the topic of many scholarly works.[10] But if we read these texts closely, if we read deconstructively and comparatively, we realize that what is preached doesn't correspond to what is produced, that there are radical discrepancies between intention and writing, between theory and practice.

It is at the intersection of public discourse on the *nahdah* and *nahdah* practices (writing, activism, editing) that the reading and *nahdah* research needs to take place. This opens up *nahdah* texts for reading and analysis, giving them their rightful place in Arabic literary studies. Thus far, these texts have been reduced to representation of discursive and political forces stripped of these kinds of particularities wherein dissonance, performance, and play occur. This requires that we read the texts and read them in all their differences and fluctuations, suspending the engagement with these works through the lens of *nahdah* rise or decline, Western influence or Arabic tradition, break or continuity. To decolonize the *nahdah* is to allow it to make its own meaning, however contradictory and inconsistent with historical narratives and ideologies of critique.

# Whose Amnesia? Literary Modernity in Multilingual South Asia

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doi:10.1017/pli.2015.17

*The debate over the impact of British colonialism and "colonial modernity" in India has hinged around questions of epistemic and aesthetic rupture. Whether in modern poetry, art, music, in practically every language and region intellectuals struggled with the artistic traditions they had inherited and condemned them as decadent and artificial. But this is only part of the story. If we widen the lens a little and consider print culture and orature more broadly, then vibrant regional print and performance cultures in a variety of Indian languages, and the publishing of earlier knowledge and aesthetic traditions belie the notion that English made India into a province of Europe, peripheral to London as the center of world literature. Yet nothing of this new fervor of journals, associations, literary debates, of new genres or theater and popular publishing, transpires in Anglo-Indian and English journals of the period, whose*

10 See selections from Khalil Baydas, "Stages of the Mind (1924)," *The Arab Renaissance: A Bilingual Anthology of Nahda Literature and Culture (1707–1937)*, ed. Tarek El-Ariss, trans. Spencer Scoville and Farah Antun (New York: Modern Language Association Book Series, *Texts and Translations*, 2016). "The New Jerusalem," *The Arab Renaissance*, trans. Ghenwa Hayek.

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*occlusion of the Indian-language stories* produced *ignorance, distaste, indifference—those "technologies of recognition" (Shu-Mei Shih) that produce "the West" as the agent of recognition and "the rest" as the object of recognition, in representation.*

**Keywords:** Indian literature, literary modernity, colonialism, cosmopolitanism

Muhsin al-Musawi's article "The Republic of Letters: Arab Modernity?" finds strong echoes in South Asian scholarship and public debates. Much of the debate over the impact of British colonialism, with its various phases and attitudes toward Indian culture and "colonial modernity" has hinged over questions of epistemic and aesthetic rupture. Was English literature a "mask of conquest"? Were Indian writers "crushed by English poetry"? Did English-educated Indian intellectuals suffer from "amnesia" of precolonial intellectual traditions? Did they internalize colonial views about Indian culture and the "Indian psyche"?[1] For a couple of decades of intense and fruitful inquiry into colonial discourse and its nationalist appropriations and transformations by Indian intellectuals and artists, the answer was a resounding yes. Studies of modern Indian poetry, art, music, and so forth showed that in practically *every* language and region, intellectuals struggled with the artistic traditions they had inherited and that constituted their *habitus*, and condemned them as decadent, artificial, escapist, and even harmful in that they took you away from art's proper duty, which was, couched explicitly or implicitly in Arnoldian terms, to be useful and improve the individual and collective moral sense.

Moreover, to take North India as an example, after the initial British engagement with Sanskrit, Persian, and even Arabic (with the Calcutta Madrassa and Benares Sanskrit College[2]), the colonial-modern turn toward vernacular languages as the proper vehicles of culture as well as knowledge and administration led to a linguistic shift toward Urdu and Hindi instead of Persian and Sanskrit. The ensuing language controversy over the "real" vernacular of North India was couched on the Hindi side in a strong language of Hindi/Hindu/Indian Self versus Urdu/Persian/Muslim Other, which matched the growing nationalist historiography of the Sultanate and Mughal periods as "dark middle ages" of invasion and of religious and cultural oppression.[3] This produced a further estrangement from Persian and the many knowledge traditions that had found expression in that language in India—history, geography, ethnography, poetics, lexicography, religion, philosophy, mysticism, mythology, astrology, astronomy, sciences, arts, flora, fauna, farriery and falconry, cuisine, and so forth. As for Sanskrit, Sheldon Pollock and a whole team of Sanskritists have investigated "Sanskrit knowledge systems on the eve of colonialism" and argued that the two centuries between 1550 and 1750 "witnessed a flowering of intellectual life

1 Gauri Vishwanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Studies and British Rule in India* (London: Faber, 1990); Sudhir Chandra, *The Oppressive Present: Literature and Social Consciousness in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992); Ganesh Devy, *After Amnesia: Tradition and Change in Indian Literary Criticism* (London: Sangham, 1992); Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988).

2 For Benares Sanskrit College see Michael Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire, and National Culture: India, 1770–1880* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

3 Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere, 1920–1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).

characterized by, among other features, an increase in the production of texts across disciplines, the rise of a new (or newly reinvigorated) interdisciplinarity, and the introduction of important new discursive practices and conceptual categories. This dynamism lasted until the consolidation of colonial power, whereupon a decline set in that ended the age-old power of Sanskrit learning to shape Indian intellectual history."[4] Notable aspects of this investigation have been the emphasis on the newness and dynamism of "late Sanskrit" and the more than occasional convergence with some Persian knowledge traditions such as philosophy, astronomy, music, and poetics. This double shift away from Persian and Sanskrit in the colonial period meant that for a lot of ordinarily educated North Indians the knowledge traditions in those languages became more distant, less accessible, and familiar more in name than in content ("paratexts without texts"). To be true, in several cases translations, particularly from Persian into Urdu, brought earlier traditions like that of ethics and cultured manners (*akhlaq, adab*) to new strata of Urdu-educated ordinary "respectable" people.[5]

Although we can easily consider English as the "new Persian," the new high language of knowledge, status, and power, the symbolic as well as pragmatic importance the vernaculars acquired as the Herderian "language(s) of the people" meant that in terms of production and circulation English continued to occupy a significant but relatively small part of the cultural field in the colonial period. To imagine that English made India into a province of Europe, peripheral to London as the metropolitan center, would be to take a very partial, English- and Anglo-Indian centered view of things. This is only one of several stories, as we shall see.

Muhsin al-Musawi's other argument is about the premodern Arabic "republic of letters" which modern Arabic intellectuals unfairly dismissed. In lieu of a "republic of letters", in the context of South Asia Sheldon Pollock has conceptualized the existence of a Sanskrit cosmopolis, which was gradually eroded in a historical process of "vernacularization."[6] In his wake, others have talked of Persian and Arabic cosmopoles.[7] Pollock's definition of "cosmopolitan" and "vernacular" links languages and polities, literary practices, and sociotextual communities:

> *cosmopolitan* and *vernacular* can be taken as modes of literary (and intellectual, and political) communication directed toward two different audiences, whom lay actors know full well to be different. The one is unbounded and potentially infinite in extension; the other is practically finite and bounded by other finite audiences, with whom, through

4 Sheldon Pollock, "Introduction: Working Papers on Sanskrit Knowledge-Systems on the Eve of Colonialism," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 30 (2002): 431.

5 Barbara Metcalf, ed., *Moral Conduct and Authority: the Place of Adab in South Asian Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Farina Mir, "Urdu Akhlaq Literature in Nineteenth-Century India." Unpublished paper, Simon Digby Memorial Conference, SOAS, London, June 9–11, 2014.

6 Sheldon Pollock, "The Cosmopolitan Vernacular," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57.1 (1998): 6–37; "India in the Vernacular Millennium: Literary Culture and Polity, 1000–1500," *Daedalus* 127.3 (1998): 41–74; "Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History," *Public Culture* 12.3 (2000): 591–625; and *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

7 See Stefano Pellò, *Ṭūṭiyān-i Hind: Specchi identitari e proiezioni cosmopolite indo-persiane* (1680–1856) (Firenze: Società Editrice Fiorentina, 2012); Ronit Ricci, *Islam Translated: Literature, conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

> the very dynamic of vernacularization, relations of ever-increasing incommunication come into being. We can think of this most readily as a distinction in communicative capacity and concerns between a language that travels far and one that travels little.[8]

Pollock's distinction between cosmopolitan and vernacular maps onto the classic distinction between high and low languages (diglossia), according to which high languages (Sanskrit and Latin in his comparison) are markers of high culture and vehicles of higher forms of knowledge, and historically have been the preserve of specialist individuals and groups, whereas low languages are and have been used in informal, primarily spoken domains. Pollock spatializes cosmopolitan and vernacular so that the former is potentially universal while the latter travels little. Further, he links them to polities and the agency of rulers and their courts, so that empires and polities with wide ambitions choose cosmopolitan languages while vernaculars mark the emergence of regional, more bounded polities. Finally, he narrates the relationship between cosmopolitan and vernacular in terms of historical supersedence as a story of vernacularization. Yet the early modern story can also be told as a story of the *persistence* of the high languages of Sanskrit and Persian in particular, and in fact of the wider dissemination of Persian well into the colonial period. This was a multilingual cultural world, and the archives of Persian, Sanskrit, and early modern Hindi/Urdu are best read together, alert to clues of the presence of other languages and voices.[9] No single language was completely hegemonic. Not just that, but the aesthetic world of the early modern connoisseur (what Katherine Schofield has called the "Mughal *rasika*"[10]) was not just multilingual but "intermedial" and linked music, painting, and poetry.[11] Which of these and other aesthetic traditions continued into the colonial period and with which major or subtle shifts is a question that has produced some wonderful scholarship in recent years.[12] Whether and to what extent the rich "intermedial aesthetic" at all survived the onslaught of epistemic/aesthetic colonial and nationalist critiques remains an open question.

Yet English did not become completely hegemonic, either. As suggested, the narrative of colonial modernity and of English displacing everything else occludes first, a great variation in regional colonial cultures (all multilingual to some extent), and second, stories of creative appropriation such as Shakespeare on the Parsi stage, where "English influence" was refracted through new technologies, existing performance, and poetic traditions to produce a new and hybrid theatrical language. If we widen the lens a little and consider print culture and performance, regional studies have shown that

8 Pollock, "Cosmopolitan and Vernacular," 593–94.

9 Francesca Orsini, "How to Do Multilingual Literary History? Lessons from Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century North India," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 49.2 (2012): 225–46.

10 Katherine Butler Schofield, "The Mughal *Rasikas*: Patrons—treatise writers—performers," *Tellings and Texts: Music, Literature, and Performance cultures in North India*, eds. F. Orsini and K. Schofield (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2015).

11 Molly E. Aitken, Allison Busch, and Katherine Schofield, "Modernity's Challenge to India's Aesthetic Traditions: Rajput Painting, Hindi Poetry and Hindustani Music." Public lecture, King's College London, October 23, 2014.

12 Amanda Weidman, *Singing the Classical, Voicing the Modern: the Postcolonial Politics of Music in South India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Davesh Soneji, *Unfinished Gestures: Devadāsīs, Memory, and Modernity in South India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Molly E. Aitken, *The Intelligence of Tradition in Rajput Court Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); and Allison Busch, *Poetry of Kings: The Classical Hindi Literature of Mughal India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

factors such as the social, intellectual, and religious composition of local elites and literate groups, their degree of Anglicization or command of other Indian languages, their entrepreneurship and support for printing activities, local caste dynamics, the greater or lesser activism of missionaries and of Indian Christians, and so on produced significantly different print cultures in Tamil, Bengali, Urdu, Marathi, Gujarati, Hindi, Konkani, Punjabi, and Sinhala, to name but a few. In her study of Marathi print culture, for example, Veena Naregal has highlighted its upper-caste dominance and exclusivity, and shown that its virulent anti-lower-caste discourse was all the sharper because of the assertion of lower-caste voices in western India so much earlier than in other areas of the subcontinent. As a result, she argues, "by the late 1870s, when modern Marathi found its literary voice, lower-caste groups did not identify with the public defined by upper-caste intellectuals"; they formed "a distinct counter-public" and used "popular expressive forms" for mobilization.[13] Bengali book culture was similarly shaped by the distance between elite forms of cultural production by the famed *bhadralok* and the commercial energies of the Battala book quarter. Yet it was taste rather than caste that divided them.[14]

Book historians have also shown that nineteenth-century publishers printed Persian, Arabic, and Sanskrit books in large numbers[15]—in some cases Arabic classics were first printed in Calcutta,[16] and in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Newal Kishore press was the largest producer and distributor of Persian books in Asia. At the opposite end of the spectrum, studies of commercial print culture have, unsurprisingly, noted the prevalence of preprint genres, the practice of biscriptual publishing (in both Nagari and Perso-Urdu scripts) and the *increased* hybridization between Hindi and Urdu languages and literary traditions in an "interocular" mediascape that included theater, prints, and popular publishing.[17]

Let me end with a point about the maps of world literature and "world" circulation and reception. I have begun to sift through literary journals and reviews in India and the United States in the late nineteenth century (the *Calcutta Review, Books Abroad, Indian Review*), and early books on "world literature" in order to get a sense of early formulations of "world literature" in Anglo-Indian, European, American, and Hindi circles and how much Indian literature circulated, where it circulated, and how it was received. Apart from a few notable exceptions—such as the *Calcutta Review* (est. 1844), which occasionally gave space to reviews of contemporary Bengali writing, to a few Bengali authors in English (including the poet Toru Dutt) and their articles on English literature; and apart from Joseph-Héliodore-Sagesse-Vertu Garcin de Tassy, who sitting in Paris compiled annual reports on the latest publications of Hindustani literature from 1850 to the 1880s—other journals "left" Indian literature to Orientalists. With the result that even if Orientalists working on modern languages like George A. Grierson had good grasp of contemporary

13 Veena Naregal, *Language Politics, Elites, and the Public Sphere: Western India under Colonialism* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), 296.

14 Anindita Ghosh, *Power in Print: Popular Publishing and the Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society, 1778–1905* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006).

15 Ulrike Stark, *An Empire of Books: the Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007).

16 I owe this information to my PhD student Simon Leese, who is working on Arabic literature in nineteenth-century India.

17 Francesca Orsini, *Print and Pleasure: Popular Literature and Entertaining Fictions in Colonial North India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2010).

literature and contacts among contemporary writers, in journals the space of *modern Indian literature* was *occupied* by writings by Anglo-Indians (i.e. British in India), as in the *Indian Review* (1883), or by "Oriental fictions".

In other words, while the nineteenth century in north India witnessed not only the continued cultivation of Persian (and Arabic), Hindi, and Urdu literary traditions, but also a new fervor of journals, associations, literary debates, and new genres in poetry and prose, as well as and a boom in popular publishing and theater, *nothing* of this transpires in journals like the *Indian Review*, published in Calcutta from 1884.

For its editors, who wanted to bring the best of monthly and weekly British and European reviews to distant Indian readers (especially "those living in remote and solitary parts of the Mofussil, where book-clubs are impossible and the larger majority of periodicals are never seen"[18]), who paid particular attention to "works published in India," and who urged Anglo-Indian authors to rise above occasional ditties and "break the fallow ground of imagination and romance that lies untilled around us in the East,"[19] contemporary Indian writing by Indians simply did not exist. And "home" and the "center" were definitely located in Britain.

This division between Orientalists and Anglo-Indian literary people is brought home well by Rudyard Kipling, who fulfilled and surpassed the *Indian Review*'s expectation of "untilled imagination and romance." Kipling, who left India in 1889, continued for a quarter of a century to be the authoritative interpreter for audiences "at home" and in the world of India ("East is East and West is West"), but also of *England* ("What should they know of England who only England know?"). Kipling's disdain for Indian "educated natives" is well known. He also had little time for Orientalist appreciations of Indian literature: provoked by William Morris's inclusion of the *Mahabharata* among of the "hundred best books,"[20] he quoted from Pratap Chandra Roy's translation of the *Mahabharata* and commented:

> Page upon page might be filled with extracts equally profitless … the wearied reader, who has set forth on his journey of discovery, with the honest intent of exploring the precious mines of Oriental lore, finds his attention wandering and his commonsense revolting at the inanities put before him …. To orientalists, the two national epics have their own special value, as the *Rig Veda* has for students of early forms of religious belief; but the working world of to-day has no place for these ponderous records of nothingness.[21]

*Ignorance, distaste, indifference*—these are precisely what Shu-Mei Shih has identified as "technologies of recognition," those "mechanisms in the discursive (un)conscious—with bearings on social and cultural (mis)understandings—that produce "the West" as the

18 "Ourselves," *Indian Review*, I.1 (1883): 4.

19 W. T. Webb, "Anglo-Indian Verse". *Indian Review*, I.1 (1883): 16.

20 "I see by this week P[all] M[all] Gazette that the worthy William Morris has been giving his opinion on the Hundred best books. Lord! Lord! What a Lying world it is. He has gravely stuck down the Mahabharata and I will wager everything I have that he hasn't got the ghost of a conception what he means when he advises the study of that monstrous midden …. I see every now and then at home some man who hasn't touched them lifting up his voice in praise of 'the golden mines of Oriental Literature' and I snort;" letter to Cornell Price, February 18–27, 1886 (in Thomas Pinney, *Kipling's India: uncollected sketches 1884–88* [London: Macmillan, 1986], 175).

21 Rudyard Kipling, "The Epics of India," *Civil and Military Gazette,* August 24, 1886 (cited in Pinney, *Kipling's India*) 177–78.

agent of recognition and "the rest" as the object of recognition, in representation." As she points out, it is through these technologies that the literary market *and* academic discourse such as world literature "selectively and often arbitrarily confer world membership on literatures."[22] The result was books like John Macy's *The Story of World Literature* (1927), which covers "Asian Literature" in merely 13 pages out of 500, just after "The Beginnings of Literature," in a chapter entitled: "The Mysterious East-Chinese-Japanese-Indian-Arabic." Indian literature consists exclusively of ancient Sanskrit literature, and the only modern author mentioned is Tagore, who is presented as a lonely, little-known voice (remember he had won the Nobel Prize in 1913) damned with faint praise:

> In our own days an Indian poet has arisen whose voice is heard beyond the intellectual frontiers of his faith and language. This is the Bengali Rabindranath Tagore. Something of the bloom and cadence of his verse must inevitably be lost in translation. We are told that he has a delicate sensitive ear for the music of words.[23]

In the end, more productive than a critique of modern intellectuals and their "amnesia," or a historical narrative about the inevitable rise of the juggernaut English (or French) and the obliteration of everything else in their wake, is to be wary of single-strand and monolingual historical narratives (Arabic existed in a multilingual world, too), and conceive of space, whether local or further flung/wider, as the "multiplicity of stories so far," and attend to those stories and the different configurations they produce.[24]

# Polysystems Redux: The Unfinished Business of World Literature

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doi:10.1017/pli.2015.15

*In responding to Muhsin al-Musawi's two-part essay on the Arabic Republic of Letters, this essay proposes a rethinking of the world systems model in global literary studies in*

22 Shu-Mei Shih, "Global Literature and the Technologies of Recognition," *World Literature: A Reader* eds. T. D'haen, C. Domínguex and M. Rosendahl Thomsen (London: Routledge, 2013), 260.
23 John Macy, *The Story of World Literature* (London, Bombay, Sidney: George Harap & Co, 1927), 43. Japanese literature is "best interpreted by Lafcadio Hearn."
24 "The multiplicity of stories so far" is Doreen Massey's definition in *For Space*, 6e (London: Sage), 9.

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