodhi Tree), written perhaps in the tenth century, show great linguistic skill. The thirteenth-century \textit{Hatthavanagallavih\textsc{rava}vamsa} (Chronicle of the monastery at Attanagalla), is a \textit{camp\textsc{p}} (mixed prose and verse) with verses in various meters, drawing on \textit{Bana} and \textit{Arya}.

Because the \textit{Dipavamsa} is an awkwardly organized work in bad Pali, scholars have thought that Mah\textit{n\textsc{ama}}, the author of the earlier part of the \textit{Mah\textsc{ava}vamsa} (Great Chronicle), was referring to that text when he wrote:

The [text] composed by the Ancients is too long in some places and too short in others, and repetitious.

Listen [now] to this [version], which does not have those faults, and is easy to learn and remember; it has come down [to us] by tradition. Where [the text] is such as to inspire serene confidence [\textit{pas\textsc{ada}}], give expression to serene confidence, and where it is animating, to animation [\textit{sam\textsc{vega}}]. (Mhv I: 2–4)\textsuperscript{4}

The commentary, however, states that “the Ancients” refers to a Sinhala version. The earlier \textit{Mah\textsc{ava}vamsa} is not high \textit{k\textsc{avya}}, but it is an elegant poem, in \textit{\textsc{sla}lok\textsc{as}} with penultimate verses in each chapter in more complex meters, which either summarize the narrative or offer reflections on it. Every chapter in both earlier and later \textit{Mah\textsc{ava}vamsa} states at the end that it has been composed to arouse serene confidence and animation in its audience. Mah\textit{n\textsc{ama}’}s date is uncertain; perhaps sixth century. The text was continued by later writers, whom Geiger assigned to the twelfth, thirteenth, and eighteenth centuries; the last of these is certain, but the earlier sections were probably the work of various hands.\textsuperscript{5} They continue the \textit{\textsc{sla}oka} plus-summary verse for-

\textsuperscript{3} I translate \textit{vamsa} as “chronicle” or “history.” Accounts of \textit{vamsa} texts are found in Law 1947, Perera 1979. Geiger 1905 discusses the \textit{Dipavamsa}, \textit{Mah\textsc{ava}vamsa}, and some later texts. Geiger’s translations of the \textit{Mah\textsc{ava}vamsa}, called \textit{Mah\textsc{ava}vamsa} (1912) and \textit{Culavamsa} (1929) deal with issues raised by the texts and their chronology; the latter has a very useful series of indices in what was originally vol. 2 (the work is now issued as one volume). A number of essays by G. C. Mendis have recently been reprinted as Mendis 1996.

\textsuperscript{4} For many later Sanskrit literary critics, following Anandavardhana in the ninth century, a single flavor (\textit{rasa}) should predominate in any work. It would be interesting to try to assess whether serene confidence or animation is in fact the predominant mood evoked by the text. Neither \textit{pas\textsc{ada}} nor \textit{sam\textsc{vega}} are traditionally viewed as \textit{rasas}.

\textsuperscript{5} Geiger called this part of the text \textit{Culavamsa}, the Lesser Chronicle, and his English translation has popularized the term. Like the compilers of the Critical Pali Dictionary, I find his ar-
mat; the third includes complex meters within the chapters. A final chapter was added by the editors of a Sinhala script edition in 1877, at the request of the British colonial government (this edition brought the text up to the arrival of the English, the *ingiri*). Various individuals continued the text in the twentieth century; in the 1970s and 1980s a new addition was made on the initiative of J.R. Jayawardene’s government. It abandons chronological ordering in favor of a topical approach, derived from the *University of Ceylon History of Ceylon*, itself derived from the *Cambridge History of India*. It has Pali verses giving the main points of each chapter and the rest is in Sinhala.

One can infer the kinds of source material the authors of the *Mahāvamsa* used from their mention in the text and from the styles of different sections. These include: (1) earlier narrative histories, such as that commissioned by King Vijayabahu I, who “had seventeen years written (about)” (*likhāpayi . . . sattarasavassāni*) before his coronation, and an eighteenth after it (*Mhv* LIX: 7, 9). Geiger may be right to infer a separate chronicle of the southeastern part of Sri Lanka, Rohana, from the seemingly awkward insertion into the *Mahāvamsa* of passages dealing with that area (e.g., XLVI: 38 ff.; LV: 3 ff.); (2) motifs from canonical texts, such as the Ten Virtues of a King (*dasa rāja-dhammā*); (3) Sanskrit sources such as the *Arthaśāstra* (Treatise on wealth and power), which clearly lies behind the account in chapter 66 of the measures Parakkamabahu I adopted in seeking knowledge of his rival, King Gajabahu; (4) merit-books (*puññapotthaka*) kept by kings, such as the one that the *Mahāvamsa* appears to quote verbatim when King Dutthagamani has his read aloud on his deathbed (XXXII 26 ff.) (such passages can consist of a mere list of good deeds, buildings erected, and so on, or they can be elaborated in more narrative form); (5) inscriptions, such as those mentioned at XXVII: 6; LIV: 28; and LX: 67; (6) wisdom (*nīti*) verses, which are found in the main body of the text as well as in the summary/reflective final verses of chapters; (7) praise-poems of kings, either written by the authors of the *Mahāvamsa* or preexistent and quoted by them as texts or inscriptions, such as the opening verses of chapter 42 on King Aggabodhi I (sixth to seventh centuries), which use plays on words, puns, syntactic parallels, and rhyme in a Sanskrit vocabulary:

---

1. These arguments unpersuasive and prefer to continue the indigenous practice of referring to the whole work as the *Mahāvamsa* or Great Chronicle.
4. If Geiger’s conjectural reading *kotallādisu* at LXIV 3 is correct, Kātuṭāya’s work is cited as part of the future king’s education.
5. Modern historians often claim that inscriptions found in Sri Lanka “confirm” one or another account in the *Mahāvamsa*, but the text may have been copied from the inscription, and it is as easy to tell lies on stone or copper (or gold) plate as it is on palm leaf.
Aggabodhi then became king, a man of good fortune, and maternal nephew of King Mahānāgā, who aspired to the attainment of the highest wisdom. He was renowned among the people as being like the sun in radiance, the full moon in charm, Mt. Meru in unshakeability, the ocean in depth, the earth in immovability, the wind in even-handedness, the gods’ adviser [Brhaspati] in wisdom, the autumn sky in purity, the king of the gods in the enjoyment of pleasures and the Lord of Riches [Kubera] in wealth, the pure [Vedic sage] Vāṣṇtha in rectitude, the King of the Animals [i.e. the lion] in strength, a Wheel-turning Emperor in the royal Virtues of a King, and Vessantara in generosity.

The Mahābodhivamsa, which identifies itself in the proem as a translation from Sinhala, tells of Gotama’s original aspiration to Buddhahood; his encounter with the former Buddha, Dipāṅkara, as the ascetic Sumedha; his Enlightenment; the first three Councils; the arrival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka with the coming of Aśoka’s son Mahinda; and the arrival of the Bodhi Tree and the beginning of the worship of the Bodhi Tree (bodhipūja). The work is mostly in prose with occasional verses, some borrowed from the chapter endings of the Great Chronicle. The prose has many very long compounds and sentences. For example, a single sentence covering two and a half pages in the Pali Text Society’s edition (pages 2–4), tells the story of Sumedha’s leaving home, going to the Himalayas to live in a leaf hut, and then abandoning the hut as a “second household life” for the foot of a tree, where he enjoys the happiness of meditation. It consists in a long series of clauses using participles and absolutives and ends with a single main verb.

He plunged into the Himalaya [region], which was made beautiful by ketaka [flowers], trees such as the aśoka, tilaka, and campaka, and many masses of blossoming flowers and groves of fragrant trees; it was crowded with kadambaka [plants] and innumerable four-footed [animals] such as deer, horses, elephants.

10. Aggabodhipat-asayo—i.e., he saw himself as a future Buddha.
11. Somma, Skt. saumya, from soma, itself closely tied to the moon in meaning.
12. There is a pun here on sama-vutti, “behaving the same way (to all)” and sama-vuṭṭhi, “raining equally (on all).”
13. Mahānāganarindassa bhāgineyyo subhāgīyo
so Aggabodhi rājīsī aggabodhipat-asayo
tejena bhānūṃ sommena candam sampuyamamandalam
Sumerum acalatena gambhīreṇa mekoluthām
vasumādharam akampena mārunāṃ saṃvaṭṭiyā
buddhiyā maramanatāṃ saddhiyā savadambaram
kāmabhogena devindaṃ atthena ca dhanissaram
dhammena suddhaśatasam vikkamena migūṭhiparam
rājadharmehi rajjehi cakkavattinarissaram
Vessantarāṃ ca dānena anugantvā jāne suto (Mhv XLII 1–5).
and tigers; it resounded endlessly with [the songs of] birds such as osprey, partridges, peacocks and bhīnakaras; it was always busy with [the comings and goings of] many kinds of beings, such as gods, demi-gods, magicians, and wizards; it shone with hundreds of various precious stones such as emeralds, silver, gold, and quartz; it glistened with thousands of forest lakes, [whose waters were] stirred up by the jug-breasts of numerous groups of women devoted to Indra; it was an ornament for the snowy mountains; hundreds of thousands of cascades of cool water in fine rain and heavy showers made it lovely; it was a mine of many kinds of jewels and a playground for gods, kinnaras, and nāgās.14

This technique for description is familiar in South Asia, from the time of the Rāmāyaṇa (e.g., the descriptions of Rama’s journey to the forest, or Hanuman’s flight to Sri Lanka). It occurs in earlier Pali literature, as in the Kuṇāla and Vessantara Birth Stories, but nowhere in the earlier Pali texts can one find this kind of alliterative long compound, each of which contains, as it were, an episode of description. Many of the terms are Sanskrit, or else Pali versions of Sanskrit words previously unknown in Pali. If the suggested dating to the last quarter of the tenth century is correct, the Mahābodhivamsa would be the earliest extant example of later Pali kavya.15

The main focus of the Hatthavanagallavigāhāravaṃsa is the story of the future Buddha king Sirisanghabodhi, a historical person of the early fourth century, from his birth to the founding of the shrine to him and a monastery at Attanagalla. This occupies the first nine chapters. The work as it now exists continues for two more chapters, recounting the good deeds done by subsequent kings on behalf of the monastery. After the last chapter, but

---

14. ketakīsakatilakasampakādinohavikakasumikharaśparimalatarasananāmanāṇītaṁ migatsaṣaṅgāṣagāyādīṣaptāpatmapādaśadambākāṃśarātītaṁ kurvavakoravamayāra-bhīnakādīsaṅkūtaṇātaniṣṭaṁ devadānasiddhāvijñādāvārtinābhātāvataṇānāvaiñcritoṁ marakatarajatakahakalākādi-vividhasikharisatasamujjalā svmiṃ bharaṇabhātāvataṇānāvaiñcritoṁ mahāhavatāvatinābhātāvataṇānāvaiñcritoṁ marakatarajatakahakalākādi-vividhasikharisatasamujjalā

15. Norman 1983: 141. The Telakahāgāṭha (Verses from a pot of [boiling] oil) is a poem in Vasantatilaka meter which shows some of this kind of literary skill, but the length of the lines in that meter prevents compounding as long as that quoted here from the Mahābodhivamsa. It is set in the narrative context of a monk’s being boiled in oil by a Sri Lankan king of the fourth and third centuries B.C.E.; he gives an elegantly worded exposition of Buddhist systematic thought as he dies. This work is mentioned in a thirteenth- or fourteenth-century narrative work Rasavāhini (Stream of sentiments), so it must be earlier than that, though the exact date is unknown. Three lines similar to lines in Telakahāgāṭha are found in an inscription in Thailand which has been dated to the eighth century. It is unlikely that the poem as a whole is that early, but this shows that the style must be earlier than the earliest extant examples of it.
before the anonymous author’s epilogue, there is a verse expressing the hope that others will “write down here” (ihālikhantu) the names and deeds of future benefactors of the monastery. Had this happened, the History of Sirisāṅghabodhi would then have served as a prologue to the monastery’s Chronicle. As mentioned, it is an erudite work, drawing on Bāṇa’s Kādambarī (Story of a woman called Kādambari) and Āryaṭṭa’s Jātakamāla (Garland of birth stories) as well as making reference to many Pali jātaka stories. The author borrows from Bāṇa the speech by Śukanāsa to Candrapiḍa when the latter’s education is complete. Part is put in the mouth of Śrī Saṅgha Bodhi’s teacher, the monk Nanda, who on the completion of his education (chapter 2) warns him of the dangers of sense pleasures; part is in the mouth of Śrī Saṅgha Bodhi himself when he attempts to refuse the offer of kingship by citing the dangers and evils of that position. Whereas the prose material from Bāṇa is mostly, though not always used verbatim, prose and verse from Āryaṭṭa is usually changed. An example of the latter is found in chapter 2: In Āryaṭṭa’s Agastya jātaka (Birth story of Agastya), the future Buddha Gotama is the Brahman sage Agastya, who is given three wishes by Indra. He asks to be free from greed and the like, and in one verse asks:

The fire of hatred—which overwhelms people like an enemy, so that they suffer loss of money, purity of caste, and the happiness of a good name—may it keep far away from me.\(^{16}\)

The Pali replaces the spatial metaphor (bhramśam . . . dūrataḥ) with a play on hā, to forsake:

May that fire of hatred forsake your heart, which overwhelms beings like an enemy [so that they] are forsaken by purity of caste and the happiness [which comes] from a good name, by wealth, and by servants.\(^{17}\)

In the colophon the unnamed author aspires to become a Buddha and, in future lives, to be “skilled in all regional languages and in every single one of the arts, in the wisdom of the world and in subduing the passions,” as also in the Baskets [of the Pali Canon], in the Vedas, in many systems of grammar, and in other forms of knowledge such as logic and the like. May I be a poet \([kāvi]\), one versed in scripture, one who when speaking his view crushes the

\(^{16}\) Translated in Khoroche 1989: 43. \(ārthad api bhramśam samāpivantaḥ / vānāpapāsadād yasasāh sukhoḥ ca / yena bhūhi hi dvāravatvā satteḥ / sa ēravahakṣa maṇa dūrataḥ syāt (Jkm vii, 18).\)

\(^{17}\) \(vānāpapāsadād yasasā sukhoḥ ca / dhanā ca hāyanti’ upajīvānā ca / yena bhūhi hi tāpupravā sattā / doṣagī ṣo te hadayaṃ jahatu (Ātt 6). Hāyanti is the passive of hā (active jahati), used in the sense of “excluded from,” “bereft of” + ablative. My translation changes the syntax to preserve the word play.
views of others, may I be able to remember many thousands [of verses] as a text after just one hearing. (Att 33)

Not all vamsa texts from this period do the same thing. The thirteenth-century Thūpavamsa (History of the Stūpa) by Vācissara claims to improve on earlier versions in Sinhala and Pali and contains a mixture of mostly prose with some verse. For this reason one could place it in the kāvya category of campū, but it attempts little verbal sophistication of the kind found in the Mahābhārata or the Hatthavanagallavāravamsa, although it does use a slightly Sanskritized vocabulary. Some texts, on the other hand, while recounting a chronological narrative seem mostly interested in the opportunity their topic affords for verbal creativity. The Dāthavamsa (History of the tooth-relic), also written in the thirteenth century and again a translation from a Sinhala original ascribed to poets (kavis), is equally focused on linguistic skill and on its subject, or more precisely, it is as much concerned with elegance of representation as it is with strategies of referentiality to the world thus represented. It starts with Sumedha’s aspiration, then tells of Gotama Buddha’s Enlightenment, his visit to Sri Lanka, his death and cremation, and the distribution of the relics before turning to the story surrounding the tooth-relic and its arrival in Sri Lanka in the early fourth century. The work’s five chapters are in five complex meters, with different meters again for the last one or two verses in each chapter.

Historiographical texts were thus capable of significant literary achievement, both in the general (English) sense and in the specific kāvya sense. In any place and time it is difficult to delineate clearly when a narrative text is a “history” or a “story.” A common-sense distinction between what has actually happened and what is made up is clearly available to any thinking person, at any place and time, who attends to the issue. But just as modern discourse theorists problematize where and how the distinction can be made, so premodern Pali histories and stories, as well as all narratives, share many representational techniques, such as the use of branch stories, which break off from the main story to recount the past of some character(s). The Pali vamsa tradition is sorely in need of close and detailed textual study.

All traditions, of course, have category problems. As is well-known, in the Sanskrit tradition both the Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa are classified as itihāsa, “history,” but also as kāvya (and even, later, as śāstra). As Sheldon Pollock shows in chapter 1 of this volume, later poets, such as the Buddhist kavi Aśvaghosa, as well as literary critics celebrate the Rāmāyaṇa’s composer, Vālmiki, as the first poet. In the Sanskrit chronicle Ṛṣṭiṭaraṅgini (River of [Kashmiri] kings), Kalhaa refers to himself as a kavi and calls Kṣemendra’s Nṛpavali (King list) a work of literature (kavi-karma).
THE SHARED STORY-MATRIX OF THE
RĀMĀYĀṆA AND THE VESSANTARAJĀTAKA

For modern readers the Vessantarajātaka is clearly just a story;18 in the Mahāvaṁsa and elsewhere, however, Vessantara appears as a historical figure. The Vessantarajātaka has not, to my knowledge, been seen by anyone as a kāvyya, but it is certainly a work of great skill and power.19 The similarity between the stories of Vessantara and Rāma has long been recognized. In the past much effort was expended in attempting to judge the relative chronology of these two texts and the Pali Dasarathajātaka (Birth story of Dasaratha), which gives a brief and rather odd version of the story of the Rāmāyāṇa’s Ayodhya chapter (Ayodhyākāṇḍa).20 Alsdorf devoted great learning and ingenuity, and not a little Orientalist hauteur, to an argument which tried to prove that the verses of the Vessantarajātaka (rearranged by him) are “pre-Buddhist.” This kind of study seems to me to take what are virtues in some areas of historical philology and turn them into vices by applying them where they are not appropriate. What Pollock says of the relations between the Rāmāyāṇa and Mahābhārata seems equally relevant to the relations between the Rāmāyāṇa and Vessantarajātaka:

[T]he question of priority with respect to preliterate epic or popular texts is in general misleading. The oral traditions of all the various genres and particular works must have been continuously interactive and cross-fertilizing. Even more clearly than [the Rāmāyāṇa], [the Mahābhārata] has roots that stretch back to the Vedic age. This fact, coupled with the structural similarity of the poems, forces us to think of the two epic traditions as coextensive processes that were underway throughout the second half of the first millennium B.C., until the monumental poet of [the Rāmāyāṇa] and the redactors of [the Mahābhārata] authoritatively synthesized their respective materials and thereby effectively terminated the creative oral process.21

Summaries of the Rāmāyāṇa and Vessantarajātaka are easily available.22 I give here very brief sketches. In the Rāmāyāṇa, Rāma is denied succession to the throne and, accompanied by his wife, Sītā, and brother, Lakṣmana, is banished to the forest by his father, King Daśaratha. The demon Rāvaṇa uses subterfuge to capture Sītā and abduct her to Sri Lanka. With the help of a

19. One commentary (Śv 95) cites it as the work of a kavi who recites texts he has heard from others (suta-kavi).
20. The Sāmajātaka (Birth story of Sāma) also contains a famous episode from the Rāmāyāṇa: Dasaratha’s accidental shooting of a young boy in the forest.
monkey army led by Hanumān, Rāma kills Rāvana and returns with Sītā to Ayodhā for his coronation after Sītā has proved her faithfulness to him by an ordeal of fire. In the seventh and last book, often considered a later addition, Rāma banishes Sītā because of gossip questioning her faithfulness; the poem ends in unhappiness and tragedy. The Vessantarajātaka tells the story of the future Buddha Gotama’s life as Vessantara, his last life as a human being. Vessantara is boundlessly generous. When he gives away the royal elephant who brings rain to the kingdom, he is banished by his father, Sañjaya, at the behest of the people. He goes to the forest with his wife, Maddi, and children, and they live as ascetics, as did Rāma and his wife and brother. An old Brahman, Jujaka, asks Vessantara for his children, and Vessantara gives them to him in Maddi’s absence. Sakka, the king of the gods, comes in disguise to ask for Maddi, and when Vessantara gives her to him, he gives her back. The children are ransomed by Sañjaya, and Vessantara returns to the city to be crowned king.

Gombrich has listed a number of specific similarities between the Rāmāyaṇa and the Vessantarajātaka, both structural and general—the banishment of an heir apparent, his life in the forest as an ascetic in Brahmanical garb, the triumphal return, and so on—as well as specific verbal echoes between the Vessantarajātaka and the Rāmāyaṇa’s “Ayodhyaṇa.” Maddi, Vessantara’s wife, explicitly compares her devotion to her husband to Sītā’s devotion to Rāma (Ja 6, p. 557, v. 541). The similarities between the two stories are, in my opinion, so deep that we would do better to think of them as a single story-matrix. From this matrix emerged Vālmiki’s monumental version, culminating but not ending the Sanskrit tradition, and the Pali tradition, culminating but not ending with the prose-and-verse Vessantarajātaka, whose extant form is from the time of Buddhaghosa (5th–6th centuries c.e.) though the text is based on earlier materials. The three versions of the Vessantara story extant in Sanskrit—in Aryaśūra’s jātakamātā, in a text from Gilgit, and in Kṣemendra’s Avadānakalpalatā (Wishing creeper of legends)—are, in their different ways, less like the Rāmāyaṇa than is the Vessantarajātaka. They are all much shorter and so lack the epic sweep and dramatic tension common to the Rāmāyaṇa and Vessantarajātaka. There is a Chinese translation of a lost Sanskrit text made between 388–407 c.e., of which there is a French translation; this is longer and preserves the sense of personal tragedy in the extreme generosity of Viṣvantara (here called Sudāna), but it lacks the political focus, despite a few narrative details shared with the Rāmāyaṇa which are not in the Vessantarajātaka. There are, of course, many widely varying versions of the Rāmāyaṇa available across South and

24. For the first of these, see Khoroche 1989: 58–73; for the last two see, most conveniently, Das Gupta 1978.
Southeast Asia; there are also many versions of Vessantara’s story. My remarks here are restricted to Valmiki’s Rāmāyaṇa and the Pali Vessantarajātaka.

The two texts deal with some of the most fundamental issues of human civilization: notably the conflict between the necessary violence of social order and the aspiration to nonviolent peace, and the demands that both kingship (public office) and a transcendentalist orientation to death, time, and eternity—the latter manifested in South Asia most clearly as asceticism—make on the values and emotions of ordinary social and family life, the sine qua non of kings, ascetics, and civilization itself. In doing so they are simultaneously tragic and utopian. Both Rāma and Vessantara are human in their weaknesses: Rāma’s madness after Sītā is taken by Rāvana, his taunting and mutilation of Śūrpāakhā, his treacherous murder of Valin; Vessantara’s sufferings after he has given his children to the Brahman Jūjaka, his being tempted to break each one of the Buddhist Five Precepts in the course of the story. Both are also superhuman: Rāma is God incarnate, though this is a fact of which he must remain largely unaware; Vessantara is a future Buddha who aspires to Omniscience (i.e., Buddhahood) and does the necessary, though in this lifetime he is a devoted son, husband, and father whose strong emotions in these three roles the Pali text clearly emphasizes. Both, moreover, have something excessive, or at least extraordinary, in their obstinate attachment to their respective virtues—an aspect of their characters which qualifies the extent to which they can be taken simply and directly as role models.26

There are, of course, numerous differences between them as well. The most basic, in my view, is the difference in the ontology of the two heroes, which reflects a difference in the social perspectives of the two forms of discourse, Brahmanical and Buddhist, and also leads to a crucial narrative disanalogy. As Pollock has shown, although Rāma is necessarily unaware of his divinity and on occasion behaves otherwise than one would expect of God, his divine status is central to Valmiki’s vision.27 (It is odd that so many scholars have been unwilling to accept this view, preferring to see Rāma’s divinity as a “later stratum” added on to an earlier epic about a human hero—very odd indeed in Western scholars, since in their cultural background the Christian imaginaire is constituted around the figure of a God-man.) Vessantara, on the other hand, is a human being in the narrated present, and a superhuman Buddha only in the narrated future. Thus Rāma can—indeed must—embody simultaneously two contradictory forms of dharma.

26. Collins (1998) applies to the Vessantarajātaka an insight of Gellner (1979), who uses the Kierkegaardian notion of the “offensiveness” of Christianity to develop an analysis of ideology: to be effective an ideology must be out of the ordinary; it must both take one aback and entice.

Vessantara, on the other hand, is wholly devoted to a future transcendentalist and nonviolent ideal, leaving the practical exigencies of kingship in the present to his father, Sañjaya. The Rāmāyana’s kingship is embodied in one person, internally bifurcated; the Vessantarajātaka’s is distributed in two persons.

To explain what I mean here I will take a step back. Elsewhere I have attempted to make sense of Buddhist attitudes towards kingship and social order by positing two forms of dhamma—What Is Right, modes 1 and 2.28 The distinction between them turns on the issues of reciprocity and violence. Dhamma in mode 1 is an ethics of reciprocity—return good for good and bad for bad—in which the assessment of violence is context-dependent and negotiable. Buddhist advice to kings in mode 1 tells them to pass judgment not in haste or anger but appropriately, making the punishment fit the crime. To follow such advice is to be a Good King, to fulfill what philosopher F.H. Bradley would have called the duties of the royal station. The punishment of criminals, and the fighting of just wars, are institutionalized forms of mode 1 reciprocity. Dhamma in mode 2 is an ethic of absolute values—do good under any circumstances, regardless of whether other people’s actions are good or bad—in which the assessment of violence is context-independent and nonnegotiable, and where any form of it, whether judicial punishment or even defensive war, is itself a crime. Thus, with ruthless logic, there cannot be a Good King because of the necessity for violence in the kingly function. The best example of this in Pali literature is the Mūgapākkhajātaka (Birth story of the dumb cripple) (Ja 6: 1 ff.), whose protagonist, Prince Temiya, spends his first sixteen years feigning these incapacities and others in order to avoid succeeding to the throne because he remembers having been a king in a former life and having suffered for a long time in hell because of it. (This text was well-known: in the Hatthavanagallavihāravamsa, for example, Siri Sanghabodhi at first declines to become king, citing this story.)

Vessantara is allowed to act solely in terms of dhamma mode 2, since King Sañjaya operates in mode 1. Because the instantiation of dhamma mode 2 in Gotama’s Buddhahood—when he will not be required to act as a king—is not yet present, the contradiction is not yet relevant, and the story can end in a fantasy utopia where Indra makes jewels rain from the sky, Vessantara can have “every creature set free, even the cats” (Ja 6: 592), and one can forget the unpleasant exigencies of life, where crimes are committed and military attacks are possible (indeed inevitable). In the case of the Rāmāyana, the two modes of dhamma also appear clearly, but they must needs be simultaneous. Rāma never gives up the kingly prerogative of violence, carrying his bow despite wearing ascetic dress and, of course, killing many beings be-

fore the final defeat of Rāvana. (As Pollock argues, even his awesome and frightening madness contains within it a reflection of the vengeance of Rudra-Śiva, which is an aspect of a king’s divinity.)\(^29\) At the same time, he gives vent to biting criticism of the mores of kings (Kshatriyas) as for instance in Rāmāyaṇa 2.18.36, where he urges Lakṣmaṇa, who has suggested using force to take back the throne of which Rāma has been deprived:

So give up this ignoble notion that is based on the code of the ksatriyas; be of like mind with me and base your actions on righteousness, not on violence.\(^30\)

Adopting for a moment the chronological-layering approach to the Rāmāyaṇa, one can see that if some “original” version had ended with book 6, it would have been entirely parallel to the Vessantarajātaka, ending with an inevitably brief description of the utopia of Rāmarājya, where everyone is happy and peaceful. Book 7, where Rāma’s inhuman level of righteousness leads to his dismissal of Sitā and her final tragedy (and his), may be seen as a refraction on the private, familial level of the disjunction between transcendentalist and pragmatic dharma, as is Vessantara’s giving away his children.

The difference of emphasis in social perspective—which can easily be overstated—is this: Brahmical ideology must, in the very same act of thought, posit the kingly sva-dharma of violence, which protects the Brahmanical social vision, and preserve as its ethical pinnacle the transcendentalist nonviolence of Brahmans and ascetics. Thus Rāma is at once God and human king. Buddhism, on the other hand, however much it may likewise require the support of kings to be a viable civilizational institution, is not obliged to think the necessity of violence and the value of nonviolence in one and the same act of thought, although it certainly must acknowledge both. It can hierarchize the two modes of dhamma and leave greater space for the critical distance afforded by mode 2—a distance which emerges often in Buddhist texts as ironic, even deliberately comic, one-upmanship. No matter how mighty kings might be in the here and now—including those, like Dhammaceti in the fifteenth-century Mon state of Pegu, who were former monks—they are time-bound mortals karmically treading the wheel of saṁsāra. Monks, on the other hand, signify and—symbolically, theatrically—embody the timeless, ineffably transcendent supremacy of nirvana. Thus Vessantara’s mode 2 dhamma leads, while he is a king, to his banishment by Sañjaya’s mode 1; when he lives it in the real, historical world (as opposed to a fantasy utopia), he becomes a Buddha, who emphatically re-


nounces kingship. In both cases, as the Rāmāyaṇa and Vessantarājataka show in their different ways, the collocation of the two can result in both utopia and tragedy.

At this point, I hope two things are clear. First, that both the Rāmāyaṇa and Vessantarājataka are indeed asking Pollock’s question—what is it that makes life possible?—and that this question contains another: what makes it possible to live with our impossible aspirations? Second, while the contradictions intrinsic to any transcendentalist, nonviolent grounding of social order may, when made explicit, paralyze systematic thought, they can be dealt with in narrative—dealt with not in the sense of quieted down or gotten rid of, but in the majestic, moving, and tension-preserving manner of the Rāmāyaṇa and Vessantarājataka.

The variegated distribution of the two stories in the areas where Pali literature has been of cultural significance has been noticed before, but not, I think, adequately described, still less explained. No attempt has been made to connect the distribution of the two stories with the differences in their content—with the exception of a much-quoted article by Bechert, in which he makes the apparent absence of a Rāmāyaṇa tradition in Sri Lanka the starting point for a study of vamsas as expressing an “ideology of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism”: “The absence of [a Rāmāyaṇa] tradition was by no means a gap or deficiency: on the contrary, it was the consequence of a conscious decision of the Sinhalese authors to prevent the spread of contradictory ideas concerning the historical mission of Lanka.” Aside from the anachronism in using the concept of nationalism for the premodern period, the argument can be countered on two grounds. First, there was no Rāmāyaṇa tradition in Burma, but neither was there an ideology of “historical mission” (this ideology is in fact a modern invention of tradition even in Sri Lanka). Second, the absence of a Rāmāyaṇa tradition in Sri Lanka is only apparent and is the result of not seeing that there was a division of labor between Sanskrit, Sinhala, and Pali literature. Gombrich sees the Rāmāyaṇa as “marginal” to Sinhalese culture and derives this idea from a difference between Hindu and Buddhist ethics. Aside from what I see as the mistaken essentialism of such an approach, this can be countered through the fact of the wide distribution of vernacular versions of the Rāmāyaṇa in Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos.

(though not, it seems, in Burma), where neither these versions nor Buddhist ethics were marginal.33

There seems to have been no further telling of Rāma’s story in Pali after the Dasarathajātaka.34 Later Pali texts do, however, make reference to it, and the story was certainly well-known. The clearest example in Sri Lanka is Kumāradasa’s Sanskrit Janakaharana (The abduction of Janaki [= Sitā]), from the seventh or eighth century. Bechert says this text was “composed (but not handed down) in Ceylon.” Godakumbara takes a different view: it was, he says, “extensively studied in Ceylon as is evident from the quotations from it in Sinhalese texts, and the wide influence the poem has had on Sinhala poets.” He mentions an undated later Sinhala translation and gloss, which attests to the transmission of the work.35 Pali texts from the commentarial period are aware of the Rāmāyaṇa. Buddhaghosa for example says it is unsuitable for monks: when the Dīgha Nikāya says that the Buddha does not attend recitations, Buddhaghosa refers to the Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa, adding, “It is not fitting to go where [either] is being told.” As examples of the concept “frivolous talk,” he gives “esteeming useless stories like the war of the Bhāratas and the abduction of Sitā, and telling stories of that kind.”

The offense is small if one does these things a little, great if one does them a lot.36 The commentary to the Vībhanga ([Book of] Analysis), the second in the canonical collection of Abhidhamma, cites the two stories as examples of wrongful learning. Monastic severity makes its own choices, but there would be no danger of offense, small or large, if there were no occasions to commit it. The Mahāvaṃsa often refers to the Rāmāyaṇa as an element of high culture.37 So in Sri Lanka Sanskrit and Sinhala versions of the Rāmāyaṇa were well-known and acknowledged—by Buddhaghosa critically and by the Mahāvaṃsa admiringly. That there was no Pali elaboration of the tale, in Sri

---

34. In that text one of a number of oddities is the fact that Rāma and Sitā are brother and sister; their marriage is thus incestuous. This is known to the commentator on the Vessanān- jātaka, who remarks (Ja 6: 558) that she was first his younger sister then his chief queen (the motif of incest reappears in Laotian versions, as elsewhere).
35. Bechert 1978: 4; Godakumbara 1955: 141. There is archaeological, literary, folkloric, and ritual evidence for knowledge of Rāma’s story and its characters; the nonarchaeological evidence is recent, it is true; in Sinhala texts only from the fifteenth century.
36. Sv 84 on D I 6; Sr 76, Ps I 201, As 100.
37. The prince who was to become Parakkamabāhu I in the twelfth century, reflecting on the shortness of life and the need to do deeds of lasting renown, declares himself inspired by the heroism of Rāma and the Pāṇḍavas “in worldly stories” (lokāyaṁ kathāva, Mhv LXIV 42). Referring to the causeway Rāma had the monkeys build across the ocean, he says “this story lives on in the world today” (Mhv LXVIII 20). The text compares a battle fought by him after he had become king to the great battle between Rāma and Rāvaṇa (Mhv LXXV 59). Two further battles are compared to Rāma’s (Mhv LXXXIII 46, LXXXVIII 69). In a Pali text from the late eighteenth century, the Rāma-sandesa (Letter to Rāma), the killing of Rāvaṇa is mentioned, but only
Lanka or anywhere else, seems explicable partly by monastic disfavor, but more tellingly because the existence in Pali of the similar but Buddhicized Vessantarājātaka made this unnecessary.

In Burma there is less evidence to go on, 38 but it is well-known that the Rāma story—or rather, stories—were popular in other parts of mainland Southeast Asia. Many studies of these vernacular versions have been published, and I need not go over this in detail. That the Rāma story was important in Thailand can be seen in the facts that the name of the first royal patron of Pali Buddhism in the northern kingdom of Sukhotai is Ramkhamhaeng, “heroic Rāma” (Ramkhamhaeng mentions Rāma and Sītā in an inscription), and that the next great kingdom, Ayutthaya, is named after Ayodhya. Versions of the Rāmāyaṇa in mainland Southeast Asia emphasize personal relations between the characters rather than the political dimensions of the Rāmāyaṇa and Vessantarājātaka. 39 In Thailand, Cambodia, and

---

38. Whether this is because the text was not known there or is due to our scant knowledge of literature in premodern times is an open question. There is evidence of Rāma in the archaeological remains of Pagan (Luce 1969, Strachan 1990). A thirteenth-century inscription records a gift to a Viṇu temple by a native of south India. It fits into the pattern identified by Pollock (1996) as that of the Sanskrit cosmopolis: there is a quotation in Sanskrit from Kulaekhara’s Mukundamalā, followed by a record of the gift in Tamil (EI 7: 197–98). King Kyanzittha was a patron of Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism and also declared himself an incarnation of Viṇu. In an inscription of 1098 he listed a number of his previous births, including that as “a victorious son of king Rām at Ayudhya” (sic; Luce 1969: 56). However, evidence of texts, in Sanskrit or vernaculars, is in short supply. A monastic author of a Jātaka text from the early sixteenth century warns his fellow monks not to tell stories of Sītā or Hanumān in public; as in the case of Pali commentaries in fifth-century Sri Lanka, presumably this must have happened for a warning to be necessary. A short sixteenth-century Burmese prose version, called the Rāmavatthu, was later elaborated in both prose and verse texts. After the Burmese invasion and sacking of Ayutthaya in 1767 Thai versions brought back from there influenced versions in Burmese, which were produced in prose, in verse, and on the stage. Of a new form of play which arose in the first half of the nineteenth century, which mixes dialogue with songs and dancing, Hla Pe (1968: 126) says “the plays were adaptations of Jātaka, episodes from the Rāma epic, and other popular stories.”

39. The fifteenth-century Ayutthaya king Rāmāthibodi names Rāma and Lakṣmana in an inscription, and there are cave murals depicting the story from the Ayutthaya period. The oldest poem in the līlī genre (which combines two verse forms), dating from the reign of king Trailok (1448–1488) refers to characters from the Rāmāyaṇa. Short verse texts on episodes of the Rāma story are extant from the reign of king Narai (1656–1688); a few other references, episodes used in drama, and text titles are extant from before the Burmese sack of Ayutthaya in 1767, but the earlier versions of the Rāmāyaṇa which must have existed in Thailand, probably then called Rāmakīrti, were destroyed in that attack. In the subsequent Thonburi period, King Taksin collected episodes of the story in a text entitled Lakhon Rāmakīrti; and in 1798 the first king of the current Bangkok dynasty, Rāma I, produced the first version of the modern work known as Rāmakīrti (= Rāmakīrti), “the glory of Rāma.” Later kings composed versions
Laos the figure of Rāma is usually said to be the Buddha in one of his former lives, and some versions take the explicit form of a Birth Story (jātaka).

The popularity of the Vessantarajātaka in recent times is universally attested by modern ethnography; that the same was true in the past can be seen in verse or for the stage; Rāma VI, educated in England at the end of the nineteenth century, produced a version when king (after 1910) based on an English translation of the Sanskrit. In the post-1767 era there have been many versions for the stage and for puppet theater, and there are numerous traces of the story in Thai folklore.

From the Middle Mekong region three versions of the Rāma story are known, all of which are very different from the Sanskrit. The Phra Lak Phra Lam (Lao versions of Lakṣmana and Rāma), also called the Rāmajātaka, sets the story in Laos and includes the theme of incest. This is present, as mentioned, in the Pali Dasaṇarajātaka and the Sri Lankan commentarial tradition, but here Rāma and Sītā are not siblings: Sītā is Rāvana’s daughter; Rāma and Rāvana are first cousins (their fathers are brothers) and brothers-in-law, since Rāvana marries Rāma’s elder sister, his cousin Candā (Skt. Sāntā). Sītā is thus Rāma’s sister’s daughter. When Rāvana abducts Sītā he is unaware that she is his daughter. In the Gosāyī Devārahī, one of “several minor versions of the [Rāmajātaka] story prevalent in Laos” (Sahai 1976: xiii), Indra’s wife, Sujātā, is reborn as Rāvana’s daughter, Sītā, to avenge her own seduction by Rāvana, but this time without a human intermediary; she appears on his lap. In the P’ommavāk (Skt. Brahmavesaka) version in Tai Lu she is born in a tree in Rāma’s garden.

In Cambodia an inscription dated variously to the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries, but in any case pre-Angkor, refers to the Rāmāyaṇa, the Mahābhārata, and other Sanskrit texts. In the Angkor emprise Vālmīki’s and other Sanskrit versions were well known; iconographic evidence is also available from that period, and Rāma figures in many of the prasasti eulogies of Angkor kings in inscriptions. After the rise of Theravāda Buddhism among the Khmer people in the thirteenth century—a historical process still far from understood—Cambodian culture in the next few centuries is difficult to decipher. With the abandonment of Angkor as political center, which Chandler (1996: 78) dates to the 1440s, much of the memory of Sanskritic culture there was lost. The early history of vernacular versions of the story in Cambodia, therefore (specialist opinions differ as to whether there was one), is impossible to discern. Pou (1982: 254) states that “from the XVth century onwards, Rāma’s story became an impetus for Khmer literature, mainly in the epic genre, whereby lengthy poems were composed as recitatives for the dance-drama called Lkhon Khol” (Masked Theater); versions of the story were used in Shadow Theater and Ballet, and temple paintings (Bizot 1989 has illustrations from one such temple). We have evidence of five vernacular versions in Cambodia. The first is the first part of the “classical” Rāmakirti (Skt. Ramakīrti), also transliterated as Rāmakār or Reamker, dated by Pou to the sixteenth or seventeenth century; she dates the second half to the seventeenth or eighteenth century. The work is in a variety of meters and differs markedly from Vālmīki’s Rāmāyaṇa. The second is a text Pou dates to 1620, called Lpōk Angār Vat (the poem of Angkor Wat), which tells the Rāma story as a series of descriptions of sculpted panels at Angkor. Bizot (1989: 27) says that this was meant to be used by guides showing visitors around Angkor, and gives a modern example; the practice continued until 1970. The third is a remarkable text published by Bizot (1989), who recorded an old village performer, Mi Chak (also one of the Angkor guides just mentioned), reciting a version of the story. His narration was accompanied by mime, dance, and music. Bizot describes a philosophical-mystical meaning to the poem, which identifies the characters, inter alia, with elements from the psychology of the Pali Abhidhamma, analogously to the Sanskrit Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa (Internal Rāmāyaṇa). The fourth is a modern prose recitation described in a French thesis; the fifth is a prose text compiled and published in the 1960s. Clearly more work is necessary here.
through the number of versions, and manuscripts of them, which are extant or mentioned in surveys and catalogs.\textsuperscript{40} For example, as Brereton reports:

In a recent catalog of Lan Na [northern] Thai manuscripts, 396 out of 2,790 (14 percent) were devoted to the \textit{Vessantara Jātaka}. By contrast, only 254 contained suttas. In numbers of volumes, \textit{[Vessantarajātaka]} exceeds all other texts or categories of texts. The total number of palm-leaf manuscripts (Thai: \textit{phūk}) devoted to the \textit{jātaka} was 5,665 out of 12,570 or 49 percent.\textsuperscript{41}

There is a short, perfunctory Pali verse version of Vessantara’s story in the canonical \textit{Cariyāpiṭaka} (Basket of conduct).\textsuperscript{42} Glosses and commentaries in Sinhala on the \textit{Vessantarajātaka} seem to have begun early, although the earliest extant, by Sāriputta, is from the twelfth century.\textsuperscript{43} In Burma there are Buddhist temples at Pagan with wall illustrations of the \textit{Vessantarajātaka} from the mid-eleventh century.\textsuperscript{44} All sources on Burma attest to the continuing popularity of the \textit{Vessantarajātaka}, along with the other nine long stories from the \textit{Mahānīpāta} section of the Birth Story collection. These Birth Stories formed a group and were the most popular of all the Stories.\textsuperscript{45} In Thailand,

\textsuperscript{40} The Sinhala \textit{Butsarama} version of the Vessantara story is translated in Reynolds (1970). The popularity of the story in Thailand is attested for in Schweisguth 1951, Brereton 1995, and McGill 1997; for the Middle Mekong in Finot 1917, Peltier 1988; and for Cambodia in Giteau 1966, 1975, Dupaigne and Khing 1981, Khing 1990, and Jacob 1996. These works, however, have little usable information about the content of different versions.

\textsuperscript{41} Brereton 1995: 62, 85 n.38.

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Cariyāpiṭaka} 78–81. The commentary (\textit{Cp-a} 74–102) preserves verses different from the canonical text, and its prose puts back much of the tension and emotion of the \textit{Vessantarajātaka}. \textit{Sūsanavaṃsa} (The History of the teachings) 105 records that in seventeenth-century Burma TiPiṭakālakāma wrote a poetical version of the \textit{Vessantarajātaka} (\textit{kāvyālayakāravasena bandhi}) as a fifteen-year-old novice. The context makes it likely that this was in Pali, although this is not specified.

\textsuperscript{43} In the twelfth century an unknown author wrote the \textit{Vesaturu-dā-sanne}. \textit{Vidyācakravarti} in the thirteenth century wrote an elegant Sinhala version, which appears in two works, the \textit{Butsarama} and the \textit{Dhavanarasa}. \textit{Godakumbara} (1955: 99) says this “differs from the version contained in the \textit{jātakapoṭa}” (the Sinhala birth stories), but the English translation seems to me very close to the \textit{Vessantarajātaka}, both in plot and in the strength of emotion expressed (if anything it is intensified). Manuscripts of many other versions are extant, continuing until the nineteenth century, in the form of popular stories, ballads, and \textit{kāvyā}. In the twentieth century there has been at least one film version, as there has been also in Thailand.

\textsuperscript{44} These are the two Hpet-Leik pagodas built by Aniruddha in the mid-eleventh century; also at various temples built by Kyanzittha. The great Ananda temple, built in 1090, illustrates the \textit{Vessantarajātaka} in 1,215 plaques, each with a short description in old Mon.

\textsuperscript{45} There exist two translations of Burmese versions of the \textit{Vessantarajātaka}, though at present the originals cannot be dated (and they may be the same text). L. A. Goss (1895) partly summarized, partly translated the story of Wethaday (his subtitle says it is “sketched from the Burmese version of the Pali text”); in 1896 O. White offered \textit{A Literal Translation of the Text Book Committee’s Edition of Wethandaya}. Text versions are at present little known, but there was an extensive practice of putting the story on the stage. Shway Zoe (George Scott) (1910: 18,
both the Pali Vessantarajātaka (known often simply as Mahachat = Mahājātaka) and vernacular versions, often in the form of mixed Pali verses and vernacular elaboration, have been common in Thai history, as have versions of the Vessantarajātaka in Cambodia and the Middle Mekong region.46

The shared story-matrix of the Rāmāyaṇa and Vessantarajātaka, distributed

294) says that of all theatrical subjects "the Wethandaya is probably best known on account of the real pathos of the story and the beauty of the composition." Forbes (1878: 143) reports that "I have seen men moved to tears by a good representation of this play." It was also produced in puppet performances. Shway Zoe (322–23) translates a song called "Rangoon Maidsens," in which appears the line "You are like Wethandaya's queen"; he comments "Madi, the spouse of Prince Wethandaya, is always regarded as the model wife." In this, again, she is a Buddhist counterpart to Sītā.

46. Stories in the later collections of Paññasajātaka (Fifty birth stories), one of which was produced in Chieng Mai around the fifteenth century (two other recensions exist, which are not edited in a Western edition), were influenced by the Vessantarajātaka, although the borrowing tends to focus on, and often exaggerate, the Perfection of Generosity exemplified by Vessantara. From the time of the earliest versions there was a connection between this story and that of the monk Mālāyya (Phra Malai), who visits heaven and meets the future Buddha Metteyya; Metteyya tells him that those who listen to the Vessantarajātaka’s recitation will be reborn when he comes to earth. An inscription from Burma in 1201 may refer to the two texts together. (The Pali version of Phra Malai is translated in Collins 1993, and Thai versions in Brereton 1995). Extensive evidence attests to the importance of the Vessantarajātaka in the modern period as a text and as a component of ritual. According to Keyes (1987: 179), "three texts—or, more properly, several versions of three texts—define for most Thai Buddhists today, as in traditional Siam, the basic parameters of a Theravadin view of the world." They are the Three Worlds Treatise, the story of Mālāyya, and the Vessantarajātaka. For Schweisguth, writing of the premodern period, the Vessantarajātaka was "the entire Buddhist catechism for Thai Buddhists, and was their only religious matter for a long period; it was effectively the only properly Buddhist text [he means concerned with the Buddha] that was accessible to them in their own language, since all the others remained in Pali redaction" (1951: 52). Herbert and Mülner (1989: 33) say that "many versions of [Vessantarajātaka] exist, including regional versions"; a survey and study of these is an urgent desideratum, as is a parallel study of the Rama texts: Schweisguth reports (1951: 64, 112 n.1) that in some texts there is confusion between scenes in the two stories. The earliest surviving vernacular written Vessantarajātaka is the royal version commissioned by King Trailok around 1482, with verses in Pali followed by a Thai verse paraphrase. Such royal versions were a genre, known as Khom Luang; thus this one is Mahachat Khom Luang. Not surprisingly, it was especially concerned with the political aspects of the story. In 1458 he had five hundred or more terra-cotta plaques made to represent the canonical Birth Stories. A verse text called Kap Mahachat was written in the early seventeenth century in two parts, the first in Pali and the second in Thai. In the late eighteenth century a minister-poet called Phra Khlang wrote a poem on two of the most popular chapters of the Vessantarajātaka, those concerning the children and Maddi. Thereafter various members of the Bangkok dynasty composed versions of or sermons on the Vessantarajātaka. One interesting aspect in Thailand is the way the text was interpreted by some reciters in the direction of farce, notably the scenes involving the Brahmin Jujaka. Laws from the late eighteenth century, for example, warn monks against comic and "theatrical" presentations of the story, preferring them to recite the Abhidhamma. Anuman Rajadhon reports that in modern times "the reciter has to display his wit and additions of his own are
throughout Asia, is the most widespread textual artifact of civilization deriving from South Asia. In the countries of South and Southeast Asia there was a division of labor, or at least an interaction, between them. The Vessantarajātaka made a Pali version of the Rāmāyaṇa unnecessary; there is no evidence that one was made or contemplated anywhere. Both have the same tragic/utopian, familial/public concerns. Where Vālmiki’s Rāmāyaṇa was known, as in Sri Lanka and pre-Theravāda Cambodia, there seem not to have been vernacular versions substantially different from it. Where one does find extensive vernacular versions, as in Thailand, Laos, and Theravādin Cambodia, they differ from Vālmiki’s Rāmāyaṇa, especially in their deemphasis or alteration of the political aspects of that version. In Thailand, for example, it was the Mahachat Kham Luang version of the Vessantarajātaka, along with the Three Worlds Treatise—a Thai compendium of Buddhist cosmology compiled from Pali texts, usually assigned to the fourteenth century—which, rather than any version of the Rāmāyaṇa, were the “politico-religious literature par excellence” in premodernity. These specific suggestions may, of course, have to be modified or abandoned; but what does seem proved is the need to think through these issues in terms of the coexistence and interaction of Pali, Sanskrit, and vernacular text production. And this, I think, is true not only of these particular texts but of many other areas of Pali literature.

KAṬA IN PALI

The Pali Canon, probably created in the last centuries B.C.E. and arranged in its present form somewhat later, contains verse texts whose composers were aware of other poetry in India, and non-verse texts which range from lists

thrown into the recitation which sometimes border on drollery and vulgarity. The orthodox people frown.” However in recent times “the merry side is on the wane” (1968: 170, 173).

In the Middle Mekong the Pali Jātaka collection existed, of course, so both the Dasaratha-jātaka and Vessantarajātaka were known, although the Lao recension of the Paññāsajjātaka was equally widespread. There were Lao translations of Pali Birth Stories, particularly the last ten; the Vessantarajātaka was the most popular in sermons and iconography, both as a whole and in the form of selected and/or abridged sections. In Cambodia, representations of the Vessantarajātaka date from at least the twelfth century; little is known about literature before the fifteenth century, but thereafter many vernacular versions of the story were made, which existed alongside recitations of the Pali version with vernacular commentary.

47. In Sri Lanka, one difference between Kumāradāsa’s Janakaḥarana and Vālmiki’s Rāmāyaṇa is the personality of Daśaratha, whom Kumāradāsa makes a much stronger character; this might represent the influence of the Vessantarajātaka in Sri Lanka, for that text, however much it has Vessantara’s father Satijaya admit he was wrong at the end, nonetheless makes of him, explicitly and implicitly, a more equally balanced force with Vessantara than are Daśaratha and Rāma.

and matrices in the style of Higher Teachings, set in a minimal narrative frame or without any frame at all, to finely wrought prose compositions. The sterner side of the Teaching easily disapproves of literary frivolity.\textsuperscript{49} The Buddha laments the future decline of his Teaching, contrasting sermons given by himself with those to be given in the future by his disciples, which will be merely “literature made by \textit{kavis}.”\textsuperscript{50} Twice poetry (\textit{kāvya}) is called a bestial form of knowledge and a wrong livelihood.\textsuperscript{51} But this is not the whole story. In one canonical text and in a number of commentaries there occurs a list of four kinds of \textit{kavi}.\textsuperscript{52} This is not explained fully, and the classification does not seem to have played a great role in later thinking, but it is worth looking at. The four are (1) the \textit{cintā-kavi}, who reflects on a subject for a long time before producing his own composition on it; (2) the \textit{suta-kavi}, who recites texts he has heard from others;\textsuperscript{53} (3) the \textit{attha-kavi}, who is able to interpret a story at greater or lesser length, presumably as appropriate to different occasions;\textsuperscript{54} and (4) the \textit{patibhāna-kavi}, who can improvise on the spot, using his own inspiration and his previous experience of stories, \textit{kārya} or drama.\textsuperscript{55}

Many techniques are found which are later explicitly acknowledged as those of \textit{kārya}. Similes, and imagery in general, are extremely common in early Pali texts, both prose and verse. Imagery can be both illustrative and constitutive. The most obvious example of the latter is the imagery of the fires of passion and suffering and their going out (quenching) in nirvana. Buddhism is quite literally unthinkable without this image.\textsuperscript{56} The following are some examples of \textit{kārya} techniques in the Canon:

Double meaning (\textit{śleṣa}) is exemplified in the following twin description of the best and worst of men:\textsuperscript{57}

\begin{verbatim}
\textit{Assaddho akataññu ca sandhicchedo ca yo naro/hat\textit{a} vak\textit{a} so vant\textit{a} so sa uttamaporiso [adhamaporiso]. The argument and translations are from Norman [1979] 1991: 187–93 (paren-
\end{verbatim}
He is indeed the best of men who is without desire, who knows the Unmade [nirvana], who has cut the connection with rebirth, who has got rid of occasions (for quarrels) [or: opportunities (for rebirth)], and who has abandoned desire. He indeed is the worst of men who is without faith, ungrateful, a burglar, one who has missed his opportunity [for religious improvement], and who is an eater of vomit.

Regarding dialogue, another technique of kavya, Warder is surely right to suggest that Pali dramatic episodes and dialogues in prose may be considered forerunners of “the forms of drama established in later kavya.”58 In the opening section of the Śamaññaphala Sutta (Discourse on the benefits of asceticism) (D I: 47 ff.) King Ajātasattu, who murdered his father, the Buddha’s friend King Bimbisāra, is sitting in the light of a full moon. Exclaiming at the beauty of the scene, he asks his ministers which holy man he might visit so that his mind may be gladdened and calmed. They suggest six names—six ascetics, the list of whose doctrines, given later, is the reason this text is usually discussed—but the king remains silent. His doctor, Jivaka, suggests he see the Buddha, who is staying in a monastery Jivaka built in a mango grove outside the city; he agrees and they set off, accompanied by many elephants and flaming torches. Nearing the monastery, where the Buddha is sitting with over a thousand monks, the king hears nothing and feels such fear that he goes stiff and his hair stands on end. He is frightened that Jivaka might have tricked him so as to be handing him over to an enemy. Jivaka reassures him and urges him to go on (into the dark forest and without the elephants), saying ete maṁdaḷa-māle dīpā jhāyanti. The literal meaning is “there are lights burning in the round pavilion”; but Buddhas and other enlightened people are often likened to lamps (which light the world), and jhāyanti can also mean “meditate” (this play on words is found elsewhere). So Jivaka is also saying “the lights (of the world) are meditating,” a gentle conceit in stark contrast to Ajātasattu’s harassed distress. The king approaches the Buddha and stands respectfully at one side, where “seeing the order of monks sitting very quietly, like the clear waters of a [still] lake, he exclaims spiritedly: ‘would that [his son] Prince Udayibhadda were endowed with a calm like this!’” The Buddha asks if his thoughts are following his affection. “Lord,” is the reply, “Prince Udayibhadda is dear to me; would that he were endowed with a calm like this!” So the paranoid parricide, in search of peace of mind on a pretty night, fears betrayal by his doctor and murder

---

at the hands of his son. The commentary (Sv 153–54) spells this out, noting that Udayibhadda did end up killing his father, just as Udayibhadda’s son, grandson, and great-grandson in turn were also parricides.

The second poem of the *Sutta Nipata* (Group of discourses) (Sn 18–34) gives a verse example of dialogue, between the farmer Dhaniya and the Buddha. They swap verses using various meters (vv.18–19 and 22–23 are quoted here):

Dhaniya: I have boiled my rice and done my milking, I dwell with my family near the bank of the Mahī. My hut is thatched, my fire is heaped up. So rain, sky-god, if you wish.

The Buddha: I am free from anger, (my mind) has no waste-land, I am staying for one night near the bank of the Mahī. My hut is open, my fire is quenched. So rain, sky-god, if you wish.

Dhaniya: My wife is obedient, unwavering. She has lived with me pleasantly for a long time. I hear no evil of her at all. So rain, sky-god, if you wish.

The Buddha: My mind is obedient, released, it has been developed for a long time and is well controlled. No evil is found in me. So rain, sky-god, if you wish. 59

The early Pali poems which have attracted the most attention are those anthologized in the *Theragāthā* and the *Therīgāthā* (Verses of monks and Verses of nuns). There are similarities between certain of these poems and later Prakrit

---

59. *pañca sūtra* guneśvara sūtra

The Buddha’s reply fits into a widespread pattern of imagery which likens a monk’s mind to his meditation hut (kūṭī).

---

The early Pali poems which have attracted the most attention are those anthologized in the *Theragāthā* and the *Therīgāthā* (Verses of monks and Verses of nuns). There are similarities between certain of these poems and later Prakrit

---

The Buddha’s reply fits into a widespread pattern of imagery which likens a monk’s mind to his meditation hut (kūṭī).

---
verses, notably those by Hāla. Two techniques in particular may be mentioned: The first is the description of a woman’s beauty, starting from the head and going downwards—a standard form in later poetry. The nun Ambapāli, a former prostitute, reflects in nineteen verses on the passing of both time and her beauty, with the same refrain at the end of each verse. Some examples:

The curls of my hair were black like the color of bees; now through old age they are like bark-fibers of hemp. The words of him who speaks the truth are not false.

Before, my eyebrows were beautiful, like crescent moons nicely drawn by a painter; now through old age they droop in wrinkles. The words of him who speaks the truth are not false.

My two breasts used to be full, round, close together, and uplifted; [now] they hang down like empty water bags. The words of him who speaks the truth are not false.

Such was this body. A crumbling home of many sufferings, it is a decayed mansion shedding the pride of its plaster. The words of him who speaks the truth are not false.

The second technique is the use of natural scenes followed by some reflection on morality or the state of mind of a monk or nun, whereas in the later works the nature scene is followed by a reflection on love, the absence of a lover, or the like. Often the nature scene is set in the rainy season, in a manner reminiscent of the Rāmāyaṇa—especially sargas 25–27 of the “Kiskindākāḍa”—and of many later works in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Pali. In the early Pali case the aloneness of monks and nuns—better, their “singleness” of social status and purpose—may be set against the motif of the rainy season as a time for love. And the violence of the rains, and of animals in the surrounding forest, are often contrasted with the peace of mind of the monk:

My hut is pleasant, a delightful gift of faith. I have no need of girls: women, go where [there is need of you].

60.

When at midnight in a desolate forest grove the sky-god rains and the fanged animals roar, the monk in [his] cave meditates—he finds no greater delight than this.

In two rainy seasons I uttered [but] one word. In the third rainy season the mass of darkness burst asunder.

The earth is sprinkled, the wind blows, lightning moves in the sky; [my] thoughts are calm, my mind well-concentrated.

Of the later Pali texts written in kāvyā style, a number are praise-poems or biographies of the Buddha.62 Jīnālāṅkāra (Ornaments of the conqueror) is a praise-poem in 241 verses of various complex meters. It begins and ends with praise-verses, while verses 15–171 tell the story from Sumedha to the Enlightenment. It has thirty short sections; the titles of sections 13 through
describe the linguistic effect they contain. There is much wordplay: verses which are palindromes (99–100); a verse with four identical padaś, each to be read a different way (97); verses of similar sounds, such as all guttural consonants (101) or all nasals (105). Its imagery can be royal and martial:

He attained the excellent white umbrella of release and from the strength of his rapture he gave voice to a spirited utterance. He cut down the Māras and conquered the enemy army [to become] the Sun of the three Buddha-Fields.63

One way Buddhist monks could express visions of beauty in poetry opposed to the usual instincts of asceticism was to depict them as that which is to be renounced. The author of the Jinalankāra does this. When Siddhattha leaves home, the poet dwells at length on the sensuality and luxury he abandons, his wife, Yasodharā; and, as here, the palace women:

When these good women, excited with full breasts and lips, their girdles shining brightly, grant the touch of their bodies they are like goddesses; delightful, wearing bracelets, in full bloom, they give delight.

Their hands bright red, delighting in the pleasure of love, all playing musical instruments, many thousands of women, great dancers, excite him saying “how can even Sakka [king of the gods] be equal to the Sakyamuni [Siddhattha]?”

Wide-eyed, smiling, with slender waists and breasts like Nimba fruit, singing songs of astonishing [beauty], wearing jewelry and colored makeup, well-dressed, they are called to dance by the musical instruments.

There is nothing to compare them to [anywhere] in the world; at their caresses one loses the power to speak. Experiencing such desire and delight, how could he, desireless, abandon them and lift his foot [to depart]?64

---

63. Patto vimuttim varasatachattra / so pātivegana udānudārayi / chetoṭo Māre vijitārisangho / tibuddha-kketadivākāra (Jinal 170).

64. Jinal 72–76. The translation here should be taken as tentative. In verse 76 line 2 the sense seems to demand a negative.

saṅkoditā pūnapayodharādharā nirākāravayupajñemakalikāla
surāgānāvajgajapassadā sodā
ramā ramāpenti varaṅghadādā.
karatavātā ratrattarīnā
ṭalāvavacare samantā
naceggatatākehasahassahatthā
sakko pi kim sakyasamoti codayum.
The Mahānāgakulasandesa (Letter from Mahānāgakula) \(^{65}\) praises two places: a city in southeastern Sri Lanka called Mahānāgakula, and Pagan in Burma. The text—only the opening section is extant—is in the form of a letter of sixty-two verses from the monk Nāgasena to Mahākassapa in Pagan, a leader of the recently introduced Sinhala lineage; it seems to have been written not by Nāgasena but by a monk in his school, and dates from the thirteenth century, while Pagan was still in its prime. It uses many different meters. The following Double Meaning (śloṣa) in praise of Nāgasena in verse 12 shows great Sanskritization—so much so that it would be impossible to understand it without knowing both individual Sanskrit lexical items and the rules for transforming Sanskrit to Pali forms. My translations attempt to be as literal as possible, to suggest the wordplay.\(^{66}\)

---

65. Other Pali texts in the form of a letter—examples in Sanskrit begin in the second to the fourth centuries—are works of kāvyā. The Saddhammopiyana (Gift-offering of truth) treats aspects of Buddhist doctrine—hells experienced as the result of bad deeds, the various results of good deeds, the advantages of transferring merit and of listening to the dhamma, and so on—in 615 verses, mostly ślokas. The colophon says it was written for the monk Buddha-soma, and a commentary attributes it to Abhayagiri Kavicakravrtin (a common epithet for monk-literati in medieval Sri Lanka) Ānanda Mahāthera. It has thus been thought to be from the Abhayagiri fraternity, but its content contains no discrepancy from Mahāvihārin views. The Rāmasandesa, from the later eighteenth century, is a stākha, since it has one hundred verses. Neville (cited in Somadasa 1993: 5.181–84) says it is written “in most elegant Pali stanzas, accompanied by a Sinhalese sanna or translation, apparently written to form one work,...” The work is little known, but deserves a place in every library of Pali or Sinhalese books.” Unfortunately no Western edition has been made, but a fairly detailed description is available in Somadasa’s catalogue. Given the extent of letter literature in Sanskrit and in Sinhala, it would seem likely that there were other examples in Pali, which have been lost. Little is known also about the genre of the Eights, attaka (Skt. astaka), examples of which we have from Sri Lanka in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. The genre includes poems in Sanskrit and Sinhala as well as Pali. They are praise-poems in eight stanzas celebrating the Buddha, relics, and historical individuals, including members of the British colonial administration.

66. 

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{isālāṇetā ḍāsulā suṃajhā} \\
\text{nimbattakānī vinhaṭhītāsaddā} \\
\text{alankatā malladhārī suṇakkhā} \\
\text{naccati šāvācarihi ghuṭṭhā} \\
\text{yāsāṁ hi loke upamā nattī} \\
\text{tāsāṁ hi phassesu kathāvokhaśa} \\
\text{taṁ tuśaṁ kāmaratīmuḥbhaṁtā} \\
\text{hitā kāsaṁ nu padamuddhāri so nirāso.}
\end{align*}
\]
Who is without a settled place, is fragrant with streams of rut-fluid, and is fortunate to be ridden by mahouts with many reins; who stirs up not even the tiniest amount of harmful dust thanks to the concentration, obedience, virtue, and gentleness [he has acquired] through training; whose cow elephants are sweet-sounding, who has great sharp tusks and the skill to split apart mighty war elephants in battle; who trumpets and is bejeweled—[this is] a mighty, perfumed bull elephant!

Who is without attachment, is celebrated for the practice of generosity, and is fortunate in having been guided by teachers with many virtues; who stirs up not even the tiniest particle of evil thanks to the concentration, learning, virtue, and compassion [he has acquired] through training; whose partner is the goddess of speech [Sarasvati]; who has great sharp tusks of wisdom to pierce the great obstacles that oppose [him] in the battle [against defilements]; who is a jewel among ascetics—[this is] a mighty [virtue]-perfumed bull elephant!

The Jinabodhāvāli (List of Buddhas and their Bodhi trees) from the fourteenth century blends systematic, narrative, and praise-poem modes of exposition. In thirty-four verses it praises twenty-eight Buddhas and their trees in ten different meters, the most common being Vasantatilaka. Each Buddha is praised in one verse, such that the text is as much a list as a story, but another title, Abhinhipani (Explanation of the resolve [to become a Buddha]), shows that a narrative—indeed a well-known one—holds the list together: that of the future Buddha Gotama’s aspiration to Buddhahood in the presence of twenty-five previous Buddhas. Their verses are preceded by those for three earlier Buddhas, who predicted his meeting with Dipânkara and his future Buddhahood. (In some other texts, the future Gotama in one of these three lives was a woman.) The previous Buddhas are very well-known, given for example in a list which begins a popular set of verses used for protection rituals (paritta). A list of the twenty-five beginning with Dipânkara, the first to whom future-Gotama made the aspiration, is found with no elaboration at the beginning of the Mahāvamsa (Mhv I 5–10). In the Jinabodhāvāli verses 1–3 are introductory, verses 4–31 praise the Buddhas, and verses

67. The compound in line 2 is to be analyzed sikkhā-kāruṇā-puṇṇa-savāna-avisarana-aghāna-agha-a∩u rented. For avisarana as nondistractedness, concentration, see BHSD; (a)ghānā must be equal to Skt. (a)ghānā, from ghān (the correspondence would be ghān- >ghrøn >ghūn). The verb is not cited in either Dhāṭupatha or Dhāṭumāṇjusā. Only those who knew Sanskrit would have been able to make the necessary conversion. In line 3 oddāraṇā is from Skt. ava-dj, with -dd by sandhi (cf. CPD s.v. ava-dāraṇa). In line 4 tiṇṇa is equivalent to (or a wrong reading for) tiṇha; and manā means noise (Dhāṭup 116, Dhāṭum 172).

68. A similar remark might be made about another text from the fourteenth century, the Pârâmimahāvātaka (Great century on the perfections), which celebrates the Ten Perfections. Nevill calls it “a rare and elegant Pali poem” (Somadasa 1987: i.17), but it awaits a Western edition.

69. Liyanaratne 1983.
31–34, along with a brief colophon, reflect on the poem and express the author’s wishes for the future, which include Buddhahood for himself. Further study might (or might not) reveal interrelationships between the meters chosen and the kind of praise given to each Buddha. By way of exemplification here I will choose two verses, giving the Pali in the text rather than in the notes, since so much depends on the sound of the words. Verse 12 is in Rukmavati, or Campakalā, which has four lines of ten syllables each. The editor of the text says that the sound of this meter “gives the impression of a dance.”

```
sohbita-nātham nāg’agga-mule
patta-sabhōdim pikkha dvījo so
patthaya bodhiṃ kato’ abhipajjam
sāduḥ name ‘ham taṇ ca munindam
```

That Brahman [the future Gotama] saw Lord Sobhita, who had attained Enlightenment at the foot of the excellent Nāga Tree. He aspired to Enlightenment after having reverenced [him]. Bravo! I too bow down to the King of Sages.

Verse 17 is in Śārdulavikriṣṭa, which has four lines of nineteen syllables:

```
bodhiṃ nīpa-dume sumedhasugato jēvā sa-sen’antakan
patta utaramāyavaṃ varataraṃ sabbaṅkutaṃ pathayaṃ
dissā hessa’ anāgata avaca yo buddho tu ‘yan sāradāṃ
vande ‘ham sirasā saddā muni-varaṃ siddhiṃ dumindena taṇ.
```

The Felicitous One, Sumedha, defeated the Ender [Death] and his army, and attained Enlightenment at the Nīpa Tree. He who was the Buddha [then] saw that the very excellent Brahman youth Uttara aspired to Omniscience, and said, “He will be a Buddha in the future.” With my head [bowed] I worship constantly this King of Sages, who gives the essential, along with his King among Trees.

We have very little evidence of literary composition in Pali on the Southeast Asian mainland. We know of vernacular works of literature there, but what little is known about Pali text-production includes no kāvyā works. Vernacular literary production in Thailand was influenced by both Pali and San-

---

70. Note that short a is pronounced as in but; long a as in father, short i as in bit, long i as in jeep; short u as in mug, long u as in boot; e as in gate; o as in so.
72. The text of this half-line, and therefore the translation, seem to me debatable.
73. Pathayaṃ here must be wrong; it is the nominative of the present participle when the accusative is needed. The meter could be preserved by reading varaṃ for varataram, and the correct pathayantaṃ for pathayaṃ.
74. An inscription of king Alaungsithu in 1141 C.E. records his aspiration to Buddhahood in elegant Pali verses of different meters (Luce and Maung Tin 1920). The nineteenth-century
skrit traditions, and the most influential work of Thai prosody, the Chin-
dhamani, was based on the Pali Vuttodaya.75 The Burmese sack of Ayutthaya
in 1767 destroyed many books—literary pieces in Pali perhaps among them.
A century later the British in Burma wrought equally severe destruction.
Everywhere, apart from Thailand, modernity arrived as French or British
colonialism. Thailand’s modernist reforms were initiated by the elite, much
influenced by the West, especially empirical science.76 Just before the final
British victory in Burma, the monk Paññāsa, under the patronage of King
Minda, produced in 1861 the Sasanavaṃsa (History of the teaching).
Lieberman shows that this is a “heavily edited translation of a Burmese-
language work” written in 1831 under the patronage of King Bagyidaw af-
fter the First Anglo-Burmese War.77 Since then, commentarial and other works
of grammar, poetics, and especially Higher Teachings have been produced
in Burma—the last notably by Ledi Sayadaw—but, it seems, no literary
works.78 In Sri Lanka, after the eighteenth-century textual revival by Saranam-
kara, little of a kavya nature has been produced. Malalasekera mentions two
verse texts. One is the Jinavamsadipani (Exposition of the lineage of the con-
queror), written in 1917 by Medhānanda, with two thousand verses in thirty
chapters.79 Its author claims in a Preface to have wanted to write a mahakāya
on the model of the Sanskrit Raghuvaṃsa and Kumārasambhava. The other,
the Mahakassapa-carita (Career of Mahākassapa), was written in 1924 by Vidu-
rupola Piyaṭissa; it has fifteen hundred verses in twenty chapters. These were
the last flickerings of a transnational Buddhist literary culture in Pali.

---

75. Terwiel 1996.
76. For a thumbnail sketch of this period of Thai history, see Collins 1998: 60–63.
77. Lieberman 1976: 139.
79. Malalasekera 1928.
modern world of colonialism has produced for the most part nationalist literary production in vernaculars or English.

CONCLUSION
The question I began with can be broken into three. First: Why does the Pali Canon, treated by modern Buddhists and scholars alike as a set of didactic religious texts, contain writing which aims at specifically literary elegance in ways taken later in India to be those of kāvya? Perhaps no answer to this question is needed. In any case neither I nor anyone else currently has one. Second: Why, after this early attention to literary value, was no Pali text produced which aimed at literary value produced for around a thousand years, with the partial exception of the Mahāvamsa? This question surely does need an answer, but again neither I nor anyone else has one. Third: Why did literary elegance begin again to be an aim of at least some Pali texts in the first half of the second millennium c.e.? I do not have anything like a full answer to this question, but the following reflections might suggest some avenues from which to start.

At the beginning of the second millennium c.e., Pali Buddhism began to move from Sri Lanka to become an international civilizational force in mainland Southeast Asia. It spread through these areas as “Sinhala” Buddhism, but the movement was in fact in both directions. Pali Buddhism, present in these areas in the first millennium, was then for the most part un-

80. To revive the monastic order after what the Chronicles describe—perhaps misleadingly—as the devastation of the Cōla rule from c. 1017–1070, the Sri Lankan king Vijayabahu in the eleventh century invited monks from Burma to preside over the new ordinations. It is more likely that, like rulers throughout the Theravāda world, he wished to impose a royally authorized lineage on existing orders of monks. The Cōla invasion from south India and subsequent rule in the tenth and eleventh centuries must have brought with it increased knowledge of and participation in a pan-Indian cultural world. There is evidence that, contrary to the Chronicles’ partisan portrayal, the Cōlas in fact supported Buddhism; it seems unlikely that they could have presided over a stable social order otherwise. If this was the case—and still more, if Vijayabahu’s reconstruction of a Pali Buddhist ideological polity had ambitions beyond the island, as it may have done—it seems possible that an attempt might have been made after that time to incorporate a wider range of cultural expression in Pali than had been attempted earlier, perhaps using the literary capabilities stimulated by the Cōla rulers. The Mahāvamsa says of Parakkamabahu II in the thirteenth century, for example, that he was skilled in the treatise of Manu (Manunitiśivasārađa) and brought learned Cōlan monks to Sri Lanka (Mhv LXXXIV: 1, 10), as well as books of all the learned traditions, such as logic, grammar, etc. (ibid., 27). In the eighteenth century, when King Kirti Sīri Rājasimha and the monk Saranaṃkara were reviving (or renewing) the order in their own image, they invited monks from Thailand, and so what is still the leading lineage in Sri Lanka is called the Siyam Nikāya. (Another was introduced from Burma in the nineteenth century.)
connected with larger-scale polities. It later began to be imported by kings as part of their state-building enterprises, and it grew to dominance in Pagan (Burma) from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries, in the Mon state of Pegu in the thirteenth century, in the First and the Restored Toungoo empires from the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries, and in the Konbaung empire of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; in what is now Thailand, in the Sukhothai and Lan Na polities in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in the Ayutthaya empire of the fourteenth through eighteenth centuries (interrupted and ended by devastating defeats at the hands of Burmese armies), and in the early Bangkok empire of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; and in Cambodia, from the thirteenth century on, in the various smaller kingdoms which arose in the territory of the old Khmer empire centered at Angkor between periods of Siamese and Vietnamese control. Why did kings at this time introduce the Pali tradition and its associated monastic lineages into areas which had all known Hinduism and other forms of Buddhism and the Sanskrit language?

I will sketch out the beginnings of two possible answers. In doing so I do not mean to exclude any value or significance attributed to Pali Buddhism by its followers. Pali literature is primarily an ideology. The earliest extant texts have been preserved as the *Tipiṭaka* (Three baskets), now called its Canon, which is the *buddhavacana* (Buddha’s word). Thus it claims an historical primacy. In ordination rituals, in scholarly Higher Teachings, in the widespread instrumentalist uses of Pali (“Pali Tantra,” “magic”—no one term is adequate) and elsewhere, Pali Buddhism was also claimed to have an intrinsic ontological value and efficacy. In its sociopolitical aspect, this ideology had to do with naturalizing inequality in social hierarchies (through karma and the idea of merit), and with the pacification of populations, helping to make it possible for tribute-takers in the premodern agrarian states where the Teaching (*sāsana*) was established\(^{81}\) to extract a surplus from tribute-givers. The Pali Buddhist ideology operated among the elite, primarily as an element in a nexus of power, as local power-holders were organized by a king into a *maṇḍala*. The practical realities of military control over large distances in premodern times meant that a king, at the center of a *maṇḍala* of client kings, had to exercise power through them, both politically and militarily. These local power-holders might control a small area by force alone, but a group of them could not be held together that way. Pali ideology was

\(^{81}\) This term is not to be taken in the European sense. Forms, often causative, of the verb *paitiśa* (Skt. *pratiśa*) are standardly used—as they are also, not unrelatedly, for the installation in temples of images and relics. The term has more to do with the dialectic of local and translocal than with any political-legal institutionalization of a Buddhist “church.”
important in building the cultural coherence of such a dominant class but had no part in the cultural coherence of the societies as wholes, since there was none.\textsuperscript{82} The general picture of cultural history I assume here, as an empirical hypothesis, is this: The premodern Pali imaginaire was an elite ideology, originally strongest in cities (often with branches in outlying forest regions), which over the course of the second millennium c.e. moved, sociologically speaking, downwards and outwards, and at some point before or during the modern period became a “popular,” or peasant, religion. My own guess as to when this happened would put it within the last two hundred years, as an aspect of the growth of nationalism. But others may argue for an earlier date.

The concept of literature, when more specific than just “what is written,” overlaps with that of ideology but differs from it in significant ways. On the one hand, elements adapted from an elite ideology can provide a medium for the expression of ideas and values other than those of the dominant ideology. For example, in 1868

Adolf Bastian travelled throughout Siam and Indochina, sat with villagers in the evenings when stories were told, and gave summaries of what he heard. . . . The folktales have a delightful spontaneity, vigour and realism. . . . Some stories show no trace of any political structure and may pre-date Indian influence. . . . Buddhism is certainly in the background of the verse-novels, although many of the so-called jātak are apocryphal and it must be admitted that the heroes are not presented as the devout holy characters we might have imagined!\textsuperscript{83}

But the sense of literature most relevant to this book, on the other hand, is not folktales but kāvyā, a product of linguistic sophistication and specific training. Criticism of kings and temporal power is common in Pali, but it is not an avenue for villagers’ resistance to the ideology of the elite. Kāvyā literature was a phenomenon of court society and educated culture, where the connection between it and the social, political, and economic aspects of life did not primarily have to do with the naturalization of inequality, as does Pali literature in its most general sense. Monks and their texts, as also their relics and images, were prestige objects, circulating in an exchange system of precious goods: law texts, for example could be and were put together with other power objects by kings in impressive displays.\textsuperscript{84} In the perspective of sociohistorical analysis it is an element in the rhetorical, theatrical con-

\textsuperscript{82} My phrasing here follows that of Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner 1980: 3.

\textsuperscript{83} Jacob 1996: 9, 15, 41.

\textsuperscript{84} Huxley 1995. Huxley also argues that over the course of the second millennium c.e. an autonomous legal profession emerged in Burma to create a three-way interaction and struggle with monks and kings.
stitution of civilization-bearing state-systems: symbolic capital contributing to the prestige of both the mandala-organizing king and his clients. Hallisey, in chapter 12 of this volume, speaks of civilization as producing both texts and persons; Kapstein, on the other hand, always existed in a pluralist milieu: it was never identical to “high culture,” but interacted with Sanskrit and vernacular forms of that culture. Distinctively Pali senses of literate excellence, personhood, and subjectivity were produced by Theravāda monasticism, but that was not—or better, was never predominantly—a literary culture; it was a scholastic culture producing ideology and its human embodiments.

Helms assembles much anthropological evidence to demonstrate the importance to kings and their local prestige of luxury goods brought from afar and of sophisticated and fine craftsmanship of all sorts, noting that “the exceptional significance associated with items from distant places is particularly evidenced in highly centralized polities.”

Pali literature was a luxury good in at least two ways (aside from its intrinsic elegance and worth to those who could participate in it), both of which have to do with rarity and difficulty: first, it came from afar and so connoted the spatially and temporally distant. Second, the capacity to enjoy, and still more to create it, required arduous training and separation from the economically everyday. It had to do with distance and difference in both spatiotemporal and social senses. In premodern Southern Asia—a world of constantly enlarging and diminishing mandalas of royal organization—kings with enough power and wealth aimed to build or maintain centralized states, aiming in Sri Lanka to unite the island “under one umbrella” of kingship and, in Southeast Asia, to amass enough territory to give credence to the rhetoric of the world-conquering Wheel-turning king (cakkavatti). They were also patrons (and controllers) of Pali Buddhism, and of the pluralist high cultures of which it formed a part. Pali literature in both ideological and kavya senses was part of the process of providing coherence to the elite on which such kings and states depended.

Often the introduction of Pali Buddhism into an area by kings coincided with the introduction, or at least new evidence of, writing: in Sri Lanka inscriptions in Brahmi script concerning Buddhism date from the third century B.C.E., when the Chronicles tell us Buddhism was adopted by King Devānampiyatissa. In Burma the earliest inscriptions are in Pali, and while there are inscriptions in Pyu, Mon, and Arakanese from the first millennium, the writing of Burmese dates only from the twelfth century, after the introduc-

---

85. Kapstein, personal communication.
tion of Pali Buddhism to Pagan on a larger scale than in the earlier kingdoms. If Ramkhamhaeng’s inscription in thirteenth-century Sukhothai is genuine, he simultaneously introduced Buddhism and invented a script for writing Thai, while not long afterwards, Fa Ngum in Lan Xang in the Middle Mekhong brought Buddhism and writing from Angkor. The major exception here is Cambodia, where writing dates from at least the sixth century, but Theravāda and Pali did not arrive on a large scale until the thirteenth century; thereafter, however, Pali displaced Sanskrit as the language of non-business inscriptions. Literacy, which Helms is right to treat as a luxury item and prestige good, has, of course, many symbolic values aside from its instrumental capacities. Literature in the kārṣya sense is a kind of intensified literacy: literacy for its own sake, a semiotic skill celebrating itself as a civilizational achievement.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


———. 1929. Cūlavamsa, being the more recent part of the Mahāvamsa. Translated from Geiger’s German by M. Rickmers. London: Pali Text Society.


Terwiel, B. J. 1996. “The Introduction of Indian Prosody among the Thais.” In The
Throughout history the number of Sinhala speakers has been small in comparison to speakers of languages like Hindi, Bangla, or Tamil, and the space in which Sinhala has been used has always been small in comparison to that for languages like Sanskrit, Persian, or Pali. This is hardly surprising, because the use of Sinhala as a language has been restricted almost exclusively to the island of Sri Lanka, a small part of the South Asian cultural universe. Within this universe, however, Sri Lanka has had a special place as a center of Theravāda Buddhism, often attracting admirers from India and Southeast Asia in particular, but also from as far away as Tibet and China and, in modern times, from Europe and North America. In contrast, Sri Lanka’s importance in South Asia as a cultural center for the arts—painting, music, theater, as well as literature—has been spatially much more circumscribed. Although there have been numerous moments of local cultural brilliance in each of these arts, Sinhala artists and authors have generally learned from others rather than taught others.

1. For a brief but useful account of Sinhala as a language that has “a unique character within the South Asian linguistic area, as a result of its Indo-Aryan origins, Dravidian influence, and independent internal changes,” see Gair 1998 (quote from p. 4). Especially noteworthy for this chapter is a quotation from Wilhelm Geiger and D. B. Jayatilaka: “Indeed, the structure of Sinhala itself appears to parallel the position of Sinhala culture and society within the South Asian culture area: clearly part of the region, and influenced in many ways by its South Indian neighbors, as well as by other nations and communities that have entered its history, but always retaining and developing its own special character throughout the over two millennia of its existence on the island of Sri Lanka” (Gair 1998: 12).

Important comments on the historical situatedness of categories like Aryan and Dravidian, as well as a valuable summary of the issues and problems involved in tracing the history of the Sinhala language, can be found in Gunawardana 1995: 7–19.
Sinhala’s potential to contribute to our understanding of the history of literary cultures in South Asia belies what such facts might at first suggest. Indeed, Sinhala is heuristically key to our understanding of this history, as I hope to make clear in the first section of this chapter. Giving some examples of how this is so allows me to introduce some salient aspects of Sinhala literary cultures against the backdrop of the general history of literary cultures in South Asia. I then consider five aspects of premodern Sinhala literary cultures that mark them in distinctive ways: the relationship between literary and nonliterary identities; the language and techniques of human self-understanding; the character of the earliest literary culture, as evidenced in the graffiti at Sigiriya; technologies of poetry in Sinhala, and the fascination with what is difficult; and last, the relationship between Sinhala and Pali.

SINHALA AND THE HISTORY OF LITERARY CULTURES IN SOUTH ASIA

Sinhala, along with Tamil, is among the first local languages (deśabhāṣā) used for literature in southern Asia, with significant examples of poetry and criticism surviving from at least the seventh century. Like Tamil authors and audiences, Sinhala literati seem to have considered their language the equal of Sanskrit in the work that it could do in the world quite early. Notably, literature appeared in Sinhala about the same time that theorization about poetry (kāvyā) began in Sanskrit, though ironically Sanskrit theory denied that local languages like Sinhala were even capable of literature. That Sri Lanka already belonged to the world created by Sanskrit literary culture by this time is clear from the composition of the sixth-century Jānakihavāna (Theft of Sītā in Sri Lanka), a Sanskrit mahākāvyā that owes much to Kālidāsa. Rajāśekhara, writing in tenth-century Trīpuṛ, knew of Kumāradāsa, the author of the Jānakihavāna—and in Sinhala tradition, a king of Sri Lanka—and considered him second only to Kālidāsa as a poet. Sinhala thus provides not only

2. See Dehisape Pannasara 1958: 129–32. The dates of Kumāradāsa are relatively uncertain, with some scholars placing him as late as the ninth century; see Dehisape Pannasara 1958: 109–111. On theorization about poetry in Sanskrit, see Pollock, chapter 1, this volume.

3. King Kumāra Dhātusena (r. 508–16).

4. Jānakihavānam kārtuṁ raṅguvomśe śhiṣte sātī / kaviḥ kumārādāsāś ca vāvayaś ca yadi kṣamāḥ
(To make a “Theft of Sītā” in the face of the “Dynasty of Raghu” would take a Rāvana—or a Kumāradāsa) (anthologized in Jhalan’a’s Śuṭṭimukṭitavali, and cited from that text in Dehisape Pannasara 1958: 107). The simile is appropriate in part because both Rāvana and Kumāradāsa are associated with the island of Sri Lanka. Sinhala literary culture associated Kumāradāsa with Kālidāsa more intimately than Rajāśekhara did, usually as friends; the fifteenth-century poem Pārakombasirīta (The biography of King Parākramabāhu) describes Kumāradāsa as “a learned poet who was gifted to write such great epics as jānakihavāna, and who sacrificed his life for Kālidāsa” (Pārakombasirīta v. 23). Rajāśekhara’s verse is quoted in Vikramasinha’s commentary on this verse.
some of the earliest evidence for a literary culture in South Asia using a local language, but also evidence that the choice to use a desabhāṣā for literature must have involved some self-consciousness about turning away from at least some of the norms that defined literary works and persons in Sanskrit literary culture.

Sinhala also provides evidence that the transformation of a local language into a literary language (its “literarization”) was intentional. The ninth-century poetic handbook, Siyabaslakara (Poetics of one’s own language), urges “clever poets” to be on the lookout for unintentional vulgarity in poor turns of expression on the grounds that they might come to be perceived as acceptable. This handbook for aspiring poets—among the earliest extant literary texts in Sinhala—is concerned with removing faults (doṣā) in individual turns of phrase and sentences. Indeed, to this end, the Siyabaslakara contrasts the historicity of Sinhala, which leaves it open to change, with the ahistorical stability of Sanskrit, the “speech of the gods,” and it urges poets to be on guard against unacceptable “traditional usage” (pera pīyavak; Skt. pūrvpravṛtya) “because as time goes on, will not our own language [siya vudan; Skt. svabhāṣā vacana] change, unlike Sanskrit [diva vudan]?"

It is clear from evidence in Sinhala that these kinds of intentional changes to language are related to the history of collective identities as well as to politics. The very period in which we see Sinhala fully realized as a literary language—that is, around the turn of the millennium—was also the time that use of the term “Sinhala” was extended from naming the king and the ruling classes of the island to referring to the general population and their language. The evidence for Sinhala literary activity thus can help us to understand better “the role that the literati, the group which occupies the misty regions on the boundaries of class divisions, played in identity formation” in South Asia, especially insofar as it reminds us that “this intellectual role was not one that was independent of, or unrelated to, the structure of power.”

Sinhala is also a valuable site for thinking about the subsequent trajectories of literary cultures in history. In part, this involves tracing the manner in which successive literary cultures embrace or resist both continuity and change. Sinhala literati have been self-conscious about their literary heritage for more than a millennium. Even as they have marked the possibility of innovation in literature, they have frequently taken steps to preserve their literary heritage and to resist changes to the forms of Sinhala used for litera-

---

6. Siyabaslakara v. 43.
9. Siyabaslakara, for example, says that alankāras “keep on increasing. . . even up to today. Who in the world is capable of describing them completely?” (Siyabaslakara v. 68). The author
ture. This conservatism was institutionalized in education. If literature, to quote Barthes, is "what gets taught," then something close to a pedagogical "canon," intended to provide aspiring poets with models of "good literature," began to take shape as early as the thirteenth century. An early mahākāvya in Sinhala, the twelfth-century Kavsiūmina (Crest jewel of poetry; Skt. Kavyacūdamani), is cited as an example in poets’ manuals like Sidatsangarāva (Compilation of methods; Skt. Siddhāntasangraha) and Eṣusandalakṣaṇa (Character of meter in Sinhala; Skt. Siṃhachandolakṣaṇa), and it quickly received a pedagogical commentary (sannaya), much the same as works in Pali and Sanskrit; all of these pedagogical works are from the thirteenth century but they continued to be used in literary education for centuries after, just as Kavsiūmina apparently was. Although works were added to this canon from time to time, it still had a remarkable stability, as well as longevity. Ad hoc anthologies found in manuscripts from as late as the nineteenth century, clearly meant for working poets of the time, bring together works on prosody from the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries, for example.

In this curriculum, which promoted the continuity of the Sinhala literary heritage up to the twentieth century, Sinhala authors and critics simultaneously and consistently created catholic literary cultures, especially by their inclusion of the works of other languages. For example, a thirteenth-century pedagogical commentary on another early Sinhala mahākāvya, the Susadāvata (Story of the Sasa Jātaka), places the Sinhala poem within a Sanskrit literary milieu by identifying Sanskrit sources as the inspiration for various verses; among these sources are Bālārāmāyaṇa, Māghakāvya, Śākuntala, Rāghuvaṃśa, Kāvyamimāṁsā, Kumārasambhava, and Kāvyādāraśa. Similarly, the cosmopolitan nature of the educational institutions that provided the conditions for the transmission of the Sinhala literary heritage is clear in a

---

10. As quoted in Pollock 1994.
11. See Godakumbura 1955: 140–142 for a brief account of the sannayas on the Meghadūta and the Jayadhūrana in Sanskrit, and on the Janacarita and Dāthavamsa in Pali, all of which were composed in the twelfth or thirteenth century. The dating of all premodern texts in this chapter is adopted from Vålivitye Sorata 1963, 1: xxxvii–xlii.
12. The fifteenth-century monastic poet Totagamuve Śrī Rāhula alludes to Kavsiūmina and Sidatsangarāva in his Kavyābīkara; for example, compare Kavsiūmina 1.16 with Kavyābīkara 2.5. A commentary on the Sidatsangarāva was composed in 1787 for use in the monastic educational system inaugurated by Saranamkara; see Sannasgala 1964: 495–96.
13. Somadasa 1960: Or. 6610 (1), Or. 6610 (2), Or. 6610 (3).
14. Sannasgala 1964: 113 identifies the following verses and their sources: Bālārāmāyaṇa (vv. 37, 117), Māghakāvya (vv. 50, 1510), Śākuntala (v. 51), Rāghuvaṃśa (vv. 52, 286), Kāvyamimāṁsā (vv. 53, 54, 81, 82, 108, 133), Kumārasambhava (vv. 123, 131), and Kāvyādāraśa (v. 179).
long description in the fifteenth-century Girāsandēśiya (Parrot’s message) of a monastic center of learning at Toṭagamuva, on the southwest coast of Sri Lanka. We are told that among monastic and lay scholars studying Buddhist scriptures, commentaries, and doctrinal works, as well as grammar, the Vedas, astrology, medicine, and political science (arthaśāstra), there were also connoisseurs of poetry:

In various places in that beautiful and luxurious monastery there are groups of learned men who have studied prosody [sanda; Skt. chandas], poetics [lakara; Skt. alankāra] and grammar [viyaraṇa; Skt. vyākaraṇa]. They sit as they please and recite poems and dramas composed in Sanskrit, Pali, Sinhala, and Tamil, maintaining the splendor [siri] of the best poets of old.  

Descriptions of this sort obviously tell us more about what a literary culture at a particular time was ideally, not what it actually was, and this is precisely their value for our understanding of what was involved in transforming Sinhala into a literary language. Four things stand out in this description: the study of the sciences that regulate literary activity and make literary activity a disciplinary practice, the preservation of the past within literary activity, the role of recitation, and multilinguality. I return to some of these features in what follows; for now I will only point out that descriptions of this sort should not be taken as evidence that individual authors in Sri Lanka commonly wrote in more than one language (although some did). They do remind us, however, that Sinhala literary cultures have participated in more than one translocal cultural formation at a time and have been inflected by the appropriation of literary practices, genres, and values from a number of these. Most noticeable among them is Sanskrit, which had both aesthetic and political connotations for the Sinhala world; but as the verse indicates, Sinhala literary culture in the fifteenth century was also quite alert to the literary heritages of Tamil and Pali. Authors influenced by the practices and values of Sinhala literary cultures sometimes used the lat-

15. Girāsandēśiya v. 227. Piyaratana glosses the last clause, pera kaviyara siri rukuḷu, as pārva kaviyaraṇaṃ gābhāvā ṣūkhāva (prakāśaḥ kalaṃ vi. (p. 217); ābhāva means light, radiance, splendor, as well as beauty, or alankāra. Exactly what the author has in mind when he mentions the recitation of “poems and dramas” in Pali is problematic; see Collins, chapter 11, this volume.

16. On the place of public recitation of poetry in Sanskrit literary culture, see Pollock 1995: 120: “The modes of the recitation of poetry centrally occupied the attention of literary critics like Rājaśekhara (Kāvyānimāṉu 7). And we know from the twelfth-century Śrīkanṭhacarita that in a sense a poem was only published when it was recited before an audience: ‘for a literary work without auditors to hear it is like a ship on the open sea without a helmsman; it will sink without a trace’ (25,10)” (parentheses in original). See Collins 1992: 125–26, 129 for comments on recitation within a Buddhist context. On multilinguality as having “a purely imaginary status in Sanskrit literary culture,” see Pollock, chapter 1, this volume.
ter as a vehicle for creative expression, whereas the conventions and vocabulary of Tamil literature left an indelible mark on Sinhala poetry, particularly from the fifteenth century on, when Sanskrit literary culture was everywhere waning. Sinhala authors in the fifteenth century, such as Tota-gamuve Śri Rāhula and the monastic author of the Kokilasandēśaya (The cuckoo’s message), commonly knew Tamil and sometimes referred to Tamil works, while authors who were ethnically Tamil sometimes wrote in Sinhala, as, for example, Nalluruttumumini, a royal minister in the fifteenth-century court of Parākramabāhu VI and author of the Nāmāvaliya (Garland of nouns). The involvement of Sinhala authors and critics in the creation, functioning, and self-understanding of multiple transsocietal lifeworlds defined by the use of different translocal languages (like Pali and Sanskrit) and structured by different ideologies (one religious, the other an ideology of erudition, refinement, and valor) not only illustrates the general pattern that “all literary cultures participate in what ultimately turn out to be networks of borrowing, appropriating, reacting, imitating, emulating, rivaling, defeating”; it also provides an important case study for discerning some of the myriad local processes that shaped the cultural contours of these cosmopolitan realms in South Asia. This is especially the case with Pali.

Sinhala is also valuable for gaining a nuanced understanding of superposition, whereby “new literatures develop in reaction to superposed or dominating forms of pre-existent literatures.” This aspect of the interaction of the local and the translocal in the production of literature is especially important with respect to the place of Sanskrit in Sinhala literary culture between the tenth and fifteenth centuries. As some of the examples have already suggested, during this period Sinhala authors and critics chose what counted as literature in Sanskrit without choosing Sanskrit as a literary language. That is, they combined a profound appreciation for the vision of the literary found in Sanskrit literary culture with a resolute resistance to the encroachment of the Sanskrit language on the forms of Sinhala used for poetry—or to use the idiom of Sanskrit literary culture, they refused literary tatsamas but embraced the equivalent of literary tadbhavas.

Sinhala literary culture during these centuries was internally diglossic, employing one “alphabet” for writing Sinhala poetry and one for Sinhala prose. The script was the same for both; the difference between the two was the number of permitted letters (aksaras), prose having fifty-seven, against thirty-

20. Pollock 1994: 12–13, where Pollock discusses the importance of the superposition of one language on another for the history of literary cultures.
21. A tatsama is a borrowed word; a tadbhava is a borrowed concept. See Kahrs 1992: 228.
six for poetry. The alphabet for poetic Sinhala (ēlu) prevented the use of many Sanskrit loanwords (tatsamas) because it lacked letters for the aspirated consonants of Sanskrit, although Sanskrit loanwords became as common in Sinhala prose as they later were in the literatures of other local languages elsewhere in South Asia. Sanskrit loanwords apparently became common in spoken Sinhala too, as well as in Sinhala Buddhist discourse: the Sanskritic dharmāyā (Truth, the Buddha’s Teaching) is far more common than dāham or dīhām, found in ēlu, whereas there is no tatsama in Sinhala from the Pali equivalent, dhamma.22 On the other hand, poetic Sinhala frequently privileged the ā vowel (e.g., dīhām) and the half-nasal, which are not found in Sanskrit or Pali. Both of these characteristic phonemes have their own orthographic signs, and these distinguish Sinhala from practically every other South Asian language.

These are changes in the language whose appearance can only be traced to the period in which Sinhala first emerges as a literary language, that is, beginning from the eighth century.23 Thus we see in ēlu a dominance of Sanskrit over Sinhala— even in the selection of kāvyā as the preeminent “literary”24—and simultaneously a resistance to this dominance in the efforts to distinguish the language of Sinhala poetry from Sanskrit. This is so not only at the level of phonology; the regulation of permitted sounds in ēlu sometimes conflicted with the regulation of poetic effects. Some literary ornamentations of sound (śabdalāṅkāra) were deemed outside the scope of possibility in Sinhala; according to the Siyabaslakara, these include śleṣa (“compactness,” i.e., words with double meanings), samatā (“evenness” of sound combinations), and sukumāratā (absence of harsh sounds).25

The Sinhala script underwent important changes around the eighth century, as Brahmi was replaced by the swiftly developed round-shaped script, basically the same one currently used. The new script, in contrast to the Brahmi found in early inscriptions in Sri Lanka, was capable of representing long vowels, and this surely was part of a process aimed, in part, at standardizing the language.26 More significant, the development of the new script suggests that for the Sinhala literary culture of the time, not only did “the literary work, in a non-trivial sense, not exist until it [was] inscribed,” but

22. A serious argument can be made that there are no tatsamas from Pali in Sinhala at all.
24. See Pollock, chapter 1, this volume.
25. Siyabaslakara v. 31–44. Of course, following Vāmana (who is referred to by the author of Siyabaslakara in v. 2), these aspects of literature could be taken as arthagunas (excellences of sense), and then they would obviously be possible in Sinhala: śleṣa would be congruity of ideas brought forth by ingenious turns of expression; samatā, adherence to proper sequence of ideas and ease of understanding; sukumāratā, softness resulting from the absence of dissident ideas. See Wijayawardhana 1963: 58.
the recognition of Sinhala as a language capable of literature was markedly new as a social phenomenon. The new script was both a “defining condition of possibility” for this social phenomenon and a celebration of it. A similar pattern seems to have held with respect to the cultural hegemony of Theravāda Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, for as Steven Collins observes, “often the introduction of Pali Buddhism into an area by kings coincided with the introduction, or at least new evidence, of writing.”

As we have already noted, even though āhu had some phonetic, orthographic, and poetic (as in alankāra) independence from Sanskrit, Sanskrit still provided the norms and models for most poetry in Sinhala from the tenth to the fifteenth centuries. The new script again allowed for the superposition of Sanskrit on Sinhala literature, because it newly enabled the representation of aspirate sounds (kha, gha, cha, tha, pha, bha, śa), the characters for which had fallen out of use in the later Brahmi script used in Sri Lanka from the second to sixth centuries. New signs for the letter ś, for compound consonants, for the visarga (ḥ), and for the visarga (which indicates a pure consonant, without the inherent a) also appeared in Sri Lankan inscriptions around the eighth century. In short, the new script allowed the intellectual precision of Sanskrit discourse to be textualized in a continuum with Sinhala (and with Pali, which also used the new script). The intellectual precision of Sanskrit that came from its grammatical exactness also had an impact on Sinhala grammar. S. Paranavitana has argued that the appearance of post-positions to indicate the Sanskrit instrumental, ablative, genitive,
and locative cases, which began to appear in Sinhala at this time, “seem to have come into vogue due to the paraphrasing of Pali and Sanskrit. These post-positions, which are common in the prose works dating from the Pol-
lonaruva period and after, seldom occur in poetical works.”

The impact of Sanskrit went far beyond morphological developments, however. Sanskrit discourse had a pervasive effect on prose Sinhala of the period, particularly in Buddhist scholastic works such as the twelfth-century *Abhidharmāṭṭhasangāhasānane* (Pedagogical commentary on the *Abhidharmakosā*), and the thirteenth-century *Visuddhimagga* (Pedagogical commentary on the *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa’s manual on monastic practice), where the language is full of Sanskrit loanwords and derivatives (*tatsamas* and *tadbhavas*) as well as “Sanskritic” modes of thinking. Sanskrit writers, both Buddhist and Hindu, are also frequently cited. As I discuss later, certain moral values of Sanskrit literary culture, such as prowess, valor, and prestige, also became as much a part of Sinhala literary culture as did Sanskrit literary values such as selectivity, homogeneity, and conservatism. In general, Sanskrit culture was a uniquely generative part of literary life in Sri Lanka during these six centuries, but its relation to Sinhala literary culture and to Pali in Sri Lanka was hardly simple or monolithic.

It is helpful to relate the complex connections between Sinhala literary culture and Sanskrit literary culture to other patterns in cultural-political life in Sri Lanka at the time. In contrast to elsewhere in South Asia and South- east Asia, there is a notable absence of Sanskrit in the public discourse found in Sri Lankan inscriptions, with Sinhala—admittedly often a highly Sanskritized Sinhala—almost always preferred. This absence challenges us to consider just how it was that elites in medieval Sri Lanka simultaneously participated in and resisted absorption in “the Sanskrit cosmopolis,” that “symbolic network created in the first instance by the presence of a similar kind of discourse in a similar language deploying a similar idiom and style to make

---

31. See, for example, the use of Sanskrit grammatical analysis in *Jātakasūtrasāgāsāpa* (Glos-
sary on the Jātaka commentary): 2–3.
32. See Godakumbura 1943, and 1955: 43–44.
33. Analogous, albeit quite different, patterns can be seen with respect to the place of En-
glish in modern Sinhala literary culture, where the literary in English was chosen without choos-
ing English as a literary language, especially in connection with the Sinhala novel (*navakathā*).
34. There are some important exceptions to these general comments, such as inscriptions in Sanskrit, notably a ninth-century inscription in an early form of Nagari (*Epigraphia Ze-
lancia* 1: 1–9.) There are also a number of inscriptions from the reign of Kirti Niśānaka Malla at the end of the twelfth century that contain Sanskrit—perhaps not surprising since this king came from Kalinga in eastern India. Some Sinhala inscriptions are also in *śān* verse, such as a praise poem from the tenth century for Udā Siri Sangbo; see *Epigraphia Ze-
similar kinds of claims about the nature and aesthetics of polity.” Many of
the inscriptions are in “the standard praśasti style” of Sanskrit literary cul-
ture both in contents and literary aspirations,35 as illustrated in the following
inscription of Mahinda IV from the eleventh century:

Hail! The great king [Siri Sang] Bo Abà was born unto the great king Siri
Sangbo Abà, the Kṣatriya Lord, descended from the royal line of the Okkāka
dynasty, which is the source (muśin) of a multitude of boundless and benignant
virtues (guna), and which has [thereby] caused other Kṣatriya dynasties of the
whole of Dambadiva (jambukūpā) to render homage; [he was born] in the
womb of the anointed queen Dev Gon, of equal birth and descent. After en-
joying the dignities of governor and chief-governor, he in due course became
king, and was anointed on his head, resplendent with the bejewelled crown,
with the unction of world-supremacy. With his fame (yasas) he illumined the
island of Lanka, with the prowess of victorious lords (diya nāvan),36 displayed
in the precincts of the Palace constantly filled with the wonderful presents of-
tered by kings of various lands, he brought fame upon prosperous Lanka. With
the rise of] his majestic power (tedin; Skt. tejas) he drove away from Lanka the
Dravidian foe, just as the rising sun dispels darkness from the sky, and sheds
lustre upon the world.

In gentleness he was like the moon, in depth [of character] the ocean, in
firmness the Mount Meru, in wealth the Lord of Riches; he was a mine of good
qualities (guna), an abode of the ten kingly virtues, a jewel casket for the Triple
Gem, the supporting pillar for the sāsana of the Sage, the goddess Śrī for every
prosperity and the mainstay for the world (diya).37

Inscriptions of this sort, like ēlu poetry itself, suggest that Sinhala was con-
sidered a language of prestige in its own right, a language of power and beauty
that could be used instead of Sanskrit in both public discourse and litera-
ture, despite the claims for Sanskrit’s exclusive superiority made by Sanskrit
literary theorists themselves. Noting the correspondence between the use
of Sinhala as a public and literary language and the political activity at the
time, we can see in literature a paradigm and marker that sheds light on the
political history of medieval Sri Lanka. In the large-scale imperial formations

35. See Pollock 1996: 211: “The standard praśasti style [comprises] the fixing of gene-
alogical succession, the catalogue of kingly traits of the dynasty, the eulogy of the ruling lord.”
The quotation is from Pollock 1996: 230.
36. The editor, Wickramasinghe, explains the richness of this word and helps us to appre-
ciate the cultural politics of eleventh-century Sri Lanka: “This word can be equivalent to San-
skrit (1) jagan-nātha or -nāga ‘world-lord,’ an epithet of the Buddha (or a Bodhisattva as in
Kāvyāśākha, VI.54 [see later for further comments on Sinhala kings as bodhisattvas]), also of
Viśu or Kṛṣṇa; (2) jaya-nātha or -nāga or -nāyaka, ‘lord of victory’; (3) udaka-nāthā, ‘lord of
water’; and (4) udake snātā, ‘having bathed in the water’ [which could refer to the Indic rit-
ual of installing a king with a ceremonial ‘bath,’ or abhiseka].” Epigraphia Zeylanica 1: 225 n. 4.
37. Epigraphia Zeylanica 1: 224–25, translation slightly modified (brackets in original; parenth
dtheses added.)
of medieval South Asia, Sri Lanka’s position was one of constant struggle for autonomy. As the inscription’s references to invasions repulsed and to the reception of honor from unnamed kings of India indicate, the stronger a Sinhala polity was, the more it was able to act independently of the larger empires on the subcontinent. The periods of greatest poetic production in Sinhala were also those in which a particular Sinhala king was able to secure a greater degree of separateness for Sri Lanka as a political space—which suggests that the use of \textit{elu} to create an autonomous literary space and the use of Sinhala in public inscriptions to make statements about the nature of polity itself constituted for Sri Lanka both participation in and separateness from the cultural-political world articulated in Sanskrit.

The long reign of Parākramabāhu VI (1411–1466) in Kotte is an excellent example of this correlation. Parākramabāhu VI not only unified the whole island for the first time since the twelfth century; he also defeated an attempted invasion by the Vijayanagara empire. Sinhala literary culture was particularly vibrant during his reign, with an outpouring of poetry—notably, numerous \textit{sandēsa} poems\footnote{The \textit{sandēsa}, a messenger poem modeled on Kālidāsa’s \textit{Meghadūta}, was particularly popular among authors in medieval Sri Lanka and south India, with more than 126 \textit{sandēsas} written in Sinhala alone. The south Indian and Sri Lankan \textit{sandēsa} poems portrayed the messenger’s journey more realistically than did the \textit{Meghadūta}. These \textit{sandēsa} poems are a reminder that the historical development of Sinhala literary culture is best understood as connected with the literary cultures of south India that used Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam. The distinct macropatterns of the literary cultures of south India and Sri Lanka challenge us to investigate the processes by means of which local literary cultures impacted each other directly, without the mediation of translocal languages like Sanskrit.} and the \textit{Kāvyāśekhara} (Crest jewel of poetry), a \textit{mahākāvya} by Toṇgamuwe Śrī Rāhula, the most prominent monk of the day; it is Śrī Rāhula’s monastery that is described in the verse from the \textit{Girāsandesāya} quoted earlier. Parākramabāhu VI himself is said to have composed the \textit{Ruvaṇmala} (Garland of gems), a lexicon in verse of \textit{elu} words. Some works composed during this period, such as Śrī Rāhula’s \textit{Kāvyāśekhara}, Vāttāva’s \textit{Guttīlakāvīyaya} (Kāvya of the Guttīla Jātaka), and Vidāgama Maitreya’s \textit{Kavlakunāminimālada} (Garland of the gems of the characteristics of poetry), were added to a pedagogical canon that had first taken shape in the thirteenth century.\footnote{The \textit{Kavlakunāminimālada} is included in the nineteenth-century manuscript anthologies for poets referred to earlier; see, for example, Somadasa 1990: Or. 6610 (1) II; Or. 6610 (3) I; Or. 6610 (4) I.}

As examination of the cultural world of Parākramabāhu VI’s reign makes clear, tracing the subsequent trajectories of literary cultures in history means taking measure of the changing circumstances in which literature was made and in which literature contributed to the creation of new life-worlds. The importance of this can be seen more clearly with a simple comparison be-
tween the literary culture of *elu* poetry from the tenth to the fifteenth centuries and the literary culture of southern Sri Lanka in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, even though the latter is outside the scope of this chapter. As manuscripts of anthologies for aspiring poets attest, the later literary culture of southern Sri Lanka, particularly at Matara, continued to look to the heritage of the Sinhala poetic tradition, and poets judged their worth by comparison to models set in older works. Yet the social and political circumstances of the two literary cultures differed drastically. The older literary culture was preeminently a court culture, and it participated in a political economy whose ideal world was a unified hierarchy of wealth, power, status, value, and culture. In religion, politics, and literary culture, there were continuing attempts to subordinate localities to the capital, as occurred, for example, in the reign of Parākramabāhu I (r. 1153–1186). The country was unified politically, the Buddhist monastic order was reorganized into a single institutional framework, and the first handbooks to regulate literary Sinhala were produced. An entirely different social and political order, however, was in place in southern Sri Lanka during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Not only had this part of the island been colonized—first by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, then by the Dutch, and finally by the British—but its culture increasingly rested on a commercial, market economy that was able to support multiple local elites irrespective of their standing in traditional social hierarchies. Literature and religion became vehicles for asserting new social aspirations and identities, and both literary and religious persons were supported by the new patterns of patron-client relations that were emerging in the market economy of the region.

Obviously, then, if we are to understand Sinhala literary cultures in history, we must focus our attention on how the values and practices of literary culture in Sri Lanka interacted with the values and practices of nonliterary culture—meaning, above all, Buddhist culture. It goes without saying that we cannot understand important aspects of the literary and political history of South Asia, or of individual authors and texts, without giving close attention to religion. As Sheldon Pollock argues in chapter 1 in this volume, it is Buddhists who were instrumental in the transformation of Sanskrit from a liturgical and scholarly language to a literary one, used in drama and secular poetry; and throughout the literary history of South Asia, Buddhists continued to be active and prominent at key moments.

Conversely, one cannot understand the religious history of South Asia without looking at the practices and values of its literary and political cul-

---

41. The basic ideas in this paragraph are drawn from comparative discussions in a workshop titled “Nationality and Locality in Society, Politics, and Culture in East, Southeast, and South Asia,” held at the Asia Center, Harvard University, March, 1997.
tures. This is especially the case for Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Buddhist discourse and ritual were often used to claim and display authority. A good example is provided by a Sinhala inscription from the reign of King Niśāńka Malla (r. 1187–1196), who hailed from Kalinga (in present-day Orissa) and whose claim to the throne was less than clear:

[King Niśāńka Malla] ensured the long stability of the state and the religion (lokaśāsanaya). Moreover, considering that the island of Lanka is a noble land because of the establishment of the sāsana there, that the living beings in it have lofty excellences (guna), and that, therefore, they should receive advice and protection, he out of compassion, proclaimed the [following] maxims of good counsel:

Though kings appear in human form, they are human divinities (naradevata) and must, therefore, be regarded as gods. The appearance of an impartial king should be welcomed as the appearance of the Buddha. When kings inflict punishment commensurate with the offence, they do so with good intentions, just as a physician applies a remedy for a bodily ailment. They restrain [their subjects] from evil and thus save them from falling into hell. They lead them to do good, thereby securing for them the [bliss of] heaven and release from re-births (mokṣa). If the wishes of kings were not observed, the human world would be like hell; but if their wishes were respected, it would be like heaven.

We should note, too, the overlap between the depiction of the nature of authority in this inscription and the depiction of the nature of literary “authority” found in the tenth-century Siyabaslakara:

Language is like a wish-conferring cow that gives what is desirable to those who can use it in the proper manner, but for others it will only impart bovine qualities.

42. On the place of Buddhist discourse and public ritual in the history of imperial formations in South Asia more generally, see Inden 1979. For Sri Lanka in particular, see Gunawardana 1979b: 170–211, 225–234; and 1976: 53–62. The use of Buddhist vocabulary and imagery is also ubiquitous in the political life of modern Sri Lanka; see Tambiah 1992 and Seneviratne 1999.

43. Epigraphia Zeylanica 2: 121, translation slightly modified (brackets in original; parentheses added.) The fifteenth-century panegyric poem Pārakumbhasirita v. 29 seems to echo the last sentence, albeit with the vocabulary of rasa, saying, “Listening to [Parakramabahu’s] entirely enjoyable words [numutu rasa bas äsuva] brings at once the bliss of heaven.” The comparison of the king to a physician obviously echoes standard depictions of the Buddha, but it should also be kept in mind that the discourse of aesthetics concerned with prāṇa and rasa in literature overlaps with medical discourse; see, for example, the thirteenth-century Prayogaratanāvaliśa (The garland of [medical] procedures), by Mayurapada, vv. 1, 297, 319. This Sinhala treatise also locates the practice of medicine within a religious framework: “Realizing that various kinds of beings who are afflicted by all sorts of illnesses and diseases cannot gain the threefold happiness, and having compassion for them, I now describe various methods of healing, so that they may become free of illness, lead good lives, and finally attain mokṣa” (v. 2).
Therefore it is proper that even the slightest blemish in poetry should be examined; the beauty of a lovely body will be marred by a single scar.

How can those who have not studied the śāstras distinguish between what is excellent [guna] and what is a blemish [dosā]; does the blind person have the capacity to perceive the differences in visual objects?

Therefore the learned men of old who were driven by the desire to enlighten the world composed treatises for those who were bringing forth [entering] the beautiful path [visitutu magga; Skt. vicitra marga].

By the tenth century it was being claimed that the Buddha had predicted that “none but future Buddhas [bosat-hu; Skt. bodhisattva] would become kings of prosperous Lanka.” This political vision gradually came to reconfigure Buddhist ethics. For example, narrative accounts of the Buddha’s visits to Sri Lanka and of Buddhist kings’ roles in the history of Sri Lanka in chronicles like the Mahāvamsa—itself a product of an earlier literary culture—support such claims by presenting “a moral principle distinct from those found in the Pali Canon: violence is permissible in the interest of the sāsana, against those who do not understand the ‘true doctrine’ and are opposed to it.”

While it has become commonplace to say that Buddhism was instrumental in the development of Sinhala literature, it is just as true—but far less commonplace—to say that literary activity was central to Buddhist life for more than a millennium. Consider in this regard the Nikāyasangraha, a fourteenth-century historical work, which gives a list of monastic and lay authors who had composed in Sinhala “collections of verses related to the dharma [dharmanugasālokaprabandha], translations which displayed the original’s diverse meanings [vicitrārtha prakāśa vu sannā], glossaries, and various doctrinal works. Learning from these works, wise teachers up to the present day have made the Buddha’s heritage that exists as learning [budun-ge paryapti sāsanaya] shine with doctrinal works which are suitable to their own time.”

Becoming alert to the interaction between literature and religion, both of which have connections to the political, presses upon us a number of questions that should be addressed not only in a history of Sinhala literary cul-
tures but in a general literary history of southern Asia as well. Above all, we want to consider when literary ideals inflected ethical ideals. And when they did, was it generally in a manner analogous to the reconfiguration of Buddhist ethics by new political ideals, like the new postulate that the kings of Sri Lanka were future Buddhas? In some respects, it was—in medieval Sri Lanka, at least. One important change concerned the place of fame and prestige in the moral economy of Buddhist monastic life. The statement of the Buddha that the “aim of the religious life is not to gain material profit, nor to win veneration”\(^{51}\) would seem to contravene the most basic patterns of literary culture, wherein the bestowal and acceptance of material rewards, honor, and esteem were routinely perceived as tangible signs of one’s intangible worth in the eyes of others.\(^{52}\) We can see an attempt at mediating the contradiction between these two moral ideals in the *Subodhālankāra* (Easy-to-understand poetics), a twelfth-century Pali handbook on poetics that condemns as improper (*ocityāhināṃ*) the praise of one’s own excellences (*guna*), but then says that it is not a fault to praise the good qualities of others.\(^{53}\)

There are equally important questions about what constraints religion may have placed on the production of literature in southern Asia. In Sri Lanka, Buddhist values and practices often define what is permissible or admired in Sinhala literary culture.\(^{54}\) For example, the *Siyabaslakara* says that the sub-

---

51. Majjhima Nikāya 1.192.
52. Cf. Pārākumbasirita v. 86: “May all aspects of royalty attend on King Śri Sanghabodhi Parākrama-bāhu, who is pleased at the praises of him made in the languages of Anga, Bengal, Kalinga, Hingula, and Kongana, and who bestows with pleasure lofty elephants in rut on those who composed poetical works [*kavi ban*], like bees at the lotus, namely, at the foot of the Buddha, whose body is ornamented with auspicious characteristics in all parts, large and small.”

The complex internal rhyme pattern in this verse is similar to patterns found in Tamil:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anga</th>
<th>Manga</th>
<th>Manga</th>
<th>Leu</th>
<th>Vaidhi</th>
<th>Hinga</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Munipakamal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>vaṭa</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anga</th>
<th>Tunga</th>
<th>Matanga</th>
<th>Jandena</th>
<th>Inga</th>
<th>Kin</th>
<th>Vavane</th>
<th>Yasin</th>
<th>Tatu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>hatā</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

See also *Girasandesiya* vv. 247–48, which describe Totagamuve Śri Rāhula as “having fame as his chowrie” and say: “That priest shines constantly with great prosperity [*siri*], like a wish-conferring pot, / receiving royal grants of extensive areas of villages and land in various places, like / Maha Velgodhapiyya from the great king Parākramabāhu, who was like the god Sakra.”

The growth of monastic ownership of property notably occurred just after the emergence of Sinhala literary culture in the eighth century. If later examples like Śri Rāhula are any indication, then recognition of the personal accomplishments of individual monks was among the motivations for royal donations to monasteries; donations were not just expressions of a generic intent to support Buddhism. See Gunawardana 1979b.

54. See Pollock 1994: 17–18. “The literary idiom of the transregional ecumene [of Sanskrit] is the only one available to give voice to the ‘secular,’ whereas the language of the regional community often finds its reason for being in articulating a local religious sensibility” (17).
ject of poetry should be the lives of the Buddha—a severe restriction of subject matter in comparison to what was permitted to and expected of writers of kārṣya in Sanskrit—and this norm is echoed in the twelfth-century mahā-kārṣya, Kaviśilumīna:

The condition of being a poet [kaviṅga; Skt. kavihāva]
is the flower on the tree of poetry [kavidumē],and accounts of the lives of the future Buddha [bōsatsaravīyum] its fruit.
May this fruit be on the lips of the learned.

Buddhist religious norms shaped and enriched how the “condition of being a poet” was imagined, just as they influenced notions of kingship. The author of the Siyabaslakara, a king named Salamevan (Śālamegavāra), explained his motivation for writing the text in terms that echo aspirations to Buddhahood familiar in the Theravāda tradition; it is not unlikely that as a king, he may have been looking for a way to display his nature as a bodhisattva:

May even these simple words of mine be for the benefit of others, my words wherein I have shown at least some aspects of what animates [paṇa, Skt: prāya] poetry, and ornaments of sound and sense. I have attempted to convey at least some aspects of this.

Noble people in this world make mental aspirations [mana piṇi; Skt. manah-pranavādā] with a delighted mind; they make an effort to see that even their bone marrow is of some benefit to the world of beings.

Another example in the same vein is the criticism of a monk who engaged a bit too vigorously in a nineteenth-century literary debate for conduct unbecoming for a monk.

Even the apparent scope of premodern literature in Sinhala seems largely determined by Buddhist values and practices. This is true in the most material way imaginable, since all literary texts that survive from periods before the eighteenth century were cared for, copied, and handed down in Buddhist monasteries, where there was greater institutional continuity than in the royal courts, even though much of Sinhala literature was actually produced among the literati of those courts. These texts were preserved because they were considered part of the Buddhist tradition, as the comment from the Nikāyasanggraha makes clear, and it may be that works

55. Siyabaslakara v. 20.
56. Kaviśilumīna v. 4.
57. Siyabaslakara vv. 404–5. Verse 405 is alluding to the Tigress Jātaka, known best in the version by Āryāśūra.
that were beyond the pale of Buddhist values, such as secular poetry or drama, necessarily did not survive because they were not valued by Buddhist monks.\footnote{Martin Wickramasinghe has argued that there was a tradition of poetic drama (kavinalu) from at least the twelfth century, based on references to dramatic performances in texts like \textit{Kavalemuwina} (Wickramasinghe 1970).

60. See \textit{Kāyaśekhara} 1.127–28:

With a voice sweet \([miyurasi]\) like the song of a cuckoo, the ocean of wisdom and virtue \([guna]\) uttered these words, which had various parts well decorated with ornaments of sound and meaning \([akaratlakarin, Skt. sabalankara arthalankara]\).

Then the multitude of monks, who were delighted and keen on hearing more, begged for that \([jītaka]\) story. The Omniscient One presented in a language shared by all \([sāyilā hā hā; i.e., Pāli]\) this sermon imbued with transforming flavor \([rasa]\), with words resplendent with color and clarity and pure with their finish of the Four Noble Truths like a painting.

See Dhadpale 1975: 7–11 on indications that the Buddha was considered "the exemplar of Literary Skill" in the Pali canon and commentaries.

61. \textit{Girāsandāsāya} v. 221.}

We can see, however, that Buddhism not only constrained literary activity but also reinforced the values and practices of literary culture in both premodern and modern Sri Lanka. The Buddha himself, for example, is portrayed in the \textit{Kāyaśekhara} as preaching in a manner that exemplifies literary values and skill,\footnote{See \textit{Girāsandāsāya} v. 221.} and the verse in the \textit{Girāsandāsāya} already cited that describes the poets at the monastery at Tojagamuva echoes an earlier verse in the text that describes monks studying the Vinaya, the Buddhist canonical texts on monastic discipline:

Some other groups of monks who are on the righteous path, taking well-known commentaries and subcommentaries one by one according to their liking, and also taking into account the words of advice given by learned teachers, investigate the deep points of the teaching of the Vinaya.\footnote{With a voice sweet \([miyurasi]\) like the song of a cuckoo, the ocean of wisdom and virtue \([guna]\) uttered these words, which had various parts well decorated with ornaments of sound and meaning \([akaratlakarin, Skt. sabalankara arthalankara]\).}

The descriptions of literary study and the study of Buddhist texts highlight both that learning was pursued collectively and that it included an orientation to the past. We should also note that both depictions contain an element of freedom—the connoisseurs of poetry "sit as they please," while the students of the Vinaya take books one by one “according to their liking”—that seems to emerge in the midst of their submitting themselves to the regulating norms of what they study. Even more important is the familiarity of key aesthetic terms found in texts like \textit{Siyabasalakara}—terms like \textit{guna} (quality), \textit{doṣa} (blemish), \textit{alaṅkāra} (ornament), \textit{marga} (path), \textit{rasa} (transforming
flavor), and *pratibhāna* (creative eloquence)—as fundamental concepts of Buddhist ethics.  

There are also questions about the degree to which the values and practices of literary culture reinforced action in other cultural fields. To take another example from the *Siyabaslakara*, “there are three things that are basic causes of the wealth of poetry [kav sapuva; Skt. kavyasampatti]: creative genius that is inborn [pihilan; Skt. pratibhāna], various sciences that have been studied, and sufficient experience in writing poetry,”63 The text goes on to say that even without creative genius, “one will still be able to shine in the assembly of the learned” with study and practice. Theravāda Buddhist ideas about the foundational importance of learning (*pariyatti*; Pali *pariyattī*) and practice (*pratipatti*; Pali *patipatti*) in the religious life are evidently reinforced by such normative standards for literary activity.64 The close attention to faults that was cultivated in literary culture naturally generated controversies and debates, and the practices that structured these controversies—especially the high degree of scholasticism required to participate effectively in them—provided opportunities to develop polemical skills that were then used in debates about religious matters.65

Constraints on religious practice from the literary were real, too. The valuing of poetic difficulty as a means to prestige in medieval Sinhala literary culture was recognized as discouraging the potential audiences of religious literature. While it was possible to argue in literary culture that “the words of the great and learned [mahāta viyattuṇ basa], though unintelligible, bring happiness [tosa] when heard, just as a bouquet of jasmine flowers can be known by sight, even if unsmelled,”66 unintelligibility hardly seems desirable in a didactic text. Vidagama Maitreya began his didactic poem *Lovādasantarāva* (The world’s welfare) in the fifteenth century by asking his audience not to be disheartened that it was written in *elu*, an indication that in his day the language of poetic Sinhala could only be understood by those who had

62. See Seneviratne 1992: 185: “Aesthetic rasa enlightens and makes the inner self serenely joyous. Hence it is ‘the brother of the spiritual experience’ (brahmiṇaśūnakathā). In the moment of perfect aesthetic appreciation, self is submerged in the bliss of rasa and freed from worldly bondage—a state not too far from the meditative bliss of the ascetic” (parentheses in original).

63. *Siyabaslakara* v. 64. There is a set of three comparable things found implicit in great kings: due to previous karma, they have an inborn quality (e.g., displayed by the spontaneous appearance of the wheel of authority to the cakravartin) that allows them to become a great king; they study various sciences and arts (e.g., Parakramabahu VI is described as “an ocean for the store of rules of policy, Buddhist doctrine, grammar, poetry and drama” [*Pārakumbasirīta* v. 73]); and the patterns of preparation for kingship, such as the office of yuvatī, give “sufficient experience” for sovereignty (e.g., the inscription of Mahinda IV quoted earlier refers to his “enjoying the dignities of governor and chief-governor”).


taken the time to study it.67 The critical practices of literary culture, especially the attention to literary faults (doṣa), could also apparently inhibit authors who were writing more for didactic purposes than out of literary ambition. This can be seen in the thirteenth-century Saddharmaratnāvaliya (Garland of gems of the true doctrine; a Sinhala version of the commentary on the Dhammapada), which begins with an appeal by its author, the monk Dharmasena, for his readers to overlook its literary faults:

We have abandoned the Pali method (kramaya) and taken only the themes in composing this work. It may have faults and stylistic shortcomings, but (you the reader should) ignore them. Be like the swans who separate milk from water even though the milk and water be mixed together, or like those who acquire learning and skills even from a teacher of low caste, because it is only the acquisition of knowledge, not the teacher’s status with which they are concerned.68

LITERARY AND NONLITERARY IDENTITIES

Examples such as those in the preceding section make it clear that when we study Sinhala literary cultures we are inevitably drawn to investigate how literary practices interact with literary and nonliterary identities. Some of the best aids for such investigations are the portraits of literary figures found in various sources. These include extended portraits of poets found in literature itself and also briefer accounts found in historical works in both Pali and Sinhala, such as the twelfth-century additions to the Mahāvaṃsa, or the fourteenth-century Nikāyasangraha, where we find mention of various kings and ministers as poets and authors. In these various portraits we can see Sinhala literary cultures interpreting the relation between literature and other cultural concerns. The portraits thus form something of a tradition of thought about the literary. As Stephen Owen observes: “The existence of a tradition of literary thought presupposes that literature’s nature, role, and values are not self-evident, that literature is a problematic area of human endeavor which requires some explanation and justification.”69

These portraits of authors invite further questions about what sorts of complex persons—persons who were religious as well as political, moral as well as social—were thought to be formed by their command of the language in its special use in literature. They form their own genre of praise-poem

67. Indeed, other didactic poems of the time began to use language that was closer to the spoken idiom. Most notable among these is Guttulakāvya. Godakumbura has said that “we have in the Guttuliya popular teachings to encourage the common people to practice good deeds. . . . The Guttuliya has set the style for a large number of poems composed by later writers for the edification of the masses. The popularity of the Guttuliya is due to the unlaboured and free flow of its poetry” (1955: 156).
68. Dharmasena Thera 1991: 3.
(praśasti), key to which is the display of the person’s unity of accomplishment. Here the interaction between literary and nonliterary identities, so important for our understanding of the literary as a social phenomenon, is masked in favor of seeing these various religious, political, and literary identities as mutually constitutive of an individual of excellence. For example, Toṭaṅgūva Śrī Rāhula fused together political, religious, and literary identities in a single image of King Parākramabāhu VI. Observe in this portrait the consistency of practice in each of the three spheres: the king’s ability to dominate others depends on subjecting himself to the regulatory norms of knowledge—knowledge that is mastered by allowing oneself to be mastered by it:

Knowing the Lord of Sages’ threefold word [te vaḷā munindo bana], he put aside evil.
He crossed the ocean of poetry and drama and the arts of war [avi sīp],70
crushed the pride of fierce foes with his knowledge of strategy [uḷā nāṇa; Skt. uḷāya jīāna],
and brought all of the island of Lanka to the shelter of a single parasol.71

Similarly, a closing statement in Siyabaslakara describes the personal qualities of the minister Amaragiri Kāśyapa and of King Salamevan in terms that seem to simultaneously have literary, political, and moral connotations:

My brother, the noble person Amaragiri Kāśyapa, is like a casket for the gems of the virtues [guna] of a poet and is an abode for the splendors of a faultless [nīdaṇa; Skt. nirīḍaṇa] minister. On his invitation, this poem was composed by King Salamevan, who has splendor [sirī], is replete with a trained army [saṇvyāṭa; Skt. vyāktasena],72 and who belongs to a lineage that has illuminated the space within the white umbrella by the luster emanating from the gems on the crown.73

The conjunction of literary and nonliterary identities was not limited to portraits of kings and their associates, as can be seen in a description of a monk named Buvaneka found in the fifteenth-century Haṁsasandesāya (Swan’s message):

The elder-lord [terahini] King Buvaneka [Bhūvanekarāja] constantly dwells in the royal monastery [mahāvihara] at Kelaniya in this Lanka, which is like a field of merit,74 where he is the leader of a community of monks [gāṇāyaṇaka] and

70. Crossing the ocean of saṃsāra is a standard expression for religious attainment in Theravāda Buddhism.
71. Toṭaṅgūva Śrī Rahula, Sālabhisandesāya v. 3, in Śrī Rahul Pabanda.
72. This clause could also be translated as “he is replete with an army of learned men.”
74. Alternatively, “like a field of merit” [pinketvan] can be taken as modifying “the royal mahāvihara at Kelaniya”; the line would then read: he “dwells in the royal mahāvihara, which is like a field of merit for this Lanka.” The ambiguities raised by word order in ēvu poetry are discussed later.
the acknowledged leader [nāyaka] of the ancient lineage of monks. His birth made famous the family of the minister Ekaṇāyaka, who has raised high the dynasty of the Lord of Men [nirindu kula]. He continually and habitually preaches the teaching of the Lord of Sages [munindu baṇa], receiving respect [adara] from every Lord of Poetry [kavindun] in prosperous Lanka because he had dispelled all doubts from his mind and knew poetry [kavi], drama [nala], prosody [sanda], and poetics [lakara]. His fame [for all of these] spreads like the moon or milk in a conch shell.75

That ascetic [yati] sits in the shrine of the Lord of Gods [surindu], having taken monks of his choice, and recites protective texts [paritta] that are capable of dispelling every danger in the world and that perpetually govern various universes [pāvāti noyek sakva aṇa saka (Skt. ājñā cakra) satata].76

This is, admittedly, the portrait of an elite monk. But this only means that he represents the highest religious and social accomplishments possible in Sinhala culture at the time. It is important that Buvaneka is depicted in the company of lords, each of whom makes his own positive contribution to the well-being of the world. There is a distinctive kind of moral agency here: instead of an individual agent who is capable of acting effectively and autonomously—as the moral agent is often represented in the modern West—we see an agency that is dispersed throughout an implied network of persons yet is still free and able to act effectively in the world. Drawing on the products and powers of the other lords, Buvaneka himself flourishes, but he also is able to create goods that enable others to flourish in a variety of ways. Such an understanding of human agency acknowledges the ways that persons are bound together in acts of care, responsibility, and esteem as the conditions for the possibility and effectiveness of individual action.77 Moreover, in creating goods in the world, Buvaneka brings together the separate spheres of these different lords, in much the same way that kings unified the separate regions of a country under “one parasol.”

From the tenth to the fifteenth century, the accomplishments and capabilities of Sinhala literati, too, were commonly displayed using images of kingship. Authors were honored by kings with royal titles familiar from politics and religion, such as “universal king” (cakravartin) and “lord” (īśvara). Royal appellations and imagery were applied by Buddhist monks to great Buddhist teachers of the past, such as Buddhaghosa, the greatest of the Mahāvihārin commentators, who is described in the twelfth-century Jatakaantu-

75. The suggestion of these metaphors is not only that his fame pervades the world but, like moonlight and milk, it is cooling as well as beautiful and precious.
77. For a general exploration of how such ideas of decentered agency informed ideas of family and state in Southeast Asia, including the cultural ecumene of Theravāda Buddhism, see Day 1996.
vāgīṭapadaya as “the venerable teacher Buddhaghoṣa, the crest jewel among the whole crowd of learned men, who is able to destroy all his opponents as if bursting open the frontal lobes of elephants.”\(^{78}\) And the nineteenth-century monk-poet Mihiripenne Dhammaratna, writing near Matara, was described in the same images of prowess, valor, and frightfulness by one of his monastic students:

From that day forward, and for a long time, that monk spent his days enjoying the words of praise constantly uttered by wise people, destroying the conceit of various poets who were his adversaries, and hoisting the flags of his victory all over the country.

When this monk appeared on the battlefield of Lanka, as if taking the discus of wisdom in his mind, his adversaries, who were showing great prowess in the battlefield, fled with fear in their minds.

The god of wind, namely, that monk, spread his fame in all directions in the sky of this Lanka and dispelled the heat, namely, the doubts in the minds of his friends; while the dry leaves, in the form of poets who were his adversaries, were blown away.\(^{79}\)

Royal and martial imagery was used not only for authors but also for religious figures. The names for the offices of leaders of the monastic order were increasingly drawn from the realm of politics: “king of the saṅgha” (saṅgharāja), “great lord” (mahāsvāmi, māhīmi). These titles could not be held by two monks at the same time, and those who held them were described as the “one who administered the sāsana in his time.”\(^{80}\) The fifteenth-century Girāsandēśaya’s depiction of Totoṭagamuve Śrī Rāhula as a king displays his preeminence as a creative force in the world:

Who is able to describe [Śrī Rāhula] other than the teacher of the gods? \(^{81}\)

He is a great king,

with virtue [sil]\(^{82}\) as his army and fame [yasa] as his chowrie

with friendliness [met; Skt. maitri] as his parasol

\(^{78}\) sarvavādībhakumbhavavidālanasanarathāśigavivistavanacakracūdrājanibuddhaghoṣācāryapadaya (Jitakaḥūvāgīṭapadaya v. 1; cited and quoted in Godakumbura 1955: 36). The long compound describing Buddhaghoṣa is a mark of the superposition of Sanskrit on this text. See Collins, chapter 11, this volume, on the Mahāvihāra’s place in the history of the Theravāda.

\(^{79}\) “Savsatdam Vādaya” by Koggala Dhammatilaka, included in Mihiripenne Dhammaratana 1979b: 332.

\(^{80}\) Gunawardana 1979b: 332.

\(^{81}\) I.e., Jupiter, who is invoked in Siyābasalakara (v. 2) as one among “the old masters of the science of poetry.”

\(^{82}\) Sila is a general term for Buddhist virtue, but in particular it refers to avoidance of various negative precepts, such as refraining from false speech, sexual misconduct, stealing, etc.
good qualities [guṇa] as his ornaments
the dharma as his crown, wisdom as his sword

who had vanquished enemies
in the form of lust
and had authority [anāku; Skt. ājñā]
by the force of austerities.\(^8^3\)

Even the Buddha was routinely addressed and described with royal and martial terminology (e.g., the conventional appellation: \textit{budu ṍajāyaṇa vahānsē} [the noble Buddha king]), and he was often portrayed in royal and martial imagery, for instance, in Sinhala narrative collections from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, such as \textit{Amāvāṣaṭa} (Flood of ambrosia/the deathless), \textit{Butsarāṇa} (Refuge in the Buddha), and \textit{Pūjavāliya} (Garland of offerings),\(^8^4\) as well as in the twelfth-century \textit{kāvya} in Pali, \textit{Jinālāṅkāra} (Ornaments of the conqueror).\(^8^5\)

If the \textit{prāsāstis} and self-descriptions of kings, who are depicted in cultivated literary language as masters of both that language and the sciences regulating it, are products of practices that point to an aestheticization of the political,\(^8^6\) then the images of monks and authors as kings point to social practices that politicized the aesthetic. But even with such examples of homologies and resonances between the religious, the political, and the literary in the context of Buddhist culture in Sri Lanka, we should not forget that questions about the value of literary competence have frequently been more pointed and the answers more ambivalent because, as Pollock observes, “Not only did Buddhism not stop Buddhists from writing Sanskrit literature, but when they did write, their behavior was not recognizably Buddhist.”\(^8^7\)

Some Sinhala Buddhists, both in modern times and in the past, did make similar judgments of their own about the moral import of literary activity,

\(^8^3\) \textit{Giriṣanḍesīya} v. 247.

\(^8^4\) All three of these works employ royal and martial imagery throughout, but it is especially evident in their narrations of the defeat of Mara by the Buddha. See \textit{Amāvāṣaṭa} 29–31; \textit{Butsarāṇa}; and \textit{Pūjavāliya} 196–203. In \textit{Pūjavāliya}, Mara describes the Buddha as “having great power [anubhava] and great potency [tejas]. He cannot be subdued by anyone. No creature can move him. He is a person endowed with great steadfastness [dhaīrya]” (pp. 196–97).

\(^8^5\) \textit{Jinālāṅkāra} v. 170: “The one who attained the excellent white umbrella of release, / who has a community (saṅgha) of defeated enemies, having cut down the Māras, / and who is a sun to the three Buddha-fields [birth, authority, and space] / cried out an udāna because of the force of his happiness.”

The idea that the Buddha’s \textit{saṅgha} consists of defeated enemies obviously represents for the monastic author of the \textit{Jinālāṅkāra} a striking moral attitude toward oneself. See Collins, chapter 11, this volume, for information on this verse in particular (including another translation of it) and the \textit{Jinālāṅkāra} more generally.

\(^8^6\) Pollock 1996: 216.

\(^8^7\) Pollock, chapter 1, this volume.
especially that inflected by Sanskrit literary culture, as even the Siyabaslakara’s restrictions on subject matter for kāvya suggest. Thus, Martin Wickramasinghe (1891–1976), the most important Sinhala novelist and literary critic of the twentieth century, dismissed one of the earliest mahākāvyaśas in Sinhala, the twelfth-century Muvadevdāvata (Mākhadevaṇḍātaka), by saying that its author imitates a “decadent” tradition of “later artificial poetry” in Sanskrit and thus “spoils, with his sophisticated imagination, the natural charm of what was the product of a genuine though primitive Buddhist culture.”

And if Śrī Rāhula’s fame as a learned poet was part of his authority as the leading monk of his day, other currents in Buddhist culture at the time seem to have taken a far dimmer view of literary activity like his. For example, the Hamsa-sandēśaya, also from the fifteenth century, describes another monastic center with a curriculum that is basically the same as that found in the Gīravandēśaya’s description of Totaγamuve, but it adds that its incumbent, a monk named Vanaratana, though learned enough that “his speech is the source of all poetics and rhetoric,” still “regarded poetry and drama as useless.”

Similarly, the Dambadenī Katikāvata, a monastic code from the thirteenth century, prohibits monastic involvement in “despicable arts like poetry and drama,” while the Anāgatavamsaya (History of the future), a fourteenth-century Sinhala translation of the Pali text of the same name, says that “foolish poets who liken the face of a woman to a lotus will be born as worms inside the bellies of those women.”

THE LITERARY AND THE TECHNIQUES OF HUMAN SELF-UNDERSTANDING

An awareness of the contribution of literary activity to the formation of moral and social subjects, though contested, encourages us to take seriously Kavśilumīna’s image of the “tree of poetry”: “The condition of being a poet / is the flower on the tree of poetry, / and accounts of the lives of the future Buddha its fruit.” This image turns our attention in two directions: one toward texts, the other toward persons. They are equally important because literary cultures are constituted by sets of situated practices that produce both, albeit in different ways. Every adequate account of a literary culture

89. Hamsasandēśaya v. 195, 195.
90. Dambadenī Katikāvata (para. 49, 50) says that ślokas, etc. should not be composed and recited for laymen; despicable arts such as poetry and drama should be neither studied nor taught to others.
91. Cited in Dambadenī Katikāvata, para. 268. The comparison of a woman’s face to a lotus is a standard illustration for various ornamentations (alaṅkāra) in the Siyabaslakara. For example: “Your face, which possesses the luster of your teeth and has trembling eyes, shines like full-blown lotuses with their pollen and the humming bees” (v. 111).
will eventually need to do justice to both texts and persons, to the processes
that produce them, and to the traditions of thought that explain and justify
the worth of each. Flowers, of course, are valuable not only because they are
capable of producing fruit.

Examining the reflexive relation of these two products of literary cul-
ture serves as a first step toward identifying the literary in Sinhala cultural
history. Obviously, writers produce texts, but that is not enough to make
those texts literature; nor is stipulating some special quality intrinsic to
those texts as literature sufficient to make them such. Literature clearly con-
cerns the production of texts that engender some value for a person,
whether that person be author, connoisseur, patron, or subject of a work.
Or, to use the words of Siyabaslakara, language as used in literature "is like
a wish-conferring cow that gives what is desirable to those who can use it in
the proper manner, but for others it will impart only bovine qualities."92 In
other words, the literary adds something desirable to the world beyond lit-
erary texts themselves.

Siyabaslakara’s comment provides a second marker for investigating the
literary: The pursuit of value by means of the literary takes place within a
critical context that is equally alert to disvalue, that is, to the ways that the
improper use of language can deleteriously affect persons and the world.
For instance, a popular tradition tells us that the fifteenth-century author
of Guttilakāvya was sent into exile because he began his poem with an in-
auspicious combination of letters.

None of this is to deny that literature was considered desirable in and
of itself, as the ubiquitous use of images of gems in book titles attest.93 But
for most premodern Sinhala literary cultures, literature, like jewels, was a
good that was best appreciated by the learned. As Śrī Rāhula says about his
Kāvyāśekhara:

> Just as differences in jewels
> are not really seen
> except by those who know them well,
> only poets will know
> what is good or bad
> of the many words
> that are uttered here.94

---

92. Siyabaslakara v. 7.
94. Kāvyāśekhara 1.28. The Kāvyāśekhara is a mahākāvya that tells the story of the Sattubhas-
tajātaka (*jātaka* tale 402), but the title indicates that its purpose has more to do with literary
fame than religious instruction.
The significance of the statements in Siyabaslakara and Katoyaśekhara becomes clearer when they are considered within the framework of what Michel Foucault called "forms of understanding which the subject creates about himself"—understandings that are cultivated in techniques or technologies.95

There are four major types of these "technologies," each a matrix of practical reason: (1) technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things; (2) technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or significations; (3) technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject; and (4) technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.

These four types of technologies hardly ever function separately, although each of them is associated with a certain type of domination. Each implies certain modes of training and modification of individuals, not only in the sense of acquiring certain skills but also in the sense of acquiring certain attitudes.96

Foucault’s typology of techniques of human understanding helps us take a third step toward defining the literary in Sinhala cultural history, a step that reveals the literary as a site of quite varied forms of human self-understanding. The literary in South Asia obviously elicited a technology of signs and significations that requires both training and discipline to handle well, as is clear from the numerous works in grammar, lexicography, prosody, and poetics. But that is not all it is. The use of royal imagery to depict authors makes it clear that for much of the premodern period, the literary was considered a way of exercising power in a field of action that held both winners and losers. As a technology of power, the literary determined the conduct of individuals and made them submit to ends that they themselves did not exactly choose, even as they exercised control over others by means of the literary.97 The same royal imagery also indicates that the literary is a technology of the self. However, the royal and martial is but one depiction of the personal transformation that results from literary training; as I have already noted several times, the aims of literature in Sinhala literary cultures were

97. See Pollock 1996: "One hypothesis I want to explore is that Sanskrit articulated politics not as material power—the power embodied in languages-of-state for purposes of boundary regulation or taxation, for example, for which so-called vernacular idioms typically remained the vehicle—but politics as aesthetic power. To some degree the Sanskrit ‘cosmopolis’ I shall describe consists precisely in this common aesthetics of political culture, a kind of poetry of politics" (198).
articulated with religious vocabulary and imagery, and thus the literary was embedded within various religious technologies of the self. Finally, for some Sinhala literary cultures at least, literature was a technology of production, able to increase or destroy wealth, health, and life itself. The interpenetration of the literary, the political, and the religious in the portraits of literati in Sinhala literary cultures is a quite effective way of displaying how these different types of technologies, and their correlative modes of human self-understanding, are coeval in the literary, inevitably functioning together to transform individuals and also the world.

What primarily captures our attention in investigating literature is the manner in which it is a system of signs and significations that enables a peculiar form of communication. But in Sinhala literary culture, as in Sanskrit, what is more important—what makes the literary desirable—is probably best conceptualized in terms of its affective and practical effects. The Siyabaslakara explains that “sweetness” (madhurya), one of the aspects of the literary text that animates poetry (pana), is “the quality whereby educated people will be delighted, just as bees get intoxicated by honey,” and the fifteenth-century Pärakumbasirita says that “the speech of those who are learned and noble . . . brings happiness.” 98 Here again we see that mastering the technology of signs in literary culture is embedded within a broader technology of the self. “What is desirable” as an affective experience has of course been defined variously by different Sinhala literary cultures. Moreover, affective experience is not the only good associated with the literary; the Siyabaslakara says that a mahākārya should “delight the mind of the entire world,” but it is also “an ornament [lakara; i.e., alaṅkāra] of poets.” 99 Like the ornaments of a king, which distinguish his body from those of more ordinary men, 100 the literary distinguishes authors and connoisseurs from others. As we have seen, material reward, fame, splendor, and prestige are among the practical human goods that come with literary success, all of which make the literary a profoundly generative social phenomenon. Nor did literary figures always try to denigrate these social goods. Śrī Rāhula exulted in his own prestige and social status in a self-description found in his Kāvyāsēkhara; the self-description is part of an explanation that the poem is a response to a request from a daughter of Parākramabāhu VI for him to compose a religious discourse (banāk) in verse using ētu:

May you listen with pleasure

to this discourse which is expounded

98. Siyabaslakara v. 35; Pärakumbasirita v. 6.
100. See Kāvyāsēkhara 1.26: “In a noble king the beautiful sixty-four ornaments and his body are seen separately.”
by the chief of the Vijayabahu pirivenapirivena, who illuminates the ten directions with his fame because he understands the Buddhist scriptures well, and because he has reached the limits of all learning [śāstra] as if Jupiter [guruvan] himself had arrived on earth, and because he is endowed with pure virtues [parisud sil] like the crown jewel of all the world’s learned men [viyatu].

Just as the moonbeams by opening up the night lilies increase themselves, so the scholarly man who extols the virtues of others shines and blossoms in the company of the learned.

In considering Śrī Rāhula’s self-satisfaction within a framework of religious and literary technologies of the self, it is important to recognize that as in the Hamsasandēśaya’s portrait of the monk Buvaneka, Śrī Rāhula did not seem to consider his accomplishments and stature as due only to his individual skill and achievement, or as benefiting only himself. In his early work, the Paravīsandēśaya (Pigeon’s message), in which he uses his poetic skills to compose a plea that is “beautiful in its letters, words, and meaning” to the god Upulvan (Viṣṇu) to protect a daughter of Parākramabahu VI, Śrī Rāhula attributes his literary success both to his own capabilities and to a boon he had received from the god Skanda (Kataragama), enabling him to be eminent in knowledge and wisdom:

This is the Paravīsandēśaya uttered by Rahul who was born in the Skandhāvara family and lives in the vicinity of Ṭoṭāgāmuve who had swiftly learned all literature [kav] in the Sinhala, Pali, and Sanskrit languages and who had received a boon from Skanda, the Lord of Gods, in his fifteenth year.

Sinhala literary cultures have commonly perceived literature as uniquely able to make nonliterary goods and experiences accessible across time. In

101. The sammaya on this verse explains that the śāstras are logic, grammar, poetry, drama, poetics, etc. (tarkavyākaraṇākāryanāṭakālāṅkārī).  
102. This echoes what the Jātakagātigatapadaya said about Buddhaghosa.  
103. Kāvyākhara 1.24–25, 27. The last verse resonates with Subodhākāra’s prescriptions about what is seitya in poetry, although obviously the first verses do not.  
104. Paravīsandēśaya v. 192.  
105. Paravīsandēśaya v. 203.
this is embedded yet another aspect of the literary as a technology of the self. The *Siyabaslakara* says that “the image of the fame of kings remains visible even after their deaths, when it is reflected in the mirror of language.” This understanding of the creative power of the literary helps us to appreciate why historical works, like the *Mahāvamsa* and the *Hatthavanagallavihāravamsa* in Pali and the *Elu Attanagaluvamsa*, a fourteenth-century Sinhala version of the latter text, were written in highly literary styles. \(^{106}\) Comparison with a subsequent Sinhala literary culture illuminates the distinctiveness of the literary culture of medieval Sri Lanka. In the twentieth century, fiction and drama have been commonly perceived as a means of experiencing an enduring Sinhala authenticity that is otherwise inaccessible to a contemporary not only because of broad cultural changes brought about by colonialism and modernity but also because of a personal alienation effected by education for the urban intellectual. The poignancy of this modern “discourse of the vanishing” is captured in the title of Martin Wickramasinghe’s literary account of his travels to historical sites, especially the ancient capitals of Sri Lanka at Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa: *Kalunika Sevi*ma (Searching for the Kalunika). \(^{107}\) The *kalunika* is a mythical bird whose nest will give its discoverer omnipotence, but it is not certain that the *kalunika* still survives.

Even if both the *Siyabaslakara* and Wickramasinghe appreciate the unique power of literature to enrich the world of human experience, they clearly differ in their understanding of the affective and practical presence of a literary person in the world. The *Siyabaslakara* portrays the literary as a means of positive gain, indeed as world-making, because “here in this world, all speech, whether learned or unlearned, makes the world exist on account of its perspicuity.” In the literary culture that produced poetry in *elu*, in which the *Siyabaslakara* was a key text, it was commonly assumed that with the literary one can “increase all prosperity, such as long life and health.” These ideas encouraged attitudes toward oneself that resonated with Buddhist ideas of the virtuous person being self-disciplined, compassionate, and capable of aiding others. \(^{108}\) The pursuit of well-being for oneself and others through literature broadened the cultural borders of the community of Sinhala speakers, especially with respect to appropriating from the world of Sanskrit literary culture values and practices that would enhance one’s ability to be effective in this aim. Literature was a way of coming into a world beyond one’s ordinary self—another attitude toward the self that had strong and clear Buddhist resonances.

In contrast, Wickramasinghe advocated a narrowing of cultural borders as a way of reclaiming one’s authentic self. He often portrayed the literary as

---

\(^{106}\) *Siyabaslakara* v. 6. On Pali literary culture, see Collins, chapter 11, this volume.


\(^{108}\) *Siyabaslakara* v. 4; *Nikāyasangraha* v. 1.
the only means of recovering a certain “Sinhala-ness,” though the pleasures of experiencing it through literature are inevitably tinged with sadness in the same way as “someone past forty sometimes recalls his childhood... — going to school after enjoying [anubhava kota] the flavorsome [rasavat] food cooked and given by mother—[with] pleasure, because childhood was a stream of joy, and [with] grief [sokaya] because it is not possible to be like a child again.”\textsuperscript{109}

The differences in the visions of the affective and practical presence of the ideal literary person in the world that are found in the Sinhala literary cultures provide one way of distinguishing these cultures from each other, and enable us to clarify our understanding of how the literary changed over time. Although I concentrate here on a single Sinhala literary culture’s vision of the ideal literary person and the manner in which it instantiates all four technologies identified by Foucault, nonetheless, all literary cultures, I believe, have techniques that permit the use of sign systems as well as technologies of the self; it is the inclusion of techniques of domination and techniques of production that is more variable. Thus, the ideal person in the literary culture of the tenth to nineteenth centuries that used \textit{elu} for poetry was a “world-conqueror” (\textit{cakravartin}), able to transform the world affectively and practically through the skillful use of refined literary techniques. In this culture, the self-transformation and world-transformation effected by the literary was generic, just as each \textit{cakravartin} portrayed in Buddhist literature, including the Buddha, was fundamentally identical to all others, and each brought the same sort of well-being to the world as all others did.\textsuperscript{110}

By contrast, in the twentieth-century fiction of Wickramasinghe, the ideal literary person was not a world-conqueror or a unique individual but a villager, unself-consciously secure in his local experiences of the world to such a degree that he was “by nature” literary. In the fictional recollection of literature, this villager becomes a tutor to urbanized authors and readers, who must unlearn what they have been taught in school in order to regain the cultural authenticity that survives in the village. This is manifest in Wickramasinghe’s description of a village coffeeshop in \textit{Apē Gēma} (Our village), where the village is depicted as the true space of the literary:

The old villagers [gāmiyō] who gathered at the wood-carver’s coffee shop were not poets [kaviṇ] endowed with the creative brilliance [pratībhāva] that comes

\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Apē Gēma}. In Wickramasinghe 1989: 1. Note that Wickramasinghe uses terms here that are also part of aesthetic vocabulary, in particular \textit{rasa}; on the overlap between theories of food ingestion and aesthetic experience in South Asian culture, see Seneviratne 1999. Unlike the understanding of the \textit{Siyabaslakara}, according to which the ability to experience literary \textit{rasa} is cultivated in school, according to Wickramasinghe the experience of \textit{rasa} is found in home-cooked food and thus precedes attending school.

\textsuperscript{110} Notably, the same is found in Sanskrit literary culture of the time.
with learning from books and teachers; they were poets whose creative brilliance came from the school called living. The language they spoke lacked the artificial refinement [khataka viniita bhatrayen] that is learned from the pages of books, but their tall tales, their chatter, even though it was weighed down by rusticity [gramyatyayen], did not lack the intelligence that belongs to age, a sense of the ridiculous, Buddhist piety [upaisaka kam], and the transforming flavor of laughter [snarasa], such as flavors literature [sahitya rasayen]. They had been oppressed by the suffering [duk] that belongs to human life, and even their gossip was as if it had taken drops of life that were thrown off by the river of life; it is like riches [vastu] for the compositions of poets. Some of the old villagers are like fruit trees that sprout in the forest: they grow and open wide their branches, bloom and fruit, decay and rot in the same place. The old villagers sow their words and deeds and then die in the same place. To the poets who have the power of creative genius [pratibhastaktyayena kavi tayen], villagers like this provide a large quantity of raw material that is like riches for their poetry [kavyaya ta].

Due to the influence of Sanskrit literary culture, in the literary culture of Sinhala poetry between the tenth and the fifteenth centuries, what is of the village (gramya) was vulgar and outside the realm of the literary. Wickramasinghe explicitly reverses this hierarchy of value in Apê Gama, turning the inherited terminology of literary criticism (especially rasa) against itself. For Wickramasinghe, it is the literary person who must learn to appreciate the villager’s speech—something Sri Râhula could never have imagined. Moreover, Wickramasinghe’s narrowing of Sinhala cultural boundaries has an intrinsic historical component. His admiration of village culture is a sharp rejection of the Sinhala literary heritage that found in Sanskrit a way beyond itself; for Wickramasinghe, this was a loss of self that was a price paid for greed:

Villagers experience a transforming flavor [rasa] that is greater that the distorted flavor of beauty [viktta saundarya rasaya] that can be gotten from the books of the learned. Some have the mistaken notion that the villager cannot experience the flavor of the things of beauty around him, just as the spoon does not know the flavor of the curry [vyanjana]. “The person who abandons literature and music [sahitya sangiti kalivana] is a cow without tail or horn:

111. Wickramasinghe 1989: 54.
112. The possessive pronoun in the title Apê Gama contains a productive ambiguity. Sinhala linguistic etiquette can prompt use of the first person plural possessive even when only the singular is relevant; an only child may politely refer to “our mother” (apê ammâ). Thus the title refers to Wickramasinghe’s memory of “my village,” yet the plural is also relevant, referring to the childhood villages remembered by many Sinhala city dwellers in mid-century.
113. Note again how Wickramasinghe uses food vocabulary that overlaps with aesthetics. Vyanjana also means suggestion, a key literary element in some literary cultures in South Asia, including Sinhala.
his life is the best of cows because without eating grass he still lives.” The harsh ridicule of the ancient scholar is a poisoned arrow aimed straight at those who are hungry among city-dwellers, not the villagers.\textsuperscript{114}

It is impossible to do justice to the complexities of more than one image of the ideal literary person in the space of this chapter. Yet even this broad comparison of two such images is sufficient to illustrate just how variable Sinhala attitudes to the literary have been through history. And this comparison does suggest that focusing on the image of the ideal literary person may be an alternative approach to the problem of distinguishing periods in Sinhala literary history, a problem that has yet to receive adequate critical resolution.

In modern Sinhala literary historiography, as in modern historiography of Sinhala culture in general, periodization is often structured spatially, with periods defined linearly by shifts in the island’s capital over time. P. B. Sanasgala’s monumental \textit{Sinhala S\=ahitya Vamsaya} (History of Sinhala literature) is a good example of this approach. It is divided into three parts—ancient, medieval, and modern—with the kingdom based at Anuradhapura set apart as ancient; the kingdoms centered at Polonnaruwa, Dambadeni, Kurun\=agala, Gampola, Koth\=e, Sit\=avaka, and the early Kandyan period, considered as medieval; and the eighteenth-century kingdoms at Kandy and Colombo as the modern period. There are a number of problems with this way of dividing the history of Sinhala literature.\textsuperscript{115} Obviously, it tells us nothing about the understanding of the literary in particular times and places. It also obscures the fact that distinctive literary cultures sometimes flourished far from the capital, as happened at Matara on the southern coast in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, nominally during “the Kandyan” period yet outside the political control of the Kandyan court. This model also suggests ruptures in literary history where in fact there often were none; as we shall see, there was significant continuity in \textit{elu} literary culture from the tenth

\textsuperscript{114} \textit{Ap\=e G\=ama}, In Wickramasinghe 1989: 54.

\textsuperscript{115} These problems are similar to what R. A. H. L. Gunawardana (1979b: 2–3) has identified as problems of periodization in the history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka: Most works on the ancient and medieval history of Sri Lanka have adopted a scheme of periodization based on the location of the capital of the Sinhalese kingdom; the pre-colonial history of the island is thus divided into eight periods: Anur\=adhapura, Polonnaruwa, Dambadeniya, Kurun\=agala, Gampola, Koth\=e, Sit\=avaka and Kandy. The present writer began his research with the intention of writing a history of Buddhism in the “Polonnaruwa Period,” but, during the course of his work, he became convinced of the inadequacy of this scheme of periodization. It became increasingly clear that some of the significant changes in the organization of the Buddhist \textit{sangha} in the twelfth century would become understandable only when examined in the context of the developments noticeable in the latter part of the “Anur\=adhapura Period.”
century to the fifteenth century, even though the capital shifted more than six times during this period. In short, this conventional model, which traces a succession of Sinhala polities and affirms the continuity of a Sinhala “proto-nation” that culminates in modern Sri Lanka as a nation-state, gives—perhaps intentionally—very little guidance about the criteria by which we might distinguish one literary culture from another, or one literary period from another.

Another common model for marking Sinhala literary cultures does have the virtue of focusing our attention on literature by thematizing periods according to the supposed predominance of a particular genre or style. An example of this approach is Wickramasinghe’s *Landmarks of Sinhalese Literature*, in which periods are defined as “The Age of Prose” and “The Poetry of a New Age.” Unfortunately, this approach does little more than make broad historical generalizations from particular texts, as chapter titles like “The Kavyaśekhara of Śrī Rāhula” and “The Prose of Dharmasena” make clear. This mode of historiography not only exhibits excessive confidence in its knowledge of what literature is, but also quickly goes beyond an understanding of what the literary was decided to be in the past to establish its own structures of literary taste, with labels like “classical” or “decadent” freely employed as historical descriptions.

**SINHALA LITERARY CULTURE AT SIGIRIYA**

Issues of periodization inevitably lead to the question of the historical beginnings of a literary tradition. The earliest evidence that we have for Sinhala literature, however, is the product of a well-developed literary culture that seems to have been an heir to an even earlier complex literary heritage. This evidence is the poetic graffiti inscribed mainly from the seventh to the ninth centuries at a ruined palace complex at Sigiriya, in central Sri Lanka. Even if the evidence from Sigiriya does not help us to specify exactly what cultural and social processes motivated the transformation of everyday Sinhala into a literary language, it is still worth pausing to explore the outlines of this literary culture and its practices, both because of its own intrinsic interest and because of how it can illuminate subsequent Sinhala literary cultures. Not only is the poetry found at Sigiriya a product of a lit-

---


117. There is evidence for the documentary use of the Sinhala language (or, perhaps more accurately, a Sinhala “Prakrit”) in inscriptions from as early as the third century B.C.E., but none are literature by any definition of the term, as a single example can make clear: *upasaka devaha leha*, “the cave of the lay devotee Deva” (Paranavitana 1970: 30, no. 381). Commentaries on Pali texts were composed in Sinhala before 100 B.C.E., but the little that survives of this material suggests that it, too, hardly qualified as literature.
erary culture that broadly is the backdrop for much of the elu poetry that
developed in the tenth to fifteenth centuries;\textsuperscript{118} it also became a key part
of the nativist search for a more usable Sinhala literary past that developed
in the decades leading up to and just after the independence of Sri Lanka
as a nation in 1948.

The palace complex at Sigiriya dates from about the fifth century. At the
center of the complex is a large granite rock, which rises almost perpendicu-
larly above the forest to a height of about six hundred feet, on top of which
is the palace proper. It is this rock that gave the site its name, the “lion moun-
tain,” because the entrance to the staircase that allowed visitors to ascend to
the palace was built in the shape of the front of a lion and thus gave the whole
rock the appearance of a lion sitting on its haunches.

Sigiriya was built by Kaśyapa, a king who is remembered in the Sinhala
Buddhist historical tradition as a parricide.\textsuperscript{119} He was supposed to have built
the palace as a fortress out of fear of retribution from his brother. The brother
did eventually attack Kaśyapa’s army, and when defeat was imminent, Kaśyapa
committed suicide. The site was then apparently abandoned.

On one side of the mountain, about forty feet above the access route, is
a series of frescoes of female figures. The identification of these female figures
has been the subject of scholarly debate, with some identifying the figures
as the wives of Kaśyapa and others seeing them as heavenly maidens. The
latter theory is especially associated with S. Paranavitana, who argued that
Sigiriya was built not as an inaccessible fortress, as both historical tradition
and the site itself suggest, but as a symbolic representation of the palace of
Kuvera, the god of wealth in Sanskrit myth, who dwells on the summit of
Mount Kailāśa.

A portion of the access route to the top of the mountain is enclosed by a
finely plastered wall known as the Mirror Wall. From about the seventh to
the ninth centuries, visitors to the site, already desolate in the forest, left their
impressions of the site itself as well as of the female figures portrayed in the
frescoes in verses inscribed on this plastered wall. The common appellation
of “graffiti” for these verses is somewhat misleading, for unlike most exam-
pies of graffiti, these verses clearly indicate a disciplined and sophisticated
use of language for literary purposes.

There are many surprises in the Sigiriya “graffiti.” About half of the verses

\textsuperscript{118} “[The] poetic diction [of the graffiti] appears to have taken very much the same vo-
cabulary as is met with in classical Sinhalese poems still in existence, and thus is explained the
occurrence of phraseology common to [the Sigiriya] verses and to such poems as the [twelfth-
(Paranavitana 1956, 1: cci).

\textsuperscript{119} See Obeyesekere 1990.
identify their authors and their social identities, and what they reveal is in itself surprising. Members of the royal court as well as villagers, men as well as women, monks as well as laymen, all left verses at Sigiriya. More than one king left a verse. There are forms of verse, especially meters for the two-line gi, that seem unique to Sinhala and that continued to be highly favored by Sinhala poets until about the fourteenth century; but there is also considerable evidence of a prescient awareness of Sanskrit literary culture. The notion of rasa, a key concept in the Sanskrit literary theory that was developing at the same time (and remained key in later Sinhala literary cultures), is already found in these verses. One verse, for example, urges visitors to become immersed in the “sweet transforming flavor” (mihiri vese) of Sigiriya, while a number of others explicitly employ the terminology of rasa for both the paintings and the poems. One verse even makes an allusion to Kālidāsa’s Meghadūta, which suggests a direct familiarity with individual products of Sanskrit literary culture:

The poem of Lord Sirina, resident of Digalavana:

O Cloud, my Lord!
I honor you!
Go to her house and speak,
cause her
whose courage is in pieces
whose tongue and lips are parched
to have faith.

There is some inconclusive indication of connections, though underdeveloped, to the literary resources of Pali of the time. These connections are at the level of form, not content, for the Sigiri verses are entirely secular in their discourse. Many of the verses take the form of questions and replies—a pattern of poetry found in some of the oldest portions of the Pali canon, for example in the Suttanipāta (Group of discourses). The prominence of this form of poetry in Sinhala may have been what led the twelfth-

120. “Though the Sinhalese gi metres agree with those of Prākrit in being based on the principle of the number of morae in a pada, there is hardly any metre in Sinhalese which is identical with any known in Prākrit” (Paranavitana 1956, 1: cxxxv).

121. Verse 613. Recall that the Siyabaslakara, as quoted earlier, explains that “sweetness” (mādhurya) in poetry is “the quality whereby educated people will be delighted, just as bees get intoxicated by honey.” The Siyabaslakara may have been echoing this earlier literary culture, as well as giving access to Sanskrit literary culture in its translation of Daṇḍin.


123. Verse 134.

124. See Collins, chapter 11, this volume. Examples of verses in the form of poetry in Sinhala may have been what led the twelfth-
century Sidatsangarāvva, a handbook of grammar and poetics for aspiring poets, to include in its chapter on *alaṅkāra* a type of figure that it names “the speech of two” (*ubha baś;* Skt. *ubhayabhāṣā*), explaining that “the display [*paḷavaṭ;* Skt. *prakāśa*] of the distinctiveness of action or character [*siritavese-sak;* Skt. *cāritraviśeṣa*] is what is praised within the speech of two people.”\(^{125}\) This figure was not recognized in the Sanskrit literary culture contemporary with the Sigiri graffiti—that is, it was not named in the comprehensive enumeration of *alaṅkāras* in authors like Daṇḍin—and in *elu* poetry between the tenth and fifteenth centuries it occurs only rarely, which may be due to the superposition of Sanskrit literary theory on Sinhala poetry at that time.\(^{126}\)

A number of significant literary practices are evident in the Sigiriya verses—all connected both to the disciplinary practices of literature and to a moral technology of the self. First, subject matter is predetermined and restricted. All of the graffiti at Sigiriya are about the site and its frescoes. Even at such a striking and inspiring site, this narrow range of subject matter is remarkable—Did no one remember something that happened on the way, or something at home? Did no one feel like reacting to the place indirectly with a verse in praise of the Buddha or a king? The absence of any verses about anything but Sigiriya suggests that there were commonly accepted constraints on what subject matter was appropriate to the place. The restriction of subject matter heightened the challenges of creativity for the visitors, but as the verses themselves make evident, many did rise to the challenge. Especially noteworthy are the ways in which poets used even the physical qualities of the site in their verses. For example, there are frequent allusions to the hard hearts of the women in the frescoes, who were sometimes portrayed as the wives of Kāśyapa committing suicide:

A poem composed by Sivkala, wife of Utur:

Those beautiful women on the mountain side,

have they hurled themselves
from the top of the rock
saying we too shall die
when they were separated
from their lord, the king\(^{127}\)

These women are literally made of stone, after all—when they fail to respond accordingly to the emotional offerings of the poets:

---

\(^{125}\) *Sidatsangarava* 12.10.

\(^{126}\) Paranavitana 1956, l: cc.

\(^{127}\) Verse 237.
The poem of Digilipeli Vajur:

When you look at me,
O long-eyed one,
please don’t turn away.

I won’t notice
if your heart is hard.

If you feel anything for me
I shall be satisfied.128

The restriction of subject matter seems connected to two other practices evident at the site: criticism and competition. Some poems are comments on other poems, and the consistency of critiques suggest that they were based on shared literary values. One author, for example, commented on the poem of another by questioning whether it was literature at all:

Is it a poem [kavek] because a person sat there, thought, and wrote? He thought it was a composition, but when he looked at this, didn’t he write only an empty song? He composed it by taking only what appears when one looks.129

Obviously, in calling a verse an “empty song” (his gī), this critic had some aesthetic basis by which he excluded it from the realm of the literary. The terms of his critique suggest that he regarded literature as more than just documenting the world, more than just describing what one sees before one eyes; in the terms of the Sanskrit literary theory of the time, he is rejecting this verse as mere vārtā (report), lacking in poetic appeal because it lacks vakrokti (roundabout turn of expression), atiśayokti (hyberbolic expression), catmatkāra (aesthetic delight), or svabhāvokti (description of the true nature of something, which is not perceived by ordinary people).130 In a similar vein, another poet’s critique of a verse suggests that he assumed that the literary adds something good to life:

Purporting it to be poetry, he wrote what is in his own mind—what has come to his mind merely because life continues to exist in him. Is it by you that the people going to the rock have been stopped for the sake of what is good in life [jīvye hi guṇata]?131

Other poems give some hints about what the “good in life” might have been thought to be. They suggest that poems, and the paintings to which the poems respond, give access to moods and feelings that are generalized and specific to art.

128. Verse 304.
129. Verse 492.
131. Verse 495.
He [the painter], by the art of painting, fixes even the real nature \textit{[ati sabā]} of the very source of consciousness. Having seen with his own eyes a long strand of hair, he paints and fixes diverse feelings of the mind.\footnote{132} 

Other critiques seem to indicate shared standards of taste and propriety in language, vocabulary, and subject. One verse refers to “the character of seasonable speech” \textit{(tan visi bava)},\footnote{133} which seems to refer to a general sense of what poetic form and content was appropriate at Sigiriya, while another dismisses a poet as “a conceited boor,”\footnote{134} apparently because of what was taken as a vulgar reference to the breasts of the women in the paintings. There are even verses that illustrate poetic flaws in order to critique them.\footnote{135} Some vocabulary also seems to have been proscribed in the poetry at Sigiriya, since words that are found in other Sinhala works and inscriptions from the same period are completely absent in the verses.\footnote{136} 

Such prescriptions and critiques were evidently made in a context of contests between poets, and they most likely provided the criteria for success or failure in competition. One verse is introduced with the comment that it was written when its author was about “to go away defeated,” while another says that the author defeated an opponent with his poem and went away.\footnote{137} The existence of these competitions and the language of defeat associated with them suggests an incipient technique of domination in this literary culture. It also takes us some way toward appreciating the obsessive concern with identifying and avoiding literary faults \textit{(dosa)}, which we find explicitly addressed in later works, like Siyabaslakara.

\footnote{132} Verse 541. See also vv. 150 and 161. 
\footnote{133} Verse 231. 
\footnote{134} Verse 100, commenting on verse 138. Strikingly, the word translated by Paranavitana as “boor” \textit{(gahāviyā)} is literally “householder” \textit{(Pali gahapati)}, hardly a pejorative term in the wider Theravādin culture; this possibly suggests some antagonism between the literary culture at Sigiriya and Buddhist values at the time. Another hint of this antagonism can be seen in the following verse by a Buddhist monk (verse 120): The poem of the renouncer Riyanamiya, resident of Rajanama: 

“Can you go away without seeing the golden-colored ones?
They live in this forest.”

And when he said that,
my friend lured my heart among those golden-colored ones,
ab, why did I come here?

\footnote{135} Verse 282, for example. 
\footnote{136} See Paranavitana 1956, 1: clxxiv. 
\footnote{137} Verses 245 and 246.
Although it is possible to identify in these verses a few practices that were part of the formation of literary and moral persons, it is extremely difficult to situate these practices and discern the human character of the community or individuals who composed them. Diverse people came to Sigiriya from scattered locales. Admission to Sigiriya’s “community” was selective only in the sense that a person had to make the effort to get there, and it is impossible to determine what practices and institutions in the various writers’ hometowns contributed to the achievement of the shared literary culture that the verses display, even at just the level of techniques of expression. Moreover, even though we have the names of hundreds of men and women who left verses at Sigiriya—more names than we know for any other literary culture in Sri Lanka before the nineteenth century—we know practically nothing more about any of them. It is equally impossible to conclude much about the generic nature of a literary person in this literary culture, apart from the little that can be inferred from examining the poems themselves.

THE TECHNOLOGIES OF SINHALA POETRY FROM THE TENTH CENTURY TO THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

The evidence for the literary culture that produced poetry in Sinhala for five centuries, beginning around the year 1000, is more abundant and varied than what is found at Sigiriya. It includes works of poetry in different genres, like the mahākāvyas, praṇāstis poetry in the standard Sanskrit style, and numerous messenger poems. Also included are handbooks composed with the aim of helping aspiring poets to write well, works of lexicography for poets, and finally, the portraits of individual poets who were prominent at different moments in the history of this literary culture. This evidence, taken together, covers a broad range of phenomena, and because of the multiple angles of vision that it affords, it provides an important glimpse into what the literary was held to be and to accomplish during these centuries. Most important for the concerns of this chapter, this assemblage of evidence allows us to see that the literary was used and valued at the intersection of all four of Foucault’s types of techniques of human self-understanding.

The evidence for Sinhala literary culture, abundant as it may be, is still incomplete. To reconstruct even the broadest contours of this literary culture we

138. Pollock 1996: 211 describes “the standard praṇāsti style” as comprising “the fixing of genealogical succession” (see Pārakumbasirītav. 27–28, where a brief and vague genealogy suggests that Parākramabahu’s claim to the throne was not clear in terms of the normal patterns of succession), “the catalogue of kingly traits of the dynasty” (see Pārakumbasirītav. 9–26), and “the eulogy of the ruling lord” (see Pārakumbasirītav. 29–140).
must bring together individual examples of texts and persons that were actually centuries apart—centuries in which Sri Lanka was often in considerable political and cultural upheaval. Important changes in poetry also occurred during the five centuries under consideration, as a comparison of the vocabulary and meters of the twelfth-century Kavsilumina and the fifteenth-century Kavyasakhara makes clear. But like the Sanskrit literary culture from which it frequently took inspiration, what divides this ēlu literary culture is not as important as what unifies it.  

The unity of this literary culture seems to have been self-consciously cultivated as part of the technology of a system of signs. In contrast to the variation permitted in Sinhala prose of the period, which allowed a single writer to experiment with radically different forms of the language, poetic language is selective, homogenous, and stable. Unity in ēlu literary culture is cultivated not only with respect to the choice of language and the practices of phonetic conservation that preserved archaic and largely unintelligible forms; just as Theravāda Buddhist culture and Sri Lankan political culture celebrated those who looked to the past to find guidance on how to think and act in the present, so authors in this literary culture portrayed themselves as looking to older literary models, as we saw in the verses from the Girasandēśaya describing the kinds of religious and literary study that took place at Śrī Rāhula’s monastic college. Similarly, Siyabaslakara introduces some varieties of meter (chandas) in Sinhala by referring to a poetic treatise composed by a monk named Kalanmit (Kalyāṇamitra), “who has wisdom and compassion”—prime Buddhist virtues—and who lived at Anuradhapura in the Abhayagiri monastery. And Sidatsangarāva ends its chapter on poetic ornamentation (alaṅkāra) by urging its readers not to violate the patterns of usage established by earlier poets (perakivisāma; i.e., pūrva vi kavisamaya). All of this, while part of the disciplinary practices that displayed knowledge about the literary, was part of a broader formation of the self that insisted

139. See Pollock, chapter 1, this volume.
140. This is true of Guruugomi, who wrote at the end of the twelfth century. His Dharmapradīpika (Lamp of truth), ostensibly a commentary on the Mahābodhiśāmantaka (History of the Bodhi Tree), is in a scholastic, highly Sanskritic style, except for the story of Prince Kalinga, which is written in a compact style using ēlu. The translators note that his style is so compact that “in one extreme case, seventeen English words were needed to give an adequate rendering of two words in the Sinhalese text” (Reynolds 1970: 91). Amāvatāra is written in a unique style that echoes Pali more than Sanskrit; see Wijemanne 1984: 25–26 for comparisons of Gurulugomi’s literary language in the two books.
141. For example, Alagiyavanna, author of the seventeenth-century poem Subhāsītāvya (Well-spoken words), states that he is presenting in Sinhala verse “the rules of conduct [nīti] that are in great books that have come from the mouths of sages of old” (pahulā puraṇa isvara mūvini . . . pāduṣa nīti satā gutā pūda arut lada) for ignorant people who did not have access to books in Tamil, Sanskrit, or Pali (demāla saku magada nohulama satāla dada); see Subhāsītāvya v. 5.
on submission to authority as a necessary virtue in the character of an aspiring poet.

Deference was not only paid to exemplars from the distant past; it was also to be paid to one’s immediate teacher. A vision of oneself in the future, based on one’s teacher as a model, gave a reason to the laborious efforts to transform the self now: present humility was in service of later prestige, present deference was in service of receiving later honors, present submission to correction was in service of later creative perfection and freedom, just as sacrifice of one’s desires in the present was in the service of their later fulfillment, by the workings of karma. The Pärakumbasirita explains the necessity of this attitude towards the teacher by using an image, drawn from Theravādin discourse, that likens morality to a fragrance that spreads in all directions:

Through service to teachers, one comes to resemble the wind, sweet with fragrance. What skill is there in the composition of poetry or drama without such service?142

Thinking of literary practice as a technology of the self clarifies how new poets might have approached the handbooks, grammars, and canons for poets that began to be produced in the tenth century. These supports for literature constructed a modality of knowledge about the literary, but they were not meant for self-study; they were part of a wholly different framework of disciplinary practices that assumed that one aspired to join a translocal and transtemporal community. Models for poetry, for poetic manuals, and for literary persons were found not only in the heritage of earlier Sinhala literary cultures but also in Sanskrit and Tamil, and the difficulty of access to such resources is a visible theme of Sinhala literary culture. The Siyabaslakara, an adaptation of Daṇḍin’s Kavyādarśa (Mirror of literature), says that it was written “for two groups of people: those who do not know the older treatises in Sinhala, at least in their summary form, and those who do not know Sanskrit.”143 The form of Sidatsangarava, a work that brings together grammar and poetics, seems to have been influenced by the same tradition that produced the Viracoliyam, a Tamil work that combines grammar with poetics, a combination not found in Sanskrit; at the same time, it is also clear that Sidatsangarava owes much to Sanskrit sources.144 Parākramaabahu VI began his lexicon for poets, the Ruvanmala, by explaining that he would use what was found in the wordbooks of ancient poets (poranamahakavanmhi), but that his work would also include words from Sanskrit and Pali (saku magadanen), as well as Sinhala words added by himself. But it seems that he arranged his

142. Pärakumbasirita v. 5.
143. Siyabaslakara v. 3.
work on the model of the Sanskrit lexicon Amarakośa, especially in his emphasis on the gender of nouns. Authors of Sinhala mahākāvya clearly found models in the works of Sanskrit authors like Kalidāsa and Māgha, something that was recognized by critics at the time. Such clear evidence of extensive involvement in Sanskrit literary culture indicates that the unity of Sanskrit literary culture during this period must have helped to secure the unity of Sinhala literary culture.

Sri Lanka was recognized in Sanskrit literary culture as part of the geocultural space defined by the Sanskrit ecumene; and, somewhat ironically, the clearest examples of representing Sri Lanka as a literary space occur not in Sinhala, but in Sanskrit. Rājāśekhara, writing as far away as Tripuri in the tenth century, idealized Sri Lanka in the following way:

People who produce the nectar of speech and Rohaṇa which produces gems;
and the ocean which produces pearls, these [three] are not anywhere [together]
but the island of the Sinhalas.

Sinhala literary culture itself, however, tended to define Sri Lanka primarily in religious terms. In the words of the twelfth-century inscription of Niśṣanka Malla quoted earlier, “the island of Lanka is a noble land because of the establishment of the sāsana there,” but even the physical space of the island is represented in Buddhist terms and imagery, as can be seen in the Girāsandēśaya:

Where the expansive ocean meets the shore,
may you see the beautiful Toṭagamuve, endowed with all wealth,
beautified with household gardens filled with fruits,
where the people are delighted as if heaven has descended on earth.
Look at how the waves of the ocean break upon the beach,
making an excessive noise,
as if Viṣṇu is complaining
that his shining crest gem has been taken by Nātha.
All around the monastery, it appears as if
the trees themselves
were reciting the dharma in a sweet voice,

---

146. See Godakumbura 1955: 143, 145 on similarities between the Sinhala *Muvdevadīvata* and the Sanskrit works *Raghuvarmanā, Kumārasambhava, Sākuntala,* and *Śīśupalavadha.*
147. *janaś ca vākṣudhāsītir manasātī ca rohaṇāḥ ca nāṇyātra sinhaladātipān mukāśūtī ca sāgarah* (*Balarāmāyaṇa* of Rājāśekhara, 10.49; cited in Paranavitana 1956, 1: ccii). Rohaṇa is a region of southern Sri Lanka.
148. There was a shrine to Nātha, a Buddhist deity, at Toṭagamuve. For a history of the development of the cult of Nātha, see Holt 1991.
the songs of the cuckoos,
taking in their hands,
their branches,
the \textit{ola} leaf manuscripts,
the layer of flower pollen,
on which were seen endless writing,
the bees.

Here and there in that monastery
you see the Asala tree in full bloom
with attractive clusters of flowers,
which bear the intensified color
of the robes worn by the great community of monks residing there.\footnote{Gir\textit{u}s\textit{a}nd\textit{e}\textit{s}i\textit{a}ya v. 197–98, 205–6.}

The incumbent of the monastic college at To\textita{t}agamuve, \textit{Sr\textit{i} R\textit{h}u\textit{l}a}, as well
as the community of monks residing there, further enhance the beauty of Lanka, as the following biographical verse indicates:

He [Sr\textit{i} R\textit{h}u\textit{l}a] is like the Mucalinda mountain which beautified the ocean
the good family named Skandhavaru;
grandson of the excellent chief monk of Utturumula
of immaculate character; who was endowed
with excellences [\textit{guna}] and steadfast practices;

and who was brought up by King Par\textita{k}ramab\textit{a}hu with paternal affection
for the welfare of the \textit{s\textit{a}s\textit{s}a} of the Buddha.

Worship the well-known chief priest of the Vijayab\textit{a}hu college,
who is like a gem set in the midst of an attractive garland of jewels,

    namely, the community of monks of the Mah\textita{v}i\textita{h}\textita{r}a fraternity,
a garland worn by this resplendent island of Lanka.\footnote{Gir\textit{u}s\textit{a}nd\textit{e}\textit{s}i\textit{a}ya v. 232.}

Sr\textit{i} R\textit{h}u\textit{l}a wrote in the fifteenth century, but already by the twelfth century, and perhaps even earlier, we see evidence that the translocal ecumene represented by the Buddhist \textit{s\textit{a}s\textit{s}a} was being localized in unprecedented ways. At the time of Par\textita{k}ramab\textit{a}hu I (mid-twelfth century) we see the Buddhist monastic order divided on regional lines, rather than by ordination lineage or sectarian affiliation, in contrast to what can be seen in the career of the great commentator Dhammap\textit{a}la, who lived in south India in the sixth or seventh century but who obviously considered himself as continuing the traditions of the Mah\textita{v}i\textita{h}\textita{r}a monastery in Sri Lanka when he wrote a sub-commentary on Buddhagho\textit{s}a’s \textit{Visuddhimagga}. The work of Sariputra, the great \textit{tik\textita{c}\textita{r}y\textita{a}} of the twelfth century, was criticized by Col\textit{i}ya Kassapa, who lived in a monastery “in the heart of the G\textit{o}\text{i}a kingdom.” As R.A.H.L. Gu-
nawardana observes, “the tenor of this criticism implies that there was something more than mere disagreement on doctrinal matters”: there was clearly “a certain element of regional rivalry. . . . It is evident from these polemical writings that, while the Buddhist identity transcended political boundaries, attempts were being made during this period to mark out within this larger identity the separate positions of the Cöla and the Sinhala monks.”

The process of localization was furthered by Buddhist writings in Sinhala produced at this time. Writing at the end of the twelfth century, Gurulugomi began his Amavatara, a biography of the Buddha organized around the epithet (guna) “guide of tamable beings” (purisadammasavathi), by saying that his purpose “is to narrate in concise form in Sinhala [siyabasin] for the benefit of pious people who are not learned [no viyat]” how the Buddha became enlightened and “subjugated [dama] various beings and guided them to nirvana.”

The Sinhala Bodhi Vamsaya (History of the Bodhi Tree in Sinhala) says in a similar fashion that it is composed “in Sinhala [svabhavasven] for the welfare of those beings who do not know Pali.” Significantly, Pujavaliya explains itself by referring not to the capabilities of its audience but to the different capacities of Pali and Sinhala as languages: “There are eight benefits to the world that come from the exposition of the commentaries in Sinhala [svabhavasven] on the saddharma, which is veiled by the brevity of the Pali language.” These benefits, which come from an exposition “written in Sinhala” (svabhasa likhita vua), turn out to be eight different audiences, from kings and their harems in the court to the “kings” (mahasthavira; a contemporary synonym for saṅgharaja) of the monastic community to villagers in remote places who never see monks. These eight audiences are compared to other integral sets of eight that ornament (alañkara vua) various things: “just as the world is ornamented by the eight persons, just as the uposatha day is ornamented by the eight precepts, just as nirvana is ornamented by the noble eightfold path.”

Both of these rationales invert the rationale for translation from Sinhala into Pali found in earlier texts, such as Buddhagho’s commentary on the Vinaya commentary: “But on account of the fact that this exposition had been done in the language of the island of Sihala, and since the monks

152. The term no viyat has been discussed considerably. Godakumbura translates it as “less learned” (1955: 56). Ananda Kulasuriya argues that Gurulugomi did not mean people who were ignorant but only those who did not know Pali and Sanskrit (1962: 139). Since the text contains numerous Pali quotations, Piyanseel Wijemanne suggests that it was, in fact, meant for those who knew Pali yet had only limited acquaintance with Pali texts; thus, no viyat means “less read” (1984: 4 n. 12).
153. Amavatara 1.
154. Sinhala Bodhi Vamsaya 3.
155. Pujavaliya 17.
overseas cannot understand the meaning thereof, I shall now begin this exposition in conformity with the method of treatment found in the Sacred Texts.\(^{156}\)

Texts like *Amāvatāra*, *Pūjāvaliya*, *Sīnhalabodhivamsa*, and *Saddharmaratnāvaliya* mediated the world of Pali texts and successfully gave them an immediacy in a local context.\(^{157}\) While it is possible to see this immediacy in terms of its constitutive connection to the collective identity of Sinhala people, we should not lose sight of the manner in which it was also part of a religious technology of systems of signs and, above all, of the self. As Gananath Obeyesekere has noted, “the abstract ethics and abstruse concepts of the doctrinal tradition were given an immediacy, a concreteness and an ethical salience in [Sinhala] peasant society” through such books and the storytelling derived from them.\(^{158}\)

The literary culture that produced poetry in *elu* during the tenth and through the fifteenth centuries nominally participated in, and was circumscribed as well as justified by, this process of localization of the Pali ecumene, but more important, it was the primary site for the localization of Sanskrit literary culture—a culture that was resolutely secular.\(^{159}\) Not surprisingly, the literary culture of *elu* poetry did not share the value of literary accessibility that animated the Sinhala *banapot* (preaching books); instead, it celebrated an ethos of complexity and difficulty—an ethos of relative noncommunication within the Sinhala-speaking community—that was embedded in a technology of domination. While the Pali ecumene distinguished Sri Lanka and other centers of Theravāda Buddhism from the rest of the Sanskrit cultural universe, *elu* literary culture still found ways of joining the Sanskrit cosmopolis, including the ways that it identified and acknowledged literary prestige. By the fourteenth century, for example, Sinhala authors were given the title of *saḍbhāṣā-īśvara* (lord of six languages), a title that became current in the first half of the second millennium across India, although there is no evidence that Sinhala authors wrote poetry in even one of the Prakrits alluded

---

\(^{156}\) Jayawickrama 1962: 2.

\(^{157}\) As G. D. Wijayawardana noted: “The corpus of stories in these literary works is a part of the cultural heritage perpetuated over a long period of time. Although their origins are to be found in ancient Indian lore, they have lived among the Sinhalese for thousands of years—handed down first orally and then in written form. In this process they have absorbed a great deal from the socio-cultural milieu of our country. The skeletal story has acquired flesh and blood from local culture, and has been transformed into something indigenous” (1979: 74).

\(^{158}\) Quoted by Ranjini Obeyesekere in Dharmasena Thera 1991: x.

\(^{159}\) Pollock 1994: 17–18.
to in the title, or even that any of the recipients of the title knew these literary languages.\footnote{160}

Toṣagamuve Śrī Rāhula was one of the poets who was called “lord of six languages,” although the languages in which he actually wrote—Pali and Sinhala—were not recognized in this title. Nevertheless, a literary culture characterized by the difficulty, prestige, and dominance that the title celebrates thoroughly informs the portrait of Śrī Rāhula found in the 

\begin{quote}
In this time who could be considered comparable to that lord of ascetics [yatindus],
\end{quote}

who extracts and gives to the world
the ambrosia of sweet words and their meanings,

churning with the stroke of Meru,
his clear wisdom,
the milky ocean,
the deep Abhidhammapitaka?  
He extracts the great treasure of gems,
the words and meanings of the Vinaya,
which is buried in great earth,
the teachings of the Buddha,
extracting it in accordance
with the admonitions of the teachers of old,
giving it to the community of monks
who wish for wealth in the form of wisdom;
thus he makes them happy.
He has made himself well-known over the entire earth
by understanding the eightfold schools of grammar
to his satisfaction
like the teachers of old, who expounded these branches of knowledge
and by then composing well-known treatises on them,
which causes delight in readers,
he has made this eightfold grammar well-known in the entire world.

\footnote{160. “Six-language (saṃbhāṣāmaya) poems” were, however, composed in the Jain community, where the very notion of the six languages may have originated with Hemacandra, the thirteenth-century Jain scholastic, who named the six languages as all “Prakritis”: Prakritabhasha, Shauraseni, Magadhi, Paishachi, Chulika-Paishachi, and Apabhramsha. Sinhala literary culture generally listed the six languages as Sanskrit, Prakrit, Magadha (perhaps referring to Pali instead of Ardha Magadhi, as was understood in India), Apabhramsha, Paishachi, and Shauraseni. The presence of Paishachi and Chulika-Paishachi in these lists is clear evidence that the field of literary ability the six represented was more symbolic than real—a way of indicating literary authority by spatial comprehensiveness rather than particular literary skill in the different languages. See, for example, Punyavijaya 1972, MS. no. 3072: Somasundarśūri, Saṃbhāṣāmaya-

Adinātha-Sūtinātha-Nemānātha-Pārvavanātha-Mahāvīra-stavaniṣṭavaca; MS. no. 2017.26, anon., Saṃbhāṣāmaya-adhāraṇajīvanastava; MS. no. 2017.27, anon., Saṃbhāṣāmaya-acandra-prabhajīvanastava. (These references were generously given to me by John Cort.)}
That exalted lord of monks shines in the world,
opening the wealth of the mahākāvyas
composed by poets who excelled in cleverness,
bearing the wealth of immaculate fame
like the lotuses, lilies, and the moonbeams
and constantly causing banners of victory to be tied in the entire world.
For the lotus of his mouth,
which is attractive and in full bloom,
it is prosody [sanda; Skt. chandas] and poetics [laka; Skt. alaṅkāra]
that are the soft fragrant pollen;
that lotus where the goddess Sarasvati lived
gladdened the bees, the ears of the poets.161
Then the resplendent great ocean,
the well-polished words of that lord of monks,
is constantly filled with waves,
the eighteen purāṇas.
He is a source of good fortune for the whole world,
exalted like Mahābrahma, Kaśyapa, and Jupiter.
For him, the eighteen sciences are like his inheritance;
he, who is like the great teachers of old,
expounds the rows and rows of texts and their meanings
in a delightful manner to the pandits
who kneel around him on their knees.
The six languages are like the well-known arena
where the attractive dancing girl,
the speech of that noble priest,
dances with extreme dexterity;
that priest, who is the domicile of all good qualities [guṇa],
preaches the doctrine, thus opening up the minds of the people.
He constantly shines with the excellences [guṇa]
of contentment and a delighted frame of mind,
suppressing the pride of enemies
in the form of depravities within himself [kleśa],
including hatred [sados],
not transgressing the code of good conduct, which is faultless [nīdosa;
Skt. nīrdoṣa]
and in accord with the way that was preached by the Five-Eyed One.162

Other verses in this portrait extol Śrī Rāhula’s command of the Suttapitaka (The collection of discourses of the Buddha) and the six philosophical

161. In Siyabasihara, Sarasvati is invoked in order to bestow favor on poets, but in this verse she receives favor from Śrī Rāhula instead.
162. Girasinghaśayya vv. 234, 236–37, 239–42, 244–45. The phonology of ehu allows the Sanskrit dveṣa (hatred) to become a homonym with dosā (fault, misfortune; a key term in literary analysis).
schools of Indian cultural history, but the effect of each verse is the same individually and cumulatively: Śrī Rāhula was able to do what is difficult in whatever field he turned to, and his domination of these various subjects gave him a personal freedom of thought and intellectual practice and an ability to enhance the lives of others. This ability to act freely and effectively because of knowledge brought him widespread fame and prestige and a non-coercive power over others, attracting them to him in the same way that bees are drawn to fragrant flowers.

Just as kings who struggled to maintain control of even a portion of Sri Lanka were magnified as world-conquerors in prāasti inscriptions, so Śrī Rāhula’s dominance of all fields of knowledge is exaggerated. Judging from his works, however, we can see that he was a master of Pali grammar—an intricate and demanding field of study in the Theravāda Buddhist tradition—and a great poet in elu, as well as quite learned in Buddhist thought and philosophy. In the field of grammar, his greatest work is the Sinhala-language Pañcikāpadīpaya (Lamp on the commentary on Moggallana’s Pali grammar), in which he quotes from works on grammar, logic, and scholastic philosophy (abhidhamma) in Sanskrit, Pali, and Sinhala, and refers to some exegetical works in Tamil. It seems that Śrī Rāhula turned to the study of Pali grammar in his later years, and thus much of his prestige as a monk was due to his achievements in poetry earlier in his life.

Because the literary is a set of practices that produces both persons and texts, we need to ask how difficulty and submission are practiced with respect to both texts and persons in this literary culture. One practice of difficulty in texts concerns a noteworthy feature of elu poetry: laxity of word order. That is, elu poetry ignores the fixed word order within a phrase that is customary in prose Sinhala (and in English) and permits a far greater looseness in the arrangement of words. For example, if we keyed the words in a randomly chosen verse from Śrī Rāhula’s Kāvyāśekhara to the prose gloss given by the commentator, then the arrangement of the words in the verse might look like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is only with the aid of a commentator or teacher that a novice reader would be able to put the words together to arrive at a coherent meaning. A literal translation of a verse from another text, the Haṃsasandēśaya, exemplifies yet another practice of difficulty in elu literary culture: the generation of ambiguities that occur when adjectives are separated from the nouns they

---

modify. In the Sinhala, there are no more markers of grammatical relations than in the following English version:

Radiant like luminous emeralds
with their beaks having torn up and sucked the juice of mangoes
like a rainbow ascending the sky
watch the parrots flying, to your heart’s content.  

To understand this verse, we need to know whether the first line refers to the beaks or to the mangoes. We also need to know who ascends the sky, the parrots or the swan to whom the verse is addressed. Again, the commentator guides us away from what we might expect in the word order: the first line refers to the mangoes, not to “beaks,” which is closer to it; it is the parrots who ascend, not the addressee in the fourth line.

This allowance for syntactic laxity apparently made it easier for poets to follow established poetic conventions: each verse must conform to a meter; each line has breaks (caesuras) that must be respected; words that rhyme internally and alliterate need to be placed in such a way as to create patterns within each line and within the verse as a whole. These conventions create another level of complexity of pure form and are features that āḷi shares with Sanskrit poetry. Sanskrit, however, is more thoroughly inflected than Sinhala, and looseness in Sanskrit word order is not at the expense of meaning, as occurs in Sinhala. The practice of difficulty was part of the technology that allowed a poet to use the sign system of literature—a system learned at the feet of teachers and through the study of the various handbooks for poets on grammar, prosody, and poetics, as well as lexical works. These works, ostensibly produced to make the sign system of poetry accessible to novices, also raised the standards of difficulty by practices of classification and standardization of literary forms that were acceptable. Such classifications and standardizations were meant to be exact, as regulatory norms (and the work of classification was considered difficult in and of itself). While their specificity could give some reassurance to the aspiring poet, they also could generate anxieties about mistakes and anticipated criticisms. Although we do not have any evidence of the kinds of competitions that seemed to have occurred at Sigiriya or of the kinds of literary debates that occurred at Matara in the nineteenth century, there are still indications that literary criticism

164. Hamsasandesaya v. 140.
165. Siyabaslakara v. 68: “Āḷaviśakāraṇa are the factors that bring about poetic beauty. They keep on increasing in number and forming into divisions even up to today. Who in the world is capable of describing them completely?”
166. Siyabaslakara v. 19: “For those who are desirous of entering the deep ocean of poetry, meters are like a ship in which one can travel in comfort.”
was intense. The unknown monastic author of the *Kokilasandēśayā*, a contemporary of Śrī Rāhula, actually took verses from other messenger poems, such as Śrī Rāhula’s *Sālalihinīsandēśayā* and the *Girāsandēśayā*, and offered improvements on them. He also seems to have had a minimal amount of esteem for Śrī Rāhula as a poet, mocking his title of “lord of six languages” by depicting him as having six heads, each of which was composing poetry in a different language; and when the cuckoo in *Kokilasandēśayā* stops to spend the night at Toṭagamuve, he does not listen to Śrī Rāhula’s preaching but goes off with a cuckoo girlfriend.\(^\text{168}\)

The practice of difficulty was also part of the training of the readers. To recognize what a poem was meant to signify, the readers needed to know the mechanisms by which it created its effects. What may have aided poets in writing within certain poetic regulatory norms would have made the practice of reading more difficult, and most likely the education of a poet began with reading good poetry.

Other understandings of the literary also made the practice of reading more difficult. Among these was the development of critical attention to a host of secondary signs and significations that lay obscure in a poem. At the level of signification, there were meanings that awaited discovery through the inferences made by the reader. At its conclusion, the *Siyabaslakara* departs from Daṇḍin’s *Kāvyaśāstra* to refer to something similar to the *dhvani* theory found in the work of ninth-century Sanskrit literary theorist Ānandavardhana.\(^\text{169}\)

There are two kinds of meanings to words in poetry: one meaning that is explicit, and one that comes through another meaning. The meaning conveyed when a word falls on one’s ears is called the explicit meaning.

The meaning that is different from the expressed meaning and that, like the object seen with the aid of the lamp, is conveyed through the force of inference is called the meaning that is conveyed through another meaning.\(^\text{170}\)

The *Siyabaslakara* introduces this idea in a chapter that covers other difficult ways of composition (*duṣkarabandhana*). Considered the ultimate practices of difficulty in poetry and meant to demonstrate a poet’s control of the language, they were far from any effort to document the world in language. Like the meaning conveyed through another meaning, they lie obscure in the poem, waiting for discovery and subsequent admiration by readers. For the reader, their significance lies in the act of recognition, which lifts them out of obscurity and also confirms one’s skill as a reader. A whole chapter


\(^{169}\) See Pollock, chapter 1, this volume.

\(^{170}\) *Siyabaslakara* vv. 400–401.
of Kavsilumina is devoted to these displays of virtuosity, with some verses using only one consonant, others only one vowel; some that could be read backward and forward, and others in which the same words have four different meanings.\textsuperscript{171} Some verses could be arranged into diagrams, which subsequently revealed even more layers to the poem. For example, in figure 12.1 the four lines of verse 413 of Kavsilumina are arranged in five concentric circles to form a wheel. The first two lines of the stanza have nine letters (aksara) each, and the fourth line has eleven. The last syllable of the third line repeats as the first and last syllable of the fourth line. The first syllables of the first three lines also reappear in the middle of the fourth line:

\textsuperscript{171} Kavsilumina, ch. 9.
When the letters (aksara) are arranged with the same vowels in the diagram, the name of the poem is given: Kusadā nam me (This is Kusajātaka). In a literary culture that saw the literary at even the graphic level of a text, it is no wonder that we find an inscription from this period, that of Mahinda IV that was quoted earlier, that depicts readers actively attacking and dominating a text:

Where dwell bands of scholars directing their wisdom to great literary works and adorning the Abayatura Maha Śā [the Great Shrine of Abhayuttara], just as a flock of garudas hovers with widespread wings over rows of serpents on the Himalayan mountains.\(^\text{172}\)

The difficult ways of composition (duskarabhandana) shade over into a technology of production. In poetic handbooks, of which Sidatsangarāvā is the earliest, we see a concern with how the use of signs, independently of any signification they may have, can produce desired results in the world. At this point, the literary became something of an occult science—an aspect of Sinhala literary culture that became centrally visible during these five centuries—with a variety of manuals teaching techniques that became increasingly popular, especially for the composition of verses called sethavi (verses of well-being). These include the Elusandaslakaśa and the thirteenth-century Lakunusara (The essence of prosody). Sri Rāhula was undoubtedly familiar with these techniques and used them in his poetry; while one of his contemporaries, Vīdāgama Maitreya, now generally portrayed by modern Sinhala critics as hostile to the influence of Brahmanical culture in Sri Lanka, wrote one of these manuals, the Kavlukanuminiṃadama, which has already been mentioned as part of the pedagogical canon of Sinhala literary culture that existed up to the nineteenth century.\(^\text{173}\)

Sidatsangarāvā treats these “occult” aspects of poetry in a chapter called “The Capability of [Producing] What Is Desired and [Avoiding] What Is Not Desired” (iṣṭaṃṭaḥ, Skt. iṣṭāniṣṭadhiḥkāra). Iṣṭāniṣṭadhiḥkāra forms a part of the knowledge that an author must have; through ignorance, a poet could produce evil effects for himself or for the one he is praising.\(^\text{174}\) The Sidat's

\(^{172}\) Epigraphia Zeylanica 1: 226. The “serpents” are the round-shaped script used for Sinhala.

\(^{173}\) Vīdāgama Maitreya Hmīyan gī Prabandhaw. 25–39. For an example of the modern Sinhala critics, see Wickramasinghe 1963: 189ff.

\(^{174}\) In the following discussion, I draw from Sidatsangarāvā v. 241–46.
elaboration of this knowledge begins by grouping letters into three divisions: letters associated with hell (e, k, y, m, r, j, a, n, n, a, m), letters associated with the realm of humans (u, au, p, b, g, h), and divine letters (i, i, o, ñ, th, t, d, l, v, s). A piece of setkavi always begins with a letter drawn from the divine group. In a second scheme, the Sidat groups letters into eight sets, called yonis, four of which are auspicious. The eight yonis are given animal names, and the natural animosity between certain animals guides the poet in avoiding mixing certain yonis or bringing them into close proximity, especially with respect to the name of the poet or hero:

- mongoose (a, o, n, l) versus serpent (u, j, h, l)
- deer (e, n, r) versus tiger (h, p, g, i)
- crow (e, d, y) versus owl (s, n, k, i)
- horse (am, m, t, au) versus buffalo (v, d, o, a)

The Sidat also groups the letters into a third scheme using clusters of syllables called ganas, which are distinguished according to the sequence of weights (matra) in each cluster:

- m gana: heavy in all places: - - -
- n gana: light in all places: - - -
- b gana: heavy in initial: - - -
- y gana: light in initial: - - -
- j gana: heavy in middle: - - -
- r gana: light in middle: - - -
- s gana: heavy in final: - - -
- t gana: light in final: - - -

These ganas, when found in the first line of a verse, are then connected to particular effects they produce: m gana gives victory; n gana, fame; b gana, blessing; y gana, long life; j gana, disease; r gana, extreme sorrow; s gana, death; and t gana, destruction. The Lakuṇusara, another medieval handbook for poets, also treats of auspicious and inauspicious words, while later writers connected the ganas to other aspects of the natural world, especially to the science of astrology.173

This understanding of poetry-writing as an occult science lends another dimension to Siyabaslakara’s claim that language brings the world into existence. While we might have little sympathy for such a claim, we should not ignore the ways literature functioned as a technology of production that reinforced other technologies of power, for it represented yet another way a cakravartin could exert his will in the world through knowledge.

175. For a long discussion of such occult aspects of a text, see D’Alwis [1852] 1966: cxviii ff.
THE PLACE OF PALI IN SINHALA LITERARY CULTURE

The understanding of literature as a technology of production is yet another view of the literary that Sinhala adopted from Sanskrit literary culture in the period between the tenth and fifteenth centuries. It seems appropriate, then, to end this chapter with a brief consideration of the variabilities of superposition between languages in South Asia. It is too easily assumed, on the basis of the stable place of Sanskrit in the vernacularization of the literary that spread across South Asia at the beginning of the second millennium, that it is always a translocal literary culture whose values and practices are superposed onto a local literary culture for reasons having to do with the aspirations of the local. I want to argue, however, that in medieval Sri Lanka, it was Sinhala that was superposed onto Pali for reasons having to do not with Pali, but with aspirations in Sinhala literary culture.

Steven Collins has noted that beginning around the tenth century, new styles and genres appeared in Pali that were entirely without precedent in the Theravāda Buddhist tradition (see Collins, chapter 11, this volume). I would like to mention three works in Pali that were meant to support those writing in these new ways: a handbook of prosody, *Vuttodaya*, (Exposition of meters); a handbook on poetics, *Subodhālankāra*; and a lexicon, *Abhidhānapāripāka* (Lamp on the treasury [of words]). They represent a new attitude toward the potential of Pali as a language, and indeed, we may say that they represent the initial developments of a transformation, though truncated, of Pali into a literary language. They also represent a new technology of Pali as a system of signs. In a context where texts like the *Sidat* and *Lakunusara* circulated, then *Vuttodaya*'s attention to the eight ganas suggests not only that *paritta* texts drawn from the canon were thought able to dispel danger and misfortune, but that the equivalent of *setkavi* could be composed in Pali. It is difficult to assess the impact of the transformation of Pali into a literary language analogous to Sanskrit and Sinhala, much less whether that transformation led to new collective identities, as was the case with the emergence of other literary cultures. The restricted purchase of these trends in Pali is suggested by the fact that a single monk, Sangharakkhita, wrote both *Vuttodaya* and *Subodhālankāra*.

Works like *Mahābodhiyaṇa* and *Subodhālankāra* are all derivative from Sanskrit literary culture and thus it would seem that they are evidence of the superposition of Sanskrit onto Pali, a phenomenon that did in fact occur with scholastic styles of thought and textuality. I do not think that this is so simply the case with the Pali *kabba* texts or other Pali texts like the *Mahābodhiyaṇa*. Key to this conclusion is an innovation found in *Siyabasakara*. Dändin

---

176. See Collins, chapter 11, this volume.
distinguished between two styles of poetry in his *Kāvyādārśa*, and, interestingly, given the broader geocultural trends, they are regionalized in their definition. One, Vaidarbhi, is southern, and is characterized by a simplicity of expression; the other, Gauḍī, is eastern and is characterized by baroque and unusual modes of expression. When these different styles are translated in the *Siyabaslakara*, they are relabeled as good and bad, respectively. The southern style was deemed the only good style for Sinhala literature.

At the same time, however, the values of Sinhala literary culture expected versatility from an author, to be demonstrated in skilled compositions in both styles. Since by the regulatory rules of Sinhala literary culture the Gauḍī style could not be demonstrated in Sinhala, another language had to serve as the medium. This is precisely what we see in the various ornate works produced in Pali: with their elaborate syntactical constructions, long compounds, and unusual words made up of Sanskrit *tatsama* s, they all seem to be in a Gauḍī style. We see the ideal literary person in medieval Sinhala literary culture, demonstrating his versatility in literary style, to be like a *cakravartin*, able to exert his will in any realm he chooses.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

*Medieval Sinhala texts are listed by title.*


Vijayawardhana. See Wijayawardhana.


INTRODUCTION

The Tibetan language and its literature are at once both of and alien to South Asia. Among the other languages whose literary cultures are considered in this book, Tibetan resembles Persian and English in this respect. Though this comparison is limited, it does underscore two important points: First, from the perspective of language and literature (and much else besides), “South Asia” is not an entirely well-formed conception but one that blurs as its margins are neared; second, the languages occupying the ill-defined marginal territory often have lives of their own outside the realm we would ordinarily consider South Asia. Whereas English and Persian have sometimes

I am grateful to the Committee for Scholarly Communication with China for awards in 1990 and 1992, which facilitated the background research for this chapter. I wish to thank also my host institutions in China: the Academies of Social Science in Sichuan (Chengdu), Tibet (Lhasa), and Qinghai (Xining), and the Northwest Nationalities Institute in Gansu (Lanzhou). The late Dung-dkar Blo-bzang-phrin-las (Lhasa) and Dpa ’ris Dor-zhi Gdong-drug-snyems-blo (Lanzhou) in particular provided invaluable advice and assistance in connection with the study of Tibetan kāvya.

I owe much as well to the inspiration and enterprise of the Amnye Machen Research Institute (Dharamsala, H. P.), whose founders—Pema Bum, Jamyang Norbu, Tashi Tsering, and Lhazang Tsering—were gracious hosts and unexcelled conversation partners during my residence in Dharamsala in 1993.

For encouraging this research to take its present form I thank Sheldon Pollock and all who contributed to the Literary Cultures in History project. In revising this chapter for publication, Yoshiro Imaeda (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, France) and David Germano (University of Virginia) have suggested valuable corrections and improvements. Support from the National Endowment for the Humanities for the translations that will appear in Buddhist Thought in Tibet (Kapstein forthcoming), which has contributed to the background for the present work, is also gratefully acknowledged here.

747
acted as important alien sources upon which the literatures of South Asia have drawn or to which they have reacted, the Tibetan presence in South Asian literatures has been much more restricted. Among the literary cultures we are considering here, it has perhaps loomed largest in English. But Tibet was also visited, and in some cases written about, by speakers of Nepali, Urdu, Hindi, and Bangla, among other South Asian languages—especially Hindu religious pilgrims to Kailash and the members of several Muslim mercantile clans based chiefly in Ladakh and Nepal. However, the entire question of the presence of Tibet in South Asian life and thought remains largely unexamined.

Nevertheless, there is a sense in which Tibetan literally is a South Asian language, for even ignoring the Tibetan refugees of recent decades, Tibetan

1. *Kim* and *Lost Horizon* come to mind, not to mention Hollywood’s recent fascination with Tibet. See now Lopez 1998 on Tibet in recent Western popular culture.

2. There exists a substantial literature of Hindu pilgrims’ travelogues that has not been critically studied. Examples include: Pranavananda 1943; and Tapovanji Maharaj [1960?]. Marc Gaborieau (1973) has edited and translated the journal, written in Urdu, of a nineteenth-century Kathmandu-based Muslim merchant who journeyed to Lhasa. John Perry (University of Chicago) has collected over the years a number of locally published glossaries in Arabic script of Tibetan dialects of Ladakh and adjacent regions in India and Pakistan. A collection of moral maxims in Tibetan attributed to a Ladakhi Muslim author has recently been translated by Dawa Norbu (1987). Indian visitors to Tibet have included several notable scholars of the region, such as Sarat Chandra Das during the late nineteenth century and Rāhula Sāṅkṛtyāyana in the first half of the twentieth century. The orientations of much of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Indian scholarship on Tibet are well-encapsulated in the closing paragraph (pp. xxxiv–xxxv) of the introduction to Bhattacharya 1939, a reader of literary Tibetan designed for the use of those familiar with Sanskrit:

Reference has been made above to the Tibetan translations of Sanskrit works as well as to the indigenous literature of the country, from which one can know, in the words of Csoma, “the manners, customs, opinions, knowledge, ignorance, superstition, hopes and fears of a great part of Asia, especially of India, in former ages.” As regards the translations, the Sanskrit originals of most of them have disappeared, perhaps for ever. Some may be discovered in the future in Nepal, Kashmir, Tibet, or Central Asia, but we cannot hope that they will all ever be found. The contents of these Sanskrit works are now preserved in translation in Tibetan as well as in Chinese and Mongolian. An Indian student desirous of knowing certain lost chapters in the history of literature and culture in his own country can in no way ignore or neglect these translations in Tibetan and other languages. He must bring back from those sources the treasure that has unfortunately been lost to him.

More recently, the International Academy of Indian Culture, founded in Nagpur (and later relocated to New Delhi) by Raghu Vira and continued by his son Lokesh Chandra, pioneered in the publication of Tibetan writings. During the past three decades, there has been a great volume of scholarship and popular writing on Tibet by South Asian authors, including, among many others, the diplomat and anthropologist Dor Bahadur Bista (Kathmandu), the historian Zahiruddin Ahmad (Dakka and Canberra), and the novelist Vikram Seth. Representative writings on Tibet by these authors are mentioned in the bibliography.
is the language of populations in four of the SAARC member nations (for South Asia is as much a recent political construct as it is a historically and geographically defined region). It is spoken and written in much of northern Nepal and in parts of at least five Indian states (the Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, the Darjeeling district of West Bengal, and Arunachal Pradesh—and perhaps some places in the far north of Uttarachal Pradesh). A variant of Tibetan is spoken by the people of Baltistan in northern Pakistan; and Dzongkha, the national language of Bhutan, is a local variety of Tibetan, while Tibetan proper is widely used in Bhutan as well. Moreover, the modern Tibetan publishing industry, and also Tibetan journalism, developed to a large extent in India and expanded enormously with the arrival of large numbers of refugees after 1959. However, the use of Tibetan in South Asia is not the focus of this chapter. The Tibetan-speaking communities of geographical South Asia have often been peripheral to the centers of culture in the Tibetan world, and their literatures taken alone do not reflect the full range of Tibet’s rich connections with India.

The Indian influence on Tibetan literature began more than twelve centuries ago and has been felt ever since. Even so, the Indian influence is unevenly represented in the very extensive Tibetan literature to which we now have access, which includes works of philosophy, history, and science, and many types of literature in the more restricted sense, such as epic, poetry, drama, and narrative. Some types of Tibetan writings are so thoroughly and self-consciously cast in an Indian vein that the genuine Tibetan innovations

3. For a survey of the use of Tibetan in India at the beginning of the twentieth century, see Grierson 1967 (originally published 1909). The Tibetan dialects of the Western Himalaya in India and Pakistan have been subject to continuing study and documentation by the Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore, which has published monographs on Baltistani (1975), Brokskat (1975), Ladakhi (1976), and Purik (1979).

4. The Asiatic Society in Calcutta started publishing texts in Tibetan during the nineteenth century, using the facilities of the Baptist Mission Press. Tibetan fonts were prepared elsewhere as well, for instance, at the Calcutta Presidency Jail Press, where Sarat Chandra Das published his edition of Sum-pa-mkhan-po’s history of Buddhism in 1908. Such Tibetan editions were, however, designed to be used primarily by Indological scholars and probably reached few Tibetan readers. The Tibetan Mirror Press, founded by G. Tharchin in Kalimpong, West Bengal, was perhaps the most active Tibetan publishing house in pre-Independence India and issued a Tibetan-language newspaper as well as books and pamphlets. By the 1950s Tibetans began to increasingly avail themselves of the inexpensive Indian printing industry. One of the most ambitious projects at this time was the work of an enterprising lama of the Bon religion, Khyung-sprul (1897–1956), who lithographically published the extensive collected writings of Shar-rdza Bkra-shis-rgyal-mtshan (1859–1935), a renowned Bon-po master, in Delhi. The Tibetan publishing activities of the International Academy of Indian Culture (see n. 2), and the financial incentives provided by the U.S. Library of Congress under the PL480 program, which guaranteed purchase of about twenty copies of each new Tibetan title at favorable prices on behalf of American libraries, encouraged a tremendous expansion of Tibetan publishing in India beginning in the 1960s.
they contain are effaced or denied; whereas certain other genres—notably the Tibetan epic and the vast historical literature, including several types of biography—are markedly independent and distinctively Tibetan in character.5 Responding to the concerns of the present volume, this chapter focuses on the formation by Tibetan authors of a deliberate identification with an idealized Indian literary world, and the manner in which this came to characterize many areas of Tibetan literary production. In order to restrict the scope a bit further, I have chosen to leave Buddhist shastric (i.e., commentarial and doctrinal) writing for the most part to one side. Not that it is entirely irrelevant here, but my interest in questions of voice, style, image, and literary self-identity is better addressed by focusing upon more literary texts in the sense just specified, while the special subject matter of Buddhist doctrinal treatises is not at issue. That subject matter by itself often does little to establish the distinctively Indian literary character of the work, though Tibetan Buddhist doctrinal writings, particularly after the twelfth century, do frequently seek to emulate stylistic features of works translated from Sanskrit.6

Though Tibetan has been used as a literary language in some places within South Asia, its use is most widespread in the ethnically Tibetan regions now divided among five provinces of China.7 The full geographical range in which Tibetan has served as a language of learning, however, is much greater than even this, for with the promulgation of Tibetan Buddhism among the Mongols and Manchus, Tibetan became a *koiné* among Inner Asian Buddhists by the end of the seventeenth century, and was used at the beginning of the

---

5. The most accessible overview of Tibetan literature so far is Cabezón and Jackson 1995, in which “literature” embraces in principle all sorts of writing. A useful short introduction to Tibetan literature (in the narrower sense emphasized in this volume) is R.A. Stein 1972a, ch. 5. For the epic literatures of Tibet, Stein’s researches (1956, 1959) remain the sources of first recourse. Tibetan historical literature and the state of research about it are surveyed in great detail in Martin 1997. Autobiographical literature is considered at length in Gyatso 1998. A brief survey of Tibetan poetry is given in Tulku Thondup and Kapstein 1993.

6. Some aspects of Tibetan doctrinal and commentarial writing do reflect Tibetan innovations and adaptations. Examples include the “implication-reason” (*thal-phyi*) form for the expression of logical arguments and the extensive elaboration of topical outlines. (See, for instance, Onoda 1992 on Tibetan monastic debate, and Beckwith 1990 on scholastic method.) Determining just which features of Tibetan shastric writing are derived from India and which are innovations remains problematic, however. Wayman 1984, for instance, argues that the interlinear commentary found in some Tibetan canonical editions of Abhayakaragupta’s *Mūnimagātāṃkāra* demonstrates the Indian origins of the Tibetan interlinear commentary (*mchan-'grel*). But it is now clear that the commentary on the *Mūnimagātāṃkāra* is a Tibetan supplement to the text, which reflects indigenous Tibetan commentarial traditions whose antiquity is known from Dunhuang documents. Chinese scribal practices may have in fact been the original inspiration.

7. The ethnically Tibetan regions of China include the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), much of Qinghai Province, and parts of Sichuan, Gansu, and Yunnan—an area roughly the size of the Republic of India. The Tibetan population of China is about five and a half million.
twentieth century as far west as Astrakhan (where the Volga River flows into the Caspian Sea) and as far east as Beijing. Indeed, following the fall of the Soviet Union, ethnically Mongolian Buddhists of the Russian Republic began to reaffirm their cultural ties to Tibet, and today literary Tibetan is again studied in Astrakhan, where the local government of Kalmykia has recently made it a required subject in the public schools. And wherever Tibetan is written and read, aspects of its Indian literary heritage are present too.

Tibetan may thus exemplify to some degree the great role of Indian models in the medieval development of literary cultures throughout Central and Southeast Asia and even in East Asia. The inclusion of Tibetan in the present volume, together with Steven Collins’s discussion of Pali in its relation to the literary cultures of Southeast Asia, points to a broad range of literatures which, though perhaps not usually thought of as South Asian, nevertheless reflect the contributions of India to the formation of Asian literary cultures generally. In cases such as Tibetan and Thai, in which literary works inspired by Indian models have been produced down to recent times, important questions may be raised regarding the developing relationship between the literary culture in question and the special problems posed by modern identities of various kinds (ethnic, political, economic, etc.). Accordingly, in this chapter, after describing the formation over many centuries of a culturally valued *indianité* in Tibetan literature, I examine briefly the ways in which that voice has been at once reaffirmed and contested in contemporary Tibet. To restate the central concerns of this chapter (perhaps a bit starkly) as a single question: What made it possible, and to some desirable, that in a setting so removed from medieval India as post–Cultural Revolution China, a self-consciously Sanskritized genre of Tibetan would come to be revalued (though at the same time challenged) as exemplary Tibetan literature?

**THE EARLY FORMATION OF LITERARY TIBETAN**

*Script and Literary Culture*

When speech is fixed in graphic form, the choice of graphic representation is of fundamental importance. Consider for a moment the use of written Chinese in premodern times (and to varying degrees in the present) among speakers of Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese; or the use of the Hebrew script among Jews speaking Arabic, Persian, Spanish (Ladino), or German (Yiddish); or the use of the Arabic script among speakers of Persian, Urdu, Baltistani and (in earlier times) Turkish and Malay; or the significance of the

---

8. For this information I am indebted to Professor Nicolas Tournadre (Paris).
9. On the role of Indian models in Central and Southeast Asia, see Pollock 1996; on the role of these models in East Asia, see Mair 1994.
abandonment, compelled by the Soviets, of the traditional Mongolian script in favor of Cyrillic, or that of the Ottoman usage of the Arabic script in favor of romanized Turkish due to Atatürk’s program of Westernization. In these and many other cases, the choice of script clearly signifies profound cultural commitments and orientations.

The development and spread of the South Asian writing systems presents complicated and intriguing variations on this theme. Should a Panjabi, a Tibetan, a Tamilian, and a speaker of Thai literally share notes, in the absence of a relatively specialized linguistic background they would perhaps notice some interesting similarities in their ways of writing, but little more. Unlike the twelfth-century Chinese, Korean, and Japanese, they would not be able to communicate in writing in the absence of common speech. And unlike the Ladino-speaker and the Yiddish-speaker, or the Ottoman Turk and the Malaysian, they would not be able to make out one another’s ways of writing, only to discover that many of the words remain unintelligible. In contrast, while there are indeed among the South Asian writing systems some deep structural and genetic connections that are well known to experts, these may often be unperceived by those who write in these systems. That there may be such a deep affinity without one’s necessarily being aware of it has, I think, some important implications for the way we think about the significance of the Tibetan decision, in the early seventh century, to adopt an Indic script in order to write Tibetan.¹⁰

Later Tibetan historiography attributes three great civilizing innovations to the emperor Songtsen Gampo (Srong-btsan Sgam-po,¹¹ d. 649/50): the introduction of a system of writing, the codification of the laws, and the inception of Tibetan Buddhism. These themes have been much mythologized in the writings of post-eleventh-century historians, and their accounts can only be used with great caution. Nevertheless, their association of literacy, legislation, and religious change probably does represent a genuine insight into fundamental relationships among three undeniably crucial developments in the cultural history of early medieval Tibet.¹²

The reign of Songtsen Gampo marks the beginning of the consolidation of Tibet’s imperial domain. The burgeoning dimensions of his realm, the attendant increase in the complexity of its civil and military administration, and relations with Tibet’s neighbors most certainly required close attention

¹¹. The transcription of Tibetan presents special difficulties for non-Tibetanists, as Tibetan pronunciation often does not closely resemble the orthography of the written language. I have therefore provided a rough phonemic version of each proper name used in the text, followed, on first occurrence, by its exact transcription in parentheses. In all other contexts only exact transcriptions are used.
to the regularization of the practices and policies of the state at many levels. Under such circumstances, writing and record-keeping became indispensable technologies. The earliest extant statement of what took place, from the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* (c. 800) found at Dunhuang, well reflects such concerns:

Formerly Tibet had no writing, but during the lifetime of this emperor the Great Legislation that became the Sacred Authority of Tibet; the rank-order of ministers; the powers of both great and small; the awards in recognition of excellence; the punishments for misdeeds; the regularization, among farmers and herdsmen, of pelts, acreage and roadways; the measures of volume and weight; etc.—all of the righteous governance of Tibet emerged during the time of the emperor Trhi Songtsen (Khri Srong-brtsan). Because everyone recalled and experienced his beneficence, they called him by the name of "Songtsen the Wise." 

Thus, literacy, law, and the standardization of public practices were early on regarded as products of the sweeping enactments of a single monarch.

Later tradition insists that the Tibetan script was the invention of a particular minister, Thon-mi Sambho-ta, who traveled to Kashmir to learn the principles of writing and the science of language, and who, besides creating the writing system, authored Tibet’s first books of grammar. While contemporary scholars have questioned the veracity of this account, it is clear that the Tibetan script is indeed based on Indian scripts of the period. This suggests close connections with Indian civilization, which raise the puzzle of just how much Indian influence there might have been during the early and mid-seventh century. Could a system of writing have been adopted without significant cultural rapport of other kinds?

Historians writing after the eleventh century of course argue for extensive Indian influence. They maintain, for instance, that the laws enacted by Songtsen were inspired by Hindu law (*dharmaśāstra*) and Buddhist ethical principles. However, fragments of the old laws found at Dunhuang make it clear that this was not the case. The laws appear to have been little or not at all influenced by Indian conventions and instead to have stemmed from the codification of indigenous Tibetan traditions. One may compare, in this re-
The Western medieval redaction, following the Franks’ exposure to Roman learning and tradition, of Frankish common law.\(^{16}\)

Moreover, though later tradition regards Songtsen as the first Buddhist monarch of Tibet, there is little evidence to confirm this. At best we can say that he may have extended some sort of official tolerance to Buddhism (and most likely to Chinese Buddhism), and that translations of a small number of popular scriptures may have been achieved during the seventh century.\(^{17}\) It is clear, however, that during the latter part of Songtsen’s reign, and in the generations immediately following, Chinese civilization probably exerted a greater influence upon the Tibetan court than Indian. That the Tibetans were using an Indic script and not writing in Chinese—so that the Chinese continued to consider them illiterate barbarians—thus may only reflect the circumstance that Tibetan expansion into the western Tibetan plateau resulted in a sustained Tibetan presence in regions proximate to India and the Indianized Silk Road states, where Indic scripts were already in use.\(^{18}\)

**Scripture and Literary Culture**

It appears, then, that the Tibetan adoption of an Indic system of writing had relatively weak implications for Tibet’s participation in Indian literary culture. What tipped the balance was certainly the promulgation of Buddhism in Tibet, especially after the adoption of Buddhism as the religion of the Tibetan court in 762.\(^{19}\) However, a number of points must be emphasized before we can draw the conclusion that the adoption of Buddhism axiomatically implied any extensive Sanskritization of Tibetan culture.

During the period of Buddhism’s spread in Tibet, Buddhism was something of a pan-Asian phenomenon, and the foreign Buddhists active in Tibet were no less likely to have been Central Asians or Chinese than Indians or Nepalese.\(^{20}\) While the Indian origins of Buddhism were certainly well un-

---


17. On Songtsen as the first Buddhist monarch of Tibet, see Macdonald 1971; Stein 1985, 1986. Tradition attributes the translation of a number of sūtras to the period of Śrōng-btsan, but no early evidence in support of this is known. See Sørensen 1994: 173 n. 490. Nevertheless, some experiments with Buddhist translation may have commenced during the late seventh century, at least if early-ninth-century inscriptions crediting the emperor Dus-srong with Buddhist temple construction are to be believed.


derstood, there is little in the record of imperial Tibet that suggests the view of India as the holy land, the sole authentic source of the Dharma, that became an important motif in Tibetan thought during the eleventh century.

Moreover, though the ideal of cakravartin kingship was appropriated to some extent by the Tibetan imperial court, where it melded with indigenous Tibetan and certainly also Chinese conceptions of royal authority, the Tibetans never extensively adopted Indian social and political conventions. In this, the Tibetan case probably differs from the apparent parallels in Southeast Asia that come to mind. Thus, even while Buddhism was being actively promulgated in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, with numerous scriptures being translated into Tibetan, the language of the Tibetan chancery remained notably unaffected by Indian conventions, even where Buddhism is discussed in the royal inscriptions. We find no evidence whatever that the Tibetan emperors shared the interest in Sanskrit kavya that so delighted their Khmer counterparts. Moreover, the Tibetans, whenever possible, preferred to coin neologisms in their own language and not to borrow Sanskrit or other foreign words.

Nevertheless, the project of translating Buddhist scriptures into Tibetan involved the cultivation of a broad range of Sanskritic learning, in which the emperor Trhi Songdetsen (Khri Srong-lde’u-btsan, 742–c. 800; r. 755/56–c. 797) and his descendants during the early ninth century appear to have taken great interest. There is no better reflection of this than the long version of the introduction to the Two-Volume Lexicon (Sgra-sbyor bHam-po gnyis-pa, compiled in 814), a glossary of many important Buddhist terms. As an unparalleled source for Tibetan thinking about language and translation during the early medieval period that would remain influential a millennium after its composition, it merits our consideration here.

The text relates that an assembly was convened by the emperor Trhi De-songtsen (Khri Lde-srong-btsan, d. 815) to address military matters, receive tribute from his territories, and bestow awards upon his ministers. Following these affairs, the emperor commanded that the Bactrian and Tibetan Buddhist preceptors present at the court should compose “a catalogue of the Tibetan translations and coinages deriving from the Sanskrit of the Greater and Lesser Vehicles.” He explains his concept in detail, saying that in his father’s time the translators

coined many terms of religious language that were unfamiliar in Tibetan, among which some accord with neither doctrinal texts nor the conventions of

vyākaraṇa. Those that it would be inappropriate to leave uncorrected should be corrected. Having augmented them with all those terms of language of which we are fond, and remaining in accord with the original texts of the Greater and Lesser Vehicles and with the explanations of the great former preceptors, such as Nāgarjuna and Vasubandhu, and with the conventions of language as they are established according to vyākaraṇa, write them down in a text, explaining those that are difficult to understand logically and word-by-word. As for plain language that requires no explanation and is appropriately translated in a literal manner, assign terminological conventions indicating the words [employed].

Elaborating upon this, the monarch demonstrates a clear awareness of many of the precise technical problems of translation. For example, he notes the challenges posed by the differences between Sanskrit and Tibetan word order and syntax:

In translating the Dharma, without departing from the order of the Sanskrit language, translate it into Tibetan in such a way that there is no deviation in the ease of relationships between meaning and word. If ease of understanding is brought about by deviating [from the phrase order of the original], whether in a verse there be four lines or six, translate by reordering the contents of the verse according to what is easy. In the case of prose, until the meaning be reached, translate by rearranging both word and meaning according to what is easy.

Specific difficulties in establishing a translation lexicon are discussed at length, including: issues of synonymity and homonymity, cases in which Sanskrit loan words should be used in preference to Tibetan equivalents or neologisms, the differences between Sanskrit and Tibetan ways of rendering

---

25. This term, referring to Sanskrit grammatical science, occurs here as a loanword, rather than the Tibetan translation term, lungston-pa, which would be preferred in later times.
27. Ishikawa 1990: 2.
28. "Where many names apply to a single saying, in accord with the context apply a name that arrives [at the appropriate meaning]. For instance, [in the case of] Gautama: the word gau has many senses, including ‘phrase,’ ‘direction,’ ‘earth,’ ‘light,’ ‘vajra,’ ‘cow,’ and ‘heaven.’ In the case of kausika, ‘pertaining to kusa grass’ and ‘skilled’; in that of padma, ‘joy,’ ‘owl,’ ‘possessing a treasure,’ etc. If one translates these, bringing out the ways of the words, because they suggest a great many enumerations [of meaning], it is not possible to combine all those enumerations in a single translation. But in those cases in which there is no great reason to delimit a single [usage], let it remain in Sanskrit without translation. If a term occurs that may be interpreted in several ways, then, without translating it one-sidedly, make it so as to arrive at [a suitable degree of] generality.

‘If one translates the names of countries, species, flowers, plants, and the like, one errs and the terms are awkward. Though it may be correct to translate approximately, it is uncertain whether or not the meaning is just right. In those cases, add at the head [of the
large numbers, and the correct use of prepositional modifications. Because social rank is strongly represented in the gradations of Tibetan formal usage, it was important, too, to stipulate how this was to be carried over into translations of Buddhist texts. The emperor’s introduction draws to a close with this remarkable injunction:

Besides the ways of language that are decided by order in this manner, it is not permitted for any persons, on their own, to correct and form neologisms hereafter. If there is a need for the respective colleges of translation and exegesis to assign terms in new language, then in each and every college, prior to stipulating the term in question, there should be an investigation according to the axioms derived literally from the doctrinal texts and grammars, and according to the literal usages of the doctrine, and then [the conclusion of the investigation] must be offered in the palace before the presence of the lineage holder of the transcendent lord [Buddha] and the college of the official redactor of the Dharma, and a hearing requested. After they have decided [the merits of the proposed terminology] by order, it may be added directly into the catalog of language.

As this passage, along with other documents stemming from the old Tibetan court, makes very clear, the Buddhism promoted by the court involved a strong Indian literary identity in Tibet. For instance, the Tibetan word for “country,” yul, is to be used in yul wo-ni-va-si in order to specify that the unfamiliar name Varanasi refers to a place. In this and the notes immediately following, I translate the text as established in Ishikawa 1990: 1–4.

29. “As for numbers, if one translates in accord with the Sanskrit, one speaks, for instance, of ‘thirteen hundred monks with a half,’ which, if translated in the Tibetan manner, is ordinarily ‘a thousand two hundred fifty.’ Because there is no contradiction in meaning, and [the latter] is easier in Tibetan, put numbers capable of summarization in the Tibetan way.”

30. “If one translates such particles and ornamental expressions as are found, like [the prepositions] pari, sam, or upa, translate them literally in the semantically appropriate manner as yongs-su ['entirely'], or yang-dag-pa ['truly'], or nye-ba ['proximately']. But in cases where meaning is not augmented [by them] and there is no need for a surplus of words, use a designation that accords with the meaning.”

Note that the Tibetan practice of translating the Sanskrit verb prepositions in this way often results in expressions in which they have a stronger force than in the original Sanskrit. Thus, abhisambuddha, “completely awakened,” is rendered mngon-par rdzogs-pa'i sangs-rgyas, which means “Manifestly Perfect Buddha.”

31. “As for the honorific and rank-ordered terms for Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Srāvakas, etc., translation in honorific terms is for the Buddha. For the others, only middle-rank terms and lower apply.” In effect, the emperor is saying that among the Buddhist pantheon, the Buddhas were to be regarded as more or less equivalent in status to the monarch, and all others were to be relegated to an inferior position.

commitment to a broad range of classical Indian learning. Nevertheless, despite the striking anticipation of the Académie Française (or perhaps of Borges!) in the reference to a “catalogue of language,” there is little to suggest that during the period of the empire, outside the restricted Buddhist contexts in which it found expression, such learning had established a stable place in Tibetan culture more generally. Despite the evidence that some didactic and popular literature based on Indian materials was indeed elaborated and circulated under the empire, the creation of an enduring Tibetan literary culture modeled on Indian paradigms would take place only long after the empire had fallen. Let us recall, too, the extreme resistance on the part of the Tibetans to the inclusion of Sanskrit loanwords in their language. Thus, though a few names lacking accepted Tibetan equivalents were eventually adopted—such as \textit{tsam-pa-ka} (campaka flower), and \textit{Vārānasī}—in general, Tibetan coinages came to be strongly favored: thus we find Dga’-byed for Rāma (though in the Old Tibetan \textit{Rāmāyaṇa} and elsewhere we also see Ra-ma-na), Mnyan-yod for Śrāvasti, and Byang Sgra-mi-snyan for Uttarakuru. Still, owing to the artificiality of many such expressions, they preserved something of a foreign and exotic (or sometimes learned) flavor despite their Tibetan appearance.

\textit{Kāsa}yā certainly became known to some extent among learned translators and monks during the period with which we are concerned. The most comprehensive of the early-ninth-century Tibetan Buddhist lexicons that has come down to us includes Tibetan coinages for both \textit{kavi} and \textit{kāsa}yā.\footnote{Sakaki 1916–1925, nos. 6421–22.} And the eulogies (\textit{stotra}; \textit{bstod-pa}) and epistles (\textit{lekha}; \textit{spring-yig}) translated into Tibetan during the late eighth and early ninth centuries include some examples of \textit{kāsa}yā, including works of Mātṛceṭa and Candragomin.\footnote{Lalou 1953, nos. 454, 455–57, 670, 672.} Probably the greatest achievement along these lines was the translation of Āryaśūra’s famed \textit{Garland of Birth Stories} (\textit{Jātakaṃāla}),\footnote{Lalou 1953, no. 656.} a work that, as we shall see, became exceptionally influential in Tibet from the eleventh century onward.

\textit{The Old Tibetan Rāmāyaṇa}

In contrast with Buddhist literature in translation, the indigenous Old Tibetan literature that survives is fragmentary and still poorly understood. Because the skills of literacy were preserved primarily in Buddhist circles after

\textbf{Footnotes}

\footnote{Besides the \textit{Two-Volume Lexicon}, this is perhaps most evident in the other great ninth-century lexicon, the \textit{Mahāvyutpatti} (Sakaki 1916–1925), or in the Ldan-kar Palace catalog of translations, also compiled in the early ninth century (Lalou 1953).}

\footnote{Sakaki 1916–1925, nos. 6421–22.}

\footnote{Lalou 1953, nos. 454, 455–57, 670, 672.}

\footnote{Lalou 1953, no. 656.}
the fall of the empire in the ninth century, the literary Tibetan of later centuries was first modeled on scriptural Buddhist usage. But in a small number of documents transmitted in later times, in the surviving imperial inscriptions, and among the documents found at Dunhuang, we do find an older literary Tibetan and evidence of an older Tibetan literature. Some difficult problems are posed by the interpretation of this material, and one must be cautious in exercising judgments about literary influences, questions of style, and related issues. We know, for example, little of the contemporary literatures of Khotan, Sogdiana, and other cultures besides those of India and China that may have been among the relevant influences on Tibetan. And although the Chinese vernacular literature of the period is becoming better known, thanks in large measure to the evidence from Dunhuang, few scholars have been qualified or inclined to study both Tibetan and Chinese literary materials of the late first millennium. In this and the section immediately following, therefore, I only offer some examples of literary Tibetan texts that may be of interest in the context of the present volume. The conclusions drawn from them remain tentative.

One relatively well-studied group of Dunhuang fragments contains portions of an otherwise unknown prose Rāmāyana. It probably represents, and may even translate, Rāmāyana traditions that were widespread in Central Asia during the eighth century or thereabouts, though in some of its elements it also seems to reflect peculiarly Tibetan conventions. Because the Dunhuang fragments come from several manuscripts, which sometimes overlap and repeat each other and sometimes differ significantly, one might infer that it was a popular work, though so far we know little of it outside of Dunhuang. There is evidence to suggest that the story line at least remained alive in the Tibetan literary tradition long after the period of the Dunhuang manuscripts.

38. For a popular introduction to the discovery of the "hidden library" of Dunhuang and its importance, see Hopkirk 1984. The major portion of the Tibetan documents from Dunhuang were collected by M.A. Stein and P. Pelliot, and later catalogued by M. Lalou, L. de La Vallée Poussin, and Z. Yamaguchi. Facsimiles of many representative documents, with brief introductions including references to a wide range of earlier research, may be found in Macdonald and Imaeda 1978–79. For the Old Tibetan inscriptions, see primarily Richardson 1985.
40. Comparative work in Chinese and Tibetan Dunhuang documents has so far focused upon history, religion and linguistics, and in these areas has sometimes touched upon issues of much interest for the history of literature as well. (Examples include Coblin 1991; Imaeda 1980; Stein 1985; Takeuchi 1985.) Japanese research on Dunhuang Tibetan documents has emphasized historical scholarship and the study of the Chan sect of Chinese Buddhism, which made inroads in Tibet during the eighth and ninth centuries. (For surveys, see Demiéville 1979; Ueyama 1983.)
41. See Jong 1989 for a complete text and translation, and references to earlier studies. The translations given in what follows, however, are my own.
The story as told in the Old Tibetan Rāmāyaṇa is familiar in its general contours but, like many of the “other Rāmāyaṇas,” differs from Vālmiki’s tale in important respects.42 Among its most striking features, shared also with the fifteenth-century Tibetan Rāmāyaṇa (discussed later in the section on the “blossoming of Tibetan kāvyā”), is its depiction of Sītā as the actual daughter of Rāvana, abandoned Moses-like in the waters owing to troubling portents surrounding her birth.43 The following paragraphs from one of the manuscripts kept in the India Office Library illustrate certain of its resemblances to and differences from the better-known Rāmāyaṇas. For instance, the broadly Buddhist milieu in which this version was circulated is clearly indicated by its opening reference to the worship of the arhats:

The king who held sway over the Rose-Apple Continent, who was called Ten Chariots [ = Daśaratha], had no son, so he offered worship to the five hundred arhats who live on Mt. Ti-se [ = Kailash]. They said, “In order to get a son, take [this] flower, and give it to your queen. You will have a son.”

Then the king gave it to his senior queen, and the queen thought, “Just as I am unhappy and ill at ease to be without a son, the junior queen [ = Kauśalyā] is similarly distressed.” With that, she divided the flower in two and offered [half to her co-wife]. She encouraged the king not to avoid the junior queen’s company. When the king slept with his two consorts, each of them came to be pregnant with a son. The junior consort’s son was three days older, and he was given the name Ramana. As for the son of the senior queen, he was named Lag-sha-na.

Sometime thereafter the gods and the asuras [anti-gods] went to war, and king Ten Chariots also went to assist the gods’ army. He returned after being wounded, and became grievously ill. The king thought, “Besides being advanced in years, I am terribly sick. It seems I’ll not live. The senior queen has been gracious and helpful in many different ways at all times. But according to the principle of the succession of the son to the throne, the eldest is Ramana. Besides being the eldest, he has strong skills and great wondrous abilities to challenge the kings of the four continents. Above and beyond that, Ramana has captured the king’s fancy. But if I should establish Ramana as king, the senior queen will be disappointed, and if I so establish Lag-sha-na, then, besides not being the one who has captured the king’s fancy, the public will come to disparage him. So what am I to do?” Thinking this, he became depressed. Looking into the face of his queen, his illness increased until he was at the point of death. Ramana heard this and offered these words to his father, “I am dedicated to my father’s well-being. Having renounced kingship, riches, and worldly business, without attachment, I shall conduct myself as a sage, and go to a wilderness hermitage.” So saying, he went to the sages’ dwelling. His

43. The birth of Sītā as Rāvana’s daughter is common to Khotanese, Lao, Malaysian, Kashmiri, and some Jain versions of the tale. See especially the contributions of Umakant Shah, F. Bizot, and S. Singaravelu to Iyengar 1983.
father was delighted, and set Lag-sha-na upon the throne. The father then passed away.\textsuperscript{44}

In this version of the \textit{Rāmāyāna}, the senior queen and Lag-sha-na (whose name is of course a transcription of “Lakṣmaṇa”) seem equivalent to Kaikeyī and Bharata in Vālmiki’s tale—an important difference. What I wish to emphasize, however, is not the story line, but rather that we seem to have here an \textit{Indian} story—the story of Rāma—told in \textit{Tibetan} prose, in which there are few apparent stylistic markers identifying it with \textit{Indian} literature.\textsuperscript{45} It may translate, or at least paraphrase, an Indic prose text, or it may not. However that may be, it is an \textit{Indian} story chiefly by virtue of its frame of reference, and not, it seems, in respect to features of style. It may be compared with a medieval Flemish painting of a Bible story: we know that the story is set in ancient Israel, but still it looks just like fifteenth-century Ghent, and, owing to what the painting represented and the manner in which it represented it, was able to appear at once familiar and foreign to the fifteenth-century Ghentish. Among twentieth-century novels, a work like Hesse’s \textit{Siddhartha} in some respects exemplifies a similar intersection of the exotic and the known.

In one important respect, however, the Old Tibetan \textit{Rāmāyāna} does appear to emulate a stylistic feature of Indic works translated into Tibetan. In its occasional verse passages, it sometimes employs lines that are unusually long for Old Tibetan, a rare feature that it shares only with a few other pre-eleventh-century Tibetan works, which also seem to have adopted an intentionally Indianized style.\textsuperscript{46} An example of this occurs when the farmers, Sītā’s adoptive guardians, present her to be Rāma’s bride (in this version there is no contest for her hand by bending the bow). Their request that he accept her is offered in verse:

\begin{verbatim}
Blue-black hair curling clockwise,  
Blue lotus eyes,  
Brahmā’s voice and a pure complexion—she is  
Adorned with garlands, the best ornaments, auspicious wealth!  
Glorious and taintless, born from the lotus supreme,  
The limbs of her body fully mature,  
Like a golden image with inlaid gems,  
All the quarters are alight with her radiancy,  
Her body perfumed with royal sandal;  
In the living world, with its gods, when she speaks
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{44} Jong 1989: A 65–73 and A 73–83.  
\textsuperscript{45} Stein 1983: 217.  
\textsuperscript{46} Pelliot tibétain 239, a Dunhuang manuscript dealing with funerary rituals and probably dating to the late dynastic period (ninth century), also employs unusually long verse lines in some passages, particularly in those sections in which the Indian Buddhist frame of reference is most pronounced.
The fragrance of the blue lotus spreads about.
When this one smiles or laughs
We hear pleasing musical sounds.
This jewel of a girl has come into the world:
She will not be mastered by anyone ordinary,
But only by you, for, in the human world,
There can be no other lord for her.\(^\text{47}\)

The verse lines of nine syllables are a stylistic departure from the very short lines favored in Old Tibetan verse.\(^\text{48}\) Even if this passage is not in fact a translation, the style (and not only the imagery) of translations of Sanskrit verse clearly is being consciously emulated in it. Given also the imagery, which must have seemed very exotic to a Tibetan audience,\(^\text{49}\) it is likely that in aspects of both form and content the Old Tibetan Rāmāyaṇa would have been received by some as a token of Tibet’s growing participation in the sphere of Indian civilization. It would be four centuries, however, before the stylistic emulation of Indian literature could become a matter for reflection among Tibetan literati.

\textit{The Cycle of Birth and Death}

Questions pertaining to the nature and degree of Indian influence upon the form and content of early Tibetan literature are also raised by the \textit{Cycle of Birth and Death (Skye shi ’khor lo ’i lo rgyus)}, a verse text, found in many manuscripts from Dunhuang, that has been studied by Yoshiro Imaeda (1981). Like the Old Tibetan Rāmāyaṇa, this is an archaic Tibetan literary text attributable to the late eighth or early ninth centuries and reflecting immediate Indian influences of various kinds; but unlike the former, the \textit{Cycle of Birth and Death} does not seek to translate or even to retell an Indian tale; it is an entirely original Tibetan creation. It demonstrates, above all, the effort to assimilate into a Tibetan cultural framework the new cosmology of Buddhism.

In its spread from India to other parts of Asia, Buddhist teaching had maintained the necessity of upholding the \textit{karma-saṃsāra} cosmology literally. The picture of the world that this engendered provided much of the rationale for the soteriological concerns of the teaching, but, above and beyond this, it also involved a highly rationalized understanding of the order

\(^\text{49}\) Visual images of Indian beauties were probably familiar to some through paintings, which no doubt seemed exotic as well. See, for example, the four goddesses in the corners of the remarkable Amoghapāśa \textit{māṇḍala} from Dunhuang reproduced in Giès and Cohen 1995: no. 283. The painting seems certain to date from the period of the Tibetan occupation of Dunhuang and may well reflect Tibetan stylistic tendencies.
of the world: human actions, according to their nature, motivation, moral value, and so on, were taught to have precise and regular results. The chain formed in this way by deeds and their results issued in an indefinitely extended series of births and deaths. Buddhism thus presented the medieval world with an intricate set of perspectives and problems: its rationalization of the world, together with the powerfully moralistic dimensions of this rationalization, may have in some respects well served the interests of expanding states with a growing interest in public order and regular administration throughout very extensive domains.\(^{50}\) However, Buddhism required acceptance of a difficult and puzzling set of beliefs concerning personal rebirth and a rigorously causalistic account of moral action. At the same time, the prospect of attaining *nirvāṇa* provided a channel for the energies of those who, whether owing to personal disposition or drawing the reasoned conclusion entailed by the cosmology, were motivated by the religious search for freedom (though, in relation to the interests of the state, this dimension of Buddhism was also possibly disruptive).

The introduction of Buddhism to peoples among whom the *karma-samsāra* cosmology had not been previously established often raised special problems, not the least of which was that adoption of the Buddhist worldview generally required a revaluation, if not the wholesale rejection, of prior systems of belief. Thus in China, for example, after Buddhism was introduced during the first centuries of the Common Era, a series of disputes broke out concerning the nature of whatever it was that transmigrated, with the interesting result that some Chinese Buddhists—over and against the mainstream of the Indian Buddhist tradition, which denied the existence of any permanent or enduring self or soul—posited just such an entity in order to answer their Confucian critics. And in Japan, the spread of Buddhism during the Nara and Heian periods was evidenced in the literature of the time in a great fascination with the *rokudō*, the six destinies (*sadgati*) of Indian Buddhist cosmology.\(^{51}\)

In Tibet the situation was in certain respects analogous. While early Tibetan beliefs concerning the fate of the dead are not entirely clear to us, what is clear is that Buddhist views were at first largely alien.\(^{52}\) A number of the old writings now available—including philosophical treatises, funeral texts, and, as in the present case, narratives—are all concerned to establish the veracity of the *karma-samsāra* scheme for Tibetan readers or auditors.\(^{53}\) Hence, it is of utmost importance that the tale of the *Cycle of Birth and Death* begins with the discovery of death by apparently Tibetan, not Indian, gods.

\(^{50}\) Compare Spiro 1982: 439–53.


\(^{52}\) Lalou 1952; Stein 1970; Kapstein 2000, ch. 1.

\(^{53}\) Kapstein 2000, ch. 3.
In its effort to explore the Buddhist cosmology in Tibetan terms, therefore, the *Cycle* parallels the contemporaneous Japanese literature of the *rokudō*.

As Imaeda has convincingly shown, the story, though certainly of Tibetan authorship, is with equal certainty inspired by the *Śūtra of the Array of Stalks* (*Gandavāyasāhasūtra*), wherein the merchant’s son Sudhana travels throughout India, from one teacher to another, until he finally receives the teachings he seeks from the coming Buddha Maitreya. In the *Cycle, Precious Jewel*, a son of the gods, conducts a similar search throughout the several realms of existence before he arrives at the feet of Śākyamuni. At many points the author places episodes in fantastic Indian settings. It is apparent that, beyond the matter of Buddhist doctrine, the author wishes to establish an Indian frame of reference. Moreover, the episode framing the entire tale, the death of the god Light Blazing King, is most likely modeled on the story of the god Vimalatejaprabha (Pure Splendid Light) found in a Buddhist *tantra*, the *Purification of All Evil Destinies* (*Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatantra*), that was well known in Tibet by this time. If this is so, then the author may well represent an early Tibetan Buddhist literary culture in which familiarity with a broad range of narratives derived from Indian sources was presupposed.

India’s presence within the *Cycle* is primarily imagistic. Narrative verse passages of Mahāyāna *sūtras* in Tibetan translation, like the *Array of Stalks*, certainly influenced aspects of the author’s style, particularly in his use of a seven-syllable verse line. Nevertheless, he also makes extensive use of purely Tibetan stylistic devices, such as set onomatopoetic phrases, to suggest the movements of the gods, their dress and ornaments, and so on. The brief selections that follow illustrate the interplay of Tibetan and Indian imagery in the *Cycle*:

> Throughout numberless aeons in the past,
> All corporeal beings and all of the gods,
> Have not beheld the phenomena of birth and death.
> Because they live for many years,
> So they hope to remain alive forever.
> The lord of their realm, Light Blazing King,
> Dwelt in the heavenly mansion of Exalted Light,

---

54. The name is given as Rin-chen-lag[s], which may be equivalent to Sanskrit *Ratnapāni*, “Jewel-in-hand.” Stein 1983, however, has argued with some plausibility that the Tibetan should probably be Rin-chen-legs, in which case this is likely a translation of the Chinese rendering of the name Sudhana, which in Tibetan translations from the Sanskrit is usually rendered Nor-bzang.

55. Skorupski 1983. Imaeda does not mention the possibility that this text was an influence here, but the similarity of the gods’ names, the tales of their deaths, and the problems that the mortality of one of their number raised for the gods strongly suggest this.
Radiating with fine light, unbearable to behold.
All those dwelling, above and below,
Appeared there as if in a mirror.\textsuperscript{56}

Much of this portrayal seems derived from Indian Buddhist descriptions of the heavens, but in the passages that follow there is, in addition, an emphasis on magical power and wizardry, expressed in terms that hark back to early Tibetan traditions, for instance, those concerning the marvelous powers of Tibet’s ancient, divine kings:

At some time the Light Blazing King of that realm
Fell upon the time when his life had run out:
Unable to demonstrate his qualities of magical power,
The excellent bodily light that had blazed now dimmed.
Forgetting to speak, forgetting even the movement of breath,
He thought all of this was startling.
Though he asked each and every one,
“What was my fault? How to fix it?”
No one knew how this was to be fixed. . . .

Among the gods was one of long life,
Called Dutara the Great Wizard.
He came to Light Blazing’s dwelling
And explained to them their error and confusion.
“All of you are sullied with ignorance!
Everyone in this realm
After seventy thousand aeons have passed
Comes to be just like this!
This is called the principle of birth and death.
I know not what benefits it.”\textsuperscript{57}

It is the wizard Dutara’s explanation of the Buddhist insight that even the gods must die that impels Precious Jewel, accompanied by “a retinue of many skilled in wizardry,” to seek a remedy to his father’s plight. He proceeds to travel throughout many domains, and each teacher he meets in turn tells him that the mystery of birth and death is too profound for him to understand and indicates where his next stop should be. Many of the teachers he encounters bear names similar or identical to those of the spiritual benefactors (\textit{kalyanamitra}) encountered by Sudhana in the \textit{Array of Stalks}. These adventures are highly formulaic and repetitive, and may be illustrated by Pre-

\textsuperscript{56} The description of the heavens here shows striking similarities with later Tibetan writings, particularly such “rediscovered treasures” (\textit{gter-ma}) as the \textit{Mani Bka’-bum} (twelfth and thirteenth centuries) and \textit{Pudra Bka’-dhang} (fourteenth century). The text follows Imaeda 1981, translated in Kapstein 2000: 5–6.

Then the son of the gods, Precious Jewel,
Traversing many domains,
Arrived at the land of the pure waterfall.
Many jeweled groves shone there,
Adorned with various flowers and fruits.
In the midst of those varied groves
Sat the Ṣiṣṭa Most Awesome Voice,
Adorned with an ornamented turban crown,
Wearing clothing of grass and of bark,
With a bark skirt, and a grass mat,
And surrounded by ten thousand Ṣis.58

The sage grants Precious Jewel his blessing, which causes him to experience
a vision of the realms of Buddhas throughout the universe. Moved by this
demonstration of splendor, he addresses the Ṣisi:

“When my father, Light Blazing King,
Changes body with the passage of life,
Doing what shall I once again meet him?
Doing what shall we be happy and glad?”
In those words he posed his question,
And Most Awesome Voice answered back,
“That is the law of birth and of death.
The tale of birth and death is most profound,
And I know not the way of that law.
By goodness depart from here,
Ask the Brahman Scope of Victorious Warmth59
About that tale of birth and of death!”
Then the son of the gods, Precious Jewel,
Hearing himself addressed in these words,
Performed respectful salutations,
And to inquire about the law of birth and death
Went to seek the Brahman Victorious Warmth.
Traveling there with his retainers,
The crowns of those gods rat-tat-tattled,
Their bejeweled chimes ru-ru-rung
To varied drum-sounds, du-du-du.”60

58. The description, drawing on stereotypical Indian depictions of forest-dwelling sages, must have seemed quite strange in ninth-century Tibet.
59. This is the Brahman Jayosmayatana of the Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra.
Just as the quest of Sudhana in the *Array of Stalks* reaches its conclusion with the hero’s encounter with the future Buddha Maitreya in the south of India, so Precious Jewel ultimately finds the teaching he seeks in *Aryavarta*, where he meets the Buddha of the present age, Sākyamuni. In this detail, however, the story seems to echo the *Purification of All Evil Destinies*, as it does also when the young god’s dilemma is resolved through the Buddha’s teaching of a tantric funeral ritual that will insure the future well-being of the deceased. Certainly Indian Buddhism is the basis for the cosmological framework and doctrinal content of this poem, but if we leave these matters of religion to one side, we may say that India is present for this literature as a source of stories and of images, which indeed must have seemed foreign and wonderful when the poem was composed. As a source of literary style, however, India remains almost as distant as the goal of the young god’s quest: the seven-syllable verse line, as I have mentioned, may reflect the influence of verse narratives contained in translated sūtras, but the onomatopoeia in the final verse lines just quoted is a characteristic Tibetan flourish. And there is no evidence yet of the intricately ornamented diction of *kāya*. Thus, while Tibetan authors of the eighth and ninth centuries appear to have begun to form a literary image of India, India remained an altogether alien realm, in which no Tibetan writer yet situated himself.

The foregoing examples provide some benchmarks in the study of the early medieval formation of Tibetan literature. We have seen that Tibetan literacy was first driven by the administrative and legislative needs of an expanding empire, whose realm came to embrace not only new territory but alien learning as well. The Tibetan literature produced during this period reflected this process by incorporating within the Tibetan cultural sphere stories, motifs, and images derived from the recently conquered domain. Nevertheless, our knowledge of Tibetan literary culture during the late first millennium remains in most respects vague, for with few exceptions (such as Emperor Trhi Desongtsen’s proclamation on translation), neither the authors, nor the readers, nor the audiences for recitation are known to us except by inference. From the eleventh century onward, however, an abundance of biographical and historical sources permit more direct access to the Tibetan cultures in which literature was produced and received.

---

61. Again, interestingly, it is a convention often found in the “rediscovered treasures,” most famously perhaps in the description of Padmasambhava’s terrestrial abode, the Copper-Colored Mountain (*Zang-mdog-dpal-ri*) in the *Gol·diens le’u-bdun-ma*, a text “rediscovered” in the fourteenth century.
The period from the collapse of the old Tibetan empire, in the mid-ninth century, until the flowering of the kingdom of Guge in Western Tibet, towards the end of the tenth century, remains obscure and is represented in traditional Tibetan historiography as a veritable dark age.\footnote{Kapstein 2000, ch. 1.} I need not enter into this difficult topic in any detail here, but one or two points are relevant. Tibetan appears to have survived as a literary language during this time primarily in Buddhist circles, with the result that the literary Tibetan that developed after the tenth century was derived from what had once been a language of scriptural translation. At the same time, the archaic literary Tibetan known to us from Dunhuang, the old royal inscriptions, and other early sources gradually fell out of use, becoming increasingly obscure to later generations of Tibetans. Thus, as the archaic language that had been used by the imperial civil and military administration became obsolete, Buddhist usage gradually emerged as the standard. This was the case even in subjects such as history, which had previously been written in the language employed by the state bureaucracy. Such a development would have contributed to the iconizing of Buddhism and its originally Indian context as the paradigms of learned (that is, literate) and prestigious culture.

Nevertheless, it is not at all clear that when the promulgation of Buddhism was renewed in Tibet during the late tenth and the eleventh centuries,\footnote{Vitali 1996.} anyone at the time appreciated what this might entail vis-à-vis Tibetan interest in Indian civilization more generally. The study of Indian poetics (\textit{alankāraśāstra}) seems not yet to have been a subject on anyone’s mind, though, as we have seen earlier, some works of kāvya, as exemplified by the \textit{jātakas} and Buddhist \textit{stotra} literature, were known in translation. Indeed, owing to the renewal of translation activity, beginning in the late tenth century, the corpus of kāvya-influenced writings available in Tibetan was in fact growing. As I argue in this section, the new literary Tibetan was at first (and to a large extent would always be) employed with a distinctively Tibetan voice; it was different in many respects from the sort of Tibetan that the eighth- and ninth-century authors had used, but by the eleventh century had become established as the Tibetan in which one wrote.\footnote{The precise transformations of Tibetan between the eighth and eleventh centuries, however, have yet to be adequately characterized. Tibetan historical linguistics is a relatively young discipline, and its development will undoubtedly lead to correction and refinement of the picture roughly sketched out here.} There may be some parallel in the evolution of English just a few centuries later, when the Norman influence had been absorbed and was no longer felt to be particularly foreign.
In the thirteenth century, however, a distinctive and self-consciously Sanskritized voice would also become articulated through the Tibetan medium. It is this transition that I attempt to characterize more carefully here.

*Travels in an Imaginal Wonderland*

During the late tenth century the transmission of Indian Buddhist culture and learning to Tibet entered into a new and dynamic phase. Tibetans were translating large numbers of texts once again, and some were visiting India, sometimes living there for years in order to study. Indian and Nepalese Buddhist *panditas* and yogins were also traveling to Tibet, where some (like the famous Atiśa, who taught in Tibet from 1042 until his death there in 1055) dwelt for long periods of time, gathering numerous Tibetan disciples in the process.65

Tibetan Buddhist commentarial writing began to flourish during this period, though few of the philosophical works of the eleventh and early twelfth centuries survive. Those that are extant suggest that there was as yet little interest in closely imitating Indian commentarial style (though some influences, of course, were inevitable). The primary concerns were to clarify the text for Tibetan disciples and to guide oral exposition. Other types of Tibetan Buddhist doctrinal literature—the plentiful works on the bodhisattva’s path, for instance—also seem primarily interested in expressing key doctrinal ideas in a manner that would be more accessible to Tibetans. In other words, the growing body of indigenous Buddhist doctrinal and technical literature was framed so as to mediate between the translated Indian treatises and Tibetan understanding. The concern above all was with the content of Buddhist thought, and only incidentally with its form.

At the same time, however, new literary genres were developing in which various types of Indian influence may be detected, besides the doctrinal influences of Buddhist teaching. India was now very much in vogue, and tokens of connections to the south were greatly prized.

Some of the most important types of writing that developed in the eleventh and twelfth centuries were associated with the growing movements of tantrism and yoga; in this respect developments in Tibet certainly echoed the emergence of new forms of vernacular literature in connection with new religious movements in India (a process discussed in other contexts throughout the present volume), especially the Apabhramsha verse of the Buddhist *siddhas*.66 The masters of the Kagyü (*Bka’-brgyud,* “oral-precept lineage”) were particularly renowned for their contributions to the creation of distinc-

---

65. Das 1893; Snellgrove 1987, 2: 477–84; Kuijp 1994; Stearns 1996.
tive genres of Tibetan yogic poetry and also to the development of biographical and autobiographical literature, in which visionary and dream experiences were of key importance.\textsuperscript{67} As an example we may take one of the most famous poems attributed to the founder of the Kagyü tradition, the renowned tantric adept and translator Marpa Chöki Lodrö (Mar-pa Chos-kyi-blo-gros, 1012–1097), on the teachings he received from the Indian mahāsiddha Saraha during a dream.\textsuperscript{68} For the purposes of the present discussion, it matters little whether or not the poem as we now know it is indeed authentic: in terms of both style and subject matter, it represents aspects of the evolution of Tibetan religious narrative and poetry during the period in which it is supposed to have been composed, when examples of dream or visionary encounters between Tibetan seekers and Indian siddhas abounded.\textsuperscript{69}

Marpa’s poem begins by describing the setting for the recitation of the poem itself: It is the festival of the tenth day of the lunar month (when Buddhist tantric practice requires the ritual of communal feasting \textit{[gaṇacakra]} among adepts), and his disciple Lokya José (Klog-skya Jo-sras) has requested that the master sing a new composition as part of the celebration. Accepting this invitation, and offering a formal apology for his shortcomings as a poet, Marpa recounts the occasion that inspired his song:

\begin{verbatim}
The other day, during the last month of the spring,
Coming from the heart of Nepal
To the track that is the highway of raised parasols,
Where there is a Nepalese tax station
In a village of outcasts,
The taxman, unsaluted and unbribed,
Detained us poor Tibetan travelers.
So that I too could not but stay for some days.

One night, in my turbulent dreams,
There were two beautiful Brahman girls,
With the characteristic of their clan, the Brahma-thread.
Smiling a bit, glancing at me from the corners of their eyes,
They came right before me, and said,
“You must go to the southern mountain Śrī!”\textsuperscript{70}
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{68} The text as we now have it is known through fifteenth- and sixteenth-century sources (Gtsang-smyon 1984: 43–47, Karma-pa VIII n.d.: 47b6ff.), and its authenticity seems to have been widely acknowledged within the Bka’-bgyud tradition. We are not yet, however, in a position to state with certainty whether it is or is not an original work of Marpa, though doubtlessly it derives from early traditions of his life and visionary experiences. The translated selections that follow in this section are based on the texts just cited.
\textsuperscript{69} Kapstein 1992a, 1997.
\textsuperscript{70} Śrīparvata, often identified with Nāgarjunakonda in modern Andhra Pradesh.
The girls miraculously transport him there, and upon his arrival, Marpa meets the famed mahāsiddha in a scene that in some respects recalls Precious Jewel’s encounter with the ṣiṣṭi Most Awesome Voice in the *Cycle of Birth and Death*:

In a shaded grove of *lakṣa* trees,
Atop a seat of antelope skin,
Sat the great Brahman Saraha,
Whose complexion had a brilliance I’d never seen.
Supported by two ladies,
He wore the adornments of the cremation ground.
His joyful face beamed a bright smile, and
He inquired, “Have you fared well, my son?”

Marpa is deeply moved by his vision of Saraha, and he feels his body, speech, and mind so affected by the master’s blessing that he is for a while paralyzed, struck dumb, his mind cleared of all thought. While in this state he perceives that Saraha is singing to him, so that his poem now includes within it a second poem:

Words of pure and great bliss
Poured forth from the jewel vase of his throat:

*A-ho!*
I’ve seen inseparable emptiness and compassion,
Incessant, the unartificed mind,
Primordially pure, just what is,
The union of space with space.
Because the root is planted at home,
Intellectual consciousness is imprisoned.
Meditation, a subsequent cognition,
Need not be applied to this mind.
Knowing the entire apparent world to be of the nature of mind,
There is no need for meditation, for correction by an antidote.
The abiding being of mind is not to be recollected.
Enter repose, an uncontrived disposition.
Because you’ll be free if you see the meaning of that,
Look to the conduct of a small child, or an outcast.
Watch the mad demon do as it pleases.
And like a lion who has no pride,
Let the elephant of mind wander free.
Watch the bee circling the flower!
Not regarding *samsāra* as flawed,
*Nirvāṇa* is not to be obtained.
Leave ordinary awareness in its own state,
Without contrivance, in its freshness.
You’ll not attain realization in deeds,
It doesn’t abide in place or in part.
Look to the circle of unelaborate space!
The inmost significance is an enfolding within the point wherein phenom-
ena are exhausted.
That furthest pinnacle of the view is the Great Seal.\footnote{Mahāmudrā, the “Great Seal,” designates the highest realization, sealing off the limits of samsāra and nirvāṇa, in the traditions of the Bka’-brgyud school and its antecedent movements in Indian Buddhist tantrism.}

Following Saraha’s poem, Marpa gradually returns to the original setting of his song’s recitation—the assembly of his disciples during the festival of the tenth day—retracing his steps through the several levels of experience he had traversed:

Something of symbolic meaning, getting at mind’s essential point,
Is what I heard when the great Brahman spoke.
In a moment, casting off sleep, I awoke
And grasped it with the hook of unforgetting remembrance.

In the dark crawl space of sleep,
Opening the window of awakened gnosis,
It was as if the sun rose in the cloudless sky—
The darkness of confusion was dispelled!

It is said that these [matters] cannot be spoken,
But tonight there was no way I could not speak!
Except for just this one time,
I’ve never found myself talking this way before!

It has often been said that the yogic songs of the Kagyü masters were modeled upon the dohās of the mahāsiddhas, especially Saraha.\footnote{Though dohā is often used in the context of Tibetan Buddhist tantra and yoga to describe a genre of mystical song, the term primarily refers to a specific type of New Indo-Aryan meter, which was later much employed, for instance, in the Hindi verse of Tulsi-das. Despite this, I retain here the more informal Tibetan Buddhist usage.} But in comparing the extant Indian Buddhist dohā corpus with Marpa’s poem, though it contains a section that resembles the dohās of Saraha, it is striking in its overall difference. For Saraha’s songs are skeletally bare when it comes to establishing a context or setting for their own recitation or composition, while Marpa encases his poem within a double narrative frame that provides both. The circumstances for the occurrence and recitation of the dream episode that contains the composition of Saraha’s song are made fully explicit. To construct and situate the self in narration in this way is entirely characteristic of Tibetan oratory, and literary evidence of this stance can be found even in ancient historical chronicles from Dunhuang.\footnote{Takeuchi 1985.} Thus, whatever the influence of the Buddhist Apabhramsha dohā literature may have been, Marpa’s voice remains an assertively Tibetan one.

With this in mind, it is instructive to compare Marpa’s poem with the de-
scription of the Most Awesome Voice in the Old Tibetan *Cycle of Birth and Death* quoted earlier. Insomuch as both involve stereotypical descriptions of Indian ascetics, there is an element of striking similarity between them. But if we contrast the employment of the imagery of India in the two texts, an important difference is at once evident: authors like Marpa are no longer only narrating a world of the imagination but are placing themselves squarely within it. This, of course, reflects the fact that Marpa and many of his contemporaries did in fact travel to India to study with the renowned teachers of the day.\(^74\) Itineraries in India, however, were seldom treated as literal accounts of physical and geographical voyages, for throughout the literature of the eleventh and twelfth centuries Tibetan seekers emphasized above all the inner dimensions of their explorations. We have just begun to glimpse, however, how far their journey would eventually take them.

Finally, we must note that while Marpa, as a translator and exponent of the Buddhist *tantras*, was certainly familiar with a broad range of Indian Buddhist tantric literature, including many of the songs stemming from the tradition of the *mahāsiddhas*, his translations also include one very elaborate *stotra* addressed to Mañjuśrī and attributed to the authorship of Candragomin, so that we may assume that his knowledge of Sanskrit included at least some background in *kāvya*.\(^75\) However, the song-poems (*mgur*) of the Tibetan yogis—considered the form of poetry that became a hallmark of Marpa’s tradition above all through the vast corpus attributed to his disciple Milarepa (Mi-la-ras-pa, 1040–1123), and of which we have seen one renowned example—are remarkable during this period, and frequently even much later, for their eschewal of the ornamental conventions of *kāvya*.\(^76\) The yogic song, whose connection with Indian literature was established through its constant references to the traditions of the *mahāsiddhas* and to symbols derived from the *tantras*, remained nevertheless a decidedly Tibetan genre, drawing freely upon well-established conventions of oratory and bardic recitation.\(^77\) The literary culture that produced the yogic song, which we have seen reflected in the festive exchanges between the adept Marpa and the circle of his disciples, resembled in part the culture of poetic recitation and oratorial performance that continue to be practiced at weddings, rehearsals of the Gesar epic, and other public occasions throughout the Tibetan world.

---

\(^74\) Das 1893; Roerich 1959; Tucci 1971.

\(^75\) Sgrub-thabs-kun-’dus 1970, 2: 146–49.

\(^76\) Nevertheless, later authors of *mgur* may also draw on the conventions of *kāvya*. A notable example may be found in the ornate verses opening Milarepa’s fifteenth-century biography (Gtsang-smyon 1981: 1–2). The translation found in Lhalungpa 1977: 1–6 altogether loses the poetic character of these very difficult verses.

\(^77\) On these genres, see Stein 1959; Helffer 1977; Aziz in Aziz and Kapstein 1985; Jackson 1984.
Beginning about the twelfth century, a new genre emerged that further consolidated the Tibetan cultural relationship with India: the Tibetan *jātaka* literature. What distinguishes these materials from their Indian sources is that the Tibetan *jātaka* most often relate the past lives of contemporary Tibetan masters and not only those of the Buddha and his closest disciples, though many Tibetan *jātakas* do place their subjects among Śākyamuni’s disciples. There can be little doubt that the emergence of this type of narrative contributed to the ideological background for the development of an incarnate hierarchy in Tibet from the late thirteenth century onward. But during the two or three centuries preceding, the Tibetan *jātakas* were seldom concerned to demonstrate a continuous chain of authority from one lifetime to the next in Tibet. Biographical and autobiographical writings during that period frequently refer to their subjects’ past lives, relating how their subjects acquired the virtues and accomplishments of *bodhisattvas* in previous lifetimes, and most of these are set in India. Thus, spiritual authority within the Tibetan world was justified not by reference to prior authority in Tibet but by a history of self-cultivation in India. This, however, entailed that India no longer had to be found in India, for India was now present in Tibet, in the transmigrating mind-streams of notable Tibetans. Some examples will illustrate just how widespread and culturally significant this reorientation was.

The twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw the growth of an impressive literature devoted to the cult of the *bodhisattva* of compassion, Avalokiteśvara, who during this period was increasingly described as Tibet’s spiritual patron. In literature the seventh-century emperor Songtsen Gampo (see earlier), who had perhaps already been proclaimed as a *bodhisattva* for some centuries, came to be not only firmly identified with Avalokiteśvara, but the Indian Buddhist *sūtras*, above all the *Cornucopia of Virtues* (*Karanādavijñāha*), which discuss Avalokiteśvara’s many lives and emanations, were now taken as supplying the past history of the emperor himself. By the fourteenth century—as we find

---

78. The institution of lineage succession through incarnation appears to have taken form in the Bka’-brgyud schools during the thirteenth century. It is certain, however, that more or less informal recognition of incarnate teachers had already occurred before this time. The chief innovation in the Bka’-brgyud schools—and it was an important one—was to tie such recognition to the actual inheritance of titles, rights, and properties.

79. Examples include the eleventh-century Rnying-ma-pa master Rong-zom-pa (Dudjom Rinpoché 1991, 1: 703–709), thought to be the incarnation of the Pandita Śrīmatīnākārti, who died in Tibet, as well as Ma-cig Lab-sgron in the twelfth century (Gyatso in Aziz and Kapstein 1985) and Karma Pakshi in the thirteenth (Kapstein 1985). But at the same time, some were already claiming ancient personal histories in Tibet, as did Nyang-ral Nyi-ma’od-zer (1124–1192; Dudjom Rinpoché 1991, 1: 755–759).

in the biography of the master Dölpopa (Dol-po-pa, 1292–1361), who, like the later Dalai Lamas, was regarded in Tibet as an emanation of Avalokiteśvara. These identifications required that the account of the subject’s past lives include both the bodhisattva’s legendary history and that of emperor Songtsen. Henceforth, each new generation of reincarnating Tibetan religious leaders would encapsulate both an Indian and a Tibetan past, necessitating the ongoing production of jātaka-inspired literary representations of their long travels through time.

Among the relatively early literary works in which the Tibetan jātaka is elaborated is the great account of the past lives of Atiśa’s leading Tibetan disciple, Dromtön (‘Brom-ston, 1004–1064), a text probably redacted in the thirteenth century, though certainly on the basis of materials first composed and compiled during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. At the beginning of the text we find Atiśa residing in a hermitage with Dromtön, along with another close disciple, Ngok Lekpé Sherap (Rngog Legs-pa’i shes-rab, fl. mid-eleventh century) also in attendance. Referring to a short verse work in which Atiśa has described the virtues cultivated by a bodhisattva, Ngok asks them how they have cultivated each virtue. In response, Atiśa elaborates a series of twenty jātakas illustrating the verses, in each of which Dromtön is identified with the hero while Atiśa and Ngok are important characters. With the exception of one tale that takes place in China, the rest involve rebirths in India, most often in places celebrated in the life of the Buddha: Vaiśāli, Kauśāmbi, Varānasi, Magadha, Kuśanagara, and so on. Dromtön’s past lives are without exception as persons of high status—as a Brahman, a prince, or, most often, a kalyāṇamitra (no monkeys or woodpeckers here!)—which perhaps reflects the role of the Tibetan jātaka in bolstering claims to authority within the Tibetan world.

In the preceding section I argued that one of the crucial developments in eleventh-century Tibetan literature was the transformation of India from an exotic but remote land to an exotic land in which Tibetans found their own imaginal universe. The Tibetan jātaka literature in a sense takes this a step further: if figures like Marpa can be said to have found themselves in India, others, like Marpa’s senior contemporary Dromtön, who never visited India, may be said to have found India within themselves.

The themes I sketch out here, involving a thorough reordering of the Tibetans’ conception of their relationship with India, are reiterated throughout the literature of the eleventh through thirteenth centuries. It is during this period that Tibet came to be thought of as the terrestrial field of Avalokiteśvara in accord with the will of none other than the Buddha Śākyamuni.

---

81. As, for instance, in Dol-po-pa, 1992–93 vol. 1.
82. ‘Brom ston rgyal ba’i byung guas kyi skyes rabs 1994.
This development made Tibet part of Śākyamuni’s world, no longer outside of Āryadeśa. Thus, the great Gampopa (Sgam-po-pa, 1079–1153) was regarded as Candraprabha, Śākyamuni’s interlocutor in the Samādhirājasūtra (Sūtra of the King of Samādhi), while his grand-disciple Drigung Kyopa (’Brig-gung-skylabs-pa, 1143–1217), one of the great teachers of the age, came to be thought of as the very presence in Tibet of Nāgārjuna.83 Many similar examples can be adduced. Tibetans have thus come to place themselves within India and India within themselves, and the newly developing forms of Tibetan writing are defined in large measure by these new self-situatings.

Sakya Paṇḍita and the Ideal of Sanskrit Learning

With the revival of Buddhist scholasticism in Tibet during the eleventh century, the promotion of courses of study based upon the Indian Buddhist sūtras required that general elements of Indian learning, forming essential background for the understanding of often sophisticated texts, be part of the program as well. Those most expert in this respect appear to have become increasingly critical of their fellows, who, they maintained, were becoming prone to spurious interpretations and misunderstandings.84 As a result, within a century or two, some factions within the Tibetan Buddhist world began to adopt a strikingly “Indological” standpoint, insisting that the study of Buddhism had to be to a large extent enframed within a core curriculum of Indian learning. This trend found paradigmatic expression in the works of Sakya Paṇḍita Kūnga Gyentsen (Sa-skya Paṇḍita Kun-dga’-rgyal-mtshan, 1182–1251), to whose contributions I now turn. The significance of Sakya Paṇḍita’s role is widely acknowledged within traditional Tibetan historiography, most emphatically perhaps in the renowned history by the Fifth Dalai Lama, who explicitly relates the establishment of the Indian learned sciences (vidyāsthānas, rig-gnas) in Tibet to his influence.85

Sakya Paṇḍita’s life and contributions have been discussed at some length elsewhere.86 Most useful in the present context would be an overview of his ideals of literary learning, and of the manner in which these came to define, for later generations, a paradigm of classical learning. To draw an analogy with post-Renaissance conceptions of a “classical education” in the West seems appropriate in this case, for both involved the strong affirmation of an alien antiquity (Indian for Tibet, Greco-Roman for Western Europe) as an ap-

propriate model of excellence; and in both cases, it was poetic excellence that was regarded as a touchstone of moral and intellectual refinement.

One of the sharpest reflections of the manner in which Sakya Paṇḍita tied the construction of a learned persona to the refinement of Sanskrit literary culture is found in a short essay on his own scholarship, which he repeats in longer or shorter forms at various points in his writings. The fullest version is his auto-commentary on a verse entitled the Eight Ego Poem, so called owing to its eight repetitions of the Tibetan first person pronoun. This self-eulogy, which recalls the lyrics of W.S. Gilbert, may be translated roughly as follows:

I am the grammarian. I am the dialectician.

Among vanquishers of sophists, peerless am I.

I am learned in metrics. I stand alone in poetics.

In explaining synonymics, unrivaled am I.

I know celestial calculations. In exo- and esoteric science

I have a discerning intellect equaled by none.

Who can this be? Sakya alone!

Other scholars are my reflected forms.87

Notably, this bit of doggerel was authored by a prominent Buddhist monk, an exponent of the teaching of the selflessness of persons. And Sakya Paṇḍita’s doctrinal works make it perfectly clear, if any had thought to question it, that he would have been loath to impugn this cardinal tenet.88 It is understandable, therefore, that some of his contemporaries expressed consternation regarding his motivations here; some suggested that he was engaging in an idle boast, while others more charitably asked whether the verse might best be taken as poetic hyperbole. These critics he sought to address in his commentary.

In its details the commentary is of interest primarily for its revelation of the precise contents of a classical Indian Buddhist literary education as Sakya Paṇḍita understood it. Explicating each of his eight self-attributions in turn, he surveys the contents of his own studies and summarizes his own writings to support the contention that he is indeed an acknowledged master of the topics concerned. In the concluding section of the essay, he argues that in composing the offending verse he was in fact adhering closely to models provided by some of the most admired Indian Buddhist thinkers: Dharmakīrti, Sthiramati, Prajñākaramati, and others had all at one point or another similarly eulogized themselves. To demonstrate this Sakya Paṇḍita provides a brief anthology of these poems of self-praise.89 Indeed, he asserts, it has been

the practice of all the great masters to adorn themselves in this way, but never
to boast of the mundane virtues of their race, wealth, following, military
might, or lordship, for truly learned persons would be ashamed to engage
in that sort of braggadocio. The real reason that the wise have sometimes
indulged in self-praise has been to encourage themselves to adhere closely to
the ideal of learning and to exemplify that ideal on behalf of those who would
learn from them.

That Sakya Paṇḍita arrived at a sort of reductio ad absurdum of the very
ideal of self-construction he espoused is something we need not dispute. De-
spite his great and enduring (and for the most part well-deserved) legacy
within Tibetan learned culture, some would nevertheless henceforth regard
him above all as the very type of the self-inflated scholar, a model of conceit.
In the eyes of these critics, he defined with crystalline precision the bound-
aries that self-assertive genius had not only to challenge but to transgress.
Thus, in the satirical literature of the yogic traditions, Sakya Paṇḍita, the mas-
ter of sciences, became the object of the trickster’s play. The culture of
selflessness, we may conclude, does not absolve one from the demands of
self-regard and the corresponding need to reflect upon how one is regarded
by others. At the same time, it provides no assurance that one will indeed
be so regarded.

Let us return now to consider some particulars of the literary curriculum
that Sakya Paṇḍita sought to promote. To introduce his program of Indian
classical study to the Tibetan world, he composed a number of pedagogical
treatises on special topics such as metrics (chandas) and synonymics (abhi-
dhāna).91 His famous Jewel Mine of Aphorisms (Subhāsītaratnanidhi) may also
be seen as an introductory survey of the Sanskrit aphoristic literature, most
of its verses being translations and paraphrases rather than original com-
positions.92 However, the work in which he most succinctly sets out his pro-
gram is undoubtedly the Mkhas pa ’jug pa’i sgo, the Scholar’s Gate.93 Here he
formulates his conception of a trivium based upon the mastery of composition,
rhetoric, and debate. The first chapter, on composition, supplies a se-
ries of fine short surveys of the elements of grammar and poetics, including
the theory of designation and meaning, rasa theory, and a detailed intro-

91. These writings include: a commentary on the Pedagogy authored by his uncle (Byis pa bde blo blag tu ’jug pa’i nram bshad; Sa-skya 1992, 1: 529–54); an introduction to grammar (Sgra la ’jug pa; Sa-skya 1992, 1: 503–23); a book of synonyms modeled on Amara (Tshig gi gter; Sa-skya 1992, 1: 569–99); and a treatise on metrics (Sdeb sbyor sna tshogs me tog gi chun pa; Sa-skya 1992, 1: 600–647). To these we may also add his specialized writings on music (Rol-mo’i bstan-bcos; Sa-skya 1992, 1: 349–63) and his monumental work on logic and epistemology (Tshad-ma rigs-gter; Sa-skya 1992, 2: 1–537).
duction to the study of poetic ornament (alaṅkāra). In his introduction to the work he summarizes his ideals of learning, once again, with reference to his own achievements:

I have seen, studied, and familiarized myself with most of the famous [works]:

1. Treatises on grammar including the Kalāpa and Candra;
2. The epistemological [pramāṇa] texts, such as the Samuccaya [the Epistemological Compendium of Dignāga] and the seven dissertations [of Dharmakīrti];
3. Works of kārya, including the Jātaka[mālā of Āryasūtra], the three great [poets], and the three lesser [works of Kālidāsa];
4. The Jwel Mine [Ratnakara], the Prosody Collection [perhaps the Chandomañjari] among other treatises on metrics [chandas];
3a. In the science of poetic ornament [alaṅkārastra], the writings of Daṇḍin, Sarasvatī's Necklace [Sarasvatīkaṇṭhaabharaṇa], and so on;
5. In synonymics [abhidhāna], Amara's Treasury [Amarakoṇa], Universal Illumination [Viśvatrakāśa], and others;
6. Joy of the Nāgas [Nāgānanda], Bouquet of Beauty [*Rūpaṃnijari] and other dramas;
7. Among medical treatises, the Eight Limbs [Aṣṭāṅga], Life Science [Ayurveda], and so on;
8. In the technical sciences [silpastra], the proportions of images, and the examination of earth, water, and so forth;
9. The calculation of the constellations [naksatra], among external objects, and of the inner vital energies [vāyu], and so on, including the Wheel of Time [Kālacakra], which is a specialty of both Buddhists and non-Buddhists, and the treatise by Śrīdhara; and
10. In the inner sciences [the Buddhist religion, adhyātmavidyā], the Tripiṭaka of sūtra, vinaya, and abhidharma, the four [classes of] tantra—kriyā, caryā, yoga, and anuttarayoga—and their commentaries, subcommentaries, and so forth.

So I am not fabricating things, nor am I a charlatan; therefore those whose intelligence is clear should leave off attachment and aversion and study with delight this exposition of my Scholar's Gate . . . .

One who is learned [a pandita] is one who knows without error all branches of knowledge; otherwise, the term “learned” is also applied to one who has mastered a particular topic.94

94. Sa-skya 1981: 4–5. The following remarks explain briefly the names and references found in this list, which summarizes the traditional enumeration of the ten sciences. (But note that poetics, generally treated as one area of study, is here divided into kārya proper [3] and alaṅkārastra [3a], for which reason my numbering of this is irregular.)

(1) Current research on the study of Sanskrit grammar in Tibet is surveyed in Verhagen 1994. The Kalāpa and the grammar of Candragomin were among the best-known Sanskrit gram-
There are many interesting features of this list, which abbreviates the expanded accounts Sakya Pañḍita and his disciples repeat at several points in their writings (above all, in his autocommentary to the *Eight Ego Poem*). The emphasis placed upon this inventory suggests that it was intended to buttress a particular ideal of learning, to be studied and emulated by others. Many of the constituents of this ideal, however, could not have been widely known in Tibet in Sakya Pañḍita’s time, as in some cases there were not yet Tibetan translations of the works in question (for instance, the writings of Daṇḍin and Amara), and in a few instances there never would be (for instance, *Sarasvatī’s Necklace* and the *Universal Illumination*). What is striking is that the area best known to Tibetan Buddhist scholars, the “inner science” of Buddhism, is summarized only briefly in closing. Sakya Pañḍita’s emphasis is clearly on the branches of Indian learning that were regarded as more or less secular, in the sense that they were thought to contribute not directly to the higher aims of the Buddhist religion but rather to the refinement of this-worldly values. This comports well with the overarching aims and purposes of the *Scholar’s Gate*, which except for some brief statements concerning the major Buddhist philosophical systems in the final chapter on debate, is concerned above all with the linguistic and literary sciences.95

In his treatment of *rasa* theory and the classification of poetic tropes, Sakya

---

95. See Jackson 1987 for the final chapter on debate.
Paṇḍita, for better or worse, cast a mold for the treatment of Indian literary theory that has endured in Tibet to the present day. The distinction between a primary emotion (sthaṭībhāva) and the aesthetic sentiment engendered by its skillful depiction (rasa), all-important for the developed forms of poetic theory in India, is largely forgotten, and the primary concern is the classification of harmonious and conflicting sentiments. For example:

In compositions involving expressions of heroism and valor, [these qualities] are contradicted by expressions giving rise to laughter, and by tropes engendering compassionate love or meekness and mental resignation due to serenity, for they defeat the force of expression. But if the force is not defeated, and there is no contradiction, then in accord with the context there is no harm in applying them. 96

The Scholastic Gate, perhaps inspired by the dramaturgy of Bharata, rings the changes on all the nine rasas in this fashion. Similarly, the conventions of poetry, and the ornaments, or tropes, are largely a matter of definition and stipulation, for instance:

By reciting the hero’s virtues first
One overwhelms [the qualities of] his opponent.
This style of expressing them
Is celebrated among the poets.

Some, however, are pleased to speak
Of overwhelming virtues and faults only after
Having first recited the enemy’s virtues
Of race, family, wisdom, learning, and such. 97

This and other similar stipulations are of course derived from Sanskrit rhetorical conventions. The Scholastic Gate, however, does not progress much beyond the provision of such rules and guidelines, and certainly does not penetrate the subtleties that already characterized the best Sanskrit literary criticism centuries before the Scholastic Gate was composed. Lest Sakya Paṇḍita’s work appear as only a poor shadow of its Sanskrit models, however, we should recall that the Scholastic Gate was intended primarily as a general survey of and introduction to Indian literary theory on behalf of a Tibetan readership with little exposure to this subject matter. In this respect, in fact, it largely succeeded, and it has enjoyed a reputation for being clear, succinct, and generally pleasant to read. It was, however, a work begging to be surpassed, not only in quantity and detail—in these areas it was surpassed by the extensive body of later Tibetan commentary on Daṇḍin 98—but also in

the depth of its literary analysis. That this apparently was not accomplished in traditional circles was no fault of Sakya Paṇḍita’s, except perhaps inasmuch as he was canonized as the paradigm of the literary scholar.

Sakya Paṇḍita certainly became renowned and influential by virtue of his learning. What may have tipped the scales in favor of the widespread adoption of his perspective on learning, however, was the spread of his influence to the Mongol empire of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; for under the Mongols the hierarchs of Sakya, the principality in whose ruling family Sakya Paṇḍita had been born, acted as the preeminent agents of the imperial power in Tibet.⁹⁹ The lords of Sakya, however, were content to remain pluralists in their dealings with the differing traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, and even those Tibetans who would eventually overturn their political sway were educated in their schools. (Indeed, Ta’i Si-tu, who wrested power from Sakya, studied at Sakya itself as a teenager.)¹⁰⁰ One result was that by the time Sakya lost its hold over Tibet, during the 1350s, Sakya Paṇḍita’s ideal of pañḍityam was firmly established as a Tibetan cultural ideal. No doubt the fact that Tibetans had long since found themselves in India, and India within themselves, contributed no less than the Mongols to the authority his vision attained.

The Blossoming of Tibetan Kāvya: Rāma Retold

In Tibetan learned circles Sakya Paṇḍita inspired a great surge of interest in the Indian literary arts, and in the generations following his own, new energy was devoted to the translation of fundamental literary works. A key figure in this movement was Shongtön Dorje Gyentsen (Shong-stong Rdo-rje-rgyal-mtshan, thirteenth century), whose translations included the lexicon of Amara; Daṇḍin’s Mirror of Poetry (Kāvyādāśā); Jñānaśrimitra’s metrical tour de force, the Metrical Garland Eulogy (Vṛttaṅgalapāta); and well-known literary texts such as Harṣa’s Joy of the Nagas (Nāgānanda) and Kṣemendra’s Marvelous Vine of Birth Stories (Avadānakalpalata). Kālidāsa’s Cloud Messenger (Meghadūta) was translated during the same period.¹⁰¹ These works left an enormous legacy in Tibet, and from the fourteenth century onwards virtually every Tibetan author of note, whether monk or layman, tried his hand at some kāvya.¹⁰² Even the exponents of yogic song, who well appreciated

¹⁰¹. On Shongtön Dorje Gyentsen, see Hahn 1971: 8–10; for Daṇḍin, see Banerjee 1939; for Jñānaśrimitra, see Hahn 1971; for Harṣa, see Bhattacharya 1957; for Kṣemendra, see Das 1888–1918; for Kālidāsa, see Dpa’-ris Dor-zhi 1988.
¹⁰². Among the most renowned authors and works, I note the third Karmapa hierarch Rangjung Dorje (Karma-pa Rang-byaṅ-mdzod-rje, 1284–1339) whose poetic jñātakas came to form
the power of the Tibetan song-poem (mgur), were not untouched by the allure of Ratnakara’s metrics and Danṭin’s classifications of ornament.103 Tibetan käyā continues to be written in the traditional vein (see later section), and I have even been shown an elaborate stotra eulogizing the elder George Bush for the defeat of Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War.104

Given the historical duration of the Tibetan käyā tradition, and the abundance of the literature now available, only the briefest sampling can be offered here. Because we have already seen something of the Old Tibetan Rāmāyaṇa, a useful point of comparison is the Tale of Rāmaṇa (Ra maṇa’i rīrgs btsod), an elaborate käyā composed by a famous junior disciple of Je Tsongkhapa, Zhangzhungpa Chöwang Drakpa (Zhang-zhung-pa Chos-dbang-drags-pa, 1404–1469). The precise sources upon which Chöwang Drakpa based his version of the Rāma story are nowhere mentioned, but it is striking to note that the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682), perhaps second only to Sakya Pandita as a promoter of the Indian literary arts in Tibet, and the author of a wide variety of poetic works and a well-regarded commentary on the Mirror of Poetry (Kaṇḍvādar 4a) (Smith 1970); the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682), perhaps second only to Sakya Pandita as a promoter of the Indian literary arts in Tibet, and the author of a wide variety of poetic works and a well-regarded commentary on the Mirror of Poetry (Kaṇḍvādar 4a) (Smith 1970); the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682), perhaps second only to Sakya Pandita as a promoter of the Indian literary arts in Tibet, and the author of a wide variety of poetic works and a well-regarded commentary on the Mirror of Poetry (Kaṇḍvādar 4a) (Smith 1970); the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682), perhaps second only to Sakya Pandita as a promoter of the Indian literary arts in Tibet, and the author of a wide variety of poetic works and a well-regarded commentary on the Mirror of Poetry (Kaṇḍvādar 4a) (Smith 1970); the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682), perhaps second only to Sakya Pandita as a promoter of the Indian literary arts in Tibet, and the author of a wide variety of poetic works and a well-regarded commentary on the Mirror of Poetry (Kaṇḍvādar 4a) (Smith 1970); the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682), perhaps second only to Sakya Pandita as a promoter of the Indian literary arts in Tibet, and the author of a wide variety of poetic works and a well-regarded commentary on the Mirror of Poetry (Kaṇḍvādar 4a) (Smith 1970); the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682), perhaps second only to Sakya Pandita as a promoter of the Indian literary arts in Tibet, and the author of a wide variety of poetic works and a well-regarded commentary on the Mirror of Poetry (Kaṇḍvādar 4a) (Smith 1970); the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682), perhaps second only to Sakya Pandita as a promoter of the Indian literary arts in Tibet, and the author of a wide variety of poetic works and a well-regarded commentary on the Mirror of Poetry (Kaṇḍvādar 4a) (Smith 1970); the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682), perhaps second only to Sakya Pandita as a promoter of the Indian literary arts in Tibet, and the author of a wide variety of poetic works and a well-regarded commentary on the Mirror of Poetry (Kaṇḍvādar 4a) (Smith 1970);
ing that in its broad outlines, and in many telling particulars, it closely re-
sembles the Old Tibetan versions. For instance, here too, Sītā is Rāvana’s
daughter, who as an infant is abandoned in the waters. Primarily through
summaries given in commentarial glosses on Sakya Paṇḍita’s collection of
aphorisms and on the Tibetan translation of the Mirror of Poetry, we know
that the tale of Rāma was kept in circulation during the period immediately
preceding the composition of the Tale of Rāma,105 and Chöwang Drakpa
was no doubt familiar with these works. It is the literary history of the Ti-
betan Rāmāyana for the period between the production of the Dunhuang
manuscripts and the mid-thirteenth century that remains a mystery.

To exemplify the stylistic orientations of Chöwang Drakpa’s text, over and
against the Old Tibetan Rāmāyana, let us consider the manner in which he
describes Rāma’s meeting with and betrothal to Sītā:

Well-conveyed by his well-brightened chariot,
Ramaṇa, blazing lustrous light,
And she who’d been delivered by her river friend106
Met together in the time of their flowering.
Their eyes fell as do those of the offering-eater
On meeting the owl’s guttural cry.107

“She is worthy to be the mirror
That captures the king’s happy visage”—
This was the one thought that occurred
To the host of farmer-folk.

“The golden ensign of her form
Will beautify the king’s palace!”
This aural report, the jewel of her fame,
Became the earring of the land’s daughters.

The eager upon this earth
Desired just news of her,
And desired not even in dreams
Other broad-eyed beauties—
For who, holding fast to Sārasvatī’s name,
Would wish to clasp an apish mane?
So the spell masters among the people
Recited Sītā’s name as a charm,

106. In the Tibetan story Sītā was abandoned in the waters, which carried her to safety
among the farmers. Whereas the Jaina version has her placed in a jeweled container, the Ti-
betan speaks of a copper casket, interestingly echoing traditions concerning the disposal of the
corps of Tibet’s first mortal king.
107. Their eyes fell owing to their shyness. The eyes of the crow (“offering-eater”) are said
to look downward at night when the call of the owl is heard.
Until their jawbones, broken machines,
Hung slack upon their breasts.108

In Chöwang Drakpa’s *Tale of Ramaṇa*, narrative continuity has given way to atomic verses, each embodying a specific image or ornament. The work as a whole is not a river of story but more akin to a necklace, each verse conceived as a discrete gem. The exemplification of many different ornaments is considered desirable in poetry of this sort, and, to the extent possible, Daṇḍin’s stipulations are followed with care. For example, the commentator on the *Tale of Ramaṇa* goes to great lengths to specify precisely which of Daṇḍin’s prescriptions governs each verse. The vocabulary, too, is peculiar, depending to a great extent on terms known only from the Tibetan translations of works on Sanskrit synonymics. So, for instance, “offering-eater” in the first verse just quoted refers to the crow, and the Tibetan term used, *gtor-len*, was created specifically to represent the Sanskrit *balibhuj* and has no use in ordinary Tibetan.109 Therefore, without a commentary (oral or written) the text would be impenetrable to anyone who had not been extensively trained in the Sanskrit literary arts as known in Tibet. The most notable departure from Sanskrit poetic convention here is the flexibility of verse length. Though verses of four lines, equivalent to the Sanskrit verse of four quarters, are common, so too are verses of six or eight lines, and in the selection just quoted the commentator treats the final passage as a single verse of ten lines.

What was the readership for Tibetan literature of this sort? Most of the known authors of Tibetan *kāvya*, as well as commentaries and textbooks on matters relating to poetics, were of course monk-scholars, though some lay aristocrats contributed as well: Tshering Wang’gyel is an especially prominent example. Nevertheless, monastic education, despite the promotion of Sanskrit literary knowledge by Sakya Paṇḍita and other renowned masters, was primarily a matter of Buddhist liturgy and shastric learning. Though there were always some monks who sought to master *ālaṃkāra-stra* and related topics, and despite the assumption that a *real paṇḍita* ought to be familiar with such material, the mainstream of the monastic colleges tended to look askance at such frivolity.110 Where literary learning was most encouraged was among the lay aristocracy and the factions of the learned clergy.


109. Indeed, it is such an unusual term that it is not even found in the most complete dictionary of literary Tibetan to date (*Bod rgya tshig mdzod* 1985), though one does find there the exact synonym, *gtor-za*, listed as a term for “crow” known specifically from the *abhidhāna* treatises.

110. My evidence for this is primarily anecdotal, but discussions over many years with Tibetan monks and laypersons from diverse educational backgrounds convince me of its general veracity. The research in progress of Dreyfus (1997b) promises to clarify Tibetan monastic curricula.
who harbored reservations about the value of the scholastic debate programs. Though it would be wrong to exaggerate it, one may detect some parallel here with the late medieval and early Renaissance division in Europe between schoolmen and humanists.\textsuperscript{111} In Lhasa it was almost a given that whereas the educated monks would master the arguments of the philosophers Dharmakirti and Candrakirti, the sons of the nobility would study Dandin and the various Tibetan imitations of Amara. Indeed, the actual production of k\textacya among educated laypersons was certainly much greater than what we find reflected in the published literature. It is clear that the laity made use of their poetic skills in drafting government and personal documents, in journals, in love poems, and in correspondence—writings never intended for publication.\textsuperscript{112} The literary world briefly described here changed little with the passage of centuries, until the tragic events of 1959 brought the cultural life of traditional Tibet to an end. It is only in the posthumous writings of the controversial culture-hero Gendün Chöphel (Dge-'dun Chos-'phel, 1903–1951) that we find the beginnings of a modern critique of the Tibetan k\textacya tradition, but one inspired by his encounter with Indological scholarship in India during the 1930s and 1940s and seeking a return to the direct study of poetry in Sanskrit.\textsuperscript{113} 

\textbf{K\textacya in Contemporary Tibet}

\textit{The Revival of K\textacya in Post–Cultural Revolution Tibet}

Following the end of the Chinese Cultural Revolution in 1976 and the ouster of the Gang of Four two years later, China embarked upon a new course of reform that permitted, among many other things, renewed study and cautious revival of aspects of traditional cultures. These changes were vitally important for the minority nationalities of China, whose cultural traditions had been doubly assaulted by a combination of Maoist fervor and Chinese chauvinism. Tibetans, who had witnessed the destruction of their monasteries and

\textsuperscript{111} Le Goff 1993.

\textsuperscript{112} Goldstein 1989: 451 n. 85, reports the letter of Canglocen, a political figure “well-known as a poet,” written when he fled Tibet in 1937, that was “memorized by lay officials” owing to its elegance no less than its contents. Taring 1970: 232, describing her 1959 escape from the Lhasa Uprising, reports that she “hurriedly wrote notes for Jigme [her husband] and our daughters in difficult poetical language.” This was, of course, to protect all concerned should the notes have been intercepted by the Chinese authorities. Bstan-'dzin-dpal-'byor 1986 provides the autobiographical records of a famous eighteenth-century prime minister, which make abundant use of conventions derived from k\textacya. Until its recent publication, this work circulated in manuscript form only among the highest-ranking noble households. Such examples abound. To collect the poetry of Tibetan laypersons at the present time would be a worthwhile venture, one certainly best undertaken by Tibetan scholars of literature.

\textsuperscript{113} Dge-'dun-chos-'phel 1990, 3: 353–555.
libraries, the exile of many leading authorities in areas of both religious and secular culture, and the persecution of most persons of such standing who had remained behind, awoke in the early 1980s to ponder both the wreckage of their civilization and the prospects for renewal that Dengist reform seemed to promise.114

One of the many areas in which the reforms had immediate, though not always clear, ramifications was Tibetan-language publishing. While this had been limited for almost a decade and a half to political tracts and some educational materials, it was now possible for the officially sanctioned Nationalities Presses and other publishing houses to issue a wider variety of Tibetan writings, including some traditional works. However, publication did not become perfectly free; in general, it was still felt inappropriate for purely religious writing, which had no justification for publication besides religious interest, to be published by the state-sponsored publishing houses.115 The decisions made regarding what was acceptable to publish under state subsidy in most respects paralleled concurrent decisions with regard to Tibetan-medium education, especially in the colleges and universities in which Tibetan programs were in place or under development.116

The problem that all this entailed, however, was that in traditional Tibetan society religion had so thoroughly dominated the production of literature that no clear distinction between religious and other types of writing could be drawn with much consistency. Works on lexicography and grammar were generally unproblematic, while tantric ritual texts were definitely out.117 But between the sciences that could be readily separated from religion and works that stood ideologically condemned as exemplifying the “blind faith” of the old society, there remained a vast domain whose credentials as religious or secular, culturally valuable or superstitious, were less easy to determine.

What emerged was, interestingly enough, a renewed emphasis on the main areas that formed the basis for the education of the old aristocracy. Works on the “language sciences”—grammar, synonymics, poetics, meter, and drama—together with books of history, biography, legend, and story, began to appear in large numbers. Episodes from the epic of Gesar, which could be taken as representing, in its essence, an indigenous Tibetan bardic tradition that bore only a veneer of Buddhism, became a mainstay

116. During the mid-1980s, for instance, the Lhasa Teachers’ College was upgraded to become Tibet University (Bod-ljongs Mtho-rim-slob-grwa, Xizang Daxue), with Tibetan-medium postgraduate programs in Tibetan language, literature, and history.
117. In fact, in recent years some state-supported Tibetan language publishers, particularly in Sichuan, have also begun to bring out works on ritual, meditation, and yoga.
of the renewed publishing industry. Encyclopedic works, although largely concerned with religion, could be justified as repositories of broad Tibetan cultural knowledge: thus, the relatively early appearance (1982) of the renowned encyclopedia by Kongtrül (Kong-sprul Yon-tan-rgya-mtsho, 1813–1899). *Jātaka* tales and *avādānas*, albeit clearly part of the religious literature, also began to appear, though the presses seem to have been more guarded here. The collected works of famous lamas, too, were occasionally published. This was justified on the grounds that the primary intent of the publication was broader cultural interest, even though much of purely religious interest was contained within them. More or less scientific topics, such as traditional astronomy and medicine, were of course relatively unproblematic, and writings on Buddhist logic and epistemology also gradually reappeared.

As this brief and much-simplified survey makes clear, by the mid-1980s, even given the avoidance of religion on the part of the official publishing houses, large areas of traditional Tibetan literature began to return to public circulation, including material that was indeed intimately connected with the religious traditions of Tibet. But this revival also began to raise questions of relevance: for an ethnic Tibetan in political China in the late twentieth century, just how was one to respond to the reappearance of so much past tradition? *Kārya*, as it turns out, has been one of the areas in which the Tibetan cultural confrontation with the Tibetan past and with the challenges of modernity has been keenly felt.

In the first decade following the Cultural Revolution, the renewed activity of Tibetan language publishing houses in China made available to the public, in inexpensive and relatively well-produced editions, much of the corpus of the most highly esteemed Tibetan *kārya*, together with other types of Tibetan poetry, including the aphorisms of Sakya Pandita (1982) and his *Gateway to Learning* (1981); the *Tale of Ramana* (1983); the *Tale of the Lord of Men* (1981) and the *Story of the Incomparable Prince* (1979) by Dokhara Tshering Wang’gyel; and the biographies and yogic songs of Milarepa (1981) and of Shabkar Tshokdruk Rangdrol (1986 and 1988), among many others. Contemporary Tibetan writers and educators produced several new commen-

118. See, for example, *Mkangs bstan* 1984. In general, the Tibetan-language presses in eastern Tibet, i.e., Qinghai, Gansu, and Sichuan, which are outside of the Tibet Autonomous Region, have reflected more liberal policies, and they began to publish some more or less religious texts during the mid-eighties. Private publishing enterprises have been relatively free with respect to religious publication.

119. Again, the eastern Tibetan presses were in the forefront here. Particularly revealing in this connection is the publisher’s introduction (dated 1989) to Rig ’dzin Bsdud ’joms rdo rje 1991, which explicitly cites directives of the eleventh Party Congress regarding the preservation of cultural traditions.
taries on Daṇḍin and a new commentary on the Tibetan translation of Kālīdāsa’s *Meghadūta* also. The rehabilitation of Tibetan poetry, and above all of *kāvyā*, reached a culmination of sorts with the appearance in Qinghai in 1988 of a three-volume anthology of Tibetan literature, the first work of its kind, entitled *Ingots of Gold: Compositions of the Successive Masters of the Glacial Land* (*Gangs ljongs mkhas dbang rim byon gyi rtsom gyi gser gyi shram bu*). The collection was compiled by two scholars of the Qinghai Nationalities Institute in Xining: Lozang Chödrak (Blo-bzang-chos-grags) and Sonam Tsemo (Bsod-nams-rtse-mo). In all, some 180 works by 76 authors are represented. The list of contents reveals some prominent biases in the selection of authors and works: works of the past four centuries or so are much better represented than earlier writings, authors from Amdo (northeastern Tibet) better than those from other regions, and clerics of the Gelukpa sect better than others. These leanings may be explained at least in part by the fact that the compilers are based, and conducted most of their research, in contemporary Qinghai, which corresponds to the traditional province of Amdo and has long been prominently Gelukpa. The bias of greatest interest, however, is the strong tendency of the compilers to favor works of *kāvyā* over other types of Tibetan poetic writing. Unlike the others, this tendency cannot so easily be explained as the result of the contingencies of time and place alone. It is, rather, owing to a particular conception of literature itself that *kāvyā* is privileged above, notably, the *mgur* literature (though the latter is of course to some extent represented).

It is unfortunate that the compilers saw fit to provide only a sketchy introduction to their anthology, so that the principles of selection and the overarching rationale of the work are not discussed in any detail. However, the following remarks offer some interesting suggestions:

120. Commentaries on Daṇḍin include Dung-dkar 1982, Rdo-rje-rgyal-po 1983, Bset-shang 1984. For the commentary on the Tibetan *Meghadūta*, see Dpa’ris Dor-zhi 1988. This commentary is in fact based upon a Chinese study of Mallinātha’s commentary, published in Beijing during the 1950s.

121. Blo-bzang-chos-grags and Bsod-nams-rtse-mo 1988. I thank the editors for their presentation of this very valuable work during my visit to the Qinghai Nationalities Institute, Xining, in July 1990.

122. The second author is in fact an ethnic Mongolian of Qinghai Province. “Tibetan studies” in China is primarily, but not exclusively, an ethnic Tibetan affair, and scholars of non-Tibetan origin often use Tibetan pen names in their Tibetan language publications. The leading Chinese Tibetologist, Wang Yao, who has also contributed to Tibetan literary studies, uses the name Dbang-rgyal, for example.

123. The anthology includes a small number of works in prose, most of which may be described as prose-∗kāvyā*, though there are some exceptions, all illustrating archaic Tibetan literature. It is thus primarily a poetry anthology, and not a general literary anthology at all.
Literary composition, which flows from the brushes of the masters,\textsuperscript{124} is indicative of a society’s livelihood and national character. The nationality [here, the Tibetans] need not vie with others, [its traditions of literary composition] being perfect and abundant. However, because there have been many historical obstacles and natural calamities, those exceptional compositions were mostly prevented from spreading widely and faced many obstacles. In particular, the ten years of civil unrest [during the Cultural Revolution] and so forth brought about much damage, for which reason, even if intelligent youths wish to study, it is difficult for them to get their hands on [this literature]. Under these circumstances, there have been some immature intellectuals, narrow in their learning and prejudiced, who have said that the Tibetan nationality has no traditions of literary composition. And some others have said that the literary traditions of the Tibetan nationality are limited to the aphorisms of Sakya Paṇḍita, the Vetala stories,\textsuperscript{125} or perhaps some historical tales. These exceedingly unworthy missiles of deprecation have been hurled once and again.

In consideration of the aforementioned circumstances, we have been motivated by the hope, first, of preserving and increasing the cultural traditions of the Tibetan nationality; second, of increasing the knowledge of certain persons [the “immature intellectuals” referred to above]; and, third, of benefiting to some extent intelligent youths who are especially interested in Tibetan literary composition. We have been able to gather together just a few drops from the limitless reservoir of Tibetan literature.\textsuperscript{126}

Clearly reflected here is an ideological dispute, which emerged in official circles involved with Tibetan affairs following the Cultural Revolution, concerning just what elements of the traditional culture were worthy of renewed support in a modern, socialist China.\textsuperscript{127} *Ingots of Gold* was in a sense offered as a supporting dossier for one side of the argument, seeking to demonstrate that there was indeed a Tibetan literature worthy of the name. Yogic songs, with their irreducible religious commitment, evidently could not be emphasized. More folkloric genres, such as dance songs, were already favored in Chinese cultural bureaus as properly representing the cultures of minority peoples and therefore contributed little to the rehabilitation of Tibetan literary culture. *Kār̥ya*, by contrast, clearly belonged to the sphere of literature

\textsuperscript{124} An oddly Sinicized locution, as the bamboo pen, not the brush, is the traditional Tibetan writing instrument.

\textsuperscript{125} Macdonald (1967 and 1972) provides a study of this genre, accompanied by the text and translation of one version of the tales.

\textsuperscript{126} Blo-bzang-chos-grags and Bo-o-nams-rtses-mo 1988, 1: 2.

\textsuperscript{127} This dispute has intensified in the Tibet Autonomous Region since 1996, and Tibet University’s Department of Tibetan Literature has at times been shut down for political reasons. Indian Buddhist texts of importance for Tibetan literary history, such as Śāntideva’s famous poem, the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (Introduction to the Conduct of Enlightenment), were at one
(in an honorific sense), and, what is more, the religious framework of much Tibetan kāvya could be explained in terms of literary convention rather than religious commitment per se. The renewed interest in Tibetan kāvya during the 1980s, therefore, can be read in part as one dimension of a broader effort to rehabilitate Tibetan culture in the wake of earlier repression and ongoing ideological criticism.

**Kāvya in Question**

Despite its revival, the Tibetan kāvya tradition has also come to be regarded as problematic—and not only among the ignorant or the ideologically motivated denigrators of traditional Tibetan culture. Tibetan kāvya flourished in the refined and insulated world of monastic scholars and cultivated aristocrats. It is by no means clear that it provides an adequate voice for Tibetans struggling with their place as marginalized citizens in a rapidly modernizing China.

The renewal of Tibetan-language publishing in China not only facilitated a revival of traditional literature but also provided new opportunities for young Tibetan writers, who were experimenting with nontraditional genres. Such experimentation was plainly more widespread in China than it was among refugees in India; for the latter were much concerned with the preservation of tradition and were increasingly using English as a medium to voice contemporary concerns, while the former were actually encouraged by Chinese authorities to emulate popular Chinese literature, for instance, the short stories of Lu Xun. One predictable result was the production of works representing socialist literary values in Tibetan; another result was that some of the younger Tibetan writers abandoned their own language in favor of Chinese, thus reaching a wider readership in China and abroad. But the experiment in modern Tibetan literature, including novels, short stories, and free-form poems adhering to the colloquial language, forged an opening nevertheless.

One of the most distinctive young voices to emerge was that of the poet and scholar Döndrupgyel (Don-grub-rgyal, 1953–1985), whose tragic death...
by his own hand has been interpreted in some quarters as a political statement on the Tibetan predicament in China. In his scholarship, Döndrupgyel devoted much attention to the documents and literary traditions of the early medieval Tibetan empire, and his research in this area formed the basis for his greatest achievement, The History and Character of the Song-Poem (Mgur glu’i lo rgyus dang khyad chos), an impressive dissertation of more than three hundred pages published in the year of his death. Beginning his work with a typology of Tibetan song-poems, he turns to examine the songs found in the Old Tibetan Chronicle from Dunhuang, offering detailed commentary upon them and attempting to adduce the formal features and poetics of the Old Tibetan song (chapter 2). This is followed by a similarly careful reading of selected songs by Milarepa (chapter 3) and then, turning to later authors, a far-reaching series of theoretical reflections on the form, inspiration (srog; lit. life force), ornamentation, and emotional dimensions of the Tibetan song-poem (chapters 4–8).

On surveying Döndrupgyel’s study, a question immediately arises concerning the relationship between his vision of the poetic universe of the song-poem and traditional Tibetan understandings of kävya. More clearly than any other text of which I am aware, his work demonstrates how kävya has become both problematic and indispensable to Tibetan literary culture. He writes:

Since the text of the Mirror of Poetry was translated into Tibetan, a profound power entered into Tibetan kävya and song, and it provided forceful encouragement for the promulgation of Tibetan song and kävya. But because all in common relied upon the root-text of the Mirror, within a few centuries the rapid promulgation of kävya and song slowed and high quality could not be maintained. In terms of form and subject matter, too, though there were new and fine compositions imbued with the special character of their age and of the nationality, there were not many thus produced. Moreover, while our scholars translated many poetic works like the Marvelous Vine [Avadānakalpatala], the Cloud Messenger [Meghadūta], and the Tale of King Jimutavāhana [that is, Nāgānanda], and composed the Tale of Rama, the Tale of the Bodhisattva Sadāprādita [of Tsong-kha-pa], and so on, and while even now there are innumerable model books on poetics, still it appears that they were unable to produce many new and novel poetic compositions that are easy to understand, facilitating comprehension. The chief reason for this was that the basis for earlier composition and kävya was not established among the Tibetan people as a whole, but instead was established only among those endowed with the learning involving mastery of the sciences. Owing to this, the treatises and model books

131. Don-grub-rgyal 1985. I am grateful to Professor Leonard van der Kuijp for providing me with a photocopy of this work.
of kāvya were bound up with many unknown or poorly known synonyms and archaisms, and adorned with incomprehensible poetic ornaments. Thus, the masses of the people were not able to study their compositions, or they found them hard to understand, so that the relationship between kāvya among our literary arts and the Tibetan people came to grow ever more distant.132

Döndrupgyel of course adopted here a sociological stance that accorded with accepted socialist theories of literature.133 This, however, in no way discredit the essential thrust of his argument, and it is clear that he resisted any facile tendency to condemn the Tibetan kāvya tradition outright. His position is evident in his qualified praise for some past literary achievements, but above all through his recourse throughout his work to theoretical categories drawn directly from the kāvya tradition. Thus, one section of his work is devoted to “ornaments of the song-poem that accord with those of kāvya,” while the lengthy chapter on the emotional dimensions of the song-poem is in fact an elaborate restatement of rasa theory.134 And in his own verses, which conclude chapters and important sections of the book, Döndrupgyel is ever reliant upon the conventions of Tibetan kāvya. We may draw the conclusion, then, that while in certain respects the Tibetan people and the kāvya tradition indeed parted company, in others kāvya became inalienably part of their poetry.

The six volumes of Döndrupgyel’s collected writings recently published in Beijing (Don-grub-rgyal 1998) include posthumous works found among his papers as well as short pieces that first appeared during his lifetime only in local Tibetan journals that are difficult to find outside collections in Gansu and Qinghai. These materials allow us to trace in some detail Döndrupgyel’s ongoing involvement with kāvya in his own writing, a course that interestingly retraces much of the ground covered earlier in this chapter.135

Döndrupgyel’s immersion in the literary voices of the past is in evidence, for instance, in his devotion to the Tibetan traditions of the Rāmāyaṇa. His collected poems, occupying the first volume of his works, begin with his own delightful retelling of the epic. The introductory essay summarizes the history of the Rāmāyaṇa and aspects of its spread in world literatures, its modern translations and reception. That this was among his sustained interests is demonstrated by a number of his other writings: his collected works in-

134. These two sections can be found at Don-grub-rgyal 1985: 240–244 and 271–306. The term I translate here as “emotional dimension” (nyams) may be used for either bhāva or rasa in translations from Sanskrit.
135. The collected writings, Don-grub-rgyal 1998, became available to me only while I was working on the final revision of this chapter. See Kapstein 2002 for precise volume and page references for the works alluded to here.
clude fragments from a translation of the Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa, apparently from a Chinese version, as well as commentarial notes on the renowned Tale of Ramāna, which we have considered earlier, while a modern translation of the archaic Tibetan Rāmāyaṇa from Dunhuang is found also there. Similarly, he devoted sustained attention both to the Tibetan yogic songs and to later traditions of kāvya, as represented in the writings of the Fifth Dalai Lama.

These interests are prominent, too, in his prose fiction. The short story Sens geong (A disease of the mind), which opens the second volume of the collected works, containing his prose fiction, is the tale of a young woman’s coming of age, related in the first person by its protagonist, Detso (Bde-mtsho). The language is rich and dense, informed throughout by an intertwining of Amdo idiom with the elaborate conventions of Tibetan kāvya, for example, when Detso describes first falling in love: “At that time my whole body was oppressed with shame, and though I could not even lift up my head, I was nevertheless pushed on by the action of mind, afflicted with love, so that my two guiding eyes were dispatched to accompany him as he departed.”136 The use of the Tibetan coinage modeled upon Sanskrit nāyana, “that which guides,” to refer to the eyes well reflects Döndrupgyel’s knowledge and employment of Indian conventions.

At the present time Tibetan literary culture, torn between traditional monasticism and South Asian, Chinese, and Western modernities, is in transition. In his own poems Döndrupgyel wished both to break new ground and to retrieve what still seemed valuable from the past. As he wrote in one of his verses:

What fills my ears right here and now
is nourishment
for our future.137

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Tibetan Sources


tary of Ngag-dbang-bstan-pa'i-rgya-mtsho. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang.
———. 1982. Legs par bshad pa rin po che'i gter dang de'i'grel pa. Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang.

Non-Tibetan References


PART 5

The Twinned Histories of Urdu and Hindi
MODERN ORIGIN MYTHS OF HINDI AND URDU

Using the term “early Urdu” is not without its risks. “Urdu” as a language name is of comparatively recent origin, and the question of what was or is early Urdu has long since passed from the realm of history, first into the colonialist constructions of the history of Urdu/Hindi, and then into the political and emotional space of Indian (Hindu) identity in modern India. For the average Hindi user today, it is a matter of faith to believe that the language he knows as “Hindi” is of ancient origin and that its literature originates with Amir Khusrau (1253–1325), if not even earlier. Many such people also believe that the pristine Hindi or “Hindvi” became Urdu sometime in the eighteenth century, when the Muslims “decided” to veer away from Hindi as it existed at that time and adopted a heavy, Persianized style of language, which soon became a distinguishing characteristic of the Muslims of India.1 Even scholars often suggest or state that the language today known as Hindi is the rightful claimant to the space in Indian literary history occupied, at least up to the end of the seventeenth century, by the language today called Urdu. The positing of Hindi against Urdu has had far-reaching effects on the literary culture of Urdu, yet few of these have been documented—much

All translations from Urdu, Hindi, and Persian are mine. The transliteration scheme is that of Pritchett 1994. Grateful acknowledgment is made to Sheldon Pollock for suggesting lines of inquiry, to Frances Pritchett for asking the right questions and helping with editing, and to Sunil Sharma for general assistance.

1. In recent times, this case has been most elaborately presented by Amrit Rai (see Amrit Rai 1984). Rai’s thesis, though full of inconsistencies and tendentious speculation rather than hard facts—and of fanciful interpretation of actual facts—was never refuted by Urdu scholars as it should have been.
less discussed and explained in proper perspective. However, no discussion can now afford to ignore the fact that there are two claimants to a single linguistic and literary tradition, and that the whole issue is more political than academic. I begin, therefore, with a brief historical account of the origin myths and realities of the terms “Hindi” and “Urdu.”

Early names for the language now called Urdu were (more or less in chronological order) “Hindvi,” “Hindi,” “Dhilavi,” “Gujri,” “Dakani,” and “Rekhtah.” In the north, both “Rekhtah” and “Hindi” were popular as names for the same language from sometime before the eighteenth century, and the name “Hindi” was used, in preference to “Rekhtah,” from about the mid-nineteenth century. In fact, the spoken language was almost always referred to as “Hindi.” Even in the early twentieth century, the name “Hindi” could be used—as it was by Iqbal, for example—to refer to Urdu. “Hindvi” was in use until about the end of the eighteenth century. Muṣḥafi (1750–1824) says in his first divān (poetry volume), compiled around 1785:

Oh Muṣḥafi, put away Persian now,
Hindi verse is the mode of the day.

“Urdu” as a name for the language seems to have occurred for the first time around 1780. All, or almost all, of the earliest examples are from Muṣḥafi again. He says in his first divān:

Muṣḥafi has, most surely,
a claim of superiority in Rekhtah—
That is to say, he has expert knowledge
of the language of (the) urdū.2

“Urdu” here may mean the city (of Shāhjahānābād, that is, Delhi) rather than the language. In the following instance, from the fourth divān, compiled around 1796, the reference seems clearly to the language name:

They put gosh and chashm everywhere in place of nāk and kān,
And believe that their language is the language called “Urdu.”3

The name “Urdu” seems to have begun its life as zabān-e urdū-e mu‘allā-e shāhjahānābād (the language of the exalted city/court of Shāhjahānābād) and originally seems to have signified Persian, not Urdu. It soon became shortened to zabān-e urdū-e mu‘allā, then to zabān-e urdū, and then to urdū. The authors of Hobson-Jobson cite a reference from 1560 in support of “urdū bazaar” (camp-market). They also claim that the word urdū came to India

3. Muṣḥafi [1796] 1969: 578. Gosh and chashm are the Persian, and nāk and kān are the Indic, words for “nose” and “ear.”
with Bābur (1526), that his camp was called urdū-e muʿallā (the exalted camp, or court), and that the language that grew up around the court/camp was called zabān-e urdū-e muʿallā. While the citation is obviously correct, the commentary of the authors is wrong for many reasons: there were plenty of Turks in India before Bābur; Bābur never had an extended stay in Delhi; Hindi/Hindvi/Dihlavi was already in use in and around Delhi before Bābur. No new language grew up in northern India as a result of the advent of the Mughals there.

By the eighteenth century, if not sooner, the word urdū meant the city of Delhi. It retained this sense until at least the early nineteenth century. Inshā and Qatīl say in Daryā-e latāʿifat (The river of lightness and subtlety, 1807) that “the residents of Murshidabad and ‘Azimābād [Patna], in their own estimation, are competent Urdu speakers and regard their own city as the urdū”; Inshā means that they are really provincial and are not true citizens of Shāhjāhānābād. Further evidence is provided in the Persian literature of the time. Around 1747–1752, Sirāj ud-Dīn ‘Alī Khān-e ‘Arzū (1687/88–1756), the major linguist and Persian lexicographer of his time, composed Navādir ul-alfāz (Rare and valuable among words), in which he constantly uses both urdū and urdū-e muʿallā to mean Delhi. Commenting on the word chhīnīl (woman of easy virtue, harlot) for instance, he says, “We who are from Hind and live in the urdū-e muʿallā do not know this word.” In another work he declares: “Thus it is established that the most excellent and normative speech is that of the urdū, and the Persian of this place is reliable... and poets of [various] places, like Khāqānī of Sharvān, and Nizāmī of Ganjah, and Sanāʾī of Ghaznī, and Khusraw of Delhi, spoke in the same established language, and that language is the language of the urdū.” It is thus obvious that in the 1750s, the terms urdū, urdū-e muʿallā, and zabān-e urdū-e muʿallā did not, at least among the elite, mean the language that is known as Urdu today. The name zabān-e urdū-e muʿallā probably began to refer to Hindi around 1790–1795—at any rate, no earlier than January 1772.

Although many of the Mughal royals, including Bābur himself, knew Hindi in some measure (later Mughals knew at least one Indian language quite well), Urdu became the language used around the court only in January 1772, when Shāh ʿĀlam II (r. 1759–1806) moved to Delhi. The court’s official language remained Persian, but Shāh ʿĀlam II, because of his long sojourn in Allahabad and his personal predilection, spoke Hindi on informal occasions. This informal use, along with Shāh ʿĀlam’s knowledge of languages (including Sanskrit), patronage and love for Hindi, and practice of Hindi literature, gave the language respectability. In fact, in his prose narrative Dās-

tānājā‘ib ul-qisas (The strangest of stories), begun around 1792–1793, Shāh ʿAlam identified the language of the tale as Hindi.⁶

For their part, the English seem to have found, from the first, a set of names of their own liking or invention. Edward Terry, companion to Thomas Roe at Jahāngir’s court, described the language in his A Voyage to East India (London, 1655) as “Indostan,” saying that it was a powerful language that could say much in a few words; it had a high content of Arabic and Persian, but was written differently from Arabic and Persian.⁷ In late-eighteenth-century colonial encounters, the name that the British most favored for Hindvi/Hindi was “Hindustani.” This was perhaps because it seemed orderly and logical for the main language of “Hindustan” to be called “Hindustani,” just as the language of England was English, and so on. “Hindustani” as a language name was not entirely unknown. Sayyid Sulaimān Nadvi cites occurrences of it in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Persian texts; he himself in fact favors it over “Urdu” as a language name because of the negative associations of the latter.⁸ Yet “Hindustani” never became popular: as a language name it does not occur in any major Persian dictionary, and most native speakers preferred “Hindi” or “Rekhtah.”

The British identified what they called “Hindustani” as largely a Muslim language, though they also granted that it was spoken, or at least understood, all over India. Hobson-Jobson describes “Hindostane” as

the language that the Mahommedans of Upper India, and eventually the Mahommedans of the Deccan, developed out of the Hindi dialect of the Doab chiefly, and the territory around Agra and Delhi, with a mixture of Persian vocabularies and phrases, and a readiness to adopt other foreign words. It is also called Ooroo, i.e., the language of the Urdu (‘Horde’) or Camp. This language was for a long time a kind of Mahommedan lingua franca over all India, and still possesses that character over a large part of the country, and among certain classes.⁹

The Oxford English Dictionary (1993) is even more explicit than Yule and Burnell were in 1886, defining “Hindustani” as “the language of the Muslim conquerors of Hindustan, being a form of Hindi, with a large admixture of Arabic, Persian, and other foreign elements; also called Urdu, i.e. za-ban-e Urdu, language of the camp, sc. of the Mughal conquerors.”¹⁰ Thus both Hobson-Jobson and the Oxford English Dictionary define “Hindustani” in con-

---

formity with British perceptions or policy: namely, there are two languages—Hindustani for the Muslims, Hindi for the Hindus.

In 1796, well before Yule and Burnell, John Gilchrist published a grammar of the “Hindoostanee Language,” which included examples from “the best poets who have composed their several works in that mixed Dialect, also called Oordoo, or the polished language of the Court, and which even at this day pervades with more or less purity, the vast provinces of a once powerful empire.” Writing somewhat grandly of the British adoption of the term “Hindustani,” Gilchrist observed that “Hindoostan is a compound word, equivalent to Hindoo-land or Negro-land. . . . It is chiefly inhabited by Hindoos and Moosalmans; whom we may safely comprise, as well as their language, under the general, conciliating, comprehensive term Hindoostanee.” He gives the following reasons for his terminology:

This name of the country being modern, as well as the vernacular tongue in question, no other appeared so appropriate as it did to me, when I first engaged in the study and cultivation of the language. That the natives and others call it also Hindee, Indian, from Hind, the ancient appellation of India, cannot be denied; but as this is apt to be confounded with Hinduee, Hindoo,ee, Hindvee, the derivative from Hindoo, I adhere to my original opinion, that we should invariably discard all other denominations of the popular speech of this country, including the unmeaning word Moors, and substitute for them Hindoostanee, whether the people here constantly do so or not: as they can hardly discriminate sufficiently, to observe the use and propriety of such restrictions, even when pointed out to them.

Hinduee, I have treated as the exclusive property of the Hindus alone; and have therefore constantly applied it to the old language of India, which prevailed before the Moosulman invasion; and in fact, now constitutes among them, the basis or ground-work of the Hindoostanee, a comparatively recent superstructure, composed of Arabic and Persian, in which the two last may be considered in the same relation, that Latin and French bear to English.

In addition to cheerfully and confidently assuming the right to make decisions for the natives—since they themselves apparently have no discrimination and do not know what’s good for them—Gilchrist also perpetrates a canard on Persian and Persian speakers (among whom, at that time, there were many Indians as well) by saying that in Persian hindū means “Negro.” Though he recognizes Hindvi as the “basis or ground-work of the Hindoo-

13. This canard has found echoes in the modern Indian English-language press, where absurd meanings have been foisted on the Persian word hindū. The latest is by Wagish Shukla, a normally careful and humane scholar. Reviewing Vasudha Dalmia’s book on Bhāratendu Harischandra, Shukla claims that in Persian, Hindū means “nigger” (Shukla 1997).
Stanee,” he omits to mention—or doesn’t know—that Hindvi was not a separate language but was merely an early name for the same language for which he was now prescribing the name “Hindoostanee.”

Gilchrist lifted most of his theory from Nathaniel Brassey Halhed (1751–1830), who was one of the first to have written a grammar of the Bangla language (1778). Halhed identified a language called “Hindustanic” that “had two varieties, one which was spoken over most of Hindustan proper and was ‘indubitably derived from Sanskrit.’” The other was “developed by the Muslim invaders of India, who could not learn the language spoken by the Hindus, who, in order to maintain the purity of their own tongue, introduced more and more abstruse terms from Sanskrit.” Thus the Muslims introduced “exotic” words “which they superimposed on the ‘grammatical principles of the original Hindustanic.’” Here we can see the source not only for Gilchrist’s grand prescriptions but also for the definitions of the words “Urdu” and “Hindustani” that we find from Fallon (1866) through Platts (1884) and the Hobson-Johnson (1886) to the Oxford English Dictionary (1993). Fallon declared “Urdu” to mean:

an army; a camp; a market. *urdū,i m‘alla,* the royal camp or army (generally means the city of Dīhli or Shahjahanabad; and *urdū,i mu‘alla ki zaban,* the court language). This term is very commonly applied to the Hindustani language as spoken by the Musalman population of India proper.

In strikingly similar language, Platts defined it as:

Army; camp; market of a camp; s.f. *(urdū zabān),* the Hindūstānī language as spoken by the Muhammadians of India, and by Hindus who have intercourse with them or who hold appointments in the Government courts &c. (It is composed of Hindi, Arabic, and Persian, Hindi constituting the back-bone, so to speak):—*urdū-i-mu‘alla,* The royal camp or army (generally means the city of Delhi or Shāhjahānābād; the court language *(urdū-i-mu‘alla ki zabān);* the Hindūstānī language as spoken in Delhi.

The Oxford English Dictionary identifies “Urdu” with “Hindustani,” and goes on to distinguish “Hindustani, the lingua franca,” from the tongue that is the official language of Pakistan!

In his Dictionary, English and Hindoostanee (Calcutta, 1790) Gilchrist declares that Sanskrit was derived from “Hinduwee,” which was spoken over much of India before the Muslim invasion. He further suggests that repeated invasions of Muslims resulted in the creation of “Hindustani”: “Muslims referred to this language as ‘Oorduwer’ in its military form, ‘Rekhtu’ in its po-

ethical form, and ‘Hindee’ as the everyday language of the Hindoos.”

Worth noting here first is the mutilation of the term urdu-e mu'alla: Gilchrist does not know that it is a compound, and its first part standing alone is meaningless, so that no one ever wrote, or spoke, “urdū-e.” Next we might note the entirely imaginary classification of the language: military, literary, and Hindu. Finally, we can see here the source for Gilchrist’s confident prediction that “the Hindoos will naturally lean to the Hinduwee, while the Moosulmans will of course be more partial to Arabic and Persian; whence two styles arise.” That the prediction found many ways of coming very nearly true should not permit us to ignore the fact that it was based on historically false and morally questionable premises.

Since the name “Hindustani” did not work in spite of Gilchrist’s confidence, the British were obliged, eventually, to give it up. They found a better alternative: “Urdu” was a name that did not have the faintest reverberations of a Hindu link. On the contrary, since it was a Turkish word, its Muslim connections were obvious. As we have seen, Shāhjahānābād gradually came to be called urdu-e mu'alla, and the language spoken there became “the language of the urdu-e mu'alla.” And Khuṭ-e Arzū had, of course, described Persian in exactly the same terms. Now with the patronage and practice of Shāh ʿAlam II, Hindi, rather than Persian, began to be called “the language of the urdu-e mu'alla.” Though the shortened name “Urdu” didn’t instantly become universally popular, the etymology of the word urdu, and the fact that in Rekhtah/Hindi the word urdu did mean, among other things, “camp,” or “camp-market,” made it easy for the British to propose that Hindi/Rekhtah was born in Muslim army camp-markets, and that that is why it was called zabān-e urdu-e mu'alla.

The earliest printed source for this fiction from an Indian author seems to be Mir Amman Dihlavi’s Bagh o bahār (Garden and spring), a prose romance produced in 1803 at the College of Fort William, under Gilchrist’s direction, as a text for teaching Urdu/Hindustani to British civil servants. Mir Amman says that he wrote the story in the “language of urdu-e mu'alla.” He adds that he was asked by Gilchrist to “translate” the story into “pure Indian speech, as spoken among themselves by the people of the urdū, Hindu or Muslim, women, men, children and young people.” In the pages following, he proceeds to apprise the reader of the “true facts about the language of the urdū.” He says:

Finally, Amīr Taimūr (with whose House the rule still remains, though only in name), conquered India. Due to his advent, and extended sojourn here, the bazaar of the army entered the city. And that’s why the market-place of the city

came to be called *urdu*. When King Akbar ascended the throne, people of all communities, hearing of the appreciation and free flow of generosity as practiced by that peerless House, came from all four sides of the land and gathered in his Presence. But each had his distinctive talk and speech. By virtue of their coming together for give and take, trade and commerce, question and answer, a [new] language of the camp-market came to be established.¹⁹

Mir Amman did not tell the reader that there was a gap of a century and a half, as well as a dynastic change, between the coming of Taimūr (1398) and the advent of Akbar (r. 1556–1605). Moreover, Akbar never lived in Delhi, and the only time he would have had an army camping near Delhi would have been in 1556, when he fought Hemū at Panipat, eighty kilometers away. Most important, Mir Amman omitted to mention that the language in question was called Hindvi/Hindi from early times, and “Hindi” was its commonest name in his day. But the immense success of *Bagh o bahār* as a school text ultimately caused Mir Amman’s narrative to prevail, in every sense of the word.

The story didn’t come to prevail quickly, though. A long time was required for “Hindi” and “Urdu” to take root as the names of two different languages. The native speaker’s resistance to the term “Urdu” may have had something to do with the fact that the name suggested false images about the origins and nature of the language. As late as December 1858, Ghālib was uncomfortable with “Urdu” as a language name, and he used it as a masculine word in a letter to Shiv Nārā’īn Ārām; language names are invariably feminine in Urdu, but *urdū* in the sense of “camp, camp-market” is masculine. Sayyid Sulaimān Nadvī, as we have seen, preferred “Hindustani” for just those reasons; “Hindi,” of course, was unavailable to him by then.²⁰

Aḥad ʿAlī Khān Yaktā, a poet and physician of Lucknow, wrote *Dastūr ul-fayābat* (The exemplar of proper speech), a small tract on Urdu syntax—he uses both “Hindi” and “Urdu” for the language—in or before 1798.²¹ He wrote the book in Lucknow and was uninfluenced by British political considerations. The *Dastūr* contains the earliest printed observations made by a knowledgeable native Urdu speaker on the origins of Urdu:

> And the reason for the appearance of this exquisite language is . . . that the wise and the learned of the time and the age, and the masters of all arts and sciences, persons of excellence and erudition, poets and people from good families, wherever they were, came from all sides and all shores of the world, traveled to this large and desire-fulfilling territory, and attained their heartfelt wishes and purposes. And most of them adopted this paradise-adorned

land as their own native place. Thus, due to their coming and going to the court, and having to deal with the local people, it became necessary for them to converse in this language.

Inevitably, during intercourse between them and these, and these and them, in the course of conversations, they mixed in each other’s vocabulary as much as needed, and got their business done. When this had continued over a long span of time, a state was reached when, by virtue of absorption of words and connections of phrases from each other, it could be described as a new language; for neither the Arabic remained Arabic, nor Persian, Persian; nor, on the same analogy, did the dialects and vernaculars included under the rubric “Indian” [which had contributed to the new language] retain their original form. But even at this time, a single mode, such as should exist, had not stabilized. . . . And every community and group used to privilege its own idiom over the others.

Yaktā goes on to say that, ultimately, persons of “knowledge and wisdom, having no choice” laid down a standard register: among its requirements was speech that was

very clear, familiar to the temperament, and easily comprehensible to the plebeian and the elite. . . . But speech conforming to the above conditions is not to be found except among those inhabitants of Shahjahanābād who reside within the city’s ramparts, or in the language of the offspring of these honorable persons, who have migrated to other cities and taken up residence there. Thus the language of those inhabitants of Lucknow who are not its ancient residents, and were not there in the past, is nowadays closer to the standard speech.22

These remarks are quite in accord with the privilege that the Delhi idiom arrogated to itself soon after Hindi/Rekhtah became the main medium of literature there. The literary culture of Delhi became, for all intents and purposes, Urdu’s literary culture (as is discussed in a later section of this essay). The British apparently had no problems with this. But stories about the origin of Urdu were another matter.

Yaktā’s observations about the origin of Urdu must have been based on the common perception of educated native speakers of those times. These perceptions were hardly suitable material for stories about Urdu as the language of “Muslim invaders” and “conquerors,” a language that only those Hindus who were in the employ of a Muslim ruler had adopted—practically under duress. Yaktā was no linguist—historical or comparative—and did not know that the dialect now called Khari Boli, the developed form of which is Urdu, had existed prior to the arrival of the Muslims. Muslims functioned as cata-

lysts in refashioning the dialect into a full-fledged language. The broad story of Urdu’s birth and growth as given by Yaktā is accurate enough, and it differs from Mir Amman’s British-approved story in every important respect.

There is evidence to suggest that the Hindus, for whose “benefit” a whole new linguistic tradition was being constructed in the nineteenth century, were initially not too happy either. Christopher King argues that a class of “educated Hindi speakers, committed to a style of the khari boli continuum which differentiated them from the Urdu speakers,” had not yet arisen in the north by the 1850s. In King’s words: “To find statements by Hindus educated in the Sanskrit tradition, denying the existence of this new style of khari boli, then, should come as no surprise.” He narrates an incident that shows that young students at Benares Sanskrit College were unaware of what Europeans meant by “Hindi”; for them, hundreds of dialects deserved the name. Nevertheless, the British succeeded in a project that was motivated by colonial arrogance and that engendered strong emotions and a special kind of faith in “Hindi/Hindu” identity.

At the time that modern Hindi was being groomed to occupy center stage on the Indian linguistic and literary scene, Urdu was being denigrated on moral and religious grounds. Bharatendu Harishchandra (1850–1885), for instance, who is widely regarded as the father of modern standard Hindi, was at that time not only switching from Urdu to Hindi but also writing savage, if vulgar, satires mocking “the death of Urdu Begam”—among whose mourners were Arabic, Persian, Pushto, and Panjabi, for they shared a common, “foreign,” script. Addressing the Education Commission of 1882, Bhāratendu testified (in English):

> By the introduction of the Nagari character they [the Muslims] would lose entirely the opportunity of plundering the world by reading one word for another and misconstruing the real sense of the contents. . . . The use of Persian letters in office is not only an injustice to Hindus, but it is a cause of annoyance and inconvenience to the majority of the loyal subjects of Her Imperial Majesty.

23. King 1994: 90–91. Vasudha Dalmia has recently quoted Grierson (1889) as saying that the “wonderful” hybrid language known to Europeans as “Hindi” was “invented” by the Europeans themselves. She goes on to say that by the 1860s, “the nationalist supporters of Hindi” who were involved deeply in “the creation of myths and geneologies [sic] concerning the origin of Hindi” would have treated as “preposterous” any suggestion that “their language was an artificial creation.” Their belief was that “Hindi was spoken in homes across the breadth of North India and this had been the case before the Muslim invasion.” Both imperialists and nationalists believed “the Hindus possessed a language of their own, which set them off not only from contemporary Muslims, but also from Muslims in the past.” While the English “stressed their own agency in the creation of their language,” the Hindus “claimed continuity through the ages.” Dalmia 1997: 149–50.

There were other anti-Urdu voices at that time, especially in Benares, but Bhāratendu Harishchandra’s diatribes stand out, coming from a creative writer who began his career in Urdu and who still occupies a place in the history of modern Urdu literature. As late as 1871, he wrote that his language, and that of the women of his community, was Urdu. In fact, belonging as he did to the pachkāhī (western) branch of the Agrāv clan, he may not even have known the Benares-area folk language of his time. He certainly looked down upon the purabī (eastern) branch of the clan. 25 No other Hindu writer seems to have switched from Urdu to Hindi in the 1880s, but after that time the name “Hindi” began to be used less and less for Urdu. As we have seen, the British also more or less gave up on “Hindustani” once the name “Urdu” became almost universally popular. Writing in 1874, Platts had compromised, titling his work A Grammar of Hindustānī or Urdu. As late as 1879, Fallon had still named his work A New Hindustani English Dictionary. But by the time Platts published his famous dictionary (1884), the new nomenclature was firmly in place: its title was A Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi, and English.

New Urdu writers continued to rise from among the Hindus, but the Muslims, perhaps unconsciously responding to the pressure of official British opinion, tended to exclude Hindu writers from the Urdu canon (and the Persian canon too, but that is another story). In his enormously popular history of Urdu poetry called Ab-e hayāt (Water of life, 1880), Muhammad Husain Āzād (1831–1910) ignores numerous Hindu poets of the eighteenth century, including such major figures as Sarb Sukh Divānā (1727/28–1788), Jasvant Singh Parvānah (1756/57–1813), Budh Singh Qalandar (fl. 1770s), and Tikā Ram Tasalli (fl. 1790s). Among poets nearer his own time, Āzād makes only marginal mention of Ghanshyām Lāl Āṣī, a leading poet of Delhi and a pupil of Shāh Naṣīr (1760s–1838). Āzād found only one Hindu poet worth more than passing mention: Dayā Shankar Naśīm (1811–1844), whom he discusses anachronistically and confusingly along with Mihr Ḥasan (1727–1786). 26

In 1893, Alṣaf Husain Hālī (1837–1914) published his Muqaddamah-e shīr o shā’īrī (Introduction to poetry and poetics), an extensive theoretical statement on the nature of poetry and an indictment of Urdu poetry following official British ideas about what was wrong with it. Next to Water of Life, the Muqaddamah remains the outstanding work of Urdu criticism of the nineteenth century, commanding nearly absolute authority even now. The Muqaddamah is dotted with references to and quotations from Urdu poets of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. With the exception of four ref-

erences to Dayā Shankar Nasim—two of them quite perfunctory and all of them disapproving—there is no Hindu among them. By the end of the century a number of potential Urdu-readers were switching over to Hindi in northern India, and many institutions and movements had sprung up there to aggressively sell the Nagari script and modern Hindi. Yet the Hindu community continued to produce Urdu writers, and the end-of-century scene included a number of dominating, or potentially dominating, Hindu literary figures in Urdu.

In 1939, the Delhi station of All India Radio broadcast a series of six talks entitled Hindustani kya hai (What is Hindustani?). The time and the subject were both fraught with emotion. Urdu’s case was most forcefully presented by Brij Mohan Datâtreya Kaffi and Šabd ul-Haq. But among them all, Šârâ Chand came out with the most historically succinct presentation. He said:

For the Hindus, Lallûjî Lâl, Bâdal Misrâ, Benî Narâ’in, and others were ordered [by the authorities at the College of Fort William] to prepare books comprising prose texts. Their task was even more difficult. Braj did exist then as the language of literature, but it had prose scarcely even in name. So what could they do? They found a way out by adopting the language of Mir Amman, [Šer Šali] Afsos, and others, but they excised Arabic/Persian words from it, replacing them with those of Sanskrit and Hindi [Braj, etc.]. Thus, within the space of less than ten years, two new languages... were decked out and presented [before the public] at the behest of the foreigner. Both were look-alikes in form and structure, but their faces were turned away from each other... and from that day to this, we are wandering directionless, on two paths.

Šârâ Chand thus clearly suggested the British political motivation; five years later, writing his monograph The Problem of Hindustani, he blamed the misguided “zeal” of some “college professors” at Fort William. His conclusion was, however, the same: the zeal of the professors led to the creation of “a new type of Urdu from which Persian and Arabic words were removed and replaced by Sanskrit words.” Although this was done “ostensibly to provide the Hindus with a language of their own,” the step had “far-reaching con-

28. The harm, however, had been done. True, there were historians like R.W. Frazer, who said, “When [Urdu was] used for literary purposes by the Mussalmans, the vocabulary employed was mainly Persian or Arabic. When used as a lingua franca, for the people speaking the various dialects of Hindustan, the vocabulary is mainly composed of the common words of the marketplace. . . . High Hindi is purely a book language evolved under the influence of the English who induced native writers to compose works for general use in a form of Hindustani in which all the words of Arabic and Persian were omitted, Sanskrit words being employed in their place.” (If he had said “by Mussalmans and Hindus” instead of merely “by the Mussalmans,” he would have had it exactly right.) But such voices were few and far between. See Frazer [1898] 1915: 265.
sequences,” so that “India is still suffering from this artificial bifurcation of tongues.”

The sane and dispassionate accounts of historians like Tārā Chand were not enough to uproot the plant of doubt and suspicion, especially when it was fed and nurtured by waters from chauvinistic streams. Francis Robinson’s conclusion that “an increasingly important development in the 1880’s and 1890’s [was] the tendency of the Hindi movement to become a communal crusade against the Urdu language” is borne out by the report of the Education Commission set up by the British in 1882. In his evidence before the commission Shiv Prasād, a senior official in the Department of Education (then called “Public Instruction”) in U.P., who had switched his support from Urdu to Hindi, said: “For Hindus, Hindi was a language purged of all the Arabic and Persian accretions which served to remind them of the Muslims’ supremacy while the Nagri script had a religious significance. . . . For Muslims on the other hand Hindi was dirty and they thought most degrading to learn it.” Thus, he argued, in the “second half of the nineteenth century, Urdu and the Persian script in which it was written became a symbol of Muslim power and influence.” Shiv Prasād was also unhappy over the popularity of Urdu—which, he somewhat inconsistently added, was becoming a mother tongue for the Hindus.

One of the cultural consequences of the Hindi-Nagari movement of the late nineteenth century was the inculcation among Urdu speakers of feelings of guilt and inferiority about Urdu script and orthography. Not only Harishchandra, as we have seen, but also other supporters of Nagari, like Rājendralāl Mitra, an influential Sanskrit scholar of early-modern Bengal, claimed that Urdu’s script was intrinsically inferior. The seed for these ideas, too, had been sown by Gilchrist, who published the Oriental Fabulist (1803) to prove that “Hindoostanee, Persian, Arabic, Brij Bhasha, Bangla and Sanskrit” could all be written in the roman script “with ease and correctness.” The great success of the colonial discourse in India can be judged from the fact that a modern, liberal historian like Siddiqi actually admires Gilchrist for his proposal to romanize the script of these languages: he looks upon it as a step toward the “unification” of the country. In fact, the roman script cannot (without diacritics) configure many important Urdu sounds, but the British introduced it for the army’s use anyway; apart from army and missionary texts, however, roman script never caught on. Nevertheless, calls for “improvements” in Urdu orthography, or even script, are still made, and not in “anti-Urdu” circles alone. The Urdu linguistic and liter-

ary community is perhaps the only one in the world that feels uncomfortable, and even guilty, about almost every aspect of its script and orthography. To this must be added a surreptitious feeling of guilt generated by the Urdu literary community’s almost universal belief that Urdu was a “military language” after all.

The fault for this, I think, lies with Urdu historians from 1880 on, who did not stop to examine the implications of the fact that if the name “Urdu” first came into use during the last few years of the eighteenth century, as we have seen, it could not possibly have any military implications. The only literary historian who did realize the anomaly here was Grahame Bailey. He even offered a tentative explanation for the late appearance of the name “Urdu.” Unfortunately, he also made a number of fanciful observations about the origin of Urdu, and as a result his writings on this matter seem not to have been taken seriously. Bailey argued that “Urdu was born in 1027; its birthplace was Lahore, its parent Old Panjabi; Old Khari was its step-parent; it had no direct relationship with Braj. The name Urdu first appears 750 years later.” And he noted some queries:

1. Why was there a delay of centuries in giving the name Urdu?
2. If a new name had to be given in the eighteenth century, why was this name chosen for the language when it had many, many years previously been given up for the army?
3. If the army was not called urdu till Babur’s time, 1526, the language that had then existed for nearly five hundred years must already have had a name. Why was that name given up?34

Bailey noted that the problem was easier to state than solve. Yet to him must go the credit for at least realizing that there was a problem. Bailey in fact did suggest an answer, but with extreme diffidence: “Jules Bloch made a striking suggestion, which he admits is only an intuitive feeling required to be substantiated by proof, that the name Urdu is due to Europeans.”35 Bailey didn’t investigate Bloch’s idea further, for he felt that since Gilchrist always called the language “Hindustani,” and in 1796 reported—as we saw earlier—that the language was also called “Oordoo,” it could not have been the British who introduced the name. This is quite true. But it was the British who popularized the name, for apparently political reasons. Even Bailey fell into the “military error” by believing that urdu means “army” and nothing more, when in fact there is no recorded instance of this word ever being used in the Urdu-Hindi-Rekhtah-Dakani-Gujri language to denote “army.” As borne

34. Bailey 1938: 1, 6. I am grateful to Frances Pritchett for bringing to my attention Grahame Bailey’s writings on this subject.
35. Bailey 1938: 3.
out even by the definitions of the word *urdū* from Fallon and Platts that I cite earlier, its most popular meaning was “the city of Shāhjahanābād.”

The blame for not effectively refuting the theories about the antiquity of modern Hindi, and even its anteriority over Urdu, must also lie with the historians of Urdu—all of whom failed to address this issue scientifically and logically, if they dealt with it at all. Premchand, though not a historian by any means, had clearer ideas than they on this subject. He advocated the use of “Hindustani”—which he defined as a simplified Urdu/Hindi—but recognized that Hindi was not a separate language as such. In an address delivered at Bombay in 1934, he declared, “In my view, Hindi and Urdu are one and the same language. When they have common verbs and subjects, there can be no doubt of their being one.” Speaking in Madras before the Dakshin Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha, also in 1934, he said, “The name ‘Hindi’ was given by the Muslims, and until just fifty years ago, the language now being described as ‘Urdu’ was called ‘Hindi’ even by the Muslims.”

But remarks like these were not decisive and had no force of theory, and so fictions about Urdu’s “Muslim military character” persisted, and are generally current even now.

BEGINNINGS

Urdu literature may have begun with Masʿūd Saʿdī Salmān Lāhorī (1036–1121). Nothing survives of the “Hindi” *divān* that he is reported to have put together. We know about it from Muḥammad Ṭūfī’s *Lubāb al-albāb* (The essence of wisdom). Composed in Sindh around 1220–1227, the *Lubāb* says of Salmān: “The quantity of his verse is greater than that of all the poets, and he has three *divāns*: one Arabic, the other Persian, and the third Hindvi, and whatever from his poetry has been heard or come across [by me] is masterly and most pleasing.” Since the term “Hindi” was used occasionally in the Indian medieval period to denote any Indian language, a question has been raised by modern scholars about the Indian language in which Salmān actually wrote. Khusrau, writing a few decades after Ṭūfī, helps to clarify the question.

In his *Maṣnawi Nūh sipihr* (Nine heavens, 1317–1318), Khusrau devotes an entire long section to India. Placing the “Indian speech” above Persian and Turkish because of its “pleasing vocabulary,” he goes on to say:

In short, it’s quite without purpose  
To try and gain the heart’s pleasure  
From Persian, Turkish, or Arabic.

---

36. Premchand 1983: 108, 124. I am grateful to Professor Jaʿfar Razā of the University of Allahābād for drawing my attention to these texts of Premchand.

Since I am Indian, it’s better
To draw breath
From one’s own station. In this land
In every territory, there is
A language specific, and not so
By chance either. There are
Sindhi, Lahori [Panjabi], Kashmīrī, Kībar [?],
Dhaur Samandari [Kannada], Telangi [Telugu], Gujar [Gujarati],
Maḥārī [Tamil], Gaurī [West Bengali dialect], and the languages
Of Bengal, Avadh, Delhi
And its environs, all within
Their own frontiers.

All these are Hindvi, and
Are in common use
For all purposes since antiquity.38

Some of the glosses I provide here are tentative; nevertheless, one can see
that Khusrau distinguishes Lahori (Panjabi) from other languages like
Avadhi, or the muṣṭalāḥ (specific speech) of Delhi and its surrounds.

Earlier, in the magnificent Dībāchah (Preface) to Ghurrat al-kamāl (The
new moon of perfection, 1294), his third dīvān, Khusrau said:

I am a Turk from India,
My response is Hindvi.
Egyptian candy I don’t have
For doing converse in Arabic.

I have presented to friends a few quires of [my] Hindvi verse too. Here I con-
sider it sufficient to just mention this and not give examples, for no delecta-
tion is to be had from inserting Hindvi words into sophisticated Persian, ex-
cpt when needed [for explaining something.]

Since I am the Parrot of India
If you ask for the truth
Ask in Hindvi
So that I reply in dulcet tones.

He then offers “An Account of the Compilation of Three Dīvāns” that
emphasizes his own uniqueness: “Although Masʿūd Sāʿd Salmān does have
three dīvāns, he has them in Arabic, Persian, and Hindvi.” How one wishes
Khusrau had given some examples of his own work, for almost nothing of
his “Hindvi” survives today. But his account does make two things clear:
Masʿūd Sāʿd Salmān wrote in Hindvi, and so did Khusrau. The reason Khus-
rau’s Hindvi works did not survive seems to be that he didn’t write much in
Hindvi, and didn’t consider what he wrote worth saving. In Nūh sipihr, writ-

ten nearly twenty-five years later, Khusrau claimed some knowledge of Sanskrit but said nothing about being a poet in Hindvi.  

Clearly, Khusrau did not consider his Hindvi efforts worth preserving because Hindvi still had not become a respectable literary language by his time, and he considered it suitable only for light-hearted, for-the-nonce composition. The reason Mas'ud Sādī Salmān’s Hindvi did not survive is presumably the same. We do not know the size of his divān either; it may have been quite small, and may even have been regarded as an embarrassing oddity by his Persianate admirers. The Ghaznavid sage and poet Sanā’i (1087/91–1145/46), who made a collection of Salmān’s poems and presented it to the great man, apparently says nothing about his Hindvi poetry. The odds are that Salmān wrote in Hindvi chiefly to demonstrate his virtuosity—not an uncommon practice in medieval literary culture in the Middle Eastern and the Indo-Muslim milieus. He wrote in Arabic for the same reason.

The first person whose Hindvi writings survive in substantial quantity, and with whom Urdu literature can seriously be said to begin, is Shaikh Bahā ud-Din Bājan (1388–1506). His grandfather came from Delhi and settled in Ahmadābād. Shaikh Bājan was born in Ahmadābād, worked in Gujarat, and described his language on different occasions as “Hindi,” “Dihlavi,” and “Hindvi.” Northerners—mainly army men and civil servants—first came to Gujarat in large numbers in 1297, when ’Ala ud-Din Khalji (r. 1296–1316) annexed Gujarat after assuming the sultanate of Delhi. A larger movement toward Gujarat from the north is reported to have taken place around 1398, when Taimūr sacked and occupied Delhi. By Shaikh Bājan’s time there was a considerable population of Dihlavi-speakers in Gujarat. Shaikh Bājan was a major Sufi of that part of the country. He collected some of his Persian and Hindi prose and verse in an anthology that he called Khazā'ın-e rahmatullāh (Treasures of divine mercy and compassion), in honor of his mentor, Shaikh Rahmatullāh. In it, he included Hindi/Hindvi poems in a verse genre called jikrī (after the Perso-Arabic zikr, “remembering”). It was a genre apparently much used in fourteenth-century Delhi, too. Shaikh Bājan wrote:

Poems that have been composed by this faqir are called jikrī in the Hindi tongue, and the singers of Hind [northern India] play and sing them upon instruments, observing the discipline of the ragas. Some of these are in the praise of Pir-e Dastgīr, and of his mausoleum, or in praise of my own native land, that is, Gujarat; some are disquisitions on my own purposes, and some in the cause of pupils and seekers; some are on the theme of love.

42. Sherānī 1966, 1: 176.
The Shaikh here establishes the parameters of Urdu language and literature for a long time to come: the language is Hindvi, the meters used are both Indic and Persian, the themes of poetry are both sacred and secular. The poetry has a strong popular base and appeal; there is an air of spiritual devotion and Sufi purity about its transactions. Love of one’s native land is also a notable theme.

The quality of Shaikh Bájan’s poetry is uneven; the tone is occasionally one of ecstasy, though the general mood is didactic. The following poem occupies a middle space between these two. It celebrates the inaccessibility of God, yet there is a hint of desperation. Success is not certain, failure is a strong probability. Still, there is a certain pride, a sense of distinction, in having such a distant and forbidding Beloved:

None can walk Your path
And whoever does
Exhausts himself, walking, walking, . . .
The Brahman reads the holy texts
And loses wit and wisdom
Yogis give up deep meditation
The anchorites practice
Self-denial, and do
No good to anyone.

Philosophers
Forget philosophizing
They bare their head, trying
To keep the feet covered.

Jains, in Your service,
Suffer pain and do
The most arduous penance.

Look there—
A dervish, in a new guise
A shaven fakir; another yet,
Master of the Age, pious
In worship; and here’s another,
Become a wanderer
Shouting ha, hu, ha, hu.
There’s a frenzied one,
Openly so; another wanders
The desert, mad, unknown.

One, drunk with love,
Raves and yells,
And another falls
Unconscious.
A wanderer, with long and
Matted hair, and black
And dark as night;
Another madman gets the
Shivers, shaves his head
And says only Your name.

Secretly yet another
Pronounces words of power
And domination; and
Here’s someone else
Breathing out secret Names
Mad to capture the whole world.
Another, there, fasts and keeps
Awake, all night, every night.

And that one, there, becomes
A beggar, asking for
You alone, in alms.

Thus all groups and all bands,
All weeping and wasting away—
Pieces of chewed sugarcane.

That’s what they see
That’s what they find!
So say, O Bájan,
What can you count for?44

The preceding is a translation of a complete poem, comprising fifteen verses (or thirty lines) of a rather short meter in the original. The meter is Indic and reasonably regular. Bájan favors Indic meters but on occasion uses Persian ones too. The poetry is pleasing in its simplicity, but an occasional stunning metaphor (seekers after God end up like chewed sugarcane—with no juice or sweetness of life left in them, and fit only for burning) enlivens the utterance and raises its level substantively. While the poems mostly use words sparingly, they pack in a lot of meaning. The language itself seems to possess this characteristic, recalling Edward Terry’s observation (quoted earlier) that “Indostan” “speaks much in few words.” In fact, in Shaikh Bájan’s time the language had not yet acquired anything from the vast, rich store of images and metaphorical words and phrases that made Persian poetry (both Indian and Iranian) very nearly unique in the world, in that it possesses a huge ready-to-use vocabulary that sets up resonances of signification the moment anything from that vocabulary is used in a poem.

Like nearly all poetry in the Indian Sufi tradition, Shaiwah Bajan’s embodies the Islamic worldview as refracted through the prism of Indian eyes. Hindu imagery and conventions abound in the works of early Sufi poets, and sometimes even affect their names. Shaikh Mahmud Daryai (1419–1534), another Sufi poet of Gujarat writing in Hindi/Hindvi, occasionally calls himself “Mahmud Das.” It is possible that Kabir (d. 1518) and Shaikh ‘Abd ul-Quddus Gangohi (1455–1538) called themselves “Kabir Das” and “Alakh Das,” respectively, for the same reason.45

By the early fifteenth century Hindvi had become so popular in Gujarat that its vocabulary began to appear in Persian as well. In 1433–1434 a Persian dictionary, Bahr al-fa’iil (Ocean of graces), was compiled in Gujarat by Fazl ud-Din Mu’hammad bin Qavam bin Rustam Balkhi. In addition to the numerous Hindvi glosses of Persian words provided in it passim, it includes a whole chapter “comprising Hindvi words used in poetry.” By the time of Qazi Mahmud Daryai (1415–1534) and Shaikh ‘Ali Muhammed Jiv Gamdhan (d. 1565), the names “Hindvi” and “Dilhavi” seem to have generally been given up in favor of “Gujri.”46

Yet even much later, “Hindi” as a language name had not disappeared from Gujarat. A masnavi called Tanakh-e ghariibi (A rare history), composed in Gujarat between 1751 and 1757, contains the following verses:

Shoot no barbs at Hindi,
Everybody knows and explains
The Hindi meanings well.

And look, this Qur’an, the Book of God,
Is always explained in Hindi;
Whenever it is intended to expound
Its meanings openly, to the people,
One says and explains them
In Hindi.47

It must have been in the fifteenth century, if not earlier, that literary activity in Hindi/Hindvi became popular in what is now called the Deccan. The first name that we are aware of at present is that of Fakhr-e Din Nizami, whose masnavi has been tentatively called Kadam rao padam rao (c. 1421–1434) after its two chief characters, since the single extant manuscript of the poem does not have a name. It is a poem of great length; the manuscript comprises 1032 verses (2064 lines)—and is incomplete.

The language of Kadam rao padam rao is dense and difficult, perhaps be-

47. Sherani 1966, 2: 249.
cause of the poet’s heavy preference for Telugu and _tatsama_-Sanskrit vocabulary. Yet unlike Bájan, who rarely used Persian meters, Nizāmī composed his poem in a standard Persian meter, and used it quite carefully. Nizāmī is not a better poet than Shaīkh Bájan, but he tells his story reasonably well:

Kadam Rā’o said, Honored Lady,  
Come, and listen carefully;  
I’d heard it said that women  
Do deceive a lot, and I today  
Saw something of your tricks;  
And ever since I saw those tricks  
In real life, I have been  
In perplexity. What I knew  
By hearsay alone, I saw with  
My own eyes. And since then  
My eyes have had no peace.  
Two serpents I saw, one  
A female, high-born, the other  
A lowly male, and they together  
Were playing lover-like games  
Of sex, and lust. As God  
Did make me King, so how  
Could I see such inequity  
Of pairing? I sprang at them  
With my rapier drawn  
To finish it off then and there.  
The female fast slipped away  
With her life, leaving her tail behind.  

Some of my translation here is, inevitably, tentative. But the poem has an easy flow of rhythm, once one develops a knack for reading it aloud.

THE BIRTH OF LITERARY THEORY

The most prominent feature of _Kadam rā’o padam rā’o_ is its secularity: though it has a moral of sorts, it is basically a poem about kingcraft, miscegenation, worldly learning, magic, and mystery. It is also consciously literary. The poet regards the use of _ihām_ (double entendre, or punning), as the essence of versifying:

A poem that doesn’t have  
Dual-meaning words,  
Such a poem does not  
Attract anyone at all—

A poem without
Words of two senses. 49

Khusrav in his preface to Ghurrat al-kamāl (1294) describes himself as the
inventor of a special kind of īhām in poetry. 50 Moreover, Faṭḥīr-e Din Niẓāmī’s
advent is parallel to, and quite independent of, Shaikh Bājan’s. These first
stirrings of literary theory that we see in Niẓāmī’s poem suggest that by his
time Hindi/Hindvi had matured as a medium for creative expression. It is
significant that the first intimations of theory that we have in Urdu do not
hark back to Iran or Arabia but were generated in India, and that it is a poet
who was the first major literary theorist of Hindi/Hindvi.

Before proceeding further it would be good to consider Khusrav’s liter-
ary theory. His ideas seem to have had a quiet but far-reaching influence on
Urdu and Indo-Persian literary practice, not always by providing direct guide-
lines but certainly by offering general support to literary activity. Niẓāmī’s
stress on īhām certainly owes something to Khusrav’s precept and example.

Khusrav’s influence may also be seen in the importance placed on ravānī
(flowingness) in Indo-Persian and Urdu poetry. While the need for poetry
to flow easily and be amenable to public recitation must have been evident
to audiences and realized by poets from very early times, Khusrav seems to
have been the first to write about it in some detail. He created a somewhat
complex, and certainly subjective, theory of ravānī—subjective enough to
remind us that he claimed to know Sanskrit and so may have been familiar
with the concept of the saḥydaya, the sensitive reader of poetry.

In the preface to his Kulliyāt (Collected poems), which he seems to have
compiled after 1315, Khusrav discussed and graded his own four divāns on
the basis of ravānī. He described the first one as “like the earth: cold, dry,
dense, and brittle.” His second divān contained ghazals that were “gentle and
soft in the imagination like water, and superior to earth, and purged of the
dust of all dense words”; they were “warm, and wet.” The third contained
“ghazals roasted and baked and most desirable . . . soft and delicate, and more
flowing and superior.” The fourth divān contained “ghazals like fire” that
could melt tender hearts, soften steely ones, and destroy loveless ones with
their “blazing flame and fiery brilliance.” 51

It is not necessary, and probably not possible, to give an exhaustive anal-
ysis of the theories, allusions, and wordplay involved here. The basic theme
is that Khusrav sees ravānī as a quality of the nature of fire and water. The
best ravānī is like water-turned-to-heat (air) turned to water-turned-to-air-
turned-to-water. Poetry flows like the rise and fall of music—only more freely,

because air, water, and fire essentially follow their own bent, while music is bound by time and rhythm. The *ravānī* of poetry transcends the bounds of time and rhythm, merging and transmuting disparate elements.

Khusrav stresses the role of the proper temperament in the appreciation, and also the production, of poetry. He begins the discourse on *ravānī* by appealing to people who have the proper temperament or nature. He uses the word *tab*, the standard word in Persian/Arabic for the poet’s “temperament.” The root word in Arabic means “to impress something upon something,” as with a seal or signet. Thus a person with the proper temperament would have to have some training, or early imprinting, as well. Khusrav twice uses the term *tab-i vaqqād* (the brilliant-fiery-lively-heated-bright, hence intelligent and perceptive, temperament)—once with regard to the reader, and elsewhere with regard to himself. Just as the poet has the *tab-i vaqqād* that enables him to make poems, the reader should have *tab-i vaqqād* to see and know what the poet is doing. The resemblance here to Abhinavagupta’s notion of the sahālaya reader who has “a heart with the keen faculty of perception” is obvious.\(^5\) The idea of the union of fire and water as the essence of *ravānī* leads us to the notion of poetic energy. A poem that does not fully participate in its maker’s energy as embodied in his (fiery) creative imagination, would have less *ravānī*. Fiery poems have the energy of movement. They cause things to happen, yet their energy is harnessed not to causes social or moral, but to the cause of love.

The prime importance that Khusrav placed on *ravānī* finds echoes everywhere in Persian/Urdu poetry, culminating in the assiduous cultivation of *ravānī* by the Delhi Urdu poets of the early eighteenth century. One of the earliest poets after Khusrav to place particular value on *ravānī* was Ḥāfiẓ (1325?–1398) in a Persian verse of uncertain authenticity but significant fame:

As for him whom you call
“The Master,” were you to look
Truly with care: artificer he is,
But he has no flowingness.\(^5\)

Nearer to home, Urdu poets in the Deccan, building upon the notion of *ravānī*, took the next step in syntagmatic image-making and introduced the imagery of the ocean, and of pearls in it. Shaikh Ahmad Gujrati, in his ma‘nawi titled *Yūsuf zulaikhā* ([Prophet] Joseph and Zuleika, 1580–1585), praises his own poetry:

Then the shoreless ocean
Of my heart came into flood
And the sky bent over
To rain down pearls.  

Mulla Vaj’hi (d. 1659?), in his long poem *Qutb mushtari* (*Qutb* [Shâh] and *Mushtari*, 1609–1610), builds further upon Shaikh Ahmad’s imagery:

My pearls began to gleam so
That the pearls of the sea
Turned to water within
The mother of pearl.  

Nuṣratî Bijâpûrî (1600–1674) praises his poet-king ʿAlî ʿĀdîl Shâh (r. 1656–1672) in his long poem *ʿAlî nâmah* (Chronicle of ʿAlî; 1666):

Your mind is limpid, your
Temperament clear and pure,
Valuer of speech, subtle
And sharp, it can cleave
Even a hair.

Poetry is but a wave
From the ocean of your heart,
The army of your thoughts
Looks down upon the sky.

Earlier in the poem, the poet invokes God’s benediction:

Let my thoughts fly high, like the winds;
To my temperament give
The ocean’s perpetual wave and flow.  

In this poem Nuṣratî also speaks of *mazmûn* (theme), as opposed to *ma’ni* (meaning)—a distinction that seems to have first been made in India, perhaps under the influence of Sanskrit, by the Persian poets of the “Indian style” (*sâbî-i hindî*) of his time. This distinction later became an important part of the poetics of the Urdu ʿghazal in eighteenth-century Delhi.  

Valî (1665/67–1707/8) also uses the ocean-flow image to a double purpose: praise of the *ravînî* of his verse and praise of the beloved’s flowing tresses:

In praise of your tresses
Truths and meanings, wave upon wave

---

57. See Frances Pritchett’s essay (chapter 15) in this volume.
Come into flow every night
Like the ocean of my temperament.

Such is the power
Of the waves of my poetry
That it would be proper for
My temperament to be compared
To an ocean.\textsuperscript{58}

Urdu poets in early-eighteenth-century Delhi made ravanî one of the cornerstones of the new poetics that was emerging at that time. I call this poetics “new” in the sense that it sought, consciously or otherwise, to pull together a lot of thinking and feeling about the nature of poetry that had been gathering in the Urdu literary culture over the centuries. Here is just one instance, from Shākir Nājī (1690?–1744); it is delightful in its own right and also closely echoes Vali’s verse:

\begin{quote}
The flowingness of my temperament
Is no less, O Nājī,
Than that of the ocean;
Were someone to write a ghazal
Like this ghazal of mine,
I would become his water carrier.\textsuperscript{59}
\end{quote}

Perhaps the single most powerful component in the matrix of Muslim literary ideas and practice is the Qur’an, which is believed to be uncreated yet is a miracle of textual creation. Poetry tries to approximate this miracle. Khusrāw said that all knowledge was “in the ocean of the Qur’an,” so that “if anyone said that poetry was not in the Praised and Exalted Book, he denied the Qur’an.” Since the Qur’an was, again by definition, also the most beautiful text, it was proper to place both the mind and heart of poetry in the Quranic context. This great theoretical leap was made by Khusrāw in the Preface to Ghurrat al-kamāl. He pointed out that the Prophet had said “undoubtedly wisdom is from poetry,” and not “undoubtedly poetry is from wisdom.” Thus poetry is superior to wisdom: “A poet can be called a philosopher [\textit{hakim}], but a philosopher cannot be called a poet.”\textsuperscript{60}

Khusrāw’s brilliance lay not so much in proposing a new theory as in presenting a fusion of two worlds and enunciating a new argument in favor of the fusion. The general principle that he implied here—that poetry is a body of knowledge in its own right, and that it is concerned with larger issues and not with the statement of “truths” seen from either a personal or an “objec-

\textsuperscript{58} Vali [1945] 1996: 239.
\textsuperscript{59} Nājī 1989: 342.
\textsuperscript{60} Khusrāw [1294] 1975: 20, 18–19. See also Jamāl Husain 1993.
“Transitive” standpoint—was implied in the literary theory of the Arabs and was not too far from that of the Indian tradition. For both bodies of theory saw poems as meaningful, but not information-giving, texts. It is in this context that Khusrau’s role in formulating the literary taste of Urdu seems most significant.

It is a measure of the special value placed by the Indo-Muslim poetic culture on the generation of meaning that among the “firsts” in poetry of which Khusrau is especially proud is a special kind of pun (iḥām); he relates punning directly to the generation of meaning. He says in the Preface:

Before now, the tongue of the poets, which is the hair-dresser and adorner of poetry, did hair-splitting in iḥām such that two subtle points resulted. This servant, by his sharp pen, split the point of the hair of meaning such that seven subtle points were obtained from one hair. . . . In brief, if in times before, the image presented by iḥām had two faces, and whoever looked was astonished, Khusrau’s temperament has devised an iḥām having more reflectivity than the mirror. For in the mirror, there is only one image, and it cannot show more than one idea. Yet this [iḥām of mine] is a mirror such that if you place one face before it, seven proper and bright ideas appear.

Your intrepid falcon, playing
With its own life, would engage
The Simurgh in mortal combat
Were you to set, O massive-headed
Lion, your falcon to hunt.61

Khusrau proceeds to show that through one change in punctuation and the polysemy of three of the words, this verse generates six meanings. His original claim was seven meanings, so the text at this point must be defective. From the verse as given in the text, however, one can actually generate eight meanings; my translation brings out only one of them (see the discussion of iḥām later in the chapter).

While the nature of the language in which literature was being produced in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was never in doubt—it was a language of the common people, different from other, preexisting languages, and it did not yet have many intellectual pretensions—the name of the language continued to be dual until quite late, in the Deccan as well as in north India. People must have been traveling back and forth between the north and the south (which at that time included Gujarat) starting with the reign of Muhammad Tughlaq, who in 1327 shifted the headquarters of the sultanate from Delhi in the north to Daulatabad in Maharashtra. Although he reversed this decision in 1335, travelers’ transactions between the two parts of the country continued—especially because it was the elite of Delhi who had been

uprooted, and they naturally had large retinues. Not all of their numerous clients, pupils, and camp followers went back to Delhi; some retained their connections in the south, at least for some time. These persons must have described their language as Hindi/Hindvi/Dihlavi or Gujri, depending on where they came from.

Even native south-India-born speakers of the language are on record as describing their language as Gujri. Examples can be found in the work of the Sufi Shâh Burhân ud-Dîn Janâm (d. 1582?), who was born in south India. Hindvi poetry had already established a powerful presence in the south by the time of Fakhr-e Din Niẓâmî and Mirânjî Shams ul-‘Ushshâq (d. 1496), the father and mentor of Burhân ud-Dîn Janâm. Mirânjî identifies his language as “Hindi.” Janâm calls his “Gujri” and “Hindi” on different occasions. It is obvious that Janâm is making a point in literary theory: in describing his language as Gujri/Hindi, he is establishing his connections with the Sufi, other-worldly, creative literary modes of the Gujri poets, rather than with the this-worldly, essentially nonreligious though didactic world of literary activity constructed by Niẓâmî and his successors.

The Gujarati Sufi Shaikh Khûb Muḥammad Ğîstî (1539–1614) was the greatest Gujri poet, and a major poet by any consideration. He wrote his long poem (or series of short, connected poems) called Khûb tarang (Wave of beauty) in 1578. In addition to being one of the greatest poems of the mystical-intellectual tradition—strongly reminiscent of the style of Shaikh Muḥyi ud-Dîn ibn ‘Arabî—Khûb tarang also contains brilliant thoughts on the nature of poetry. Its author was aware of the interpenetrative transactions that were gradually building up a body of Hindi/Gujri language and literature. Arabia and Iran were not remote or threatening father-figures but active contributors, and the end result of these interactions was a distinct, though local, identity. He says in Khûb tarang:

Like the speech
  Flowing from my mouth:
  Arabia and Iran join in it
  To become one.

The speech that flows
  From the heart,
  The speech of Arabia and Iran:
  Listen, listen to the speech
  Of Gujarî.63

Khüb Muḥammad Cisti also wrote *Chhand Chhandān*, a verse treatise in which he attempts to collate the systems of Sanskrit and Persian prosody. The opening verse is:

*Say bismillāh, and name this*  
*Chhand chhandān, a book*  
*About the pingal and 'arūz*  
*And the tāl adhyāyah.*

Khüb Muḥammad Cisti evinces the same interest in the “poetryness” of verse, poetic devices, and poetic grammar that characterizes Khusrav’s literary thought; *Chhand chhandān* apparently influenced the poetry and poetics of the Deccani king and poet Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ḥād Shah (r. 1580–1611), who was the first to put together a complete ḍvān in Urdu/Hindi/Dakani. In another work, *Bhā’o bhed* (Mysteries of the modes), the Shaikh discusses tropes and figures of speech: he defines each figure in Persian and Gujarī, then illustrates it from his Gujarī poems. Khusrav and Khüb Muḥammad Cisti thus emerge as the earliest literary theorists in Urdu. As we shall see, Cisti seems to have set the trend for literary thought in the century that followed.

Shaikh Ḥusayn Ḥād Shah (b. c. 1539), in his longish *maśnavī Yūsuf zulaikhā* (1580–1585), spoke extensively about poetry, language, and his own views on how to write poems:

*Since I had both*  
*Natural and acquired capacity*  
*For writing poems, I was long*  
*In the company of learned men,*  
*And imbibed some of their color*  
*Into my own being.*  
*...*  
*I spent many days learning*  
*Syntax, many I spent*  
*Internalizing its voice, like a balance*  
*In my own heart; many days*  
*I spent learning grammar, whose texts*  
*Quite conquered me. I heard*  
*Disquisitions on the science of figures too,*  
*And picked up pearls of logic there.*  
*My teacher taught me religious*  

---

64. Sherānī 1966, 1: 197–200. *Chhand chhandān* = metrics, meters, or stanzas on metrics; *pingal* = Sanskrit prosody; *'arūz* = prosody (a general term, here applied to Perso-Arabic-Hindvi metrics); *tāl adhyāyah* = section or chapter on (musical) beats. The book as it exists, however, only has two parts, one on *'arūz* and the other on *pingal*. Remarks on musical beats are passim.

Philosophy and mysticism;
I obtained instruction in science
And the arts, basics of thought
And belief; and juristic texts
Also took many of my days.
I have enjoyed the essence
Of prosody and rhyme, and worked
Hard to internalize them. I am
Acquainted with astrology, medicine;
Having become a lover of Juice and Essence,
I have drunk deep of many such.

So many qualities one must have,
And so much learning, before
One can tell the story of a Prophet.

Telugu, and Sanskrit, I know well
And have heard poets and pandits;
I have read a lot of Persian,
And studied a bit of Arabic poetry too.66

This redoubtable inventory of skills and attainments may not have been
typical, but it certainly described Shaikh Ahmad, whose reputation spread
well beyond Gujarat early in his own lifetime. The Shaikh was invited by King
Muhammad Quli Qutb Shâh of Golconda to be his court poet, a position he
assumed in 1580–1581. Shaikh Ahmad’s list shows that literature in Hindvi/
Gujrî had now evolved in sophistication and refinement. It was no longer
merely a spontaneous affair of the heart but had become a serious discipline.
He describes the work that a truly accomplished poet can do:

It’s not difficult for me to compose
In all the genres of poetry there are.
I can use rare thoughts, and rare modes,
Rare and novel tropes and figures.
My themes, auspicious, bright, would show
The light of the sky on this
Lowly earth.

As my words fly out high they see
This whole world as one particle.
They cleave the depth of the netherworld,
The height of the sky, unraveling them
Like the strands of a thread.67

The Shaikh mentions allegory, imagination, metaphor, and subtlety of thought as his special qualities:

If I were to write in the mode of metaphor
And simile, I would make a new world,
A world different from this; sometimes
I’d separate life from the living;
Sometimes I’d take away
The life of the Light of life. Sometimes
I’d show the earth as high
As the sky, and sometimes I would
Spread out the sky like the earth.

I would depict thoughts, subtle and delicate
Like finely carded cotton.
One could see the soul of an angel,
But not my thoughts.

I thought, if I could find the poems
Made by Khusrau or Nizāmī,
I should quickly put them
Into Hindvi. So one day a friend
Lent me Jāmī’s Yūsuf zulākhā,
And I began to do it
In the Hindvi tongue, with strong meter,
And similes, and tropes, and figures.
I should not be Jāmī’s slave, but follow him
In some places, and not follow him
In some. I should extract whatever
Poetry Jāmī had, and add some of my own.

I should bring in fewer
Arabic words in the tale, nor mix
Persian and Arabic overmuch.
I shouldn’t elide, or twist words
To fit the meter, or write
Incoherently.68

Sanskrit, Telugu, Arabic, Persian, are all grist for this poet’s mill, and he is not in awe of or inclined to privilege any particular linguistic tradition. He acknowledges Khusrau and Nizāmī and Jāmī but is quite prepared to improve upon them. His language has a literary and linguistic milieu of its own, with no need to be propped up by foreign importations.

Poetry, for Shaikh Ahmad, is the business of creating new worlds, reves-

ing the order of things so as to make them anew. While his general debt to Arabic and Sanskrit poetics is obvious, it is hard to pinpoint exactly where their influence lies. Rather, there is an air of assimilation, an indirect intimation of connections and continuities. Like Khusrau in his Persian, Shaikh Ahmad is constructing not so much from the past as for the benefit of the present and the future. Anticipations of what will come to be called the “Indian style” of Persian poetry can be seen. They are not dominant yet, but they are clearly the most prominent element in the Shaikh’s poetics. The emphasis on abstract, subtle thought; the centrality of metaphor; the global reach of the imagination; and the value placed on figures of speech—all these are characteristics of the “Indian style.”

Shaikh Ahmad’s concern for the language—avoiding too much Arabic and Persian, not distorting pronunciation to suit the meter, not resorting to elisions or compressions—indicates a maturity and stabilization of linguistic usage. But this was perhaps more in theory than practice, for Gujri and Dakani poets are notoriously free with pronunciation, keeping it firmly subservient to the exigencies of meter or even topic. Often the same word is pronounced in two or three ways in the same text within a brief space, making metrical reading extremely difficult. Yet the theoretical interest evinced by the Shaikh in keeping a “standard” pronunciation intact suggests the faint beginnings of what in the late nineteenth century became an obsession with “purity” and “correctness” in language.

Vaj’hi, writing his ma’navi Quth mushtari some twenty-five years later (1609–1610), shows this concern more strongly:

One who has no sense of coherence
In speech should have nothing to do
With writing poems. And one should not
Have the greed to say too much, either.
If said well, even one single verse
Will suffice. If you have the art,
Use finesse and subtlety. For
One does not stuff bags full with color.
The difficult part of the art of poetry
Is to make both word and meaning
Coincide. Use only such words
In your poems as have been used
By none but the masters.

If you knew the grammar
Of poetry, you would use
Hand-picked words, lofty themes.
Even if there’s but one powerful theme,
It enhances the pleasure of the speech.
If your beloved is beautiful like the sun,
And if you further beautify her face,
It is like Light upon Light. Even if
A woman had a thousand flaws,
She would look good if she knew
The art of self-adornment.  

One can see a number of new things happening here. In addition to sharing Shiākh Ahmad’s interest in words and their correctness in usage, Vaj’hi is also concerned with the parole of the ustād (master, mentor). The use of words not used by the ustāds is not to be encouraged. He places a special value on beauty of speech for its own sake: a fine theme is doubly valuable if well expressed, but even a poor theme gains substantial beauty if expressed with élan and style. Vaj’hi proposes something like the notion of sāhitya (equality of words and meaning), as well as the idea that poetry is an exercise in words. Vaj’hi died about 1660, leaving Gujri/Hindvi/Dakani able to boast a fully fledged literature in prose and verse. The Gujri impulse in fact reached its peak with Shiākh Khūb Muḥammad Čistī.

The literary theory that provided meaning and justification to the practices of the two and a half centuries that preceded his own time is summed up by Ṣaṅ’āṭi Bījāpūrī in his maṣnawī Qissah-e benāzir (A peerless story, 1644–1645). Ṣaṅ’āṭi does not seem to have added anything substantial of his own to the ongoing construction of the poetics for Hindvi literature, but he did say some interesting things about the language that he used. His remarks have almost a normative force:

I did not put much of Sanskrit in it.
I kept the poem free
Of verbosity. Dakhani comes
Easy to one who doesn’t have Persian.
For it has the content of Sanskrit, but
With a flavor of ease. Having made it easy
In Dakhani, I put into it
Tens and scores of prominent
And elegant devices.

Note that while Vaj’hi calls his language “Hindi,” Ṣaṅ’āṭi calls his “Dakhani”—and he sets it up in opposition and apposition to Persian, as Khūb Muḥammad Čistī did for Gujri. For Ṣaṅ’āṭi, poems should have an indigenous air, with neither too much Sanskrit nor too much Persian. But there is still room for elegant and noticeable devices, and fine artifice. Poetry, for Ṣaṅ’āṭi, is the

70. Cf. Pollock, chapter 1, this volume.
soul and apogee of all human endeavor. It does not need ratification from outside authority. Nor does the poetics genuflect before the ancients, Sanskrit and Perso-Arabic. Perhaps the most remarkable thing about early Urdu literary theory is its air of independence. This tradition of independent thought continued in the south until its last great classical writer, Maulâna Báqar Ágh (1746–1808).

**THE EMERGENCE AND DOMINANCE OF REKHTAH IN THE NORTH**

Literary activity in Gujri/Hindi continued to flourish. As we have seen, the author of *Târîkh-e (animation successive)* (1751–1757) in Gujarat justified the use of Hindi in strong terms. By the later eighteenth century, ʿAbd ul-Vali ʿUzlat (1692/93–1775) had made his powerful mark, traveling from his birthplace in Surat to Delhi and then to the Deccan proper, adorning literary and intellectual gatherings all over the place. His poetry provided continuities with that of Vali and became an important learning source for the writers who followed. The preface that he appended to his *Diwân* (1758–1759) is the first Urdu prose of its kind.

Prose of many kinds seems to have made hesitant beginnings at about this time in the north. The earliest known work is Faˈlī’ *Karbal kathā* (Story of Karbala, c. 1732), a translation of a Persian religious narrative. Then there are two *dasti:"Nau tarz-e muraša"* (A new ornamented style, 1775) by ʿAţa Husain Tahsîn, and *Qişâb-e mehr afroz o dilbar* (The story of Mahr Afroz and Dilbar, c. 1731–1755) by ʿIsâ Khan Bahâdur. The names of Harî harassment Sañbhalî (fl. 1730s) and Bindrâban Mathrâvî (d. 1757), and of a prose work by each of them, also appear. Nothing else is known of them. Saudâ (1706?–1781) wrote an Urdu prose preface for his *Kulliyât*.

By the time of ʿUzlat’s death in 1775, the Delhi idiom had become dominant in most of the Urdu world, and a separate Gujri tradition ceased to exist by the end of the eighteenth century. ʿUzlat described his language as Hindi. This, coupled with the example of *Târîkh-e (animation successive)*, suggests that “Gujri” as a language name had fallen into disuse by about the 1760s.

The reasons for the gap in the north from Masˈûd Saˈd Salmân (1046–1121) to Khusrau (1253–1325), and then the second period of silence, broken only in Gujarat in the early fifteenth century, can now be summarized as follows: Masˈûd Saˈd Salmân’s and Khusrau’s efforts were casual and were not in accordance with any established mode of writing. The fact that there was literary activity in Avadhî in the fourteenth century (Mullâ Dāˈûd’s poem *Chandāfn in 1379*), but not in Urdu, shows that Urdu did not have literary status at that time. Urdu did not attain the status of a literary language un-
til the Sufis took it up in Gujarat in the fifteenth century, closely followed by the Dakinis. No Sufi seems to have made Hindi/Hindvi a vehicle for literary expression in the north before Shaiwshu Abd al-Quddus Gangohi (1455–1538) and Kabir (d. 1518); neither, however, wrote in the mainline Khari Boli Hindi/Hindvi that we know as Urdu today. The reason that the Sufis did not adopt this language in the early centuries may have been the popularity and general understandability of Persian in the north, which obviated the need for the Sufis to use Hindi/Hindvi for their popular discourse.

The earliest literary text in Hindi/Hindvi extant in the north is Muhammad Afzal’s 325-verse masnavī Bikaṭ kahānī (Story of misery, 1625). Also known as Afzal Gopal, Muhammad Afzal (d. 1625/6) was not a Sufi in the strict sense, but he seems to have been the kind of lover that Sufis are believed to be. All we know of the poet is that he died in 1625; the poem itself is generally assumed to have been completed not long before his death. It is a major work and needs to be examined separately; that it is not strictly a religious poem is one of the more interesting things about it.

The seventeenth century did see some literary activity in the north, though of generally indifferent quality. Most of it was folk-religious in character, and almost all of it took place in the century’s last quarter. Raushan ‘Ali wrote his long jang nāmah (Chronicle of battle), also called ‘Ashūr nāmah (Chronicle of ten days), in verse, in 1688–1689; Ismā’il Amrohi wrote a masnavi called Vafat nāmah-e bibi Fātimah (Chronicle of the death of Bibi Fātimah) in 1693–1694. Both are folk-religious poems. The former is closely modeled on Miskin’s jang nāmah-e muhammad hanif (Chronicle of the battle of Muhammad Hanif, 1681) in Gujri. The closeness between the dates of composition of Raushan ‘Ali’s and Miskin’s poems suggests direct influence. If this is so, there must have been literary contact of a fairly immediate kind between the south and the north in the last part of the seventeenth century. Miskin describes his language as Gujri, while Raushan ‘Ali describes his, in various instances, as Hindi, Hindustani, and Hindvi. The fact that Raushan ‘Ali identifies the language he uses by a different name even though he closely follows Miskin suggests that he considered his tradition different and separate from Gujri.

Apart from these folk-religious poems of the last quarter of the seventeenth century—and one other manuscript of folk-religious poems that cannot be dated with certainty—no literary work survives between Afzal at the beginning of the seventeenth century and Ja‘far Zaṭallī (1659–1713), the first writer in the north to write exclusively in Urdu, at the century’s end. Yet the work of neither of them offers any clues to, or hints about, the great efflores-

cence that was to take place in Delhi early in the eighteenth century, and that would go on undiminished, through war and strife, civil commotion, political disintegration, and foreign sway, for one hundred and fifty years.

In the early centuries of Hindi/Hindvi, there seems to have been an osmosis of that language into Persian on a scale that has not yet been fully appreciated. Persian’s second oldest dictionary—the first to be prepared in India—is *Farhang-i qavvās*, compiled by Fakhr ud-Dīn Qavās Ghaznavī in ‘Alā ud-Dīn Khaljī’s time (1296–1316). It was followed by two other extant dictionaries in the fourteenth century, and three in the fifteenth century. All these dictionaries include many Hindi/Hindvi words as lexical or glossarial items. Persian dictionaries of great depth and range continued to be produced in India until well into the nineteenth century; most if not all of them were designed for an Indian readership, and they generally expected a high degree of sophistication from their users, especially from the sixteenth century onwards. It is thus not surprising that Persian-Urdu or Urdu-Persian glossaries were an important early linguistic activity in Hindi/Hindvi in the north. Thus Hakim Yusufi (fl. 1490–1530) wrote a “long poem” (*qaṣīdah*) “about Hindi words” that glosses a number of Hindi/Hindvi verbs and nouns in Persian; in 1553, Ajay Chand Bhaṭnāgar compiled a more complete glossary in verse.

The point is that in the north, up to the seventeenth century, most producers and consumers of Hindi/Hindvi literature, and followers of the discourses of the Sufis and other holy people, knew enough Persian not to need a local language for instruction and delectation. Persian, it seems, was a local language for most if not all of them. This would also account for the emergence of Rekhtah—first as a genre, then as the name of the language in which the *rekhtah* text was composed, and finally as the term for any poem composed in Rekhtah.

One of the several meanings of *rekhtah* is “mixed”—in particular, the mixture of lime and mortar used for building activity. Thus *rekhtah* became the name for a poem in which either Hindi/Hindvi was added to a Persian template or Persian was added to a Hindi/Hindvi template. The *rekhtah* mode is evident in the earliest Urdu poetry in the north, including even such a sophisticated poem as Afzal’s *Bikaṭ kahānī*. *Bikaṭ kahānī* has 325 two-line verses; of these, 41 are entirely in Persian; 20 have one line of Urdu and one of Persian; and in another 20, half of one line is Persian, the other half being Urdu. Even more complex combinations are possible: for example, in line 1 of verse 14, the first four words are Persian, the rest Urdu, while line two is entirely in Urdu; in verse 15, the first line is all Persian except for one Urdu word, artificially Persianized, and the second line is entirely Urdu except for the penultimate word, which is Persian though assimilable in Urdu.⁷⁶

---

The Persian-based popularity of *rekhtah* in the north seems to have retarded the growth of Hindi/Hindvi literature. Though not unknown in the south, *rekhtah* never had much of a presence there. The Persianization of the north may have been the result of snobbery or of the immense prestige of “Indian style” Persian poets in that part of the country. Evidence of the tilt in Persian’s favor can be seen in the distinction between *rekhtah* and *ghazal* that was long made in the north. But the important distinction was that *rekhtah*, whether in mixed language or plain Hindi/Hindvi, was in early decades not considered *ghazal*, even if it was in the *ghazal* form. The term *ghazal* was reserved for the Persian *ghazal* alone. Consider the following verse of Qāʾim Chândpûrî (1722/25–1795):

Qāʾim, it was I
Who gave *rekhtah* the manner
Of a *ghazal*. Otherwise
It was but a feeble thing
In the language of the Deccan.77

No one seems to have asked what Qāʾim meant by giving *rekhtah* “the manner of a *ghazal*.” Surely there were a lot of *ghazals* in both Dakani and North Indian Hindi/Hindvi before Qāʾim Chândpûrî? His own *ustâds*, Saudâ (1706–1781) and Dard (1720–1785) would have been right there when he wrote this verse, probably before 1760. It should be obvious that he meant Persian when he said *ghazal*, even if his *ustâds* would have considered this boast to be in bad taste since it belittled their own achievements.

The issue is settled beyond doubt by Muṣḥafî. In his eighth *divân*, which would have been compiled in the early 1820s, we find the verse:

Muṣḥafî, my *rekhtah* is
Better than *ghazal*—
For what purpose should
One now be
A devotee
Of Khursâu and Saʿdî?78

While Delhi claims, almost imperially, to be the pristine seat of Urdu literature, and while this claim colors and affects the literary culture of Urdu in many ways, the fact remains that Delhi began with a bias against Dakani/Hindvi and patronized the hybrid genre *rekhtah* for a long time, even naming the language “Rekhtah” (which also means “poured, scattered, dropped”) as if to reflect its lowly origins. Considering this bias, it is not surprising that

there was very little Urdu literature in and around Delhi before 1700. The surprising thing is that there was as much as there was.

Perhaps in an effort to nullify its Dakani/Gujri-linked past, or perhaps as a defense mechanism, Delhi’s literary culture developed an arrogance, and consequently an indifference, toward non-Delhi kinds of literature. It was an attitude that survived well into the twentieth century. Even Delhi literature, if it didn’t conform to “ghazal standards,” was not accommodated in the contemporary or historical canon. Poets like Afżal and Jaफar Zaफalli suffered neglect, and even contempt, at Delhi’s hands. Very few tagkùrahù (anthologies) mention these two poets. To this day, the former remains practically unknown in academia, and the latter is mentioned, if at all, with an air of disapproval and disgust.

Yet both Afżal and Zaफalli are major poets. Afżal was also the pioneer of the bùrah mùsùhù genre (a kind of “shepherd’s calendar”) in Urdu. Afżal’s poetry is recognized, though very briefly, by Mi्र Hasan, who wrote in his tagkùrahù (completed about 1774–1778) that Afżal’s Bìkaط kahùnì had been composed “about his own state” and was written in “half Persian and half Hindi, but popularity is a gift of God.” 79 Miɾ Hasan’s observations show a hint of disapproval because Afżal wrote in the classic rekhtìh mode, which had fallen into disuse (and in fact, disrepute) by that time. Miɾ Hasan’s remarks may have actually turned potential readers away from Bìkaط kahùnì. The poem is not autobiographical, as Miɾ Hasan assumed. It is a first-person narrative told by a lovelorn woman. The poem abounds in lively, colorful imagery and has the easy flow and controlled passion characteristic of major love poetry.

Jaफar Zaफalli was perhaps the greatest Urdu satirist, and that is saying a great deal, considering that Urdu is particularly rich in satire and humor of all kinds. But Zaफalli was more than a satirist—he was a lover of words, and of bawdiness and pornography (both soft and hard), which he used as both a weapon of satire and a means of expressing his spirits, high or low. He was a master of variety and technique, and a profound student of life and politics.

Both Afżal and Zaफalli are important linguistically because they use a language that is fledging itself out of its somewhat tawdry rekhtìh form and is on its way to becoming the nearly perfect medium that it did become within about four decades of Zaफalli’s death. Zaफalli’s vocabulary is larger—and therefore much more varied—than that of Afżal. His career marks the major watershed in the history of Urdu literature, and not only in the north. The skills developed over the previous two centuries and more may not all have been available to Zaफalli; and in any case, there was little humor or satire in Gujri and Dakani. Zaफalli must have learned from his great Persian prede-

cessors, especially Fauqi Yazadi, an Iranian who spent some time in India during Akbar’s reign. Fauqi and Zaṭalli share, among other things, a proclivity for pornography for the sake of fun as much as for the sake of satire and lampoon.

Compared to Gujri and Dakani, the language of both Afzal and Zaṭalli sounds less outlandish to modern northern ears. The reason is that it has very little tatsama-Sanskrit, Telugu, Marathi, or Gujarati in its vocabulary. The Persian component of their language—the effect of rekhta or of direct natural absorption or both—is familiar enough; so is the Braj and Avadhi component. A good bit of their vocabulary, which was retained by Delhi writers over much of the eighteenth century, has been lost to mainline (Delhi-Lucknow) Urdu, but it survives in the Urdu spoken in eastern India and is also comprehensible to Urdu speakers in the south today. This suggests that except for the strong southern content, the register of Hindi and Dakani was much the same in the seventeenth century. The language of Delhi changed substantially between 1760 and 1810, while that of the east and the south remained comparatively stable. Parochialism and a chauvinistic belief in the superiority of their own idiom and usage—which became the hallmark of the speakers of the Delhi register of Hindi/Rekhta in later years—is nowhere in evidence before the 1750s. In fact, if there was an upper register before the mid-eighteenth century, it must have been located in the south.

By the middle of the seventeenth century, the “Indian style” was the order of the day in Persian poetry everywhere in Iran, Turkey, and Indo-Muslim India. The influence of Sanskrit, Braj, and Avadhi on Indo-Muslim literary thought had begun more than a century earlier and had assumed a distinct and strong presence during Akbar’s reign. By the 1640s, Paṇḍitarāja Jagannātha was writing poetry in Dārā Shikoh’s and Shāhjahān’s courts. His poetry in Sanskrit is clearly imbued with Persian influences, and most poetry of the Indian style in Persian should find responsive echoes in Sanskrit-trained ears.80

If the prestige and popularity of Persian retarded the growth of Hindi/Rekhta literature in the north, the influence and power of the Indian-style Persian poetry nevertheless had salubrious effects on Rekhta/Hindi poetry and theory when Rekhta/Hindi came into its own in Delhi in the late 1600s. Shāh Mubārak Abrū (1083/85–1733) was the first major poet in Delhi in the 1700s. He must have begun writing poetry late in the seventeenth century, and he is generally regarded as having adopted i̱ham extremely early in his career. We have seen that Khusrau claimed to be the inventor of a highly elaborate kind of i̱ham in poetry. But the immediate influence on Abrū seems to have been Sanskrit through Brajbhasha (Abrū came from Gwalior, an im-

80. See chapter 2, by Alam, and chapter 1, by Pollock, in this volume.
portant Braj area) and Indian-style Persian poetry. Even Muḥammad Ḥusain Āzād, who criticized Urdu poetry for being too Iran-oriented, acknowledged that iḥām must have come into Urdu poetry from Sanskrit.  

Abrū, and indeed whoever entered upon the business of poetry in Dakani/Hindi/Rekhtaḥ in the early eighteenth century, came under the influence of Vali, and in many ways Vali has been the poet of all Urdu poets since the first decade of the eighteenth century.

**VALI’S LITERARY REVOLUTION**

According to an estimate made in 1966, there were extant at that time sixty-five dated manuscripts and fifty-three undated manuscripts of Vali’s *divān* in libraries and similar collections; his verses also appear in numerous anthologies. Nur-ul-Ḥasan Hashmi, the leading Vali expert of our time, says that these numbers, though huge by ordinary standards, are still less than the actual corpus of Vali’s extant manuscripts, which should run to over two hundred.  

Vali was born somewhere around 1665–1667, and he died most probably in 1707–1708. However, dates as disparate as 1720 through 1725, and even 1735, have been proposed as the year of his death. In fact, determining a late date for Vali’s death is a political, rather than scholarly, issue; for one of the most famous stories about Vali is that he was advised by Shāh Gulshan, a saint and poet who lived in Delhi, to give up his Dakani style and adopt the style and the themes of the Persians. Thus the longer Vali lived after he putatively received Shāh Gulshan’s advice, the easier it is to show that his poetry was Persian/Delhi-inspired, and so to reduce his status as an original poet who influenced the poets of Delhi. The year 1707/8 seems the most likely year of Vali’s death, however, because the oldest extant manuscript of his *divān* is dated 26 ṭabarīʿ al-Avval, 1120 hijrī, which corresponds to July 15, 1708. This manuscript contains all the poetry that we at present know to be Vali’s; it stands to reason therefore, especially in view of his great fame, that he was not alive and composing poetry much later than that date.

Vali’s popularity is obviously attributable to the quality and the influence of his poetry. For he was not a Sufi or a religious leader whose works and words would have been lovingly and carefully preserved by his followers. Judging from the number of male (and maybe female) friends and lovers that he celebrates in his *divān*, he must have been a man of the world, and of his time—a period when the expression of physical love in poetry was much less inhibited than became the rule in Urdu culture from about the mid-

---

nineteenth century onward. Besides being a poet and a man of the world, Vali was a man of learning; he was from Gujarat, or Aurangabad, or both. He revolutionized Urdu poetry. Standard Urdu literary historiography and thought have tried their best, over the last two and a half centuries, to diminish Vali's achievement—for he was an outsider, and a Dakani to boot, and it must have been gall and wormwood to the “Mirzās” of the educated upper classes and ustāds of Delhi to have to acknowledge the primacy and the leadership of such a person.

Even many of the earliest Delhi poets, who would have felt most keenly the positive impact of Vali, were deeply ambivalent about him, and they acknowledged their debt to him in equivocal language:

Äbrū, your poetry is
Like a Prophet’s miracle,
And Vali’s, like the miracle
Of a mere saint.84

Vali is the master in Rekhtah,
So who can write
An answer to him?
Yet to write with
Diligent care and search
Gives success, given
A little inspiration.85

Were someone to go and recite
Nāji’s verse on Vali’s grave,
Vali would rip open his own shroud
And spring from his resting place
Crying, “Well said!”86

Hātim is not all that insufficient
To give peace to my heart,
Yet Vali is the true Prince
Of poetry in this world.87

Shāh Hātim in fact said of himself, “In Persian poetry, [Hātim] is a follower of Šā’īb, and in Rekhtah, [he] considers Vali the ustād.”88 Shāh Hātim, most generous of poets, is the only one whose tribute to Vali is not left-handed.

The later masters, particularly Mīr (1722–1810) and Qā'im Chāndpūrī, took the lead in belittling the achievement of Vali by introducing the story

84. Äbrū 1999: 271.
of Sa’dullāh Gulshan advising Vali. The story is, in brief: Vali came to Delhi in 1700—as we know from Qā’im—and met Gulshan, who looked at his poetry and advised him to “appropriate” themes and images from the Persians, thus enriching his own poetry. Vali took the advice seriously and implemented it successfully. Then when his divān arrived in Delhi in the second regnal year of Emperor Muhammad Shāh (1720–1721), it took Delhi by storm, and everybody, young and old, adopted Vali’s style of poetry.89

One is bound to wonder why Shāh Gulshan would have waited for somebody—whether Vali or someone else—to come from outside Delhi to be the recipient of his somewhat unethical advice. Delhi at that time—in fact, at any time—was home to numerous poets. Most of them wrote in Persian and also tried their hand at a bit of Rekhtah. They were perfectly fluent in Persian and knew Persian poetry as well as Shāh Gulshan did. And if there were more suitable recipients for such advice, there were also more suitable advisers. Among the major Persian poets in Delhi at the end of the seventeenth century, Mirzā ‘Abd al-Qādir Bedil (1644–1720) and Muhammad Afzal Sarkhush (1640–1714) commanded greater respect and a larger following than anyone else. Bedil was in fact at the apogee of his illustrious career during the 1700s and even wrote a bit of Rekhtah himself. Gulshan himself was Bedil’s follower, or perhaps even his pupil, in Persian poetry.

To be sure, Vali must have called on Shāh Gulshan, if the latter was in Delhi when Vali came there. Gulshan came from Burhanpur, Gujarat, and traveled at least once to Ahmadābād, where Vali may have met him. There is a small Persian prose tract composed by someone called Vali who describes himself as a pupil of Gulshan. According to Madani, the master-pupil connection between Vali and Gulshan would have been for Persian and would have begun at Ahmadābād or Burhanpur.90 On balance, then, the likelihood of Vali having known Gulshan from before his visit to Delhi in 1700 is strong enough to cast serious doubt on the stories narrated by Mir and Qā’im about Vali and Gulshan.

I call these accounts “stories” because the details of Qā’im’s version are very different from those of Mir’s. Qā’im completed his taṣkīrah in 1754. He is reputed to have been at the task earlier than Mir. Nevertheless, neither Mir nor Qā’im was even born when Vali came to Delhi, so neither had any more personal knowledge than the other. Qā’im tells an even more curious tale. Recognizing that a poet who had attained the mature (by the reckoning of the time) age of thirty-three or thirty-five—Vali was born around 1665–1667—wasn’t a likely candidate for patronizing, somewhat avuncular advice from a comparative stranger, Qā’im stipulates that Vali was not yet a poet before that momentous meeting with Gulshan:

[Vali] used occasionally to compose a couple or so of Persian ši‘r’s in praise of the beauty of [a young Sayyid called Mir Abū’l-Ma‘ālī]. On arrival here [in Delhi], when he gained entrance to the presence of Ḥārat Shāiḫ Šā‘ūlāh Gulshan, the latter commanded him to compose poetry in Rekštah, and by way of education, gave away to him the following opening verse, which he composed [there and then]:

Were I to set down on paper 
The praises of the beloved’s 
Miraculous beauty, I would 
Spontaneously convert the paper 
Into the White Hand of Moses.

In short, it was due to the inspiration of the Ḥārat’s tongue that Vali’s poetry became so well-loved that each and every verse in his divān is brighter than the horizon of sunrise, and he wrote Rekštah with such expressive power and grace that many ustāds even of that time began to compose in Rekštah.91

This tale might be more plausible than Mīr’s, except that we know Valī was already a poet of substantial repute when he visited Delhi in 1700–1701. While it is impossible to date all of his poetry accurately, references to contemporaries who died before 1700 clearly establish that he was a serious Rekštah/Hindi poet before 1700. There is, for example, the following agonistic reference to the famous Indo-Persian poet Nāṣīr ‘Ali, who died in 1696:

Were I to send this line 
To Nāṣīr ‘Ali, he would upon 
Hearing it, spring up excited 
Like a streak of lightning.92

Other knowledgeable tagkrāh writers do not support the story of Shāh Gulshan’s advice; one in fact explicitly rejects it, sneering, “Let the truth or falsehood of this statement be on the original narrator’s head.”93

It is extremely unlikely that Vali’s poetry owes anything to Shāh Gulshan’s instruction or example. Apart from the Dakani tradition and language in his blood, and the part that Gujri played in his nurture, he had Ḥasan Shauqi (d. 1633?) as his exemplar. Shauqi was in Ahmadnagar (then in Golconda),

91. Qā‘īm Chāndpurī [1754] 1968: 105. It is impossible to render this beautiful verse satisfactorily in English. “White Hand of Moses” refers to a miracle granted to Moses by God at Sinai. He was asked to put his right hand under his collar. It came out entirely white, “without stain, or evil” (Qur’ān 27.12).
but his reputation seems to have been widespread. The main characteristics of Shauqi’s poetry are a richness of sensuous imagery and a language comparatively free of hard Telugu and *tatsama*-Sanskrit influences. An extreme case of these influences is the work of Fakhr-e Din Niẓāmi; more moderate but still fairly heavy influence is evident in the writing of Nuṣrati, perhaps the greatest Dakani poet. By comparison, Valī’s language tilted more toward the Persian-mixed Rekhtah of Delhi. Most of the Dakani component of Valī’s language is *tadbhava*; and a good bit of it is to be found in Delhi’s register as well.

It appears that a strain of Dakani/Hindvi developed in and around Aurangabad after Aurangzeb and his vast armies had established a presence there. This happened even before he took the throne at Delhi. His campaigns in the Deccan continued through his long reign (1658–1707). ‘Abd us-Sattār Siddiqi, perhaps the greatest modern comparative linguist in Urdu, says:

> It seems clear that by the end of the tenth century *hijrī* [1590/91], there were two forms of the Hindustani language in the Deccan. One, which was current in Dravidian[-dominated] areas of the Deccan, outside the territory of Daulatabad, and found few opportunities to renew its connections with the language of Delhi. . . . The other form of the language was that which was prevalent in Daulatabad and its surrounds. The Mughals turned towards the Deccan in the beginning of the eleventh *hijrī* century [end of the 1590s], and their influence grew fast. They also made Daulatabad their headquarters, and Aurangzeb, too, established the city of Aurangabad just a few miles from there. People from Delhi came to Aurangabad in very large numbers in the times of Shāhjahān and Aurangzeb, and brought Delhi’s high Urdu with them. It renewed and refurbished the language of the territory of Daulatabad, and the Aurangabadis happily adopted the new language of Delhi. And that is the language that we find in Valī; and but for some minor differences, it was the language spoken in Delhi in Valī’s time.\(^94\)

‘Abd us-Sattār Siddiqi may have simplified the case a bit, but the picture he presents is broadly accurate. Shafiq Aurangābādi writes about Nuṣrati that his poems come “heavy on the tongue because of their being in the mode of the Dakanis.” Maulvi ‘Abd ul-Ḥaq, who spent a substantial part of his life in Aurangabad, says that in the first half of the eighteenth century the language registers of Delhi and Aurangabad were practically indistinguishable. Once the Deccan became more or less independent of Delhi in the 1750s, the language of the Daulatabad-Aurangabad area lost touch with Delhi and gradually tilted back to the main Dakani mode.\(^95\)

Hasan Shauqi’s poetry is comparatively gentler on the Aurangabadi ear.

---

Hasan Shauqi is the only Dakani/Hindi/Rekhtah poet whom Vali mentions as a rival, or as worthy of comparison with himself:

It’s quite proper, O Vali,  
If Hasan Shauqi should come  
Back from the dead, eager  
For my poems.\textsuperscript{96}

All the others whom Vali ever mentions as equals or inferiors—and he names quite a few—are Persian poets. In a remarkable ghazal he fits the names of numerous Persian poets in a series, using them, through word-play, as words of praise for the beloved. Apart from Shauqi, the only Dakani/Hindi/Rekhtah poet whose name he brings in is Shâh Gulshan, and he can be described as a Hindi/Rekhtah poet only by courtesy.\textsuperscript{97}

So what did Vali do? He showed that Rekhtah/Hindi was capable of great poetry, just as Gujri/Hindi and Dakani/Hindi were. He also showed that Rekhtah/Hindi could rival, if not surpass, Indo-Persian poetry in sophistication of imagery, complexity and abstractness of metaphor, and the “creation of themes” (ma\={z}m\={u}n \={a}fr\={\i}n\={i}). Historically, perhaps his most important contribution was to infuse among Rekhtah poets the sense of a new poetics—a poetics that owed as much to the Indian-style Persian poetry, and through it to Sanskrit, too, as it did to his Dakani predecessors:

\begin{quote}
O Vali, the tongue of the master poet  
Is the candle that lights up  
The assembly of meanings.

\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots

The beloved has made her place  
In Vali’s heart and soul  
Like meaning in the word.

\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots

The way for new themes  
Is not closed;  
Doors of poetry  
Are open forever.

\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots

The beloved  
whose name is Meaning reveals  
Herself, bright, when the tongue  
Removes the curtain from  
The face of Poetry.
\end{quote}

Poetry is
Unique in the world, there is
No answer to poetry.98

THE NEW LITERARY CULTURE

By the early eighteenth century, many Indians—especially in the north but also in the Aurangabad area—regarded themselves as having a native speaker’s competence in Persian; I have given some details of the confident eighteenth-century Indian Persian literary culture in a recent article. Most of the earliest Rekhtah writers in Delhi were Persian poets who wrote in Rekhtah only on the side. That this was the case until much later in Aurangabad too is evidenced in a *tazkirah* by Shafiq Aurangbadī. He comments that he began writing poetry in Persian by the age of twelve (he was born in 1745), had no taste for Rekhtah, and in fact looked down upon it. When Rekhtah poetry became extremely popular among his friends, he too turned to it, but not without considerable mental conflict and anguish.99

The new wave of Rekhtah/Hindi writers who began to arrive on the scene in the early 1700s—and whose poetry received a much-needed boost from the example of Vali—wrote more Rekhtah than Persian.100 Yet Persian did not become the mere second string to the Delhi poet’s bow until much later. There was not much “high” literary activity in Rekhtah before the impact of Vali was felt in Delhi. As we saw earlier, until quite late in Delhi’s literary culture *ghazal* meant only “Persian *ghazal.*” Young writers who were turning to Rekhtah at the turn of the century in Delhi were perhaps more comfortable in Persian than in Rekhtah. Thus, when poets began composing in Rekhtah in large numbers, they needed guides or mentors to put them through their paces, whence was born the institution of *ustād* and *shāgird* (pupil, disciple), which is unique to Urdu literary culture and did not even exist in Dakani or Gujri.

Once established, the custom of forming *ustād-shāgird* relationships spread fast. In the beginning it certainly met a felt need: a literary community was giving up a foreign language in which it was comfortable in favor of the local

98. Vali [1945] 1996: 286, 203, 177 (these page numbers correspond to the first, second, and last three quoted verses, respectively).
100. By the mid-eighteenth century the Hindus, too, who had also been concentrating on Persian, began to adopt Rekhtah. In the beginning, major figures like Sarb Sukh Divâna (1727/28–1788/89) were bilingual in Urdu and Persian; Divâna established a long and illustrious line of *shāgirds* through his own *shāgirds*, especially Ja’far ‘Ali Hasrat (d. 1791/92). By the end of the century, Hindus were active participants in the Urdu creative scene, a situation that, happily, continues to this day, in spite of politically motivated efforts to alter it.
language—the literary codes of which were seen as more or less independent, so that they needed to be specially learned. What began as a need, however, soon became a fashion, and then a minor industry and a source of patronage. Loyalties were generated and abrogated; feuds began to occur between _ustāds_, and between _shāgirds_ of the same _ustād_; and poetic genealogy became an important part of a poet’s literary status. Within this new system, codes of conduct and protocols of behavior—such as the _mushā’irah_, or literary gathering—were developed. These were mostly in place by the 1760s, soon spreading to all Rekhtah/Hindi centers: Lucknow, Benares, Allahabad, Murshidabad, Patna, Aurangabad, Hyderabad, Surat, Rampur, Madras, and so on.101

One important manifestation of this new Urdu literary culture was its almost morbid obsession with “correctness” in language. Undue—and sometimes even almost mindless—emphasis on “correct” or “standard, sanctioned” speech in poetry and prose, and even in everyday converse, has been one of the most interesting and least understood aspects of Urdu culture from the mid-eighteenth century onward. Persian’s immense prestige (“Persian” here includes Arabic) may account for a part of this emphasis. The idea seems to have been to make Rekhtah approximate to the Persian of a native Persian speaker. This was elitism of a sort, and may well have been meant to be exactly that.

Shāh Ḥātim is reputed to be the person with whom all this began. He did recommend using words in accordance with their original Arabic/Persian pronunciation—something that, as we have seen, the Dakinis also recommended, but never practiced. Ḥātim also suggested removal of _hindī bhākhā_ words from the Rekhtah/Hindi poet’s active vocabulary. But the suspicion remains that all this may have been a defensive ploy for creating a distance between the language of _Valī_ and that of Delhi. For Ḥātim also emphasized, in no uncertain terms, the primacy of established idiom over bookish idiom. And Ḥātim, too, does not seem to have been at all faithful to his own prescriptions. In the selection from his _diwān_ called _Diwān zādah_ (1755/56), which he made by “purging” his older poetry of usages of which he now disapproved, one can find numerous examples of the very things that he was seeking to remove from the language of poetry.

101. Examples of poetic genealogy still occur: a poet from Maharashtra recently claimed to trace his poetic lineage back to Saudā (d. 1781) and Dard (d. 1785). See Ibrahim Ashk 1996:4.

The _mushā’irah_ had been in existence in India since the sixteenth century, but had been confined to Persian recitation alone. The new literary community of the North, gaining confidence gradually, instituted _mushā’irahs_ in Rekhtah as well. It was common until the 1920s, if not even later, for Persian poetry to be recited at Urdu _mushā’irahs_ without the audience or the poet feeling any incongruity. Until the 1950s and even later, individual Urdu poets’ collections (including mine) often contained a bit of Persian poetry too (Faruqi 1997a). For a full discussion of the _mushā’irah_, as well as the full literary and cultural dimensions of the _ustād-shāgird_ relationship, see Pritchett, chapter 15, this volume.
Compared to the prescriptions, however self-contradictory, of Hātim, Vali’s approach was freer and more relaxed: both local and Arabic/Persian pronunciation had equal right in the language; words used by the common people did not need to be avoided. This was the credo in Rekhtah also, but Vali, because of his influence and popularity, was the great exemplar who was to be imitated—and also denied. This tension comes through clearly in Shāh Ḥātim’s preface to the Divān zūdah:

This servant [Shāh Ḥātim] . . . during the past ten or twelve years, has given up many words. He has favored such Arabic and Persian words as are easy to understand and are in common use, and has also favored the idiom of Delhi, which the Mirzās of Hind [the north] and the nonreligious standard speakers [rind] have in their use; and [he] has stopped using the language of all and sundry areas, and also the Hindvi that is called the bhākhā; [he] has adopted only such a register as is understood by the common people, and is liked by the elite.\(^\text{102}\)

One can see Ḥātim’s dilemma: he wants to hunt with the hounds and run with the hare. He doesn’t want to declare independence from Vali, but he also wants to emphasize his own Delhi-ness. He wants to use Arabic and Persian vocabulary, but only such as can be commonly understood. (Vali, by contrast, was quite fond of Arabic phrases.) He wants to use language that is sophisticated and secular, language used by the Mirzās and rinds (educated, more or less free-living, nonreligious frequenters of wine houses and market places) of the north, but the language should also be understandable to the common people of Delhi. He doesn’t want to use Brajbhasha, the language of areas to the south of Delhi (that is, toward Aurangabad) from which both Dakani and Rekhtah had derived a number of tatsama words. (Vali’s language, by contrast, abounds in tatsama words.)

Ḥātim’s agenda was basically twofold: its negative part was his (un)conscious desire to move away from Vali; its positive part was his wish to bring the language of poetry into line with that of the Mirzās, the rinds, and the common people of Delhi. Balancing all these elements was a task, but great poets like Mīr performed it very well. Unfortunately, it was the least important and the least right-minded part of Shāh Ḥātim’s agenda—namely, downplaying the value of tatsama words—that caught the eye and fancy of many later historians. What was an attempt to arrive at a secular, urbanized and urbane, modern-idiomatic, and literate yet not overburdened language was seen and hailed as exclusionism and “reformism,” as if the language were a criminal or a patient who needed reform or healing and it was the duty of the poet to perform this task.

There is no doubt that the proportion of tatsama vocabulary declined in

Rekhtah/Hindi over the second half of the eighteenth century. But was it because of Hātim, or for other reasons not yet discovered? Was Hātim describing in the guise of prescription, and was the language at that time changing faster than we make allowance for? One would need more evidence than is available at present to ascribe the decline in the number of tatāsama words in literary Urdu to the “exclusionism” and “reforms” inaugurated by Hātim.

In any case, Urdu literary culture from the late eighteenth century onward does place an unfortunate stress, which is also entirely disproportionate to their value, on “purism,” “language reform,” “purging the language of undesirable usages,” and—worst of all—privileging all Persian-Arabic over all Urdu. Urdu is the only language whose writers have prided themselves on “deleting” or “excising” words and phrases from their active vocabulary. Instead of taking pride in the enlargement of vocabulary, they took joy in limiting the horizon of language, to the extent of banishing many words used even by literate speakers or their own ustāds. Why this Persian-privileging and “purifying” process came into existence, and why Urdu writers themselves took an active part in establishing and perpetuating it, is a question that I have addressed, though not entirely solved, elsewhere.103

The linguistic restrictiveness of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Urdu contrasts most starkly with the steady expansion of literary theory that we see from Valī (1665/57–1707) to Shāh Nasīr (1755?–1838) and Shaiḵ Nāṣīkh (1776–1838). The first major discovery in the field of literary theory was that a distinction could be made between maẓmūn (theme) and ma’nī (meaning). Classical Arab and Iranian theorists use the term ma’nī to mean “theme, content.” As late as 1752, we find Ték Chand Bahār in Bahār-i-ajam defining the word ma’nī as “synonym of maẓmūn.” Barely fifty years later, Shams al-lughāt, the next great Persian dictionary compiled in India, defines ma’nī as “that which is connoted by the word.” The idea that a poem could be about something (maẓmūn, theme), and could mean something different, or more (ma’nī, meaning), may have come from the Sanskrit tradition. One is reminded of Anandavardhana’s classification of different kinds of meanings (literal, secondary, implied) and surpluses of meaning.104

In Urdu, Mullā Nuṣratī Bijāpūrī (1600–1674) seems to have been the first...

103. Faruqi 1998. Muṣḥafī [1878] 1990 deals with the limitations placed on language. Of course, the power of langue is always greater than that of parole, and Urdu is no exception. Thousands of “incorrect” or “questionable” words and phrases entered even the literary language, despite the restrictions, and continue to enter even now. Yet many of the taboos that originated in the early nineteenth century are still in place. In theory, and also to a large extent in practice, Urdu literary idiom remains the most restrictive kind imaginable.

to use the term *mazmūn* in the sense of “theme, idea.” Since he does so a number of times, and usually in the context of poetic excellence, he is doubtless making a point in literary theory:

Reveal, O Lord, on the screen  
Of my poetic thought  
The freshness and virginity  
Of all my themes.

Your manner is new,  
And your speech  
Appeals to the heart.  
Your themes are lofty  
And colorful.

I spoke throughout  
By means of new themes, and thus  
Revealed the power  
Of God’s inspiration.

New, fresh themes  
Are my weapons  
To cool and kill  
My opponent’s breath.\(^{105}\)

Nuṣratī, a man of great learning, may have known Sanskrit. Or he may have picked up a point or two from Telugu-speaking literary friends, or from Kannada—he was originally from an area which is now in Karnataka (as, for that matter, Bijapur is too). In any case, he would have been aware that such a distinction was being made, or assumed, by his “Indian style” Persian-writing colleagues—and he himself said that he made Dakani poetry resemble that of Persian. More importantly, he also said in his *Gulshan-e 'ishq* (Garden of love, 1657) that there are many “Hindi” (Indian) excellences that cannot be properly transported into Persian, and he, Nuṣratī, having discovered the essence of both, had created a new kind of poetry by mixing the essence of one with the other.\(^{106}\)

The introduction of this far-reaching distinction between theme and meaning made several things possible. It was recognized, for instance, that while themes were theoretically infinite, very few of them were acceptable in poetry. Thus the creation of themes (*mazmūn āfīrīn*)—the search for new,

---

105. Nuṣratī Bijāpūrī 1959: 9, 27, 425, 426. In the second verse quoted, he praises the poet-king 'Alī 'Adīl Shāh II.

acceptable themes, or for new ways to express old themes—became a noble occupation for the poet. This gave rise to a mode called *khiyâl bandî* (capturing imaginary, abstract, elusive themes), in which the theme’s novelty or far-fetchedness became an objective for its own sake (although far-fetched or novel themes also had to pass the test of acceptability). The mode—though not the term—seems to have begun with the Indian-style Persian poets of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In Urdu, traces of this manner can be found in Vâli, ’Abd ul-Vali Uzlat, and Mîr. By the end of the eighteenth century, it was firmly in position as the ruling mode of the day.

Praising the beloved’s beauty, for instance, was a major theme. Praising the beauty of her face was a major subtheme. Praising the eyes, lips, cheeks, and so forth, were major sub-subthemes. Praising something that was not in any of the conceivable categories presented several challenges: one had to find such a thing; then one needed to imagine, or find, some praiseworthy aspect of it; and then, hardest of all, one needed to invent terms of praise that conformed to the dictates of convention. This is how Mîr looks at the beloved’s pockmarked face:

They weren’t so plentiful,  
The pockmarks on your face—  
Who has been planting  
His glances on your face?

This is brilliant, for it implies beauty both before and after disfigurement by smallpox. But the verse turns upon a wordplay: in Urdu, one of the ways to convey the act of looking intently at something is to say “bury/embed/plant the eyes or the glances in/on something.” Jur’ât (1748–1809) imagines a direr situation, but doesn’t quite achieve the image that could bring off the desired effect:

The body of that rosy-Rose  
Bathed in the efflorescence  
Of smallpox: like the action  
Of the moth on bright velvet.

Jur’ât uses for the beloved the word *gul*, which means “rose, flower,” and also “scar, spot.” This is happy wordplay, but the image of the rose-body

---

107. Ali Jawad Zaidi says that Urdu poets of the early eighteenth century adopted the art of *mażmûn e fûrisî* and complex craftsmanship as a conscious design, and the underlying theory “was not different from what Bhâmâhâ had developed in the seventh century. . . . The tradition that travelled from Sanskrit to Persian, and from thence to Urdu, may have kept changing its form and structure, but not its spirit.” Zaidi 1970: 41.
doesn’t go well with that of velvet. Now consider Nāsiḥ, greatest of the khyāl band poets:

When blisters of smallpox
Appeared on the beloved’s face,
The bulbul were deceived:
Dewdrops on rose petals, surely?110

Like Mir, Nāsiḥ introduces an outsider into the story; the difference is that in Mir, the outsider causes the harm, and in causing it reaffirms the “lookability” of the beloved’s face. In Nāsiḥ, the outsider presents another’s point of view. The subtlety is that the other is the bulbul, or nightingale, the quintessential lover, while the rose is the quintessential beloved. Thus the beloved’s ravaged face is not really ravaged; the bulbul takes it for rose petals bathed in dew. Both the shiʿr (verses) also affirm the beloved’s delicateness by suggestion (kināyah), but in different ways: in the Mir verse, the beloved is so delicate that the onlooker’s glances, like needles, hurt and cause breaks under the skin. In the Nāsiḥ verse, the delicate, rosy smoothness of the skin causes the blisters to glow like dewdrops.111

Consideration of khyāl band takes us nearly half a century ahead in my narrative, however, for khyāl band came into its own toward the end of the eighteenth century. The main mode of early-eighteenth-century poets was iḥām. If khyāl band sought to push to the limit the poet’s innovativeness (and in fact also his luck), it was the frequent use of iḥām (wordplay generated by the intent to deceive) that characterized the earliest major effort to make poems yield more meaning than they at first glance seemed to possess. This was called maʿnā ʿafirinī (creation of meanings)—as opposed to maẓmūn ʿafirinī (creation of themes). In the textbook definition of iḥām, the poet uses a word that has two meanings, one of which is remoter and less used than the other, and the remoter one is the intended meaning. The mind of the listener/reader naturally associates the word in question with the more immediate meaning and is thus deceived, or else the listener doubts that he has heard the verse correctly. Poets of the early eighteenth century, however, did much more than this. In the hands of Valī and the Delhi poets iḥām came to include many kinds of wordplay that showed greater creativity than the conventional definition of iḥām allowed for. For instance, they concocted situations in which the two meanings of the crucial word were equally strong, making it impossible to decide which was the poet’s intended meaning; or

111. It must be remembered that many shiʿrs of khyāl bandī sound faintly (or even strongly) bizarre in English translation today. One is tempted to believe, though, that they would not sound entirely outlandish to “thinking poets” (in Coleridge’s words) like John Donne or other metaphysical poets.
in which the crucial word had more than two meanings, all of them more or less relevant to the poem’s discourse.  

Let us now take a look at an instance of *ihām*. For obvious reasons, *ihām* does not fare well in translation, and excellence has to be traded off for translatability. Ābrū says:

I hacked through life in every way,  
Dying, and having to live again  
Is Doomsday.  

I will now supply, in order from obvious to less obvious, the aspects of meaning that are lost in translation: “I hacked through life in every way”: (1) I tried all ways of living a life; (2) I suffered all kinds of hardship. “Dying, and having to live again”: (1) being resurrected; (2) dying by inches, again; (3) engaging in the cycle of living and dying over and over again. “Doomsday”: (1) the day of resurrection, when all the dead will be brought back to life; (2) a major calamity; (3) a great deed; (4) a cruelty.

The main point about *ihām* is that it intends to deceive or surprise the reader/listener, to create a happy effect of wit, and, ultimately, to explore new dimensions of meaning and the limits of language. It was also recognized, however, that some poems appeal directly to the emotions though their meaning, at least at first flush, and perhaps always, is not very clear or does not seem valuable. The quality that makes this possible is *kaifiyat*, a state of subtle and delicious enjoyment such as one derives from tragedy or a sad piece of music. *Kaifiyat* does not permit sentimentality in the sense of extravagance in words—that is, words that are larger and louder than the emotion that the poem is trying to convey. *Kaifiyat* makes no overt appeal to the listener/reader’s emotions; in many cases, the protagonist/speaker’s own mood or state of mind may be difficult to fathom, and it is always complex enough to discourage a direct, linear interpretation.

The concept of *kaifiyat* resembles the Sanskrit concept of *dhvani* (suggestion) in some respects. Krishnamoorthy has noted that Abhinavagupta

112. Faruqi 1997b.  
113. Ābrū 1990: 270.  
114. Even in its most elementary form, *ihām* was regarded as *sangat-e ma‘navi* (a figure pertaining to meaning, an *arthālaṅkāra*), and not just a frivolity, as modern Urdu critics seem to have unanimously concluded. A similar prejudice has been held against Sanskrit *śleṣa*, which deploys a number of strategies remarkably like *ihām*. Theorists have disagreed on the question of what produces polysemy in Sanskrit. Udīhaṭa seems to have denied even two senses to a word, holding that in case of *śleṣa*, “the words should be regarded as different when they have different senses, even though their forms may be the same.” The position of Mammaṭa was closer to the concept of *iḥām* as defined in the books: one word, two meanings (Kunjunni Raja [1963] 1995: 44–45). In the hands of the Urdu poet, an *iḥām*-based utterance could convey many more than just two meanings; this is less common in Sanskrit.
appreciated in a poem “the vital animation provided by the emotional content described in all its variety, including states of mind,” and that Abhinavagupta cited as an example Bhaṭṭendurāja’s description of the physical and emotional responses of the village girls when they first see the god Kṛṣṇa in his full youth. Krishnamoorthy paraphrases Abhinavagupta’s comments on Bhaṭṭendurāja’s muktaka (independent stanza) as follows: “For one who cannot respond to the intensity of love in this stanza, it cannot have any poetic value. There is no recognisable figure of speech beyond two common-place similes, nor any highly striking poetic gem embodying the rasa of śṛṅgāra or love.”\(^{115}\)

While dhvani is a more comprehensive concept than kaifiyat, what Abhinavagupta seems to be describing here is precisely what most often happens in a verse with kaifiyat.\(^{116}\) The absence of striking metaphors or images makes a verse of kaifiyat even harder to translate than an ihām-bearing verse; here is one such example:

I looked at her, and sighed a sigh
I looked at her with longing, once.\(^{117}\)

The mood of a kaifiyat-bearing verse can be compared to that of an accomplished Elizabethan lyric or song. This view would be somewhat reductionistic if applied always—especially to a truly great poet like Mir, whose kaifiyat poems are found very often to hold complex meanings, too. It does, however, generally hold true for verses like the one quoted here.

I round out this discussion of kaifiyat with an example from a ghazal by Mir, in his third dīwān, compiled around 1785:

I wept away all the blood there was
In my heart; where is any drop left now?
Sorrow turned me to water
And my life flowed away.
What is there left of me now?\(^{118}\)

The interrogative has a rhetorical power in Urdu that the English translation cannot match. Yet if not the rhetorical power, perhaps some of the pensive, bitter-heavy mood does come through—the voice of one who has seen all weariness, all departures, and all journeys. Mir gives free rein to his instinct for wordplay even in such situations.

I devote so much space to khīyāl bandī and kaifiyat because khīyāl bandī, if at all known to modern Urdu scholars, is one of the unmentionables of Urdu

\(^{118}\) Mir [1796?] 1968: 556.
poetry; hardly any critic has had the courage to recognize that Ghālib—
whom most people today regard as the greatest Urdu poet—was a khiyāl band

to the core. As for kaiyfīyat, the term is unknown, and modern poets like Fi-
räq Gorakhpūrī (1896–1982), some of whose poetry evinces the quality of kaiyfīyat, have been praised for entirely the wrong reasons.

Another concept, not fully developed or realized but clearly present in
poets from Mir to Shāh Naṣīr and even Ghālib, was that of shorīsh, or shor
angezi. The phrase shor angezi has been present in Persian since at least the
sixteenth century and seems to have become a technical term by the end of
the seventeenth century. A poem was considered shor angezi if it had the qual-
ity of passionate yet impersonal comment on the outside universe, or the ex-
ternal scheme of things. Also important were notions concerning the
grammar of poetry, like rab( connection between the two lines of a verse)
and concepts flowing from irām, such as riāyat (consonance) and munāsibat
(affinity), both of which pertain to the play of words in extending or
strengthening the meaning in a poem.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

‘Abd ul-
Haq, Maulvi. 1968. Urdū kī ibtīdā’ī nashū o namā mērī šayfyā-e kirām kā hām
Brentwood, Md.: Amana Corporation.
Delhi: Bureau for the Promotion of Urdu, Government of India.
Adīb, Maśūd Ḥasan Rizvi. 1984. Shumāli hind kī qadim tarīn urdū nazmeñi (Urdu). Luck-
now: Kitāb Nagar.
Afżal, Muḥammad. 1965. “Bīkāt kahāni.” In Qadim Urdū 1, edited by Maśūd Ḥusain
Khān. Hyderabad: Osmania University. (Also included in Sherānī 1966, vol. 2.)
Ahmad Gujrātī, Shaikh. [1580–1585] 1983. Yūsuf zulaikha (Urdu). Edited by Sayyid-
Amrullāh Hāhābādī, Abu-
H. Ḥasan. [1778–1780] 1968. Taṣkirah-e masarrat afzā. Edited, abridged, and trans-
New Delhi: Bureau for the Promotion of Urdu, Government of India.
Delhi: Kāvasth Urdū Sabhā.
Book Depot.


Like almost all other Urdu literary genres, the *tazkira* (anthology) tradition of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was taken over from Persian; in fact, until well into the nineteenth century most *tazkiras* of Urdu poetry were themselves written in Persian. Etymologically, *tazkira* is derived from an Arabic root meaning “to mention, to remember.” Historically, the literary *tazkira* grows out of the ubiquitous little “notebook” (*bayāz*) that lovers of poetry carried around with them for recording verses that caught their fancy. A typical notebook would include some verses by its owner and others by poets living and dead, both Persian and Urdu. More serious—or more organized—students might compile notebooks devoted only to certain kinds of poetry: to the work of living poets, for example, or the finest poets, or poets from a particular city, or women poets, or poets in a certain genre. There were a great many occasional poets, but only a few of them had become “possessors of a volume” (ṣāhib-e divān) by collecting a substantial body of their own poetry and arranging it for dissemination in manuscript form. Compilers of notebooks were thus often moved to perform a public service by sharing their work with a wider circle. With the addition of a certain amount—sometimes a very small amount—of introductory or identifying information about the poets, a notebook could become a *tazkira*. *Tazkiras* circulated in manuscript form, and as printing presses became more common in north India they gradually began to be printed as well.

---

1. It should be kept in mind, however, that the first *tazkiras* of Persian poetry were Indian; they were composed in Sindh in the early thirteenth century. See Alam, chapter 2, this volume. The transliteration scheme employed here is that of Pritchett 1994.

Since *tazkirahs* both define and embody the parameters of this literary culture, they are excellent tools with which to understand it. They can illustrate for us its highly formalized, remarkably coherent vision of poetry. By no coincidence, Urdu criticism—that is, literary criticism of Urdu literature written in Urdu—has adopted over the last century the term “classical” (*klāsīki*) as a rubric for the poetry of this period. For the purposes of this essay, then, and to avoid definitional ambiguities, “classical” refers to the poetry created by this literary culture in north India between the early eighteenth century and the late nineteenth century. The poets of this literary culture were conscious of sharing both a vocabulary of inherited forms (genres, meters, themes, imagery) and a set of authoritative ancestors to be emulated (certain earlier Persian and Urdu poets); they were committed to mastering and augmenting a single, much-cherished canon, so that the memorization of thousands of Urdu and Persian verses lay at the heart of their training. They even shared, as we will see, an unusually codified approach to poetic practice: a formidable apprenticeship system to which much importance was given and an institutionalized set of regular gatherings for recitation and discussion. All these elements were already fully present—albeit still somewhat new—by the time of the first three *tazkirahs* (1752) and were present still—albeit somewhat on the decline—at the time of the last *tazkirah* (1880). Both before the early eighteenth century and after the late nineteenth century, the absence of not just some but most of the elements in this cluster is equally striking. The sudden, seemingly full-fledged appearance of this literary culture, and then its relatively abrupt and thoroughgoing disappearance, give it clearly marked boundaries; it thus becomes, for comparative purposes, a very suitable case study.

All the *tazkirahs* document and record this literary culture—but not, of course, always in the same way. Their origin in the ubiquitous personal “notebook” explains one of their most conspicuous traits: their individuality, their insouciance, the insistence of each one on defining its own approach to its own group of poets. These idiosyncrasies can be clearly seen in their various styles of organization. Although the majority arrange their contents in alphabetical order by the first letter of each poet’s pen name—and thus are emphatically ahistorical—this scheme is by no means universal; no fewer than twenty out of the sixty-eight or so surviving *tazkirahs* adopt other systems. The earliest three *tazkirahs*, all completed in 1752, present their poets in a largely random order. The fourth, completed only months later in 1752, is alphabetical. The compiler of the fifth, completed in 1754–1755 but begun

---

3. The fact that two of the three earliest *tazkirahs* claim to be the first *tazkirah* of Urdu poets makes it probable that we are indeed seeing the beginning of the genre, rather than simply its earliest surviving examples. However, early *tazkirahs* also refer to other early *tazkirahs* not now extant (Akbar Haidari Kashmiri 1995: 13).
as early as 1744, already felt able to present the poets in an “early, middle, late” sequence.4

In this study I examine two tazkirahs in some detail, within the context of their tradition; I also consider the kinds of attack to which they have been subject since the death of their literary culture. These two tazkirahs are opposite enough in certain respects to reveal the whole range of the genre. The first is very early and helps to define its tradition; the second is quite late and shows us the literary culture in its fullest flower. The first works selectively and haphazardly; the second is encyclopedic and tightly organized. The first is acerbic, sharp, austere, authoritative; the second is casual, snobbish, gossipy, conventional in its judgments. The first is famous for pronouncements; the second, for anecdotes. The first grapples with questions of origin; the second is intensely present-minded. Both make legitimate claims to linguistic and literary innovation. And beneath the level of their differences, both reveal the contours of the same brilliantly accomplished literary culture, and show its trajectory during the two centuries of its creative life.

**MIR’S TAZKIRAH**

Among the earliest group of three tazkirahs, one stands out as the first tazkira par excellence. It opened up the tradition as decisively as Āb-e hayât (Water of life, 1880), the last tazkira and the first literary history, eventually closed it down. This primal tazkira, Nikāt al-shū’ārā (Fine points about the poets, 1752), is a literary as well as historical document of the first magnitude. In it, one of the two greatest poets of the tradition, Muḥammad Taqī “Mir” (1722–1810), gives us not only his selection of poets worth mentioning but also literary judgments about the nature and quality of their work, often illustrated with “corrections” (iṣlāḥ) that he felt would improve individual verses.

Mir is well aware that he stands near the beginning of a tradition. He introduces his tazkira on that basis:

Let it not remain hidden that in the art of rekhah—which is poetry of the Persian style in the language of the exalted city [urdu-e mu‘ādā, lit. “exalted encampment”] of Shahjahānābād in Delhi—until now no book has been composed through which the circumstances [ḥāl] of the poets of this art would remain on the page of the time. Therefore this tazkira, of which the name is Nikāt al-shū’ārā, is being written.

Although rekhah is from the Deccan, nevertheless, since no writer of tightly connected [marbūṭ] poetry has arisen from that region, their names have not been placed at the beginning. And the temperament of this inadequate one [the author] is also not inclined in such a direction, for [recording] the cir-

---

cumstances of a number of them would be bothersome. Still, the circumstances of some of them will be recorded, God Most High willing.

I hope that whichever connoisseur of poetry [sāhib-e sukhan] this book reaches will bestow on it a glance of favor.5

Mir thus begins by pithily defining rekhtah (mixed), the commonest name in his time for what we now call “Urdu” poetry: rekhtah is poetry made by shaping Delhi urban language in the literary mold of Persian.6

After this definition, however, Mir must deal with an uncomfortable fact: the existence of at least several centuries’ worth of “Dakani” Urdu poetry composed in the Deccan (in Golconda and Bijapur) and elsewhere (notably, in Gujarat).7 Within a few brief sentences Mir performs several contortions as he seeks to explain how he has dealt with the Dakani poets. Rekhtah—the poetry, not the language itself—is “from” (az) the Deccan, he acknowledges. However, no writer of “tightly connected” (marbut) poetry (a term we will examine later) has appeared there. Therefore he has not given Dakani poetry pride of place in his tazkirah. Moreover, he himself is not a researcher by temperament; thus he is not inclined to trouble himself (or his readers?) with a systematic study of these second-rate poets. Still, he plans to include “some of them.”

Mir does indeed include a fair number of Dakani poets; almost a third of the 105 poets in his tazkirah are southerners. One such Dakani poet was ’Abd ul-Vali ’Uzlat, a personal friend whose “notebook” Mir gratefully mined for information (87–102). But for over two-thirds of the Dakani poets he includes, Mir gives little or no biographical information and records only a verse or two. Plainly Dakani poets are quite numerous, but Mir does not know—and obviously does not want to know—much about them. They cannot be omitted, but neither are they fully accepted as peers, much less ancestors.8

Mir’s complaint that most Dakani poets do not write “tightly connected” poetry shows that he was thinking chiefly of the ghaṣal, which in any case was by far the most important genre in his literary culture. The ghaṣal was incorporated, along with so much else, from Persian; but once again, to give the picture its due complexity, it should be noted that one of the very ear-

6. The later—and clearly tendentious—British misunderstanding of the term urdu-e mu’āllā as “army camp” instead of “royal court” is discussed by Faruqi in chapter 14, this volume.
8. Some of the contours of this vexed relationship have been mapped by Petievich 1990, 1999; and by Faruqi in chapter 14, this volume. Their explorations of these complex regional and cultural tensions, though inevitably speculative at times, perform an invaluable service, opening up crucial, long-ignored areas of literary and cultural history, and showing the kinds of research that must be done before we can claim any adequate historical understanding of the situation.
liest important founders of Persian ġhazal, Mas'ūd-e Sa'd Salmān (c. 1046–1121), was a Ghaznavid court poet in Lahore. The ġhazal is a brief lyric poem, generally romantic and/or mystical in tone, evoking the moods of a passionate lover separated from his beloved. Each two-line verse (šīr) of the ġhazal was in the same strictly determined Perso-Arabic syllabic meter, and the second line of each verse ended with a rhyming syllable (qāfyah), followed by an optional (but very common) refrain (radif) one or more syllables long. To set the pattern in oral performance, the first verse usually included the rhyming element(s) at the end of both lines. The last verse usually included the pen name (takhallis) of the poet. Each verse was semantically independent, so that the unit of recitation, quotation, and analysis was almost always the individual two-line verse, not the whole ġhazal. This independence made the marbut quality of each verse an obvious criterion for critical judgment.

In the conclusion to his taḏkirah, Mir carefully delineates the contours of this ġhazal-centered literary universe. He divides rehwat into six types: first, verses in which one line is Persian and one Urdu; second, verses in which half of each line is Persian and half Urdu; third, verses in which Persian verbs and particles are used, a “detestable” practice; fourth, verses in which Persian grammatical structures (tarkib) are brought in, a dubious practice to be adopted only within strict limits; fifth, verses based on Ḿam, the use of “a word fundamental to the verse, [in which] that word should have two meanings, one obvious and one remote, and the poet should intend the remote meaning, not the obvious one.” The sixth and last type, “the style that I have adopted,” is “based on the use of ‘all verbal devices’ [ṣanāṭ].” Mir explains: “By all verbal devices is meant alliteration; metrical and semantic parallelism in rhymed phrases [tarsi’]; simile; limpidity of diction; eloquent word choice [fasāhat]; rhetoric [balāghat]; portrayals of love affairs [adā bandī]; imagination [kiyāl]; and so on” (161).

The first four of these categories consist of verses so closely bound to Persian that they contain whole chunks of the language, or at least incorporate its grammatical forms and structures. Poetry like this represents rehwat’s earliest history: Mir attributes occasional macaronic verses of the first type to Amīr Khusrav (1253–1325), the poet to whom he gives pride of place—in lieu of the Dakani poets—by putting him first in the taḏkirah (10). The fifth category describes a specialized form of punning that had been highly fashionable in Mir’s youth; after its particular vogue had passed, it was destined to remain, along with other forms of wordplay, central to the technical repertoire.

Mir reserves his sixth category for himself; and in his own poetry he wants

to have it all. He claims to use in his work the whole available repertoire of verbal devices and techniques. The subtlety and complexity of his poetry have recently been analyzed with a sophistication of which he would certainly have approved. And as we have seen, Mir particularly values poetry with complex internal connectedness; his primary reproach against Dakani poets is that they fail to create it. Later in the tazkirah he returns with special emphasis to this point, acknowledging that there are a few exceptions but repeating his scornful assertion that most Dakanis are “poets of no standing” who merely “go on writing verses” without knowing how to make them marbuṭ. About one verse by a Dakani poet he complains even more sarcastically, “The relationship between the two lines of this verse—praise be to God, there’s not a trace!” (87, 91).

Mir in his tazkirah outlines the terrain of his own literary culture not merely theoretically, but historically and practically as well. He is highly aware of poetic lineages: where possible, he always names the ustāds of the poets he includes. The ustād-shāgīrd, or master-pupil, relationship was a systematically cultivated and much-cherished part of the north Indian Urdu tradition—and, apparently, of no other ghazal tradition, including the Indo-Persian. This apprenticeship system transmitted over time a command of the technical repertoire of verbal devices, as exemplified in verses from the classical poetic canon. At the heart of the system was the process of “correction” by which the ustād improved the shāgīrd’s poetry. It appears that in practice the most common kind of correction involved changing only a word or two, and that the chief goal of such changes was generally to make the two lines of the verse more tightly connected.

Mir also attaches much importance to another institution that is especially—though not uniquely, since Persian and especially Indo-Persian examples have been reported—characteristic of the north Indian Urdu tradition: the mushā’irah, or regular gathering for poetic recitation and discussion. Mir himself hosted one such mushā’irah and carefully recorded in his tazkirah the manner in which this came about. The poet Mir “Dard” (1721–1785), whom Mir venerated as a Sufi master, handed it over to him:

And the poetic gathering for rekhah at this servant’s house that is regularly fixed for the fifteenth day of each month, in reality is attached and affiliated only to him. For before that, this gathering used to be fixed at his house. Through the revolving of unstable time, that gathering was broken up. Thus, since he had heartfelt love for this unworthy one, he said, “If you fix this gath-
ering for your house, it will be a good thing." Keeping in mind the love of this gracious one, it was thus arranged. (50)

Even at this early stage mushā’irahs must have been omnipresent, for Miʿrūs allusions to several others. “Four or five years ago there used to be a gathering of rekhātuh companions at Jaʿfar Ṭḥāl’s house—God knows what happened that caused it to break up”; “In the old days, for several months he [the poet ‘Kāfir’] had fixed a gathering for rekhātuh at his house; finally his rakish habits caused it to break up”; “I used to see him [the poet ‘Ajiz’] in Hāfiz Ḥalīm’s mushā’irah” (127, 135–36).

This latter instance seems to be almost the only time Miʿrū actually uses the word mushā’irah for such sessions; usually there is some general term for “gathering” (majlis; jalsah; more rarely, majmāʿ), and once he even experiments with murākhīhab— which, he explains, has been devised to refer to a gathering for rekhātuh “on the analogy of mushā’irah” (since the latter term refers to a gathering for poetry [shiʿr] in general, 134). The institution thus plainly antedates the fixing of its name: there were well-established mushā’irahs before there was even a well-established name for them. While many South Asian literary cultures have featured occasional gatherings for literary performance (e.g., the goṣṭh in Malayalam, the aranīyam in Tamil, the kavigān in Bangla), and a few have even had regular ones (e.g., the kind sponsored by Vastupāla in thirteenth-century Gujarāt), these have generally been under the control of a courtly patron or outside authority. Urdu mushā’irahs, however, even when sponsored by patrons, have been largely controlled by the poets themselves, and have had, as we will see, many of the features of technical workshops.

THE EXEMPLARY SAJJĀD

One of Miʿrū’s favorite poets, and a personal friend as well, was called Sajjad (d. 1806?). In describing Sajjad, Miʿrū reveals many facets of his own understanding of rekhātuh and its proper practice:

Miʿrū Sajjad is from Akbarābād [Agra]; he is a seeker of knowledge, has ability, and is an excellent poet of rekhātuh. He is a shāāgīr of Miyaʿīrub, and uses the pen-name “Sajjad.” He is a very good man, and his poetry has already arrived at the level of ustād-ship: it is extremely well composed, and possesses themes [maʿāni]. His speech is not that of just anybody. When a piece of white paper is placed before him, then his colorful thought becomes the shadow of the [fertilizing] rain cloud on the garden of searching [for new themes]. Enjoyable construction [bandish] is a servant to his every line. His every verse in a short meter runs a razor across the liver; the language of his expression, in its refined-ness, is the jugular vein of poetry. Injustice is another thing; otherwise [to the fair-minded] the depth [tahdāri] of his poetry is manifest. To anyone who knows
his hair-splitting temperament, his verse is coiled and burnt, like a hair touched by flame.

Formerly there used to be at his house a gathering of friends and a {rekhtah}-recitation assembly. This servant too used to go. For the present, because of some misfortunes our meetings have been somewhat reduced, from both sides. May God keep him well. (60)

According to Mir, a good verse is intellectually piquant: it shows a mastery over great “hordes” of themes, and it arranges them to create fresh effects. It is vividly imagined: a colorful mind-born garden is made to bloom on the white page. It is tightly constructed: every line is inventive and is enjoyably presented. It is powerful as a razor—literally, a surgical lancet—on flesh, and delicate as the jugular vein. To ascribe to the poet a “hair-splitting temperament” is actually a compliment to his subtlety and fine powers of discrimination. His verses are “coiled”—convoluted, complex, full of multiple meanings—and also “burnt,” like the suffering heart of the archetypal lover. Intellectually piquant, vividly imagined, tightly constructed, emotionally powerful, layered with “coiled” and intertwined meanings—this, in Mir’s eyes, is the ideal {ghazal} verse.

Here we also see Mir displaying his own love for subtle, elegant wordplay. Although he is writing—in Persian—what we would think of as critical or analytical commentary, he conveys his meaning by playing with metaphors that themselves are directly part of the {ghazal} universe. And in a markedly belletristic way, he creates constant echoes and resonances in his own prose. For example, Mir praises Sajjad for his sophisticated literary sensibility by attributing to him a “hair-splitting” (mūshigāf) temperament. Then he describes his poetry as multilayered, convoluted, “coiled” (pechdār); and also as emotionally intense—passionate and pain-filled, literally, “burnt” (sokhtah), like the archetypal lover’s heart. Both of these qualities are captured when he calls Sajjad’s verse a “hair touched by flame” (mū-i ātash didah): As everyone in the {ghazal} world knows, a hair singed by a flame will instantly form a tight curl, and the curl itself will be dark and ashy. Such use of a series of words drawn from the same domain, while conducting discourse of an ostensibly unrelated kind, is a form of elegance much valued in the medieval Persian prose tradition. Since it is supererogatory, it feels luxurious and aristocratic: it gives the mind two (or more) pleasures for the price of one.

After this introduction, Mir provides us with many samples of Sajjad’s poetry. Most of them, of course, are single verses or selected small groups of

15. I am grateful to Shamsur Rahman Faruqi for help in interpreting this and other examples of Mir’s difficult Persian, and for many other kinds of advice and counsel about this paper. Faruqi’s work shows that the word mū’ni, literally “meaning,” here refers to what later came to be called mazmūn, or “theme” (Faruqi 1997: 14–25).
verses rather than whole ghazals. With the very first such sample Mir offers us his own “correction” as well. It involves, as many corrections do, a change in a single word, and it seeks to tighten the verse internally. Sajjād’s verse, followed by Mir’s comment, is:

Don’t demand your deserts from these infidel idols, for here if anyone
Dies of their tyranny then they say justice was done.\(^{16}\)

Although false [bāṭīl] is false, nevertheless in the first line, in place of “infidel” [kāfīr], according to the belief of this faqīr, the word “false” [bāṭīl] is true [ḥaq].

(60)

The beloved, in ghazal convention, is well-known to be an idol: beautiful, cruel, demanding, treacherous, a false god who diverts one’s attention from the true God.\(^{17}\)

Mir’s words here have two dimensions. Bāṭīl (false, vain) in the first line would be a better adjective for “idols,” since it would doubly echo the “true” in the second line: ḥaq has a range of meanings, including truth, justice, and God. This pairing of opposites would increase the marbūṭ quality of the verse, thus enhancing its excellence. But Mir is also showing once again his own delight in clever wordplay: he is using a form of allusive double meaning (ṣīla’) much appreciated in the medieval Persian literary tradition. Since the verse is about true and false religious faith, justice and injustice, his word choices are similarly focused. He makes a point of playing with paradox: instead of saying that the word “false” is more suitable, he says that although “false is false,” nevertheless “false is true.” And he introduces religious double meanings by contrasting “false” with ḥaq, “truth, justice, God.” Appropriately for the domain of meaning, he refers to himself as “this faqīr” and speaks of his literary judgment as his “belief.” Even as he uses language analytically, he uses it playfully and creatively as well.

MIR AND YAQĪN

Mir not only gives us the exemplary Sajjād, he presents an anti-hero as well: the poet Ināmullāh Khān “Yaqīn” (1727?–1755). Yaqīn “has compiled a diwan and is very famous,” as Mir acknowledges; his ustād was the prestigious Mirzā “Maṭhar.” Moreover, his late father was humane, sociable, hospitable, poetically inclined, and a personal friend of Mir’s. How then, Mir implies, can the son have gone so wrong? “People have told me that Mirzā Maṭhar used to compose verses and give them to him, and he counted them as his

\(^{16}\) kāfīr batōn se dād nah chāhā ki kāfīr ko ‘i/ mar jā sitam se un ke to kahte hasā ḥaq hu’ā.

\(^{17}\) Here as always, the beloved is grammatically masculine, very probably to achieve a “desirable state of nonparticularity” (Haftī [1893] 1969: 133) and abstraction.
own legacy.” This Mir finds hard to believe—he is even “inclined to laugh”—because “everything else can be inherited except poetry” (80–81).

He then proceeds to denigrate Yaqin’s character and abilities as thoroughly as possible. Yaqin surrounds himself with flatterers: “To make a long story short, he has taken up some petty and worthless people [as admirers]—if you and I wanted, we too could take up such people.” He is arrogant: “He thinks so highly of himself that in his presence even the pride of Pharaoh would appear as humility.” And his incompetence is manifest, for “on meeting this person you instantly realize that he has absolutely no taste in the understanding of poetry,” and in fact “everyone agrees” that his poetry “is not free of flaws.” Mir can even offer proof: he reports that the poet “Saqib” once went to Yaqin’s house “only to test him,” and “fixed the pattern for a ghazal” to be composed on the spot by both poets. The result? Saqib “composed a whole ghazal in good order—and not even a single line of verse from him!” (80–81).

Mir’s primary accusation, bolstered by snide anecdotes, is direct and highly insulting—that Yaqin simply appropriated his ustād Maghar’s verses and claimed them as his own (the accusation seems to have been quite false). While such behavior in a senior poet was unforgivable, more subtle kinds of appropriation were a major source of tension within the tradition. The corpus of Persian ghazal was immense and prestigious and was constantly being augmented by contemporary Indo-Persian poets. What if a poet in effect translated (or perhaps “transcreated”) a Persian verse into Urdu? If this happened deliberately, it was “plagiarism” (sarqah) and was held to be culpable. But what if such duplication happened accidentally? Then it was a case of “coincidence” (tavārud), in which parallel thought processes applied to the same material led to similar results. Such cases were an inevitable result of the way ghazal poetry worked. The semantically independent, internally unified, metrically tight verses were ideally designed for memorization. Poets were trained in part by memorizing literally thousands of such (Persian and Urdu) verses. Since the individual two-line verses were not semantically bound to the particular ghazal in which they occurred, they required a great deal of prior knowledge on the part of the audience. This knowledge included a map of the interrelated, metaphorically based “themes”—usually called mazmūn, though sometimes the term māni was used—that constituted the ghazal universe.18 The sharing of these themes meant that poets were always echoing or evoking (if not on the verge of “plagiarizing”) each other’s verses.

Mir then shows us an example of such interrelated themes: two verses that share their basic imagery, but not culpably. One of Yaqin’s opening verses,
included among the samples of his poetry, reminds Mir of one of his own. But the two make very different use of their basic thematic matter. Mir cites the two verses side by side:

This utterance of a naked madman [majnūn] pleases me—
How long can one always keep on ripping? I’ve passed beyond my collar. 19

This faqir has a verse very near to this one, with almost the same theme [mānī], and in my opinion it is better in quality:

Rip upon rip appeared, as fast as I had them sewn up—
Now I’ve washed my hands of my collar itself. (86) 20

The very word for madness, jinnūn, evokes Majnūn (the “mad one,” lit. the “jinn-possessed”), the classic mad lover of Arabic-Persian-Turkish-Urdu literary tradition. And with the theme of madness we are at the heart of the ghasal’s system of imagery: the lover, if not always mad, is always on the verge of madness.

For the ghasal is always exploring borderline cases—and, in the process, playing with boundaries. The ghasal looks for boundaries in order to transgress them; the ghasal poet makes some of his best hay in fields where the wild paradox grows. This is why in the ghasal universe there is no coziness, no rootedness, no wives and children, no normalcy or domestic tranquility whatsoever. Instead there is transgression beyond all plausibility. Poets envision themselves as madmen; as drunks, wastrels, or profligates; as infidels or apostates from Islam; as criminals facing execution; as mystical seekers claiming direct access to God; as voices speaking from beyond the grave; and as lovers always of forbidden and unsuitable beloveds (courtesans, unavailable ladies in pardah, beautiful boys). For as Azād shrewdly observes in Ab-e hayāt, “In presenting everyday topics, the impact of the expressive power is extremely weak.” By contrast, he says, the use of “matters that are contrary to good manners” creates a kind of “heat and quickness of language”—so that “the urge evoked in the poet’s heart mingles with the emotional effect of the poetry to create a little tickle in the armpits even of sleepers.” 21

Ghasal convention prescribes that a mad lover will rip apart the neck-opening of his kurtā because he feels himself suffocating and needs more air; he will then proceed to tear at his clothing more generally, because those in grief and despair rend their garments, and because madmen are known to tear their clothes off. Majnūn, as everyone in the ghasal world knows, fled

19. mujhe yih bāt khush ā’ī hai āk majnūn-e ‘uryān se / kehā kī kahānī tak chāk ham gūze garebān se. (Amending bayābān—in this context obviously a calligraphic error—to garebān, and ā’ī to ā’ī.)
20. chāk par chāk hu’ā jān jāan silāyā ham ne / ab garebān hi se hath uṭhāyā ham ne.
to the wilderness after he lost his beloved Lailâ. There he lived quite alone, except for the sympathetic wild animals whom he charmed with his songs of love. He rent his garments until he was virtually naked. Yaqîn’s verse imagines an encounter with a naked madman, a “jinn-possessed” (majnûn) one. The madman complains, “How long can one always keep on ripping?” Beyond the collar, what does one do next?

This noninformative (inshâ’iyah) mode of speech, questioning or speculative or exclamatory, is a fundamental device of the ghazal and is far more versatile than any factual or informative (khabariyah) statement. In fact such inshâ’iyah speech is multifaceted in Urdu (and Persian) in a way that can hardly be captured in English, since it is made possible by grammatical simplicities and the absence of punctuation.22 Such radical multivalence is part of the ghazal’s “meaning creation” (ma’ni āfrînî)—its love for extracting the maximum number of meanings from the fewest possible words.

Yaqîn offers us inshâ’iyah discourse in the form of a rhetorical question that remains unanswered: How long can one keep ripping one’s garment—before what? Before it falls apart into shreds and one is left entirely a “naked madman”? Before one loses patience and tears it off and flings it away? Before one’s passion enters a new phase and ripping a garment no longer suffices to express it? Before one reaches a state so transcendent that one no longer attaches any importance to clothing at all? And how does this question fit together with the final brief khabariyah statement, “I’ve passed beyond my collar”? Does he rip other things now? Other garments? His own flesh?

Yaqîn’s is not a bad verse, but Mir is right to prefer his own. He knows that a twist is needed to establish originality—the introduction of some new thought, or even some especially suggestive new word. “A fresh word is equal to a majmûn,” as Shâh Jahân’s poet laureate Abû Ẓâlîb “Kalím” put it.23 Mir’s verse seems to regard the whole process of garment-ripping in a way more mystified than mystical. He is actually trying to keep the neck-opening of his kurtâ mended, it seems, but every time he gets a rent stitched up, another one appears. Because he is so absent-minded, so heedless, so lost in his inner desolation, he finds that these rips just seem to happen of themselves, with no indication of the cause. His reaction to the situation is one of bafflement, impatience, and ultimate indifference—he has “lifted his hand from” (se hâth uthânâ) his collar entirely. I have translated this phrase with the comparable English idiom, “wash one’s hands of,” to show its colloquial meaning: to give up on, to renounce, to abandon all concern for.

Mir has thus achieved an elegant kind of “meaning-creation”: he has arranged for a common phrase to be read both literally and idiomatically—
such that both readings are entirely suitable to the verse, though exactly contrary in meaning. Idiomatically, “I’ve lifted my hand from my collar” would mean “I’ve washed my hands of my collar”—I’ve given up on it, I’m disgusted with it—let it suffer rip after rip, let it need mending, let it fall apart entirely, I don’t care what becomes of it! I’ve abandoned the collar to its fate, and those rips that keep appearing will no doubt finish it off. Literally, however, “I’ve lifted my hand from my collar” would of course mean “I’ve ceased to touch my collar”—I’m no longer constantly ripping it open, I’m leaving my collar alone. And the addition of “now” (ab) seems to imply a change of state. Perhaps I do dimly realize that it was my hand all along that was causing the rips? If Mir considers his verse superior to Yaqin’s, this witty and effective play on a common expression is surely a large part of the reason.

There is more to be said about this verse, of course—the small (and almost untranslatable) particle hi itself provides a range of possible fresh emphases. This tiny particle can either emphasize (“I’ve washed my hands of my collar”) or restrict (“I’ve washed my hands of my collar alone”) the word it follows. If it is read emphatically, it adds an expressive note of impatience and even exasperation to the verse. Read as restrictive, however, and with the literal rather than idiomatic form of the phrase, it implies “I’m keeping my hands off only my collar”—that is, I will rend the rest of my clothing, and maybe even tear my hair, it is only my especially vulnerable collar from which I will now keep my hands away. But in any case, pity the poor translator! How to convey all these nuances and possibilities in a single English line? Plainly, it cannot be done. Even hi itself involves such a wide range of choices: “just,” “very,” “exactly,” “indeed,” “truly,” “only,” “alone,” “merely,” “solely,” “altogether,” “outright.”

Moreover, these multiple interpretive possibilities are not adventitious or casual: they are absolutely fundamental to the genre. Classical poets generally go out of their way not to provide us with any interpretive help in choosing among such multiply arrayed meanings. Not only does nothing in this verse—and nothing we know about Mir generally—enable us to decisively choose one interpretation out of the range of possibilities; but even worse, everything we know about this verse, and about these poets generally, tells us that they were extremely proud of their ability to lead us into exactly this sort of interpretive bind—and then leave us there. (Which is why the modern tendency among editors to guide our interpretations by inserting Western-style punctuation is such a sad sign of cultural ignorance and loss.) One’s mind must be left to ricochet around among the various possibilities without being able to come to any resolution. This undecidability forms part of the piquant and inexhaustible quality of many of the best classical ghazal verses.

MIR’S ARROGANCE

Mir felt, however, that such subtleties of poetic analysis were not for just anyone. As we have seen, in his introduction he hoped that not just any random reader but any “connoisseur of poetry” would look on his *tagkirah* with favor. And in his conclusion he warns off outsiders in no uncertain terms: “The meaning of these words the one whom I’m addressing understands; I do not address the common people [*śvām*]. What I have written is a warrant [*sanad*] for my friends, it is not for just anybody.” He does make some room for other views of poetry: “The field of poetry is wide, and I am well aware of the color/changefulness of the garden of the manifest” (161). But the universality (of using all verbal devices) and the complexity (of making verses internally *marbūl*) that he claims as his own appear to relegate other kinds of poetry to a second-class status.

While defining his own poetics Mir thus makes a strong, if not quite explicit, claim to superiority. The force of that claim is increased by his fearless and famously impatient literary judgments about other poets. Not only is Yaqin such a fake that he doesn’t have even the smallest trace of poetic understanding, but “Hashmat,” too, is a vulgar chatterer who “makes inappropriate objections to people like us”; and perhaps worst of all, the hapless “‘Ushshāq” (“Lovers”), a Khatrī, not only has a foolish pen name but “composes verses of *rekhṭah* that are extremely non-*marbūl*” (80, 102, 136). Such pronouncements soon inspired the composition of several other *tagkirahs*, as indignant poets leaped to the defense of those whom Mir had ignored or slighted.

Mir’s poetic judgments are unaffected by the aristocratic birth, courtly rank, or wealth of those he judges. In his *tagkirah* he includes soldiers, Sufis, and poor men in need of patronage as readily as he does the rich and powerful. Mir also declines to be morally selective: the poet “Ḥātim” is “ignorant” and “arrogant.” But never mind: “What do we have to do with such things? He has a lot of poetry—his *divān*, up to the letter *mīn*, is in my hands” (75). It is Ḥātim’s poetry, not his allegedly deficient character, that is important. Mir was supremely confident in making such decrees. He was able to lay down the law—and back it with the remarkable quality and impressive quantity of his own verse. He composed six *divāns* in his long lifetime, and his fame eclipsed that of nearly all his rivals. The figure of Mir the irascible purist became legendary within the tradition.

For this unique stature Mir paid an ironic price. In a kind of posthumous co-optation he was made the sponsor of a radical linguistic “Delhi chauvinism.” Many anecdotes, which were given their canonical form in *Aḥ-e ḥayāt* and are still widely known, illustrate the curmudgeonly attitudes later attributed to him. While traveling to Lucknow Mir is made to rebuff the friendly chitchat of a commoner who is sharing his oxcart. The commoner says, “Your
Honor, what’s the harm? It’s a pastime while traveling—we can entertain ourselves a bit with conversation.” Mir replies angrily, “Well, for you it’s a pastime; as for me, it corrupts my language!”

In Lucknow itself Mir is made to snub the local aristocrats even more pointedly than he did his humble traveling companion. When some “nobles and important people of Lucknow” call on him and courteously request him to recite some verses for them, he puts them off repeatedly, at length telling them, “Noble gentlemen, my verses are not such as you will understand.”

Finally, feeling a bit piqued, they said, “Your Honor! We understand the [Persian] poetry of Anvari and Khâqânî. Why will we not understand your noble utterance?” Mir Sahib said, “That’s true. But for their poetry commentaries, vocabularies, and dictionaries are available. And for my poetry there is only the idiom of the people of Urdu, or the stairs of the Jama’ Masjid [in Delhi]. And these are beyond your reach.”

In this and many similar displays of “Delhi chauvinism,” the austere, severe, dignified poet from the venerable but decaying Mughal city is made to look down his nose at Lucknow, which is seen as a lively but frivolous new center of wealth and patronage.

The “Mir” of later tradition in fact becomes the consummate Dihlavi poet; he is made to insist that one must be an educated, language-conscious, native speaker of upper-class Delhi Urdu before one can become a poet of rekhtah—or even, apparently, genuinely appreciate rekhtah. In view of Mir’s own life, this would have been an extraordinary attitude for him to adopt; after all, he himself, as Carla Petievich points out, “was born in Agra, moved to Delhi when he was nine years old, returned to Agra during the invasion of Nadir Shah in 1739, returned to Delhi thereafter, and spent the last thirty years of his life (1781–1810) in Lucknow.” Analyzing the “two schools” theory that later became such a commonplace of Urdu critical tradition, Petievich shows that this Delhi-Lucknow polarization is full of cultural, historical, and psychological interest—every kind of interest, in short, except the literary kind.

But of course the Mir revealed in Nikât al-shi’ârah itself would never have dreamed of taking such a “Delhi chauvinist” stance. The poets he includes in his taḳkireh come from various cities, yet there is no hint that the native or lifelong Dihlavis are in any way superior to the others. The only outsiders who trouble him are the Dakani poets; and with them, his struggle is never finally resolved. Moreover, it is clear that Mir did not value the use of “pure” idiom above everything else. His favored poet, Sajjâd, once again provides

a case in point: in one verse Sajjād takes liberties with an idiomatic expression. Mir comments: “In an idiom, making such a change is not permissible”; and he quotes the correct expression. Then he continues: “But when a poet obtains masterful usage in poetry, he is forgiven” (70). The real Mir is interested in Delhi court language not as an end in itself, but for the literary use one can make of it.

The other later, widespread canard about Mir depicts him as a naively suffering (real-life) lover by temperament, full of pathos, innocence, and simplicity—a poet who placed a supreme value on intense emotional sincerity and disdained all mere wordplay and verbal artifice. This image of Mir is so patently false that even the few passages from his taqkirah that we have examined thus far serve effectively to discredit it. Remarkably, this view persists in many popular and some scholarly quarters, despite the existence of ample evidence to refute it and virtually none (except literal readings of the stylized tropes in certain carefully chosen verses) to back it up. This view forms part of a wider vision of “natural poetry” that came to dominate modern Urdu criticism, most unfortunately for the ghazal, after the shock of 1857 and the end of the taqkirah tradition in 1880.28

FORT WILLIAM COLLEGE: AN INTERLUDE

Appropriately enough in view of his status, Mir became the first Urdu poet whose complete works were typeset and printed. The voluminous Kooliyati Meer Tyqee (Complete works of Mir Taqī, 1811), an immense project, was a collaborative effort by no fewer than four editors.29 The honor of preparing and publishing this work goes, like many other oft-begrudged honors, to Fort William College in Calcutta, which was originally set up in 1800 as a language training institute for British colonial administrators. During its first two decades Fort William published many works designed for use as language textbooks—and perhaps, subliminally at least, as role models. Urdu at this time was like a “lively boy,” says Āb-e hayât, who “was delighting everyone, in poets’ gatherings and the courts of the wealthy, with the mischievous pranks of his youth.” Overseeing this boy, however, was a “wise European” who was “seated with a telescope atop the fort of Fort William in Calcutta.” This European “looked—and his hawk-like glance deduced that the boy was promising, but needed training.”30

Since the Urdu ghazal tradition was so well established by the beginning

---

28. On this extremely distorted image of Mir, see Pritchett 1979; for an example of the persistence of this view, see Russell and Islam 1968, and Russell 1992; on “natural poetry” and modern Urdu criticism, see Hall [1893] 1969.
29. Das 1978: 159
of the nineteenth century, for Fort William to publish its great master Mir no doubt seemed an obvious choice. Far more characteristically innovative was the publishing of a *tagkirah* of Urdu poets written in Urdu instead of Persian, under the sponsorship of Fort William’s “professor of the Hindoostane language,” the redoubtable John Borthwick Gilchrist. This work was compiled by Haidar Bakhsh “Haidari,” a regular Fort William “moonshee” (*munshi*, or scribe) who taught, wrote, and prepared textbooks for the students’ use; it was published as part of a larger work, *Guldastah-e haidari* (Haidari’s anthology), in 1803. Another similar, though much shorter, *tagkirah* in Urdu was prepared at almost the same time by Mirza ‘Ali “Luṭf,” an author loosely affiliated with Fort William, but it was not published until a century later. This work by Luṭf contains one fascinating assertion: that Mir himself once “appeared before Colonel Scott with a view to literary employment at Fort William College, but because of his old age he could not be selected.”

In his early years Mir had helped to draw the boundaries of *rekhah*, separating it politely but firmly from the enveloping Persian medium in which it had been born; in his *tagkirah*, written when he was thirty, the word “English” never occurs. Near the end of his long life, when he was eighty or so, we see him reacting to the first delicate literary probes and proddings from the English world—and reacting perhaps even favorably, if Luṭf’s account can be relied upon. Mir died in 1810; the printed version of his complete works appeared in 1811. A watershed of sorts; or as a larger watershed one might choose the year 1803, the year in which Lord Lake took Delhi—and in which Haidari’s work became not only the first *tagkirah* of Urdu poets to be published but also the first to be composed in Urdu rather than Persian (since Luṭf’s was for the most part a brief and very direct translation from a Persian source).

Yet on the whole, even after 1803, the new British rulers of Delhi took pains to be as unobtrusive as possible. As one historian has noted, in studying the early nineteenth century “one is impressed by how little in feeling and in style of life, the educated classes of upper India were touched by the British presence before 1857.” Or as Azād himself put it, “Those were the days when if a European was seen in Delhi, people considered him an extraordinary sample of God’s handiwork, and pointed him out to each other: ‘Look, there goes a European!’”

For after all, the fact that Fort William College commissioned, prepared, and published so many ground-breaking, precedent-setting books does not mean that people paid much attention to them, or that those who did read

---

them—especially in the early decades of the century—found them to be anything more than curiosities. The ghazal was the genre of choice, and “the number of Urdu poets was much greater than the number of Persian poets”; but when it came to prose, “the whole country was interested only in reading and writing in Persian,” according to the Lakhnavi historical writer ‘Abd ul-Halim “Sharar” (1860–1926). And although Fort William Urdu prose works “may have impressed the English in those days, they did not—and could not—impress anyone among the Hindustani literary people.” For “at that time the effect of English education had not changed the country’s literary taste,” and Persian’s rhymed prose, flowing diction, and artistic use of repetition “dwelt in imaginations and minds.” Even the powerful tradition of Urdu prose romance, or dastan, became a significant written genre only relatively late in the nineteenth century.

Urdu poetry and Urdu prose thus had radically different histories in north India. The tazkirahs tell us that when Vali Dakani came north in the early eighteenth century, his poetry spread like wildfire, and rekhtah at once began to supplant Persian as the poetry of choice: Vali had been the first to “match Persian stride for stride.” The result was that “when his divān arrived in Delhi, Eagerness took it with the hands of respect, and Judgment regarded it with the eyes of attention; Pleasure read it aloud.” But when Fort William provided similarly exemplary Urdu prose texts (not only for tazkirahs but for other genres as well), and even conveniently published them, the resulting works had almost no impact—and in fact were rather condescendingly ignored for decades. Lovers of rekhtah preferred to embed their verses in a matrix of Persian prose. Tagkira of Urdu poetry continued to be written in Persian: eleven of them survive from the first four decades of the nineteenth century, along with only one very halfhearted Urdu work, really more of a “notebook,” and even that one was linked to Fort William patronage.

Not until the 1840s was the grip of Persian prose finally broken: starting in that decade, well over half the tazkirahs of Urdu poets began to be written in languages other than Persian. Garcin de Tassy composed a massive and important tazkirah of sorts (1839–1847) in French, and Alois Sprenger produced a tazkirah (1850) in English. But most, of course, were in Urdu. Of the three Urdu tazkirahs composed in the 1840s, two were small productions (twelve poets in one, thirty-seven in the other) by Delhi authors

35. I quote from Sharar [c. 1913–1920] 1963: 181–83. There is also a useful English translation of Sharar’s work that can be relied on for most purposes (Sharar 1975), but I have not quoted it in this paper because I want to stay closer to the literal wording of the original. On the dastan, see Pritchett 1991: 21–28.
closely associated with the British-sponsored Delhi College. Thus the author of the third could almost claim to have written the first truly “indigenous” Urdu *tagkirah* of Urdu poets, the first one not to be directly inspired, or even indirectly influenced, by British patronage.

**KHUSH MARIKAH-E ZEBĀ**

This third *tagkirah* compiled in the 1840s, *Khush ma‘rikah-e zebā* (A fine and appropriate martial encounter, 1846), by Sa‘ādat Khān “Nāṣir,” is a particularly notable example of the genre. We do not know when Nāṣir was born; we know only that he died between 1857 and 1871. He was a Lakhnavi, and a very religious Shiite; he was lively, sociably inclined, a lover of anecdotes. He had all the outward requisites of poetic status: he was accepted as a *shāgird* by a well-known *ustād*, Mirzā “Mużnīb,” and in turn had *shāgirds* of his own. He composed a number of *divāns* of Urdu poetry, using almost every genre available; most of these are now lost. But clearly he had “no special rank” as a poet. He occasionally composed in Persian, and he translated from Persian. His only published work was the Urdu prose romance *Qiṣṣah agar o gul* (The story of Aloe and Rose, 1846).

His lengthy *tagkirah* was completed in 1846—or rather, reached a stage its author initially deemed complete, for its name is a chronogram (*tārikh*) encoding that year. But the text’s history is one of steady expansion in manuscript form over the following fifteen years or more. Four manuscripts exist, each subsequent one containing significant authorial revisions; each includes a different number of poets and slightly varies the selection of poets, although the general trend is toward expansion and improved organization over time.

This situation was common in the *tagkirah* genre, especially in its earlier years: since publication was not generally intended, the *tagkirah* was disseminated by repeated copying and recopying—and what author could resist the chance to make improvements? One could add new poets one had recently discovered, or include dates of death (along with the traditional chronograms that encoded them) for poets who had recently died. Nāṣir took advantage of the chance to do even more: within his remarkable *ustād-shāgird* structure he added a city-by-city grouping of poets as well. The overall number of poets contained in the four manuscripts taken together is 824—a total that is large but not, by *tagkirah* standards, extraordinary.

Nāṣir’s own account of his work is casual, offhand, almost perfunctory. Some *tagkirah* writers started with the creation of Adam and the whole of hu-

---

man literary history; offered glimpses of selected high points of Arabic, Persian, and Indian poetry; explicated their views on poetic theory; or gave accounts of their own lives—and only after dozens of pages got around to the ta'zīrah itself. Naṣīr, by contrast, introduces his massive volume with the briefest possible description of his project:

For some time this unworthy one had the idea of compiling a ta'zīrah of the poets of Hind. But because of a lack of information about the circumstances of the early poets, this intention was not fulfilled. In those days when the ta'zīrah compiled by the late Miyaṭ Mūṣafī Sāḥib came to hand, the importunities of enthusiasm roused courage to action. And in contrast to Miyaṭ Sāhib, whose ta'zīrah is in the Persian language, this faṣīr wrote in Hindi, for uniformity [yakrangi] is better than diversity [dorangi]; and he did not retain the rule of alphabetical order, so that wherever one would find the name of a shāgīrd, it would be written under the ustād's name. And so that the [use of the] Hindi language and the manner of [arranging] the poets' names would be my invention. And those poets whose ustād and shāgīrd relationships are not known, and their names and identities not understood—it would conclude with them. I begin it with Miyaṭ Rāfī us-Saud, first because he is the founding elder of composition in rekhīlah, and second because the lineage [silsilah] of this insignificant one's shāgīrd goes back to him.42

Three sweeping claims are made here, and all deserve scrutiny: that Naṣīr invented the use of “Hindi” rather than Persian for ta'zīrah; that he invented the organization of poets according to lineages; and that Saudā is the founding elder of Urdu poetry.

Naṣīr wishes to write a ta'zīrah of the “poets of Hind,” or India—so what more logical language to use than the “language of Hind,” or “Hindi”? Abandoning the Persian language used by almost all of his predecessors is an act justified in a single phrase: he chooses Hindi because “uniformity is better than diversity.” It can be seen already in this brief preface that Naṣīr is by no means a theorist: he obviously loves order and organization, but he feels no need to explain his methodology at length. Perhaps he feels that simplifying and rationalizing the process of ta'zīrah-writing is a self-evidently desirable goal: why use two languages when you only need one?

And of course, Naṣīr participates in the wider rethinking of Persian that was going on in his time and place. Less than a decade later, another Urdu ta'zīrah writer, in Delhi, described his own sense of the situation: “A number of right-seeing companions showed me the way: Persian is the merchandise of the shop of others, and the capital of the trading of strangers; accomplishment in it requires a whole long lifetime, and some sweet-singing guide from among the nightingale-voiced ones of the garden of Iran.” Instead, one

42. Naṣīr 1972: 1:1. I give further references to volume and page number in the text.
should concentrate one’s efforts on Urdu: if Urdu could “manage to become clean and trim,” then “Persian would be devoid of radiance before it, and Afghan Persian [Dari] would go out of use by comparison to it.” Persian, however beautiful, is ultimately the property of others; Rekhtah/Hindi/Urdu, with its great potential, is the proper locally owned field for literary work.

“Hindi” as the “language of Hind” could—and did—play an obvious role as an umbrella term. Like the term bhāsha, or bhākha, “(colloquial) language,” it could mean whatever a given writer and audience understood by it. Until a much later point in the nineteenth century Hindi was the most common name, in the literary culture we are examining, for the language we now call Urdu—a language that used the Delhi region’s Khari Boli grammar and the Persianized range of its vocabulary, and was written in a modified form of the Persian script. There was no confusion with what is now called Hindi—the Khari Boli grammar written in Devanagari script—simply because as a literary presence that language scarcely existed. Nāṣir uses “Hindi” very often in the course of his tagkīrah, while “Urdu” occurs only rarely; the other term he uses—once in his brief preface and often at other points in his tagkīrah—is of course “Rekhtah.”

Nāṣir claims to be the first tagkīrah writer to use the “Hindi” (= Urdu = Rekhtah) language rather than Persian. This claim is unfounded. However, he must have believed it, or at least expected his readers to believe it; otherwise as a proud boast in his preface it makes no sense. And indeed his claim may well have reflected his knowledge, for three of the five earlier Urdu tagkīrahās had been composed long ago—thirty to forty years previously—and far away, in Calcutta. He might well not have known of them. The other two tagkīrahās were only slightly earlier than his own, so that the periods of composition undoubtedly overlapped, and they were much smaller productions. Moreover, they were by Delhi authors—and while Delhi was not so far from Lucknow, local chauvinism and mutual rivalries were not exactly unknown. As we have seen, all five earlier Urdu tagkīrahās had been produced under markedly Westernizing auspices; thus the semilegitimacy with which Nāṣir could have claimed to be writing the first truly “indigenous” Urdu tagkīrah of Urdu poets.

But of course such subtle and hairsplitting claims were outside his purview. Nāṣir was not a scholar, as his own preface makes clear. He says he was unable to write his tagkīrah until he obtained information about the early poets; once he obtained Muṣḥafi’s tagkīrah, he immediately set to work. At the end of the tagkīrah (2: 585) he reports his laborious acquisition of only four sources: Muṣḥafi’s two tagkīrahās, Sheftah’s, and Sarvar’s. He refers much more

44. King 1994.
often to Muḥafīzi, but he uses the others also, and he is indebted directly or indirectly to several more taṣkirahs as well. Of course, in his world manuscripts were hand-copied, and were rarer and more difficult not only to obtain, but even to know about, than we usually remember. But even by the standards of his own time, he was definitely unscholarly, as his editor Mushfiq Khvājah notes with disapproval. He ignored a number of the most famous and valuable taṣkirahs—ones that were “not so rare and inaccessible that Naṣir wouldn’t have obtained them if he had searched.” His basic practice was to use “for one poet, material from one taṣkirah.” And even then, he was careless: “Muḥafīzi’s taṣkirahs were before him—at least Naṣir could have copied down from them the poets’ birth and death dates; but he didn’t even do that much.” He had “no special principle before him” as he described some poets in one sentence and others in a number of pages, and gave very few or very many samples of their work.  

In one respect, however, Naṣir was the most rigorous of Urdu taṣkirah writers. While the great majority of taṣkirahs were alphabetical, roughly chronological, idiosyncratic, or even random in their listing of poets, Naṣir’s alone was based as scrupulously as possible on the poetic lineage (ṣilsilaḥ), the chain of transmission over time from uṣṭād to šāgird. There was a certain logic to this organization, since in the north Indian Urdu ḡazal tradition these relationships were so highly developed and so uniquely important. In his introduction Naṣir claims, as we have seen, to have invented this approach to taṣkirah organization; and this time his claim seems to be quite legitimate. He thus begins his taṣkirah with the great uṣṭād Saudā, both “because he is the founding elder of composition in ṭekhtah” and because “the lineage of this insignificant one’s šāgirds goes back to him.” Naṣir documents this latter claim with pride: the lineage runs from Mirzā Muḥammad Rafi “Saudā” (1706–1781), Mir’s great contemporary, through Mirzā Aḥsan ‘Ali “Aḥsan,” to Mirzā Muḥammad Ḥasan “Muṣnib,” to Naṣir himself. As can be seen, Naṣir places himself in the fourth literary generation, so that his two šāgirds—one of whom was a nawab from whom he received a regular stipend (1: 81–82)—then fall into the fifth. The maximum depth of this whole “family tree” of lineages is (in some cases) seven uṣṭād-to-šāgird “generations,” mapped over a period of roughly a century and a half.

Within this “family tree” one at once notices the immense disproportion between quality and quantity. Most of the poets on Naṣir’s list are minor and are now deservedly forgotten. Of the lineages founded by the two greatest poets in the classical Urdu tradition, Mir and his successor, Mirzā Aṣadullāh Khān “Ghālib” (1797–1869), Mir’s had no more than thirteen poets while Ghālib’s had—according to Naṣir—exactly one. Among the other major po-

ets, Sauda, Nasir’s own ustād, had sixty-five shāgirds over four generations; and Khvājah Mir ‘Dard’ (1720–1785) had seventy-two over seven generations; these numbers sound reasonable. But the lineage of Shaikh Gulām Hamadānī “Muṣḥafī” (1750–1824), author of Nasir’s favorite taṣkīrah sources, ended up with no fewer than 341 poets over six generations, or well over half of the 595 poets who are included in the whole set of lineages. Many chance factors were involved: ustāds who lived longer, who lived in important cities, who had sociable dispositions, whose poetry was widely popular, who needed the extra money, obviously ended up with more shāgirds—and even one or two talented and energetic shāgirds could be the makings of an impressive lineage. And poets who composed their own taṣkīrah of Urdu poets—Muṣḥafī himself composed not one but two—could make sure that everyone knew the full list of their shāgirds.

Above all, from Nasir’s taṣkīrah one can clearly see how widespread the lineage network was and how fast it ramified: how many hundreds of poets needed or wanted to have an ustād, and how commonly they sought a close relationship with an available local poet, no matter how minor, rather than claiming affiliation with a greater poet more distant in place and time. Plainly these ustād-shāgird relationships were generally based not so much on prestige or literary fame as on local access and personal affinity. One can also see from Nasir’s presentation how the lines of power ran: it was not the ustād who needed the shāgirds, to enhance his prestige; rather, it was the shāgirds who needed the ustād, to train them in the skills of poetry-composition. In Nasir’s view, wherever one finds the name of a shāgird, one should find it linked to the name of his ustād.

Nasir takes this linkage very seriously and recognizes that its intimacy lends itself to abuse. About one verse attributed to Qā’im he says pointedly, “I have seen this verse in Sauda’s dīwān also”—and he adds, with a heavily sarcastic disapproval reminiscent of Mir’s, “There’s no harm, because the shāgird acquires ownership of the ustād’s property!” (1: 25). Although they could not (legitimately) inherit poetry, shāgirds could be heirs in many other senses—and this was true even if they were women, and even if they were courtesans (ṭāva’if). Nasir tells an anecdote about the courtesan Begā “Shirīn,” shāgird of the poet “Bahr”:

One day Mir Vazir “Ṣabā” said to me, “I have heard that Shirīn’s poetry has been [favorably] mentioned in the mushā’irah. It’s a pity that she is not among the descendants of Shaikh ‘Nāsīḥ,’ so that his name would have remained radiant.” Miyānī Bahr said, “Pupils too have the status of sons, his name will remain established through us.” And he said to Shirīn, “You too, through connection with me, are his granddaughter.” (2: 582)

The practical uses of such close relationships between ustād and shāgird were, as we will see, manifold.
Like any family tree, this one invites questions about its beginnings and ends. Where did the primal ancestors come from, and what happened over time to the descendants? In the case of classical Urdu poetry, the latter question is relatively easy to answer: a decade after Nāṣir’s genealogical chart had first been drawn up, the family was killed off, or at least mortally wounded. The shock of the “Mutiny” of 1857 (the “First War of Indian Independence”), and especially its bloody aftermath, in which the British avenged themselves with particular harshness on the Indo-Muslim elites, gave rise to forms of political, economic, social, and cultural restructuring that produced a notable literary restructuring as well. Āzād’s Āb-e ḵayāt (1880) is generally held to be the last tagḵirah; by no coincidence, this crucial canon-forming work—which is heavily indebted, as many have recognized, to Nāṣir’s own lively and anecdotal narrative style—is also the first modern literary history. Āb-e ḵayāt looms over the tagḵirah tradition and acts as a hinge between the old literary world and the new. Nāṣir too, like Āzād, lived to see the deathblow given to his literary culture. He initially completed his tagḵirah in 1846, a decade before the Mutiny; but some of his addenda were made after 1857, and he may have been alive as late as 1871, to see that what Āzād called “the page of the times” had been turned—and turned with (literally) a vengeance.46

The question of origins is, however, more vexed. As we have seen, Nāṣir identifies Saudā, the head of his own lineage, as the founder of “composition in rekhtah” (rekhtah go’i), and begins his tagḵirah with him. Introducing Saudā, Nāṣir reports that Saudā’s father was from Isfahan and that his mother came from a distinguished family. He then simply endows him—by means of an anecdote found nowhere else in the Urdu tradition with a divine gift for poetry:

A radiant faqīr used to bestow a gaze of attention on the aforementioned Mirzā [Saudā]. After the death of [Saudā’s] venerable father, he said to this solitary pearl, “This is the time when the prayer of the needy would be accepted and granted in the Court of the Fulfiller of Needs. Whatever you wish, ask for it.” He petitioned: “Thanks to you I am free from care. If you insist, then please bestow on me the wealth of speech, the expression of which is poetry composition.” This one whose prayers are granted smiled on him, and as a pen name for this careless madman he brought to his lips the word “Saudā” [madness].

(1: 3)

The faqīr also bestowed on him undying, universal fame “throughout the four quarters of Hindustan”—a fame, Nāṣir notes, that Saudā indeed possesses, for he is known and revered “in every house.” After the faqīr’s blessing Saudā went directly to Delhi, the “seat of the kingdom, where all the people of tal-

47. Shamīm Inhomi 1971: 25.
ent and accomplishment were gathered,” and dazzled everyone with his poetic powers (1: 3–4). Nāṣir does not even trouble to tell us where Saudā lived before he went to Delhi: his life was his literary life, and his literary life began with his trip to Delhi.

In other taḏkirahs, as we have seen, (north Indian) Urdu poetry tends to begin with Valī. Āzād in Āb-e ḫayāt, for example, describes Valī as the “Adam of the race of Urdu poetry” and meditates at length on his role as its founder, the person who “brought all the meters of Persian into Urdu,” who imported the ghazal itself and “opened the road” for the other genres. Since Urdu poetry had a history of several prior centuries in Gujarat and the Deccan, however, Valī could at the most have been a kind of Noah, restarting poetry in the north after a great flood of forgetting had wiped the slate clean of Deccani literary activity. Mir was too close to his Dakani predecessors to simply overlook them; by Nāṣir’s time, such erasure was much easier to perform. But Nāṣir takes the amnesiac process a step further, for he is not even interested in Valī; we learn in passing only that “the foundation of rehktaḥ was laid by him” (2: 568). Instead, Nāṣir blithely begins his lineages a generation later, with Saudā and his peers. He then jump-starts the tradition with the faqīr’s divine gift to Saudā: the invention or founding of Urdu poetry.

The point is not that Nāṣir has some particular revisionist view of early Urdu literary history. Rather, he seems to have almost no interest in it. He simply bundles it all up and makes it a transaction between God (through a faqīr) and his own founding ustād, Saudā. His view of Urdu poetry is synchronic, and his interest in his own contemporaries is far more compelling than his commitment to the past. His only recognition of Persian, the ancestral language, is to boast of his originality in replacing it with “Hindi” in his taḏkirah. He is not anxious about the past, because he sees the present effortlessly assimilating it, using it, and evolving beyond it. And he does not even have much time for the past, because the present is so fruitful and the poetry so obviously flourishing. Saudā is revered “in every house” in all quarters of Hindustan; other great poets are equally universal in their appeal (1: 348–49), and more and more shāgīrds flock to the available ustāds. Arranging the poets into lineages is, among other things, a way to organize the proliferation of poets that Nāṣir sees all around him. It is a way of putting one’s house in order to serve the needs of the present; it is a display of one’s own inventive energy and zeal. Through such a unique achievement, even a poet of secondary talent could hope to make a name for himself.

Not surprisingly, Nāṣir the Lakhnavi paints an exceptionally harsh portrait of Mir, who was not only Saudā’s great contemporary and rival but had

---

also by then been co-opted into appearing as the quintessential Dihlavi poet. When Naṣīr tells the story of Mir and the commoner in the oxcart, he describes the man as a grocer (baniyā); and makes Mir recoil from the mere sight of the man’s face and keep his eyes fastidiously averted for the duration of the trip (1: 141). He also depicts Mir as arrogant in the extreme, to both his peers and his patrons. In Lucknow, Mir “Soz,” Nawab ʿĀṣif ud-Daulah’s ustād, is asked to recite a few ghazals and is then lavishly praised by the nawab. Both Mir Soz’s “presumption” and the nawab’s praise displease Mir. He says to Mir Soz, “You’re not ashamed of such presumption?”—and proceeds to clarify his point: “About your venerable status and nobility there is no doubt, but in poetic rank no one equals Mir!” (1: 143–44). Naṣīr thus, by no coincidence, heightens the contrast between the arrogant Mir and the carefree and casual Saudā.

Naṣīr devotes to ustāds like Saudā and Mir, and to some personal friends as well, a number of pages of anecdotal narrative; but most poets receive very brief entries. Naṣīr generally introduces his poets with a flourish: in many cases, with traditional (though often low-quality) Persianized rhymed prose (saj'). Here is his account of an extremely unimportant poet: “A poet with distinction [imtiyāz]; Mir Amānāt ‘Alī, pen name “Distinguished” [mumtāz]; being Saudā’s shāgird was his source of pride [nāz].” This, followed by a single verse as a select sample of his work, is all we hear about Mumtāz (1: 22–23). Rather than being credited with any special “distinction,” this poet is plainly being introduced with resonant sound effects. Naṣīr is a circus ringmaster presenting his performers with a flourish: “thrilling—chilling—high-flying—death-defying!” As Naṣīr says of another poet’s work, the verses are recorded “so that the reader may enjoy them”; but the truth is more complex. Poets’ verses are their memorials (yādgār), and minor poets may well live on only in such references as this; it is an almost poignant service for a tāzikraḥ writer to preserve their names. Naṣīr says of yet another poet, “Some of his verses are recorded so that he will still continue to be mentioned [zikr us kā baqi rahe]” (1: 393, 390). Zikr is of course the literal root of the tāzikraḥ.

In the case of a major poet, however, such rhymed prose not only proves no barrier to communication, but in fact is often used for especially formal pronouncements. After a few sentences of (unrhymed) biographical information, Naṣīr presents to us his great contemporary, the Lakhnavi ustād Khvājā Haidar ‘Alī “Atash” (1777–1847): “Now the mansion of rekhātah is established on this sound pillar; despite his venerable age, a maker of every verse in a romantic style; a perfect knower of divine mysteries; few are austere and pious like the Khvājah Šāhīb; and his poetry is all select; it is so fa-

49. shā'ir-e bā intīyāz / Mir Amānāt ‘Alī tabhullus Mumtāz / shāgird-e Saudā us kā māyah-e nāz.
(Line breaks have been imposed to show the rhyme.)
mous that there is no need to collect it” (2: 1). The (non)relationship of poetry to personal biography in this literary culture is here perfectly illustrated. Nāṣir admires Ātash for his status as a venerable elder, his mystical knowledge, his austerity and piety, his religious qualities—and for his nevertheless making (experiencing, interpreting) “every verse in a romantic style.” The word “romantic” ([āshiqānah] literally means lover-like, and Nāṣir makes it clear that the lover-like qualities should inhere in the poetry and the interpretation of the poetry, not in the life of the poet. If Ātash invariably created and experienced poetry romantically despite his piety, venerability, and old age, this was a piquant and exemplary personal achievement. It demonstrates once again the entirely nonnaturalistic poetics of the classical ḡazal, which were later to be so sadly misconstrued by the cult of “natural poetry.”

Nāṣir was also adept at using rhymed prose for the occasional hatchet job. Here he introduces one of his least favorite poets: “Accustomed to [improper] intervention and appropriation; Mīr Ḥusain ‘Allī ‘Ṭa’assuf’; a shāgīrd of Mīr Sher ‘Allī ‘Afsos,’ extremely self-regarding and self-willed; the souls of the departed are in pain because of him; very wrongly he made objections to the ustāds’ verses; and he put together a brief pamphlet to mislead everybody” (1: 244). Nāṣir intends to refute this pamphlet in detail: he provides a series of examples that shed light both on his own view of poetry and on the kinds of literary debate in which his culture constantly engaged.

One of Nāṣir’s examples of Ṭa’assuf’s folly deals with his analysis of a verse by the revered ustād Ātash—a verse that Nāṣir singles out for its excellence:

A verse of Khvājah Ātash’s that is one of the best verses:

I am crazy about hunting the bird of madness
I am making a snare from the threads of my collar.

About this by way of regret [ṭa’assuf] he says, “I hope that the possessors of intelligence will consider what a defect can be seen in the meaning of this introductory verse. If the bird of madness has not yet been captured, then no person in his senses pulls out threads from his collar, which is the work of a madman. And if it has already been captured, then to procure the equipment for hunting is a vain action. If he had said it like this, it would have been better:

50. ab bīn-e rikhtah is ruhn-e sālim se pā’edā / bāvajūd jārānah sāli ke ṣarz-e ’āshiqānah par har shī’r kā shā’ār / ’ārif-e kānim / qānī’ avs mutavakkil / Khvājah Sāhib sā kamyāb / avs kalām un nā sab intikhāb / is qadar makhār kā use hājaj jām’ a karne kih nahiān.


52. saudā hu’ā hāi murg-e jussīnī ke shikār kā / phaudā bānā rāhā bānī garebān ke tār kā. The word saudā, “madness,” I have translated as “to be crazy about,” in order to capture the punning effect that our own idiom also conveys.
Whoever might be crazy about hunting the bird of madness
Let him make a snare from the threads of my collar.”

The correction that this self-deluded one has done—if he [the “I” of the verse] is a madman, how would he have a collar? And if he is not a madman and is in his senses, since when is the act of a madman done by a man in his senses? If in Khvâjah Sâhib’s verse he had already finished with his madness, then the objection would have been appropriate. (1: 245)

Âtash’s verse invokes the complex interplay between madness as an overpowering force that nullifies all personal choice and madness as an object of the lover’s personal choice—one that he voluntarily and even urgently pursues. Ta’assuf is right to put his finger on the paradoxical nature of this interaction but wrong to consider it a defect. Âtash is exploring, and relishing, the process by which the lover goes mad—a process both voluntary and beyond all volition, a process of his eagerly making a snare for something that has already captured him. The verse also highlights the wordplay embodied in the common idiom saudâ honâ, “to be crazy (about).” Since everyone in Nâsîr’s world shares all of this background information already, the discussion is devoted only to matters of overall poetic effect and interpretation: does the verse create a clumsily flat contradiction, or an elegantly unresolvable paradox?

Through this kind of extremely abstract argument the treatment of ghazal themes (maznûn) at the broadest level is refined and developed. At a slightly lower level of generality, Nâsîr also offers, in another of his refutations of the presumptuous Ta’assuf, an argument about logical and semantic “fit”:

Now please listen: About Shaikh Nâsîr he writes, “His poetry is ‘the shop grand, the food bland.’” Accordingly, this verse is taken as proof:

My intoxication and awareness are the same state—
I never had a dream that my fortune was awake.

He says, “In this verse the defect is present, that the first line has no connection [râbt] with the second line. In the first line the theme of madness is found, and in the second fate and destiny. He should have said,

No one thought my sleep to be any different from wakefulness—
My heedlessness and awareness are the same state.”

Someone should ask that incoherent one: When heedlessness, awareness, dream, wakefulness—four things—are present in one verse, how can there not be connection? And when that madman likens the theme of the first line to madness—is madness mentioned in it, or bad fortune? And the lack of connection in the first line of his own verse is manifest: its theme has been badly fitted in. (1: 246–47)

The two lines of a ghazal verse form in every sense an independent mini-poem and must be related to each other in some clear and poetically effec-
tive way, so that they have “connection” (rabḥ). We have seen Mir’s heavy emphasis on the cultivation of marbūṭ poetry—poetry that possesses rabḥ. Nāṣīkh’s first line suggests that the speaker is deeply mad—in fact he is never not mad, so that he has no intervals of lucidity. His “intoxication” of madness is identical with his normal awareness. He is so far from aspiring to better fortune that even in his dreams he never imagines that his fortune would “awaken” and would bring him good luck. Nāṣīkh’s verse is undoubtedly more piquant than Ta’assuf’s pedestrian reworking. (And by playfully calling Ta’assuf “that incoherent [berab] one” and “that madman,” Nāṣīr too, like Mir, ties his critical language directly into the content of his discussion.) But the point is that here the argument is at the level of the line: the success or failure of the “connection” between the two lines that should make them marbūṭ, the fitting in (ba’dhna) of a theme into an individual line. The question is one of nuts and bolts, of technical skill in verse construction.

MUSHĀIRAHS

Such disputes were sooner or later brought into the central institution of this literary culture: the poetry recitation session, or mushā’irah, venue for legendary rivalries, definitive site of the “fine and appropriate martial encounter” of Nāṣīr’s title. Here the battles often came down to a level even more detailed and finicky, as individual words were called into question. Almost all mushā’irahs were “patterned” (tārḥī), which meant that an exemplary line from a verse was announced in advance, and all the poets recited fresh verses composed for the occasion in that specified meter and rhyme scheme. In one of his vivid anecdotes about mushā’irah behavior, Nāṣīr narrates such a “martial encounter.” This anecdote shows us Shāikh Imām Bākhsh “Nāṣīkh” (1776–1838), one of the ustāds criticized by Ta’assuf, assuming the offensive in his turn. Nāṣīr writes in his account of Maujār Rām “Maujī”:

These few verses are his memorial:

When that unveiled one went to bathe beneath the water
Then because of the color of her face a rose [gulāb] bloomed beneath the water.

When in a state of despair I wept from thirst
There appeared there the wave of a mirage beneath the water.

Tears flowed from the weeping eyes in such a way
Just as water would flow from a fountain under water.

This pattern [tārḥ] was that of Mirzā Ja’far Şāhīb’s mushā’irah. Mirzā Ḥāji “Qa- mar” and Mir Muṣṭafār Ḥusain “Ẓamīr” wanted to have Maujī Rām disgraced through the lips of Mirzā Qatīl. Mirzā Qatīl, in the open mushā’irah, made the following objection to [his ghazal]: that to call a rose [gul] a gulāb is contrary to usage; and a fountain is outside the water; and that a mirage is only [in] a
desert—what connection does sand have with waves? When Mirzâ Şâhîb made these objections against it in the open mushâ’irah, Shaikh Imam Ba’khs Nâsikh found his temerity extremely displeasing. Maujî Râm took his plea to [his ustâd] Miyan Muşhafî. Miyan Şâhîb said, “Friendship ought not to be spoiled because of a shâqîrî; one can acquire many such [shâqîrîs].” When Nâsikh heard that Muşhafî was not supporting Mauji, he himself sent for Mauji, wrote these questions and answers on a folded paper, and gave it to him. At the next gathering, he read it in the open mushâ’irah:

O most eloquent of the eloquent, Mirza Qatîl Şâhîb, when you made these objections to this lowly one’s ghazal, that to call a rose gulûb is contrary to usage and has not entered into Urdu—it is strange that a poet like you, the pride of the age, would say such a nonsensical thing. Do you not know that in the idiom of the people of Hind, cold weather during the spring season is called gulûb-i jâvâ, and rose-color is called gulûb? Not to mention that Miîr Mu‘hammad Taqî, who has no equal or peer in the language of rekhtah, says, [he quotes verses by Miîr, Maţhâr, and Muşhafî illustrating these usages of gulûb]. And when you said that a fountain is outside the water, in fact Sa‘dî, in the Gulistân, has committed this ‘mistake’: [he quotes an illustrative Persian verse]. And when you said that a mirage is only in a desert and asked what connection it has with a wave—Nâsîr ‘Alî says [he quotes an illustrative Persian verse]. This is the answer to every one of your objections. (1: 514–16)

Here Nâsîkh offers two kinds of evidence: that of colloquial language, and that of poetic authority (sanad). In the case of a disputed usage, citing instances from the work of recognized ustâds in the tradition is an extremely powerful form of legitimation. Of the five examples he offers, three are in Urdu and two are in Persian. One of the Urdu examples is by Maţhâr, who is much better known as a Persian poet. Of the two Persian examples, the first is by an Iranian and the second by an Indo-Persian poet. The interpenetration of the Indo-Persian and Urdu ghazal traditions could hardly be clearer; in fact Qatîl himself, at whom this argument is directed, was known—by Nâsîr himself (1: 296–97), among others—chiefly as a Persian ghazal poet. But the relationship with Persian was increasingly fraught: Ghalîb, for example, made a point of scoffing at Qatîl’s Persian scholarship, claiming to respect only the Persian of native speakers—an attitude that led to a bitter and prolonged literary war.53

Once Nâsîkh has demolished Qatîl’s objections to Mauji’s ghazal, he proceeds to carry the war into the enemy’s territory:

53. “In some gathering Mirza recited a Persian ghazal. Some persons objected to one word in it. And the objection was according to the rule that Mirza Qatîl had written in one of his pamphlets. When Mirza heard it, he said, ‘Who is Qatîl? And what do I have to do with Qatîl? He was a Khatri from Faridabad. I have no respect for anyone except native speakers.’ Most of those people were pupils of Mirza Qatîl. Thus, they averted their eyes from the rules of hospitality, and tumult and turmoil arose among great and small” (Azâd [1880, 1883] 1982: 505). For further discussion of these issues, see Faruqî 1998.
And the second ghazal, composed by Zamir, that you claim is free of defects—
in one verse of it are [grounds for] two objections:

Even in their homeland the distracted ones [sargashtagoñ] find no peace at all
As the fish’s restlessness [izgirab] is not diminished beneath the water.

My dear sir, no poet has spoken of the restlessness of a fish under water, for
the reason that a fish finds no rest anywhere except in the water. And if izgirab
is used in the meaning of “speed”—well, there is a big difference between “rest-
lessness” and “speed.” Sargashtah is singular; when you form its plural, instead
of [the final] he, the Persian kaf [= gaf] and alif nun will come, and it will be
sargashtagin. Where has the invention of sargashtagoñ come from? Those who
know the Urdu language in this age are Miyãn Mušhafi and Inshā’allah Khan;
it is vain for you to intervene where you have no standing. Your Persian is no
doubt famous—let the Isfahanis enjoy it! Beyond that, you can have only our
greetings and respects! (1: 516–17)

As can be seen, the “objections” here are made at a very precise and even
nit-picking level. Nasiḵ not only criticizes the description of fish as show-
ing “restlessness” under water, but even takes exception to a grammatical
form: sargashtah has been given an Urdu oblique plural ending instead of a
Persian one. His tone toward Qatīl is withering: Qatīl may know Persian, but
he should not plume himself on his Urdu, since the true contemporary us-
tāds for Urdu are Mušhafi and Inshā. Persian and Urdu interpenetrate, but
Urdu maintains its own standards of mastery, and over time the relationship
becomes more and more contentious—for despite many vicissitudes and
purist fantasies, Urdu, as can be seen, is increasingly asserting its autonomy.

SOCIAL CONTEXTS

Mushā’irahs were not only complex competitive arenas and technical work-
shops but hothouses of gossip and general social rivalry as well. From Nāṣir’s
tagkirah we can obtain an unusually complete and lively impression of the
societal range of Urdu poetry in the Lucknow of his time. The love of sto-
ries and anecdotes and small local details that Nāṣir shows in his tagkirah is
unmatched (until Āb-e hayāt) in the tradition and is one of the special dis-
tinguishing features of his work. His contemporaries hated his tagkirah for
its candidly gossipy stories and casually—or gleefully—unflattering anec-
dotes;55 they could not have imagined how much we in our time would value
it for exactly that kind of insider’s approach.

In Nāṣir’s world there were numerous Hindu poets; Maujī Rām Maujī was
of course among them. Mirzā Muḥammad Hasan Qatīl (1757/58–1818) was

himself a convert from Hinduism. Naṣir is especially strong on the Lucknow poets of his own time: for about one hundred of them he is our only source of knowledge. He records about forty-five poets who seem from their names to be Hindu and seven poets named “Singh” of whom one or two were perhaps Sikhs. (Some tagkīrah writers, by contrast, tend more or less to ignore Hindu poets.) Naṣir also includes another Hindu poet who had become a Muslim, as well as a Muslim poet who “through his evil fortune” had been converted to Christianity (1: 275, 1: 38). He provides brief accounts of fourteen women poets (2: 577–83, 2: 628); for only two of them does he name ustāds. Of them all, the most fully described is the courtesan Shīrin, heroine of the anecdote about the “sonship” of shāgīrds—a relationship in which her ustād, Bahir, as we have seen, most specifically included her.

Naṣir also mentions a few poets from humble backgrounds, including a barber (1: 47–48), a herald (1: 204), a perfumer (1: 248), a member of the lowly Hindu porter (kahār) caste (1: 421), a watchmaker (2: 99), a shoe merchant (2: 397), and a jeweler’s son (2: 513–14). It is clear that their relatively low social status does not exactly disqualify them from being poets, but it does let them in for patronizing treatment. Naṣir is rather surprised by their achievements, and seeks to use them as a moral lesson. The poet “Hajjām” (“Barber”), for example, “obtained improvement [islāh] by trimming the beard of Mirzā Rafi Saudā.” Naṣir enjoys his pun on the barbers’ idiomatic use of the word islāh to mean “trimming or shaving the hair.” And as we might expect, Naṣir proceeds to assign all the credit to Saudā: “The company of accomplished people has the quality of a philosopher’s stone: iron, although it is black inside, becomes pure gold, just as this craftsman obtained the wealth of the coin of poetry, and received praise and applause in all Shāhjahanābād [Delhi]” (1: 48). Of “Mujrim” Naṣir says, “Although he is a shoe merchant in Dalāl Bazaar, in the mold of his temperament verses are well formed.” In this case, the credit goes to his city: “And what a cultivated city Lucknow is, that nobles from elsewhere are consumed with jealousy over the eloquent word choice [fasāhat] of our craftsmen!” (2: 397). Naṣir’s use of “mold” and “well formed” also wittily evokes the shoemaker’s craft, in the style of allusive double-meaning much appreciated in the Persianized literary tradition.

Among all these humble poets, particularly fascinating is Aftāb Rā’ī “Rusvā” [“Disgraced”], who according to Naṣir amply lived up to his pen name:

He was a jeweler’s son; through the zeal and ambition of love he gave up name and honor, and wandered in streets and markets. Street urchins used to present him with a drum and a cowrie shell; with a garland of cowrie shells around his neck, this verse was on his lips:

---

57. Farmān Faṭḥpūrī 1972: 596.
He was disgraced \( \text{frusv} \), he was ruined, he became a vagabond—
Whoever passed through love’s way.

Due to his distractedness, he left Shāhjahānābād [Delhi] and came to Amroha. Since in those days men from Delhi were honored and esteemed everywhere, he settled down in a Sayyid’s house. One day he sent a youth to get wine, and the youth became absorbed in childish games. This verse was on his lips at every moment:

The boy went away to get wine—how can there be entertainment?
I give up the thought of wine—may the boy be well!

When he was dying, he requested his drinking companions to bathe his corpse in wine [rather than water]; his drinking companions acted on his request. These two or three verses, which are the pearls of his temperament, are noted by way of memorial: \[ \text{Naṣir quotes two verses}. \] (2: 513–14)

Here is almost the archetype of the \text{ghazal’s} classic lover-protagonist: wandering, half-mad, disgraced, flaunting his intoxication, violating worldly and religious norms—living out \text{ghazal} conventions, it would seem, in his actual life.

What is striking about this anecdote is its tone—elegiac, austere, free of the moralizing or condemnation of which Naṣir is exceedingly capable. For Naṣir is never one to mince words: he gleefully offers critical anecdotes and makes sweeping, hostile judgments about two dozen or so poets, many of whom he accuses of arrogance, use of vulgar and abusive language, ingratitude toward noble and generous patrons—or sexual pursuit of boys. Concerning eight or nine poets (out of 824) Naṣir records that they loved boys. In some cases he clearly disapproves of this behavior. About “Fidvī” Lāhort, whom he dislikes, he writes: “In his mind, his claim to poetry was beyond all limits; and passing beyond the level of poetry, he set his foot on the path of love of boys \( \text{amrad parasti} \). This vile practice caused many conflicts within his family; his body was pulverized with wounds, but he didn’t have the strength to give up this weakness” (1: 126). But in the case of Naṣir’s own close friend “Aẓhar,” his tone is much more indulgent: “In the season of his youth he was restless with love for smooth-faced [beardless] ones, and unable to control his love of boys who were the envy of Houris” (2: 154).

What can be made of anecdotal commentary like this? It is not necessary to affirm the historical truth of such anecdotes to find them significant; and in fact, many of the most famous literary anecdotes, especially those in \text{Ab-e hayāt}, have been amply discredited. In this case, it is the doubleness of perspective that is so piquant. For the \text{tagkīrah} tradition situates itself right at the intersection of social reality and literary convention: it reports—anecdotally

at least—on the poets, as well as on their poetry. When a sexual predilection for boys is considered in its actual social context of lived behavior (as in the case of Fidvi), Nāṣir often views it as repugnant. But when the love of beautiful boys is considered abstractly or distantly (as in the case of ‘Azhar) or is allegorized into an archetypal life of alienation, suffering, and death (as in the case of Rusvā), it arouses no such disgust. It seems then to become assimilated into the ghazal’s poetic universe, along with madness, drunkenness, outcast status, apostasy from Islam, sacrificial death, and other themes of transgression. 59

As we have seen in Nāṣir’s treatment of Ātash, the romantic and passionate behavior attributed to the ideal-typical lover was emphatically not to be conflated with the real life of this venerable and elderly ustad. Still, especially in the case of minor poets, the tagkiras’ anecdotal approach often faces two ways. Āzād says of a certain minor poet who died young: “He was himself beautiful, and loved to look at beautiful ones, and finally gave up his life in the grief of separation.” 60 Is this biography or a romantic play on a literary archetype? In the case of the extremely numerous minor poets, about whom often little was known except as vague gossip and rumor, such conflation was understandable; and of course nobody bothered about it, since people read tagkiras for literary pleasure—for good poetry and good anecdotes, not precise factual information. Only with the cult of “natural poetry” from the late nineteenth century onward did such biography and pseudobiography become reified in the naive way that continues to be troubling to many ghazal-lovers.

Many of Nāṣir’s characteristic attitudes converge in a unique and often-cited passage, in which he observes with considerable disdain a new performance genre that was destined to become the start of the dramatic tradition in Urdu. 61 His report takes the form of an eyewitness account—and it is the only one we possess. Sayyid Āgha Ḥasan “Amānat” (1815–1858) had composed, Nāṣir tells us, a mašnavī—an extended poem, often narrative, in rhymed couplets—called Indar sabha (Indra’s assembly) “in the manner of a rahas.” A rahas was a kind of performance involving Kṛṣṇa and the gopīs that was invented by Vājīd ‘Alī Shāh (r. 1850–1856) and staged by him in his court at Lucknow. Amānat’s work, in its new performance mode, now opened this genre to an unprecedentedly wide audience:

And in this mašnavī he composed ghazals and holis and thumris and chhand in the [Braj] Bhākhā language. Thus when they heard it Panāīt Kasmiṃrī and Bihārī the Porter and Mir Ḥāfiẓ selected some beautiful children and lovely moon-

faced boys and had the boys memorize the maśnavī, and educated them in singing and dancing, and set up a rahās. And they were retained for fifteen rupees a day. Accordingly, people saw this new-style gathering and liked it very much, and thousands of common [bazaar] people began to come for it. One day the author of this taṣkīrah too went to this rahās gathering of the Indar sabhā. I saw that thousands of people were mad and crazy for those beautiful boys. As the verse says:

There was such a crowd of moon-faced ones
That I was afraid my heart would be ground to pieces.

And Miyān Amānat was seated on a high platform, and a beautiful moon-faced boy sang before him. When I saw this, after watching for a while I came away to my home.

Lest we should fail to note his disapproving tone, Nāṣir adds a final verdict: “Just as thousands of women became prostitutes [fāḥishah] through Mīr Ḥasan’s maśnavī, so through this maśnavī, Indar sabhā, thousands of men became sodomites [lūṭi] and catamites [mugham], and sodomy became widespread” (1: 231).

Nāṣir’s comparison is to Mīr Ḥasan’s Sīhr ul-bayān (Magic of discourse), which is by far the most famous maśnavī in Urdu. Yet in his account of Mīr Ḥasan, Nāṣir has lavish praise for the maśnavī and not a word to say about its alleged corrupting tendencies (1: 41–42). Apparently Amānat’s work irritates Nāṣir and inclines him to dark mutterings. Even in the midst of his petulance he cannot help inserting a verse, but that does not change his basic mood. For in this performance he sees what might be called a real-world vulgarization of the love of beautiful boys: instead of being abstract poetic visions of beauty, desire, and transgression, here the boys are present in the flesh, in quantity, singing romantic verses before a huge audience of excited common people. Instead of remaining a sophisticated genre, recited in settings controlled by poets and elite patrons, here the maśnavī is filled with colloquial verse forms and acted out as popular entertainment. Instead of a few commoners’ being generously allowed to join the company of poets, here a veteran poet himself presides over the offering of his work for mass consumption and patronage.62 Here is the beginning of something new, the seed of Urdu drama from which would grow the Parsi theater and so much else besides; Nāṣir seems to sense this, and he is not amused.

**USTĀDS, SHĀGIRDS, AND POETRY-MAKING**

We have noticed the confrontational aspects of the tradition—the way the musha‘irah functioned as an arena for many kinds of conflict and rivalry. But

the warmer and more supportive side of the literary experience should not be overlooked. Impromptu composition was highly valued, and many opportunities were available for the poet to show his skill. Above all, well-earned praise from one’s ustād was sweet beyond measure. Nāṣir describes, with a becoming show of modesty, one such achievement of his own that earned his ustād’s praise:

One day [a shāgīrī named] “Tapish” came to Ḥazrat Ustād [Muẓnib], having composed this line and petitioning for the second line:

Sir, please just shoot your arrow with a bit of care.

As it happened, this humble one too was in attendance at that time. From my lips, without thought or hesitation, there emerged:

Some awestruck one might be in the guise of a gazelle.

The ustād was extremely pleased with the second line and gave the highest praise and applause to my inventiveness. (1: 67–68)

What does it mean to “shoot with care”? To avoid hitting an innocent passerby who stands transfixed by the sight of the beloved’s beauty? Or to shoot accurately for a clean kill, to spare the hopelessly infatuated lover any prolonged suffering? Both at once, of course. This is part of the elegance of kināyāh, “implication,” one of the recognized ways to make a small two-line poem feel packed with meaning.

While the shāgīrī might pull off such feats occasionally, for an experienced and long-practiced ustād these subtleties were routine. An ustād was a priceless resource: by changing a single word, he could raise the verse from the realm of the ordinary into a much finer and more complex state. Taking a mediocre verse, the ustād “adorned it with the jewels of correction” (2: 310–11). Many of Nāṣir’s anecdotes illustrate such skills.

Whichever taciturn one [kam suḵhan] I address would speak out—
There is such accomplishment in me that a picture would speak out.

Mīyān “Dīlīrī” Ṣāhib used to say, “One day I was in attendance upon Shaikh Nāṣik, when Mir Saʿādat ‘Alī “Taskīn” arrived. The Shaikh Ṣāhib said, “Please recite something.” Dīlīrī Ṣāhib recited the verse above. The Shaikh said, “Your verse is good. If in place of ‘taciturn’ [kam suḵhan] there were ‘tongueless’ [be zabān], then your accomplishment would be manifest and the verse would become peerless.” Dīlīrī Ṣāhib accepted his alteration. (1: 175–76)

The difference between “taciturn” and “tongueless” is the difference between an improbability (a reticent, silent person speaks) and an impossibility (a tongueless person speaks; a picture speaks). The claim is now a miraculous
one, parallel to that in the second line—and a far more suggestive and compelling verse has been created.

The emphasis on ghazal verses as independent two-line poems naturally encouraged the cult of rahi and the creation of various kinds of “implication” and multivalence and subtlety in small amounts of verbal space. It also lent itself to a focus on the smallest possible verbal space, the single perfect word—the word that brings the whole verse to life and delights the audience. As we have seen, Mir reserved a separate category of Urdu poetry for verses based on ihâm, the use of a “word fundamental to the verse” that would “have two meanings, one obvious and one remote, and the poet should intend the remote meaning, not the obvious one.” Such verses carry an obvious one-two punch, since they first notably misdirect—and then abruptly correct—the audience. Nâşir, too, recognizes ihâm as a special style characteristic of certain poets (1: 491, 1: 505, 2: 142). In one case, he links it explicitly with the pursuit of meaning, describing a poet as not only an ihâm-creator but also a ma’ni band, a “capturer/depicter of meaning” (2: 419). After the early vogue for ihâm had passed, the concept remained as one of the technical devices in the ghazal repertoire; it was merely one rather specialized form of “meaning-creation.”

Ghâlib, the last great master of classical ghazal, was famous for this kind of convoluted, metaphysical, “difficult” poetry. He famously declared poetry to be “the creation of meanings [ma’ni āfîrînî], not the measuring out of rhymes.” But the love of wordplay and complexity certainly goes back at least to Mir, who, as we have seen, claimed all verbal resources as his own.

A single utterance has any number of aspects, Mir
What a variety of things I constantly say with the tongue of the pen!

And again:

Every verse is coiled [pechdâr] like a lock of hair
Mir’s speech is of an extraordinary kind.

Not only examples of such complex poetry, but also specific references to it and claims of prowess in it, are found in the work of virtually all the great Urdu (and Indo-Persian) poets. Samayasundar’s legendary feat, at Akbar’s court in Lahore, of drawing more than eight hundred thousand meanings from an eight-word sentence, might in fact be considered a sort of limit case of ma’ni āfîrînî.

Moreover, this love of wordplay, implication, and verbal complexity was
no mere elite pastime: at least in nineteenth-century Delhi and Lucknow it was by all accounts a widespread taste that pervaded the popular culture. According to Sharar, wordplay with double meanings (ṣila') was a specialty of Amanat, the author of the *Indar sabha*; but even his expertise was outdone by the skill of the people of Lucknow in general. Sharar names several popular Lakhnavi genres of wit and quick repartee (e.g., *phabti, tuk bandi*) and singles out for particular praise the cry of a street vendor:

A street vendor was selling sugarcane in the market. This was his cry: “Hey friends, who will capture a kite?” Can any metaphor be more enjoyable than this? The most refined metaphor is that in which the name neither of the thing itself, nor of the metaphorical thing, appears. Only some special feature of the metaphorical thing is mentioned, to give pleasure in the speaking. What better example can there be of this than his not mentioning the name of sugarcane, or of the bamboo with which kites are captured, but only saying, “Who will capture a kite?”

The bamboo pole with which kites are captured is a metaphor for the tall sugarcane; and the pole itself is not even named, but only suggested. Sharar reports that no simile could be more to the taste of the common people (*bāzāri log*) than this, and that “hundreds, thousands” of such examples could be heard “night and day” in popular conversation.  

A disdain for “mere” wordplay is by now deeply engrained in the poetic sensibilities of modern Urdu-speakers. Yet, as Shamsur Rahman Faruqi points out, it is quite wrong to conceive of such wordplay as some kind of lacy ornamental frippery unrelated to the real world. “Wordplay tells us much about language and its possibilities, its colorful varieties, its subtleties.” And since language itself is not merely a most important part of our world, but is also actually constitutive of that world, none of its creative and expressive possibilities should be overlooked. Wordplay is, in short, always meaning-play as well. The poets and audiences of the classical Urdu ghazal were well aware of its multivalent powers, and valued it accordingly. Their heirs live in a literary universe that is, by comparison, much simpler, flatter, and more impoverished.

THE LAST *TAŹKIRAH*?

Naṣir’s *tažkirah* was initially completed in 1846, and a decade later the Mutiny swept away the world of classical Urdu poetry. Old “Mughal” Delhi was destroyed, its poets dispersed. The young Muḥammad Husain Azād, whose father was executed by the British for participation in the rebellion, fled the

city on foot with his whole extended family. Placing them in safety with friends, he wandered for several years, avoiding arrest, until he settled in Lahore and eventually got a job with the Department of Public Instruction. There he lived for the rest of his life, and there he wrote, among many other works, \textit{Ab-e hayat} (Water of life)—for he knew that “poetry is water of life to the spirit.”\textsuperscript{68} He explained his purpose in this work by analyzing the traditional cultural role of the \textit{tazkirah}:

Moreover, those with new-style educations, whose minds are illumined by light from English lanterns, complain that our \textit{tazkirahs} describe neither a poet’s biography, nor his temperament, character, and habits; nor do they reveal the merits of his work, or its strong and weak points, or the relationship between him and his contemporaries and between his poetry and their poetry. In fact they even go so far as to omit the dates of his birth and death. Although this complaint is not entirely without foundation, the truth is that information of this kind is generally available in families, and through accomplished members of distinguished families and their circles of acquaintances. It’s partly that such people have been disheartened at the reversal in the times and have given up on literature, and partly that knowledge and its forms of communication take new paths with every day’s experience.

\textit{Tazkirahs}, in other words, had always been supplemented by oral narrative and anecdote—stories about the poets were “the small change of gossip, suitable tidbits to be enjoyed when groups of friends were gathered together,” so that “it never occurred to people to write about these things in books” in any systematic manner. Could anyone have known “that the page of the times would be turned—that the old families would be destroyed, and their offspring so ignorant that they would no longer know even their own family traditions?”\textsuperscript{69} \n
\textit{Azád} emphasized the value of the new technology of printing, and he proposed to use it to create a new super-\textit{tazkirah}. “All these thoughts made it incumbent upon me to collect what I knew about the elders or had found in various references in different \textit{tazkirahs} and write it down in one place.” Moreover, he would strive for a degree of narrative continuity that traditional \textit{tazkirahs} had never remotely desired: “And insofar as possible I should write in such a way that speaking, moving, walking pictures of their lives should appear before us and attain immortal life.” As he sought to renew, vindicate, and purify Urdu poetry, he had a clearly proclaimed agenda: Persian was over and done with, while “the English language is a magic world of progress and reform.”\textsuperscript{70} In \textit{Ab-e hayat} \textit{Azád} created the ultimate \textit{tazkirah}—it was at once

\textsuperscript{68}. \textit{Azád}, quoted in Pritchett 1994: 50.
\textsuperscript{69}. \textit{Azád [1880, 1883] 1982: 3–4. (Source for all quotations in the paragraph.)}
\textsuperscript{70}. \textit{Azád [1880, 1883] 1982: 4.}
the self-proclaimed culmination of the tradition, the preeminent canon-forming work, a severe and sweeping criticism of the classical poetry, and the first real linguistic and literary history of Urdu. After this immensely transformative work, neither the *tażkira* tradition nor the classical poetry could ever look the same again.

**BEYOND THE *TAŻKIRA* TRADITION**

In the aftermath of the cataclysmic events of 1857 and their lasting effects, and in the aftermath of *Āb-e hayāt*, what now survives of this particular literary culture? Certainly much of it is long gone, and over the past century and a quarter its surviving texts have been widely misunderstood and misjudged.71 Āzād and his followers crammed the classical *ghazal* willy-nilly into a Victorian and naively realistic mold; when they found parts that didn’t fit, they were quite prepared to cut them off and cast them aside. The fact that Mir wrote verses in which the beloved was a beautiful boy was never a problem within the stylized and well-understood world of the *ghazal*; since Āzād’s time, however, it has made many critics uncomfortable, and such verses are routinely edited out of anthologies. Mir was proud of his verses based on wordplay and punning; nowadays some consider it insulting to his “simplicity” and “sincerity” even to point out that such verses exist. Modern Urdu readers are thus left with a monumental legacy of literary achievement, and on the whole, a very inadequate critical apparatus for making sense of it.

And what of the other “classical” genres? Our discussion here has given them short shrift in order to look as closely as possible at the *ghazal*-based heart of this literary culture. The generic spectrum of classical Urdu poetry has been described, and its famous *ustāds* enumerated, in considerable detail elsewhere; accounts are available both in Urdu and in English.72 Like the *ghazal*, the other genres too have had their various problems with the post-1857 tendencies—moralistic, realist, nationalist—of the Urdu critical tradition. Ram Babu Saksena, in one of the earliest Urdu literary histories to be written in English, accused all the poetic genres en masse of a “servile imitation” of Persian poetry that made them, as he explained in carefully numbered categories, (1) unreal; (2) rhetorical; (3) conventional; (4) mechanical, artificial, and sensual; and (5) unnatural—for Persian poetry was often “vitiated and perverse.”73

---

And the situation is not all that different even today. The panegyrical *qasidah* has been found demeaningly effusive and implausibly hyperbolic; the satiric *hâjû* has “degenerated” and consists of “coarse and vulgar lampoons”; the Shiite Karbala-lament, or *marâşiyah*, with its weeping and fainting heroes, is accused of excessive pathos and a lack of “manliness”; the prose romance (*dâstân*) is castigated for displaying “a complete lack of historical sense,” and its looming presence is denigrated or even largely ignored.  

All these common attitudes are easy to illustrate from a single widely known literary history, Professor Muhammad Sadiq’s—and that too, sadly enough, is the very one the English-language reader is most likely to encounter in a Western library.

The trajectory of the *shahrâšheb* (“city-destruction”) genre is particularly illustrative of the changing times: from its Turkish origins as a sexy, witty, wordplay-filled inventory of beautiful boys (whose looks made them “city-destroyers”) and their various professions, the genre evolved into a still-witty “world-turned-upside-down” poem in which the poet exulted in his verbal prowess and gloated over his upstart rivals or expressed a variety of other opinions about different professions and classes in his city (the world might be going to hell, but his art remained supreme). It also came to include some melancholy, rather abstract, *ghazal*-influenced evocations of the utter ruin of a city. Over time, critics have increasingly sought to reify such accounts as much as possible and to view the genre as one filled with actual, reliable historical descriptions of urban decay.

Whatever have been the vicissitudes of other genres, however, the *ghazal* remains in a class by itself. According to that same authoritative literary history by Muhammad Sadiq, the *ghazal* is guilty of a uniquely long list of offenses. Because the *ghazal* was “tainted with narrowness and artificiality at the very outset of its career,” it “lacks freshness”; it “has no local colour”; its deficiency in “truthfulness,” “sincerity,” and a “personal note” has made much of it into a “museum piece.” Its imagery is “fixed and stereotyped”; it is “incapable of showing any feeling for nature”; it is a “patchwork of disconnected and often contradictory thoughts and feelings.” Its love is “a torture, a disease,” a “morbid and perverse passion”—a view that is a “legacy from Persia” and is “ultimately traceable to homosexual love.” Furthermore, over time the *ghazal* has gone from bad to worse: it has developed “wholly in the direction of fantasy and unreality” in the course of its “downward career.” For all these reasons, in short, the *ghazal* “stands very low in the hierarchy of literary forms.”

The *ghazal* remains in a class by itself, moreover, not only because of its
historical preeminence or the widespread modern discomfort with its “immoral” themes and “unnatural” poetics. The other important traditional genres all involved units of composition longer than the two-line verses of the ghazal and were by comparison less performative, less orally focused, less agonistic, less versatile. Textual and attributional problems in most of the longer genres were also less pervasive: since longer works were fewer and more conspicuous, their authorship was easier to establish, and they were more likely to circulate in writing than orally. In the case of the other literary forms, there was much less need (or use) for a special genre of record and dissemination like the tagirah. For although other genres were involved in a secondary way, the whole interlocked literary culture of ustād, shāgird, and mushā’irah documented in the tagirahs was primarily devoted to the cultivation of the ghazal as an elite oral performance genre.

Once the page of history had been turned on that culture, how could the ghazal live? How could it maintain its subtlety and complexity, and how could the necessary level of connoisseurship be inculcated in its audience? After Āb-e ḥayāt, people continued to write works that called themselves tagirahs, like ‘Abd ul-Ḥaqq’s Gul-e ra‘nā (The graceful rose, 1921–1922), Lālāh Śrī Ram’s multi-volume Khumkhānah-e jāved (The eternal winehouse, 1906–1926), and many other less famous examples. Such works are produced to this day. But authors could no longer write a tagirah naturally and unself-consciously; they always had to take into account, for better or worse, the all-pervasive influence of Āb-e ḥayāt, with its naive and ruthlessly Westernizing notions of literary history.

And how to make up for the even more irretrievable loss of those bearers of oral tradition, the great ustāds of the past? Once the aftermath of 1857 had destroyed the patronage system—and in fact the whole culture—that had sustained such ustāds, what was to be done? For decades people mourned the loss of the old ustād-shāgird lineages, and of the poetic world they had constituted. Attenuated ustād-shāgird relationships continued to exist, but the heart had gone out of it all. The power of collective nostalgia eventually produced a remarkable monument: a work called Mashshāh-e sukhān (The adorner of poetry) by “Ṣafdar” Mirzāpūrī, of which the first part was published in 1918 and the second part in 1928. According to Māulvī ‘Abd ul-Ḥaq, the first part sold so briskly that within a few years not a copy was to be had anywhere. Starting in 1927, therefore, ‘Abd ul-Ḥaq serialized the second part in his journal Urdu, since he considered the work so important. It offered an anthology of the great ustāds’ corrections, he explained, and showed their extraordinary technical skill: “how changing only one word,

77. On Gul-e ra‘nā and Khumkhānah-e jāved, see Saksena [1927] 1990: 311–12; on less famous examples, see ‘Ishrat [1918] 1928; on more recent works, see Jauhar De’olbandi 1985.
or rearranging the words, or taking out an unsuitable word and putting in a suitable one, lifts the level of the verse and the *mazmūn* to a new height.78

Readers so appreciated the first volume, Şafdar wrote, that they helped locate much new material in letters and other sources for the second volume; while the first volume featured only seventeen *ustāds*, the second volume contained exemplary corrections by fully sixty-one *ustāds.*79

At about the same time, Muḥammad ‘Abd ul-‘Alā “Shauq” Sandīvī devised a fascinating experiment, poised between the old ways and the new. He composed sixteen ghazals and sent them, with polite and deferential letters, to a number of well-known poets, asking for correction. Then he took the responses of forty-two of these *ustāds*, juxtaposed their corrections to each verse, and turned the whole thing into a very well-received book. Even today similar attempts continue to be published: corrections made by revered poets—including “corrections” of the corrections of earlier *ustāds*—are sometimes compiled and analyzed, as was recently done in the case of “Abr” Aḥsānī Gunnāurī (1898–1973).80

If *ustād-shāgird* relationships and the correction process survive in a kind of ghostly conceptual limbo, the *mushāʿirah* itself is far more vigorously present. Reformist *mushāʿirahs* with an assigned topic (“Patriotism,” “The Rainy Season”) rather than a pattern line were part of the “natural poetry” movement from its earliest days. It is true that nowadays in films and books people look nostalgically to the past, imagining consummate *mushāʿirahs* as they never were but should have been. But important modern *mushāʿirahs* too have been studied.81 Modern public *mushāʿirahs* now take place in every city in the world where Urdu-speakers are at all numerous and organized; many readers of this volume will be able to find them if they look. They are now usually not private affairs but open public performances funded through donations and ticket sales; they are single events rather than regular meetings; they are no longer “patterned” but are free-form; they do not feature criticism or analysis of the poetry but instead are run by specially adept “comperes” who know how best to entertain the audience.82

The ghazal itself thrives nowadays not only among popular and crowd-pleasing “*mushāʿirah* poets” (as they are sometimes called) but among serious poets as well; a list of names could be provided that would include almost

80. Shauq Sandīvī (1926) 1986; on “Abr” Aḥsānī Gunnāurī, see Cīstī 1990.
every notable Urdu poet of the twentieth century. But these more serious poets cannot write with the expectation of oral performance, the way the classical poets could. They cannot assume, for example, that the audience would hear the first line of each verse several times, so that the audience would be held in a state of suspense before being granted access to the second line, as would have been the case in a classical mushâ‘irah; some recitation styles actually turned mushâ‘irah performance into almost a musical genre.\(^{83}\) Nowadays, serious modern ghazals tend inevitably to be “eye poetry” meant to be experienced first and foremost on the printed page. This in itself marks them off very sharply from their classical predecessors.

In any case, in numbers and influence serious ghazals pale by comparison to the extraordinarily pervasive mass-market, “pop” ghazal phenomenon. If Ghalib’s life is made, or rather remade—extremely and implausibly democratized, romanticized, and nationalized—into films and television serials, if his ghazals are sung (sometimes rather inaccurately) by Jagjit and Chitra Singh, is this a gain or a loss to historical memory? A gain, no doubt, but a bittersweet one. Anita Desai’s novel In Custody (1984), and the successful Urdu film Hifzat (Protection) that was made from it, are seen by some as a trash ing of the old literary culture, by others as a nostalgic lament at its decline. “Hindi” (actually, Hindi-Urdu) films are full of filmi ghazals of a naive, romantic, simplistic kind—but can the ghazal still be itself, after such a sacrifice of depth for the sake of maximum breadth of appeal? The ghazal thrives in modern “cassette culture,”\(^ {84}\) and now on CDs as well. An astonishing number of informative and interpretive websites—mostly amateurish but clearly labors of love—are devoted to both classical and pop ghazals, as anyone with a web browser can easily discover. Only the ghazal’s modern readers and hearers can decide its current health, and so far they seem to show an undiminished enthusiasm.

Modern ghazal is now a living genre in Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi, Panjabi, and other languages, with its own history in each one. And even more strikingly, we are seeing an attempted leap by the ghazal into English—not through translation, but as a genuine indigenized genre. Translations have a long history: some Persian ghazals of Ḥāfiz Shīrāzī were translated into Latin and published by Sir William Jones as early as 1771; Ḥāfiz’s whole divān was published in German in 1812–1813, and influenced Goethe. English translations of Urdu ghazals have included unsatisfactory versions too numerous to mention, a few textbooks for students, and one volume of literarily excellent but highly inaccurate “transcreations” by modern English poets working from literal

\(^{83}\) Qureshi 1989: 175–89.

\(^{84}\) Manuel 1993: 89–104.
translations. Now, however, the Indian-American poet and translator Agha Shahid Ali has been making serious efforts to work with a “ghazal” genre in English by preserving the repeated element (radif) at the end of each verse. His efforts seem to be increasingly well received. And why should they not? English can surely make room for the ghazal, and the ghazal can no doubt make itself at home in one more new language.

Vali, himself a mediator between different times, places, and literary styles, has laid the groundwork beautifully:

The road to fresh mazmins is never closed—
Till Doomsday the gate of poetry is open.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Sources in English
Naim, C. M. 1989. “Poet-Audience Interaction at Urdu Musha‘iras.” In Urdu and Mus-

85. On Hāfiz and Goethe, see Schimmel 1992: 4–6; for English translations/textbooks, see Barker 1977, and Matthews and Shackle 1972; for “transcreations,” see Ahmad 1971; Ali’s work with the radif can be found in Ali 1997: 40, 73–74, 78.


Sources in Urdu and Persian


This chapter considers the role played by literary culture in defining a north Indian cultural identity that can be seen today as both regional and participating in India’s wider culture. What is this role, and how has it been played? How have literary forms, styles, themes, and languages been perceived, and how have they been employed to express societal concerns and cultural values? In addressing these and similar questions, I discuss aspects of the literary tradition of Hindi from the fourteenth century to the late nineteenth century. The tradition is a complex one involving the participation of several related forms of language, and I make the nature of this participation an organizing theme of the chapter. To assist readers who are not specialists in South Asian studies I provide historical and other contextual background to the various topics discussed, as seems appropriate.

The way in which expressions such as “literary tradition of Hindi” are used in this chapter deserves explanation, given the linguistic ambiguity of the term “Hindi.” In accordance with its meaning—“Indian”—in Persian, this word was used by Muslim groups in north India chiefly to refer to local Indian vernacular language, although it could refer in principle to any Indian language. Thus the Arab traveler and writer al-Biruni used it in the early eleventh century to refer to Sanskrit. By the thirteenth century the word was used, along with its variants “Hindavi” or “Hindui,” to refer to the linguistically mixed speech of Delhi, which came into wide use across north India and incorporated a component of Persian vocabulary. This speech could be written down either in Persian script, which became normal practice in Indo-Muslim communities, or in Devanagari script, which happened mostly where Hindu influences prevailed. Those writing this language in Devanagari script normally had affiliations with traditional Sanskrit culture, and as evidence from the late seventeenth century indicates, their Hindi was liable to con-
tain a smaller infusion of Persian vocabulary as well as a proportion of loanwords of cultural connotation borrowed from Sanskrit. This Hindi/Hindui became a major component of the mixed language of the north Indian sant poets (discussed later), such as Kabir of Benares. In so doing it acquired a significant literary function alongside its general communicative role across north India, and beyond. It developed eventually, by different routes, into modern Urdu and modern Hindi, which, linguistically regarded, are essentially complementary styles—Persianized and Sanskritized, respectively—of the same language.

Two other forms of north Indian language, closely related to Hindi/Hindui, were in use as literary languages from at least the fourteenth century. Brajbhasha, the speech of the Agra district to the south of Delhi, became the standard language of Krishna poetry and court poetry; from around 1600 until the rise of literary Urdu in the later eighteenth century, it was recognized along with Persian as the leading literary language of the whole northern region. Avadhi, localized in and around the Lucknow-Allahabad region, was recognized from an early stage as the vehicle of Sufi narrative poetry; in a different role, it acquired a cultural and literary importance that continues to this day as the language of Tulsidas's late-sixteenth-century scripture of Rama worship, Rāmcaritmānas (Holy lake of Rama's acts).

It was thus in three speeches—Brajbhasha, Avadhi, and Hindi/Hindui—that the literary traditions that are the subject of this chapter received expression and were passed down over several centuries. These literary traditions were expressed most fully (we may assume) among predominantly Hindu communities. Aspects of earlier religious and social culture that had remained vital since ancient times were also transmitted through these traditions. Cultural continuities—as also the close linguistic kinship existing between Hindi/Hindui and Brajbhasha—ensured that when modern Hindi began to emerge on the grammatical base of Hindi/Hindui, the literary and lexical traditions of Brajbhasha, Avadhi, and Hindi/Hindui would be intimately familiar to its authors and their public. From the outset they would be infused into the new style of language. The literary traditions of Brajbhasha and Avadhi would continue to inform the development of modern Hindi into the twentieth century. They had, indeed, been an enabling factor in the rise of modern Hindi in the late nineteenth century, underpinning the concept of it as a future language of literary scope. It is historically and linguistically inappropriate to speak of early Brajbhasha and Avadhi as dialects of modern Hindi, which they long preceded as literary languages; however, in the context of an early twenty-first century consideration of questions of literary culture in north India, they may properly be regarded as falling within a composite “literary tradition of Hindi.”

Consciousness of cultural continuities, and hence desire for their preservation, are important concerns within Hindi literary tradition. This is well
illustrated in the earliest work dealt with in the present chapter, Maulānā Dāūd’s Candīyaṇ (1379). The rationale of Candīyaṇ lies in cultural rapprochement and the gradual rise of new attitudes after 1200 as a consequence of the Muslim incursion and settlement, yet this work uses a stanza pattern based on late Middle Indian (Apabhramsha) models established centuries before. Running through much of the literature discussed in this chapter is a characteristic contrast between, on the one hand, a desire to express new attitudes and motivations in contemporary language and style, and, on the other, an awareness of norms of older literary culture, especially as enshrined in Sanskrit texts and language.

The bulk of this chapter is devoted to developments in Brajbhasha and Avadhi literature, and in sant poetry, that took place between the late fourteenth and the eighteenth centuries. The final section of the chapter deals with circumstances of the emergence of modern Hindi as a language of literature in the nineteenth century. Four localities feature as sites of innovation or achievement: Gwalior to the south of Agra, the Braj district to the north of Agra, Orccha (in Bundelkhānd to the south of Gwalior), and Benares with its hinterlands in eastern U.P. and Bihar.

Gwalior has the significance of being almost the earliest identifiable center of cultivation of Brajbhasha poetry. Here a fifteenth century poet named Viṣṇudās became the effective inaugurator of a tradition of narrative on Sanskritic (Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa) themes, adapted to use in a new, modern way.

The Braj district came to new literary prominence with the awakening, around 1500, of a new Kṛṣṇa devotion all across north India, Bengal, and Gujarat. Sectarian groups established themselves in the traditional sacred sites of Braj; a flourishing oral poetry of Kṛṣṇa songs, both sectarian and non-sectarian, rapidly developed, as well as a literature of more elaborate narrative and expository poetry that was early on committed to writing, and some sectarian prose. Brajbhasha remained important throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, existing in a limited literary symbiosis with Urdu at first, and a fuller one with modern Hindi later.

Orccha became an important center of Sanskritic culture and Brajbhasha poetry in the late sixteenth century and produced in Keśavdās (b. c. 1555) one of the leading poets of Brajbhasha. Thanks chiefly to the information provided by Keśavdās in the introductions to his poems, we have fairly good knowledge of the circumstances and range of literary and scholastic activities at Orccha, and of the operation of literary patronage at the Orccha court around 1600.

Benares became an early center of the diffused sant tradition of Rama devotion in the fifteenth century, and in the sixteenth century the very different Ramaism of Tulsīdās’s Rāmacaritmānas was formulated there. The eighteenth century saw the flourishing of court poets—specialists in poetic theory and
in adaptive use of age-old themes drawn from Sanskrit kāavya literature—in the Lucknow-Benares area. In the nineteenth century, it was at Benares that the need to develop modern Hindi as a style of language containing an alternative literary dimension to that of Urdu was first experienced. The versatile writer Hariścandra (1850–1885), of Benares, was the first major exponent of the new literary style. Most of the activities around the turn of the nineteenth century directed towards developing Hindi and its literature, and establishing it institutionally, owed something to his work in drama, prose, or poetry.

BRAJBHASHA AND AVADHI IN THE CONSOLIDATION OF A NEW LITERARY CULTURE

Received Traditions and Bicultural Identity: Dāūd’s Candāyān

Cultural rapprochement, particularly between Sufi and nāth śāiva communities, provided conditions in which Maulānā Dāūd completed his Sufi romance, Candāyān, composed in Avadhi, in 1379. Dāūd lived at Dalmau near Rae Bareli, and belonged to a local branch of the Čisti Sufi community. This community had long been established in north India and is known to have had close contacts with local populations. Candāyān testifies to the extent of Dāūd’s assimilation of local culture. He finds his story in the folktale of Lorik and Čanda (which is identified with more easterly regions today), and interprets the story from a position of identification with both local culture and Sufi tradition. A tantalizing reference in Candāyān to piram kahāṇi, “tales of love,” illustrates that Candāyān had predecessors in the romance genre that are now lost; it is clear that some of these were vernacular, and of Sufi type.

Dāūd’s introduction to Candāyān is strongly bicultural, though he composed it to the standard requirements of a Persian narrative maṣnavī (literary romance). In Sanskritic vocabulary he describes his teacher Zainu’ddīn as “setting him on the path of dharama that removes sin [pāp],” opening his eyes to spiritual teaching, and providing him with a “boat of dharama to cross the Ganges.” Dāūd also throws light on the genesis of his poem, saying that he learned to write in “Turkish” script under Zainu’ddīn’s tutelage and, having done so, recorded what he composed in the same script and “sang [it] in Hindi.” Elsewhere, he speaks of “uttering” the poem (udbhās-, kah-). A num-

1. The nath śāivas were yogis, worshippers of Śiva, who had inherited traditions of late Buddhism.
5. turaki likhi likhi hinduki gāi. Candāyān, v. 9.
ber of inferences can be drawn from these remarks. The roots in Persian literacy of the cultural tradition to which we owe the Hindi Candäyan are clear, as is the role of a Sufi outpost at Dalmau in mediating that tradition. It is probable, again, that the poet’s own literacy aided assimilation of forms and style from the putative vernacular literary tradition. Even though the poem, or parts of it, circulated as an oral work, it was evidently also transmitted in writing from the time of its composition down to the period of the earliest extant manuscripts, in the sixteenth century. The existence of an early scribal tradition of Candäyan, as well as the poem’s popularity in the fifteenth century, is confirmed by the fact that a translation of it into Persian was undertaken at that time. Finally, Dāūd’s totally assured possession of “Hindi” as his literary vehicle emerges ex silentio from his introduction. He mentions Hindi as his spoken language only to contrast it with his use of Persian script, and for him the question of using any other language evidently did not arise.

Dāūd’s indebtedness to preceding literary tradition is clear in his use of a stanza pattern combining the Apabhramsha dohâ couplet with the four-foot caupâi, which has Apabhramsha analogues. We see the most distinctive stanza structure of Hindi narrative poetry established here, at the very outset of the extant Hindi literary tradition. Equally significant—and a powerful testimony to the extent of cultural rapprochement—is the presence of Sanskritic loanwords in appreciable numbers in this founding text of the tradition. The literary identity of Candäyan is clear again in Dāūd’s treatment of the story of Lorik and Cândâ as compared with modern folk versions. Dāūd expands a single central theme of the tale, providing it with a more elaborate structure than the folk versions and a style capable of carrying the Sufi symbolism. His poetic technique draws on both Persian and Indian traditions. Thus he uses the stock-in-trade metaphors in both literatures, and finds in Indian poetics the nakh-sikh conventions of description of a woman’s beauty and the theory of the savor (rasa) of love. This for Dāūd is symbolic of divine beauty and the human being’s love for it, as well as of earthly love. Yet the literary merges constantly with the popular in Candäyan. As a courtly lover in the Krṣṇa mold (nāgar châi), Lorik climbs to Cândâ’s balcony seeking the paradise of divine love; earlier, however, he has cut a very different figure in the bazaar when buying the rope he will need for the ascent; and when he faints at the temple, nearly mortally wounded by the “arrow” of Cândâ’s glance, his collapse is that of “a goat slaughtered at Diwali.”

6. This was essentially a Persian manuscript tradition. Of eight complete or partial manuscripts noted by M. P. Gupta, only one (dated v.s. 1673) is in Devanagari script.
7. This translation was destroyed before being completed, at a date before 1479. Digby 1975: 15 referring to Laṭṭi f e Quddâši. The historian Bada’oni (b. 1540) mentions the (earlier) reputation of Candäyan and its impact among Muslims, which motivated the translation. Ranking 1884: 333.
Altered Views of Old Traditions: Viṣṇūdāsa’s Poetry at Gwalior

Much of the credit for consolidating an early tradition of vernacular narrative on Sanskritic themes goes to a Gwalior poet named Viṣṇūdāsa. Gwalior, under Hindu Tomar kings throughout the fifteenth century after a long period of subjection, became during the reign of Dūgarsī (1424–1454) a significant political force holding something of a balance of power between Muslim states of the north and west. It was also an important cultural center supporting Jain, nāth sāiras, and Muslim as well as Hindu communities. The long-standing Jain use of themes from the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa in extended narratives in Apabhramsha meant that Kṛṣṇa and Rāma traditions were current in this form in western Jain centers. Two Jain poets, Yaśāḥkirti and Raydhū, are known to have composed and recited Apabhramsha narratives of Kṛṣṇa and Rāma in the Gwalior region around 1440. A temple inscription of 1405 from near Gwalior indicates that by that time, Brajbhasha had been receiving local cultivation in formal use for at least some decades.

Conditions were thus locally favorable for Viṣṇūdāsa’s Brajbhasha adaptations from the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa titled Pāṇḍavaścari (Deeds of the Pāṇḍavas; 1435) and Rāmāyankathā (The story of Rāma and his deeds; 1442).

Other favorable factors were also at work. If the preface to the Maithili poet Vidyāpati’s Apabhramsha poem Kirtilatā (c. 1400) is anything to go by, most people, aside from some members of Jain communities, would by now have regarded Apabhramsha as an outdated medium. Many, whether Hindu or Jain, would have shared Viṣṇūdāsa’s awareness of Gwalior’s role as “a thorn in the side of her enemies,” as well as of the disturbing effect of Muslim presence on Indian, or Hindu, ways of life. How, Viṣṇūdāsa asks in his version of the Mahābhārata, can the heart and soul of dharma be maintained today? A poet with such a consciousness, as well as his audience, would tend to read a significance unknown to earlier Jain authors into the old Mahābhārata traditions, for the sociopolitical situation of his time and place lent itself to definition in terms of community identity.

Pāṇḍavaścari and Rāmāyankathā are extensive works for singing or recitation, and are composed in stanza patterns resembling the caupāi-dohā of Candiyan; they show practice in composition and anticipate (though hardly reach) the stylistic fluency of the later Brajbhasha poets. In Pāṇḍavaścari, themes taken

from the opening books of the *Mahābhārata* serve notionally as proxy for almost the entire Sanskrit source. The purpose of Viṣṇudāsa’s version seems to have been to present a selection of the old legends in modern language as an allegory of the modern history of Gwalior, at a time when contemporary society had acquired both an Indo-Muslim dimension and a heightened sense of cultural ties to older times. In *Rāmāyankathā* the intention was to cover Vālmiki’s story in careful outline, if unevenly emphasizing its parts, in order to maintain a coherent relation of the whole. Viṣṇudāsa abridges the story drastically, reducing or discarding expository passages as well as most material pertaining to ancient legend or history. Yet he reveres Vālmiki, whose Sanskrit text he has evidently studied, and acknowledges Vālmiki’s authority as author of the original *purāṇa.* He is conscious of what he has left out of his own version, composed in a later age to meet different needs.

Viṣṇudāsa’s introductions to *Pāṇḍavacarit* and *Rāmāyankathā* are among the most elaborate found in Hindi *prabandha* (narrative-expository) works. They place him and his poem firmly within the literary ambience of the Gwalior court and seem to confirm that he stands near the inception of the Brajḥashya tradition of *prabandha* verse. Viṣṇudāsa disclaims knowledge of versification and figurative language (*chandu* and *lāchhu*) but is well versed in the latter at least. In his invocation to the goddess Sarasvatī in *Pāṇḍavacarit* he inventively replaces her standard symbol, the *vīṇā,* with a book, as if seeking acknowledgment that the new vernacular *prabandha* is now under her patronage. With a similar intention he seems to strive for an easy use of Sanskrit vocabulary in his vernacular verse.

It may be in accordance with his family’s *śāktas* sympathies that he chooses to invoke King Dūngarśi’s queen as *devī* in the course of referring to interests in poetry or learning on her part. He refers in *Rāmāyankathā* to learning the skills of oral poetry (*vacana*) from his guru, Sahajnāth, and the evidence of variant manuscript readings confirms that *Pāṇḍavacarit* was originally orally transmitted.

Viṣṇudāsa thus worked within the ambit of Sanskrit literary culture while giving it a popular dimension. Standing at or near the beginnings of the Hindi literary tradition, he revived in new form the fundamental *Krṣṇa* and Rāma traditions enshrined in the old epics; in so doing he established a vernacularizing procedure that would be followed by many others during the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. The fame of King Dūngarśi was not des-

---

13. McGregor 1998. The Sanskrit *purāṇas* were a class of encyclopedic works preserving old knowledge and tradition. Viṣṇudāsa uses the term loosely here in its Brajḥashya form.
15. The Sāktas were devotees of *śakti,* Śiva’s energizing power perceived as a female principle and equated with his wife, Durgā.
tined to endure, as the relative indifference of a seventeenth-century Gwalior annalist named Khargray demonstrates, and Vishudras’s contribution to the development of a Brajbhasha literary tradition has likewise been largely obscured until recently.17 The importance of his demonstration of the capacities of Brajbhasha goes beyond the literary merits of his work. Eighteenth-century Persian poets of north India showed a more just historical perception than Khargray had done when, looking back beyond the long intervening period of Braj devotionalism, they named the literary Brajbhasha of their own day the “language of Gwalior.”18

Krṣṇa Bhakti and the Revival of Traditions of the Braj Region

The mood of passionate devotion (bhakti) to Krṣṇa that arose in north India by the early sixteenth century can be seen as a reaction against patterns of social and religious organization—Brahmanical, saiva, sakta—that had long been dominant and were suddenly perceived, in an age felt as new, as needing revision. The ground was not unprepared for change. The iconoclastic Ramaite sant movement, western in origin but acclimatized in the north by the early fifteenth century, had presented a challenge to both Hindu and Muslim religious attitudes through its popular poetry, first in Rajasthan and then elsewhere (as in the Benares region, where it is illustrated in poems ascribed to Kabir [fl. c. 1450?]).19 The temporary independence of Gwalior had symbolized a reassertion of Indian, or Hindu, cultural identity, and perhaps foretold a changing political balance. The success of Brajbhasha in the fifteenth century indicates a readiness to give up the earlier Apabhramsha language vehicle and literary style, now seen as outdated. In this situation, the popular and learned Krishnait poetry that flourished in Gujarat in the fifteenth century20 appears to have been a developmental model for Krṣṇa poetry in the north. Songs of devotion to Krṣṇa were composed in the early sixteenth century by Mirābāi, of the Mewar (Udaipur) region of Rajasthan, and other Krṣṇa poets were probably active at the same time in the more northerly Rajasthan-Braj area.21

17. Gopacalākhyān (text in Drivedi 1980). In Khargray the memory of Dūṅgarsi’s fifteenth-century victories gives way to those of Gwalior’s famed resistance to Iltutmish’s siege c. 1300 and its final loss in Akbar’s time, as well as to a memory of its cultural prestige under Mansinh (late fifteenth century). Accurate knowledge of Viṣṇudras and his poetry begins only recently with H. N. Drivedi’s work in the 1970s.
18. As in Banvālidas [Val] 1877: 3, referring to the language of Nandadas (preface to his translation of Nandadas’s Brajbhasha version of Prabodhacandrodaya).
19. The sants were a community of poets and singers who denied the validity of both Hindu and Muslim teachings and taught a mystical love for a Rama knowable only through his Name.
21. See the section on Sūrdas and the Vallabhan pada repertoire later in the chapter.
The mood of popular devotion centered on Kṛṣṇa’s deeds as an *avatār* received support from the philosopher Vallabha’s monist emphasis on devotion to a Kṛṣṇa regarded as ultimately real (c. 1500). Vallabha (1479–1531) and colleagues of the Bengali mystic Caitanya (1486–1533) took advantage of the new route between Delhi and Agra through the town of Mathura22 that came into use after 1505 on the foundation of the modern city of Agra to found a sectarian worship of Kṛṣṇa in the nearby Braj region. Inspired partly by speculations emanating from south India on the region’s sacred status,23 they worked to create anew the lost legendary sites of Kṛṣṇa’s deeds (*līlā*). These were to serve as pilgrimage places, assuring an influx of devotees and an optimum environment for the sectarian establishments. The Vallabhanas became the more important of these two communities in the development of Brajbhasha literature.

Vallabhan hagiographical tradition indicates that both successes and difficulties attended the early consolidation of the sect.24 The building of a new temple at Govardhan funded by a merchant convert of the Khattri community is said to have been a lengthy process, taking place against a background of Muslim incursions. Vallabha records in Sanskrit the mixed piety and indignation of his reaction to the Muslim attacks, during which the sect’s chief idol was removed for safety to a remote area and he “relied on Kṛṣṇa” for refuge from temporal aggression.25 Reaction in the temple donors’ communities, however, is likely to have been based more on indignation than on piety, in keeping with the cultural awareness felt earlier by Viśuṇḍa and heightened now by enhanced empathy with the Kṛṣṇa tradition. Contact with the Caitanyas throughout Vallabha’s lifetime—though it was a cause of rivalries, as the communities’ differing traditions show—was evidently close. The Vallabhanas depended on the Caitanyas for provision of temple priests and for devotional scholarship. An analysis of *bhakti* in terms of classical Sanskrit poetics by the Caitanya theologian Rūpa was used by Vallabhan poets almost from the outset, as it was also used by poets of the later Rādhāvallabhan and Haridāsa communities. Rūpa, on the other hand, in setting out his theory of the “savor of bhakti,” was ready to equate Vallabhan doctrines with his own.

---

23. Bakker 1987: 28–30; Entwistle 1987: 248–49. (The take-up of these speculations in the poetry of different Braj sects is discussed in Corcoran 1980.)
24. Vallabhan traditions appear to have factual basis in various instances (although this is less the case where aggrandizement of the sect or idealizing interpretations of its members’ doings are involved). McGregor 1973: 31–33; cf. Barz 1976 (translation of some of the texts [*vārtāt*]); Vaudeville 1980: 15–45 (discussion of much of the history referred to earlier); Entwistle 1987: 261–63.
25. Sanskrit verses from Vallabha’s *Kṛṣṇārṇaya (Sūlaiśvāra)* quoted by Gupta 1947: 30 n. 2.
Creation of a Repertoire of Kṛṣṇa Literature

The institutionalization of Vallabhan bhakti soon created the need for inventories of vernacular songs (padaś). The pada, a song stanza of flexible meter and length evolved from Apabhramsha meters, was a genre well established both in sant poetry and in the Kṛṣṇa songs of Mirābāī. Kṛṣṇa padaś were used in kirtan—worship and celebration of the deeds (līlā) of Kṛṣṇa as avatār, especially those of his early childhood in Braj and his dance (rās) with Radhā and the other Braj women. They were also important in sevā, or cult observance. A separate impulse to expand the range of vernacular Kṛṣṇa poetry in both subject matter and genre manifested itself only later in the sixteenth century, but was implicit from the outset in Vallabha’s veneration of the Sanskrit Bhāgavatapurāṇa. As Vallabha and Caitanya had worked to recreate the Braj of legend and speculation in the physical here and now, so the poets of both sects were to create first a corpus of Brajbhasha Kṛṣṇa songs, and then a wider repertoire of Brajbhasha poetry in a variety of meters and forms. Some of these would be traditional, others of contemporary or very recent origin. Poets of the other sectarian communities, and also many non-sectarian poets of Braj, would make major contributions. The sacred topography of Braj would be reduplicated in the new literary tradition.

Sūrđās and the Vallabhan Pada Repertoire

Eight poet-singers are identified in Vallabhan hagiographical traditions as a group (aṣṭ chāp) consecrated jointly to Kṛṣṇa, and affiliated individually either to Vallabha or to his second successor Viṭṭhānāth (c. 1515–1588), in whose time these traditions probably began to be assembled. However, the first of the eight poets, Sūrđās, was in reality not a Vallabhan.26 The appropriation of this prestigious but little-known poet seems to illustrate a wish or need on the Vallabhans’ part to associate themselves with the stream of popular bhakti that had begun to flow strongly in the Rajasthan-Braj area during the early years of the Vallabhan movement, or shortly before. Eventually Sūrđās, the “Kṛṣṇa poet who became a pupil of Vallabha,” came to be regarded as the eponymous author of the entire huge, inflated modern anthology of Kṛṣṇa songs called Sūrsāgar (Ocean of Sūr). This situation implies that both before and after the years when the aṣṭ chāp tradition first evolved, nonsectarian poets were active in larger numbers than poets of the Vallabhan and other sects, sharing their purpose if not their conscious sense of direction to fill out a new “matter of Kṛṣṇa.” The popularity of Kṛṣṇa songs right across

north India’s culturally mixed society is suggested in the *Haqāiq i Hindi* (Realities of India) of Mir Vahid of Bilgram (Hardoi district; 1556). This work provides Islamic interpretations of persons and places of the Kṛṣṇa story.  

Verses attributed to the eight different poets of the *aṣṭ chāp*, when compared, can offer useful clues to the literary history of this group. Some seem to illustrate perceptible differences in the respective poets’ treatment of themes, explicitness of sectarian attitude, or style. The distinction between earlier and later poets that can be made out seems to agree with their assignment to Vallabha or to Viṣṇulāl in the hagiographical traditions. The credibility of some of these traditions, and the authenticity of some of the verses, are to that extent reciprocally strengthened. It appears that many of the extant *sevā padas* attributed to Parmānanda (whose traditional affiliation is to Vallabha) were assigned to him in an expanded corpus of the *Śūraśāgar* type. *Sevā padas* dealt with routines of tending the idol of Kṛṣṇa, with honoring Vallabha or Viṣṇulāl, or with sacred places and the celebration of festivals.

Mannerist elements of the kind that became prominent in seventeenth-century Brajābhasha poetry may have been represented in Vallabhan songs from the outset. This is suggested in songs on Rādhā attributed to Kumbhandas, who was reputedly the first singer at Vallabha’s original Kṛṣṇa temple. An easy fusion between the mannerist and the popular was possible because, as we know from authentic early songs of the Śūrdas tradition, the Kṛṣṇa *padā* was already substantially literize. To this literization a *Gītagovinda* (Song of Kṛṣṇa) tradition mediated through Gujarat had probably contributed. In addition, the well-established currency of vernacularized (*semi-tātsama*) forms of Sanskrit words in Hindi poetry by the early sixteenth century assisted the adoption of literary usage at more popular levels. Use of the syllabic *ghanakāri* and savaiyā meters appears only in verses by the later poets, however; and the rhetorical artifice that sometimes accompanies them illustrates that the sectarian *padā* tradition was by now fully established in style and scope. Interestingly though surprisingly, the appearance of popular elements in the songs seems to have kept pace with the development of mannerist emphasis in them—as in descriptions of Kṛṣṇa’s lunches (*kalevā*) with the Braj cowherds, village activities at dawn, or the progress of a *holi* festival party through the village. It is as if within the sect itself a new balance

29. A couplet by the Radhavallabhan sectarian Dhruvdas (seventeenth century) refers to Parmānanda and Śūrdas as marking out the “way of Braj” between them in their songs: *paramānanda aru śūra mili gāt sabā braja rītī.*
30. The term “mannerist” as used here describes an approach characterized by preoccupation with display of poetic art and by a dominant interest in the *rasa* of love (*śṛgīra*).
had been struck between artistic performance and popular perception, perhaps with some waning of the first bhakti impulse. What is certain is that the ast chāp poets brought artistic consciousness and innovating skill to devotional use of the pada, adding to the literary capacities of an already versatile genre and creating together one of the earliest discrete, identifiable bodies of song literature extant in Hindi.

Nandadās and the Brajhasha Prabandha Tradition

In Viśthalnāth’s time the sect consolidated its position. It asserted its organizational independence from the Caitanyas, strengthened contacts with Gujarat already established during Vallabha’s pilgrimages, and won local land rights from the Mughals at Agra. The elaborate and varied poetic production of the scholar-poet Nandadās (fl. 1585) confirmed the acclimatization of the prabandha in Brajhasha, and together with the poetry of Keśavdās (fl. 1600) set what proved to be its enduring standards. The preservation of what may be a complete and exclusive inventory of Nandadās’s authentic works in a textually trustworthy manuscript of the eighteenth century suggests that Nandadās’s work had enjoyed canonical status during a preceding period. Almost all of Nandadās’s prabandhas are adaptations from Sanskrit works—some artistic and imaginative, some scholastic, some sectarian. He was later known for his poetic artistry, but in the consolidation of the literary tradition, the range of his work and his learning were as important as his art.

In several of his works, Nandadās adopts the fiction of composing that work for a “friend” (mita; mitra) who is eager to understand the technicalities of the subject matter. Otherwise, apart from stock invocations to deities and in one case to his guru, Nandadās provides no introductions to his prabandhas. His work shows him combining two literary roles: a general role of poet, scholar, and popularizer of received culture and religion; and, within the cult, a more specifically sectarian role as composer of songs expressing profound reverence for Viśthalnāth. In the former role especially, Nandadās’s influence extended much beyond the Vallabhan sect. His references to the “reading” or “speaking” (parī-, bhākh-) of several of his compositions, and to their being “heard attentively and retold,” imply that they were read aloud or recited and may have circulated orally among audiences of devotees.

To illustrate Nandadās’s many-sided contribution to Brajhasha poetry,
I turn now to some features of his leading compositions. His Rāspañcādhyaṭiyi (Quintet on Krishna’s dance) is usually regarded as his finest work. Its subject, drawn from the Sanskrit Bhāgavatapurāṇa, is essentially the soul’s love and longing for God, matched by God’s perfect love and grace. Following the purāṇa, Nandadās uses the human symbolism of the dance of the women of Braj with Kṛṣṇa to unfold a religious theme. Rāspañcādhyaṭiyi is imbued with a tension between poetics of treatment and scholastic discipline. The following lines from the beginning of the poem, describing the atmosphere of the moonlit groves where the dance will take place and evoking the devotee’s perception of this atmosphere, illustrate its poetic mood:

The moon lifts up his train of stars—
    Heralds the dance, and its delight,
A lover skilled, the face to gild
    Of the beloved with saffron light;
His soft beams throw a burnished glow—
    A haze, as of red powder hurled
By the god of love, to fill the grove
At this, his carnival!
The leaves, shot through with glinting rays
    That slant to the forest floor,
Seem for Kāmdev a canopy
    Made fast with crystal cord:
The moon slides high, an eager spy
    Arrayed in beauty bright—
Peeks on tiptoe, to see the show
Now staged by Ramā’s dear delight!\(^4\)

Yet Nandadās consciously distinguishes in Rāspañcādhyaṭiyi between popular and scholastic “varieties of religious experience.” He carefully follows the purāṇa in its reticence about Rādhā’s status as chief among the Braj women and Kṛṣṇa’s partner. Rather than recognizing Rādhā in the manner of popular tradition (and as in his own devotional songs), he will not go further in this work than to make a wordplay on her name.

Rāspañcādhyaṭiyi was immediately successful, as borrowings from its text (by c. 1600) by the Krishnaizing Rāmānandi poet Agradās (by c. 1600) show. The many manuscript copies that still survive attest to its reputation. In Nandadās’s Siddhāntapañcādhyaṭiyi (Quintet of doctrine) the rāsā story is retold as an exposition of Vallabhan doctrine, its eroticism now sharply deemphasized. His Dasamskandh (Tenth book), which is in caupāi-caupāi meter, acknowledges

---

the śaiva commentator Śrīdhara of Benares.35 This work was evidently planned as an adaptation of the whole of book 10 of the Bhāgavatapurāṇa, but Nandadās did not take it beyond the beginning of the dance theme, perhaps because he now had his freer, more lively Raspañcādhyaṇī treatment in mind. In Rukminimaṅgal (Rukmini’s wedding) the eponymous heroine of Nandadās’s version of Rukmini’s story shows a defiance of family convention in her love for Kṛṣṇa that makes her one of the most imaginatively recreated individuals in early Hindi poetry, and a perfect symbol of the early bhakti ideal of independence of community:

I rack my brains, but don’t know what to do.
I bowed to the world’s conventions, deferred to family honor,
Only to lose my treasure, my all!
But I will follow Hari as my beloved with all my strength—will not give him up!
My parents, brothers, relatives—let all of them burn!
To hell with their scruples that have lost me my love,
Have divided me from Nandkumār, so precious, so lovely.36

The variations of treatment and viewpoint shown in these several works illustrate the Bhāgavatapurāṇa’s acquisition of a new literary identity at this time and in this place as a matrix of Brajbhasha literary culture.

Nandadās is almost the first poet known to have addressed the problems of familiarizing vernacular poets and their audiences with the theory of poetics. His Rasmanjari (Bouquet of rasa) is indebted to Bhānudatta’s Sanskrit work (1450); his Anekarthaṁanjaṅji (Bouquet of senses) is a versified vocabulary of difficult words explained for those who “cannot understand or pronounce Sanskrit.” The thesaurus Maṅmaṅjaṅji (Bouquet of synonyms) based on Amara has a similar intention. The many surviving manuscripts of these scholastic works suggest that they played a crucial role in the consolidation of mannerist tradition among audiences, and perhaps among poets themselves. Nandadās’s adaptation of Kṛṣṇaṁśura’s eleventh-century Sanskrit allegorical drama of theistic Vedānta, Prabodhacandrodaya (Rise of the moon of understanding), shows a complementary purpose to that of the above works on poetic theory, in that it was made for religious study, and specifically for reading rather than recitation. Nandadās follows Kṛṣṇaṁśura quite closely; his interpretations have more the character of general than of sectarian bhakti.37

35. 1.10–13. Nandadās praises Śrīdhār’s discernment, beside which his own (he says) is fragmentary.
The most influential of Nandadas’s works, *Bhāvargīt* (Bee’s song), adapts the well-known *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* theme of Uddhav’s taking Kṛṣṇa’s message to the *gopīs* (the Braj women). This theme had been discussed long previously in early Marathi, and was also treated in Gujarati (Bhim, 1484). The Caitanya theologian Rūpa had treated the same theme in Sanskrit in the early sixteenth century. In Nandadas’s version (the title of which is an allusion to a motif of the message theme) Uddhav’s discussion with the *gopīs* becomes a debate on the values of *jñāna* and *bhakti*—knowledge and devotion—which the *gopīs*, who of course support *bhakti*, triumphantly win.38 So considerable an alteration of the *purāṇa*’s account illustrates the emphasis placed on Kṛṣṇa’s status as *avatār* in northern Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*. Vallabha’s form of Kṛṣṇaism had facilitated this emphasis, which was resisted by the Ramaite Tulsi-dās. Nandadas’s version of the Uddhav story became the model for several later versions in which the story was made a vehicle for expounding different attitudes. The *Bhāvargīt* theme remained vital into the twentieth century, when it was adapted in modern Hindi in Ayodhyāśim Upādhīyā’s *Priyapravās* (The beloved’s exile; 1914); here Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa have modern personas and stand for ideals of service and sacrifice. At a more popular level, verses of Nandadas’s poem were still accurately preserved and in use around 1950, among dance troupes at Mathura.39

**The Court Literature of Orccha c. 1600**

The Bundela principality of Orccha (Madhya Pradesh, south of Jhansi) became an important center of Sanskrit language and Brajbhasha poetry in the late sixteenth century. Orccha, with its nonsectarian Kṛṣṇa poetry and its mannerist court poetry as represented in the work of Keśav-dās, displays a different local integration of the components of poetic practice and a wider artistic range in their use than is clear within the sectarian ambit of Braj. During the immediately preceding centuries the Bundelas, who had indirectly succeeded a Candella dynasty at Orccha after a period of divided control of the region, had successfully maintained their authority. References in Keśav-dās’s genealogies suggest that the Bundelas were conscious of re-asserting Hindu *dharma* against opposition in the fifteenth century; and an inscription in Sanskrit, Persian, and “Hindi” implies the presence of an Indo-Persian element in a predominantly Sanskritic culture.40 After the founding of Orccha under Rudrapratāp in 1531, the Bundelas continued to be largely independent of Delhi-Agra throughout the century, extending their terri-
stories in the early Mughal years but under pressure from the time of the Afghan ruler Seršāh (d. 1545). They lost control of some areas towards the end of the reign of Madhukarśāh (1554–1592) as Akbar consolidated his power.

The introductions to Keśavdāsa's prabandhas give valuable information about Keśav himself; his patronage by Indrajit, the third or fourth son of Madhukarśāh (b. c. 1555); and the circumstances of the Orccha court. Maintenance of their political and military position remained a major Bundela preoccupation in Madhukarśāh’s time, as is illustrated in Indrajit’s demonizing of Akbar as “emperor of the Daityas” in one of his scholastic works. However, the cultivation of music and poetry were also important to Indrajit. Described by Keśavdāsa as a versatile prince—sakala dharma kau dhama—Indrajit commissioned Keśav’s Rasikpriyā (Companion to love; 1591), a work that “gives knowledge of the way of rasa to poets who, without it, would be as Kṛṣṇa without Rādhā.” After Madhukarśāh’s death and the division of the Orccha territories, Indrajit, the second oldest of Madhukarśāh’s surviving sons, received the jāgir (freehold estate) of Kachova (Nad Kachuva, twenty miles southeast of Orccha). Keśav tells in his Kavipriyā (Companion to rhetoric; 1601) of Indrajit’s “boundless liberality” as a patron at Kachova, and he refers to Indrajit’s presiding over public and private performances of music, singing, and dance. The courtesans at Kachova were “complete in their command of the ocean of rāga and melody.” Keśav particularly praises the singing and vina playing of Indrajit’s favorite, Rāyprabhin, who composed or recited verse “with talents rivaling those of Śārdā” (Sarasvati, the patron goddess of speech and poetry). This scenario provides a convincing background for the single kavitta verse on Indrajit’s and Rāyprabhin’s love that survives, attributed to Indrajit himself under the name “Dhīraj Narind.” (Indrajit appears here as an average, rather than a gifted, mannerist poet: proficient in standard techniques of alliteration, assonance, and conventional wordplay on multiple literary meanings of Sanskrit terms.)

Again from Keśavdāsa, we know that Orccha was a center for the cultivation of Sanskrit from the time of its foundation. Keśav’s ancestors had been prominent pandits attached to the court of Mānsimh of Gwalior (1484–1518); one had been expert in the six traditional systems of philosophy. Keśav’s grandfather had come to the new court of Orccha in Rudrapratāp’s

41. See especially Kavipriyā and Bīsimhdevcarit, ed. Miśra 1954, vols. 1 and 3 (references to Keśavdāsa text are to this edition).

42. Rasikpriyā 16.15.


44. Quoted by the anthologist Sengar (1878: 156); Gupta 1970: 259. Kavitta is an alternative name for the syllabic meter ghanākṣari referred to earlier.
time and been appointed there to expound “purāṇas.” In Kaviḍpriyā Keśav tells us ruefully of his own status, by contrast, as a “bhāṣā poet”—the first in his family’s long scholastic line. Such self-deprecation is only nominal, however. Changed cultural circumstances brought Keśav to the use of Brajbhasha and won him (as he says) both Indrajit’s patronage and “open access” to Birbal, Akbar’s minister at the Agra court. It is clear that with his family’s tradition and his own poetic gifts, Keśav was an important agent in the transference of Sanskrit scholastic tradition to Brajbhasha, and that he stood near the beginning of this process, which continued to the eighteenth century. In Vijñāṅgitā (Gitā of right knowledge; 1610) Keśav is conscious of the cultural role that is to be played by Brajbhasha as both the recipient and the communicating agent of the older tradition.

Scholasticism: Indrajit of Orccha

The scholastic ambience of the Orccha court was of some complexity and depth. Keśavdāsa’s Brajbhasha poems imply his considerable knowledge of Sanskrit authors and sources (Rudrabhaṭṭa; and the Yogavāsiṣṭha, Prabodhacandrodaya, and many other texts); and Indrajit composed commentaries on Sanskrit texts in Brajbhasha prose. His commentaries on two of the seventh-century Sanskrit poet Bhartṛhari’s three collections of epigrammatic verses (subhāṣita) are preserved. In his Sanskrit introduction to these commentaries Indrajit describes himself as learned (śāstrarthaḥavicārvān), but his Sanskrit, with its occasional slips and errors, seems workmanlike rather than scholarly. This, taken with the academic style of his exposition of Bhartṛhari, makes it almost certain that Indrajit drew on scholastic help in composing his Brajbhasha text. From the versions of the northern recension of Bhartṛhari which he used, we can deduce that Indrajit may have had access to a commentary in Rajasthani language. It is almost certain from Indrajit’s commentarial style that the purpose of his commentaries was to facilitate understanding of the Sanskrit original in a community in which learning and culture were shared (and recognized as being shared) by Sanskrit scholars on the one hand and Brajbhasha-using poets and laymen on the other: a purpose similar to that of the sectarian Nandadāsa in his Rasmaṇḍari and other works. The texts were intended to be read aloud and “heard,” probably in a context of teaching or study.

A revealing error in Indrajit’s commentary on Nītiṣataka (One hundred

45. Kaviḍpriyā 2.9–18.
46. 1.12. Vijñāṅgitā is a digest of the Sanskrit Prabodhacandrodaya drawing also on other Sanskrit works.
47. Edition of Nītiṣataka commentary in McGregor 1968. The work is referred to in Indrajit’s introduction as śāstrarthaḥavicārvān.
verses on morality) illustrates that in the cultural ambience of Orccha-Kachova a Sanskritized style of spoken Brajbhasha was recognized and had high prestige. Indrajit makes few serious errors in his commentary, but at one point, in glossing the Sanskrit word *samskṛta*, he confuses its adjectival sense, “cultivated,” with its nominal sense, rendering Bhartṛhari’s reference to “cultured speech” (*vānī yā samskṛtā dhāryate*) wrongly as “speech that has acquired Sanskrit [vocabulary]” (*vānī ju samskṛtaṁ līnai hai*). Such a slip would hardly have been possible had Indrajit not been familiar with a Sanskritized style of speech in his own society.\(^{48}\) We are fortunate in Indrajit’s slip, for it reveals a direct antecedent of the Sanskritized style of modern standard Hindi. We may infer that such a style is likely to have gained currency wherever sections of society (for instance, courts or sectarian establishments) felt a heightened consciousness of traditional culture.

**Keśavdās and the Consolidation of Brajbhasha Verse Tradition**

Situated in the culturally favorable environment of Orccha, Keśavdās produced the greatest range of major compositions of any Hindi poet. Keśav’s breadth of outlook and the technical brilliance of his poetry make him the most prestigious of Hindi court poets and the leading exponent of the mannerist style. His work illustrates the consolidation of a composite poetic tradition in Brajbhasha at the moment of its full maturity. A range of polysyllabic meters, mostly variants of the *ghanakāra* and *savaīyā*, now complemented the four-foot *caupaī-caupaī* and the *dohā*. Scholastic analysis of poetic theory at the interface of *bhakti* and *śṛṇgāra* had provided poets with a repertoire of situations and motivations from within the Kṛṣṇa theme. The status of that theme in the general culture contributed to the popularity of not only the mannerist style but also the Brajbhasha tradition expressing it. In addition, a new dimension of the Rāma theme linking *bhakti* and the *smārta* tradition (tradition as “remembered” rather than “heard” through revelation) had been opened to vernacular poetry in the recent work of Tulsiṇa. Finally, conditions providing patronage as well as discerning audiences for Brajbhasha poetry and poets existed at successful local courts, such as those of Orccha and Gwalior, and at the Mughal court at Agra. Court interests and the political relationships between kingdoms now became themes of a poetry expressing a sense of contemporary identity, with frequent allusion to the deeds and power of Kṛṣṇa as well as to the status of Rāma.

Keśavdās’s poetic persona was primarily that of a scholiast and mannerist, one who would give instruction to poets in the “way of delight” (*rasa-ṛiti*) of poetry. *Rasikpriyā* deals with such subjects as the *rasas* of poetry, of which

---

love, śṛṅgāra, is supreme; the types of “heroes” (nāyak) and “heroines” (nāyikā); the situations and conduct of different types of nāyikās; the nāyikā’s emotions and those of her confidante; and the recognized types of poetry (three types distinguished by progressive ornateness of style, culminating in a fourth, the love of Rādā and Hari [Kṛṣṇa]).

If, as Keśav tells us, the rasa of love is one of delight, it is art, and skill in the use of poetic language, that give access to it. Following Rudrabhaṭṭa, an innovator who in his Śṛṅgāratīlaka (Adornment of love) had transferred the application of rasa theory from drama to poetry, Keśav somewhat analogously transfers the theory itself fully from Sanskrit to Brajbhasha. Nandadas had already framed definitions and given Brajbhasha examples of the standard categories, but Keśavādas went beyond Nandadas in his use of the modern meters and in his search for innovation in subject matter. His verses are tableaux on the details of his theme—vernacular in language, but self-consciously literary in flavor and style. The most routine conceits can under Keśav’s handling acquire a verve and memorability that conceals, even commends, their conventionality, as when the lady’s “deadly beauty” and “lightning brilliance” transform her into an incarnation of love:

Does her beauty bewitch like the snake’s, or blind like the lightning’s flash? Is she the love god’s partner, to be so lovely?

We must assume that with the shift of rasa poetics to vernacular treatment, its theorists gained both a new capacity to make innovations in the spirit of the theory and a sharper interest in doing so. The theory was brought closer to the realm of everyday life through its expression in everyday language, or something like it. Verses featuring the sakhi (confidante) were often contextualized in the contemporary world by drawing the sakhi’s occupational names from everyday local life. Some names can from their form be localized in the Braj-Bundelkhand region: “midwife,” “neighbor,” “betel-seller,” “bangle-maker,” or the euphemistically named Rāmjanī, of mixed community. The protagonists’ vernacular speech enters the verse with dramatic effect—as in situations of inveiglement or where the sakhi exclaims at (and calls the world to witness) the depth of the lover’s despair.

Keśav’s Kavi priyā deals with rhetoric: figures of speech (alaṅkāra), verse forms, and metrics. A popular verse places his contribution to poetry far below those of the “bhakti poets” Tulsidas and Sūr das, but the number of extant manuscripts of Rasikpriyā and Kavi priyā testifies to the importance of

51. In chapter 1, this volume, Pollock notes a converse lack of vitality and innovation appearing in the Sanskrit tradition of poetics from about this time.
Keśav’s vernacularization of contemporary poetic theory, and to its significance to his many successors at later courts. For them he would remain the foremost of riti (mannerist) poets.52 Outside of court environments Keśavdās’s influence was also important, notably in the work of Bihārīlāl, a dependent of Jaisimh Mirzā of Amber (1617–67) and a poet of flair and grace. Bihārīlāl’s dohas, based loosely on mannerist themes, won a more popular acceptance for riti poetry than Keśav’s own verse could have obtained and brought him a high reputation among Hindi poets that lasted until the twentieth century.

In his Rāmcandrikā (1600) Keśavdās draws on Vālmiki’s work, but he presents Vālmiki in his introduction not as revered inaugurator (ādi kavi) of the Rama literary tradition, but as a figure of contemporary relevance who commends and authorizes worship of the Name of Rāma.53 Influenced by Tulsiḍās’s constant search for new motivations for bhakti in his characters, Keśav similarly sought new interpretations in presenting details of the story. If a Brahman’s identity is to be established, this can be done metrically by giving him a Brajbhasha verse set to a distinctive Sanskrit meter; if, following a hint from Tulsiḍās, the demon Bāṇa’s failure to lift Śiva’s bow (and so win Sītā) is to be emphasized, the bow’s inertia in Bāṇa’s hands can be described as “that of a yogi’s mind”—the very negation of bhakti.54 Ever a mannerist Keśavdās regards such innovations as a display of poetic craftsmanship as much as a contribution to the Rāma subject matter. Rāmcandrikā thus creates a different perspective from that of Tulsiḍās on the śmārta culture that provides the setting for Rāmacaritmanas.55 The number of extant manuscripts of Rāmcandrikā illustrates its wide success in court communities. Keśavdās was able to construct a new image of Rāma—culturally and artistically comprehensive in its time and place, and more potent than the image of Kṛṣṇa received from Śrīpura literature. Secular connotations could be safely emphasized in this retelling of a sacred legend as a showpiece of modern poetic art.

Keśav’s poems on affairs of court and state are based firmly in the literary culture of Rāmcandrikā. Prince Birsingh’s rise to power at Orccha is chronicled in Birsinghdevcarit (The deeds of Birsingh; 1607) as a “spreading vine of conflict” that bears fruit in the prince’s struggles with his brothers and with Akbar, and in his consequent support for Akbar’s son Salīm (Jahāngīr). The events take place against the background of an elaborate description of an

52. Several commentaries on Rasākprīyā and Kaviśprīyā were composed, including those by Surati Misra (Agra, early eighteenth century) and by Sardār (Benares) as late as c. 1850.
53. Vv. 7–11.
55. The word śmārta refers to sacred tradition as “remembered” or recorded rather than as “heard” through revelation.
idealized Orccha, its topography and its court life, with an interlude on the arts and duties of kingship. Allegory lightens the burden of Keśav’s panegyric: when Bir辛h is crowned by Dharma, Conflict vanishes; and in the acceptance of Jahāṅgīr’s overlordship, Greed turns in the direction of bhakti, and Love towards Śīv, Hari, and one’s guru. Keśav co-opts contemporary norms of expression of devotion and cultural piety here to express, without emphasizing it, a sense of political awareness in the court community. At the opening of the poem, however, he asserts his fellow-citizens’ pride in the state identity of Orccha more pointedly, associating past deeds by members of its dynasty with those of Gwalior Kachvāhas, Rājput Sisodiyas, and now with the deeds of Bir辛h, who, like these predecessors, has been marked by Kṛṣṇa for the frustration of their opponents’ designs.56

Ramaism and Its Central Sites: Ayodhyā, Benares, Galta

Devotional Krishnaism had been preceded by a Ramaite form of Vaishnavism in north India. Roots of the latter can be found in temple inscriptions and iconography of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries in central India, and it is clear that it rests on a Śāiva foundation. Its rise also appears to owe something to ideals of dharma symbolized by Viṣṇu and Rāma that were emphasized by Gāḍhaḍāvala kings of Benares during the last years of independence of the north Indian kingdoms (late twelfth century). This Ramaite Vaishnavism was patronized in central India by the Maratha Yādava kings of Daulatabad, including Rāmacandradeśa (1271–1309), who resisted Alā’uddin’s incursions in west India. A contributory element to it is the cult of the Name of Rāma that is attested in northern ritual and Upanishadic texts, probably of Benares, in the eleventh century. The nonmaterial praxis of this cult appears to have aided it in Muslim times, when the building of temples faced restrictions in many north Indian areas, and the practice of calling on God’s Name was in keeping with both the meditational practice of nāth Śāivas and the Muslim practice of dhikr.57

The measure of cross-cultural understanding achieved via contact and social interpenetration between nāth Śāivas and Sufis during the early Muslim centuries provided conditions in which the western and northern sant poets’ mystical devotion to God’s Name could be widely successful outside Brahmanical orthodoxy. The title sant means “good,” or “holy.” The sant poets’ devotion, which contained a Sufi element, arose first in west India, inspired by feelings of passionate love (bhakti) for God as Rāma, and was transmitted quickly to north India. Devotion to Rāma as seen differently—as a supreme

56. 1.2.
being having personal attributes—would come to expression more slowly in vernacular poetry in the north (by the beginning of the sixteenth century), yet would command more assent in the long run. A forerunner of it at Dūgarsi’s Gwalior can be glimpsed in Viṣṇudās’s poetry (mid-fifteenth century), and the Sanskrit Adhyātmaramāyana (?) c. 1500 and Tulsīdās’s Rāmacaritmānas (late sixteenth century) show it fully developed. Its recognition in the wider society is illustrated in the striking of coin by Akbar’s mint about the year 1600 showing Sītā and Rāma at Ayodhyā.

The Sant Poets and Their Tradition

The early north Indian sānt poets were a loose community of poet-singers. It is their poetry that most clearly marks—along with Daūd’s contemporary work, Candāyan—the full emergence of vernacular language in literature. Less self-consciously literary than Candāyan, though drawing as that work does on Apabhramsha metrical forms, the sānts’ poetry was essentially popular and oral. The poet-singers’ view of society and religion, evolved during the period of social upheaval and adjustment from which north India was then emerging, was one of broad reappraisal of values, and moral counsel (upades cetāṇi) was one of its prime products. The sānts saw conventions, doctrine, and orthodox practice as valueless compared to a devotion that was essentially mystical, expressed in the singing of God’s praises and repetition of his Name as Rāma. The sānt poets presented these themes in terms of events and preoccupations of everyday life, but discussed them frequently in terms of concepts long ingrained in Indian thought.

Consider, for example, some verses from the west Indian poet Nāmdev (c. 1350), who is credited with establishing sānt poetry in Rajasthan and north India:

“Whom did you get to thatch your hut?” asks Nāmdev’s next-door neighbor.
“I shall give you twice his wages for his name.”
“I can’t obtain him for you, lady;
Behold, he is present in all things—
The Upholder of my spirit!
He asks the wages of love to thatch a hut,
And comes of his own accord, if one turns from worldly ties;
Such a one I cannot describe—he is in the hearts of all men everywhere.”

Who has seen Rām’s coming, and who knows Him?
Who can tell of and understand Him who is without kin?
None see where the bird in flight rests,
Nor the path of the fish in water;
Behind the mirage the sky is not seen:
Nor is Nāmdev’s Lord Viṭṭhal known, who set in place the three worlds!
Give up deceit and sham, oh heart:
Be ever-mindful of Hari’s Name!
You may bathe in Ganges, Godavari and Gomti, or at the festival of Kedārnāth;
You may make untold pilgrimages, and mortify your flesh in the Himalayas—
But this is less than uttering the Name.  

The early ṣants were able to take advantage of the changing language use and changed social conditions of their day to spread a compelling, straightforward message. By about 1400 their teachings had spread from Rajasthan to Benares, where Kabīr, a Muslim convert to the community, was active with other ṣants from, most probably, the mid-fifteenth century. In the Benares area the ṣants prospered early under merchant patronage. The impact of their poetry is attested in the inclusion of many ṣant poets’ verses in an appendix to the Sikh scripture Ādigranth (Book of the beginnings; 1604). However, a reference by the Gwalior annalist Khagrāy (? 1631) implying resistance to their teachings suggests that the ṣants’ influence may have reached a peak by that time. On the other hand, the ṣants’ continuing success is illustrated by the foundation of many communities in Rajasthan, Avadh, and Bihar in the seventeenth century, and no less by the much-expanded, dialectally confused record of their oral verses that exists in manuscripts, all of which long postdate them.

In the absence of a commanding, alternative vernacular teaching opposed to their own, everything worked at first in the ṣants’ favor: the easy metamorphosis of Apabhramsha meters and stanza forms into true colloquial forms at this time; the straightforwardness of the poets’ teachings; the negating element in their teachings, which left little to be said in terms of argument yet was grist to the mill of inventiveness and paradoxical expression; and finally, the everyday subject matter of the verses and their imagery, which made for easy reception. If a village is a metaphor for the human body in a Kabīr verse, then its landlord’s accountant can stand for the figure of Death, pursuing the tax-defaulting poet. Or Kabīr may be a merchant, trying to save his capital while harassed with cares about his oxen and baggage: a soul struggling in life’s turmoil. A still more challenging (though no more effective) range of ṣant imagery is drawn from the nāth śaiva repertoire of paradoxical imagery involving yoga terminology. Here too, though, images are usually uncomplicated in the verses that are most likely to go back to Kabīr him-

58. Ādigranth, 657 (Sorath); 525 (Gūjāt); 973 (Rāmkali). The translations quoted here were first published in McGregor 1984: 38–39.
59. Dharmād, Kabīr’s leading early disciple, seems to have been a wealthy merchant of Bandogar (Rewa district). McGregor 1984: 56 and nn. 60, 62.
60. Text of Gopalākhya (The tale of Gwalior) in Dwivedi 1980: the Brahman Khagrāy deplores current disregard of the non-Brahmanical teaching of Kabīr and his Benares fellow-ṣant Raidaś (52).
self, as opposed to verses of later tradition. Thus a churn may represent the body, the churning stick the heart, the two churning-women the yoga duality of īrā and pīṅgala, and the butter the mystical sound (saśāda) that symbolizes union with God.  

Some verses by Kabīr, including the pada translated here, illustrate a new, individual perspective on the credentials of religious authority, geographical space, and even the existential position of the individual:

Allah or Ram, I live by your Name:  
Show your servant favor, Lord!—  
Why beat your head on the ground? Can you wash your sins away?  
The man that’s called humble has bloody hands; the sinner’s guilt lies hidden.  
Give up ablutions, whatever your faith! Why babble names of God?  
Why visit mosques, or Mecca, while you angle for men’s goodwill?  
The Brahman keeps the eleventh day, the jurist keeps Ramazān—  
Unmindful of eleven months, he reserves his wisdom for one!  
If God lives in the mosque, whose is the kingdom?  
Is Rām to be found in idols or at shrines?  
The east is Hari’s quarter and the west Allah’s realm,  
But search your inmost hearts, one and all, to find Rahim and Rām.  

After an enforced juxtaposition for some centuries of two faiths and social systems, leading to a measure of mutual understanding, Kabīr’s mixed society seems to be generating a means for some, at a popular level, to surmount its own values. When Kabīr tells his audience that Hari resides in “the east,” he is speaking figuratively of an “eastern” mystical region and sanctuary of the spirit, and thinking too of his own eastern speech; but to refer to Allah’s realm in “the west” was to ask one’s hearers at Benares to recognize that the limits of their world were widening, and in more ways than one. Their world extended now beyond the bounds of “Gujarat and Tirhut” that for Dāud had represented the limits of north India, but Kabīr’s location of Rām and Rahim beyond temple and mosque was also an invitation to regard the world, and the human being’s position in it, in an entirely new light.  

In another pada, Kabīr makes his predecessor Nāmdev a member of a kind of pantheon of divine and deified beings: a group including Śiva as well as mythical figures associated with Kṛṣṇa and Rāma. If the father figure of later northern santism can be included in such a group, some atavistic sense in Kabīr of the validity of Indian cultural assumptions is surely implied. Such feelings in a former Muslim help to explain the strength of the different Ra-

---

63. Candāyan text in Gupta 1967, v. 34.  
64. Tivārī 1961, pada 198.
maite bhakti which would be popularized by Tulsidas in the sixteenth century, limiting the impact of the sants. For in a time of more positive, if less questioning, catholic affirmation, their message of mystical love would largely be lost.

The Sectarian Ramanandis: Kṛṣṇa Influence

The Ramanandis (who later became known as Rām rasikas) were one of two strands of sixteenth-century Ramaism that developed from roots in the wider Rama tradition. They emerged as a community having their seat at Galta (Jaipur) in the mid-sixteenth century, a time when sugunī (non-sant) bhakti may still have been mainly of Kṛṣṇa character. Agradās, the author of the Ramanandis’ main early vernacular text, Dhyānañjāri (Bouquet of meditation; c. 1580), received the patronage of Mānśīm of Amber about 1600 at Galta.

Dhyānañjāri, composed in the rolā meter used by Nandadas, celebrates a Rāma who shows many Kṛṣṇa features and some 4a features. This Rāma and his city, Ayodhyā, have analogues in both Sanskrit and Brajabhasha texts. Much as in the late (? 1500) Sanskrit Bhusundarāmāyaṇa, Agradās’s Ayodhyā has all the features of a supernatural realm. Its Pramodvan, “pleasure grove,” modeled on Kṛṣṇa’s Vṛndāvan, is a paragon among all the means of experiencing God. Its wells are set with gems, their water pure. In a garden (ārāma) in which a sense of ease (ārām) is all-pervading, trees of mysterious charm extend their fruit into the hands of passers-by in an imagery (and with a poeticism) that may recall Andrew Marvell’s rapture (1640) at the beauties of his purely terrestrial garden. The Sarju river of Ayodhyā is equated with the Jumna of Brāj, its dark and radiant (ujjvala) stream suggesting the body of Kṛṣṇa. Such Krishnaizing of distinctive Rāma tropes appears to depend ultimately on south Indian speculations during the early Muslim period, which assigned a double existence—on an earthly and a supernatural plane—to the inaccessible sites of the Vaiṣṇava avatārs, and offered the prospect of access to Viṣṇu’s heaven in this world to those who worship at those sites. This contributed first to Caitanya’s Kṛṣṇaism, and thence to a matching theorizing of Rāma devotion.65

But Agradās’s configuration of Ayodhyā looks beyond Sanskrit texts. Not content to simply adopt the meter of Nandadas’s Raspaṇiṇīdhyāyi, he makes a series of striking verbal and conceptual borrowings from that Brājabhasha work in his Dhyānañjāri when he describes the Pramodvan and the physical beauty of Rāma. The way Agradās makes these borrowings, from different parts of the source poem and evidently with close knowledge of its text, illustrates his intention and ability to make the fullest use of this contem-

porary, vernacular Kṛṣṇa source. The variations of topic and interpretation between the two poems, and the different order of treatment of some shared topics, means that considerable literary skill was required. Nandadās’s Śūka (the mythologized narrator of the Bhāgavatapurāṇa) becomes the prototype in physical beauty, and the model for sensuousness of description, for Agradās’s Rāma; and Agradās borrows phrasing from Nandadās’s text to describe the site of Kṛṣṇa’s round dance (rās) and Kṛṣṇa’s supernatural participation in it in evocative Ramaite terms.\(^{66}\)

The rapid dissemination of a specific, well-known literary resource implied here, and its study and sharing among sectarian communities, reveal the beginnings of what could be called a Brajbhāsa public sphere at this time. Yet the Rāma rasik and Vallabhan communities differed appreciably in their doctrines. The fact that Nandadās’s poetry could exercise a substantial literary influence on Agradās illustrates how far and how readily doctrinal differences could be bridged in the late sixteenth century at levels of vernacular literature and popular devotion. The increasing tendency of the north Indian bhakti traditions to converge towards each other, with Kṛṣṇa motifs and attitudes usually remaining dominant, can be seen here to have arisen almost at the beginning of northern sāgūṇa Ramaism.

With fragmentation of the Galta community in the eighteenth century, new Rāma rasik centers were established in Ayodhyā, Mithilā, and Citrakūṭ. This process was assisted by the weakening of Mughal power, the shift of the capital of Ayodhyā province to Faizabad (1754), and the rise of Hindu tributary kingdoms. Later, Rāma rasik poetry seems to develop in the direction of late Vallabhan and Rādhāvallabhan poetry, showing Kṛṣṇa influence on treatment of Rāma themes and on the sakhi-orientation of poets, as Śītā gains the same prominence as Rādhā. In the nineteenth century, Raghurājśīmṁ of Rewa (1833–79) composed numerous works on Kṛṣṇa themes, including a paraphrase of the Bhāgavatapurāṇa.\(^{67}\)

**Eclectic Ramaism: Tulṣidās**

Tulṣidās (1532–1623), in his greatly influential Rāmacaritmānas (Holy lake of the deeds of Rāma), tells the story of Rāma in Avadhi language largely as received from the Sanskrit Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa (Spiritual Rāmāyaṇa; ? c. 1500). The Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa had already combined the tradition of devotion for Rāma and his Name with a scholastic tradition of interpretation of older texts and a concern for outward religious observances. The final form of Rāmacaritmānas (completed at Benares sometime after 1574) shows Tulṣidās’s in-

---


\(^{67}\) Some further illustrations of Kṛṣṇa influence in later Ramaite sectarian poetry and also in sānt poetry in McGregor 1984: 169–70, 138, 141, 147.
tention to promote a similar synthesis of Rāma devotion with other religious attitudes. That Tulsiśā’s main source was not Vālmiki but Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa itself illustrates this intention. He also draws on a Śiva-purāṇa and makes Śiva the narrator of a major part of his text and the chief devotee of Rāma among the gods. In addition, Tulsiśā gives a place to the child Kṛṣṇa of the Bhāgavatapurāṇa and of recent Brajbhasha poetry. He pointedly emphasizes some of the subject matter of Bhuṣūṇḍirāmāyaṇa, a work that gives a Kṛṣṇa sectarian interpretation to the story of Rāma. It is very clear that Tulsiśā rejects the particular Kṛṣṇa emphasis of Bhuṣūṇḍirāmāyaṇa but at the same time wants to win maximum support for his broad view of religion and culture from devotees of Kṛṣṇa. Yet his main emphasis is on the Name of Rāma, and he constantly stresses his support for smārta dharma.68

A Brahman, Tulsiśā was steeped in the study of Vālmiki’s Rāmāyaṇa and other texts. He tells us in his introduction to Rāmcaritmānas that his guru first told him the Rāma story in childhood. After repeated study he grasped something of its meaning, and eventually resolved to compose a version of it in modern language (bhākhā) “in accordance with purāṇas, sacred texts and other sources.” It was natural, given the established sixteenth-century use of Avadhī in Sufi narrative poems, and of the caupā-dohā stanza pattern, that Tulsiśā should work in Avadhī and use that stanza pattern during the earlier part of his life, which preceded the main vogue of Brajbhasha. The nature of his subject, so deeply rooted in Sanskrit tradition, and the level at which he had studied it, also naturally led him to use a considerably Sanskritized style of Avadhī: more so than we find in the Kṛṣṇa poets’ Brajbhasha. This would eventually be of great significance for the development of modern Hindi. More than the language of any other work, the language of the Rāmcaritmānas, which became familiar everywhere and enjoyed a popularity of its own for nearly two hundred years before the rise of the modern language, created a consciousness of Sanskrit style as a formal linguistic resource.

Rāmcaritmānas proved to be a defining work of Indian culture, both in formulating a modern, broad-based religion and in establishing vernacular access to it. Tulsiśā’s Ramaism could incorporate the protestant emphasis of the sants but could also allow the devotee to look to the wider culture. It could recognize the charm and strength of the Kṛṣṇa tradition but match it with a larger, counterbalancing ideal. The social adaptiveness and moral content of this version of the Rāma tradition distinguished it from the vernacular Kṛṣṇa poetry of the northern bhakti tradition in that the latter, more

68. Overview of Tulsiśā’s syncretism in Vaudeville 1955, xiv–xxiii; detailed discussion 303–24 and passim.
prone to secular interpretation because of the place in it of the qualified *avatār* (one possessing attributes), tended to lose its early devotional impetus. Vernacular Kṛṣṇa poetry needed to be complemented with other traditions for cultural completion, such as the vernacular poetry of Rāma or the kind of *śaiva* poetry attested in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century anthologies. By contrast, Tulsidās’s composite Ramaism was itself already of very wide scope. For instance, the following verses from his *Kavītāvali*, a late work in Brajbhasha, illustrate the way that this Ramaism generates a poetry of personal devotion combined with moral self-criticism:

I call myself yours, O Rām,
and sing of your virtues,
So that from respect shown to you
I may gather a scrap or two of bread;
Rām, the world knows,
and to my mind it is great cause for pride,
That I have acknowledged no other,
nor do acknowledge, nor ever will;

I put no confidence in the elders,
nor trust in my own self;
“You have made me your own”—
this I shall fully know
When, uttering words wrought,
turned, pared and polished as on a lathe
I feel the very words my mouth proclaims
entering my heart.

The immediate success of the syncretistic *Rāmcaritmānas* is implied in the relative absence of competing nonsectarian treatments of the story after Tulsi’s time. Manuscripts of the work, some in Persian script, have been found all across north India. Its literary status is clear from the number of Brajbhasha and other commentaries made on it, and also from the existence of several independent Rāma compositions of the eighteenth century (including some based on Vālmiki) that seem to owe something to its popularity. Later still, nineteenth-century journalists and writers would use it allegorically to bring home the relevance of contemporary issues with maximum impact. *Rāmcaritmānas* remains the leading vernacular scripture of north India today.

69. As well as because of the secular aspect of Kṛṣṇa traditions themselves; on the importance of this for later court poetry on the Kṛṣṇa-Radhā theme, see later in this chapter.
71. Translation adapted from that in Alchín 1963: 154.
LANGUAGES OF THE HINDI LITERARY TRADITION

Having discussed and illustrated the process of consolidation of largely separate literary traditions in Brajbhasha and Avadhi speech, and referred also to the mixed speech of Delhi which was widely diffused beyond the Delhi region, I would like now to summarize the roles of these speeches as literary vehicles in the later premodern period. I also discuss aspects of their functioning, character, and linguistic relationships, all of which have a bearing on both the literary preeminence achieved by Brajbhasha in the seventeenth century and the rise of modern Hindi in the nineteenth.

Brajbhasha

The western Hindi speech known today as Brajbhasha first rose to literary use in areas to the south and southwest of Delhi. At Gwalior in Bundelkhand it can be seen to have inherited a literary tradition of the use in Shauraseni Apabhramsha. As used at Gwalior around 1450, Brajbhasha was already considerably literized: its word stock was open to supplementation with vernacularized (semi-tatsama) forms of Sanskrit words, its metrical and stanzaic forms were indebted to late Apabhramsha usage, and its grammar conformed to a broadly coherent pattern. Brajbhasha’s early appearance in Gwalior (to the south of the Braj region) foretold its later character as a speech not tied closely to a home region. As it consolidated its position in and around the Braj region during the early sixteenth century, it shed some Rajasthani features that may have reflected the early stages of its emergence as a literary speech, but it retained a grammatical variability inherited in part from the Middle Indian abundance of overlapping forms and constructions. Its word stock was always able to accommodate the local origins of poets, or (in prose) of hagiographers and scholiasts. In this flexible but sufficiently standardized form, Brajbhasha spread as the vehicle of the Kṛṣṇa cult. Dominating vernacular poetry in the west from the outset, it influenced the mixed, regionally variable language of the northern sant poets as well as the language of some of the Sikh gurus of the Ādigranth. It became almost the standard vehicle for the late-sixteenth-century court poetry, with its important metrical innovations. Brajbhasha’s position as a literary lingua franca, complementing that of Hindi/Hindui, the speech of Delhi, as the language of everyday urban life, was not so much established as confirmed by Tulsiā’s adoption of it for the majority of his later compositions, including his Kavītāvalī, excerpted from earlier. As used in literary contexts and no doubt more so in everyday speech, Brajbhasha was now absorbing an appreciable grammatical impact from Hindi/Hindui. The Jain merchant Banārsidās of Jaunpur composed freely in mixed Brajbhasha of this kind in his autobiographical poem Ardīkhathānāk (The first half of my story; c. 1614), and when Banār-
sīdas called this mixed language madhyadesa ki bōli (the speech of the middle region) he was well aware of its communicative reach and cultural scope.

Bhikhārīdās and His Kāvyanirṇay: The Functional Range and Regional Variability of Brajbhasha

Bhikhārīdās of Pratāpgarh near Lucknow was among the most original expounders of rasa and alāṅkāra. His Kāvyanirṇay (Verdict on kāvya; 1746) illustrates a final stage in the evolution of poetic theory in north India. Kāvyanirṇay clearly reveals the ambience in which kavītā and savaiyā verses articulating the theory circulated, and in which informed discussion of poetry and theory took place. Bhikhārīdās’s introduction discusses the audience’s discernment, the variety of opinions that could be current among audiences, a poet’s responsibility to take account of these, and the “pleasures of poetry” (kāvya-rasa) themselves. In his view, the memorization of verses contributes to composition skills in oral poetry on poetics, and to depth of understanding; and he sees a poet’s status as conferred by his birth and natural gifts, by his knowledge of kāvya ki rīti (the way of poetry) gained from other poets, and by his observation of the world, armed with which he may mediate rasa, the soul of poetry, for his audiences.

Bhikhārīdās makes the successful implementation of Sanskrit poetic theory in Brajbhasha practice explicit when he comments on faults (dos) in Brajbhasha composition, and on issues to do with rhyme (tuk), a feature of vernacular poetry. His observations on categories of poets, on the range of lexical styles, and on regional variations illustrate the same situation; they also imply public awareness of a diversified practice of Brajbhasha court and devotional poetry.

With understandable vested interest, Bhikhārīdās makes his first category of poets those who have enjoyed the favor of his own patron, Hindūpati, at Pratāpgarh: Toṣ, Guḷām Nabi “Raslīn,” and himself. He then forecasts the conventionality of later rīti poetry, pointing to the Kṛṣṇa tradition as the source of that poetry’s continuing strength. The art and skill (kābīṭā) of the Pratāpgarh poets will not please their successors, yet their work will survive, for

72. Verse 7 (Dvivedi 1980). The term denotes the Panjab–western Ganges plain area seen as the main region of consolidation of culture during the early post-Vedic period. Banārśīdās (whose family connections were with Narwar near Gwalior and Rohtakan near Delhi) refers to Rohtakan (v. 8) as “a fine place of the madhyadesa in the fair land of Bharata.” Tulsi in Kavi-tāvālī (7.33) speaks similarly, at exactly this time, of his own birth and upbringing in “the land of the Bharatas” (bharat-bhāmi).

73. The interests, assumptions, and practice of Brajbhasha court poets as indicated by Bhikhārīdās have similarities with those of some Hindi (Urdu) poets at almost the same period. Cf. Pritchett’s essay on tagkīnāh culture in chapter 15, this volume.
it is a pretext for thinking of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. It is the secular aspect of the Kṛṣṇa-Rādhā relationship that Bhikhārīdās chiefly has in mind here. He was probably also conscious of the weakening of the Kṛṣṇa bhakti impulse that had begun well before his time. Bhikhārīdās’s other groups of poets are: those, such as Tulsīdās or Sūrdās, who are distinguished for religious merit; those rewarded by patronage, such as Keśavdās or Bhūṣan Tripāṭhi (who attended the Maratha Śivāji c. 1675 and Catrasāl of Panna c. 1700); and lastly, those such as Rahīm and Raskhān, who had “sought fame” at Akbar’s court at Agra.

Brajbhasha, Bhikhārīdās tells us, is appreciated by all discerning people as a delightful language. Of the six styles (khaṭ bidhi) that he distinguishes—in a way reminiscent of earlier categorizations of literary languages—the two most prominent show “well-known admixtures” of Sanskrit and Persian vocabulary; two others are, quite conventionally, those of “Prakrit and Apabhramsha” (perhaps referring to the original tadbhava vocabulary and to the older literary vocabulary of Brajbhasha, respectively); while the fifth and sixth styles, jaman bhākhā and sakaj pārsī, seem to refer to stronger and weaker degrees of impact of Persianized Hindi/Hindvi on Brajbhasha observed in the mid-eighteenth century.74 The regional variability of Brajbhasha as used by poets also receives Bhikhārīdās’s attention. He enumerates some twenty poets (almost all rīti poets) from Braj itself and from the Ganges Doab, Bundelkhand, Delhi, and Rajasthan. The spoken language (bānī) of these poets, he tells us, should be enough to demonstrate that Brajbhasha is a koiné accommodating different usages. By implication, variations of pronunciation or grammar in this koiné are insignificant beside the fact of its existence, encouraging informed discussion and accepted standards in a central field of literary culture.

*Brajbhasha and the Persian Literary Tradition: Tuḥfatu’l Hind*

Contact between the Brajbhasha and Persian literary traditions is illustrated in Mirzā Khān’s Persian work, at least half a century earlier than Bhikhārīdās’s *Kāveyanirnay*, titled *Tuḥfatu’l Hind* (A gift from India; c. 1675–1700). This text was probably composed at the request of Āzam Šāh, a son of Aurangzib, who commissioned a Brajbhasha version of Kālidās’s Sanskrit drama *Śakuntalā*, at about the same time (1680). *Tuḥfatu’l Hind* is a survey of the

74. Text in Miśra 1957, 2:4, 5 (vv. 8, 14–15, 16). The expression jaman bhākhā means foreigners’, or immigrants’, language. Bhikhārīdās’s identification of this category of Persianized usage predates by several decades Western perceptions of the limitations of strongly Persianized language that led to composition of modern Hindi texts at Calcutta by Lallujī Lal and others around 1800. Lallujī makes use of the expression jaman bhākhā in the introduction to his *Premsāgar*. 
subject matter of Brajbhasha poetry on poetics, with an introduction on Brajbhasha grammar and an extensive appendix that amounts to a dictionary of the language. Its viewpoint is that the arts and literature of Braj are of great interest and value to members of the Indo-Muslim community, many of whom wish to be better informed about them in detail. Mirzâ notes that the word bhākhā ([vernacular] language) had by this time acquired a particular application as the “language of the Braj people.” He describes the bhākhā of Braj as “the most eloquent of all languages,” containing “verses full of color and sweet expressions and of the praise of the lover [Kṛṣṇa] and the beloved [Rādhā],” and favored among poets and cultivated people.75

The mother tongues of the north-Indian Indo-Muslim communities were chiefly the Hindi/Hindi of general urban use, the closely related speeches of the Doab, and Panjabi. A majority of users of these speeches would have had some passive knowledge of Brajbhasha, though nothing like mother-tongue command of it. Members of Indo-Muslim society interested in Brajbhasha poetry thus represented a particular class of this poetry’s devotees: those who did not understand the Sanskrit terms used in it but wanted to do so. It was for them that Nandadas had composed his vocabularies: samujhī sakata nahi sanskritī / jñayau cāhata nāma.76

The concentration on Sanskrit and Sanskritic loanwords found in Mirzâ Khān’s dictionary suggests how much the text is the product of a bipartite culture.77 Its materials have the appearance of what we would today call a bilingual dictionary—from Brajbhasha to Persian—yet this was a bilingual dictionary with a difference, for many of the words glossed were evidently familiar. So when Mirzâ comments on the three homonyms represented by the single spoken form bās, he can dismiss its first, common meaning, “smell,” as being “well known” (ān mārif), and proceed straight to the other, more recondite meanings (“clothing” and “house”). In this way he attaches the Persian tag mārif āst, meaning “this sense is well known,” to many glosses of Brajbhasha words and even to glosses of simple Sanskrit words.

So the Persian users for whom the Brajbhasha material was prepared hardly needed the simpler parts of it, and we should see this dictionary not entirely as a dictionary of a foreign language. Rather, it resembles the seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century English language dictionaries of what were called “hard words”: the Latin and Greek loanwords borrowed

76. Mānmañjari (ed. Sukla), 3.
77. Chatterji’s introduction to Ziauddin 1935 gives a few illustrations of the contents of the unpublished dictionary appendix. The information given here is based on the contents of a Cambridge manuscript of Tuḥfatul Hind (Palmer 1807, no. 119). The readings of this manuscript agree closely with those of Ziauddin’s manuscripts for the grammar portion of the text.
into English, or coined, in the new cultural conditions of the Renaissance and post-Renaissance. How are we to interpret this situation? The members of the Indo-Muslim community were drawn to Brajbhasha poetry by its interest and charm, but perhaps also because, in the late seventeenth century, they were experiencing growing difficulty in the use of Persian as their literary language—a development that is recognized as contributing to the rise of Delhi Urdu in the early eighteenth century. This created a dilemma: what other language could they use? At the turn of the eighteenth century, unless one was a Sufi poet, only the attractive speech of Braj was available—so close to their own speech but, as its “hard words” made painfully clear, not their own in all respects. The existence of such an undercurrent of feeling within the Indo-Muslim community may be deduced from the glosses of this dictionary and from Mirzâ Khân’s attitude to them. Such a feeling would have contributed to the swift and relatively easy move to literary Urdu in north India that followed so soon after the Tuhfat was composed.

In the same sense, in naming the Tuhfat Mirzâ may have hoped that its readers or users would take the work in the spirit of its title, as a “gift” confirming, as it were, their involvement in the wider mixed modern culture of north India. Yet the gift, attractive as it was, was destined to finally not be fully accepted; the space given to “hard words” in the Tuhfat was perhaps a portent of that situation.

Adaptations of Sanskrit Works into Brajbhasha

A partly similar, partly converse reaction to new conditions informed a new literary activity of the late seventeenth century: the making of Brajbhasha adaptations from the Mahābhārata and other Sanskrit works. Mention has been made of Azam Śâh’s commissioning of a Śakuntalâ version inside the Indo-Muslim community at this time. Within the Hindu community, the interest in adaptations from Sanskrit arising at this time can be compared with the consciousness of cultural identity detected in Viṣṇudâs’s fifteenth-century adaptations at Gwalior. This interest continued through the eighteenth century and hardly disappeared thereafter until the twentieth. Fourteen volumes of a Mahābhārata version were produced by Sabalsînh, believed to have been a landowner of Etawah, and his successors between c. 1660 and 1724. Other adaptations made from Sanskrit works at this time included the Bhagavataaparaṇa version by Bhûpati, also of Etawah, which remained popular into the nineteenth century and several versions of Prabodhacandrodaya.78 Composition of these works appears to illustrate a wish, arising from Azam Śâh’s time, for the reassurance inherent in redefining the values of one’s own

culture in terms of achievements of the past during a period of social and political uncertainty. The tendency for the language of these works to be more self-consciously Sanskritized than that of the older poetry—unmodified (tatsama) forms of the borrowed words are more common than formerly—would seem to illustrate the same attitude. The frequency of tatsama forms, as opposed to the older semi-tatsama type, in Brajbhasha manuscripts copied from the late eighteenth century onwards is similarly likely to be due to a sense of the cultural significance of Sanskrit language as a literary vehicle.

Avadhi

Avadhi speech arose in an area rather distant from Delhi (the Lucknow-Allahabad-Benares region) that had been a center of political power in the late pre-Muslim centuries but acquired a regional identity in the period immediately following. A local tradition of its use arose early (as records indicate) among Cisti Sufis, and at Benares a scholastic practice of writing Avadhi in Devanagari script and Sanskrit lexical style existed by, at the latest, the middle of the twelfth century. Use of Avadhi allowed Sufi poets access to the Indian poetic tradition, and so to the elements of Sanskrit vocabulary and the Apabhramsha-derived verse form that combined with Persian tradition in Daūd’s Candāyan. The success of Candāyan was repeated, and was exceeded artistically, by the sixteenth-century Sufi romances portraying a composite Indo-Muslim culture. Qutban’s Mīrgāvati, composed in 1503, is mentioned over a hundred years later by the Jain Banārsidas of Jaunpur as having been sung (by Banārsidas himself) to small groups at Agra. It is clear that TulSIDAS, who was born within a decade of one of the greatest achievements of Avadhi Sufi poetry, Malik Muhammad JaySi’s Padmāvat (1540), and before the composition of the main Brajbhasha prabandhas, received an Avadhi narrative form fully mature and posing no problems to artistic expression.

Avadhi speech is related typologically to the Bihari speeches and Bangla rather than to Brajbhasha, but the few major syntactic differences between Avadhi and Brajbhasha hardly affect their mutual comprehensibility. Except in Sufi contexts and in the case of Rāmcaritmānas, the extension of Brajbhasha as a literary lingua franca tended to restrict the literary use of Avadhi. The easterner Banārsidas’s use of a mixed Brajbhasha in his autobiographical Ardhhkathānāk illustrates that there were no significant linguistic impediments to the spread of Brajbhasha across the Avadh region.

79. See Chatterji 1953: 1–72 on Uktivyaktiprakaraṇa (Treatise on spoken language), compiled to explain the grammar and usage of spoken Sanskrit to Brahman students at Benares.
80. Ardhhkathānāk, vv. 335–36.
81. The chief of these (concerning the syntax of perfective verbal expressions) happens to be illustrated in the following note.
With the general move to Brajbhasha, it was left largely to the Sufi poets to continue the local literary and regional cultural traditions of Avadhi. The extent of these poets’ identification of Avadhi as the proper vehicle for Sufi romances is clear in the uncertainties expressed by Nūr Muhammad of the Azamgarh district in the mid-eighteenth century as to what language vehicle to choose. What does it matter that he has written in Hindi, Nūr asks, even though he is not a Hindu? Being one of the parrots (poets) of India, he has tasted “Persian sugar” (he says in a reference to a famous verse by Hâfîz on the superiority of Persian poets to Indian), but he is now trapped by the sweetness of “Hindi.”

Hindi/Hindui, the Speech of Delhi

Poetry in an Indian vernacular named “Hindi” or “Hindui” by Persian biographers was evidently composed at Lahore within a generation of Muslim settlement. Poetry in a language of the same name was in vogue among poets of Persian and their audiences at Delhi in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Its names became attached to a mixed speech of the Panjab-Delhi region that evolved in the Muslim capital and would have tended to have a Persianized vocabulary from the outset. Much as the speech of southeast England spread from London across northern and western English areas, including some that had different literary traditions, Delhi speech spread as a language of trade, administration, and military use to urban centers in areas under the control or influence of Delhi. Its spread in these functions was no doubt furthered by an earlier diffusion of related speech in the same functions from Kanauj, the center of the tenth-century Gujrâra-Pratihâra empire, during the first emergence of New Indo-Aryan language in north India. Those who used Hindi/Hindui as poets would have had access to the vernacularized level of Indian literary tradition evident in late Apabhramsha, as well as to the Persian literary tradition. From the later fourteenth century they included the north-Indian sant poets. The accidents of transmission and recording of the sant poets’ verses, noted earlier, mean that their language cannot be recaptured in detail today. The available evidence indicates, however, that the Hindi/Hindui of general urban use was these verses’ major component, and that they were also liable to contain a mixture of Brajbhasha with a particular poet’s own regional speech. If Kabir’s usage is representative, the early sant’s language could also have included a significant pro-

82. hindî-maga para pāra na rākhî kāi jau bahutai hindî bākhîa? Cited in Śukla 1957: 104 from Anurâghêśuri (The flute of love; 1764). Nūr Muhammad’s question implies that Muslims might feel under pressure to use the Persianized Hindi (literary Urdu) concurrently in active development in north India. A small, first step towards later perception of modern Hindi as the preserve of Hindus was perhaps being taken at this time.
portion of Persian words and a smaller, though still appreciable, component of Sanskrit vocabulary, including *tatsama* forms. The grammatical and lexical roots of modern Hindi in particular, but also some of the same for Urdu, lie in this situation.

Being a speech of western Hindi type, Hindi/Hindui showed few major grammatical distinctions from Brajbhasha, though some distinctive differences in phonology. Its currency in areas far distant from Delhi (and the use of the Devanagari script to write it) can be observed in the record of a tax remission of Damoh district dating from 1512. Intrusions of Hindi/Hindui into Brajbhasha had begun by the same century and by 1590 even affected scholastic prose, such as that of Indrajit of Orccha. In daily life at Orccha its presence must therefore have been noticeable, and its influence would have been unavoidable in literary circles at a court such as Orccha’s, which was constantly involved in dealings with the Mughal court at Agra. In its Persianized form, Hindi/Hindui was studied at Narwar near Gwalior around 1570 by the Jain Banārsidās’s grandfather; it is represented in Banārsidās’s early-seventeenth-century *Arddhkathānāk* as noted earlier; and its most distinctive grammatical feature is already found in the Brajbhasha of Khāgrā at Gwalior in the first half of the seventeenth century. Banārsidās’s (literary) “language of the madhyadesa” was being drawn into the ambit of Hindi/Hindui even at the height of its prestige.

*Early Hindustani Dictionaries (c. 1700)*

Collections of the vocabulary of the speech of Delhi—by the eighteenth century often called “Hindustani” by both Indians and Europeans—were compiled at Surat in present-day Gujarat and at Lucknow about 1700. They throw light on the scope of the speech of Delhi in these widely separate places at that time.

A *Thesaurus Linguae Indianae* (Treasury of the Indian language) was completed in 1703 by François Marie, a Capuchin friar in Surat. In the form of Hindustani glosses in Devanagari script plus roman transliteration, explaining alphabetized headwords and phrases in Latin and with French equivalents provided, it amounts to a pioneering dictionary of Latin and

84. *Arddhkathānāk*, v. 13 (text in Dvivedi 1980), *parhyau hindugi pāraśi*.
85. Use of the postposition *ne* in ergative constructions.
86. The language of the glosses is described as “Hindustani.” The manuscript, forwarded to Rome in 1703 by the author, was sent to Paris in 1785 at the request of the Sanskritist and Avestan scholar Anquetil Duperron, who copied it, intending to publish it. Anquetil’s copy in two manuscript volumes is now in the Bibliothèque Nationale; the whereabouts of the original are not clear. The presence of the material at Paris (copy or original?) is noted in Garcin de
French to Hindustani. Compilation of this massive work (eleven thousand headwords and phrases) at Surat probably depended crucially on the portable, but still extensive, single-volume dictionaries of Latin to French (1687) and French to Latin that were available by the late seventeenth century. François Marie’s chief sources for his material were probably contacts of the Capuchins in the Gujarati community of Surat, speakers of both Hindustani and Gujarati. The glosses of the *Thesaurus* show the clear impact of Gujarati usage in phonology and spelling, but their grammar, phonology, and lexicon are essentially those of modern Hindi-Urdu. A significant component of Perso-Arabic vocabulary, as also a small component of Sanskrit loan vocabulary, are represented. The latter consists chiefly of abstract nouns and noun-based locutions used in contexts of faith, belief, and worship, and in the expression of other feelings or states of mind.

The recording of this mixed vocabulary in Devanagari script in a Gujarati-speaking region reflects, first, the current use of both the vocabulary and the script in the region. Mughal power and prestige at this time had clearly reinforced the impact of the language of Delhi in western India. Second, it reveals a linguistic inheritance from early Hindi/Hindui as it had been used in southern-Indian Muslim kingdoms from the fourteenth century onwards. The Sufi poet Khūb Cisti (1539–1614) had used a “Hindwi strongly mixed with Gujarati” in Gujarat in the sixteenth century. The Capuchins of Surat were interested in both the transplanted southern version of the early speech of Delhi, with its Sufi poetry, and the practically oriented northern speech itself. The Sanskrit material represented in this dictionary alongside Perso-Arabic is hardly to be seen as specific to Gujarati and present in François Marie’s text merely for that reason; rather, it appears to have been an integral component of contemporary northern language as used at Surat, available to be drawn on as cultural or practical needs required.

A similar, though smaller, Sanskrit component of Hindustani vocabulary is recorded in the Dutch-Persian-Hindustani glossary contained in J. J. Keelaar’s *Instructie off Onderwijisinge der Persiaanse en Hindoustanse Taalen* (Instruction in the Persian and Indian languages), compiled at the Dutch East India Company’s base at Lucknow in 1698. This glossary is a practical vocabulary of some two thousand words, giving the Hindustani glosses in Ro-

---

87. These dictionaries, and others from French to modern European languages, may owe something to the existence by 1673 of a completed first draft of the French Academy’s dictionary of 1694.

man script in accordance with Dutch spelling practices. Ketelaar’s introduction is of particular interest for his informed remarks about the mixed nature of Hindustani and the existence alongside it of a less hybridized, hence more “Indian,” style of language. It is in the existence of this style, and that of François Marie’s “Hindustani” written in Devanagari script, that the roots of the much later nineteenth-century concept of modern Hindi as a potential link language from Bengal through to west India and into the Panjab are to be seen.

THE EMERGENCE OF MODERN HINDI:
HARIŚCANDRA’S USE OF LITERARY MODELS IN DRAMA

Hariścandra of Benares (1850–1885), who would become the first major writer of modern Hindi, was motivated at the outset of his career by a new cultural certitude, but he lacked both a suitable modern literary language to express it and any substantial precedent in Brajbhasha literary tradition for drama—the genre in which he first and foremost wished to write. The consciousness of cultural and historical achievements of the Indian past that had become active in the nineteenth century was an important component of sociopolitical awareness among modern communities at Benares in the middle 1860s. This awareness, shaped in forums such as the institutes and debating societies of the northern towns, with their cross-community memberships, necessarily included knowledge of the new literature in Bangla, and of the Bangla writers’ satisfaction in the use of their language. In this situation the use of modern Hindi, and the cultural significance of its Devanagari script in the context of the relative dominance of Urdu in public life, became an issue at Benares and elsewhere. The importance of the Devanagari script, structurally related to all other scripts of Indian origin and sharply distinct in this regard from Urdu, was underlined by the Bengali antiquarian Rajendra Lal Mitra in a paper read at Calcutta in 1864. In the same year a member of the Benares Institute named Mathurāprasad Miśra completed his elaborate trilingual dictionary of the bipartite Hindi-Urdu and English. Two years later, Nabincandra Rāy, a Brahmosamaj missionary

89. This work comprises a grammar as well as a glossary. Its existence has long been known, but accurate knowledge of it begins only with J. Ph. Vogel’s discovery of a manuscript at The Hague and his articles and historical study (1936, 1941, 1937). Bhatia 1987 describes the history of knowledge of the text and gives details of some Hindustani glosses. Dutch text of Ketelaar’s introduction in Vogel 1941: 655. At least one more manuscript of the Instructie is extant (Rijksuniversiteit, Utrecht). See further McGregor 2001: 18–26.

90. The Utrecht manuscript refers by name to the latter style as “hindoukie boelie” (hindug boli).
in the Panjab, was drawing attention to a possible new, national dimension of Hindi. It was in the following year that the Muslim leader Saiyad Ahmad Khān expressed doubts—usually said to mark the open emergence of the “Hindi language movement”—regarding whether Muslims and Hindus would be able to work together, through Urdu, toward the development of a new India.

Modern Hindi represented a style of language complementary to Urdu: Hindi/Hindui written in Devanagari script and, modeling Brajbhasha literary usage, open to borrowing Sanskrit vocabulary. It had some direct eighteenth-century precedents. Not “created” at Western initiative, even if it was largely “reinvented” at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the style gained important currency via the new print culture of Calcutta and northern centers such as Agra, and it was in use from 1817 in textbooks published by the School Book Societies of these centers. The North-Western Provinces Department of Public Instruction later published, commissioned, and also rewarded the preparation of textbooks. While some of these dealt with new educational subjects, others presented topics from traditional culture (such as legends of Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa heroes and heroines) that encouraged the use of Sanskritized language. The continuing high status of Brajbhasha meant that modern Hindi was still not used, or required, as a literary vehicle. But the altered consciousness of the 1860s had this result: some of those holding progressive modern attitudes, whose education had been in Urdu and might also include English, Persian, or Sanskrit, began to identify at a cultural level with use of the new Hindi style.

In his late teens, commanding his wealthy merchant family’s power of patronage, Hariścandra set about creating a repertoire of Hindi drama. His first attempts show him looking to Bangla and Sanskrit sources for models. By 1868, he had made a close translation of the well-known eighteenth-century Bangla romance, Vidyāsundar. The Sanskrit drama Ratanāvali, from which he translated a three-page interlude (viskhambhaka) in the same year, had been translated into Bangla ten years before. Hariścandra’s version of Ratanāvali was in modern Hindi prose and Brajbhasha verse, and in his preface he mentions that he had difficulty rendering the Sanskrit verses into Brajbhasha padas. But he has a larger concern here than with such matters. He is chagrined to have to admit that apart from one previous modern Hindi work—a version of the Sanskrit drama Śakuntalā successfully completed in 1863 by Lākṣmānsimh of Etawah—there was as yet no effective

91. Garcin de Tassy 1874: 293–94, 323 ff. Earlier references to Hindustani and to Hindi as national languages are made, respectively, in Garcin de Tassy 1829: 9, and by the Benares Sanskritist J. R. Ballantyne, General Report on Public Instruction . . . 1846–7: 32.  
92. Details of most of Hariścandra’s dramas discussed in this section—and extensive discussion of some of them—can be found in Dalmia 1997: 302–14.
use of modern Hindi for literary composition. Yet despite this situation Hariścandra is conscious of a power (bal) inhering in the language. We may infer from his later writing that he is locating this power essentially in the modern prose language, while accepting Brajbhasha as the vehicle of verse. He understands that such power lies in Hindi’s potential for use in the fundamentally new circumstances of his time. The future “power” of Hindi will depend on the extent to which it can express the perceptions and values of a modernizing society, one having deep and tenacious roots in traditional culture.

Turning next to another Sanskrit source, Hariścandra translated one act of the allegorical drama Prabodhacandrodāya, under the title Pākhāṇḍvidāmbara (Hypocrisy pilloried; 1871). Prabodhacandrodāya had been used from the fourteenth century by Jains, Caitanyas, Vallabhans, and others as a narrative framework for the exposition of their doctrines. In the hands of Keśavdās (Vijñānti, 1610), it served as a channel for transmission of traditional culture. Many Brajbhasha versions of it exist, including one by Nandadās, Hariścandra’s fellow Vallabhan sectarian. With its allegorical theme, in which Benares is abandoned by Devotion to Viṣṇu and ruled over by Deceit and Delusion, this venerable eleventh-century work could have seemed a tract for the times in nineteenth-century Benares, which was stirred by currents of modern renewal and rising political consciousness. In Pākhāṇḍvidāmbara Hariścandra is no longer daunted by the complexities of translation as he was in his Ratnāvali fragment. He successfully takes up the challenge of intermingling modern Hindi prose and varying styles of Brajbhasha verse. His purpose in this, modeled on Sanskrit convention, was to represent the language of different characters in the drama. Thus he renders the Prakrit of the women’s language in the original into everyday Hindi prose, but their occasional Sanskrit into Sanskritized Brajbhasha verse; and he represents differences in the Prakrit of the Jain, Buddhist, and śaiva heretics by using regional variations of Brajbhasha. Such attentive care for the text suggests that Hariścandra’s motivation in Pākhāṇḍvidāmbara was—despite the drama’s theme of crisis at Benares and the modern relevance that could be read into this—still largely a programmatic one. Above all, he wished to achieve a successful adaptation into Hindi from the storehouse of Sanskrit drama.

Pākhāṇḍvidāmbara can be seen as the precursor of a series of three dramatic works by Hariścandra that address contemporary sociopolitical issues directly. These works illustrate the evolution of Hariścandra’s views, but also his preparedness to work from sources—perhaps, too, an extent of dependence on sources. Premjogini (The yogini of love; 1875), planned as an independent, full-length drama on the present state of Benares, was left incom-

plete, with only three acts written and published. A factor in Hariścandra’s abandonment of *Premjogini* was evidently that his attention had begun moving beyond Benares, for between 1875 and 1877 he worked on two dramas on contemporary issues that had a wider context. One of these, *Bhāratmātā* (Mother India), had a Bangla antecedent. The other, *Bhairaturdasā* (India’s sad state; 1880) would come to be regarded as Hariścandra’s leading work, the one for which he is best remembered today. In *Bhairaturdasā* Hariścandra’s viewpoint is all-Indian rather than north Indian. For a framework to expound it he returned to *Prabodhacandrodaya*’s allegorical structure. The *Prabodhacandrodaya* figures of Delusion, Error, and Egoism serve as prototypes for Bhārat Durdai (India’s evil genius), and for the leader of Bhārat Durdai’s all-destructive army; the soldiers of this army are personifications of misfortunes brought on India by Muslim, Western, and Hindu agency, as well as by acts of fate.

It seems that Hariścandra had completed four scenes of *Bhairaturdasā* by 1876. At the same time he had been working on a drama titled *Bhāratjanani* (Mother India); this was an adaptation of Kiraṇcandra Vandhyopādhīyā’s Bangla drama, *Bhāratmātā*, on the theme of India’s former greatness and later decline. *Bhāratjanani* appeared in installments in Hariścandra’s magazine, *Hariścandra candrikā*, before being published as a whole in 1877. It shows an essential dependence on its source, but also considerable elaboration on it. Details of the wording and structure of *Bhāratjanani* and *Bhāratmātā* appear in *Bhairaturdasā*, the most notable perhaps being the frequent use in *Bhāratmātā* of the word *durda*, which provided Hariścandra with his title.

Drawing on these models and on his own experience as a dramatist, Hariścandra sets out his modern theme in *Bhairaturdasā*. The blend of argument, anger, irony, and satire in the first four scenes of *Bhairaturdasā* has a freedom and effectiveness that might hardly have been predicted from his earlier Sanskrit-based drama. The mood is prevailingingly informal. Long passages of Hindi prose elaborating the argument recapitulate briefer statements of it in Brajbhasha verse. The prose passages provide opportunities for comedy and farce, on the model of Shakespearean prose scenes. (Hariścandra’s translation of *The Merchant of Venice* appeared in the same year as *Bhairaturdasā*). *Bhairaturdasā* was well received; performances are known to have taken place at the houses of members of dramatic and other societies, and at theaters in Kanpur (by 1885) and Allahabad.

The first four scenes of *Bhairaturdasā* expound Hariścandra’s essential argument. However, between 1876 and 1880 he added two further scenes. He

94. This title contains a reference to the hero of the play as a devote of Kṛṣṇa. Dalmiā 1997: 

95. In addition, he completed a very successful drama on a Kṛṣṇa theme, *Candravali*, in 1876. 

96. The earliest extant edition of *Bhairaturdasā* is that of 1887 (Patna: Khadgavīlas Press).
had perhaps felt a need to dispense with allegory in concluding his drama. He may also have been prompted by the traditional six-act structure of Prabodhacandrodaya and other Sanskrit dramas. The conclusion of Prabodhacandrodaya was quite inappropriate to his account of India’s situation, however, for in the Sanskrit work Benares is regained for Devotion to Viṣṇu by an army led by Reason. Hariścandra looked elsewhere for more congenial material and found sources in two recently composed Bangla poems.

Scene 5 draws on a long Bangla poem titled Bhāratoddhār (To rescue India; 1877), by the satirist Rāmdās Śarmā. Bhāratoddhār was written as an attack on posturing and extravagance in the discussion of current affairs in Calcutta. Hariścandra turns Śarmā’s satire to his own purposes but on a wider Indian scale, creating a knockabout discussion between new characters: a group of editors, journalists, and other representatives of contemporary life in Calcutta, north India, and Bombay. He retains some of Śarmā’s wildest farce, then speaking in his own person through one of his characters, a “north Indian gentleman,” stresses the roles that education, modern skills, and literacy will play in India’s future, as well as his resentment as a journalist at the recent muzzling of public opinion by the Vernacular Press Act of 1877.

Hariścandra’s final scene borrows from a Bangla treatment of the theme of India’s decline, Hemacandra Vandhyopādhyāy’s Bhāratbhikṣā (India’s entreaty). This long poem had been composed at the time of the Prince of Wales’s visit to India in 1875. Its concluding section contemplates the extent of British power in India and its political effects, especially the catastrophic disappearance of states and dynasties, and the decline of religious centers. This has left modern Calcutta a “capital of doom” (kalikātā kali-rājadhami), and Hemacandra insists that the West must now learn of India’s past greatness and her present decline and sorrow. Hariścandra summarizes this theme in fluent Brajbhasha verse with great skill. At many points his specific dependence on Bhāratbhikṣā is very clear. He cites similar fields of early Indian cultural achievement and mentions the same ancient nations as being in India’s debt. Like Hemacandra, he sees the decline in India’s power and cultural preeminence as parallel to that of Rome, and he invokes India’s heroic legendary history in ironic contrast with its present situation. Hariścandra’s use of this passage as almost his concluding statement in Bhāratdurdaśā illustrates the importance to him of the theme of India’s past greatness, but equally, the closeness of his contact with Bangla writers and literature.

Hariścandra depended crucially on ancient literary models and recent literary example in Bhāratdurdaśā, but he had the talent and confidence to adapt them successfully to the expression of a new sense of cultural identity and a new national awareness. The history of his work in drama illustrates the breadth of his language background and the cultural interdependence
of its parts. He was able to draw on this inheritance in language and culture to create the beginnings of a new literature responsive to the needs of his time, and to demonstrate its potential for literary use so effectively that it could not be ignored thereafter. His *Bhāratdurdasā* continues to be perceived as the first milestone in the development of modern Hindi. Its completion and success signaled the emergence not so much of a genre, however, as of the language itself.

It would be some forty-five years after the completion of *Bhāratdurdasā* that the poet Sumitrānandān Pant would write disparagingly of “rocks and stones in the forest of Braj,” urging the poetic maturity of modern Hindi and giving notice that the venerable tradition of Brajbhasha as a verse standard was at an end. In a similar way, the influence of Bangla literary example and language usage had waned progressively as Hindi established itself during the early twentieth century. On the other hand, the influence of Sanskrit vocabulary on modern Hindi literary usage remained strong and overt up to and beyond Indian Independence in 1947. The use of unfamiliar Sanskrit vocabulary continued to serve as confirmation of an Indian, or Hindu, cultural identity throughout this period. As the date of India’s Independence recedes, however, the use of Sanskrit vocabulary in modern Hindi is taken more for granted. Having built on a complex vernacular tradition and been nourished from the outset by its classical inheritance, the Hindi of today is asserting full literary independence.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

*Primary Materials in European Languages*


*Primary Materials in Indian Languages*


Chatterji, Suniti Kumar. 1953. “A study of the New Indo-Aryan speech treated in the *Uktivyaktiprakaraṇa*.” In *Uktivyaktiprakaraṇa*, edited by Jinavijaya Muni. With lin-
guistic study by Suniti Kumar Chatterji and an essay on material of social and his-

Chatterji, Suniti Kumar, and B. Mishra, eds. 1940. Varnā-ratnākara. Calcutta: Bibli-


tical Materials in European Languages


tentalistik 2, suppl. vol. 4. Leiden: Brill.


Corcoran, Maura. 1980. "Vṛṇdāvana in Vaishnava Braj Literature." Ph.D. diss., Uni-


Languages, Literature and Culture. With Heidi Pauwels and Michael C. Shapiro. New

Delhi: Manohar.


Secondary Materials in Indian Languages


The current preeminence of Hindi among the modern Indian languages is a phenomenon of surprisingly recent growth and represents a dramatic change in its fortunes. Until about a hundred years ago, Hindi was commonly perceived to be an underdeveloped and underprivileged language, fragmented into several competing dialects, backward and dusty by association with its largely rural constituency, and medievally devout and convention-bound in its literary orientation. Beginning in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, however, Hindi began to refashion itself comprehensively and to assert vigorously its new identity, especially in relation to its sister language, Urdu, which inhabited the same vast and populous expanse of northern India. Through repeated and sustained struggle, it was able to enlarge its public cultural space to such an extent that it was adopted by Gandhi and Congress as the rāstrabhāṣā, the national language. Hindi became not only the medium but also one of the major planks of anticolonial nationalism, which led to its installation after Independence as the rājabhāṣā, the official language of the nation-state.

Indeed, so sudden and spectacular was the rise of Hindi that most of the
other Indian languages, some of which had modernized and reinvigorated themselves in response to the colonial stimulus some decades before, now opposed the spread and “imposition” of Hindi and its encroachment, in terms of both official diktat and popular culture, upon their traditional territories. It is an ironically apt measure of the rise and rise of Hindi during the twentieth century that whereas in the colonial period it was seen as a spearhead of resistance against British imperialism, in the postcolonial period it has had to face charges of “Hindi imperialism,” of exercising its own brand of linguistic dominance and expansionism, which have in turn been resisted by the other Indian languages. The nationalist evolution of Hindi in the twentieth century thus describes a full circle.

Such resurgence and refashioning of Hindi was effected through a series of related and mutually reinforcing measures. The movement, which began in 1867 but assumed a sustained charge through the 1880s and the 1890s, was initially a modest demand that Devanagari, the script in which Hindi is written, be permitted as an alternative script, alongside the modified Persian script in which Urdu is written, for the purposes of administrative and judicial business at the lower levels in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh (subsequently called the United Provinces and, after independence, Uttar Pradesh, both abbreviated to U.P.). This public demand made on the British government was accompanied by an internal literary development: the search for a form of Hindi suitable for the writing of prose, which until then had hardly existed but for which a growing need was now acutely felt. The form of Hindi selected, Khari Boli (a dialect or regional form spoken in the areas of Western U.P., Delhi, and Haryana) was a new literary medium, and the choice was perhaps reinforced by the fact that virtually all the poetry in Hindi so far had been written in other regional forms, mainly Brajbhasha and Avadhi. The new prose in Hindi was thus to be uncontaminated by any preceding poetry. In fact, when the early Hindi essays and novels, which were the most popular new forms of prose in the language, used poetic quotations and allusions, as they did quite frequently, they illustrated a conjunction of two different kinds of Hindi hardly ever seen before.

Soon enough, however, a new and perhaps natural demand arose: the language of prose and the language of poetry should be the same in Hindi, as in all other developed languages (including, as was specifically pointed out, English, beginning famously with the Romantic movement). In a slow and stoutly resisted change wrought over several decades and not conclusively settled until the rise of the Chāyāvād movement (broadly, the Romantic movement in Hindi poetry, discussed later in this chapter) in the 1920s, Khari

1. For an early, and vigorously counteractive, use of the phrase “Hindi imperialism,” see Rahul Sānkrityayana’s presidential address of 1947 to the thirty-fifth annual session of the Hindi Sāhitya Sammelan, in Mehta 1996: 146.
Boli established itself as the medium of Hindi poetry as well. By decisively turning its back on its literary genealogy of over half a millennium and marching off into what many at the time feared might prove to be wilderness, Hindi at once made a number of crucial choices. While it lost that long corridor of echo and allusion, which constitute much of what poetry connotes, it also shed at one stroke the encumbering load of an overwrought and played-out poetic tradition, and it awaited the future as an empty vessel into which could be poured unimpeded the spirit of the times. Further, as Khari Boli is distinctly closer in grammatical structure and even basic vocabulary to Urdu than to Brajbhasha, Hindi now set up a new correlation with Urdu, one that could prove either mutually and harmoniously assimilative or sharply and divisively contestatory.

It was in debates and controversies that began to arise toward the end of the nineteenth century that Hindi first found it necessary to define and defend itself against its cultural other, Urdu—as Urdu simultaneously and perhaps even more critically defined itself against Hindi. One drastic strategy adopted for coping with this crisis of linguistic identity was for both Hindi and Urdu to pretend that the other language hardly existed as an independent entity. In the early decades of the twentieth century, many champions of Hindi asserted that Urdu was no more than a saith, or style, of Hindi, while at least one eminent Urdu scholar has argued, paradoxically and against the grain of his own vast learning, that before the end of the eighteenth century, wherever “Hindi” was mentioned, it was in fact “Urdu” that was meant. Some scholars have inaccurately limited the use of the term “Hindi” strictly to Khari Boli Hindi, now also called “Modern Standard Hindi,” while denying the name to Avadhi and Brajbhasha, the forms or dialects in which all “Hindi” literature was written before the adoption of Khari Boli. The basic problem here seems to be a historical inability (or else ideological unwillingness) to distinguish between “Hindi” and “modern Hindi” and a refusal to entertain the possibility that any forms of premodern, nonstandard Hindi

2. See Faruqi, chapter 14, this volume. The singular originality of his argument, which leads him perhaps to overvalue the prehistory of Urdu, is best represented in the statement: “The blame for not effectively refuting the theories about the antiquity of modern Hindi, and even its anteriority over Urdu, must also lie with the historians of Urdu—all of whom failed to address this issue scientifically and logically, if they dealt with it at all.” In contrast, Sadiq gives this “long history” of (Dakani/Dakhini/Dakkhini) Urdu from the thirteenth century up to Vali (fl. eighteenth century) a short shrift of 11 pages (pp. 50–60) in a history of Urdu literature that runs to 652 pages. In any case, Dakani was, in Sadiq’s view, “a new language” that the “lay” Urdu reader today “can neither understand nor appreciate.” Sadiq [1964] 1984: 51. See also the specific study of “Dakhini Urdu” by Ruth Laila Schmidt, in which she concludes that Dakhini is “a member of the Western Hindi dialect family,” and that “even among Dakhini speakers, the Urdu of North India is used on formal occasions.” Schmidt 1981: 58, ix. For a consideration of Dakhini writing as a part of Hindi literature, see Šarmá 1972: 32–33 and passim.
ever existed. Surely, “modern Hindi” presupposes an older “Hindi,” and to
call the latter by names other than “Hindi” is to be historically and cultur-
ally inconsistent. Given the linguistic and literary as well as cultural and com-
munal sensitivity of the issue, perhaps there is an evenhanded as-
sumption of political parity at work here to the effect that if Urdu has existed
as a literary language for only a couple of centuries, as is the commonly ac-
cepted view, Hindi could not possibly have done so for considerably longer.
A strong indicator of a vital historical continuity between older Hindi and
modern Hindi is the comprehensive linguistic similarity among Brajbhasha,
Avadhi, and Khari Boli (shared largely also with Urdu). But an even more
more crucial indicator is the literary and cultural tradition itself, which these three
forms of Hindi together constitute and share (and which Urdu, by contrast,
does not). Significantly, the question whether or not Avadhi and Brajbhasha
are to be called Hindi is never asked in Hindi (which has no such term as
“Modern Standard Hindi”) but only in other languages, such as Urdu or En-
gleish, possibly because the geographical and historical scope and variety of
Hindi, unmatched by any other Indian language, may seem in some need
of being broken down for external observers. 3

Indeed, by propagating Khari Boli as the preferred dialect in the public
sphere from around the end of the nineteenth century, while allowing other
forms, including Brajbhasha and Avadhi, to fall into mere domestic use and
literary desuetude, the new standardized Hindi emerged clearly and indis-
putably as the most widely used language in the country. It was spread pre-
dominantly across seven or eight states from (to use their modern names
and definitions) Himachal Pradesh in the north through Panjab (in part),
Haryana and Delhi to Madhya Pradesh in central India, and from Bihar in
the east through Uttar Pradesh to Rajasthan in the west. In contrast, each of
the other major Indian languages, especially after the linguistic reorganiza-
tion of Indian states in 1956, is consolidated in and effectively confined to
one state. On this ground alone, Hindi qualified incontestably as the lan-
guage most suited democratically for adoption as the common language of
the nation. The emergence and spread of modern Hindi supplemented and
cemented the transregional political consensus and solidarity that the na-
tionalist movement served to bring about in the country.

The new national identity of India, whether in the colonial first half of the
twentieth century or in the postcolonial second half, thus had Hindi as one
of its defining components. Consonant with this role, the growth of the novel
in Hindi reflected if not a conscious project to narrate the nation then at least

3. On how Khari Boli Hindi in the Nagari script “was able to subsume the potentialities of
all the dialects of the Hindi language area as vehicles for literary expression,” see McGregor
1970: 177. See also McGregor, chapter 16, this volume, on the “composite ‘literary tradition
of Hindi.’”
a marked proclivity to represent not merely local or regional but equally na-
tional and nationalist thematic concerns. Both fiction and poetry in Hindi
c caught up with the literature of the Western world by telescopically assim-
ating within a matter of five or six decades trends and movements that in the
English language had taken several centuries to evolve: the romance; the pop-
ular novel of adventure and suspense; the novel of realism and the psycho-
logical novel; and in poetry, Romanticism, modernism, and progressivism. It
was as if, to make up for a delayed start because of the comparatively late pen-
etration of colonial influence into the Hindi heartland, modern Hindi liter-
ature went through accelerated development in an endeavor to draw level
with world literature, especially the literature of the English colonial masters.
After Independence, as if in a visible casting off of the colonial model, Hindi
literature turned for inspiration to literatures written in languages other than
English while it also developed an indigenous postcolonial idiom of its own,
for which of course there was no precedent or parallel in English.4

In this essay, in consonance with the distinct methodological project of
the present volume, I seek to explore selectively, and necessarily disjunctively,
three related themes that seem to represent the trajectory and role of Hindi
in the twentieth century: first and most important, the radically enabling
transformation and expansion of the Hindi language as well as its somewhat
disabling elevation to an unrealistic national role following Independence;
second, the development of modern Hindi poetry after it had changed in
midstream the horses of poetic idiom from Braj bhasha to Khari Boli, with
reference mainly to its first major movement in the new mode, Chāyāvād;
and last, the resistant reception in Hindi of a new and predominantly pop-
ular Western genre, the novel. Through this terrain of language and litera-
ture will be seen to run the antahsañila, the subterranean stream or under-
current, of the nation and nationalism, which Hindi, with its newly reinforced
transregional preeminence, saw as its special thematic burden.

THE QUESTION OF THE LANGUAGE

Scripting the Difference: Nagari and Urdu

In 1835, the English colonial power in India adopted the policy, favored by
Macaulay and Bentinck, of Anglicizing the subject peoples. Accordingly,
the previous practice of the acquisition of Oriental knowledge by the British was
reversed, and in 1837 English replaced Persian at the higher levels of ad-
ministration, supplemented by the regional languages at the lower.5 While

5. On the history of English in India and related literary-cultural questions, see Dharwad-
ker, chapter 3, this volume.
this change worked out fairly unproblematically in most parts of the country, it led to perceptions of distortion and injustice in the Hindi-speaking areas. Here, largely because of Urdu’s close similarity in both vocabulary and script to Persian, the old language of command, it was Urdu in the Persian script and not Hindi in the Devanagari script (popularly, Nagari) that was proclaimed the local official language. The situation was further complicated by the existence — since at least the founding of the College of Fort William in 1800 — of the beginnings of a contentious debate over whether Hindi and Urdu were really one and the same language (sometimes in the singular called Hindustani) written in two different scripts, or whether, despite deceptive syntactic identity and a common basic vocabulary, these were in fact two languages substantially distinct in their “higher” vocabulary, their literature, and their cultural genealogy.

A few decades after the proclamation of the new policy, and after the British had reentrenched themselves more securely than ever after the “Mutiny” of 1857–1858, a demand arose that the language used in the lower courts of law and other strata of administration be permitted to be written in the Nagari as well as the Persian script. Articulated for the first time in Benares in 1867–1868, this demand was reiterated with greater force in 1882, and then from 1893 onwards. The main reasons advanced in its support were that in the Hindi-speaking areas primary education was given almost entirely through Hindi in the Nagari script, and that Urdu in the Persian script (a notably unscientific and ambiguous script anyhow, especially when compared with Nagari) was known mainly to Muslims, who constituted no more than 14 percent of the population. (Among the Hindus, only the very small communities of Kashmiri Brahmans and Kayasths, the latter according to one definition being a relatively recently formed caste of “mixed origin,” knew Urdu, for members of both communities had traditionally led in literacy and acted as officials and scribes in previous Muslim administrations.) The demand for the use of the Nagari script was thus put forward as a democratic demand on behalf of the vast majority of the population, who were otherwise denied direct access to official documents and procedures. Furthermore, in the new colonial regime in which social and material advancement often depended on one’s ability to obtain a well-paid government job, use of the Persian script alone amounted to gross economic discrimination.

One of the most cogent and forthright statements in the cause of Nagari was made by Bhāratendu Hariścandra (1850–1885), often acclaimed as the father of modern Hindi literature. He was a poet in Hindi (as well as Sanskrit and Urdu), the founder of modern Hindi drama, a translator into Hindi of several major literary works from Sanskrit as well as of Shakespeare’s Mer-
*chant of Venice*, a pioneering and influential journalist and editor, the charismatic center of a large literary circle, and one of the wealthy and eminent citizens of Benares. In 1882, in response to a questionnaire circulated by a British Education Commission, he stated (in English):

The best remedy would be to make . . . the language of the court the language used by the people, and to introduce into the court papers the character [i.e., script] which the majority of the public can read. The character in use in primary schools of these provinces is, with slight exceptions, entirely Hindi, and the character used in the courts and offices is Persian, and therefore the primary Hindi education which a rustic lad gains at his village has no value, reward or attraction attached to it. . . .

If Urdu ceases to be the court language, the Mussalmans will not easily secure the numerous offices of Government . . . of which they have at present a sort of monopoly. By the introduction of the Nagari character they would lose entirely the opportunity of plundering the people by reading one word for another and thereby misconstruing the real sense of the contents. . . . For example, make a mark like [a three-letter word in the Persian script], and we have 606 different pronunciations. . . .

May God save us from such letters!!! What wonders cannot be performed through their medium? Black can be changed into white and white into black. . . . The use of Persian letters in offices is not only an injustice to Hindus, but it is a cause of annoyance and inconvenience to the majority of the loyal subjects of Her Imperial Majesty.7

The charge of monopolization of government jobs by Muslims was amply borne out by the government’s own statistics, according to which the Muslims (14 percent of the population) held 63.9 percent of these positions in 1857 and 45.8 percent even in 1886–1887, by which time a substantial number of Hindus had learned Urdu in order to have a share of the spoils.8

The next major initiative on behalf of Nagari came in the form of the establishment of several societies to promote the cause, in Meerut, Allahabad, and elsewhere, but most importantly in Benares, where in 1893 a group of young students founded the Nagari Pracārini Sabha (Society for the propagation of Nagari). This proved to be a crucial moment for Hindi, for not only did the Sabha play a decisive role in ensuring the official acceptance of Nagari, but it went on to sponsor a number of major initiatives that helped shape and define Hindi language and literature in the decades to come. Besides starting its own research journal, the *Nagari Pracārini Patrikā*, in 1896, it launched in 1900 from Allahabad another, more literary journal, *Saras-

which under the sternly magisterial editorship (1903–1920) of Mahāvīr Prasad Dhivedi helped to fix the norms of the new Khari Boli Hindi and give it increasing acceptance and respectability, especially as the medium of poetry. The Sabhā also conducted systematic searches for rare Hindi books and manuscripts, contributing substantially through the publication of its triennial Search Reports to the corpus of Hindi literature; in addition, it undertook to publish authoritative editions of canonical as well as popular Hindi texts. In 1910, it organized the first Hindi Sahitya Sammelan (Hindi literary conference), which then became an autonomous permanent institution under that name with its office in Allahabad and organized annual conferences at different venues all over the country. The Sammelan also became the chief instrument for the close affiliation of Hindi to the nationalist movement. Among its members were eminent political leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Rajendra Prasad, Jawaharlal Nehru, Purushottam Das Tandon, Narendra Dev, Sampurnanand, and Govind Das, nearly all of whom served as presidents of the Indian National Congress, and many of whom went on to become ministers or members of parliament in independent India. In 1929, the Sabhā published a Hindi dictionary, the Hindi Sablasāgar (Ocean of Hindi words), which remains unsurpassed in both size and authority. What was meant to be a preface to the dictionary, outlining the development of Hindi literature, by Rāmacandra Śukla, turned out to be a work in fine excess of the original requirement; it remains the foundational and largely definitive history of Hindi literature. More ambitiously, in 1957 the Sabhā began to publish its Hindi Sahitya ka Bhāt Itihās (Comprehensive history of Hindi literature), in sixteen volumes. In effect, much of what we now know to be Hindi language and literature has attained its modern definition, at least in a symbolically originary sense, from a modest first meeting of the Nāgarī Pracrāṇi Sabhā, held on the rooftop of a stable in Benares on July 9, 1893, attended by some schoolboys led by seventeen-year-old Śyāmsundar Dās.9

Meanwhile, the battle for Nagari was soon won. Sir Antony MacDonnell, appointed lieutenant-governor of the North-Western Provinces in 1895, had witnessed in 1880, as commissioner in Patna, the changeover from the Persian script to Nagari (and a variation of it, Kāthī). (The use of the Nagari script in another neighboring Hindi-speaking region, the Central Provinces, had been authorized even earlier, in 1872.) A national leader of the front rank, Madan Mohan Malaviya, made out a comprehensive case for the Nagari script in his Court Character and Primary Education in N.-W. P. and Oudh (1897) and formally presented a copy of the book to MacDonnell when he led a deputation of the Sabhā to meet MacDonnell on March 2, 1898; he

9. See Dās 1941; King 1994; and Mehta 1996.
also submitted on the occasion a petition signed by over 60,000 persons and bound in sixteen volumes. In his reply, MacDonnell expressed sympathy with the cause of the petitioners while observing that opposition from the Muslims was to be expected and that an arrangement that had continued for three hundred years could not be reversed in a day. Finally, on April 18, 1900, the government passed an order authorizing the use of Nagari, alongside the Persian script, at the lower levels of legal and civil administration.

This seemed to be a comprehensive success for the campaign for Nagari—certainly from the viewpoint of the Urdu-speakers, who, in their confident trust in the government generated by their new politics of collaboration with the British inaugurated by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and his Aligarh Movement, appeared not to have anticipated it. Apparently taken by surprise, the supporters of Urdu belatedly mounted a counter-campaign. The Urdu Defence Association was established in 1900 but promptly and sternly admonished into extinction by MacDonnell. The sturdier Anjuman Taraqqi-e-Urdū (Society for the progress of Urdu), established in 1903, has gone on to promote Urdu in many of the same ways that the Nāgarī Pracārīṇī Sabha promoted Hindi. Indeed, just as Hindi aligned itself with Congress nationalism, the Anjuman went on to champion the “two-nation” politics of separatism, which acclamed Urdu as the national language of the projected state of Pakistan and as one of the main agents in the creation of Pakistan.

Insofar as Nagari remained an unfamiliar and untested option to the long-entrenched Persian script, its use in the lower courts did not increase instantly or dramatically. This has misled a historian of the Nāgarī Pracārīṇī Sabha to state that “once the uproar had died down, little had actually changed,” for “the triumph was little more than a symbolic one and had few practical results.” In fact, the triumph gave a tremendous boost to the morale of the users of Nagari and Hindi and indeed rapidly led to a reversal in the balance of power between Urdu and Hindi, resulting in a virtual rout of Urdu in the public domain of authorship and publishing. It also gave Nagari the strength to repel with ease sporadic moves to introduce the roman script for Hindi (and other Indian languages). On the contrary, it could now press, though

11. According to the three new rules now introduced, “all persons may present their petitions or complaints either in the Nagri or the Persian character as they shall desire,” all proclamations issued in the vernacular were to be in both scripts, and no person could be appointed to any administrative position unless able to read and write both scripts “fluently.” For the full text of the government resolution dated 21 April 1900, see Rāngopāl 1965 (s.s. 1886): 160–62.
13. See the statement by Maulana Abdul Haq, long-serving secretary and then president of the Anjuman Taraqqi-e-Urdū, on February 15, 1961, that “Pakistan was not created by Jinnah, nor was it created by Iqbal; it was Urdu that created Pakistan.” Quoted in Rai 1984: 264.
equally unavailingly, its own claim to be adopted as the common script for all the Indian languages, mainly on the basis of the arguments that it was more complete and scientific than the other scripts, and that the scripts of most north Indian languages were close to it anyhow, being derived from Devanagari. Interestingly, Gandhi persistently supported Nagari for the role of a common Indian script even more strongly than he supported Hindi or Hindustani as a national language, though he made the singular exception of allowing that Urdu should continue with the Persian script, at least for the time being. “I know I am inconsistent,” he explained, “but my inconsistency is not quite foolish. There is Hindu-Muslim friction at the present moment.”

_Hindus and Muslims: Hindi and Urdu_

The petitioners for Nagari as well as officials of the government in numerous documents, including the vital order of 1900, used “Hindi” and “Nagari” interchangeably and occasionally even employed the phrase “Hindi character” when obviously “Nagari” was meant. Christopher King is highly critical of this “confusion” resulting from the “obtuseness” of the government, which displayed an “almost incredible lack of clarity and precision” and “sheer muddleheadedness” so that its actions were rendered “close to ludicrous.” But this “confusion” was even more widespread, for the supporters of Urdu, too, when fighting back, always denounced the Hindi language (usually as being vulgar, rustic, and unrefined) and hardly ever the script. There appeared to be, in fact, a perfect, tacit understanding between both the warring parties and also the government as to what exactly was at stake: it was a grand imbrication, conflation, and confusion of script, language, culture, community, and eventually even nation.

No two languages in India (and perhaps few elsewhere) have had such a close and yet contestatory relationship as Hindi and Urdu, a relationship that has been described variously, in human kinship terms, as that between mother and daughter, between two sisters (though not quite twins, for one language or the other has always claimed to be the older), and between mutually jealous co-wives or concubines. Their complex, intertwined, and yet sorely vexed history raises a whole range of major questions that have proved historically to be of vital consequence to the Indian nation:

1. **Similarity.** Are Hindi and Urdu one and the same language, though they have always been written in two different scripts? Even if they are no longer

---

so, were they ever the same language in the past? Are there any historical grounds for considering either Hindi or Urdu as the source from which the other originated?

2. **Split.** If Hindi and Urdu can be regarded as (having been) basically the same language, how did they break away from each other, and when and why, to cause the present divide? Can one language be held more responsible than the other for causing and promoting this rift? How far was such a division due to nonlinguistic, social, or communal reasons, that is, to factors arising mainly from the respective religious affiliations of their speakers? Did the British rulers of India at any stage play a part in either bringing together or separating Hindi and Urdu, and if so, to what purpose and effect?

3. **Commonality.** Even after the divide, did Hindi and Urdu share common ground, and if so, to what extent? Was either language able to develop, at any stage in its historical evolution, a “composite” literary culture in which members of the other community participated significantly? Could a common language partaking (equally?) of both Hindi and Urdu, often called Hindustani, have served as the lingua franca of undivided India, or even of India after Partition (as distinct from Pakistan, where Urdu was designated to serve that function right from the beginning, or indeed from even before the creation of Pakistan)? Could such a common language be used not only on the street or in common conversation but also for “higher” creative and discursive purposes? Is there evidence on the ground of the use of such a common language?

A wide variety of answers have been provided to these questions, and most have appeared partisan in terms of the conclusions reached, if not in terms of their very orientation. It would be futile as well as presumptuous to arbitrate between them. What can perhaps be usefully attempted here, instead, is to locate the provenance and politics of some of these responses and to point briefly, even summarily, to the limitations of each, which prevent it from being accepted as a universally satisfactory answer. In one sense, insofar as these are not merely academic questions but issues with a live charge, the only settled answers to them can be those so far provided by history, such as the indisputable decline of Urdu and the rejection of Hindustani as the “official” language of India in favor of Hindi. It may therefore be instructive to review, apart from all the arguments, some such conclusive factual processes as well.

The view that Hindi and Urdu are one and the same language has been put forward from two very different points of view. The first is the strictly linguistic or grammatical, and the second is the optimistically secular or non-sectarian. In terms of grammatical structure, Urdu and the modern Khari Boli Hindi are nearly identical, though it may be remembered that Khari
Boli became the dominant form of Hindi only about a century ago, and that the forms of Hindi in wide use for several centuries before that, Avadhi and Brajbhasha, were not quite as close to Urdu. In any case, the skeletal similarity between Urdu and modern Hindi does not extend to flesh and blood, as it were, for the larger part of the vocabularies and the cultural matrices of these languages have always been widely different, being derived from Arabic-Persian and from Sanskrit, respectively. The narrowly and technically linguistic view of language has in any case been supplanted by a wider cultural view in recent years, as in the field of translation studies, where the old hypothesis that translation is something that takes place between two different languages has been largely superseded by the view that the act of translation is a wider negotiation between two different cultures.\(^\text{18}\)

The view that Hindi and Urdu are one and the same language is also supported by those who believe that such a stance may project or produce a more desirable state of affairs generally, to the extent that it may minimize conflict and possibly bring about goodwill and harmony between Hindus and Muslims. Sometimes, on the contrary, supporters of Hindi and Urdu have each claimed these languages to be identical as part of their larger hegemonic agenda of suggesting that their own language is more identical, so to speak, than the other, so that the other language is effectively subsumed within theirs. This is reflected, for example, in the respective claims, considered earlier, that in the period up to the eighteenth century wherever “Hindi” was mentioned, what was meant was in fact “Urdu,” or, conversely, that Urdu was just one of the many varieties or styles of Hindi.

The view that Hindi and Urdu were at least initially the same language usually originates with the extraordinary example of Amir Khusrau (1258–1325), who wrote a few light and even risqué verses in colloquial Khari Boli—perhaps as a jeu d’esprit—which have probably been substantially transformed and updated anyhow during centuries of oral transmission, unlike his work in Persian, which has been more faithfully preserved.\(^\text{19}\) Altogether, Khusrau seems to be a one-off—not the sturdy common stem from which Hindi and Urdu both later branched out, but a distant straw in the wind from the point of view of literary history. For the next major figure to write verse in a comparable idiom of Khari Boli occurs in Urdu not until Vâli (fl. c. 1700), four centuries later, and in Hindi not until Bhâratendu Hariścandra and his contemporaries, six centuries later.

On the issues of when and why Hindi and Urdu broke away from one an-

\(^{18}\) For “the cultural turn” in translation studies, see in particular the introduction in Bassnett and Lefevere 1990: 1–13; also Lefevere 1992; and in general, volumes in the Translation Studies series published by Routledge, London.

\(^{19}\) For a scholarly retrieval of Khusrau’s “Hindavi” work, see Nâraṅg 1990. See also Coprâ 1988: 43–44.
other and which is the more to blame, there are, predictably enough, three broad responses: (1) Urdu did it, beginning in the first half of the eighteenth century, when it systematically threw out indigenous words and overloaded itself with more and more imported Persian; (2) Hindi did it, beginning in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, in brute assertion of its numerical majority and its newly found nationalist political strength; (3) the British did it, at the College of Fort William (founded 1800) under their notorious policy of divide and rule, with John Gilchrist, the first grammarian of Hindustani and the moving spirit of that college, as the archdemon. The most comprehensively documented case for the view that Urdu was the one that broke away has been made by Amrit Rai—the novelist-son of Premchand—who had extensive linguistic competence in Hindi, Urdu, English, Bangla, and Sanskrit; his argument remains substantially unanswered. Rai also lays to rest the convenient and glibly anticolonial theory that the division was the mischief of the British; they, “like pragmatic men,” may have exploited an existing fissure, he suggests, but they certainly did not cause it. It may be relevant to recall here that Gilchrist’s preference for the common name for Hindi and Urdu, “Hindustani,” was in his own lights, prompted by an impulse quite the opposite of divisive; he said he meant it as “a general, conciliatory, comprehensive term.”

Even though this in-between or interstitial third term, Hindustani, has always carried the taint of denoting a language rather closer to Urdu than to Hindi—if not quite synonymous with Urdu—it was to prove useful in signifying and highlighting the actual or projected common ground between Hindi and Urdu, especially after the rift between the two languages had fur-

20. Rai 1984: 11, 285–89. In a review of Rai’s work, Masud Husain Khan seems to agree that “what happened to Modern Hindi at the turn of the 19th century [had already] happened to Urdu at the turn of the 18th century,” but alleges that Rai “the academician turns into a politician” when he disputes “the claims of Urdu to being a common language of the Hindus and the Muslims” (Khan 1987: 148, 150). King, while admitting that Rai’s analysis is “convincing,” attempts to deflect Rai’s main thrust by arguing that about a century after Urdu had caused the divide, Hindi reacted by causing “the other side of the divide”—as if a divide did not have two sides to begin with. See King 1994: 12–13, 175–77. Faruqi, while describing Rai’s work as “full of inconsistencies or tendentious speculation rather than hard facts,” acknowledges that it “was never refuted by Urdu scholars as it should have been.” Asserting his own radical disagreement with Rai, Faruqi, however, seems to endorse Rai’s major factual finding: “There is no doubt that the proportion of tatsama vocabulary declined in Rekhtah/Hindi [i.e., Urdu] over the second half of the eighteenth century. . . . Urdu literary culture from the late eighteenth century onwards does place an unfortunate stress . . . on ‘purism,’ ‘language reform,’ ‘purging the language of undesirable usages,’ and—worst of all—privileging all Persian-Arabic over all Urdu.” See Faruqi, chapter 14, this volume.

21. Gilchrist, quoted in Dalmia 1997: 164, and also in Faruqi, chapter 14, this volume.

22. For various dictionary definitions and other sources identifying Hindustani as the language predominantly of the Muslims, see Faruqi, chapter 14, this volume.
ther widened following the Nagari controversy. Thus, there are two distinct phases to this history that perhaps need to be distinguished. In the first, Hindi overthrew the hegemony of Urdu and went on rapidly and comprehensively to eclipse it; in the second, mainly through Gandhi’s efforts at conciliation shortly afterwards, Hindi somewhat halfheartedly sought to make common cause with Urdu, under the rubric of Hindustani, in the nationalist interest of Hindu-Muslim unity.

From Urdu to Hindi: Crossing the Divide

At no time in the history of Urdu did it represent more of a “composite” literary culture than just before that culture fell apart. In the last half and particularly the last quarter of the nineteenth century, there emerged what Francis Robinson has aptly called “the Urdu-speaking elite.” This comprised mostly Muslims but also, so far as the reading and writing of literature was concerned, members of the old administration-friendly Hindu castes: the Kashmiri Brahmans (who numbered no more than 791 in the whole province of U.P. in 1891) and the somewhat more numerous Kayasths. Together they formed a powerful bureaucratic elite, which even threatened to cut to size the more substantial power of the landlord elite. Almost as a side benefit of their privileged high literacy, they also produced literature in the elite language that they had in common. 23

However, with the ever-widening spread of education and the recognition of the importance of the true vernacular Hindi (for Urdu was never the language of the rural illiterate masses, even in U.P.), 24 this elite now found itself well and truly swamped. In the public sphere of literate transaction, Hindi now overtook Urdu with a surefooted inevitability, as if it were the steadier tortoise racing against the arrogant and indolent hare. Tables 17.1 and 17.2 reflect the dramatically changed reality in terms of publications.

The quantum leap in the circulation of Hindi books and newspapers would appear to be directly attributable to the more than “symbolic” triumph of Nagari in 1900, as if at that historic moment the floodgates had burst open. The hegemony of Urdu ensured by official support up to this time seems to

24. In an incident in Râhi Mâsom Razâ’s novel Ādhâ Gâ, set largely in the Muslim half of a village in eastern U.P., where all characters, Hindu and Muslim, speak normally in Bhojpur, the local Hindi dialect, a Muslim character, wishing to stand on his dignity, abruptly speaks a sentence in Urdu to another Muslim, and is promptly mocked for doing so: “Good Lord! Speaking Urdu now, are you!” At another point, a local person, arguing with some separatist Muslims who have come to campaign for Jinnah and his demand for Pakistan, tells them that they would not understand the local language, “for you have made Urdu the language of the Muslims... . When Pakistan is created will you leave Urdu behind or will you take it with you?” Razâ [1961] 1984: 46, 255; see also 28 and 44 for other similar episodes.
have crumbled all at once, and the high artifice of its refined courtly literature proved to have had no wide social base. Urdu was never again going to be able to claim any kind of parity with Hindi in terms of either language or literature; after Independence, in an ironic reversal, it was indeed Urdu that pleaded in the Hindi-speaking states to be accepted as the official second language so that it could benefit from some state patronage again.

The wider prevalence of Hindi over Urdu was reflected in the careers of many individual writers of this transitional period, and their personal histories bear an intimate and revealing testimony to this literary revolution. Nearly all Hindi writers, of whatever caste or social background, who were born between, say, 1875 and 1910, grew up learning Urdu and often basic Persian, even if they never wrote in either language (and even though these languages washed off them sooner rather than later). They include writers as varied as Jagannāth Dās “Ratnākar” (1866–1932); Harivāś Rai, “Bachchan” (1907–); and S.H. Vātsyāyan, “Ajñeya” (1911–1987).25 Even more interesting are the cases of other writers who began their careers in Urdu but, as Hindi emerged as clearly the stronger of the two languages, soon crossed over to Hindi in the most visible demonstration of the new literary order—by voting with their pens.

Although Bhāratendu Hariścandra did write verse in Urdu, he was not

25. Ratnākar passed his B.A. in English, Philosophy, and Persian, and then started on an M.A. in Persian, though he went on to write poetry in Brajbhāsha; see Bhatt 1957: 4. For a more representative instance of quick learning of elementary Persian by rote and quicker forgetting, see Bachchan 1998: 79–80.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 17.1 Number of Books Published in U.P.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Urdu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Hindi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Robinson 1974: 77.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 17.2 Number and Circulation of Newspapers in U.P.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number Circulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Urdu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Hindi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Robinson 1974: 78.*
the first (as he was in so many other respects) to move from Urdu into Hindi. He is reputed to have composed his first couplet as a child, and its language is clearly and unsurprisingly Brajbhasha, in which he went on to write the better part of his poetry, besides a certain amount in Khari Boli. His Urdu verse occupies no more than six of the 1,113 pages in the closely printed double-column edition of his complete works; his Urdu takhallus, or pen name, “Rasā,” which means he who has informal access (to the beloved), is perhaps doubly apt, for he had easy access to Urdu but no real intimacy with it, and no great desire for it, either. A short farcical piece he wrote called “Urdu kā Siyāpā” (A dirge for Urdu, 1874), has come in for sharp condemnation from scholars recently; but what is often overlooked is the fact that Urdu had here “died”—as Hariścandra explained in his prefatory remarks—not as wished or alleged by any of its enemies but in the fearful rhetoric of its keenest champion, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, who felt betrayed by an old friend and supporter of Urdu, Rājā Śiv Prasād (1823–1895), and apparently blamed him for doing Urdu in. 26 Rājā Śiv Prasād was the odd man out in the whole scramble between Urdu and Hindi in the nineteenth century, for he was equally reviled by both camps for seeking to bring Urdu and Hindi together through the doomed experiment of publishing Urdu in the Nagari script in several of his own works as well as in a newspaper he founded, the Benares Akhbar. 27

The first significant writer of this period to have decisively crossed over from

26. Faruqi, in chapter 14, this volume, describes Hariścandra as “writing savage, if vulgar, satires mocking ‘the death of Urdu Begum,’” whereas Hariścandra wrote just the one comic mock elegy, Dalmia, in her careful and elaborately contextualized reference to this piece, still says: “There was a palpable hardening of fronts. . . Hariścandra lapsed into a mock wail” (Dalmia 1997: 200–1). This may be seen as characteristic of Dalmia’s whole scholarly procedure in her nevertheless indispensable study of Hariścandra: her wide learning is impeccable but her inferences are somewhat forced and ideologically predictable. Hariścandra’s short poem runs as follows:

O dear Urdu, hāy hāy. Where have you gone, hāy hāy?
O my darling, hāy hāy. Munī Mūllā hāy hāy.
Wallah Billah hāy hāy. Crying and cursing, hāy hāy.
Dragging their feet, hāy hāy. Now all is lost, hāy hāy.
They pull their beards, hāy hāy. Their world upside down, hāy hāy.
Their livelihood gone, hāy hāy. All government jobs gone, hāy hāy.
Who has killed her, hāy hāy? Who brought such news, hāy hāy?
They gnash their teeth, hāy hāy. How editors loved her, hāy hāy.
How she could talk, hāy hāy. How much she talked, hāy hāy.
How she could flatter, hāy hāy. How pert of tongue, hāy hāy.
She’s gone for ever, hāy hāy.

(Hāy means alas.) See Hariścandra 2000: 12.

27. For Rājā Śiv Prasād’s contribution to Hindi contrasted with that of an eminent contemporary, Rājā Laksman Singh, see Saksenā 1989.
Urdu to Hindi was Bāl Mukund Gupt (1865–1907). An essayist and editor, he started by editing successively two Urdu periodicals, Čunār Akhbār and Kohēnī, but then learned Hindi beginning in 1888 with the encouragement of Pratāp Nārāyan Miśra (1856–1894), another robust essayist, editor, and poet of the time. Gupt’s fame rests on his achievement as the editor of several Hindi journals, most notably Bhārat Mitra, which he edited from 1899 until his death, and for which he himself wrote, among other things, open letters to successive British viceroys. Written under the persona of “Shiv Shambhu,” a bhāngswilling merry Brahman, these letters are witty and trenchant political satires, distinctly bolder than most pronouncements on the Raj by contemporary Urdu and Hindi writers, which are either loyalist or at best ambivalent. It is highly doubtful that Gupt could have produced such radical political pieces, especially in the persona (and with the traditional privileges) of a carefree, outspoken Brahman, had he gone on writing in Urdu. That his crossing over from Urdu to Hindi also marked for him the beginning of a firm new loyalty is indicated by his prompt and strong response in Khari Boli verse to the protests by the supporters of Urdu against the Nagari decision of 1900.28

The emblematic example of an Urdu writer going across to Hindi has to be Premchand (1880–1936), not only because of his towering literary stature but also because of the reasons he cited for making the move. Premchand is acclaimed as the founder of the modern novel in both Urdu and Hindi; moreover, he is still regarded as the greatest novelist and short-story writer in either language. He was born in a Kāvasth family; his father had a lowly government job in the postal department, and he grew up in a village near Benares learning Urdu and Persian from the village maulvi (traditional Muslim scholar). Urdu was thus the literary language to which he was born, and between 1902 and 1917 he wrote his first five novels and some eighty short stories exclusively in Urdu. But beginning in 1915, he moved gradually and steadily to Hindi, first publishing Hindi translations of some of his Urdu short stories (done by himself or by others under his supervision) and then writing originally in Hindi. Although he continued to produce some shorter works, such as stories and speeches, in Urdu to the end of his career and made his works available in Urdu as well as Hindi (though not simultaneously), nearly all his major novels, including the two discussed later in this essay, were written and published first in Hindi in more or less the last decade of his life.

Apparently, Premchand moved from Urdu to Hindi more through the force of larger cultural circumstances than from individual caprice or predilection. His fifth novel, Bāzār-e-Husn (The brothel), found no publisher in the drastically shrinking Urdu literary market, even though he already had a considerable reputation in Urdu. However, it was snapped up in Hindi

under the title *Sevāsadan* (The house of service, 1919) with an eager demand from publishers for more works. But there were other reasons that motivated Premchand besides the primary needs of an author for a readership and for financial reward; in a letter written in 1915 to his closest friend, the Urdu editor Dayānārayan Nigam, he stated: “I am now practising to write in Hindi as well. Urdu will no longer do. Has any Hindu ever made a success of writing in Urdu, that I will?”

Behind this expression of anxiety and unease lies Premchand’s sense that Hindu writers in Urdu before him were all too few and in any case had never been fully accepted. That this was no mere subjective or biased impression is borne out in a history of Urdu literature by Grahame Bailey published in the middle of Premchand’s career in 1928, which concludes: “About 250 authors have been mentioned in this work. Apart from Premchand . . . only eight are Hindus, the rest are Muhammedans. The only famous writers among them are Daya Shankar Nasim, Ratan Nath Sarshar, and Durga Sahae Suroor.”

A more recent history by Muhammad Sadiq, over three times as extensive as Bailey’s, still names only seventeen Hindu writers in Urdu, including journalists. As if confirming all the apprehensions of communal bias in Urdu that Premchand had entertained, Sadiq says: “But this much will have to be admitted that Muslims continued to treat him [Premchand] more or less as an outsider.”

**Inventing Hindustani: Gandhi and Premchand**

A last chance arose for the two languages to make common cause, even to join as one, at least for some practical purposes, when the Hindus and the Muslims united for a brief period during the nationalist movement from the time of the Lucknow Pact (1916) up to about 1935. This was the period when under the common name and banner of Hindustani, Hindi and Urdu attempted not only to intertwine but actually to commingle, not out of any strictly linguistic, literary, or cultural impulse but in accordance with a larger nationalist political agenda and on the meager basis of a common *bāzār* vocabulary of probably no more than five hundred words.

---

29. Rai 1991: 130. For all information relating to Premchand, Amrit Rai’s biography has been my main source.


31. Sadiq [1964] 1984: 439. As for the proportion and reception of Muslim writers in Hindi, they were numerous and prominent up to c. 1800, nearly totally absent from that point up to Independence, and back in numbers in the postcolonial, post-Partition phase, making a strong and distinctive contribution to Hindi. See Trivedi 1993: 40–42.

32. See Anderson 1983: 47, on how different vernaculars that assembled to form various national languages in Europe necessarily stabilized at a level “above the spoken vernaculars,”
To begin toward the end of this all too short episode, a defining moment for the campaign for Hindustani seems to have come at 9 a.m. on April 24, 1936, when at the first and last convention of the well-meaning new organization Bhāratīya Sāhitya Pariṣad (Indian literary council) at Nagpur—attended by many of the most important national leaders as well as Hindi and Urdu writers, including Premchand—Gandhi, in the chair, began to speak. He suggested that the most appropriate medium for the business of the Pariṣad would be “Hindi or Hindustani,” for “Hindi” alone suggested a language replete with Sanskrit words, while “Urdu” alone indicated a language laden with Arabic and Persian. But Gandhi’s apparently neutral formulation caused a veritable storm. It was put to the vote and carried by 25 to 15 (rather than unanimously, as most of Gandhi’s proposals were in most Indian bodies most of the time), and it seemed to open up all the old wounds, especially among the supporters of Urdu. From this moment on Hindustani was a dead horse.

The delicate but vital nuance on which it all hinged was that Gandhi had advocated not “Hindustani” but “Hindi or Hindustani,” thus allegedly leaning more toward Hindi than Urdu. Gandhi had of course been supporting “Hindi” as the national language at least since he had first presided over the Hindi Sāhitya Sammelen in 1918; it was in that capacity that he had taken the initiative to establish in the same year the Dakṣin Bharat Hindi Pracār Sabhā (Society for the Propagation of Hindi in South India). Meanwhile, however, Gandhi had in many ways distanced himself from the Hindi Sāhitya Sammelen; when he was invited to preside over another annual session in 1935, he had even there used the term “Hindi-Hindustani” and gone on to remind the Sammelen that what he had meant by “Hindi” might have been different all along from what the Sammelen meant: “Even in 1918 I had said that Hindi is the name given to the language which both Hindus and Muslims speak naturally and without effort. There is no difference between Hindi and Urdu. Written in Devanagari, it is Hindi; the same written in the Arabic script becomes Urdu.” When in 1942 Gandhi founded yet another organization for promoting his favored national language, he called it the Hindustani Pracār Sabhā, and in 1944 he resigned from the Hindi Sāhitya Sammelen (even as he had resigned from Congress in 1934).

Even so, Gandhi’s preference for “Hindi or Hindustani” on April 24, 1936, seems to have come as a bolt from the blue for the supporters of “Hindustani.” Of all those present, Maulana Abdul Haq, secretary and subsequently

---

33. For a vivid account of this meeting, see Rai 1991: 354–57.
34. Gandhi 1965: 35.
president of the Anjuman Taraqqi-e-Urdū from 1923 until his death in Pak-
istan in 1961 and acclaimed as Bābā-e-Urdū (the Grand Old Man of Urdu),
seems to have been the most seriously upset. Back from the meeting, he wrote
in his journal, Urdu, of Gandhi’s great betrayal, interpreting it in openly
communal terms:

So long as Mahatma Gandhi and his followers hoped to be able to arrive at a
political agreement with the Muslims, they kept chanting “Hindustani, Hind-
stani.” . . . But when they could no longer entertain such a hope . . . they
cast off their cloak of deception and came out in their true colors. Let him
now propagate Hindi as much as he likes. If he cannot let go of Hindi, we can-
ot let go of Urdu either.

This seems written out of a broken heart but arises in fact from a piece of
fond self-deception quite comparable to the “deception” that Haq accused
Gandhi of. Earlier in the same piece, Haq had recalled happier times: “The
day has been when Mahatma Gandhi had written in his own hand a letter
to Hakim Ajmal Khan in Hindustani, that is, in the Urdu language and in
the Persian script.”35 If this is what Haq’s notion of “Hindustani” really was—
Urdu language in the Persian script—no wonder it needed to be qualified
or at least supplemented, as by Gandhi, with the term “Hindi” to ensure that
it occupied some kind of middle ground.

In this battle, Premchand, also a committed supporter of Hindustani, had
stood his ground heroically, like the boy on the burning deck. He alone had
spoken out at that convention to disagree publicly with Gandhi (though ap-
parently not to his face, for Gandhi had left before discussion began), and
now he wrote to remonstrate with Haq, explaining how this seeming defeat
was in fact a victory, for though only three Urdu writers had been present,
as many as fifteen votes had been cast for “Hindustani.” But it was too late
to mend fences. The bluff of “Hindustani” had been called, on both sides,
and there was nothing left to salvage. Perhaps there had never been any real
common ground.

Premchand himself had already made Hindustani his overriding mission
in the last year of his short life. Between January and June 1936 (when his
fatal illness began), he traveled constantly—to Allahabad, Agra, Purnea,
Delhi, Lucknow, and Lahore—to propagate everywhere his ideal of a com-
mon language; it was as if he now traveled in Hindustani. Interestingly, at
about this time he also returned to Urdu to write a couple of his best-known
shorter works in it, including the short story “Kafan” (The shroud), published
in Urdu in December 1935 and under the same title in Hindi in April 1936.
However, the two versions served (if unwittingly) to point up both the com-

mon ground and the distance between the two languages. The dialogue between the two main characters, both illiterate villagers, is pretty much identical in the two versions, but the descriptions and commentary by the narrative voice are far from so. The very first line of dialogue in the story, *malîm hotâ hai baqègî nabhî*, is exactly the same in both versions. But the first sentence of the last paragraph, describing the climax, has little in common in the two versions except the unremarkable final verb:

[In Urdu] sârâ maikhânâ mahv-e tamâshâ thâ aur yîh donoî maikhâsh maikhmûr-e mahtiyat ke ‘alam meî gîye jâtî thê.

[In Hindi] piyakkarî ki ãkhê inki or lagi hui thî aur yah donô apne dil mî mast gîye jâtê thê.

In another of Premchand’s famous stories, this time published first in Hindi as “Sòtrañj ke Khilàrî” (The chess players, October 1924) and then in Urdu as “Sòtrañj ki Bâji” (A game of chess, December 1924), it seems as if the two versions were calculated to show how wide apart the two languages were or could be. Describing in the opening paragraph the decadent Lucknow of 1856 just before the British marched in to annex it, the Hindi version says:

*jivan ke pratyek vibhâg mê ämod-pramod kà pradhânya thâ. sásanvibhâg mê, sâhitya kyetra mê, sâmajik vyavasthâ mê, kalâkausal mê, udyog dhandhô mê, aharvyaahâr mê, sarvatra vâlasîta vyâpt ho rahî thî.*

In Urdu this reads:

*zîndagi ke hark shûbe meîn rindi o masti kà zor thà. umûr-e siyâsat meîn, shêr o sukhan meîn, jàrz-e miîsharat meîn, saîvat o kezarat meîn, tijârat o tabîdlî meîn, sabhi jogah nafas-parasî ki duhâî thî.*

These languages are not only different, they are mutually incomprehensible, and the examples cited here fully support Ralph Russell’s general observation that on the matter of Hindustani, there was a “remarkable contrast between Premchand’s theories and his practice.”

But on this issue, as famously in much of his fiction, Premchand was apparently inspired by the “idealistc realism” that he himself described as his preferred mode. He knew even better than Gandhi that except in a basic and minimal sense the common language called Hindustani did not exist; but, like Gandhi, he believed that ideally it should exist and that every right-minded person should work

---

36. Quotations from both short stories are from the facing-page parallel text edition by Goyanka 1990: 228–229, 242–243, and 326–327. It needs to be added that the Hindi/Urdu versions of Premchand’s Urdu/Hindi texts may not always have been rendered wholly by himself, though no other translator or collaborator is ever acknowledged.


toward it. He recognized even in theory that while in the making this mixture of the two languages would look like "an odd couple": "A word from Urdu will be seen intruding into Hindi like a crow among swans, at one place, while at another, a Hindi word in the midst of Urdu will ruin the flavor like salt in a sweet dish." This was a fully realistic recognition of how two supposed versions of the same language could in juxtaposition produce what might sound like utter discord.

Though he was an active supporter of the Hindustani Academy founded in Allahabad in 1927 (and funded generously by the British government), Premchand was not blind to the mutually accommodating but self-defeating arrangement at the Academy’s annual convention in January 1936, by which there were two different presidents: Maulana Abdul Haq for the Urdu section and Pandit Ganganath Jha for the Hindi section. As Premchand, himself a participant at the convention, later commented: “The wall which has been coming up between Urdu and Hindi was thus raised a little higher.” He noted too how when the historian Dr. Tara Chand, secretary of the Academy, made a speech in the new-fangled and unsettled Hindustani, it was met with roars of derision. Elsewhere, skeptics were challenging supporters of Hindustani to produce a single discursive work, as distinct from novels and short stories, in the kind of mixed language they were advocating. “What we wish to ask our separatist brethren,” Premchand candidly if somewhat ingenuously replied, “is that if such a language already existed, where would be the need for an institution such as this Academy?”

That Hindustani remained a sweet, idealistic (and ideological) fiction is borne out by the separatism that ensued, through which, especially after Independence and Partition, the two languages have been even more acutely polarized. Perhaps from the very beginning of the worthy campaign to support it, Hindustani was a utopian dream, the more unrealizable for the fact that the whole project was primarily communal—that is, anticommmunist—in its inspiration and orientation, rather than strictly linguistic. As Gandhi had said (quite unrealistically) in his presidential speech at the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan in 1918: “The distinction made between Hindus and Muslims is unreal. The same unreality is found in the distinction between Hindi

40. Premchand 1962: 316–18. While arguing that the kinds of language used for discursive works and for creative writing are necessarily different, Tara Chand repeatedly employed the iterative phrase ilm aur adab, vidyā aur sāhitya; the first three words mean “knowledge and literature” in Urdu and the last three mean the same in Hindi, thus illustrating a tautological procedure common in Hindustani that may be considered self-defeating. Chand 1971: 7. In January 1931 the Hindustani Academy began to publish a quarterly journal under the common title Hindustani, which however was published separately in Hindi and Urdu—the Academy’s practice thus directly contradicting what it preached. See Chand’s annual report as general secretary for 1931–1932 in Chand 1932: 246.
and Urdu. . . . A harmonious blend of the two will be as beautiful as the confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna and last forever.” Later, Gandhi too, like Premchand, acknowledged that Hindustani was more a cherished dream than a hard fact: “But what is Hindustani? There is no such language apart from Urdu and Hindi. . . . There is no such written blend extant.”

On another, even later occasion, Gandhi developed his earlier metaphor of holy confluence to give it a mythic dimension: “If Hindi and Urdu mingle, there will emerge the Saraswati greater than both the Ganga and the Yamuna.” But as Gandhi knew very well, there is no Sarasvati river visible where the Ganga and the Yamuna meet at Prayag/Allahabad, except to the eye of faith.

The year after Gandhi died, the Constituent Assembly of India hotly debated the question whether “Hindi” or “Hindustani” should be the official language of the nation; and despite the fact that the first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, was a Kashmiri Brahman strongly in favor of Hindustani and often critical of Hindi language and literature, “Hindi” narrowly won the crucial vote in the end. During his long tenure of office (1947–1964), Nehru made sure to make haste slowly in promoting Hindi in its new role, especially as opposition grew from non-Hindi-speaking states. In this intranational postcolonial struggle, owing to the preference both Gandhi and Nehru had constantly expressed for Hindustani, Hindi did not enjoy any carry-over goodwill from the nationalist period. Indeed, the battle it won in the Constituent Assembly may well have lost it the war—at least, ironically, in the wistful reflection of probably the most Sanskritic of all contemporary writers of Hindi, Vidyānivās Miśra: “We made a mistake just after Independence. We did not dislodge English immediately, and . . . we did not go by the late Nehru’s wishes and adopt ‘Hindustani’ in the Devanagari script as the national language. Had we done so, perhaps the language would have begun to be used from day one and would have developed of its own through being used.”

41. Gandhi 1965: 14. Employing as metaphor the confluence of Gāṅgā and Yamunā, rivers holy to Hindus, may seem another example of Gandhi’s use of communalist symbols, except that a mixed Hindi-Urdu style is sometimes called gaṅgojī in Urdu, as for example in the title of a volume of poems by the Urdu poet “Nāzīr” Banārsī (1962).

42. Gandhi 1965: 63.


44. For the view that the opposition to Hindi from Tamil speakers, which was the most fierce among the speakers of non-Hindi languages, was part of an ongoing anti-Brahman, anti-Sanskrit campaign—for “the Tamils rather regard [Hindi] as a sort of Sanskrit, if not a would-be Sanskrit”—see Jesudasan and Jesudasan 1961: 270. For an account of passionate anti-Hindi agitations even before Independence, in which unlikely Tamil-speaking allies made common cause, see Venkatachalapathy, 1995: 705–67.

“Hinglish” Now: The Globalized Hybrid

Fifty years after Independence and Partition the relationship between Hindi, Urdu, and Hindustani is palpably less tense and strained. Nehru’s “Hamlet-like” procrastination in implementing the decision to install Hindi promptly as the official language of the state and the decision of the government to continue with English as the additional official language indefinitely, beyond the designated fifteen-year period of transition (1950–1965), have effectively dispelled all apprehensions of Hindi imperialism. They have also perhaps saved India from the fate, suffered by Pakistan, of further fragmentation when the attempt was made to impose Urdu on Bangla-speaking East Pakistan, which then broke away to become Bangladesh; or that suffered by Sri Lanka, where the introduction of a Sinhala-only language policy has centrally contributed to the rise of secessionist Tamil dissidence. India remains a nation effectively without a national language, but at least—and perhaps precisely for that reason—it remains a nation.

Even between Hindi and Urdu, there has recently developed perhaps an easier and freer relationship. The immensely popular “Hindi” films produced in Bombay, which have over the decades probably done more to make the language intelligible all over India than any official decree could, have always used a fairly predictable basic vocabulary that might as well be called Hindustani. Even in the higher reaches of literature, numerous editions of the major Urdu poets reinscribed in the Devanagari script (with ample footnotes) have been published, along with many popular anthologies of Urdu poetry, though, conspicuously, Hindi poetry has not been accommodated in Urdu to any comparable extent. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Urdu ghazal emerged as a form of popular music that provided the first real alternative to Hindi film music. The soap operas on the numerous television channels broadcast by satellite have a common audience all over India, Pakistan, and beyond, and their content and commonly accessible language often naturally transcend the shadow lines that mark national boundaries.

The fire has gone out of the century-long Hindi-Urdu rivalry partly for such pragmatic reasons as these, and partly because the accomplished historical fact of Partition has effectively settled the matter. But no less important is the fact that both Hindi and Urdu (and for that matter all the other Indian languages) now face a rival of a different dimension altogether: global

46. King 1997: 99, also 109, 115, 123.
47. For giving currency to the notion of national boundaries as shadow lines, see Ghosh 1988.

Firdaus Azim, a Bangladeshi academic, once remarked that a youth in her country nowadays speaks Bangla at home and English at the workplace, but falls in love in Hindi after the patterns of behavior presented through Hindi films and satellite television. Personal conversation.
English is transforming Hindi in public as well as domestic use, while the spectacular rise of Indian writing in English (following the wide success of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, 1981) threatens to overshadow literary production in all the indigenous Indian languages. On television, in talk shows, and in interviews during newscasts, it is not at all uncommon for the interviewer to put a question in Hindi and for the interviewee (including even Hindi film stars) to understand it perfectly but then begin answering in either English or in a mixed language in which the nouns and adjectives are usually English and the verbs Hindi. Code-switching and code-mixing are not an exception but the order of the day, though in these interlocutions it often appears that while Hindi has most of the questions, it is English that has all the answers.

In 1887, at the height of the movement for both Nagari and Khari Boli, one of the most tireless champions of the cause, Ayodhya Prasad Khatri (1857–1905), had divided Khari Boli into five categories, namely, “The HIndi,” which had no “foreign” or “difficult Sanskrit” words; “Pandit’s Hindi,” with “large Sanskrit words”; “Munshi’s Hindi,” which lay “midway between the Pandit’s and [the] Moulti’s Hindi and is styled by European scholars as ‘Hindustani’”; “Moulti’s Hindi,” which comprised “a number of Persian and Arabic words” and which its writers also referred to “by the name of Urdu”; and finally, “Eurasian Hindi,” into which “difficult English words are imported.” In this taxonomy Khatri was not only comprehensive with a vengeance but has also proved prescient, for the fifth kind of Hindi, the “Eurasian,” which however he did not associate with native speakers of the language, seems set to become the new trend in contemporary India. The examples Khatri reprinted of “Eurasian Hindi” included:

Rent Law kā Īham karē, yā Bill of Income Tax kā?
Kyā karē āpnā nahī hai sense right nowadays. . . .
Darkness chāhī huā hai Hind mē cārī taraf
Nām ki bhi hai kahī bāqi na light nowadays.

Shall we bemoan the Rent Law, or the Bill of Income Tax?
Alas we are not in our right sense(s) nowadays. . . .
Darkness is spread all over India
There isn’t left even a ray of light nowadays.

And the succinct line in another piece:

*Jāke London mē badal dālēge nation āpnā.*

We’ll go to London and change our nation.8

At the time Khatri compiled them, these samples must have seemed a bit of a lark, for few Eurasians spoke much Hindi, but in contemporary India similar instances of code-mixing represent a kind of slack and elementary bilingualism, which is spreading rapidly and widely. The poet Vishnu Khare (1940–) hits this new linguistic-cultural nail on the head when he represents a politician saying during a speech to his small-town Hindi-speaking constituency of Chindwara in Madhya Pradesh (M.P.):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Tum bāṭ karte ho tribals villager employment \textit{aur} railway line \textit{kī} } \\
\text{Are mil kar kām karī to Chindwārā \textit{mē} khul saktā hai Disneyland} \\
\text{International airport \textit{aur} khul kar rahēge \textit{ek dīn}} \\
\text{M.P. mē progress \textit{kī} possibilities endless \textit{hai}.}
\end{align*}
\]

You talk merely of tribals, villagers’ employment, and the laying of a new railway track,
But if we work together we can set up another Disneyland in Chindwara
And an international airport, and we shall certainly have them one day.
The possibilities for progress in M.P. are endless.\textsuperscript{49}

Nor is this a parodic exaggeration, for one can hear sentences in “Hinglish” (as this hybrid Hindi is sometimes called now) every passing day on the news bulletins of television channels (especially Zee TV): “Prime Minister \textit{ne kahā hai} \textit{kī} Leader of Opposition \textit{ne jo bhi} charges \textit{lagāye hai} \textit{ve sab absolutely baseless hai}” (The Prime Minister has stated that all the charges leveled by the Leader of Opposition are absolutely baseless). Khatri had envisaged only a tiny and marginal minority of “Eurasians” (racially hybridized people) using this type of Hindi. But a larger and more hegemonic social fraction of the culturally deracinated elite is now using this pidgin. However, to take a more positive view of this seemingly irresistible cultural development, one may think that (as evidenced in Hindi’s dramatic evolution through the twentieth century from Brajbhasha to Khari Boli through Hindustani now to Hinglish), “Hindi \textit{mē progress \textit{kī} possibilities endless \textit{hai}}.”

MODERNIZING POETRY

From Brajbhasha to Khari Boli: A New Patriotism

The transformative shift from Brajbhasha, the form of Hindi in which most poetry had been written from the sixteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, to the newly adopted common form of Khari Boli had already begun in a substantial sense with Bhāratendu Hariścandra. Although most of his poetry is still in Brajbhasha and fully redolent of that tradition, some of

\textsuperscript{49} Khare 1994: 76.
it makes a path-breaking if diffident approach to Khari Boli, and a small part of it (as we saw earlier) is in Urdu, which had always been written in Khari Boli. Thus, one of his best known poetic dicta, on the importance of language, is written in Brajbhasha: *nij bhaśa unnati ahai sab unnati ko mūl* (The progress of one’s own language is the key to progress of all other kinds), while another pronouncement, cited just as often, on colonial economic exploitation is in a couplet in which the first line is (perhaps unwittingly) in Khari Boli and the second in Brajbhasha.

*Āngrez rāj sukh-sāj saje sab bhārī*

*Par dhan bides cali jāt yahai ati kkvārī.*

Under British rule are arrayed all kinds of means of comfort,
But for the mortification that our wealth is drained abroad. 50

The gap between Brajbhasha and Khari Boli, though far from nonnegotiable, is no less wide than that between, say, Chaucerian and twentieth-century English, and for a literary community to will itself to effect such a transition within a matter of decades, rather than let it slowly and surely evolve over centuries, must be rare in the history of languages. This shift is fairly well documented in histories of Hindi literature as far as the publication history of works in Khari Boli is concerned, yet it is seldom asked why it was felt necessary to effect the change in the first place. An obvious factor was the felt oppression of Hindi by Urdu, along with the frequent charge by the champions of Urdu that Brajbhasha and Avadhi and the other dialects that comprised Hindi were vulgar, rural, and unrefined. To adopt as the medium of literary expression a form of language that was the only one ever known to Urdu itself would be to strike at the very roots of this prejudice. It would also be to shed at a stroke the medieval thematic baggage of *bhakti* (devotionalism) that had degenerated over the centuries into *rīti* (the courtly style that had become mechanical convention) and to enter the modern age with a new kind of humanist sensibility. As S. H. Vatsyāyan, “Ājīeya,” the foremost modernist poet in Hindi, was to say, “The rise of Khari Boli marked the introduction and acceptance in [our] literature of this-worldliness [laukiktā].” 51

Surprisingly, the fact that hardly any Hindi poetry had ever been written before in Khari Boli was not considered an impediment. Whatever form of language was good enough for the new and modern genre of prose in Hindi (where, again, Urdu in Khari Boli had distinctly more to show for itself than

50. Hariścandra 1988: 461
51. Vatsyāyan [Ājīeya] 1976: 45, 51. Saccidānand Hirānand Vatsyāyan (“Ājīeya”) published under three different names: Vatsyāyan, for criticism and essays, and two different spellings of his pen name—Ājīeya (the Sanskrit spelling) and Agyey (the Hindi phonetic spelling)—for poetry and fiction.
Hindi) would also, it was hoped, be good enough for Hindi poetry. It truly was a leap in the dark—and perhaps the single most crucial turn in the centuries-long literary history of Hindi. With it, Hindi virtually traded off much of its poetic heritage and its traditional base in the wide countryside (where Brajbhasha and Avadhi continued to be spoken over vast areas) so that it could be thought capable of attaining urban refinement and becoming truly modern. (Oddly, Urdu, with all its Khari Boli tradition, was to find it much harder to develop a modern literary idiom, for larger cultural reasons.)

The first notable writers of Hindi verse in Khari Boli, as well as the editors facilitating this process, were, relatively speaking, modern men with a grounding in English and an exposure to the modernizing projects of the British Raj acquired through service in various departments of the government. The dominant figure of the age, after whom the period spanning the first two decades of the twentieth century is named in some histories of Hindi literature, is Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi (1864–1938). He started his schooling in Urdu in the madarsa in his village in U.P. while he learned Sanskrit at home. At the age of thirteen he moved thirty-six miles away to a small town to begin learning English (and also, though unwillingly, Persian, because, as he tells us, Sanskrit was treated as an “untouchable” at that school and was not taught). He later taught himself Gujarati, Marathi, and Bangla. Unable to finish school because of financial hardship, he acquired the new skill of a telegraphist, worked as a signaler in the railways, and was eventually promoted to chief clerk. He resigned after twenty-two years of service following an altercation with his white superior.

He had meanwhile been writing and translating works from both Sanskrit and English in a wide range of fields. He also published a fastidious book-length review of a school textbook, on the basis of which he was offered in 1903 the editorship of Saraswati, the journal founded by the Nagar Pracharini Sabha in 1900. As editor he acted with magisterial authority to encourage and shape creative and discursive writing in Khari Boli Hindi while settling with a firm hand matters of grammar and usage in this new form. He was the first to publish in his journal nearly all the eminent writers of his age, nurturing and directing their talent even as he fashioned through peremptory editorial emendation the language they wrote. For his role as a maker of modern Hindi he earned a stature greater than that of many of the creative writers who wrote for him, as warmly acknowledged by the writers themselves. He was truly an acarya, a guru whose conduct is worth emulation by his disciples—a title conferred on him early on by literary consensus.

In accordance with his definition of literature as “the name given to the

accumulated treasury of all knowledge,” Dvivedi made Sarasvati not merely a literary journal but a vehicle for disseminating anticolonial discourse on all kinds of social, political, and economic issues, so that he came to play a pioneering role in what is now called hindi navjagrāṇ, Hindi reawakening or renaissance. His advocacy of poetry in Khari Boli can be seen to be part of the same modernizing nationalist endeavor. As he could note with some satisfaction as early as 1914, poetry in the sweet but by now mindless Brajbhasha had steeply declined, while poetry in “the Hindi of daily conversation” had prospered because that conversation contained good and attractive bhāv (ideas/sentiments) and because, as he put it in a doubly emphatic compound of Hindi-Urdu synonyms, the samay-zamāna, the very times, demanded such poetry.

Of the pioneering poets in Khari Boli Hindi, Śrīdhara Pāthāk (1859–1928) is a particularly significant and engaging figure. Though he apparently began learning Sanskrit from his father almost before he learned to read Hindi, he went on to pass the school and university entrance examinations in English, and later also read for two years for a law degree at the Muir Central College, Allahabad. Among the early-modern Hindi writers, he probably had the best English—an advantage reflected in his career of over thirty years as a government employee (in the railways, the Censor Commission, the Public Works Department, and the Irrigation Commission), during which he rose to be an office superintendent, and had the opportunity to travel widely across India. Like Dvivedi and several other Hindi writers, he too eventually resigned his government job following a disagreement with his English superior.

Pāthāk’s English showed up in his literary output in various new ways. He was the first Hindi poet whose work bore the clear impress of his having read the English Romantics and their eighteenth-century precursors. He wrote a large number of poems on nature, treating it not as a quarry for suitable or fanciful similes for human beauty, as Sanskrit and Hindi poets had traditionally done, but often reversing the poetic procedure by personifying nature and ascribing to it human attributes. Nature was seen in his poetry as a source of attraction in its own right, and not as a universal presence but as wearing different aspects in different locations. Pāthāk wrote in particular about the hills and mountains—Shimla, for example, and Kashmir and Dehradoon—regarding such places not as holy or divine (in the tradition of Kalidāsa, who described the Himalayas as devatātmā, possessing a divine soul) but in a new, British or Western light, in which they were attractive for their climate and aesthetics, unlike the hot and dusty plains. (Pāthāk him-

self had more than once spent time in the hills as a convalescent, again a very British healing procedure new to India.) Indeed, some of his early poems were written in English, including one titled “The Cloudy Himalayas.”

Paṭhak’s nature poetry is thus in one sense distinctly Westernized; in another respect, however, it remains patriotically Indian. Several of his poems pointedly assert that it is nature in India, and not nature as such, that is so beautiful, and some participate in a pan-Indian nationalist poetic discourse beginning to develop in many languages around this time: the geographical shape of India is personified as Bhāratmātā, Mother India, with the Kashmir Himalayas in the north being the resplendent crown on the head of the human figure and Kerala in the south being the feet, which are washed by the three seas that meet at Kanyakumari. Paṭhak published a volume of poems titled Bhāratgīt (Songs of India), comprising hymns and anthems composed with nationalist lyrical intensity. Yet we also find in him (from our post-colonial viewpoint) the ambivalence, if not contradiction, characteristic of nearly all contemporaries and some successors of Bhāratendu Hariścandra, for Paṭhak also translated “Rule Britannia” into Hindi and composed eulogies for Queen Victoria and King George V.

Another marker of the increasing permeation of Hindi by English literature and sensibility is Paṭhak’s important role as a translator. Besides rendering into Hindi Thomas Gray’s “The Shepherd and the Philosopher” and adapting Keats’s “Isabella, or the Pot of Basil,” Paṭhak translated three long works by his favorite English poet, Oliver Goldsmith, who along with Gray was a modest forerunner of the English Romantics much as Paṭhak himself was a forerunner of the Hindi Romantic (Chāyāvād) poets. The romantic yet restrained love story of Edwin and Angelina titled “The Hermit” was translated by Paṭhak as “Ekāntvāśi Yogi” (1886), “The Deserted Village” as “Ūjaṛ Grām” (1886), and “The Traveller” as “Śrānt Pathik” (1902). The Hindi titles themselves speak of a deep cross-cultural affinity and adaptation, as the texts represent a congenial meeting of sensibilities. Like Paṭhak’s own poetry, some of his translations are in Khari Boli and some still in Braj bhasha, in accordance with the opposing pulls of his transitional times. In the preface to the third edition of “Ūjaṛ Grām” Paṭhak offers a poignant image to justify his choice to translate this work into Braj bhasha: “The young maiden Khari Boli was rapidly appropriating the place of the old lady Braj, and in fact had already done so to a large extent. . . . So it seemed only natural that the aged language should approximate to the condition of the deserted village.”

Far less ambivalent than Paṭhak in his commitment to both Khari Boli

55. Raghuvās 1991: 44.
and to patriotism was his younger contemporary, Maithili Śarān Gupt (1886–1964), who proved to be the foremost Hindi poet of the Dvivedi era. He was rather more classical than Romantic in temperament, was a regular contributor to Sarasvati, and came as close to fulfilling all of Dvivedi’s dreams for the progress of modern Hindi as any writer did. Unlike Pāthak, he was and remained a thoroughly homespun man and perhaps had less command of English than most Hindi poets of the twentieth century. His first major work, which instantly made him famous, was Bhārat Bhāratī (The voice of India, 1912), a rousing nationalist survey of the state of the nation and particularly the hindu jāti (Hindu community). His other great work, the epic Sāket (Sāket being a synonym for Ayodhya, 1931), is a modern reworking of the story of Lord Rāma, with innovative departures. These include making Rāma a little more earthly than divine and according a sympathetic representation to some unregarded or maligned female characters, such as Urmilā, Lakṣmāna’s left-behind wife, who is made the protagonist and the central consciousness of the poem, and Rāma’s villainous stepmother, Kaikeyī. After Gupt had written, the question of the suitability or desirability of modern Khari Boli Hindi as the medium for poetry was once and for all settled. In his prolific poetic career, Gupt, who had a modest nationalist, Gandhian profile, kept pace with the times, and in the period immediately following Independence came to represent the Hindi community like no other writer; he was popularly acclaimed as the rāstrakavi (national poet) and was the first writer to be nominated to the Rājya Sabhā, the Upper House of the Indian Parliament.

_Bhārat Bhāratī_, the more urgently topical of Gupt’s two masterpieces, became the song of an age—with numerous admirers able to recite from memory large portions of it for decades afterwards—because it gave to inchoate patriotism a focus and a form, in a fluent and easy rhetorical style. This long poem contains 259 quatrains recalling and extolling the glorious past of India, 156 lamenting its sunken and wretched present state, and 140 on its bhavisyat, or future, which are not so much cosily utopian as they are admonitory and hortatory. The tone is set by the famous first half of quatrain 14:

_**ham kaun the kyā ho gaye hain kyā hōge abhi_  
_āo vicārē āj milkar ye samasyāh sabhī_  

What we once were, what we have now become, and what we may go on to be: Come, let us together consider all these issues.58

57. Aptly, Gupt (in a manuscript tribute printed in facsimile on the opening page) led the homage to Dvivedi in the diamond jubilee issue of _Sarasvati_ in 1961: “If Bhāratendu gave a new birth to Hindi, it was Dvivedi-ji who brought it up.” Gupt 1961: 1.

The main inspiration behind this searching poetic introspection provides a vital clue to the formation of what is now (only too?) readily identified as Hindu (rather than Indian) nationalism. It was an earlier work in Urdu, Altaf Husain Hali’s *Musaddas* (originally titled *Madd-o- fazr-e-Islam* [The ebb and flow of Islam]), which when published in 1879 ran “like wildfire among the Muslims” because it lamented the contemporary plight of Islam.\(^5^9\) Gupt now sought not to counter but indeed to emulate it in his own work, in a poetic endeavour that is not so much reactionary or reactive as it is responsive and complementary. Moreover, it was not Gupt’s own idea to do a Hali in Hindi; the suggestion that he do so was made by Raja Rampal Singh, K.C.I. (Knight Commander of India), a loyal subject of the British.

In accordance with the political mindset of the times, the project that Gupt advocated for the uplift of Hindus and Indians (for the terms were used by him interchangeably, as often in Hindi) was not anti-British but instead extolled the British for having established a liberal regime in India by the grace of the god Nārāyan and for ensuring peace and permitting liberty of religion to the Hindus (with the implication that the earlier Muslim rulers had not always done so).\(^6^0\) But, more surprisingly, Gupt’s very Hindu poem had no anti-Muslim sentiments to express either. It was due to internecine rivalry between various Hindu kings, he said, that “we” had “invited” the Muslims to come and rule over us. Even the most fanatical/pious of the Mughal emperors, Aurangzeb, was not to be blamed for his discriminatory and repressive measures against the Hindus, for

> Our own karma was to blame, and the vicissitudes of time
> By which it is now bright day and now it is dark night.

And Akbar’s liberality, of course, was hardly matched among the rulers of any race.\(^6^1\) Bhārat Bhārati thus provides a useful insight for historicizing the chicken-and-egg debate on the interrelationship between the reviverist Muslim discourse and the comparable Hindu nationalist discourse.

The catholicity and liberality of a poet such as Maithili Šaṅkṛi Gupt are the more remarkable for the fact that personally he was perhaps as devout a Hindu as Tulsīdās had been three and a half centuries before him. While his *Sūhet* now ranks next only to Tulsī’s supreme classic, the *Rāmacaritmānas*, among all poetic versions in Hindi of the story of Rāma, Gupt, with characteristic modesty, declared:

> Rām, your name itself is [a guarantee of] poetry
> One only has to write about you to become a poet.

\(^6^1\) Gupt [1912] 1987 : 81, 83.
It may not be too far-fetched to say that Gupt’s blend of bhakti and patriotism achieved a popular effect similar in nature, though of course not in scale, to that achieved by Tulsidas in his own beleaguered times.

**Chhayavād: Something New and Strange**

While Maithili Śaran Gupt unquestioningly and even proudly belonged to the mainstream of Hindi poetry and sensibility, within the same decade in which *Bharat Bhārati* was published there arose a poetic movement that initially no one seemed to know how to account for or where to place. This was Chhayavād, the allegedly romantic-mystical-ethereal-escapist school of poetry, which became controversial as soon as it was born and is critically alive even today. The movement as such lasted barely two decades, broadly from 1917 to 1936 (or, as variously dated, from 1920 to 1942); it was denounced and dismissed by many contemporary critics as so new as to be bizarre, and so strange as to be reprehensibly foreign. Now, after several more poetic movements have come and gone, opinion seems to be consolidating that Chhayavād was, on the contrary, the most vital turning point as well as the greatest achievement of modern Hindi poetry, and all that followed through the twentieth century would hardly have been conceivable without it.\(^{62}\)

Chhayavād (from चह्याओ; lit. shadow, shade, comparative darkness, reflection; also, an apparition or specter) was a term given currency by the detractors of the movement rather than its practitioners or champions, and makes no more sense etymologically than does English “metaphysical” poetry. However, it has stuck, unlike two other terms alternatively used in the contemporaneous debate: rahasyavād, which means mysticism; and svacchandatavād, from svacchand, which generally means “self-willed, unrestrained” or “following one’s own will,” but which is also the standard Hindi translation of the English “Romantic.”\(^{63}\) Indeed, one of the earliest critical responses to this new poetry was to attempt to detect or impute links between it and British Romantic poetry, either directly or filtered through the latter’s existing influence on Bangla poetry and especially on Rabindranath Tagore, who having sensationaly won the Nobel Prize in 1913, was very much in the minds of both rising poets and comparative critics in all the Indian languages.

The intention in either case was to denounce Chhayavād poetry as derivative and inferior while also rejecting it as alien to the very nature and tradi-

---

tion of Hindi. Mahâvîr Prasâd Dwivedi got in an obvious gibe early on when, pleading disingenuously his complete bafflement by the movement and its name, he surmised that it probably meant the shadow cast by the ideas and emotions of one poem upon another. He may have had reason to be put out, for Châyâvâd poetry, though written in Khari Boli as he desired, was among other things so sonorously lyrical as to make much of the poetry that he himself had preferred and promoted seem distinctly prosaic and pedestrian. Râmacandra Šûkla reacted to Châyâvâd in his canon-forming History with a gut hostility tempered by patient, discriminating engagement. He gave one of the poets of the movement more space than he had given any writer except Tulsîdas, but still drew two red herrings across the path of its critical appreciation. One was that the much-speculated-upon “châyâ,” or shadow, was presumably the “phantasmata” of the Christian saints; the other, that the name “Châyâvâd” came directly from a movement of poetry in Bangla also so named. Both suggestions are quite baseless, though it would be doing Šûkla a patent injustice to call them canards. Châyâvâd in fact has proved to be the acid test of the range of sensibility and resourcefulness of all the major Hindi critics since Dwivedi and Šûkla, most of whom have felt drawn into writing a book on the subject. To put it another way, the very standards of Hindi criticism have risen as the debate on Châyâvâd has evolved, just as the stem of a lotus flower does when the level of water in the pond rises (in a very Châyâvâdi image suggested by probably the foremost of all these critics, Namvar Singh).

So, what was Châyâvâd, and how did it alter the paradigm of both poetic and critical discourse in Hindi? Recognized as representing the widely varying characteristics of the movement are about a dozen poets, of whom three or four are regarded as its forerunners: Śrîdhar Pâthak, Mukutdhar Pandey (1895–1984), Râmnârâ Tripâthi (1889–1963), and Mâkhânlâl Caturvedi (1889–1968). (In a vital variation on the usual characterization of these poets as precursors of Châyâvâd, Šûkla said that they represented a svabhâvik svacchandata, a natural or organic Romanticism, while the greater poets who came later were Romantics shaped by some alien influence.) The great trinity of Châyâvâdi poets is unanimously acknowledged to be Jâyâsântkar Prasâd (1889–1937); Suryâkânt Tripâthi “Nîrâlâ” (1899–1961); and Sumitrândan Pant (1900–1977). Another name readily added now—only partly out of gendered political correctness—is that of Mahâdevi Verma (1907–1987),
the only major Hindi woman poet since the bhakti poet Mīrābāī (?1498–1562), with whom she is indeed often compared for thematic similarities.

Distinctly the oldest poet among the four, who is also seen as having been a little aloof from the others poetically, was Prasād. He began his poetic career by publishing two volumes, in each of which some of the poems were in Brajbhasha and some in Khari Boli; when these were revised by him and reprinted, one volume contained only Brajbhasha poems and the other only Khari Boli. No less symptomatic of the transitional times was that a long poem he had first published in Brajbhasha was rendered by himself into Khari Boli eight years later under the same title, Prempathik (Traveler on the path of love; 1909 and 1917, respectively).

Prasād’s magnum opus and last work is an epic, the only poem on that scale in all of Chāyāvād poetry, Kāmīyānī (Daughter of Kāma [another name of the heroine, Śraddhā], 1935); it stands as the single most impressive achievement of the whole movement. Prasād narrates a Hindu genesis myth, which he maintains in his prose preface is “historical,” though he treats it by and large allegorically. The hero, Manu, represents manan, both thought and emotion; his companion and progenitive mate, Śraddhā, signifies in both name and act feminine devotion or reverence; while another female character, Iṛā, logical intellect, completes an initially uneasy ménage à trois, which however is harmoniously reconciled at the end with a journey to the holiest of all mountains, Kailāś. The depiction of love and other emotions has an unprecedented psychological subtlety even when the characterization remains allegorical: Iṛā, for example, appears to us with her hair disheveled, like a logical tangle, while on her breast are heaped together in two mounds all knowledge and all the arts. The style (in conformity with the main source of the story, the Rgveda) is high Sanskritic and suggestive of the sublime, and any contemporary relevance, as highlighted by the radical poet and critic Gajānan Mādhav Muktibodh and others, seems to lie in the epic’s attempt at a sabhyat samikṣā, a critique of civilization, especially of a civilization such as the one ruled by Iṛā, which is overly intellectual, overly materialistic, and overly industrialized (improbable as this may sound in a genesis myth; it is perhaps a veiled representation of the modern West).

Sumitranandan Pant also concluded his long and prolific career with a would-be epic—a poem about six times the length of Prasād’s work—Lokāyatan (Abode of the people, 1964), but that was long after Chāyāvād was dead and gone and he himself had dried up to become a didactic philosophical versifier. He had begun very differently from Prasād, as a stunningly fresh and devoted poet of nature—an inclination apparently engendered by his birth

and upbringing in an enchanting village in the U.P. Himalayas, Kausani. Unlike Prasad, whose schooling had come to an end after the sixth standard, Pant went on to attend high school in Benares and then to read for a degree at the University of Allahabad, which he left in 1921 to join Gandhi’s Noncooperation movement. He was the first Chayavad poet to make an impact, and consequently became the butt of much critical ridicule. Polemically joining battle in a thirty-seven-page introduction to his first major volume of poems, Pallav (New leaf, 1926), he trenchantly counterattacked the moribund tradition of Brajbhasha poetry and rousingly asserted the triumph of Khari Boli:

The era of the battle for survival between Brajbhasha and Khari Boli is already over. . . . From the womb of that delicate mother has been born this vigorous daughter, who shines in resplendent beauty everywhere and whose tongue is as lightning. Hindi has stopped lisping now. . . .

The Krishna that is India has now laid down his flute and picked up the Pana-canjanya [the conch shell he blew during the Mahabharata war]; the sleeping voice of a sleeping nation has come awake, and Khari Boli is the conch-trumpet of that awakening. Braj had the sweetness of slumber but this has the vibrancy of awakening; that had the moonlight of dreamy inaction but this has the vocal and action-urgent light of day.

Surveying the whole tradition of earlier Hindi poetry in both Brajbhasha and Avadhi and giving credit to the few to whom it could hardly be denied—Stir, Tulsiji, Kabir, and Miraji—he characterized the later Brajbhasha poets as wallowing in grotesque and vicious luxury. Speaking of the requirements of changed times, Pant declared:

We need not just a language but a language for the nation; not a language of books but the language of human beings, in which we laugh and cry, run and play, embrace and quarrel, breathe and live; a language that would be the ideal medium for the new face and mental makeup of the country. . . . It is a highly ridiculous and shameful fallacy that we should think in one language and express ourselves in another, that the language of our thought should not be the language on our tongue, that the corpus of our prose should be different from the corpus of our poetry, . . . that the heart of our literature, the soul of our country, should be divided into two by raising in the middle an artificial wall!70

Pant’s high rhetoric here represents the imperative voice of Hindi modernity and Indian nationalism in a way that his poetry fully did not—at least not yet. He was at this stage above all else a poet of nature for nature’s sake, famously preferring it over human attractions:

Abandoning soft arboreal shade,
Breaking off my magic bond with nature,

How can I, maid, enmesh my gaze, in the coils of your tresses
Forgetting this other world of mine?

Nor, as this translation seeks to suggest, was his poetic diction anywhere near everyday speech; indeed, nearly all Chāyāvād poetry showed a predilection for a distinctly higher, Sanskritic register than the poetry that preceded or followed it, which may have been one of the reasons for its alluring musicality.

So complete and sufficient was Pant’s devotion to nature that he even called it his “Goddess, Mother, Companion, Soul!” However, he was at the same time strongly moved by not merely the spirit of the times but indeed the call of the times, yugdharma; he certainly has more volumes of poems whose titles begin with yug (the age) than any other Hindi poet. During the 1930s, he predictably enough added Marx to Gandhi as a new mentor; inspired by both, he published a volume of poems, Grāmyā (Of the village, 1940), devoted to describing not only village scenes but the poor, low-caste, and untouchable villagers themselves, who may be a little prettified but are recognizable subalterns nonetheless. A particularly popular poem in this volume begins bhāratmātā grāmvāsinī, “Mother India is a villager”—echoing directly Gandhi’s famous assertion that India lives in her villages—and it goes on to describe her in hues of dusty destitution and despondence.

Suryakant Tripathi “Nirala” (the pen name means rare, unique; also, a solitary spirit, following the etymology from nirālay, meaning without a fixed abode) today stands fairly clearly by himself as the greatest of the Chāyāvād poets. He was the most rebellious, unconventional, penurious, and yet carefree of the three poets—unlike Prasad, who came from a long-established business family and for all his Romanticism was marked by a classical temper and elegance; or Pant, who also came from an affluent, well-educated family, and who cultivated a refined, delicate, mild-mannered poetic persona. Though by the mid-1910s Nirala had already published a few of his best-known poems, it was through his affiliation with the literary circle that gathered in Calcutta in the mid-1920s around Seth Māhadev Prasad, who founded—and funded—the journal Matvālā (The intoxicated; the wayward or free spirit), that he effectively found his poetic voice. In turn, he now fashioned a new persona to go with the journal by adopting the pen name Nirala, which was nearly synonymous with the title of the journal besides rhyming with it, and became its star contributor.

71. Pant [1926] 1967: 89. The tatsama Hindi text runs: choy drumō ki mydu chāyā / tor prakṛti se bhi māyā / bāle! tere bāle-jīl mē haise uljhā dū locan / bhal abhi se is jag ko!

72. For all information relating to Nirala, I have followed the three-volume critical biography by Ram Vilas Sarmā (1969) [1994], which ranks as one of the two best literary biographies in Hindi, the other being Amrit Rai’s biography of Premchand, Qulam ka Sipahi.
Nirala, whose ancestral home was in a village in central U.P., was born and brought up in Bengal in the small princely state of Mahishadal and grew up speaking Bangla as well as Hindi. Nirala’s later relationship with Bangla was complex and on occasion even hostile, but there is no denying that he brought to his Hindi poetry a new pattern of sound and syntax that has a discernible Bangla trace. He was fairly competent in English and read its literature with discrimination and relish, but he also bristled against the language from time to time for reasons that may aptly be called postcolonial; in his last, disturbed years he would often launch into impassioned monologues addressed to Jawaharlal Nehru, the highly Anglicized prime minister of the country.

Of all the modern Hindi poets, Nirala has the widest range of both theme and style, and the greatest intensity as well as formal virtuosity. He was the first to write in free verse in Hindi (beginning in 1916), and he experimented with adapting Urdu meters to Hindi, besides devising some new ones of his own. He wrote poems of acute social consciousness, such as the one describing the heart-rending sight of an emaciated beggar whose stomach and back have become as one, or the one about a female stone breaker hammering away at high noon in hot summer by a shadeless roadside in Allahabad. His trenchant political satires include Kukurmuttā (1942), a long Marxist-dialectic exchange in free verse between the elitist rose and the bottom-of-the-heap mushroom (called in Hindi kukurmuttā, or dog piss, and, unsurprisingly, regarded as inedible). Some of his lyrics stage a seemingly improvised play with sheer sound rather in the manner of a classical singer in the Hindustani style, while others, especially from his last period, build on devout phraseology hallowed for centuries in bhakti poetry.

The pillars of Nirala’s fame, however, are three of his longer poems, published at about the same time but each in a different mode. “Sārojāmṛtā” (In memory of Saroj, 1938) is an elegy for his daughter, who died shortly after marriage at the age of eighteen. The informal conversational style that Nirala chose to write in prose has been called a “thought for the moment.” The third is “Bhratāḥ” (Brother, 1939), a long meditation on the common themes of birth, death, and life; all three are powerful and different in style.

He is thus one of a galaxy of twentieth-century writers who came to Hindi from another language or from a bilingual upbringing: Bālmukund Gupt and Premchand (both from Urdu), Ajīeya (from Panjabi and English), Amṛṭāl Nagar (from Gujarati), Yaśpāl and Ashq (both from Panjabi/Urdu), Muktibodh (from Marathi, the language in which his brother chose to write), Kṛṣṇa Sobti (from Panjabi), and several other, less eminent writers. Such instances of interlingual transition in the inveterately multilingual Indian situation perhaps also place in perspective the intralingual changeover from Brajbhasha to Khari Boli, which, though momentous enough, was nevertheless a smaller and smoother domestic matter.

“As men gain release so does poetry. Release for men is to get rid of the shackles of karma, and release for poetry is to get rid of the rule of metre. . . . Truly free verse is that which stands on the ground of metre and is yet free” (Nirala [1929] 1966: 12, 19). Elsewhere in the “Bhratāḥ” (preface) to his early volume of poems, Parimal, Nirala acclaims the rise of Khari Boli and argues strongly against Bengali opposition to Hindi’s claims to be the rastrabhashā (9, 9–12).
rālā adopts for it not only guarantees authenticity of emotion but also allows it to develop into an autobiographical poem with a multilayered richness, with humor and irony punctuating penitential regret at his bereavement. “Tulsī Dās” (1938), written in a complex stanza of six lines rhyming aabccbb with the b lines longer, is a well-wrought tribute from the poet to his greatest predecessor, who was also his all-time favorite poet. He explores the springs of Tulsidās’s magnificent creativity in both the personal and the cultural context, subtly suggesting that the latter has a parallel in the colonial situation in Nirālā’s own times. And in “Rām ki Śaktipūjā” (Rāma’s worship of Śakti, 1938), Nirālā joins the long tradition of rewriters of the Rāmāyaṇa, his point of departure being not Vālmiki or Tulsī but an episode from the Bangla Rāmāyaṇa by Kṛṣṭibās. In the incident Nirālā chooses to recreate, Rāma is deep in battle with the evil Rāvana, but the demon, under Śiva’s protection, is far from ready to succumb to the good that Rāma represents. So Rāma must now propitiate a superior divinity, the female Śakti (cosmic power), by performing a sacrifice through the night. At the culmination of the worship he is ready to offer his own lotus-like eyes in the absence of actual lotus flowers until the goddess intervenes to bless him. The epic sublimity of the poem and its vigor as a poem engaged thematically with power (śakti-kavita) are lit up, as Rām Svarūp Caturvedi has pointed out, through contrast with two tender and intimate moments of psychological depth, in the first of which Rāma recalls his first meeting with Sītā, over whom the battle is being fought, and in the second, how his mother used fondly to compare his eyes to lotus flowers.75 Stylistically, the first eighteen lines are perhaps the loftiest rhymes yet attempted in Hindi, seeking to convey through sound as much as sense the tumult and the exhaustion of another inconclusive day of battle; anyone who can read them aloud with feeling and without faltering over the consecutive Sanskritic samastapadas, or long compounds—and many can do so from reverent memory—has proved his credentials as a true rasika, a worthy connoisseur of the poetic tradition of Hindi.

The fourth and last of the four major Chāyāvād poets, Mahādevi Verma, is well served in English by Karine Schomer’s book-length study, which attends with assiduous sympathy to each aspect of her poetic and personal achievement, just as David Rubin’s The Return of Sarasvati offers a considered (if overly defensive) introduction to Chāyāvād, together with a useful body of translations of each of the four major poets of the movement.76 The youngest of the four, Mahādevi displayed in her five slim volumes, published in breathless succession over twelve years (1930–1942), perhaps the most

accomplished formal control and verbal felicity among them all, and a remarkable thematic and stylistic integrity. She expressed in a majority of her poems a transcendental mystical yearning, which is by definition insatiable and whose keynote is intense ṛednā, painful and anguished suffering, which for her is paradoxically welcome and sweet. Negatively viewed, such delimited achievement has led to the charge that Māhadevi throughout wrote the same poem in the same manner. As if in self-knowing response, she abruptly stopped writing poetry in 1942, to take and strictly observe some Gandhian nationalist vows—always to wear ḫāḍī, for example; and to speak always in Hindi with never a word in colonial English, with the result that her spoken Hindi soon evolved into a model of felicity. In his introduction to Māhadevi’s first volume of poems, a comparatively literal poet of the Dvivedi generation, Ayodhyā Singh Upādhyāy, “Harīaudh,” had slipped in the recommendation that the voice of Mother India should also be heard in her poetry. Even if she did not seem able to heed the advice during her poetic career, Māhadevi devoted the rest of her long and productive life to becoming a worthy instrument of that nationalism. Having already separated from an incompatible husband, she served for long years as a teacher in a nationalist women’s school (later college), the Prayāg Mahila Vidyāpīṭh, and wrote prose works that show a sensitivity unprecedented in Hindi to poor and lowly women and what may retrospectively be called subaltern characters, thus inaugurating a nationalist-feminist discourse in Hindi some decades before the current wave of literary and activist feminism began to sweep the West.77

**The Importance of Chāyāvād: A Second Golden Age?**

Of the post-Chāyāvād Hindi poets, who early weaned themselves away from Chāyāvād’s pervasive and beguiling influence and then struck out along their own very different poetic directions, the two most prominent are Saccindānand Hirānand Vatsyāyan “Ajñeya” (1911–1987) and Gajānan Mādhav Muktibodh (1917–1964). They are now seen as polar opposites, which is a huge historical irony given that the two had initially appeared together as kindred spirits

77. How Māhadevi Verma’s “explicit and vigorous feminist concerns” as embodied in her poetry and her “position as a major feminist philosopher of our times” have remained “sadly unexplored” is noted in a recent anthology of women’s writing in India—except that the piece by which she is represented in it is a prose character sketch, which hardly strengthens her claims in either respect. This anthology also represents Subhadrā Kumārī Cauhān (1904–1948), a contemporary and friend of Verma’s, by a similar minor prose piece and not by her best-known poem, which is indeed the best-known modern Hindi poem by any woman, possibly because in it Cauhān describes the Rani of Jhansi, one of the bravest fighters in the “Mutiny” of 1857, as having “fought like a man.” Tharu and Lalita 1993: 459–66, 419–24.
in a pathbreaking anthology of post-Chāyāvād poetry, Tār Saptak (The seven [musical] notes, 1943), a selection of the work of seven rising young poets picked and introduced by Ajñeya. The common thread, as Ajñeya saw it, was an interest on the part of all the poets in modernist experimentation, while five of the seven in their introductory autobiographical statements at the same time claimed to be “Marxist” or “Communist.” This unlikely (and possibly at that stage somewhat innocent) alliance could not last long, and in recent decades it has become the custom in Hindi literary criticism to praise Ajñeya only while routinely denouncing Muktibodh—or vice versa—with only one or two younger successors, such as Sarveshvar Dayal Saxena (1927–1983) and Raghuvir Sahāy (1929–1991), able to pass muster on both sides of the critical divide. In retrospect, this post-Independence ideological polarization and indeed dissociation of critical sensibility (to adapt T. S. Eliot’s controversial but suggestive phrase from another context), may also be one of the reasons why the earlier achievement of Chāyāvād, and in particular of its defining genius, Nirāla, continues to be almost unanimously acclaimed as the last great turn in Hindi poetry, with both the modernist and the Marxist critics seeming equally keen to appropriate it as the great source of their respective traditions.

Such valorization of Chāyāvād of course marks a major revaluation, even a reversal, from the times of Chāyāvād’s inauguration, when it was condemned as the outcome of some alien influence, or as romantic escapism in the midst of the mounting nationalist struggle for independence. But the sweeping cultural critique of the West allegorically offered by Prasād in contrast with his epic invocation of originary Indian values; Pant’s long journey from a wide-eyed, solitary fascination with nature to a depiction of the acutely deprived masses inhabiting village India; the rousing refiguring of the favorite Hindu god, Lord Rāma, as also of his chief bard, the saint-poet Tulsīdās, by Nirāla; Mahadevi’s resolute turning away from the making of mystical-erotic transcendent verses to a life of highly purposeful social commitment—all these contributed to the realization that however sugar-coated its intensely lyrical mode might occasionally be, Chāyāvād poetry remained a salutary, vitalizing pill for those embattled times. The early charge that it derived from British Romantic influence was soon blunted by the growing perception that its major themes were all deeply indigenous. In any case, the influence of the British Romantics in Hindi was nothing compared with the headlong fervor it had excited earlier in Bangla or was exciting contemporaneously in Kannada. The latter, having remained landlocked in its (Brajbhasha-like?) poetic conventions, was revolutionized in 1921 by a volume called English Gitagalu, a translation of selections from Palgrave’s Golden Treasury. 78 Largely because

---

78. “If there ever was an instance of a single book of poems, translated from English into an Indian language, changing the course of development of that language,” it was this work.
Hindi had already initiated on its own terms the process of formally modernizing itself without forsaking its thematic home turf, it was in little danger of being "crushed by English poetry"—the fear expressed for Marathi by Viṣṇu Kṛṣṇa Ciplunkar (1850–1882), a contemporary of Bhāratendu Hariścandra, in the more vulnerable late nineteenth century.79

In terms of internal linguistic and stylistic evolution, too, Chāyāvād marked a new point of departure. By adopting high Sanskrit diction confidently and comprehensively, this new poetry seemed to enunciate and affirm a natural and inherent tendency of linguistic development that Khari Boli Hindi would follow. The specter of Urdu was now well and truly laid and the chimerical pursuit of Hindustani quite abandoned, at least in literature if not yet in politics. If many Hindi poets returned to the more common and relatively Urdu-enriched diction, as they notably did beginning in the 1960s, it was of their own free-ranging stylistic will and not under any political persuasion, and they did so while retaining, when the theme or occasion demanded, the high-Sanskritic option.

Altogether, nothing more reassuring or gratifying could have happened to Khari Boli Hindi so soon after its adoption as the new poetic medium than Chāyāvād. Through attaining a memorable musical felicity quite comparable with Brajbhasha at its sweetest, through negotiating a rather more indirect and therefore perhaps more artistically effective mode of engaging with topical political concerns than Pāthak or Gupt, for example, had been able to devise, and through absorbing Western Romantic-individualist influence while incorporating it into a newer Gandhian-Marxist ethic, Chāyāvād not only raised a number of new stylistic and thematic possibilities but also went on by and large to fulfill them, all within a couple of exceptionally productive decades. The repeated claim that Chāyāvād constitutes a second golden age of Hindi poetry, after the bhakti movement some four or five centuries earlier (also, as it happened, at the beginning of a linguistic shift, in the midst of a political upheaval, and featuring three or four poets of outstanding gifts and caliber), may be palpably exaggerated, but it is not entirely unfounded.

THE NOVEL AND THE NATION

Resisting a Genre: Nāvil, Upānyās, Kādambarī

Of all the genres of Indian literature, the novel had perhaps the most abrupt start. It is often asserted that the novel did not exist in India until exposure

---

through British education to the Western and especially English model of the genre led to emulative efforts in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In recent decades, often in a gesture of postcolonial counter-assertion, this statement has been modified to say that though the novel may not have existed in precolonial India, prose narrative certainly did exist in a variety of forms, even in Sanskrit. An exploration of the circumstances in which the novel in India arose thus offers an instructive double perspective: on the formation of Indian nationalism, with which this new literary form is coeval, and more broadly, on the interaction between the colonial master-literature and an Indian literature such as Hindi, which was seen as suffering from a deficiency that the West supplied. The genre of the novel, like the railways or cricket, seems to have been a modernizing “gift” of the colonizers’ civilization, but as it did not run along fixed tracks nor was obliged to adhere to any officially codified rules of the game, it mutated in ways that show both clear traces of the impress of the West as well as necessarily blurred signs of its erasure. The growth of the novel in India provides as richly complex a literary instance as one can expect to find anywhere of reception as resistance.

Both the lack of the novel and the presence of narrative in India are emblematically reflected in the very naming of the new object when it did come into existence. In many Indian languages it was called upanyās, through appropriating for this specific need a Sanskrit term that generally meant “putting down” in a considered “juxtaposition” of its relative parts any well-organized literary composition; in other languages, such as Urdu and Panjabi, it came to be called directly nāval or nāvīl; and in yet others, like Marathi, in an act of cultural recall and accommodation, the new genre was given the name kādambari, after the highly sophisticated Sanskrit novel or narrative of that name by Bāna Bhaṭṭa (seventh century), rather as if all subsequent Spanish novels had been called “quixotes” or all English novels “clarissas.” Thus, although the novel may have been a new literary form in India it was, as a form of complex prose narrative, quite old and traditional, in fact, a purāṇa.

This double if ruptured genealogy of fiction in India makes the search for

---


81. For Gujarati, see Yashaschandra, chapter 9, this volume.

82. A useful synoptic view of the earlier Indian narrative tradition and the transition to the novel is found in Mukherjee 1985: 3–18.
the “first” novel not a matter merely of archival retrieval and chronological priority but rather one of critical arbitration. There are perhaps half a dozen different prose narratives in Hindi, all of which approximate in some but not all respects to the generic expectations of a Western novel. The more interesting task here is not to decide which one of these scores the most points on a scale of conformity, but to account for the various significant ways in which these narratives both approach and depart from the Western literary model.

In speaking of the novel in India, we might also ask whether an imported literary form comes complete with the social and economic determinants of the historical moment of its formation in the originary culture. If so, what is the role of the very different set of historical circumstances attendant upon the induction of this form in the recipient literary culture? According to a widely respected older theory, the novel arose in England with the rise of the middle classes consequent upon the Industrial Revolution. According to some newer and even more influential theoretical notions, the novel is almost coextensive with the nation that it narrates (almost into existence), while the nation itself is an imagined community invented in Europe almost out of a felt necessity caused by factors such as the decay of religion, standardization of a national language, and the advent of print capitalism. In another hotly contested formulation, Third World novels are (to be) read as “national allegories”—presumably by a non–Third World reader.

If there is any common factor here, it is that all these formulations have understandably been devised without reference to the specificities of the literary and historical situation of the novel in India. The middle class in India is, in common opinion, beginning to rise only now, a century after the novel did. The novel in most Indian languages (with the partial exception of Hindi, the purported national language) sought to narrate not the nation but its own particular linguistically constituted (or imagined) regional community. And the growth of the novel was clearly informed by Indian readers (including potential or actual writers of novels) who read a vast number of English, French, or Russian novels as if those too were allegorical representations of their respective nations and the major source from which Indian readers formed their notions of these countries and their culture. In an important sense, then, to speak of the “novel” as written in Indian languages not only in its early stages but perhaps even now is to subscribe to the many assumptions about the very form and the role of the genre in the West that do not apply to its development in India.

83. See, respectively, Watt 1957; Bhabha 1994; Anderson 1983; Jameson 1986; and Ahmad 1992.
In his canon-forming history of Hindi literature, Rāmcandra Śukla identified the first Hindi novel in terms that repay our attention: “The first original novel of the English kind to be published in Hindi was indeed Parīkṣāguru [Trial as teacher, 1882] by Lalā Śrīnivās Dās.”84 The work is thus distinguished not only from earlier texts that were in effect translations or adaptations of Western novels and thus not “original,” but also from any other original novels that might not have been of the English/Western kind, or at least not sufficiently so. Keenly aware of various cross-generic mutations, Śukla is not begging any questions here by adopting the strategy of offering a narrow definition that draws attention to the exclusivity of its own parameters. If he is ruling out some earlier narratives that illustrate the diversity of the initial Hindi variations on the form of the Western novel, he is also implying that not all narratives are or need be novels “of the English kind.”

The Early Hindi Novel: The Tyranny of the Form

The first of the Hindi “novels,” which preceded Parīkṣāguru by a good eighty years, is as early a work as can be considered a novel in any Indian language. It was written in 1801 by an Urdu poet, Inshā’ullah Khān, at the court of the Nawab of Lucknow, away from the reach of any colonial Western influence.85 His Rāni Ketaki ki Kahānī (The story of Rāni Ketaki) is passed over in histories of Hindi literature as a curiosity for the indigenous simplicity of the language avowedly used in it, but its formal and thematic aspects are even more remarkable than the virtuoso linguistic performance. This is the love story of a princess and a prince in which, to prevent the intended marriage, the prince and his parents are turned into deer through a curse and are put out to graze. All is resolved happily in the end through recourse to the god Indra, who then graciously attends the wedding and gifts the couple with twelve lovely fairies from his celestial court to serve as maids to Ketaki (while strictly instructing them not to have much to do with the prince); a sapling of the wishing tree, Kalpavṛkṣa; and a she-calf of the wish-fulfilling cow, Kamadhenu, which he conveniently tethers to the tree. The story is repeatedly punctuated by passages of verse, in the last of which Ketaki’s old and trusted maid-in-attendance merrily chides her for having impetuously consummated the marriage even before the prescribed rituals allowed.86 Though this work would seem not to qualify as a novel because of its brevity (thirty-six pages in a modern reprint) and the use of the supernatural and of verse, the gods

84. Śukla 1940 (v.s. 1997): 541.
85. This work heads the “Chronological List of Major Novels in [the] Indian Languages Published Between 1801 and 1900,” in Mukherjee 1985: 189–92.
86. See Khān [1801] 1950.
in it are endowed with a novelistic sense of human comedy, while the verses are far from uplifting or didactic.

Verse (composed, as in Rāni Ketaki ki Kahāni, by the author himself) constitutes a far more substantial part of the work in Śyāmasvapna (Dream[ing] of Śyāma, 1885) by Thākur Jagmohan Singh, and the verse is mostly in Brajbhasha, which at places also colors the Khari Boli prose. The author was brought up and educated by the British government after his father, a minor ruler who rose against the British in 1857, was captured and jailed for life and soon after committed suicide. On the title page Singh described his work as falling into two generic categories, each belonging to one of the two literary cultures that had formed him: as gadyapradhan cār khandā ek kalpā (a work of imagination/fiction/fantasy [kalpā] in four parts, mainly in prose), and also (in English and in roman characters) as “an original novel.” Hindi critics have called it a gadyakāvya (prose-poem) or a campū (a mixture of prose and verse), evoking categories familiar in Sanskrit literature. (The term kāvyā is common in Sanskrit to all literary creation, though in the modern Indian languages it came to be used narrowly for verse alone.)\(^87\) A liberal use of verse, either quoted or of the author’s own creation, is in fact a common feature of several early Hindi narratives; its presence serves comparatively to problematize the sharper distinction between verse and prose in English and the insistence, as for example in Henry Fielding’s originary definition, that the (English) novel is “a comic epic-poem in prose.”\(^88\)

Along with the frequent passages of verse, these early Hindi narratives include other features that are distinctly new and modern. In Śyāmasvapna, for example, the love story involves protagonists from different castes, causing some soul-searching anguish for the hero that is foregrounded by the author; the intensity of the emotion depicted is markedly personal and individual (not universalized or ascribed to gods, as in earlier Hindi literature); and nature is described in a new, patriotic, and nationalist manner. There is also a long, phantasmagorically vivid scene centering on a new object recently imported from the West, a railway train, and another, shorter scene in which the hero goes to buy another object that had newly become available, a pair of spectacles, from a shopkeeper who comes from the śveta-dvīp—the island of the whites.\(^89\)

Indeed, in the Indian literary situation, any depiction of interaction with white characters; any accommodation within the narrative of Western institutions and objects brought in through the colonial intervention; or any use of words, phrases, literary passages, or allusions from the English lan-

---

\(^87\) Singh [1888] 1953: 14. For kāvyā, see Pollock, chapter 1, this volume.

\(^88\) Fielding [1742] 1979: 25 (my emphasis).

guage may in itself be regarded as a sign of the modernity of the text and possibly also of its enhanced eligibility for inclusion in the Western category of the novel. Such is the author’s self-conscious use of the English word “novel” on the title page of Šyāmśvapna. Such, too, are the persistent references in Pariksāguru to the hero, a rich young man of Delhi, being taught Shakespeare, Jonson, and Swift by an Indian private tutor; or to the profligate hero declaring himself bankrupt and being taken into custody under a new and somewhat bewildering legal system introduced into India by the British. In the very opening scene of the novel, the first of many in which the hero is beguiled into extravagant and useless expenditure, he is persuaded to buy a pair of large framed mirrors, which he can ill afford, by an English shopkeeper, “Mr. Bright,” while another Englishman, “Mr. Russell,” an old business acquaintance of the hero, lies his way out of having to lend him money when the hero needs to be bailed out—all examples of human conduct that could have come straight out of a classic English novel such as Vanity Fair.\textsuperscript{90}

In some pre-Pariksāguru narratives, the juxtaposition, if not conflictual interaction, of Indian and Western ideas and objects still leans more toward the traditional Indian, which is possibly why these works are seen to fall outside the domain of the Western kind of Hindi novel. In Śraddhārām Phillaurī’s Bhāgyavatī (1877), for example, a work set in contemporary times, the deft and wise young heroine, finding herself accidentally separated from her party while traveling on pilgrimage, approaches the local rāja for help, and introduces herself and her unfortunate situation to him in Sanskrit ślokas that she composes on the spot. At the beginning of the novel, her father acclaims the British rulers in traditional legitimizing terms, as “Mahārājā Angrez,” and himself as their prajā, their childlike subject. And at the end of the narrative, as her father-in-law lies dying, Bhāgyavatī is able to persuade her mother-in-law to call in an āgrezi dāktar—an Indian doctor trained in Western medicine—even though the medicines he might prescribe would instantly contaminate the old Brahman and imperil the purity of his caste.\textsuperscript{91} Such explicit intrusions of modernity can be seen to mimic the intrusion of the Western form of the novel itself, within which they are enacted.

The dominant presence in many Indian novels of the joint, or extended, family also stands in contrast with the situation in a substantial proportion, if not a majority, of Western novels, where the focus of interest only too pre-

\textsuperscript{90} “This would be a new kind of book in the language. . . . In writing this book I have derived great help from Sanskrit works such as the Mahābhārata, Persian works such as the Gulistān, essays in The Spectator and those by Lord Bacon and Goldsmith, and current journals such as Sridhār. . . .” Dās [1882] 1974: 12–14.

\textsuperscript{91} See Phillaurī [1877] 1973: 11, 45, 96, 117.
dictably is the romantic relationship between a man and a woman yet to marry, with the novels often ending as soon as the protagonists have exchanged wedding vows. Bhāgyavatī is one example of this radically different, more communal, and less individualistic Indian social paradigm, but a more apt case in point is Devrānī Jethānī ki Kahānī (1870). This narrative by Pandit Gaurī Dutt (also famous as a dedicated propagator of Nagari)92 is about an elder daughter-in-law and a younger daughter-in-law who are married to brothers who, at the beginning of the novel, are still living under the parental roof. In comparison with such domestically populous narratives, the one-man, one-woman story line of many Western novels must have seemed positively one-dimensional, for by and large even today’s Indian novelists have not yet adopted this abiding Western stereotype and begun focusing on a romantic love interest to the exclusion or at least neglect of the extended family. In the majority of Hindi novels and short stories, it is fathers, mothers, and brothers, to say nothing of devrānīs and jethānīs (younger and elder daughters-in-law), who occupy the center of the stage. The kind of love that seems to be the consuming passion of Western novelists and readers alike is pushed to a corner and confined to occasional interludes. The Indian novel is different from the Western not merely in formal terms, such as the significant presence of verse; it is also thematically different in expressing quite another view of the individual, the society, and the world.

Even the early adventure novel and the detective novel in Hindi bore strong features that distinguished them markedly from their generic counterparts in English. The most “gothic” and seemingly escapist of all the novels of this period, Candrakantā (1888) by Devkinandan Khatrī (1861–1917), with its multipart sequel, Candrakantā Santati (Candrakantā’s children, 1896–1905), proved phenomenally popular and indeed broadened the very constituency of Hindi readers; after many reprintings, the cover still proudly proclaims that “lakhs [hundreds of thousands] of [mostly Urdu] readers learned Hindi to be able to read this novel.”93 The sources of its magic were far from English; the bag of mystifying stage effects here is rather more Persian-Muslim, while the landscape around Chunari and the Hindu characters, with all their unrealistic actions, still add up to a meaning that has been interpreted as strongly ur-nationalist.94

92. Dutt [1870] 1986. When Pandit Gaurī Dutt reached the age of forty, he renounced domestic life and took sannyās (ascetic renunciation), gave away all his property for the cause of Nagari and dedicated himself whole-heartedly to its propagation, even adopting the greeting “jaya nāgarī” in place of “pranām” or “jaya rām.” See Šukla 1940 (v.s. 1997): 578.
93. In a reassertion of their undying popularity, Candrakantā and Candrakantā Santati were adapted for Hindi television in the 1990s, running to high ratings for over a hundred episodes.
94. It has even been suggested that since Candrakantā, with its locale of several independent Hindu kingdoms over which seems to fall neither a British nor a Muslim shadow, proved
The early Hindi novel is thus undeniably the result of the intervention of a Western genre, and yet in its form as well as substance it is far from convincingly Western. Too many historians of the early Indian novel have overvalued the external features of the form to conclude that the early Indian novel is “something that is not yet a novel,” as if it were a less-developed and retarded specimen rather than a valid variant in its own right.55 Thus, Meenakshi Mukherjee’s thesis in Realism and Reality that the realist mode of the nineteenth-century English novel, which was “the immediate model for the first generation of Indian novelists,” did not quite fit the Indian “social reality,” describes in fact only part of the mismatch. Even nonrealist modes of the English novel, such as the gothic or the romantic-historical, were not of much use to Indian writers, not only because the local gothic or historic “reality” was different, but also because they did not accord with older and often very different indigenous modes of literary representation and narrative.96

The recent tyranny of the novel over other modes of narrative, through which “the very word ‘novel’ has become a term of praise when applied to earlier narratives”97—or indeed to culturally “other” narratives—was compounded in India by the tyranny of British rule and British education. The novel may or may not have arisen in England with the rise of the middle classes, but it certainly arose in India concurrently with the rise of colonial cultural hegemony. Considering that (to adapt a phrase of Bakhtin’s) “the birth and development of the novel [in India] as a genre took place in the full light of [not merely ‘historical’ but specifically] colonial day,” a more explicit theoretical connection perhaps needs to be argued between the oppression of both British rule and the British novel.98 That may help us ex-


96. Mukherjee 1985: 10, 13, argues that “Indian literature did not have any tradition of this variety of realism [i.e., the Western] because it was based on a rather different view of reality,” but that “whatever term for the novel was adopted in an Indian language, the formal and thematic aspirations of the early Indian novel were the same as those of the English novels read by pioneering Indian novelists.”


plain precisely why the transplantation of the novel has been a source of lasting unease in Hindi literary culture. To judge by translation, that litmus test of cultural accommodation, novels by some of the most outstanding Indian novelists (including one or two Hindi novelists discussed in what follows) are thought so aesthetically imperfect by their Western, or even Westernized Indian, translators that not only significant changes but even large-scale deletions are blithely made, showing up the difference between the Western and the Indian notions of narrative and in particular the drastically different “sense of an ending” (in Frank Kermode’s phrase) in the two literary traditions.

Nor was this an early teething problem that has now gone away or been resolved. In a panel discussion sponsored by a Hindi journal in 1992, when some of the most eminent Hindi writers and critics were invited to name their best ten Hindi novels, some chose to stop well short of that number, while others who dutifully did go the distance joined them in asserting that “we haven’t yet been able to master [sādh] the form of the novel,” and one or two even wondered whether the genius of Hindi had yet been able to contribute anything to the form. To read such statements as mere confessions of artistic failure would be to subscribe to colonial claims of the superiority of Western literary models. What these acknowledgments of unease point to, equally, is a wide discrepancy between a literary form that came into existence in peculiarly Western social and cultural conditions in the modern age following the Industrial Revolution, and an Indian sensibility and worldview traditionally shaped by very different notions of society and culture. The novel as a genre remains imperfectly assimilated not only in Hindi but also in the other Indian languages for the good reason that witting or unwitting resistance to the form has marked all attempts to imitate, adapt, or domesticate it. If the Indian novel is still taken to narrate the Indian nation or to constitute a national allegory, it can only be because, like the Western novel, the Western nation too is a category arbitrarily imposed on India.

99. For example, in their truncated translation of Bibhutibhūṣan Bandopādhya’s *Pather Panchali*, T.W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherjee cut out the last sixty-eight pages, claiming that the remainder “is something of an anti-climax,” and that excising it reveals that Bandopādhyaḥ achieved a coherence and a dramatic unity “without fully realizing that he had done so.” Quoted in Mukherjee 1981: 89. I discuss later in this chapter Ajñeya’s deletion of a substantial part of Premchand’s *Godān* in his translation. For an example of the same sort of mismatch, but from the opposite direction, see the adaptation of an English work of fiction by the Bengali novelist Bhūdev Mukhopādhyaḥ, who left out the last part of the original; S. K. Dās (1991: 114–16) discusses this and concludes: “The structural considerations were vital in distinguishing the traditional stories, katha, akhyan, upakhyan etc. from the novel.”

Premchand: The Wretched of the Nation

Premchand, the first major novelist in Hindi or Urdu, is still universally acknowledged to be the greatest novelist in either language, except that some think that he is an even greater short story writer. Whether or not Indian writers may be said to have mastered the Western form of the novel, they certainly have taken to the related but crucially different form of the short story in a way unparalleled in either English or even American literature, possibly because it does not enforce the same requirements of protracted “consistency” of characterization that would lead up to a realization of the individual self, nor demand organization of the material into an elaborate “organic” plot necessarily culminating in a (Western) vision of life, with all ends neatly tucked in.\textsuperscript{101}

In any case, the first major event in Premchand’s writing career happened in 1908 when his first collection of short stories, \textit{Soz-e-Vaṭan} (The lament of the nation), ran into trouble with the British government, by whom he was then employed in the minor office of a sub-deputy inspector of schools. He was summoned overnight to appear before the British head of the district, told to destroy all copies of his seditious book, and exhorted to congratulate himself that he lived under the civilized British administration rather than the preceding Mughal one, for then his hands would have been chopped off.\textsuperscript{102} In prudent self-interest, Premchand now severed anyhow the pseudonym he had been publishing under, Nawab Rai, to become henceforth Premchand.\textsuperscript{103}

Of his twelve completed novels (including four early and minor novellas, which were the only ones to be first published in Urdu), \textit{Raṅgabhūmi} (The arena of play, 1925) and \textit{Godān} (The gift of a cow, 1936) stand out as of-

\textsuperscript{101} For example, Guleri’s short story “Usne Kahā Thā” (1915), which narrates with subtlety of plot, psychological sophistication, and emotional restraint a love story set in part in the battlefields of Flanders, could hardly be matched by any Hindi novel for many years afterwards. Ramcandra Sukla in his History once again made a vital observation when he said that short stories “of so many shapes and complexion” had already appeared in Hindi that “they cannot now all fit into Western characteristics and norms. . . . We shall have to recognize that this too is a form of the short story. If Western norms haven’t been followed in this case, well then, they haven’t.” Sukla 1940 (v.s. 1997): 652–53.

\textsuperscript{102} Rai 1991: 73–75.

\textsuperscript{103} Whereas among English writers pen names have been used primarily by a handful of women novelists, among Hindi writers only poets have written under pen names. These have usually been a part of their given names, rather than an emotively expressive and freely chosen \textit{takhllus}, as in the case of Urdu poets. Premchand felt obliged to assume successive pen names to get around the rule that government servants could not publish anything without prior official approval. The name “Ajiya” (the unknowable) was suggested for Vatsyayan by Jainendra Kumār when the latter clandestinely submitted a short story for publication in Premchand’s journal \textit{Hans} on behalf of Vatsyayan, then in jail.
ferring contrasting representations of the state of the country in his charged nationalist times. Of the three-hundred-odd short stories he wrote, the large majority are about villagers oppressed by landlords and priests alike; about overly Westernized city men and women and rich collaborators with the Raj, nearly all of whom in the course of the story have a change of heart; and (in his last phase) about the poor, some of whom, unsettlingly, seem to have stopped caring that they are poor.

Premchand started writing Raṅgabhūmi, the finest Gandhian novel in Hindi, shortly after he had heard Gandhi speak at a public meeting at the height of the Noncooperation movement in 1921 and subsequently resigned from his government job. The hero of the novel is a simple, devout blind beggar called Sūrdās—blind beggars as a type being called after the blind bhakti poet of the sixteenth century of that name. In his general conduct and view of the world, Sūrdās’s character evokes a deep cultural symbol of the kind that Gandhi was particularly adept at enlisting in the cause of nationalist politics. Gandhi is not directly mentioned in the novel, but Sūrdās clearly stands for him as he resists with passive nonviolence the plot to dispossess him of his inherited patch of land, which he shares with his community. An Indian Christian industrialist, a big Hindu landlord, and the British Collector all collaborate, and Sūrdās is ultimately shot down by the Collector. The novel has a wide range of simple and good-hearted characters; it has several rambling episodes and seems altogether loose-limbed and overlong; and it includes in a minor key a distinctly shy and unfulfilled love story concerning two highly idealistic, emotional, and self-sacrificing young persons. With its share of facilitating coincidences and improbabilities—and in other respects, too—it may seem to strain fictional credibility. But it also has an unmistakably powerful and moving impact. It is a strong example of the artistic indirection by which political nationalism is rendered more effectively as cultural nationalism. Premchand’s own favorite among all his novels, it remains untranslated into English.104

Godān has been translated twice, once each by Indian and American translators—as has Nirmalā (1927), a conveniently slim novel and the only one by Premchand with a woman protagonist. (Notwithstanding Premchand’s stature, all of his other novels remain untranslated.) Godān tells how Hori, who cultivates a smallholding of his own and dreams of owning a cow (which would not only provide milk but, no less important, allow him the opportunity to perform the meritorious deed of fondly serving it), is ground into dust by mounting extortionist debts and social inequity. Even as he lies dying, he ritually donates to a priest the cow he himself could never own, except for a tantalizingly brief interlude, while he lived. The British rulers

are not so much as mentioned (far from their shooting or raping anyone, as in Premchand’s earlier novels); the village landlord is a distant, absentee figure who has enough problems of his own; and while the role and relevance of the many characters who constitute the urban subplot (set in Lucknow) remain a major crux of Hindi literary criticism, they are certainly not in any way demonized. The novel has been read as a text of economic nationalism and even as a Marxist critique of bourgeois nationalism, but also alternatively as Premchand’s recognition of the deep allegiance that a character like Hori owes, without any thought of protest, to traditional religious and social values—an uninterrogated internalization that proves to be a greater burden for him than any external instrument of exploitation.

Premchand remains an—if not the—iconic figure of modern Hindi literature. His strengths as a writer as well as the fissures of his sensibility all seem to lie on the surface for any reader to take in, but his long evolution as a writer contains some bends that are a little harder for us to negotiate. He had grown up reading notoriously but deliciously escapist Urdu narratives of the kind then widely believed to be the surest means of corrupting tender minds, but he soon devised for himself the fictional tenor of a kind of realism not found in any discussion of realism in the West, which he called adarśonmukh yathārthvād. His own English translation of this term is “idealistic realism,” but more precisely, perhaps, it is “ideal-oriented realism,” realism tending towards or serving to project an ideal state of affairs. He believed, as he famously declared in his presidential address to the first All-India Progressive Writers’ Conference in 1936, in literature with a dynamism and a purpose, without however acknowledging that in his own case what made such purposeful fiction palatable was his generous sense of human comedy. In Godān, as the spring season of harvesting arrives and the mango and mahua trees spread the fragrance of their blossoms while the koel sings, Hori, in the midst of all his troubles, also bursts into song and then proceeds to exchange affectionate pleasantries that verge on the flirtatious with a woman moneylender to whom he is deep in debt.105 Even Premchand’s bleak final works, such as the short story “Kafan” (The shroud, 1936), are lit up with an unlikely but instinctively carnivalesque affirmation of life that defies any ulterior ideal or ideology and goes beyond the oppressive economics of exploitation, politics of inequality, or realism of stark reality.

It has proved hard to slot Premchand neatly into any artistic or political category on the whole because of his thematic variety and complex ideological evolution. He has been viewed as belonging to the revivalist Hindu-patriotic

105. Premchand [1968] 1987: 298–99. Roadarmel’s translation extinguishes the erotic by having Hori say: “You really look young today, sister,” though the Hindi bhābhī, elder brother’s wife, with whom one could by tradition have a flirtatious relationship, is also used later in the exchange.
mode in his early works (such as the proscribed Urdu work, *Soz-e-Vaṭṭan*); to the mainstream Gandhian-nationalist mode in his middle-to-late work; and to the incipient progressive school in some of his last texts, which include the hard-hitting essay of 1936, “Mahājani Sabhyatā” (Capitalist culture). In each of these roles, however, he refracts the changing shades of Indian nationalism, as did the contemporary Chāyāvād poets such as Nirālā and Pant. Though he earned his B.A. degree late in life, he had always read English and other Western literature with discrimination and enthusiasm, and he kept up the vital Hindi writerly tradition of also translating a variety of congenial authors, including the early Urdu novelist “Sarshar,” Maeterlinck, Tolstoy, George Eliot (whose *Silas Marner* he adapted into a distinctly Indian version of the sentimental pastoral), Anatole France, and John Galsworthy. At the same time, with his increasingly firm commitment to purposive social realism, he also expressed a distinct lack of personal sympathy for Bangla literature, explaining tactfully that though it gets “closer to the heart,” this is because “a feminine quality is predominant in it. I myself haven’t enough of it.” He thought that the tenderness of nostalgic emotion was only one part of creativity, that another equally important component was the sterner resolve to look forward. “Rabindranath Tagore and Sarat Chandra Chatterji are both great writers. But is theirs the only way for Hindi?” Even apart from his own inclination and example, Hindi writers and readers in general were turning away or cooling off so far as Bangla literature was concerned. Bangla had imbibed the colonial cultural influence sooner and rather more enthusiastically than probably any other Indian language, especially in the matter of a new form such as the novel, and had therefore been the object of admiration and envy all over India—and certainly in Hindi since the times of Bhāratendu Harisendra—but its first-innings lead now seemed to be played out.

**After Premchand: Versions of the Postcolonial**

The Hindi novel after Premchand acquired a greater interest in individual subjectivity as revealed in a socially conflictual context, especially in the works of Jainendra Kumār (1905–1988) and Ajñeya. A card-carrying Communist writer such as Yaśpāl (1903–1976) explored in his fiction possibilities of a workers’ revolution as well as complexities of social and sexual morality; he also wrote the monumental Hindi novel on Partition, *Jhūṭa Sac* (The false truth). Bhagyātī Caran Varma (1903–1981), a mainstream realist novelist, produced

---

108. On colonialism and literature in Bengal, see Kaviraj, chapter 8, in this volume.
engaging if schematically simple family sagas depicting the nationalist movement as perceived and articulated through political differences between fathers and sons and among brothers. The first major Hindi novelist to emerge after Independence, Phaniwaranath “Renu” (1921–1977), took Hindi fiction, with its growing urban middle-class preoccupations, back to village life, which he depicted with a cultural interiority that seemed to surpass even Premchand’s, while he viewed popular nationalist aspirations and frustrations from his effectively postnationalist vantage point. These five novelists, with all their individual inclinations and peculiarities, had this in common: even when they explored psychologically or sociologically the growth and development of individual characters or a community at large, their narratives were still dipped in the dye of contemporary nationalist issues. In terms of representative variety as well as originality and stature, Ajneya and Renu stand out among all the Hindi novelists after Premchand. Unlike the Chayavād trinity, these three preeminent novelists did not belong to the same movement or even to the same generation, and it is in fact in the mutually illuminating contrast that they offer that the richness of Hindi fiction is truly reflected.

Ajneya was primarily a poet, though he also wrote three novels, widely spaced over time and varied in theme. The first of these, Šekhar: Ek Jivani (Šekhar: A life, 2 vols., 1941, 1944), was probably as Western a novel as was ever published in Hindi, both in its form, which is that of the “self”-centered bil- dungsrroman, and in its theme, which is the formation of identity as explored in an explicitly social-political frame. It is also existentialist avant la lettre, for it appeared even before existentialist fiction began to be written and acclaimed in Europe. Significantly, the novel is called not a novel but “a life” (that is, a biography, in a double meaning of the word also available in Hindi), and is narrated in a flashback under the shadow—and fear—of imminent death, the very first one-word sentence being phāsi! (Gallows!). The hero is a rebel many times over: at home as a child irrepressible in his questioning of everything, against society as a student fired by the spirit of reform, against British rule as an armed revolutionary (which is why he is in jail and faces the prospect of execution by hanging), and also in an overarching existentialist sense. Throughout, his quest to realize his individuality is described with an unprecedented lyrical intensity, which is supplemented by a constant stream of quotations from Sanskrit, Bangla, and Hindi, but most of all English, poetry. In the first edition the English verses were printed in the roman script without Hindi translations, which were later appended in footnotes on public demand; indeed, an early outline of the novel, drafted in jail, was apparently largely written in English.109

109. See Hooker 1998 for a focused study of selected aspects of Ajneya’s fiction.
Unlike Ajñeya’s two later novels, which he himself translated into English in an efficient but not particularly inspiring demonstration of his bilingualism, एक्हार remains untranslated. Ajñeya did translate, however, two classic Hindi novels by his elder contemporaries in both of which he made breathtaking changes reflecting both the wide gap between his own aesthetic sensibility and theirs and his utter confidence in his own. In Tyागपत्र (1937; translated as The Resignation) by Jainendra Kumar, a slim enough novel (at eighty-eight pages) to start with, Ajñeya dropped a whole chapter; and in his translation of Premchand’s गोदान, he chose, even more drastically, to translate only the rural main plot, leaving out the whole of the urban subplot, which, even if some critics see it as problematically irrelevant to the main plot, constitutes over 40 percent of the novel. Ajñeya’s version of गोदान fortunately was not published until one of his American students translated the rest of the novel and joined the two parts together.110

Of all the twentieth-century Hindi writers, Ajñeya was probably the most privileged by birth and the most widely traveled by upbringing. He was educated in places as far flung as possible within India—Srinagar, Lahore, and finally Madras, where for a year he read for but did not finish his M.A. in English. In a striking reversal of his attitude toward colonial rule (for एक्हार’s imprisonment for being an armed revolutionary is closely modeled on the author’s own life), he chose during World War II to serve as an officer in the British Indian army, apparently because it was for a larger cause. In 1951 he published a book of poems written in English, and from 1961 to 1964 and again in 1969 he taught Indian literature and culture at the University of California, Berkeley. However, his very cosmopolitanism has served to prevent him from being accepted by ideologically committed Hindi critics, who have been equally scathing, on the other hand, about his exploration of the roots of traditional Indian culture (for example, his valorization of the traditional Indian conceptualization of time above the Western). This has been seen as a return swing of the pendulum, as not only a compensatory but also a reactionary activity. Writers like Ajñeya and Nirmal Verma (1929—) —the latter by consensus the outstanding contemporary Hindi novelist—who may have attempted to evolve a sensibility that is no less Indian for being sensitively receptive to the West, still risk a double condemnation for allegedly leaning now too far to the West, and now too much back to the East, from some quarters in Hindi that maintain an exaggerated critical anxiety concerning both Western influence and any suggestion of nativism. Ajñeya’s vari

110. See Premchand [1968] 1987: xii, for a muted acknowledgment by the translator, Roadarmel: “A manuscript by S.H. Vatsyayan was very helpful to me in translating the village section of this novel”; more explicit information came from Ajñeya, in personal conversation.
ation on the key existentialist endeavor, “May I become just what I am,” ac-
quires a wry intercultural circularity here.111

Like Ajñeya’s, Reṇu’s first novel, Maitā ācal (1954; translated into En-
glish as The Soiled Border), is considered his best work. He took the title from
Sumitranandan Pant’s poem, mentioned earlier, describing Mother India
as a poor villager, the fields with their dusky, grain-laden crops represent-
ing the hem of her dusty and dirty sari. The Hindi word ācal means pri-
marily the front edge or border of a sari, which passes over the breasts (with
erotic and also maternal associations). By extension, it also means a bor-
der region, and Reṇu’s novel not only marked a return to village India but
also inaugurated a new subgenre in Hindi, which in the preface Reṇu him-
self called ācalik upanyās, or the regional novel. This kind of fiction depicts
a remote geographical and cultural region with a rare intimacy and with
selective, authenticating use of the local variant or dialect of Hindi, often
with footnotes supplied to gloss the rare local terms, as in Reṇu’s own novel.
By contrast, in Sekhar, the footnotes explain the passages that are in En-
lish, but then Ajñeya’s novel and Reṇu’s novel represent in almost every
other respect, too, the two poles of the wide social range of the novel in
Hindi.

Reṇu was born in a village in the district of Purnea in Bihar, which he
used as the setting for Maitā ācal. He was a political activist who participated
in the Quit India movement of 1942 and in the armed revolution that over-
threw the tyrannical Rana dynasty in neighboring Nepal in 1950. He turned
to literature following a long illness in 1952–1953, but toward the end of his
life returned to active politics, renouncing official honors conferred on him
and going to jail during the massive popular movement of the mid-1970s
that was partly the provocation for Indira Gandhi’s imposing a state of emer-
gency. It therefore comes as a disappointment to some politically commit-
ted readers to find that Maitā ācal is not a revolutionary novel; indeed, it is
not even much of a political novel, but rather is what may be called a cul-
tural novel, evoking in unparalleled richness of acute and cherished detail
the life of a village in all its many dimensions.112 The village comprises clearly
demarcated though highly interactive quarters for each major caste, includ-
ing the tribal Santhals; it has its full share of exploitative wealthier villagers;
and it has local political leaders, too, with differing ideological convictions
of which they themselves have only a hazy grasp. The time span is 1942 to

111. Quoted by Sāh 1990: 21. See also Miśra 1978: 3–45 for as extensive and reliable an
account of Ajñeya’s life and career as is so far available.

112. Reṇu [1954] 1990. For an unremitting recent critique of the representation of the
idea of revolution in the work of three Hindi novelists (Ajñeya, Yaśpal, and Reṇu), which also
betrays incidentally the double bind of Marxist criticism on an ideological issue such as this,
see P. Singh 2000.
1948—from the Quit India movement to the assassination of Gandhi, which is symbolically replicated at the end of the novel in the death of the one true Gandhian, the dwarf Bavandás, who is brutally crushed underfoot while trying to stop a convoy of bullock carts carrying smuggled goods across the India–East Pakistan border. Reṇu describes how, as soon as Independence is attained, the Gandhian Congress in and around the village is corrupted and travestied anyhow by all the enemies of freedom, and old collaborators of the Raj turn around and claim to be truer followers of Congress than the old dedicated workers.

Mailā Ácat was the first “postcolonial” novel in Hindi, not perhaps in any of the recognizable senses of the rarefied theoretical debate that has been swirling around that buzzword of the Western academy in the last decade or two, but in the simpler, more forthright, and substantive sense that it describes what happened immediately following Independence;113 for it caught the first stirrings of the mohbaṅg, or disenchantment, with all the high expectations that the common people hoped would be fulfilled upon the nation becoming free. Reṇu, always too much of an artist not to want to tell the whole truth, presented in his next novel, Puratí Parikathā (Episode of the barren land, 1957) a more encouraging postcolonial development in the same geographical region (the implementation of a big irrigation project initiated by the new government) without any loss of cultural authenticity, but it was eventually the tone of disenchantment that predominated in his own later fiction, and in Hindi fiction and poetry generally.114

Two later novels that in very different ways represent some other dimensions of self-critical postcolonialism of the indigenous variety are Rāg Darbāři (1968; translated into English under the same title, which could be translated as “the sycophant’s song”) by Śrīlāl Śukla (1925–), and Kali-Kathā: Via Bypass (1998) by Alkā Sarāogi (1960–). In his relentlessly comic-satirical novel, Śukla revisits a village much like those depicted by Premchand a few decades after Independence to show how the new gains in education, democracy, and general economic development have been turned into subtler and even more effective tools of dominance by a newly emerged but firmly entrenched rural elite. “Kali-Kathā” denotes a story of the Kali Yuga, the last, “leaden” era; but it is also a pun on “Calcutta,” or in Bangla “Kolikatā,” where the novel is set. Saraogi narrates over a 150-year time span the internal diaspora of her community, the Marwaris—a trading caste perhaps rather more notorious than celebrated for their industriousness and prosperity—from Rajasthan and Haryana to the new British capital, Calcutta; the high ideal-
ism of three young friends in three contrasted shades of ideology at the height of the nationalist movement; and finally, the crass and cynical materialism of the post-Independence generation—all presented in a remarkably sophisticated and knowing narrative that even includes a couple of parodic nods in the direction of that other, more globally diasporic postcolonial writer, Salman Rushdie.\textsuperscript{115}

**HINDI NOW**

Hindi language and literature have traveled a longer historical and cultural distance in the hundred years since the recognition of Nagari in 1900 than they had in the previous six centuries—or than most other Indian languages have over the same period. While the wide acceptance and reach of Nagari helped Hindi realize and assert its vast potential, the more or less simultaneous movement from Brajbhasha to Khari Boli served to cut it off substantially from its accumulated literary idiom and tradition and its grassroots vitality. A whole century has now passed at the end of which, while modern standard Hindi dominates in the public sphere, there is probably no village or even small town in the entire vast Hindi terrain where people still do not speak, while conversing with family or friends, with a perceptible measure of the local dialect, thus practicing a doublespeak in which the language on their tongues is markedly different from that at the tip of their ballpoint pens, to say nothing of what they tap out on the keyboard. This exceptional gap between language and literature and the uncertainty, for some decades beginning around 1880, of negotiating it may have retarded the growth of Hindi drama and to a lesser extent of the Hindi novel, as compared with these genres in some other major Indian languages, since both forms depend considerably more than poetry or discursive prose on verisimilitude of speech. On the other hand, this in-betweenness of double enunciation, if not register, may have turned out to be a creative resource, as can occasionally be glimpsed in the profusion of speech varieties authentically deployed in the Hindi rural or regional novel.

However, any possibility of a modern Manipravalam emerging out of a literary commingling of Brajbhasha and Khari Boli was ruled out by the increasing, self-imposed pressure on Hindi to standardize itself for internal export as the national language.\textsuperscript{116} Another political compulsion affecting the natural growth of Hindi, at least until Independence and Part-


\textsuperscript{116} For the idea of manipravál, see Freeman, chapter 7, this volume. Incidentally, Premchand, coming from Urdu, adhered to his artistic decision to have even the lowest of his village characters speak throughout in standard Hindi, unlike Režu, in whose work even the narrator’s voice osmotically takes on a regional flavor.
tition, was for it to remain closer to Urdu than to its own premodern forms, such as Brajbhasha, so as to champion the lost cause of a united nation. The increased “Sanskritization” of Hindi after Independence was not, as is often alleged, imposed from above by the various apparatuses of the state (which mainly introduced the technical neologisms) but rather an organic tendency of the language that helped it expand its expressivity in all directions and, once the incubus of Urdu was lifted, brought it closer to the other Indian languages, most of which already had a vocabulary no less Sanskritic. Hindi after Independence also began to function as the treasury of Indian-language literatures by translating most prolifically from them, thus affording many of these sister literatures a far larger potential readership and higher visibility while of course enriching itself in the process. In drama, the sparsest genre of Hindi literature, for example, it is generally conceded that Hindi ke natak (Hindi plays) may not have as much to show for themselves as hindi mē natak (plays available in Hindi). At the same time, there has been a growing recognition all over the country that literature written originally in Hindi in the twentieth century (as distinct from the nineteenth) was no less developed and rich than literature in any other Indian language. The advantages, such as they were, of earlier exposure to the colonial literary stimulus—earlier than in the case of Hindi—which accrued to some other Indian languages, have long since worn off, as have the effects of the earlier spread of literacy and modern Western education. As is sometimes pointed out, the prestigious Jñānpiṭha award, given each year to an outstanding writer in any of the eighteen or more Indian languages, has gone more often to Hindi writers than to writers in any other Indian language. 

Now, in our predominantly audiovisual age, when we seem to have reverted from half a millennium of Hindi literature in written form to increasing use of the spoken word as the chief means of communication and entertainment, Hindi finds itself, not only through films but even more through the innumerable television channels, with a wider, even pan-Indian, reach than ever before. Hindi may not be, and may no longer aspire to become, the national language; and it seems to have passed on even some of its share of linguis-

117. While a large proportion of the works translated from other Indian languages into Hindi (including those by Mahasweta Devi and U. R. Anantha Murthy) have been brought out by private publishers, the extensive translation publishing programs sponsored by the Sahitya Akademi and the National Book Trust have also served substantially to enrich Hindi. Though these government-funded bodies are required to maintain a broad parity of opportunity among all the eighteen Indian languages recognized in the Constitution, their lists reveal a strong trend for more translations into Hindi than into any other Indian language. Indeed, in 1999, nine out of the eighteen winners of the annual translation prizes awarded by the Sahitya Akademi for each language turned out to have translated not from the original text in some other Indian language but from an existing Hindi translation of that text.
tic chauvinism and expansionism to other, smaller subnational languages, notably Tamil and even Indian English. But it is a language, perhaps like none other in the long history of India, that a very large part of the nation at least passively understands and assimilates. It is certainly a less powerful language to know and especially to speak than English, but even upper-class and elitist English in India is now unabashedly contaminated by Hindi, notably in the punch line of many television and print commercials, thus suggesting the emergence of a middle-class middle ground at least in the marketplace. The colonial prejudice against Hindi, due to which it was regarded much like the untouchable punka-wallah squatting in the hot and dusty verandah of the colonial bungalow in which the mensahib English resided (to adapt an abiding image from A Passage to India), has now given way, in a paradoxical postcolonial development, to both Hindi and English inhabiting (while also contesting with apparent civility) the domestic space of the Indian nation, with Hindi perhaps as the fading jethâni and the younger English as the more indulged devrâni.118

118. Of Raghuvîr Sahâ’s many poems on the role and status of Hindi in India after Independence, especially in relation to English, perhaps the most succinct is a two-line poem titled “English”: “The English taught us English to turn us into subjects / Now we teach ourselves English to turn into masters.” For the English translation of another poem by Sahâ titled “Hindi,” see Weissbort and Rathi 1994: 7–8.


INDEX
1025
Andhra, 384, 400
Andrews, C. F., 216
Angad (guru), 624
Angkor empire, 666n. 39
Anglicization, 3; and domestic service, 210; and interr

acial marriage, 212–13; and religious conversion, 214–15. See also colonialism; English education; English lan

uage
Anglo-Indians, 211–12, 257
Anis, Mohan Lál, 177
Arabic literature, translations into Persian, 142
Arabic language: as international culture language, 23; loan words from, 530; and Sindhi language, 622, 625–26, 632
Arabic literature, translations into Persian, 142
Arjunavarmadeva, 113n. 163; Amarasíataka, 113
Aṣyupatasi (guide poem), 471
arthaśāstra (ropes), 43
Arthaśāstra, 653
Arunachalam, M., 293n. 30, 302n. 79, 304
Aryalpi, 20
Aryan movement, 241, 247
Aryásūra, 652; Agastyaśātaba, 656–57; jitakamālā, 656, 659, 758, 780n. 94
Arzū, Siraj al-Dīn ‘Ali Khán, 182; on Hindvi, 168; and importance of tradition, 188; and pan-literary identity, 183–85; on Persian, 811; on Persian-Sanskrit correlation, 175, 176; 175n. 138; works: Majmū’
al-Naṣī’is, 171; Musīn, 175; Navādur al-afūz ʿurdū-e muʿallā, 807; Siraj al-Lughat, 174
Asakārā (noncooperation), 606
Asāt Thākur, 591–93
Asani, Ali, 23
Ashraf (aristocracy), 627, 635
Aṣi, Ghanshyām Lál, 815
Asiatic Researches (journal), 219
Asoka (king), 299, 650
Aṣṭamāsa (cycles of eight months), 144, 147
Aṣṭopeti, 487
Aṣṭopadyāya (performance genre), 487
Aṣṭa chāṭ (poetic group), 921–23
Aṣṭaṃghoṣa, 80–81, 82, 88, 657; Bhudda-
carita, 74–75, 78n. 88, 102; Śrītrālakārā, 110n. 152; Savdararānanda, 74
Aṣṭaṃghoṣa, 80
Ātash, Khvājā Haidar ‘Ali, 889–91, 897
Atemporality, 509
Atiśa, 769, 775
Atishkada, 176
Aṭṭār (poet), 181, 638
Aṭṭhaka (genre of the Eights), 676n. 65
Ātitejī, 277, 277n. 14
Aurangabad, 847, 849
Aurangabad, Lachhmí Naráyan Shafiq, 847, 849; Gali Rūmā, 176
Aurangzeb (Mughal emperor), 162, 170, 847, 849
authenticity, 26; of early Sindhi literature, 620–21; internal contestation in discourse of, 245–47; quest for, 259
Avaiyāra, Māturā, 277, 277n. 14
avatāra, 788
Avadh (eastern Hindi), 25, 837; influence on Hindi, 945–46, 960–62; Sufi poetry and, 913, 938
Avahattha (north Indian linguistic form), 514
Avalokiteśvarā (bodhisattva of compassion), 774–75
avunvatā (polluting castes), 451
Avadh, 200
Ayāz, Shaykh, 629
Ayodhyā, 847, 849
Avadhāk (native colonial figure), 241
Ayyoub, Abū Sayyād, Ādhyakṣakātā o Rabindranāth, 561
Ayutthya kingdom, 665, 679, 681
Azād, Muhammad Hūsain, 19, 843; on ghazal conventions, 874; literary anecdotes of, 896–97; work: Ab-e hayāt, 19, 815, 879, 887, 888, 901–3, 903
Āzām Sāh, 944
Ağar, Luṭf-Allah Beg, 176, 178
'Aẓhar (Urdu poet), 896–97
Bahā Fīqhānī Shirāzī, 171, 173, 179
bahu (native colonial figure), 241
Babur (Mughal founder), 161; and Iran, 159, 160; and Persian literary criticism, 171; Turkish influence on, 158; and Urdu, 806–7
Bābūr-nāmah, 161
Badami, 324
Badari, 332
Badami, Mullā 'Abd al-Qādir, 159–60, 162, 633, 916n. 7
Bahā al-Dīn, 175
Bahādur, Ḥisāb Khān, Qisah-e mehri afaq o dilbon, 837
Bahār (spring), 142–43
Bahār, Malik al-Sha'ārā Muhammad Taqī, 178, 187
Bahār, Tck Chand, Bahār-i 'ajam, 165, 174, 852
Bahā ud-Dīn Bājān, Shaikh, 821–24, 826; Khażā'īn-e rihmatullāh, 821
Bahmani sultans, 419
Bahr, Miyāli, 880, 895
Bairam Khān (Mughal noble), 158, 161
Baker, Godfrey Evans, 215, 218
Bakhshāshī, Mirza Muhammad, 167
Bakhshī, Nizām al-Dīn, 161
Bakhthin, M. M., 9, 545
Bālasaraswati (Telugu poet), 386
bālavabodha (children’s prose genre), 594
Balija (caste), 413, 414
Balākhi, Faiz ud-Dīn Muhammad bin Qawām bin Rustam, Bahr ul-fazal, 824
Ballalasena, Bhujapurabundha, 79
Baloch, Nabi Bakhsh Khan, 620, 622
Baloch Academy, 6–7n. 7
Bāṁla Academy (Bangladesh), 6–7n. 7
Bāṇa (Sanskrit poet): praise-poems of, 76; and vacanākāras, 363; Sanskrit narrative form of, 603–4; and later Pali poetry, 652; works: Haracarita, 57n. 38, 65, 75; Kādambari, 65, 579–80, 656, 1000
Banārsidas (Jain poet), 947; Ardhaṭhākāvatāk, 940–41, 945
Bandopādhya, Bibhutibhūṣan, Pather āchār, 1007n. 99
Bandopādhya, Rangalal, “Bāṅgālā Kavitā Viṣṇyāka,” 6n. 6
Bamerjee, Chitra Divakaruni, 255, 258; Arranged Marriage, 257; The Mistress of Spices, 257
Bangalore, 237, 282, 378
Bāṅgīṭa Sāhitā Pārīṣad, 6–7n. 7
Bangladesh, 981
Bangla language: classification of, 23; colonialism and, 33; 532–33; 545–46; cosmopolitanism of, 531; hybridity of, 543n. 56; individuation of, 24; influence on Indian-English literature, 261; and linguistic identity, 538–42; shifts in, 520, 525–26; study of, in West, 4n. 4; “unity” of, 514
Bangla literary culture: aestheticization of, 534–38; British Romantic influence on, 990, 998; Caitanyaavacitānta and, 518–21; caste in, 517–18, 540–41; children’s literature in, 549–50, 550n. 71, 554; colonialism and, 17–18, 532–33, 538–39, 1011; cosmopolitanism in, 553–54; cultural transactions and technologies in, 550–55; eighteenth-century poetry, 528–29; exclusion of Muslims from, 504, 504n. 1, 507, 540–42, 541n. 53; fantastic in, 549–50; histories of, 504–7; influence of, 954, 995; Islamic aspects of, 529–32; literary criticism in, 530n. 47; literary territoriality in, 510–14; literary tradition in, 507–10; literary transformation in, 503–4, 551–52, 503–64; martial theatre in, 226, 518–18; modern, 532–64; padavali in, 521–28; patronage in, 513–14, 569n. 28, 537–537n. 48; performance texts in, 551; premodern, 514–32; prose, modern, 542–48; science and, 546–50; social contexts of, 562–64; sociopolitical awareness in, 949; study of, in West, 6

Barniyās (personal manager), 209

Bankimchandra. See Chatterjee, Bankimchandra

Baqar Agāh, Maulānā, 837

bārahmāsā (seasonal cycle songs), 144–47, 841

Bārah Navaṭī, 144–45

Barid Shahi Sultanate, 157

Baroda, 237

Barthes, Roland, 692

Basavaṇṇa: as bhakti poet, 348, 357; and courtly culture, 354; 359; on ideal poem, 333; as regional dēśi poet, 560; vacanās of, 350–51, 352

Basavaraju, L., 348n. 44

Basavēsvara, 397

Bastian, Adolf, 682

Bau, Buddhadev, 555, 560

Baudelaire, Charles, 560–62

Bayāt, Bayazid, 161

Bayb, C. A., 211

Beale, Dorothea, 216

Bechert, H., 663

Bed耀Vīsāva kingdoms, 370

Bedil, Mirzā Abd ul-Qadir, 845

Beg, Chalapi, 159

Beg, Mirzā Qālī, 629; Zināt, 651

Beg Aghin, Shah, 617–18

Begum, Golbādam, Humayun-nāmah, 161

Benares, 814, 914–15, 934, 949, 983

Rendre (Kannada poet), 387

Bengal, 17, 27; Buddhism and, 29, 329; Caitanya movement in, 487; Muslim elite in, 200; official language in, 233; Sanskrit literary culture in, 99; subimperialist expansion in, 538n. 50, 539. See also Bangla language, Bangla literary culture

Bengal Academy of Literature, 6–7n. 7

“Bengali Works and Writers” (Ghosh), 6n. 6

Bentinck, William, 233

Beveridge, Annette, 161

Bewas, 629

Bhabha, Homi, 259

Bhadag, Niranjana, 604, 607

Bhagavadgītā, 513

Bhāgavatapurāṇa, 337; Brajbhasha adaptations of, 944; Hindi adaptation of, 924–26; Kṛṣṇagīthā compared to, 469; Tamil version of, 279n. 18; Vaishnavas and, 522

Bhaka, 168

bhakti (devotionalism): authenticity of, 621; in Bangla literary culture, 508, 515, 524–25; in Brajbhasha literary culture, 919–26, 929, 935–39; and erotic, 469; general vs. sectarian, 925; in Gujarati literary culture, 576, 588–89; in Kannada literary culture, 502–63; in Kerala literary culture, 469–26, 489, 479, 482–84; literary forms included by, 536–57; political usefulness of, 506–7; and shift to Kharī Boli, 983; vs. smārtā, 929; and social critique, 492; spontaneity of, 397; in Tamil literary culture, 301, 304; and Virashaivism, 347

Bhālan (poet), 579, 580–81, 588; Naḻakkhyān, 580

Bhāma, 46, 58, 61; Kaṟyāḷakārā, 42

bhavītā, 621

Bharat, 28

Bhārata, 358, 781; Nāṭyaśāstra, 42, 454

Bhāratcandra Raygūnakār, 520, 528–29, 529n. 34, 534; Ānaddāmangal, 226, 506, 509, 516, 528; Māṁśīka, 528, 530; Rasaṁajjārī, 528; Vidyāsundar, 506, 509, 528–29

Bharati, C. Subramania, 232, 272n. 4
British Education Commission, 817, 963–64
British India. See colonialism
Brown, Charles Percy, 5n. 5
Brujin, Thomas de, 621
Buddha: biographies of, 674–75n. 62; on kṣāya, 670; literary quality of preachings, 705; and Pali language, 650; royal/martial depiction of, 711, 711n. 84; and Tibet, 775–76
Buddhaghosa (Pali commentator), 653; and Pali Canon, 651; on rāmaṇa, 664; royal imagery used to describe, 709–10; Sanskrit influence on, 697; and translation, 732–33
buddhavacana (Buddha’s word), 681
Buddhism: Apabhramsha and, 71–72; and bhakti movement, 306; community compartmentalization and, 78; cultural hegemony of, 696; influence of, 34; influence on Bangla, 504, 515, 529; influence on Sanskrit, 69–70, 700; influence on Sinhala, 700–707, 726n. 134, 730–33; influence on Tamil literature, 293–94, 295; influence on Tibet, 762–64; Pali, 680–81, 680n. 80, 683–84; and Pali texts, 650–51; and the past, 728; Sanskrit used by, 24; southern, 17; Tibetan, 752, 754–58; and unification of cultural space, 29; and violence, 660–63, 702
budhamaṇḍal (circle of the learned), 328
Bukka (Vijayanagara king), 95
Buller (British administrator), 599–600, 602
Bulle Shah, 639
Bundelas, 926–27
Burma: Pali influence on, 679, 679n. 74; 683–84; Pali inscriptions in, 651, 683; Rāmāyana in, 663, 665, 665n. 38; lessantarajātaka in, 667, 669–68n. 45
Burnell, A. C., Hobson-Jobson, 806–7, 808, 810
Burns, Robert, 227
Burton, Richard, 622, 624
Bush, George H. W., 783
Būstān, 163
Buvaneeka (Buddhist monk), 708–9, 716
Byron, Lord, 227
Caitanya (Bengali mystic), 518–19n. 21, 518–21; and Bangla literariness, 524–25; cosmopolitanism of, 526n. 28; and Kṛṣṇa bhakti, 920–21; significance of, 505–6, 525; and Sufism, 530
Caitanya movement, 487
cakrabandhana (circle composition), 739
Cakravarti, Mukundaram, Candimangal, 516–17, 530
cakravartin (“world-conqueror”), 718, 741, 743–755
Cākyār, Dāmodarāṇa, 479
cākyāksītītu (theater genre), 486, 489
Cākyārs (caste), 451, 467, 476, 485, 486, 490
Calcutta, 233, 234, 237, 561–62, 1015–16
Calcutta Coffee House, 553
Calcutta Literary Gazette, 242
Cālukya dynasty, 341, 347–48, 569–70, 576–77
Cambodia: Pali influence on, 25, 684; Pali inscriptions in, 651, 666n. 39; Rāmāyana in, 663–64, 666n. 39; lessantarajātaka in, 669n. 46
Cambridge History of Ceylon, 653
Cāmināṭaiyar, U. V., 17; biography of Pillai, 281–85, 318; career of, 272–75; language ability of, 275–76; social background of, 286–87; and Tamil literary culture, 271; Tamil literary education of, 276–81, 304; as teacher, 286n. 33
campakam (Sanskrit meter), 395–97
Campbell, Thomas, 227
campū (courtly epic), 324; vs. devipada, 398–400; and folk epic, 334; in Kannada literary culture, 344; in Kerala literary culture, 458–57, 464; in Pali, 657; performance of, 394; in Telugu literary culture, 393–94; and vacanakārāṇa, 353–54
Cāndīdās (Vaiṣṇava poet), 505–6, 523, 525, 527, 551
Candragomin, 758–62, 773
Candrakirti, 786
Candrakīrti, 786
Candrārabhā, 776
Candrarāja (Kannada poet), Madanatilaka, 328
Candrōksāvam, 472
cāṇkum (literary academies), 16–17, 305–6
cāṇkum anthologies: literary conventions governing, 308; rediscovery of, 288; as representation of Tamil literary culture, 289, 305–18
cakam literature: akam poetry, 306, 309, 311; corpus of, 279–80, 280n. 21; decline of, 3; influence of, 305; meter in, 297; political landscape of, 299; tayam poetry, 298, 302, 306, 310, 311–12; Tamil, 293, 294–95, 444–470, 471; capitalism, 30, 31, 249; Carey, William, 234; caritākhā (biographic branch), 506; caritra (narrative-prose genre), 594; Cariyāpāda, 667; Carlos (Tamil theorist), 339n. 29; Carpenter, Lant, 215; Cartilha, 214; caryapaḍa (Buddhist religious texts), 504, 506–7, 515, 515n. 19; caste: in Bangla literary culture, 517–18, 540–41; in Gujarati literary culture, 591–92; in Kannada literary culture, 352–53; in Kerala, 450–51, 452–53, 467–68, 481–82, 494–96; in Mughal literary culture, 163, 164–65; and religious conversion, 216n. 48; in Tamil literary culture, 286–88; cātakam, 277, 277n. 14; cātuḥ poetry, 414–18, 430; caturdāis (sonnets), 230; Cēkkilār, Peryapurīnālam, 279, 280n. 22, 283n. 25, 363; Čekkīlar, Periyaṭhuvam, 279, 280n. 22, 283n. 25, 363; Čekkūṭurāvam (Cēra king), 296, 298–99, 300; Čennabasavāna, 548; censorship, 238; Central Asia, 155; Mughal poets from, 162n. 103; Timurid poets in, 171; Čēra kingdom, 298–99, 444–46; Čeruśēri, Kṛṣṇagūṭha, 468–69; Četiṭyār, Tiyākara, 274, 276; Četiṭyār (Tamil caste), 286; Chand, Tara, 979, 979n. 40; Problem of Hinduastani, 816–17; Chandahśrītra, 339n. 26; chandasyas (prosody and metrics), 339–40; Chand Bardai, Pīṭhivirāṇā, 228; Chand Bhatnāgar, Ajay, 839; Chandīmangal (Mukundaram), 226; Chandobhdīka, 339–40; Chandrabhan Brahmān, 164–65; Channing, William Ellery, 215; Charles II (king of England), 206–7; Chatfield, K. M., 600, 601–2; Chatterjee, Bankimchandra, 229; and ādīḥ, 553; as aesthetici, 557; background of, 552; and Bangla literary language, 544–45; colonialism and, 18, 241; hostility to Muslims, 541; and literary modernity, 232, 540; prose works of, 555–56; translations of, 28, 554; work: Bāngudārir, 536; Chatterjee, Upamanyu, 215; Chattopādhya, Saratchandra, 552, 554; Chaturvedi, Makanlal, 991; Chaturvedi, Ram Svarup, 996; Chaudhuri, Amit, 255, 258, 261; Afternoon Raag, 259; Chaudhuri, Nirad C., 240, 251–53, 254; Autobiography of an Unknown Indian, 251–52; Continent of Circe, 252; Hinduism, 252; Intellectual in India, 252; Passage to England, 252; Thy Hand, Great Anarch!, 252; Chaudhuri, Pramatha, 545n. 60; Chauhan, Subhadra Kumari, 997n. 77; chaumāsas (cycles of four months), 144, 147; Chāyavād poetry, 959, 962, 990–99; chaumāsas (cycles of six months), 144, 147; China: Buddhism in, 754–55, 763; Cultural Revolution in, 786; Tibetan publishing industry in, 787–89; Tibetan use in, 750–51; Chināmān, 679; Chinese language, 31; Chinggis Khan, 134; Chintāmāni Bhāṭa, Śaṅgāpratī, 148; Chiplunkar, Vishnu Krishna, 999; Ching-Hsi Hidayat, 175; Chitrādurg, 378; Chitra Singh, 907; Chtire, Dilip, 233, 261; Christian imaginaire, 660; Christianity, 30; conversion to, 213–15, 216n. 48; and diasporic writing, 235; and image of spiritual East, 31; and interracial marriage, 212–11; Christian missionary: influence of, 214–15, 220–21, 533; as prototypical historical agent, 230; Ciddanadamitrī, M., 348n. 44; Cikkadevarāja Wodeyar, 378; Cīḷēppatikāram (attrib. Itākō), 292, 295–301; commentaries on, 289; and re-
INDEX 1031

discovery of Tamil literature, 274, 288; and Tamil curriculum, 280
Cinatirumalakāryulu, Tālāpāka, Sankir-tanalaḥṣaṃyam, 409n. 39
Cinnadevi (Vijayanagara queen), 416–17
Cintāratnam, 483
Cirilakiyam, 278n. 17
Citāvitrāmula, Tāpaṣka, Saṅkir-tanalakṣaṃyam, 409n. 39
Cintāratnam, 483
Cirilakiyam, 278n. 17
Cintāvatramu (picture-poems), 430–31, 432
Citrakavityam (“brilliant literature”), 52, 52n. 28
Civācariyar, Umāpati, Cēkkapura, 283n. 25
Civakacintāmani, 274–75, 288, 310, 312, 312n. 101; in Purattiraṟṟu, 315, 316, 318
class: in diasporic writing, 257–59; political economy of language and, 232–38; and vernacularization, 627
clerk-interpreters, 209, 210
Clive, Robert, 234, 234n. 91, 252
Cola kingdom, 298–99, 301, 444–47, 68on. 80
Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, 227
Coliya Kassapa, 731
cooperation: diasporic discourse of, 259; internal contestation in discourse of, 251
Collins, Steven, 17, 29, 696, 742, 751
Colombo (Sri Lanka), 720
colonia administration: English language dispersed into, 232; and patronage, 282; scholars in, 209
colonialism, 30; analyses of, 15; Christianization and, 214–15; and contact zones, 206–16, 207n. 14; and cultural life, 537–38; English education and, 237; impact on Bangla, 17–18, 33, 506, 538–39; impact on Gujarati, 506–608; impact on Hindi/Urdu controversy, 808, 817–19; impact on Hindi/Urdu history, 805, 814, 814n. 23, 692–67; impact on Kannada, 379–80; impact on literary production, 679–80; impact on Sindhi, 624–26, 640–43; impact on Urdu, 879–82; and language naming, 24; and linguistic reduction, 66; novel and, 1006–7; and print culture, 232, 238–43; and subject-positions, 241–43
“colonialitis,” 231
Columbia Literary History of the United States, 10
comedy of manners, 245
Committee on Script, 625
communism, 553, 559
community: language of, 235; and literature, 27–30; political, 27; religious, 31; sociotextual, 27
Company of Merchants of the Levant, 203
compromise, 23
concrete poetry, 430–31, 432
company, 284n. 27
Constituent Assembly of India, 980
contact zones, 206–16, 207n. 14
Cook, Ananda, 54, 55n. 31
copp (quatrain), 571, 573, 575
Cork (Ireland), Din Muhammad in, 217
Cosmopolitanism: internal contestation in discourse of, 248–51; as subject-position, 242. See also Sanskrit cosmopolis
Coursanapura, 351
countercritique, 230, 253
counteridentification, 346
couverture, 205
courtesan culture, 453–57, 473–74
courtly epic. See also ampū (courtly epic); mahāvīr (Sanskrit courtly epic); skandha (Prakrit courtly epic)
crabbie, George, 227
Cromwell, Oliver, 206–7
Cūlavamsa, 652n. 3
culler, Jonathan, 9n. 12
cultural ambidexterity, 242
cultural contestation: aestheticism and, 231; print culture and, 239–41; in representations of India, 205–6, 222, 230
Cuntaramūrtti, 276n. 10
Cutler, Norman, 17
Cuttack, 237
Cycle of Birth and Death (Skye shi ’khor lo’i lo rgyus), 762–67, 771, 773
Dādā Bānī, 635
Dādū (poet), 620
Dādūpanthi sect, 634–35
Dakani (southern Urdu), 25, 157, 806
Daksīṇ Bharat Hindi Pracār Sabhā, 977
Daulatsh, 775–76n. 85
Dalmia, Vasudha, 514n. 23, 973n. 26
Dalpatram (Gujarati poet), 596
Daly, Jane, 213, 217–18
Dambadeni (Sri Lanka), 720
Dambadeni Katikawatta, 712, 712n. 90
Damodaragupta, Kutthunimata, 116–17, 454
Danda, 340, 476
Danidin: alasikārī in, 724, 783; on Apa-

bhramsa, 63; chronologies of, 79, 79n. 91; influence in Tibet, 78n. 94, 781, 785, 788–89; influence on Kannada, 332, 335; influence on Sinhala, 723n. 122; influence on Telugu, 399; on innovation, 692n. 9; kāya rules of, 43–44; and literary languages, 61; and mārga, 107. See also Kāsirādasa (Danidin) Dante, 230
Darāz, Gest, 632–33
Dard, Khvājāh Mīr, 840, 869–70, 886
Darjeeling, 237
Darvä'sh, Shāikh Mahmūd, 824
Das, Jibanānanda, 552, 557–58, 560, 562; "Cal," 547
Das, Kāśirām, Mahabhrānta, 226
Das, Lālā Śrīnīvas, Parkṣīgūrā, 1002, 1004
Das, Śisir Kumar, 12n. 16, 220, 1007n. 99
Das, Śyāmsundar, 605
Dasarathājūta, 604, 666n. 39, 669n. 46
Das Kambūh, Harkaran, 165
dāstan (fable), 135, 904
Datta, Aksāyakumār, 544
Datta, Sattvendra-Math, 349n. 34
Dāvūd, Mālahānā, 147; Canduyān, 147, 914, 915–16, 917, 933, 945
Daudpotā, Allama, 615
Daulatābādī, Mir 'Abd al-Vahhāb, Tagkirah-i

Binaṣī, 177
Daulatshāh Samarqandi, 140–41, 155, 155n. 78, 171, 175; Tagkirah al-Shi‘a‘a', 140
Dave, Narmadāsākhar: and colonialism, 598–602, 608; on Dayārām, 601; and financial independence of poet, 587; methodology of, 583–84; prose works of, 595–96; works: Kavivarita, 6, 583; Narmagadha, 599–602, 604
Davānī, Jalal al-Dīn, Akhlaqi-falāšī, 165
Dayārām (Gujarati poet), 593, 595, 601
De, Bishnu, 545n. 60, 547
Dealtry (archdeacon), 227
Deccan, 176, 824, 847
decolonialization, 210, 230, 262
Delhi, 233; as center of Persian poetry, 155, 187; colonial rule of, 886; Hindi/Hindi speech of, 912–13, 940; Indian-English writers in, 227; Indo-Persian poets in, 176; language change in, 842, 847; lin-

guistic chauvinism in, 877–78, 884; love of wordplay in, 900–901; Rekhtah writers in, 849; Urdu and, 806–7, 811, 813, 818–19, 840–41
Delhi College, 882
Delhi Sultanate, 137, 419; patronage of Persian writers, 133–34
depersonalized experience, 45
Derozo, Francis, 223
Derozo, Henry: as aestheticist, 223–26, 223; discursive style of, 240; lyric poetry of, 224–26; multilingual/multicultural background of, 213, 214, 215, 223–24; nationalism in, 242; works: Fakir

of Jungehra, 224; "Sonnet to the Pupils of the Hindu College," 225; "To India," 225–26
Desai, Anita, 213, 254, 258, 259, 260
Desai, Sisir Kumar, 12n. 16, 220, 1007n. 99
Desi/deśi, etc. (place; vernacular forms): in Bangla literary culture, 516–17; in Kannada literary culture, 333–34; vs. mārga, 26, 106–8, 401, 420, 424–27; and patronage, 344; in Telugu literary culture, 401–2, 420–21, 424–27; universal vs. regional, 360; used to measure popularity, 339
desi bhākhā (regional languages), 573
Desi, Sisir Kumar, 12n. 16, 220, 1007n. 99
de Souza, Eunice, 213, 215, 261
Devabodha (Kashmiri ascetic), 60n. 48
Devacandra (historian), Rājāvallabhāsāmi, 375
devāḷaśī system, 455, 456
Devanagari script: Hindi written in, 884, 912; 959, 962–67; Hindustani written in, 947–48, 949; Sindi controversy over, 624–26, 640
Devānampiyatissa (Sri Lankan king), 683
Devasthī (Jain poet), 577
Devi, Jahnavi, 226, 227
Dhammapāla (commentator), 731
Dhanapāla, Bhavavattakaha, 65
Dharamśūri (Jain sage), 144–45
dharma (duty): historical-political narrative embedded in, 372–73; vs. kavya dharma (poetic duty), 346; Mahābhārata vs.
Vesāntarājatakan on, 660–63
Dharmadāsa, 69
Dharmakīrti: as Buddhist writer in Sanskrit, 46, 69, 78n. 88, 777; influence of, 786; lost works of, 110n. 152, 777
Dharmarathna, S. M., 696n. 27
dhārastra, 60
Dharwadker, Vinay, 18, 22, 28, 615
Dhiro (bhakti poet), 578
Dholamarura Duhā (ballad), 146
Dhoyi, Pavanadu, 106
Dhrūv, Ananda, 415; and eroticism in kavya, 406; humility of, 411–12; non-Sanskrit sources in, 426; on patronage, 389; work: Kālaḥastisvarasatākau, 413, 426
Dhurmtollah Academy, 223
dhvani, 44, 738; as Dravidian idea, 339n. 29; and kaifiyat, 856–58
diaspora. See postcolonial diaspora
dictionaries: Brajbhasha-Persian, 942–44; Hindi, 965; Hindustani, 947–49; Persian, 149, 174, 185; Sanskrit-Kannada, 327, 349
didactic texts, 310–11
differentiation, 23
difficulty, as poetic virtue, 112, 706–7, 734–41, 900–901
Digby, John, 219
Digilipeli Vajur, 725
Dilhavi, 806, 831
Diķita, Ramabhadra, 100
Diğer Şahib, Miyaşı, 899
dingal (manner of recitation), 575
Din Muhammad, 234; collaboration in, 241; and cultural contestation, 204–6, 231, 239, 253; as early Indian-English writer, 211, 217–18; English-language abilities of, 199–202; multilingual/multicultural background of, 213, 215, 221, 229; work: Travels of Dean Mahomet, 199–202, 218, 221
Diipaṅkara, 677
Dīvamāna, 652
discourse: constructionism in, 258; modes of, 244, 248; shifts in, 239–41
Dīvākara, Bhavavānta, 94
Divañā, Sarb Sukh, 849n. 100
Dīvaṭā, Narsimhāro, 602; Smaranamukura, 593–94, 607
Dodiā, Vasto, 583
Dodo Chanesar (ballad), 616
Dogri, 23
dohā, 772
Dūlpopa, 775
domestic sphere, 210, 235
Dōndrupgyel (Don-grub-rgyal), 791–94; History and Character of the Song-Poem (Mgur glu’i lo rgyus dang khyad chos), 792–93; Sans gong, 794
doṣa (blemish), 705
drama: in Gujarati literary culture, 591–93; Hindi literary models for, 949–54; language use in, 65–66; in Sanskrit literary culture, 485–86. See also temple theater
Dravidianism, 288
Dravidian languages, 25, 33; Tamil as parent language of, 446–47
Drayton, Michael, Poly-Olbion, 204
Drigung Kyopa (‘Bri-gung-skyobs-pa), 776
Dromtön, 775
Droumond, David, 215, 223, 224–25
D’Souza, Charmayne, 213
dubhā (Mughal protoprofessional class), 208–11, 218, 219, 233
duḥā (couplet), 573, 575, 582
Dāgarsi (king), 917, 918–19
Dumont, Louis, 455
Dunhuang, 753, 759
Durgasimha (translator), 331
duskarabandhaka (difficult ways of composition), 738–40
Dutt, Gauri, Devrānī Jethānī ki Kohānī, 1005
Dutt, Govin Chunder, 214
Dutt, Henrietta, 228
Dutt, Kylas Chunder, 242
Dutt, Michael Madhusudan: as aestheticist, 223, 226–32, 557; choice of themes, 555–56n. 78; Indianess in, 247; influence of, 557; influences on, 554–35; multilingual/multicultural background of, 213, 214; and political economy of English, 18, 235; as professional writer,
Dutt, Michael Madhusudan (continued)
548; works: Captive Lady, 228; Meghnadudadh, 534–35; “Palace and the Park at Versailles,” 230; “Rizia, the Empress of Ind,” 228; “Visions of the Past,” 228
Dutt, Rajnarain, 226, 227
Dutt, Toru, 223, 230, 231, 240, 253
Dutta, Sudhindranath, 545n. 60, 547
Duttahama (king), 653, 657
dvipada (Telugu meter), 398–400, 428
Dvivedi, Mahavir Prasad, 965, 985–86, 991
Dvivedi, Manilal, 602
Eagleton, Terry, 9, 9n. 12
East India Company, 202, 204; Bengal Army, 217; censorship policies of, 238; and displacement of Persian, 188–89; employment of literate Indians in, 208–11; employment of mestizos in, 211–12; empowerment of, 206–7, 232–33; and English education of Indians, 234; Indian-English writers in, 219; interracial friendships in, 215
East Indian, The (newspaper), 224
Eliot, Thomas Stearns, 373
Ellis, B. T., 625
Ellis, John, 9n. 12
Elphinstone Institute (Bombay), 598
Elu Atanagaluvaamsa, 717
evu (Sinhala poetry), 727–41; alphabet for, 695; and Buddhist ethics, 717; Buddhist influence on, 730–35; change in, 690–700; continuity of, 720–21; difficulty as virtue in, 705–7, 734–40; as occult science, 740–41; Sanskrit influence on, 696–97, 733–34
Elusandasakura, 692, 740
Eluttachan, 20, 479–84, 491; Adhyyama Ramayana, 480–82; Bhavatam, 480
employment zone, 254
English education: in Gujarati literary culture, 596–97; of Indian-English writers, 229; influence of, 3; 230–31, 232; institutionalization of, 207, 237; novel and, 999–1000, 1006–7; schools, 234; in Tamilnadu, 275
English Gitagbha, 998
English language: arrival in India, 202–6; contact zones for spread of, 206–16; first Indian writers in, 217–22; ghazal in, 908; global, 25, 26; and Indian languages, 260–62; influence in Tibet, 791; influence on Bangla, 533, 538, 545–46; influence on Hindi, 981–83, 987, 1012–14; influence on Urdu, 902–3; as international culture language, 25; as key to career success, 275; linguistic chauvinism of, 1017–18; as medium of translation, 230, 260–61; as official language of British administration, 227, 233, 962, 981; political economy of class and, 232–38; as sign of modernity, 1003–4; social history of, 201; Tamil literary histories in, 289n. 37. See also colonialism; Indian-English literary culture
epic poetry, Kannada, 325–26, 334
erotic: in Brajbhasha literary culture, 922n. 30, 929–30, 931; in Kannada literary culture, 356, 357–58; in Kerala literary culture, 462–65; in Sanskrit literary culture, 115
Errapragada (Telugu poet), 390, 397n. 18
Estavam, Father. See Stephens, Thomas
ethnic culture, literary culture vs., 31
ethnohistory, 19, 19n. 23, 76
ethnonationalism, in Sindhi literary culture, 640–43
Ezzeiel, Nissim, 253, 254, 261
Fabian socialism, 249
fabulation, 258
Fallon, S. W., 810, 818–19; New Hindustani English Dictionary, 815
Fanon, Frantz, 252
Farghana, 175
Farid, Shaykh, 620
Farrukh (Ghaznavid poet), 136
Farsi, Abū Nasr-i, 137
Faruqi, Shamsur Rahman, 24, 901, 960n. 2, 970n. 20, 973n. 26
Faruqi, Shaykh Ibrāhim Qawwām, Sharaf-nāmah-e Maneri, 149
Fatehpur Sikri, 203
Fatullah Shārūzī, Mir, 162
Fauqu Yazadi, 842
Fayzī Fayāzī, 136, 159, 161, 169; emotion
in, 172, 173; Iranian criticism of, 178; tāzah-gū' of, 179
Fazl, Karbal kathā, 837
feminism, 997, 997n. 77
Fidvi Lahori, 896–97
Fielding, Henry, 1003
film: effect on literature, 563; Hindi, 511, 981, 1017; Urdu, 907
Firdausī (poet), 150n. 63, 151, 186;
Shah-nahmah, 133
Fisher, Michael H., 199–200, 217
Fitch, Ralph, 203–6, 233, 239
folk/bardic tradition, 635–37
folk epics, Kannada, 334, 338–39
folklore, 451–53
folksongs, 297–98, 297n. 67
Forbes, Alexander Kinloch, 602
Forbes, C. J. F. S., 668n. 45
Forster, E. M., 216, 256; A Passage to India, 212, 256n. 148
Fort William College (Calcutta): and Hindi/Urdu controversy, 963, 970; tāzah-published by, 879–82
Foucault, Michel, 714, 718, 727
François Marie, Thesaurus Linguae Indianae, 947–48
Frazer, R. W., 816n. 28
Freeman, Rich, 20, 22, 26, 28, 1016n. 116
free verse, 995, 995n. 74
Gaborieau, Marc, 748n. 2
Gadamer, Hans Georg, Truth and Method, 550
Gadit, Jayant, 583
gadya (literary prose), 55
Gajabahu (king), 653
Galta. See Jaipur
Gandhian movement, 242
Gandhian nationalism, 247, 249
Ganēs, K. N., 491, 492
Gangādharam inscription, 329n. 8
Gangohi, Shaikh 'Abd ul-Quddūs, 824, 898; Rukhs-nāmah, 149
Gangopadhyay, Sunil, 562
Gardezi, Fath 'Ali Khan, 185
gātha (Prakrit lyric), 44
Gaudi poetry, 63, 743
Gauḍiya Vaishnavas (cult), 506, 518–21, 522–33
Geiger, Wilhelm, 652, 652n. 3, 653, 689n. 1
gender asymmetry, 212
gender-centered discourse, 254
Gendun Chöphel (Dge-'dun Chos-pel), 786
Genghis Khan. See Chinggis Khan
Germany, 5
Ghālib, Mirzā Asadullah Khan: difficulty as virtue in, 900; and khiyāl bandi, 838; and Persian, 167–68, 186, 893; popularization of, 907; significance of, 178; and Urdu, 812; ustād-shāgird relationships of, 186, 885–86
Ghant Kashmirī, 172
ghazal (lyric poetry), 3; definition of, 868; difficulty as virtue in, 900–901; innovations in, 135; of Khusrau, 826; meaning creation in, 875–76; Mir on, 871–72; and “natural poetry,” 890; and nonsectarianism, 169; origin of, 153, 153n. 68, 867–68; post-1857, 903–8, 981; and Rekhtah, 840–41, 849; in Sindhi literary culture, 628; themes in, 873–75, 891; Urdu poetics and, 828; verse form of, 891–92
Ghazāl (imām), 161; Ḥayāt al-Dīn al-Dihān, 138, 142; Kīmiyā'i Su‘ādat, 166
Ghazna, 132, 1540. 75
Ghaznavids, 132, 133, 137
Ghosal, Gokul, 209
Ghose, Manmohan, 216, 223, 230, 231, 235
Ghosh, Amitav, 215, 250, 255, 258, 261
Ghosh, Kasiprasad, 61, 6
Ghumli temple, 592
Ghir, 1546. 75
Gil (two-line verse), 723
Gīlānī (Nuqṭavī founder), 159–60n. 96
Gilbert, W. S., 777
Gandhi, Mohandas: and Hindi/Urdu controversy, 958, 967, 975–80; Hind Swaraj, 604–8; influence of, 994; intercultural contact network of, 216; and literary space, 28; Narasimha and, 599–90, 599n. 36, 591; and power structure, 587; and rationalism, 548n. 63; and regional language, 597, 573–74; swadeshi campaign of, 231
Gandhi, S. S., 624
Hindui/Hindvi/Hindavi, 137n. 18, 810, 831, 833, 838, 913: in Gujarat, 822–24; songs in, 181; Urdu and, 805
Hinduism/Hindus: Advaita school of, 638; in Bangla literary culture, 540–42; Brahmanical, 518–19n. 21; converts to Christianity, 216n. 48; Derozio on, 225; and diasporic writing, 255; and English use, 235–36; Hindi/Urdu controversy and, 814, 814n. 23, 817, 946n. 82, 950, 963, 967–71, 971n. 24; interaction with Muslims, 181, 921–22; and Persian use, 149, 163; pilgrims’ travelogues of, 748, 748n. 2; and rationalism, 546n. 63; Rekhtah and, 849n. 100; and Sanskrit, 24; in Sindhi literary culture, 638–40; and Sindhi scripts, 625–26, 640; and Sufi poetry, 824; and Tamil literary culture, 272; in Urdu literary culture, 894–95; Urdu writers among, 815
Hindu Mahasabha, 247
Hindu nationalism, 989
Hindustan: literature under early sultans of, 135–42; Mongol invasion of, 152, 153; Mughal rule in, 159; Turkish conquest of, 133; vernacular language emerges in, 187
Hindustani Academy (Allahabad), 979, 979n. 40
Hindustání kyá hai (radio talks), 816
Hindustani language, 511, 511n. 15, 808–9; dictionaries, 947–49; and Hindi/Urdu controversy, 970–71, 975–80; rejected as official language of India, 968. See also Urdu language
Hindustani literature, 51, 5
Hindustání Prácr Sabha, 976
“Hinglish,” 981–83
historical anachronism, 510–11
historical-anthropological spirit, 14
historical obsolescence, 557
historicalist contemporaneity, 509
historicity, 16–17
historiography, subaltern school of, 13
history, 18–22
Hla Pe, 665n. 38
Hölderlin, Friedrich, 14
Hollier, Denis, 11, 11n. 15; New History of French Literature, 10
Holocaust, 253
homosexuality, 255
Hope, Theodore, 599
Hope Vacanmala (school readers), 599
Hugo, Victor, 230
al-Hujjáj, Shaykh ‘Ali bin Uṣmán, Kashf al-Mahjúb, 139
Humam, Hakim, 159
Humáyún (Mughal emperor), 158, 159, 160
Hume, David, 223
Hyderabad, 237
Ibn al-Muqaffá (translator), 148
Ibn al-Nadim, 622
Ibrahím ‘Adil Sháh (sultan), 157
Ibrahím Gházní (sultan), 135, 137
Ibrahím Qugh Sháh, 157
identity: and language, 11, 24–25; lesbian, 255; national, 247–48, 961–62; and premodern past, 32
ideology, of antiquity, 4
ikám (pun), 180–81, 825–26, 830, 842–43, 855–56, 856n. 114; Mr and, 900; Rekhtah and, 868
Ikhláš, Kišan Chand, 177–78; Hamisha Bahá, 177
ilmakanam (Tamil grammatical texts), 273, 273n. 8, 290, 293
ilmkáyam (Tamil literary texts), 273, 273n. 8, 290
See also Cilappatikáram (attrib. Ilankó)
Ilutmish (sultan), 138, 141, 142
Imaeda, Yoshiro, 762, 764
‘Inát, Miýán Sháh, 693
Indepen¬dence: and English, 235–36; and Hindi, 962, 1016–18, 1018n. 118; and Hindi/Urdu controversy, 979; ideological polarization following, 998; and inter racial marriage, 212
India: common language for, 511n. 15, 968; concept of, 12n. 16; as cradle of European civilization, 3–4; cultural contestation in representations of, 222; in diasporic writing, 257, 258; English language in, 202–6; epistemological change regarding, 221–22; heroic vs. satiric representation of, 235; influence on Tibet, 769–86; meaning of, 27–28; regional literary cultures in, 157; rhetorical orientations toward, 239–41; Tibetan publishing industry in, 749, 749n. 4
India, northern. See Hindustan
India Education Act of 1835, 234
Indian-English literary culture: aestheticization of, 222–32; as counterdiscourse, 205–6; dynamics of critique in, 222; and English dispersion, 236–38; of postcolonial diaspora, 254–56; political economy of language/class, 232–38; and print culture, 238–43; social efficacy of, 231; tripartite beginning of, 218.

See also colonialism; English language
Indian languages: English language and, 260–62; political/cultural geography of, 567–69; premodern complementarity among, 582; and print culture, 239
Indian National Congress, 965
Indianness, 247; and postcolonial diaspora, 256–57
Indian Opinion (Gandhi’s journal), 607
Indian provincialism, 241–42
Indian style. See sabk-i Hind
Indian women, 254
India Office Library, 759
Indianness, 247; and postcolonial diaspora, 256–57
Indian style. See sabk-i Hind (Indian style)
Indian women, 254
India Office Library, 759
indigenous scholars, 209–10
individuation, 23, 24
Indo-Aryan languages, 23, 33, 650
Indo-Persian, ghazal in, 3
Indo-Persian literary culture. See Ajam; Mughal literary culture; Persian literary culture; Sindhi literary culture
Indrajit (Bundela ruler), 927
 Ingots of Gold (Gangs ljongs mkhas dbang rim byon gyi rtsom yig gser gyi shram bu), 789–91
Injū, Jamāl al-Dīn, Farhang-i Jahāngīrī, 166–67, 174
Inquisition, 214
inscriptions: Kannada, 323–26, 329–30, 329n. 8, 351; Kerala, 445–45n. 20; Pali, 653, 653n. 9, 666n. 39, 683; Sanskrit, 85, 85n. 101, 106; Sanskrit and, 84; Sri Lanka, 695, 697–98, 697n. 34; vs. textualized poetry, 59
inshā'īyah (noninformative speech mode), 85
intentionality, 20, 48–50, 48n. 17, 49n. 19
intercultural friendships/social relations, 255–56
intercultural contact/social relations zones, 206–16; employment zone, 208–11; and first Indian-English writers, 218; friendship/social relations zone, 215–16; marriage/family zone, 211–13; and postcolonial diaspora, 254–56; religious conversion zone, 213–15
interracial marriages, 200, 211–13
interracial contact/acculturation zones, 206–16; employment zone, 208–11; and first Indian-English writers, 218; friendship/social relations zone, 215–16; marriage/family zone, 211–13; and postcolonial diaspora, 254–56; religious conversion zone, 213–15
inventational, 230, 245
invention, cultural traditions of, 20
Iqbal (poet), 178
Iqbal’s Šuruyā, 176
Iqbalī, 293
Iqbal’s Šuruyā, 176
Iran: “Indian style” in, 29, 842; literati in Mughal India, 133, 159; and New Persian, 155–57, 178, 187; and spoken Persian, 184
irattakkāppiyakal (twin epics), 280
irony, 246
Islam/Muslims: Apabhramsha and, 71–72; and diasporic writing, 255; elite, 200; and English use, 235–36; excluded from Bangla literary culture, 504, 504n. 1, 507, 540–42, 541n. 53; Hindi/Urdu controversy and, 817, 950, 963, 967–71, 971n. 24; Hindus excluded from Urdu canon by, 815; influence on Bangla, 929–32; interaction with Hindus, 181–82, 921–22; introduction to Indian world, 148; languages used by, 943–44; and Sanskrit decline, 101; in Sindhi literary culture, 638–40; Urdu and, 813–14, 946n. 82
Ismā’īl Amrohī, Vafāt nūmā-e bābī fātimah, 838
Ismā’īlīs, 629
Itihāsa, 44, 50–52, 58–60, 657
Jabali (poet), 140–41
Jagadānanda (Vaiṣṇava poet), 512, 526
Jagaddala monastery, 115
Jagaddhara, Sutakusumanjali, 92n. 115
Jagannātha Panḍita, 42–43, 55n. 31
Jagannātha Pandha, 96–99, 842; Bhāmīṇīvīla, 96–97; Rasagongadhāna, 96–97
Jagjit Singh, 907
Jahāngīr (Mughal emperor), 162, 208, 930–31
508–10, 534; in cītu poetry, 415; emendation in, 55n. 41; influence of, 301, 690; kāvya of, 401; literacy and, 88–89; literary criticism of, 590n. 47; and literary temporality, 536; mahākāvya of, 100; messenger motifs in, 473; nature poetry of, 986; on Rāmāyaṇa, 81; Sanskrit and, 51; as Sinhala model, 730; works: Kumāravyabhava, 59–60, 65, 362, 780n. 94; Mahāvaṃśa, 76–77; Rāghuvaṃśa, 75, 106–7, 111, 462, 533; Śakuntala, 59n. 43, 114, 114n. 164, 543; 944; Vikramorvaśīya, 63. See also Meghadūta (Kalidasa)

Kalim, Abū Tālib, 875

Kalilinga War, 299

Kalinskattapperavi, 311–12

Kollol (journal), 553–559

Kollol (literary group), 557

Kallol (journal), 553, 559

Kallol (literary group), 557

Kallumathada Prabhudeva, 368–71

Kalyanraji, 583

Kamandaka, 295

Kāmasūtra, 328, 454

Kāneppali, 385–86

Kampāṇ, 284n. 28, 292, 302n. 79, 304

Irāmāvatāram, 279, 301, 312. See also Kampāvāmiṇyāram

Kampāvāmiṇyāram, 279, 295, 301–5, in Pugattirappu

312–13; 314–15; 318

Kanaka Dasa, 308

Kandya (Śrī Lanka), 720

Kannada language: classification of, 23; cultural identity of, 326; first used in inscriptions, 324; influence on Indian-English literature, 261; influence on Telugu, 383–84, 425; as transregional culture language, 25; and Jainism, 69; oral-folk puranic storytelling in, 248; origin of, 31; reasons for poetic choice of, 328–29, study of, in West, 4n. 4, 51, 5; and vacana, 21; vernacularization of, 326–27; in Vijayanagara, 371, 377–78

Kannada literary culture: absences in construction of, 332–33; beginning and consolidation of, 323–40; British Romantic influence on, 998; bhedamāṇḍali and, 326, caste in, 352–53; colonialism and, 379–80; consensus as basis of, 331–39; 361, 364; "corpse of the king" image in, 354–58; dogmatic reader in, 374–75; epic imagination in, 329–31; erotica in, 374–75; historical differentiation, moment of, 326–29; influence of, 25; inscriptions as public narratives in, 323–26, 329–30; as institution, 341; interaction of empire and secular poetics in, 341–46; liberal theorists in, 363–68; literary intelligentsia divided in, 368–71; multiple deśi in, 359–63; poetry of, 325–26, 379; prosody as negotiation in, 338, 339–41; radical epistemes in, 346–54; recontextualization of epistemes in, 362–63; Sanskrit and, 326–29, 334, 335–36, 339n. 26, 349; Śrīvijaya as creator of, 331; symbolic fragmentation in, 345–46; textual basis of political power in, 371–80; typologies in, 338–39

kannadaśāvyajyātī (Kannada metric forms), 340

Kannadi, 298–90, 300

Kāṇḍāsañā. See Nīrān. (Kerala family of poets)

Kant, Immanuel, 224

Kapstein, Matthew, 29, 683

Karaka, Dosabhai, 596

Karmodyāvāha, 774–76

Karnadeva (Chaulukya-Vāghela king), 592

Karnatak, 69, 323, 326–37, 337, 341, 379

Karunānti, Mu., Čalapattikāram: Nāṭakak Kāṭpiyam, 300

al-Kāshānī, Abū Bakr bin ‘Ali bin ‘Ugmān, 142

Kāshān, Kalim, 161, 176, 179

al-Kāshīfī, Mulla Husain Važ, 163

Kashmir: Indo-Persian poets in, 176; kāvya in, 44–45, 85; Sanskrit literary culture in, 91–94, 101, 117–18, 120–21; theological aspects of, 14n. 20

Kasim, M. 532

Kāśīrāmdas, Mahābhārata, 505, 521

Kāśypa (king), 722, 724

kathakoḷi (Kerala temple theater), 476, 484–89

kathā (narrative prose genre), 66, 66n. 60, 594

Kathāsvātisāgara, 551–579

Kauṭilya, 295

kavi (poet). 53, 53n. 29

kaviyam (extemporaneous verse contests), 535–550–51

Kavikāman, Śaṇavātakam, 454

kvinaḷu (poetic drama), 703n. 59
Malayalam language: classification of, 25; cultural identity of, 534–55; Ezhuthachan and, 20, 481; grammar texts of, 332; influence of, 33; and linguistic identity, 441–43, 494–95; and Sanskrit, 296; study of, in West, 4n. 4; and Tamil, 24, 26, 446–48
Malayalam literary culture. See Kerala literary culture
\textit{malfūṣ} (conversation; table-talk), 135, 147–48, 147n. 49, 148n. 51
\textit{malfūṣūt} (oral discourses), 619
Malgudi (fictional village), 246
Malayalam literary culture.
Mantra
Mama
Mañju
Malik al-shuṭṭaṭ (poet laureate), 133, 161–62
Mallikārjuna, munadi Cikhaṭṭāpāla Sāṅgataya, 371–72
Mallikārjuna (Kannada poet), Sāṅkṣudhāravera, 328, 593–603, 597
Mammāta, 856n. 114; Kāvyaprabāśī, 523, 571
Manmi riddles, 616
\textit{Manasāmāngal}, 516
Maneri, Shaykh, 181
\textit{mangalkāvya}, 147, 226, 511, 515, 516–18
Mangarasa III, 325n. 3
\textit{ma'āni} (meaning), 828, 852–56, 875–80
\textit{Mavi Bhai-bam}, 705n. 56
Māṇiyakāvākara (poet-saint), 28on. 23; \textit{Tiruvempāvai}, 281
Māṇikya (Jain poet), 591; \textit{Pṛthvīvaṃśavani}, 79–80
Māsīmekalai, 274, 286, 293
\textit{manipravāla} (pearls and coral), 26, 1016n. 116
Manipravālam language: \textit{campu} in, 456–57; courtesan culture and, 453–57; development of, 445–46; Hindi as, 1016; as \textit{kāvya} medium, 443; \textit{mahakāvya} in, 490; messenger poems in, 472–75; vs. Pattu, 448–50; in religious literature, 462–65
Manjuśrī, 773
Manka: on historical-literary style, 575n. 38; on Kashmiri royal abuses, 93–94, 117–18; \textit{kāvya} theory of, 45n. 9; oral recitations of, 89–90; work: \textit{Svākarthavacara}, 92, 693n. 16
mannerism, 922–23, 922n. 30, 929, 931
Munsīm (Gwalior ruler), 927, 936
\textit{Manifesto}, 334
\textit{mantra} (liturgical formula), 22, 55–54
Manu, 295
Manusmūrti, 540
\textit{maya} (sacred texts), 290, 290n. 44
\textit{mazum}, 302–3, 302n. 81
Marathi, 26, 157, 261, 999
marṣīḥ poet, 867, 872, 891–92, 900–901
\textit{marga} (the Way): as Buddhist concept, 705; vs. \textit{dēśi}, 26, 106–8, 401, 420, 424–27
Markandeya purāṇa, 493
market sphere: English dispersed into, 232, 233–34; and print media, 238, 240–41
Marpa Chöki Lodrö (Mar-\textit{pa} Chos-\textit{kyi-blo-gros), 770–73
Marriage/family zone, 254–55
Marshall, P. J., 209
\textit{māsiyāh} (Shiite Karbala-lament), 904
Marṭūda Varma, 489
Marwari, 26
Marxism, 249, 994, 998
Masīh, Qaḍī, 181
\textit{masjāvī} (narrative poem): allegorical interpretation of, 181; in Indo-Persian literary culture, 134–35, 144, 169; in Sindhi literary culture, 628; Sufi, 147; in Urdu literary culture, 898
mass-circulation journals, 22
Mašūd Sād Salām, 133, 136–37, 186; and \textit{Amāl}, 152; as first Urdu poet, 819, 837; Hindi poetry of, 147, 821; Indian elements in poetry of, 142, 144–47; Iranian criticism of, 178–79; and \textit{sākhi}
\textit{Hindi}, 131–32, 179, 187; works: \textit{Māhātā-yi Fārsī}, 144–46; \textit{Ruzhā-yi Fārsī}, 143; \textit{Ruzhā-yi Hafta}, 145
Matara (Sri Lanka), 700, 737
\textit{matha} (monastery), 856n. 114
Mathurā, 260
Mātrēci, 74–75, 758–62
Maturai, 278
INDEX 1047

Matvála (journal), 994
Mauji, Mauji Ram, 892–93, 894
Mavara-n-nahr, 133
Mavo, Vasantbhadra, 590
Mawar-án-nahr, 175, 187
Mayideva (Viraśāva intellectual), 368
Mayūra, Suryāśātaka, 75
Mayurapada, Prayogaratnāvaliya, 701n. 43
Māzhār, Mirzā, 872–73, 893
mazmūn (theme), 828, 852–56, 854n. 107, 873–75
meaning production, 44–45
Medhānanda, Jñanavasantipani, 679
Meenakshisudaran, T. P., 302n. 79
Mehmara, Shah Mehta, Nanda
Mehrotra, Arvind Krishna, 261
Merusundar, merchant-God, 637, 637n. 53
merchant: in Bangla literary culture, 517–18, 532; in Kerala, 456–57, 494; as prototypical historical agent, 204
merchant-God, 637, 637n. 53
Merusundar, Vighatātālikhiruḥvabodha, 579n. 18
Merrunga (Jain poet), 579
metaphor, 53–54, 53n. 30
meter, 677–78
metonymy, 53–54, 73, 73n. 77
Meykanṭār, Caurāhānāpōtam, 279n. 19
mgur (song-poems), 773, 773n. 76
Mia Mir (Sufi shaykh), 618n. 10, 620
Middle Kannada, 21
Middle Persian, 132
Mihiripenne Dharmaratna, 710
Milarepa, 788, 792
Milindapañha, 651
Milner, A., 668n. 46
Milton, John, 227; Paradise Lost, 535
Mināmsā, 53–54
Mīgācīcintaram Pillai, T., 280n. 22, 287
Cāmaṁñātaivu’s biography of, 272–73, 318; death of, 479; language ability of, 275–76; oral discourses of, 317; and patronage, 281–85, 284n. 26, 307; as teacher, 276–77, 280, 285–86, 288, 319; works: Kumputkṣaṇātātyam, 283
Minhaj al-Dīn va al-Mulk, 142
Mir, Muhammad Taqī, 844–46, 851, 854, 857; arrogance of, 877–79, 888–89; Kooliyati Meer Tyque, 879; and masbūt poetry, 892, 900; Nīkāt ush-shū’ ārā, 866–79; poetic lineage of, 885, 888; on Sajjād, 870–72, 878–79; on Yaqīn, 872–76, 877
Mirābāi (Kṣṇa poet), 919, 921, 991–92
Mirkhvānd, Rauṣṭat al-Safā, 163
Mishra, Pratap Narayan, 974
Miskīn, Jing nūmāh-e muhammad hasīf, 838
Miśra, Mathurāprasād, 949
Miśra, Vidyāvināśa, 480
Mistry, Rohinton, 261
Mitho (bhakti poet), 578
Mitra, Premendra, Koolliyati Meer Tyqee, 550n. 71
Mitra, Rajendral, 817, 949
modernism, 249, 998
modernity: cultural inferiority in, 32; English as sign of, 1003–4; literary, 555–62
modernization, 3, 66
Mohenjo Daro, 613, 626
mokṣa (liberation), 372–73
Mollā (potter woman), 430
Moore, Thomas, 227
Moraes, Dom, 213, 254
Moral Maxims, 277
Moral Maxims, 277
Moreau de Maupertuis, Pierre-Louis, 224
Mughal India: and Bengali Muslim aristocracy, 531; cosmopolitanism under, 208; dakhāsi, 208–11; Persian as official language of, 158, 165–66, 233, 807; Persian literary culture adopted by, 25, 131–32; political culture of, 167–71; Sanskrit literary culture in, 95–100; Urdu use in, 807
Mughal Indian literary culture: controversy over Indian style, 177–86; “Indian Style” in, 842; and Iranian literati, 159; patronage in, 161–62; Persian language and, 159–67, 537n. 48; poetry, 169, 171–74; and political ideology, 168–71; rise of, 158; Urdu and, 537n. 48, 848–49
muhâjirs (emigrants), 641–42
Muhammad (prince), 139
Muhammad (prophet), 613
Muhammad Ghuri, 228
Muhammad Muhsin, Mir, 185
Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah, 157, 832, 833
Muhammad Shah (Mughal emperor), 845
Muhammad Tughlaq, 830–31
Muirim (Urdu poet), 895
Mukherjee, Bhatari, 215, 255, 258; *Holder of the World*, 257; *Middleman and Other Stories*, 259
Mukherjee, Meenakshi, *Realism and Reality*, 1006
Mukhili, Anand Ram, 184; *Mir'at al Istilah*, 105, 174
Mukhopadhyaya, Bhudev, 511, 530, 1007n. 99
Mukhopadhyaya, Subhas, 555
mukhaka (independent lyric verse), 65n. 58
Mukitbohd, Gajanan Madhav, 992, 997–98
Mukundarama, 226
Müller, Friedrich Max, 4n. 4, 39, 252
Multan, 132, 139, 141, 150, 187
multilingualism: and acculturation, 208; and diffusion of English, 216; in Indian-English literary culture, 210, 218–19, 233; in Gujarati literary culture, 578–79; in Kerala theater, 485; and language choice, 66–69; at Mysore court, 377–78; tripartite modern structure of, 236–37
Mumtaz, Mir Amanat'Ali, 88q
Munir Lahori, Abû al-Barakat, 182–84, 188
Munja (king of Paramaras), 68
munir, 219, 219n. 54
munshi (secretary), 162, 164–66
Munshi, K. M., 569
Murtti, Namacivya, 275–76
Musalmãni Bamla, 504, 541n. 53
musâ'irah (Urdu literary gathering): development/conventions of, 850, 85on. 101; disputation in, 892–94; Mir on, 869–70; oral recitation of ghazal in, 905, 906–7
Mushtaf, Shaykh Ghulam Hamadani, 176, 806, 840, 852n. 103; in musâ'irah, 893–94; poetic lineage of, 886; *taghirah* tradition of, 884–85
Mussoorie, 237
Mutaliyar, Arunãcala, 282
Mutaliyar, Irãmacãmi, 274
Mutaliyar (Tamil caste), 286
al-Mu'tazz, 'Abdullah ibn, 150
Mutiny of 1857, 879, 887, 901, 903, 963
Mu'tibi Samarqandî, 162n. 103
Musnad-i-Muhammad, 712
Mu'zinib, Mirzã Muhammad Hasan, 882, 885
Mysore, 100, 237, 370–71, 377–78
Nacana Sômudu, 390
Naccínârkkinîyâr, 275
Nadvi, Sayyid Sulaimân, 808, 812
Nâgalingavôgi, Navalugundada, 379
Naga oral poems, 29
Nagaraj, D. R., 13, 19, 21, 26
Nâgari Prâcâraî Prâtrâ (journal), 964
Nâgari Prâcâraî Sabhã, 964–65, 966, 985
Nâgari script. See Devanâgari script.
Nâgarjuna, 776
Nâgasena (Buddhist monk), 676
Nâgavarma, Immadi, 327–28, 330–40; *Abhidânamavastuktôta*, 327; *Karnâtpakabhasâ-bhãsana*, 327
Naidu, Sarojini, 223, 250, 240, 253
Naik, M. K., 218
Nâipaul, V. S., 252–53; *A Million Mutinies Now*, 252; *India: A Wounded Civilization*, 252
Nâji, Muhammad Shakîr, 829
Nakhshabi, Ziyâyâl-Din, 148
Nâkîrâr, 290n. 43, 306
Nâlatiya (Patumâgar), 277n. 14; organization of, 312; in *Pugattirtrun*, 315–16; significance of, 293, 310; in Tamil curriculum, 277–78
Nâllurununununi (Tamil minister-author), 694
Nambi Arooran, K., 288
Nâmibhârs (caste), 451, 476, 486, 490
Nâmdev (sant poet), 933–34
Nâmâyâr (Tamil poet-saint), 304
Nâmvar Singh, 991
Nânak (guru), 621
Nânâlal (critic), 603–4
Nânâvarâ (Buddhist monk), *Râjâdhâvanâ-mattapakáisini*, 679n. 74
Nanda (monk), 636
Nandadâs (Brahmachara poet): and Braj-bhasha *prabandha* tradition, 923–26; and *râsa* theory, 930; vocabularies of, 943; works: *Aukâthbhâmañjâri*, 925; *Bhâravargî*, 926; *Dasamkandh*, 924–25; *Mâsmañjâri*, 925; *Prabodhacandrodya*,  
and popular language, 515; script used for, 696; study of, in West, 5
Pali literature: historical background of, 649–51; influence of, 723–24; as intensified literacy, 680–84; kāvya in, 669–80; Rāmāyana/Vessantarakīrttaka story-matrix, 658–69; and Sinhala, 733, 733n. 157, 742–43; vamsa texts in, 652–57
Pallavas, 306
palm-leaf manuscripts, 31, 276, 285–86
Pampa (Kannada poet): campa of, 69, 366; cultural identification of, 337; epic imagination of, 330–31; ideology vs. aesthetics in, 344–46; and inscriptions, 325; and premodern Kannada authorial function, 325, 325n. 3; as multigender writer, 328; primary language of, 329, 329n. 8; resentment of, 359; as universal desi writer, 380; work: Vīramāḷyanaṇavijaya, 106, 330–31
pāṇa (song-form), 483
Pāṇi, 148, 331
Pāṇiḥkārtrātiṭṭha, 736
Pandey, Mukundhar, 991
Panditārādhyāya (Telugu grammarian), 397
Pāṇḍya, Navalrām, 596, 599, 600–601, 602, 604
Panikkar (caste), 467
Panini (Sanskrit grammarian), 84, 85;
Subhdānaśaṇana, 387
Pānij, 616
Pānijāyita, 668–69n. 46
Panthināmi (Buddhist monk), Sāsanavānsa, 679
Pāṇinīparyāptyāyā, 278n. 15
Pant, Sumitrānand, 934, 991, 992–94, 998, 1014; Grāmyā, 994; Lokāyatan, 992; Pālās, 993
Pāṇīṭṭha kingdom, 290, 298–99, 395–6, 444–447
paraḥyattattva (love for God), 521
Parākramabāhu I (Kōtē king), 653, 664–65n. 37, 700, 731
Parākramabāhu VI (Kōtē king), 699, 706n. 63, 715–16; Raivavāna, 729
panārāṇa (tradition: lineage), 79, 510
Parāvāna, S., 698, 722, 722n. 118, 726n. 134
Parānprajā, 215
Parāśurāma, 459
Pārīta, 279
Pārāsitāca, Kavanakā Puratsikābhīpīyam, 300
Pārāśī, Kōpalakirīṣṇa, 280, 280n. 22
parā vāh (ultimate language), 588
Paričay (journal), 553
Parimēlākākar: ethical literature of, 293, 293n. 50; sectarian commentary on Tīrūkkōḻal, 294, 295n. 57, 308–9, 317
Parmānandadās (Kṛṣṇa poet), 922
Parthasarathy, R.: on colonial influence, 231; on Cīlaṭṭāṭkārām, 297, 297n. 65, 298, 299–300; poetry of, 259, 261
Partition of 1947: and Hindi/Urdu controversy, 979; and Sindhi literary culture, 613, 625, 640, 641
pāśātīyā bhāv (Western sensibility), 545
Paśho Academy, 6–7. 7
Patañjali, Mahāhāṁsa, 84
Pāthak, Rāmaṇārāma, 600
Pāthak, Sridhal, 986–88, 991; Bhāratī, 987
pāṭyukūlkānakkū, 289
Paśūṇacarī, 238, 239
Patna, 237
Patnaik, Deba, 214
patronage: in Bangla literary culture, 513–14, 526n. 28, 537, 537n. 48; in Braj-bhāsha literary culture, 929; and colonialism, 282; in Gujarati literary culture, 584–85, 592–93; in Indo-Persian literary culture, 133–34, 154n. 75, 161–62; and Jain purity, 343–44; in Kerala literary culture, 494–95, 473n. 78, 477–78; at Orcha court, 914; and power, 526n. 28, 527n. 31, 537n. 48; role of king in, 388–89; in Sanskrit literary culture, 118–20; Tamil literary culture and, 281–82; in Telugu literary culture, 391, 402, 408, 409, 412, 413–14, 418; in Urdu literary culture, 905; in Vijayanagara, 94
pāṭṭiyāl, 278n. 15
Pattu, 448–50, 457–62, 465, 467
pattuppāṭṭu (canikam poems), 280
Patumagar, 277n. 14. See also Nālōtiyār (Patumagar)
Pattuvaṭṭu, 432, 459
Peddana, Allasani: in cāṭu poetry, 415, 417; kāvya of, 402, 406–7; oral poetry of, 430; Sanskrit in poetry of, 419; work: Muvvurtirūțum, 402–5, 408, 419
Peeradina, Saleem, 255
Pegu (Mon state), 681
pékbhath (demon stories), 485–86
Pérácírijar, 293
Perry, John, 74n. 2
Persian-Arabic, 209
Persian language: Arabic classics translated into, 142; correspondence with Sanskrit, 175; as court language, 160–62, 165–66, 178–177, 188; influence of, 33; influence on Bangla, 530, 538, 542; influence on Sindhi, 626–28; influence on Telugu, 384, 385, 419; as international culture language, 23, 25; introduction and spread of, 132–35, 147–49; linguistic diversity and identity in, 154–58; as literary language, 137–38; under Mughals, 159–67; and production of vernacular place, 28–29; Rekhta and, 839, 842–43, 881, 883–84; and sabk-i Hindi, 179; Sanskrit classics translated into, 148; script used for Urdu, 962–67; spoken vs. literary, 184–85; study of, in West, 4n. 4; tazkirah in, 19.
See also New Persian
Persian literary culture: Indian contribution to, 185–86; influence on Brajbhasha, 942–44; influence on Hindi, 915–16; influence on Sindhi, 626–29; poetic tradition in, 354–57; poetry in, 168–69, 170, 842; portraits of Turks in, 156; Sanskrit and, 96–98; styles in, 187. See also Ajam; Mughal Indian literary culture; Sindhi literary culture; Urdu literary culture
Perry, John, 74n. 2
Pérváciríjar, 293
Perry, John, 74n. 2
Persian-Arabic, 209
Persian language: Arabic classics translated into, 142; correspondence with Sanskrit, 175; as court language, 160–62, 165–66, 178–177, 188; influence of, 33; influence on Bangla, 530, 538, 542; influence on Sindhi, 626–28; influence on Telugu, 384, 385, 419; as international culture language, 23, 25; introduction and spread of, 132–35, 147–49; linguistic diversity and identity in, 154–58; as literary language, 137–38; under Mughals, 159–67; and production of vernacular place, 28–29; Rekhta and, 839, 842–43, 881, 883–84; and sabk-i Hindi, 179; Sanskrit classics translated into, 148; script used for Urdu, 962–67; spoken vs. literary, 184–85; study of, in West, 4n. 4; tazkirah in, 19.
See also New Persian
Persian literary culture: Indian contribution to, 185–86; influence on Brajbhasha, 942–44; influence on Hindi, 915–16; influence on Sindhi, 626–29; poetic tradition in, 354–57; poetry in, 168–69, 170, 842; portraits of Turks in, 156; Sanskrit and, 96–98; styles in, 187. See also Ajam; Mughal Indian literary culture; Sindhi literary culture; Urdu literary culture
Perunturai, 283
Peters, Carla, 878
Phillauri, $raddhara$mar, Bhágavatí, 1004–5
Phra Khlang (minister-poet), 668n. 46
Phra Lak Phra Lam (Lao version of Lak$ma$ and Rama), 666n. 39
Pílai (Tamil caste), 286
Pillai (Tamil caste), 286
pillaittanil, 278, 281, 281n. 24, 283
Pongal, 3, 339n. 26, 340, 340n. 32, 575
Pongal, 3, 339n. 26, 340, 340n. 32, 575
Pongal, 3, 339n. 26, 340, 340n. 32, 575
Pongsanam, 406
prapattiyam: absent in Pugattiyai, 51–12; genres included in, 278–79, 278n. 15, 278n. 17; of M. Pillai, 281–82; and sectarianism, 295
praśāsa, 1
Piyatissa, Vidurupola, Mahákassapacarita, 679
Platts, John T., 810, 818–19; Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi, and English, 815; Grammar of Hindustani or Urdu, 815
Plethys, John T., 810, 818–19; Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi, and English, 815; Grammar of Hindustani or Urdu, 815
Pliny, Natural History, 8
pluriverse, 337
Pollock, Sheldon: on Buddhist influence on Sanskrit, 700, 711; on Kannada, 326, 474, 525; on patronage and power, 526n. 28, 527–28n. 31, 537n. 48; on prāśasti style, 727n. 138; on Rāmāyaṇa/ Mahābhārata relationship, 638; on Sanskrit cosmopolis, 665n. 38, 714n. 97; on Vālmiki, 657; on vedicization, 509
Polonnaruwa (Sri Lanka), 720
Pommařak, 666n. 39
Ponna (Kannada poet), 328, 337, 344
Pope, Alexander, 227
portability, 639–40
Portuguese India: Luso-Indian community in, 212; religious conversion in, 214
Portuguese language: displaced by English, 233–34; “market Portuguese,” 234n. 91
postcolonial diaspora: and cosmopolitanism, 249–50; Indian-English writers of, 253–60; and interracial contact zones, 210, 212; of Sindhis, 613
postcolonial society, 32
Pōtana, Bhágavatí, 391, 410–11, 412
Pou, S., 666n. 39
power, 31
prabandha (narrative-expository works), 278, 571n. 9; Brajbhasha tradition of, 923–26; of Kesavadas, 927–28; of Vīṇudās, 918
prabandham, 486, 489
prabandhamu (courtly kavya genre), 402n. 26
pragmatic methodology, contingency of, 16–18
praise-poems: of Bana, 77; Pali, 653–54, 674–75, 674–75n. 62. See also prāśasti (praise-poem)
Prājñákaramati, 777
Prakrit language: decline of, 71n. 73; classification/definition of, 23, 62; Harśicandra’s use of, 951; and Jainism, 24; Kannada and, 340–41; as language of underworld, 168; as literary language, 61–64, 567; lyric poetry in, 44; as poetic choice, 64–68, 65n. 58; and popular language, 515; range of, 74, 74n. 79; regional types of, 63; study
literary narrative, 58; erotic as, 357–58; and medical discourse, 701n. 43; and Sanskrit poetics, 42, 44–45, 576; and secularization, 346; shift to vernacular treatment, 929–30; in Sīgiriya graffiti, 723, 723n. 121; and language, 24–25, 33–34; 66n. 61, 69–74; portability and, 639–40.

See also specific religions; specific sects

religious community, 31

religious conversion, 213–15, 255

religious sectarianism, 293–95, 303–4, 311

remembrance, 19

Renou, Louis, 55n. 31

Reńu, Phaniśvarānāth, 1012, 1016n. 116; *Maila Ākāi, 1014–15; Parāti Pārakāthā, 1015

revivalism, 247, 259

Rģedo, 55

Richardson, David Lester, 226–27, 242

Rieu, Charles, 139

Rimi, Jālāl ad-Dīn, 638

Rinehart, Robin, 639

ритику́я, 3, 931, 941

Rīyanamiya (resident of Rajanama), 726n. 134

Rīža, Glaūm ‘Alī Mūsā, Guldastah-i Karnāṭak, 177

Rīzah, Tāj al-Dīn, 138

Robinson, Francis, 817, 971

Rodrigues, Santan, 213

rokudō (Japanese six-destinies literature), 763–64

romantic nationalism, 225–26

Rose, Raul D’Gama, 213

Rose-Apple Continent, cosmological map of, 29

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 223


Roy, Rammohan, 211; Brahmo Samaj

founded by, 532; and cultural contestation, 231, 239, 253; as early Indian-English writer, 218, 219–22; Islamic influence on, 531; major works of, 220–21; missionary influence on, 214–15, 220–21; multilingual/multicultural background of, 215; significance of, 540–41

rubū’i (quatrain), 136

Rubin, David, *The Return of Saraswati, 996

Rūdaki (New Persian poet), 154

Rudrabhaṭṭa, Śyāṁśvatītaka, 930

Rudramahālaya temple (Aśphilapur Pāṭan), 592
Sanskrit cosmopolis: bifurcation in, 29; and localism, 114; and political culture, 714n. 97; and Rāmāyaṇa, 665n. 38; Southeast Asian participation in, 108–9; in Sinhala literary culture, 697–98, 733


Sanskrit language: and aesthetic commitment, 17; and Brahmanism, 73–74; Buddhist influence on, 700; correspondence with Persian, 175; definition of, 62; as international culture language, 23, 25, 31, 74–75; as lingua franca of intellectual life, 275–76; as literary language, 61–64, 82–84, 567; mantra in, 22; as poetic choice, 64–75; Rāmāyaṇa and, 80–87; as sacred language, 168; and social identity, 24; study of, in West, 5; Télugu adaptations of, 394–97

Sanskrit literary culture, 89–90; anthologies in, 114–17, 115n. 105; beginning of, 76–91; cultural dominance of, 42, 341; difficulty defining, 39–41; end of, 91–102, 120–21; ethnohistorical habit in, 76; “indigenist” knowledge of, 41–42; in Kashmir, 91–94, 101; lack of logographic uniformity in, 110; literacy vs. orality in, 87–91; literary categories of, 422; literary narrative in, 57–61; mapping of, 103–8; as model for secularization, 346; monolinguality of, 67–69, 68n. 05; in Mughal India, 95–100; Orchha as center of, 926; as Pali source material, 653; patronage in, 118–20; Persian influence on, 96–98; poetic theory, 316; public recitations in, 693n. 16; range of, 74–75; regionality and recession in, 108–14; rule-bound practices in, 361; social sites of, 114–21; standards of literary judgment in, 78; text-critical procedures in, 111–14, 111n. 156; textuality in, 47–52; theater, 485–86; vahkōki in, 251; in Vijayanagara, 94–95, 101. See also kāvyā sānta (quiescent), 356

Śāntala Dēvi, 329–30

sant poetry, 914; definition of, 919n. 19; languages used in, 913, 946–47; in Muslim times, 932–33; tradition of, 919, 933–36

Śāqīb (Urdu poet), 873

Sahihbhai, Bhōlanāth, 503–94

Sahara (Kannada poet), 357

Saranamkara, Abhisambodhi-ala-alaṅkāra, 674n. 62

śarana, 349, 350

Śārāngadhara, 386

Śaogō, Alka, Kāl-Kathā, 1015

Saraswati, 81n. 94

Sarasvati (journal), 964–65, 985–86

Saraswati, Dayananda, Satyārtha-prakūṣā, 241

Śāripuṭta, 731

Sarkhvush, Muḥammad Afzāl, 845; Kalīmāt al Shayʾ-anūn, 177

Śārmā, Rāmdas, Bhaṅgadābhūtis, 953

Sarmāst, Sāchā, 627, 628, 630; music and, 632

Śarshār, Ratan Nath, 975

Samudrabandha, 47n. 13

Samudragupta, 106

Sana’ī, Husain, 137, 161, 181, 821

Sānātī Bijāpūri, 896–97; Qisāš-e benazir, 836

Sanctis, Francesco de, Storia della letteratura italiana (de Sanctis), 10

sandēkāya (messenger poems), 465; definition of, 699n. 38; genre features of, 470n. 68, 70; in Kerala literary culture, 693–95; in Manipravalam, 472–75; in Sinhala literary culture, 699

sandhyā bhaṣā (Buddhist linguistic codes), 515

sāṅgāyā (metrical form), 336, 338n. 22, 377

Sangharakshitā (Buddhist monk): Suhodhā-alaṅkāra, 43n. 6, 703, 742; Vattiṭeyya, 742

sanhita, 280n. 21

Saṅjāya (king), 663

Sankalīka, Hansaukhum, 570

Śākūkara (philosopher), 302, 595

sankirtan (congregational singing), 526

Sannasgala, P. B., Sinkhala Sāhiya Viniyaya, 720

Śaṅkara (sage), 392, 595

Saṁśkrita (Buddhist monk): Abhisambodhi-alaṅkāra, 674n. 62

Śaṅkara (philosopher), 302, 595

Sarasvatī, Dayananda, Satyārtha-prakūṣā, 241

Śāripuṭta, 731

Sarkhvush, Muḥammad Afzāl, 845; Kalīmāt al Shayʾ-anūn, 177

Śārmā, Rāmdas, Bhaṅgadābhūtis, 953

Sarmāst, Sāchā, 627, 628, 630; music and, 632

Śarshār, Ratan Nath, 975
Sindhi, Memon Abdul Majid, 616
Sindhi Adabi Board, 6–7n. 7
Sindhi language: classification of, 23; influences on, 53; as literary language, 627–28; linguistic features of, 613–14, 613n. 1; music and, 632–33; scripts used for, 622–26; and Sindhi identity, 640–43; study of, in West, 4n. 4
Sindhi literary culture: colonialism and, 624–26, 640–43; folk/bardic tradition in, 635–37; heritage of, 614n. 3; music and, 631–35; oral vs. written literary cultures in, 614–21, 635; Persian influence on, 626–29; religious identity in, 638–40; religious poetry in, 629–35; scripts and identity in, 622–26; tazkirah in, 864n. 1
Sindhi Sahitya Sabha, 625
Sindhi Translator, Office of, 641
Singh, Khushwant, 261
Singh, Thakur Jagmohan, 691
Sinha, Kaliprasanna, Mahabharata, 521
Sinhala, 23; influences on, 33, 34
Sinhala language: changes in, 691; in early inscriptions, 721n. 117; influence of, 689n. 1; as literary language, 690–91; script used for, 695–97, 696n. 27; study of, in West, 4n. 4; and Tamil secessionism, 981
Sinhala literary culture: author portraits and literary identity in, 707–12; Buddhist influence on, 700–707, 726n. 134; English in, 697n. 33; ideal literary person in, 717–21; and Pali, 664, 742–43; pedagogical canon in, 692–93; poetic difficulty in, 706–7; poetic drama in, 705n. 59; Rāmāyana in, 664; Sanskrit influence on, 692–93, 694, 696, 723, 725; at Sigiriya, 721–27; Tamil influence on, 693–94; and techniques of human understanding, 712–21; as technology of power, 714–15. See also ēlu (Sinhala poetry)
Siraj, Minhaj, 1, 141; Tabaqat-i Nāsiri, 138, 139
Sirhind, Ilahdad Fayzi, Mudār al-Afāżil, 101
Sirhind, Nāṣir ‘Alī, 162, 170, 174
Sirina (lord of Digalavana), 723
Sirisanghabodhi (future Buddha king), 655–56
Śrīvēkara (Sri Lanka), 720
Śvadeva (Śaiva spiritual master), 351–52
Śvamahimnās stotra, 88
Śvapuruṣa, 938
Sivamohanthy, K., 288, 305, 306
Sivkala (wife of Utur), 724
Siyabaslakara: aesthetic terms as Buddhist concepts in, 705–6; on alakñaka, 737n. 165; on Buddha as poetic subject, 703–4, 712; and changes in Sinhala, 691, 692n. 9, 695; difficulty as virtue in, 738; on fusion of literary/nonliterary identities, 708; on language and existence, 741; on literary authority, 701–2; on literary value, 713–14; meters introduced in, 728; and Sigiriya graffiti, 723n. 121; on Sinhala style, 742–43
Skandapurana, 426
skandhaka (Prakrit courtly epic), 65, 65n. 58, 66, 77
Skilling, P., 651
ślesa (pun): and kavya textuality, 52; in Pali, 670–71, 670–71n. 57, 676–77; prejudice against, 856n. 114; in Sinhala literary culture, 695, 695n. 25; in Telugu literary culture, 405–6
śloka, 652–53
śmārtā, 929
Śobhiñārāmitra, Alankāravatnākara, 92n. 115
socialism, 249–50
social realism, 244–45
social subjectivity, 45
Society of Jesus, 203
Sogdiana, 759
Somadevasūri, Yaśāstilakacampu, 69
Somanāthuḍu, Palkuriki, 385; and dēsi, 401; and Telugu counter literary culture, 397–98, 419, 420; works: Basavapuruṇama, 398, 399–400, 426; Paṇḍitārādyacaritramu, 398–99, 428
Somanāthuḍu, Piduparti, 399, 426
Somudu, Nacana (Telugu poet), 72n. 75, 118–20
Somuṣvara, 78n. 89, 79, 577; Mānasollāsa, 72n. 75, 118–20
Sonam Tsemo (Bsod-nams-rtses-mo), 789
Songtzen Gampo (Srong-btsan Sgam-po), 752–54, 774–75
Sorley, H. T., 680n. 48, 698
South Asia: literary historiography of, 12; marginalization of, 30; meaning of, 27–28; seen through literary culture, 30–32; writing systems in, 732
Southey, Robert, 227
South India, Luso-Indian community in, 212
Soz, Mir, 889
space, and literary culture, 27–30
Spear, Percival, 216n. 48, 225
Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, 259
Sprenger, Alois, 881
Sri Lanka: absence of
Srinivas Iyengar, K. R., 218
Srinigar, 237
Srinivas Iyengar, K. R., 218
Sriram, Lalah, Kshemkhinah-e-javed, 905
Srirampur, 213, 221
Srîśailam, 385
Srîvaiṣṇava Brahmanas, 303, 482
Srîvaiṣṇava Brahmanas, 303, 482
Srîvijaya (Kannada poet): background of, 332; as creator of Kannada literary culture, 331; on dśi, 333–34
Srîvijaya (Kannada poet): background of, 332; as creator of Kannada literary culture, 331; on dśi, 333–34
śrīgūra (erotic), 356, 357–58, 922n. 30, 929–30, 931
Stack, George, 624–25; Grammar of the Sindhi Language, 622
Stephens, Thomas, 202–6, 253, 239;
Christian Purana, 202
sthalapuriṣa (local history), 248, 276
Story, James, 203
storytelling, 119
stotra literature, 92, 768, 773, 783
subaltern studies, 13, 240–41
Subandhu, Vāsavadattā, 77
Subhāstivādī, 57
subject-positions, 241–43
Subrahmanian, N., 293, 300
svadhāra (change for the better), 605–6
Sufism/Sufis: and authenticity, 621; Avadhi and, 913, 938, 945–46; in Bangla literary culture, 530; folk romances and, 636–37; Hindu imagery and, 824; in Indo-Persian literary cultures, 147–48; 157, 181; malfizāt tradition, 619; music and, 632–33; and nāth śāśva community, 913, 932; religious identity of, 638–40; in Sindhi literary culture, 616, 629–30; Urdu use of, 837–38
Sukhothai kingdom, 665, 684
Sukla, Ramachandra, 965, 991, 1002, 1008n. 101
Sukla, Śrīlā, Rāg Darbārī, 1015
Sūktasuddhāravā, 328
sūl-hi kull (peace with all), 160
Sumra dynasty, 616, 616n. 7
Sundaram Pillai, P., Maṅgūmapiṅi, 289n. 38; Some Milestones in the History of Tamil Literature, 289n. 38
Śūnyasampāde, 369
superposition, 694
supersession, will to, 43
Śūrdās (Kṛṣṇa poet), 921–23, 1009; Śūrdās, 921
surf music, 633–34
Suoor, Durga Sahac, 975
Sūr sultans, 158
Sūtānipiṅa, 17, 672, 723
Sūtātpiṅa, 735–36
svārājya (home rule), 606
Svayambhū, 77n. 85
swadeshi campaign, 251
Syed, Ghalām Murtaḍā, 631
Ta’assuf, Mīr Husain ‘Alī, 890–91, 892
taudhāva (Sanskrit derivatives), 694, 697
Tagore, Rabindranath, 216, 229, 232, 531;
aesthetization of, 535, 535n. 45; background of, 552; British Romantic influence on, 990; language of, 543n. 60; and literary modernity, 555–62; nationalism of, 542n. 54; rebuke of Gandhi, 546n. 63; Sanskrit canon and, 513; significance of, 503–4, 540, 557; songs of, 551; translations of, 554; works: “Aikat,” 560n. 83; “Bănî,” 560; “Duhosamy,” 547, 547n. 66; “Indian History,” 541–42; Kathâ O Kâhînî, 555–56n. 78, 559; “Nagarsângit,” 560; Sēvar Kavîtâ, 557; “Song of the City,” 561; Vâsînvâkâvîtâ, 522, 527n. 30
Tahsin, Âta Husain, Nau tar-e muwasa’, 837
Taila III (Câhuka ruler), 348
Taimur, 811–12, 821
Taine, Hippolyte Adolphe, History of English Literature, 6n. 6
Taksin (Thonburi king), 665–66n. 39
talapûrânâm, 276n. 10, 285
Tale of Ramaça (Ra ma ya’i rògs brjod), 783–86, 788, 794
Tālib Āmîlî, 161, 170, 178, 182
Tamil language: in Cēra kingdom, 445; classification of, 23; influence of, 25, 33, 319; influence on Tehu, 383–84, 425; linguistic chauvinism of, 1017–18; and Malayalam, 24, 26, 446–48; songs in, 275; study of, in West, 4n. 4
Tamil literary culture, 271–322; anti-Hindi sentiments in, 289n. 44; cānvâ literature in, 305–18, 444; canonical poetry in, 294–95; classification of, 289–90; 291n. 46; commentarial discourses on, 308n. 98; Dravidian influence on, 288, 290n. 43; earliest corpus of, 280n. 21; folk roots of, 297–98, 297n. 67; and Hinduism, 272; and historicity, 16–17; historization of, 288–92, 318; influence in Kerala, 460; influence on Sinhala, 603–94; literary commentaries in, 316–18; literary education in, 276–81, 283–84, 284n. 26; messenger motifs in, 470, 471; official literary debuts in, 282–85, 286, 319; oral and manuscript traditions of, 285–86; and patronage, 281–85; “poetic sequence” in, 297, 297n. 65; premodern vs. modern modes of, 318–19; prosody in, 278n. 13; recitation of saints’ hymns in, 284n. 28; rediscovery of early texts in, 274–75, 280, 288; relationship of verse to textual whole in, 316–18; and religious sectarianism, 293–95, 309–4, 311; Sanskrit and, 291–92, 294–95, 296, 301–2; siddha poets in, 289–90, 289n. 40; social environment of, 286–88
Tamilnadu: Jain proselytization in, 296; religious communities in, 273, 274, 293–94
Tamil Renaissance, 272, 288
Tamil separatism, 299–301
Tâmrâram Pillai, C. V., 272n. 2
Tansen (musician), 97
Tarâginî (meter), 479, 479, 480
Târîkh-e gharbî, 824, 837
Târîkh-i Ma’ṣūmî, 617, 618–19
Târîq Sâtâk, 998
Tarumapura, 273n. 6, 287
Tassy, Garcin de, 5n. 5, 881; Histoire de la littérature hindoue et hindoustani, 19
tatsama (Sanskrit loanwords): in Brajbhasha, 943, 945; in Hindi, 942; in Pali, 697, 743; in Sinhala, 694–95, 697; in Urdu, 851–52
Tattvabodhini Patrikā (journal), 544
Tauta, Bhaṭṭa, 147n. 48
Tavîfuj (correspondence), 175, 175n. 158
tavrom (on austerities), 155; of Āsād, 901–3; cultural role of, 902; evaluation of poetry in, 182, 188; expansion/ improvement of, 882; of Fort William College, 879–82; Indo-Persian, 133–34; of Mughal poets, 158, 175–77; of Nāsir, 882–92; Persian, 139, 864n. 1; poets represented in, 171; as remembrance, 19; social contexts of, 894–98; Urdu, 864–66, 865n. 3
Tâgḥirâ (poetic anthologies), 155; of Āzâd, 901–3; cultural role of, 902; evaluation of poetry in, 182, 188; expansion/ improvement of, 882; of Fort William College, 879–82; Indo-Persian, 133–34; of Mughal poets, 158, 175–77; of Nāsir, 882–92; Persian, 139, 864n. 1; poets represented in, 171; as remembrance, 19; social contexts of, 894–98; Urdu, 864–66, 865n. 3
Tâgḥira ko Amîn-în Avâz, 161
Tâgḥira ko fârîd-în Avâz, 161
Tâgḥirîn al-Wâgī’î, 161
Técikar, Ampalavâna, 281, 283
Técikar, Cuppiramamâjiyâ, 273–74, 275, 279, 281, 283–84, 284n. 26
Tehrani, Salim, 160
Telaganāra, Ponnkaṇṭi, Yayāti Caritramu,
384n. 1
Telakagāthā, 655n. 15
teleology, 11, 11n. 13
television, 981–82, 1005n. 93, 1017–18
Telugu language: classification of, 23; grammar texts of, 387, 393; regionalization in, 28; vs. Sanskrit, 26, 419–21; songs in, 275; study of, in West, 4n. 4, 5n. 5
Tibetan literary culture: Buddhist influence on, 29, 754–58, 759, 760–61, 762–67; Chinese influence on, 754; Cycle of Birth and Death, 762–67, 771, 773; early formation of, 751–67; Indian identity in, 769–76, 782; Indian influence on, 749–50, 757–58, 761–62; influence of, 747–49; jātaka literature in, 774–76; kāvya, post-Cultural Revolution, 786–94; kāvya, Tibetan, 782–86; lay poetry in, 786, 786n. 112; lineage succession through incarnation in, 774–76, 774n. 78; Rāmāyana in, 758–62, 783, 784; Sanskrit influence on, 21, 23, 779–82; script and, 751–54; vision poetry in, 29, 779–73
Tibetan publishing industry: in China, 787–89; in India, 749, 749n. 4; in Tibet, 788n. 118, 788n. 119
Tikkana (Telugu poet): kāvya legends of, 406; and Mahābhārata, 393, 397, 397n. 18, 421; patronage of, 94; and Telugu community, 393; and Telugu language, 384, 419; written style of, 429
Timur, 136, 187
Timurids, 171
Tipitakālakāra, 667n. 42
Tipitaka (Three baskets), 681
tīrtha anūtās, 278, 278n. 16
Tirucciraktakam, 467
Tiruvalluvar, 277n. 14, 292–95; as blueprint for Pugattu, 310; commentaries on, 289; Jainism and, 296; organization of, 308–9, 312, 317; in Tamil curriculum, 277–78
Tirumāṉakaiyār (Tamil poet), 304
Tirumugai, 276n. 10, 280n. 23
Tiruvācāampantar, 287
Tirukkuṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟṟrabbit, 282
Thākur, Abanindranath, Rājākāni, 551
Thakur, Hiro, 615, 616–17, 620
Thāmūz, 214
Thanjavur, 99–100, 378, 413
Tharoor, Shashi, 215, 255, 258
Thattawī, Mulla 'Abd al-Rashid, Farhang-i Rashidi, 171
Theragāthā, 17, 672–73
Therigāthā, 17, 672–73
Thomlinson family, 234
Thom-mi Sanbhodha, 753
Three Worlds Treatise, 696
Tibetan language: Buddhist use of, 755–58, 768, 769; as literary language, 750–51, 768–69; script used for, 751–54; as South Asian language, 748–49
Tibetan literary culture: Buddhist influence on, 29, 754–58, 759, 760–61, 762–67; Chinese influence on, 754; Cycle of Birth and Death, 762–67, 771, 773; early formation of, 751–67; Indian identity in, 769–76, 782; Indian influence on, 749–50, 757–58, 761–62; influence of, 747–49; jātaka literature in, 774–76; kāvya, post-Cultural Revolution, 786–94; kāvya, Tibetan, 782–86; lay poetry in, 786, 786n. 112; lineage succession through incarnation in, 774–76, 774n. 78; Rāmāyana in, 758–62, 783, 784; Sanskrit influence on, 21, 23, 779–82; script and, 751–54; vision poetry in, 29, 779–73
Tibetan publishing industry: in China, 787–89; in India, 749, 749n. 4; in Tibet, 788n. 118, 788n. 119
Tikkana (Telugu poet): kāvya legends of, 406; and Mahābhārata, 393, 397, 397n. 18, 421; patronage of, 94; and Telugu community, 393; and Telugu language, 384, 419; written style of, 429
INDEX 1063

Tiruvāṉṭukurai: educational endeavors at, 275–76; patronage of Pillai at, 281, 283–84; Saiva monastery at, 273, 273n. 6, 277, 287
Tiruvi<ea>vai monastery at, 273, 273n. 6, 277, 287
Tivoli (collection), 311, 317
Tolstoy, Leo, 608
Toltagamuva (Sri Lanka), 693, 705
tokā (sequence), 297n. 65, 311
Toungoo empires, 681
traditionalist revivalism, 241–42
Trailok (Ayutthaya king), 665–66n. 39, 668n. 46
Trailokya, 92
translations, 554
Transoxania, 187
Travi<ea>ndrum, 237, 465, 487
Trivedi, Harish, 24, 253
tropes, 44, 246; analysis of, 43
Trumpp, Ernst, 622
Tshering Wang'gyel, 785; Story of the Incomparable Prince, 788; Tale of the Lord of Men, 788
Tuckerman, Joseph, 215
Tu<ea>s, Na<ea>ir al-Din, Khvāja, Akhlāqi Na<ea>ṣrī, 163, 166
Tulā, 278
Ubayd (poet), 144
u<ea>c<ea>l (swing-song), 281n. 24
Uchch, 133, 138
Udhu<ea>ṭha, 850n. 14
Uddotana (Jain monk), Ku<ea>valayamāla, 66n. 60, 575
uktānuktduruktāthrayakī, 42n. 4
Ukaku<ea>ṭe Perumāl, 493, 494
ulā, 278
Umar-Marui, 633
universalism, 249
universalizations, 18
University of Ceylon History of Ceylon, 653
University of Karachi, 641
U<ea>n<ea>niṣandrama, 465–66, 472–74
Untouchable (Anand), 250
Upadhyāy, Ayodhyānī, 997; Prīyaśrīvās, 926
Upaniṣads: Roy’s translations of, 220; Virashaivist positions in, 348n. 44
uppāya, 1001
Urajyū, 282, 283, 284–85
Urā<ea>yāparaṇa, 282
Urdu Defence Association, 966
Urdu language, 33; classification of, 23; decline of, 971–75; Hindi and, 950, 960, 967–71; influence of, 25; linguistic restrictiveness in, 850–52, 852n. 103; as literary language, 837–38; as military language, 817–19; modified Persian script for, 959, 962–67; and political power, 537n. 48; origin myths of, 805–19; as Pakistani language, 641, 966, 981; Persian loanwords in, 970; prehistory of, 960n. 2; replaces Persian, 185, 984; and Sindhi ethnonationalism, 640–43
Urdu literary culture: Delhi and, 813; early, 819–25; Hindu participation in, 849n. 100, 894–95, 975n. 31; linguistic restrictiveness in, 850–52, 852n. 103, 970n. 20; literary theory, birth of, 825–37; oral recitations in, 850, 894–94, 905, 906–7; Persian influence on, 850, 872; poetic genealogy in, 849–50, 850n. 101, 869, 884–87, 905–6, 907; Rekhtah and, 837–43; Sanskrit influence on, 842–43, 852; theme vs. meaning in, 852–58, 854n. 107; “two schools” theory in, 878; Vai and, 813–49. See also tākānih (poetic anthologies)
vakr̥ti, 1064

Vāma: as convergence of language and
attitude, 352; as decoder of Saiva
categories, 349–50; definition of, 356; and
song form, 361; of Virāśivas, 19, 21
vakr̥ti, 356; as community, 348–49;
and Kannada literary intelligentsia, 364; king
excluded from literary discourse by, 354;
origins of, 347–48; recontextualization
by, 347–54; and relationship of imagination
to power, 355–56; reliance on near-
folk practices, 361; revolt against secular
poetics, 352–54, 356; as union of Saiva
categories, 349–50
Vakr̥tikā, 594–95
Vāchā, 657
Vādabhasimha, Kaṭṭukucādāvati, 272n. 1
Vagbhata, 577n. 18
Vaghihela, 597, 598, 601–2
Vāhid, Mir, Haqiq i Hindi, 922
Vaidarbhī poetry, 743
vāsīka (Brahmanical), 70–71, 336, 343–
345, 349
Vaidya, Vijaya, 603
Vaishnavism: Apabhramsha and, 24; Bangla
language and, 511–14; in Bangla literary
culture, 506, 508, 524–25; Caitanya and,
518–21; in Gujarati literary culture, 594–
95; and padavali, 522–28; Ramaite, 932–
33; in Tamil literary culture, 280, 303–5,
306–7
Vaisīkhatantram, 454–56, 462, 472
Vaiṣṇava Brahmans, 218
Vaiṣṇavī Pillai, S., 291–92, 293, 295
Vaiṣhī, Mulla, Qabī mushir, 828, 835–36
Vajī Ali Shah, 897
Vaiṣṣa ( Jain monk), 591; Bhāratīvara-
bhābho, 574–76
Vakil, Ardashir, 255
Vakpatrijā, Gaṇḍavahō, 71, 71n. 73
vakrokti, 251
Valī (Urdu poet), 908; as first Urdu poet,
843–49, 888; and dhūm, 855–56; Khāri
Boli verses of, 915; khvād bāndi of, 854;
literary theory of, 851, 852; and Rekhtah,
881
Vālī Daghāstānī, ‘Ali Quli, Rīyāz al-Sha‘wārā’,
185
Vallabha (philosopher), 595, 920–23, 926, 937
Vallabha, 111–12
Vallabhadra, 111–12
Vallabhāvī, Krishṭhāvānā, 427
Vālmīki (Sanskrit poet), 388, 392, 461, 521,
918. See also Rāmāyāna (Vālmīki)
Vāmana, 107, 695n. 25
Vāmana Bhaṣṭa Bāṇā, 385
vāmsa (Pali historiographical texts), 652–57,
652n. 3
Vandhyopādhyāy, Hemacandra, Bhāratībhoj,
953
Vandhyopādhyāy, Kīrāṇcandra, Bhāratmātā,
952
Vānita, Ruth, 255
vānīya, 41
vānī (bee-as-messenger), 281n. 24
Varadarajan, M., 297, 302n. 79
Varāhamihira, Bhāratamūlī, 50, 55–56
Varāstha, Sīyākoti, Muṣṭībāhīt-i Shīwārā’, 165,
174–185
Varavaravī, 470n. 70
Varma, Bhagvaticara, 1011–12
varṇa (fourfold caste system), 450–51
varṇaka (narrative prose genre), 338, 594
vārttika, 42n. 4
vāstu (meter), 575
vāstukas, 338
Vastupūr, 577, 584, 585
Vatsyayana, 328
Vāṭāvra, Guttikāvāyana, 699
Vāṭṭīvar, Kīrhoṇa, 276
Vatīyā, Rashīd-al-Dīn, 175; Ḥadā’īq al-Sīhr
fi Daqīq al-Shū‘, 151, 180
Vāyurūpāṇa, 51
Veda: and kārya, 53–55, 55n. 31; and Sanskrit,
62; and textual typology, 49–50,
52; and translation, 422; and Vālmīki,
80–81
vedicization, 509
vedāvāki, 326
Vēmanā (Telugu intellectual), 377
Vēnkaṭacuppaīyā, 275
Vēnkaṭādhyāvīn, Vīsvagundārāvacampā, 104,
106, 219
INDEX 1065

Verelst, Harry, 209
Verma, Mahādevī, 991–92, 996–97, 9970, 77
vernacular: British encouragement of, 185; vs. cosmopolitan, 17–18, 26, 32;
emergence of, 187; and global English, 26; interaction between master language and, 25–26; and literary inscription, 21; music and, 632–33; and orality, 22; places, production of, 28–29; and religion, 24
vernacularization: and class, 627; and identity, 31–32; and inscriptional writing, 326; and kinship, 64; of Kannada, 326–27; and Sanskrit decline, 101–2; in Sri Lanka, 28
verisimilitude, 231
vēṣa (plays), 592–93, 592n. 40
Vēṣaṇaṃśa (Vēṣaṇa, 567n. 43
Vēṣaṇarājagātha, 17; compared to Rāmāyaṇa, 659–63; descriptive technique in, 653; distribution of, 666–68, 667–68n. 45, 668–69n. 46; story-matrix shared by Rāmāyaṇa, 649
Vēṭalapāṇicasamaiti, 554
Vēṭanāyakam Pillai, C., 287; History of Tamil Language and Literature, 291; Pratāpamunayadāya Caritāram, 287n. 34
Vibhanga, 664
Victor Emmanuel (king of Italy), 230
Vidāgama Maitreya: Kavakakunikayamaladana, 699, 740; Lovidasangarana, 706–7
Vidhyācaritavatari, 667n. 43
vidyādāna, 284n. 27
Vidyākara, 69; Subhāṣitaratnakosā, 114–17
Vidyānātha, Pratāparudrayaḥbhasyaḥ, 36n. 37
Vidyāpati (Maithili poet): and Bangla identity, 507, 513; 513n. 17; and literary temporality, 556; as padavali model, 522, 527; and Vaishnavism, 505–6, 523–24; work: Kirtilataḥ, 917
Vidyāsāgar, Iśvaracandra, 540, 543–44, 555; Sīrā Vanavāsī, 543
vīhāra (Jain mendicant travels), 572–73
Vījaḍābhula I (king), 653, 680n. 80
Vijayabahu I: conquest of Kerala, 473; Kannada literary culture in, 19, 368; language policies of, 371; multilingualism of, 94; and Rāmāyaṇa, 103–6; Sanskrit literary culture in, 94–95, 101, 120–21; split in literary intelligentsia of, 308–71; Telegu literary cultures and, 377–78; Vijayabahuism is collapse of, 351–370–71 village, as space of literary, 718–20
Vivaraṇa, 651
Virabhadrā Reddi, 385
Virāvīyam, 293, 729
vivahini (longing woman symbol), 637
Virāśvaśadharasmrīnovi, 378
Virāśvanandacandrīke, 378
Virashivāism: centers of textual production, 336, 370, 377–80; divide in intelligentsia of, 368–71; and formation of political-cultural community, 367–68; origins of, 347–48; revolt against secular poetics, 352–54; in Telugu literary culture, 397–400; vacana used in, 19, 21, 347–54; 361
Visou, king as, 413–14
Vīṣṇudas (Gujarati poet), 583
Visnudas (Hindi poet), 914, 917–19, 944; Pāṇḍavacarit, 917–18; Rāmāyankathā, 917–18
Vīṣṇuparāśa, 60n. 50, 590n. 36
Vīṣṇudharmadesa, 667
Vīṣṇunātha, 67; Sāhyadarpana, 68n. 64
Vīthālāṅkāta (poet-singer), 921–22
vītyātāgama, 284n. 27
vivāka (intention), 48–50, 48n. 17, 49n. 19
Vivekananda (swami), 242, 602–3
Voltaire, 223
Vṛndāvan, 526n. 28, 530
Vṛndavandās (biographer), 548
Vṛyāṣa (Sanskrit poet), 388, 392, 401. See also Mahābhārata (Vṛyāṣa)

Walsh, William, 248
Warangal, 385
Warder, A. K., 671
Warton, Thomas, 6n. 6
White, O., 667n. 45
Wickramasinghe, Martin: on ideal literary person, 718–20; on moral import of literary activity, 712; on recovering Sinhala- ness, 717–18, 718n. 109; on Sinhala poetic drama, 709n. 59; on Sinhalese cultural politics, 698n. 36; works: Apē Gāma, 718–19; Kālesikha Sevina, 717; Landmarks of Sinhalese Literature, 721
Wijayawardana, G. D., 733n. 157
Wijemanne, Piyaseeli, 732n. 152
Winternitz, Moriz, Geschichte der indischen Literatur, 5
Wolpert, Stanley, 206–7
Woolf, Virginia, 230
Wordsworth, William, 227
World War II, 251

Yaktā, Aḥad Ḍālah Khan, Dastūr al-faṣāḥāt, 812–14
yaḥmaka, 278n. 16
yaḥmaka antati, 278
Yāpparunkalāhārīkai, 278
Yaṣīn, Irāmūlah Khan, 872–76, 877
Yaḥyūb bin Aḥī Lāg, 132
Yaṣahkhīrtī (Jain poet), 917
Yashaschandra, Sitānshu, 22, 24, 26, 28
Yaṣovarman of Kanauj, 71
Yaṣpal (novelist), Ḍavāhā Sawd, 1011
Yadhavākkula Annāmaya, Sarvēdoraśatotakam, 111
Yazdī, Sharaf al-Dīn, Ṭuṣer-nāmāh, 163

yoga: in Hindi literary culture, 934–35; in Kannada literary culture, 356–57; in Tibetan literary culture, 759, 772n. 72, 773, 782–85, 790
yogamārga (path of bodily discipline), 356–57
Yogēśvara (Pāla Bengal poet), 115
Young Bengal movement, 225, 226
Yule, Henry, Hobson-Jobson, 806–7, 808, 810
Zacharia, Scaria, 452n. 28
Zaidi, Aḥī Jawad, 854n. 107
Zainu’d-dīn, 915
Zain-ul-Abidīn (sultan), 92–93, 101
Zatālī, Jāfār, 838, 841–42
zhā (double meaning), 872, 901
Zuhūrī (poet), 182
Zulālī (poet), 182
Zulfiqār Aḥī Mast, Rāyāʾ al-Vifāq, 177
Zwelebil, Kamil V., 272n. 3, 291n. 46, 296