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Global Intellectual History



EDITED BY

Samuel Moyn & Andrew Sartori

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43. See Walter J. Fischel, "Ibn Khaldun's Sources for the History of Jengiz Khan and the Tatars," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 76 (1956): 91–99.
44. See Michael Ripinsky, "The Camel in Dynastic Egypt," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 71 (1985): 134–14; and the references in note 27.
45. See Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 21–26.
46. Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, 1:252.
47. *Ibid.*, 1:250.
48. *Ibid.*, 2:235, 417; on Ibn Khaldun's reception of Aristotelian thought, see Musin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldun's Philosophy of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).
49. Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, 1:252–53.
50. *Ibid.*, 1:251.
51. See Tarek Kahlaoui, "Towards Reconstructing the *Muqaddimah* Following Ibn Khaldun's Reading of the Idrisian Text and Maps," *Journal of North African Studies* 13 (2008): 300.
52. See Walter J. Fischel, *Ibn Khaldun in Egypt: His Public Functions and His Historical Research* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 18.
53. See Kidder Smith, "Sima Tan and the Invention of Daoism, 'Legalism' etc.," *Journal of Asian Studies* 62 (2003): 129–56.
54. Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, 1:369–71.
55. Al-Biruni, *Alberuni's India, an Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Geography, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India about A.D. 1030*, ed. and trans. Edward C. Sachau, 2 vols. (1888; repr., New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2004), 1:20.
56. See Fromherz, *Ibn Khaldun*, 138.
57. See Thomas Harrison, *Divinity and History: The Religion of Herodotus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 31–63.
58. *Han II*, 63.
59. See Schaberg, *A Patterned Past*, 276; Grant Hardy, *Worlds of Bronze and Bamboo: Sima Qian's Conquest of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 120–35.

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Cosmopolitanism, Vernacularism, and Premodernity

SHELDON POLLOCK

The intensifying interactions today between local and translocal forms of culture and ways of political being, which have become truly global for the first time, have generated renewed scholarly interest in the idea of the "cosmopolitan."¹ As many historians have recognized, the processes at work in contemporary globalization are not altogether unprecedented. But our understanding of what exactly is new and different about them, beyond the fact of their temporal speed and spatial reach, depends on our capacity to grasp the character of the earlier processes of globalization—of a smaller globe, to be sure—and the cosmopolitan identities that have characterized other historical epochs.²

The labels by which we typically refer to these earlier processes—Hellenization, Indianization, Romanization, Sinicization, Christianization, Islamization, Russification, and the like—are often used crudely and imprecisely. Yet they do serve to signal the historically significant ways in the past of being translocal, of participating—and knowing one was participating—in political and cultural networks that transcended the immediate community. These ways varied widely. In Hellenization, the dominant commitment was to a language, a culture, and even an aesthetic. In Christianization, by contrast, to a certain set of beliefs; in Islamization, to a certain set of practices; and in Romanization, to

a particular political order. Or this is how one might speculate, and speculation is all one can do for the moment. The comparative study of premodern processes of cosmopolitan transculturation—of how and why people may be induced to adopt languages or life ways or modes of political belonging that affiliate them with the distant rather than the near, the unfamiliar rather than the customary—is very much in its infancy, even for a phenomenon as significant in the creation, or construction, of the West as Romanization. And when these earlier processes do come under scholarly scrutiny, they are typically not seen as processes at all, through whose dialectical interaction the global and the local are brought into being simultaneously and continuously. Rather, they tend to be thought of as pregiven, stable, and sharply defined: the global or cosmopolitan as the exogenous, great tradition against the local or vernacular as the indigenous, little tradition. They have taken on the character of stable entities that interact in thinglike ways rather than being seen as constantly changing repertoires of practices.

A number of factors account for the neglect of the quasi-global formation that characterized early southern Asia, one that came into being around the start of the Common Era and, at its height a thousand years later, extended across all of South Asia and much of Southeast Asia. The temporal and spatial magnitude of the Sanskrit cultural and political order; the conceptual otherness of the subject matter; the apparent anomalousness vis-à-vis peer formations such as Confucian China or Latinate Europe, which has served to make the South Asia case almost invisible; the difficulty of the languages involved; the risk of provoking specialists of the particular regions where such study has always been parceled out; the almost immediate discovery of counterexamples to any tendency one believes to have discerned—all these obstacles have combined to induce a powerful resistance to generalization and large-scale interpretation.³ In addition, Sanskrit studies, heir to a brilliant and imperious intellectual tradition that had set its own agenda in the important issues of the human sciences, has had grounds to rest content with addressing the questions predefined by this tradition, and the historical expansion of the realm of Sanskrit culture was not one of them.

Symptomatic of the many problems of understanding this realm and its history is the question of how even to refer to it. The phrase

adopted here, “Sanskrit cosmopolis,” is not without its drawbacks. Besides being hybrid and ahistorical, it is actually unc cosmopolitan in the cultural specificity of the form of citizenship implicit in it: membership in the *polis*, or the community of free males. But the very need for such a coinage reveals a social fact of some theoretical importance. Other great globalizing processes of the past found emic formulation and conceptualization, whether in terms of a cultural particularity (Hellenismos or Arabīya or Fārsiyat) or a political form (*imperium romanum* or *guo*, the Sinitic “fatherland”). But for neither the political nor the cultural sphere that Sanskrit created and inhabited was there an adequate self-generated descriptor. Even the word *saṃskṛti*, the classicizing term adopted for translating “culture” in many modern South Asian languages, is itself unattested in premodern Sanskrit in this sense. We find Indian theory distinguishing the great Way, *mārga*, from Place, *deśī*, but both terms refer, significantly, only to cultural practices and never to communities of sentiment. If we are therefore obliged to invent our own expression for the transregional power-culture sphere of Sanskrit, the fact that Sanskrit never sought to theorize its own universality should not be seen as a lack or failure. On the contrary, it points to something central about the character and existence of the Sanskrit cosmopolis itself: a universalism that never objectified, let alone enforced, its universalism.

The phrase “Sanskrit cosmopolis” carries three additional implications that make it especially useful here. The first is its supranational dimension (cosmo-), which directs attention toward the expansive nature of the formation. The second is the prominence given to the political dimension (-polis), which was of particular importance to this form of global identification. Last, the qualification provided by “Sanskrit” affirms the role of this language in producing the forms of political and cultural expression that underwrote this cosmopolitan order.

The history of the Sanskrit language and its social sphere has long been an object of interest to Sanskritists, for its curious history holds considerable theoretical interest. The Sanskrit cosmopolis did not come into being simultaneously with the appearance of the Sanskrit language. Its development was slow and tentative, and for it to come about at all, the very self-understanding of the nature and

function of the “language of the gods,” as Sanskrit was known, had to be transformed. Ritualization (the restriction of Sanskrit to liturgical and related scholastic practices) and monopolization (the restriction of the language community, by and large, to the ritual community) gave way to a new sociology and politicization of the language just around the time that western Asian and central Asian peoples were entering into the ambit of Sanskrit culture. Whether these newcomers, the Śakas (Indo-Scythians) in particular, initiated these processes or simply reinforced those already under way cannot be determined from the available evidence. What is not in doubt is that then a new era—a cosmopolitan era—began.

Two key inventions, the second a subspecies of the first, marked the commencement of the cosmopolitan era in the literary-cultural domain and continued to mark its expansion: first, *kāvya*, or written literature, and, second, *praśasti*, or inscriptional royal panegyric. Sanskrit *kāvya*, a category that was clear and distinct in premodern South Asia, was a new phenomenon in Indian cultural history when it first appeared a little before the beginning of the Common Era. From the first, *kāvya* was almost certainly composed and circulated (though not typically experienced) in writing. It was this-worldly (*laukika*) in its themes, even when these concerned the divine (no *kāvya* was incorporated into temple liturgy until the waning centuries of the cosmopolitan order); it was directed above all toward investigating the elementary forms of human emotional experience; and at the same time (and for the same reason), it was centrally concerned with the nature of language itself, with its primary phonic and semantic capacities. In all these features, *kāvya* was new in the historical record, startlingly new to the participants in Sanskrit culture. Its novelty was thematized in the Sanskrit tradition itself with the story of the invention of *kāvya* told in the prelude to what came to be called the “first poem,” the Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa. In reflexively framing its own orality in a way that would be impossible in a preliterate world and in doing so around the narrative of human response to problems of a human scale, the Rāmāyaṇa account captures some of the central features of the new expressive form, *kāvya*.

Crucial to the theorization of *kāvya* in the cosmopolitan epoch was the restriction on the languages capable of producing it. The literary

conquest of cosmopolitan space by Sanskrit produced a conception of literature as something able to be embodied only in language that was itself cosmopolitan. This was, of course, preeminently Sanskrit, though two other closely related idioms—Prakrit, the “natural” or informal language, and Apabhramsha, the dialectal (literally, decayed)—were counted as legitimate vehicles for *kāvya* from the first appearance of literary-theoretical reflection in the seventh century. Both Prakrit and Apabhramsha were in fact constituted as transregional koines through the production of literary texts and grammatical descriptions, and they were used for literary production (almost exclusively so) across the subcontinent, the former from about the second or third century and the latter from about the fifth or sixth. (Since neither was spatially circumscribed, or reflexively understood to be so circumscribed, in the production of literary and political texts, neither qualifies as an instance of vernacularization.) But both languages occupy a much more subordinate position in literary history than Sanskrit, having never achieved anything like Sanskrit’s density of textual production or its spatial spread, and neither was ever used for the production of literary texts outside the subcontinent. Sanskrit was the transregional code that filled the domain of the literary. The closed set of literary languages meant in principle that *kāvya* could not be made in other, localized languages. In this thought world, the very idea of *deśi kāvya*, “vernacular literature,” would have been a contradiction in terms. In practice it never was produced until the vernacular moment came, when it was. These propositions, along with others that define the literary as distinct from all other language use, will be explored through the comprehensive analysis of literature offered by King Bhoja of Mālava in the first quarter of the eleventh century.

Once Sanskrit emerged from the sacerdotal environment to which it was originally confined, it spread with breathtaking rapidity across southern Asia. Within three centuries, Sanskrit became the sole medium by which ruling elites expressed their power from as far west as Puruṣapura in Gandhāra (Peshawar, in today’s northwest Pakistan) to Pāṇḍurāṅga in Champa (central Vietnam) and Prambanan on the plains of Java. Sanskrit probably never functioned as an everyday medium of communication anywhere in the cosmopolis—not in South Asia itself, let alone Southeast Asia—nor was it ever used

(except among the literati) as a bridge- or link- or trade-language as were other cosmopolitan codes such as Greek, Latin, Arabic, and Chinese. Moreover, aside from the inscriptions, which had larger purposes, there is little evidence that it was ever used as the language of practical rule. Tasks such as chancery communication or revenue accounting seem to have been carried out through informal uses of local language. The work that Sanskrit did do was beyond the quotidian and the instrumental; it was directed above all toward articulating a form of political consciousness and culture, politics not as a transaction of material power—the power of recording deeds, contracts, tax records, and the like—but as a celebration of aesthetic power. This it did in large part through the new cultural-political practices that came to expression in the *praśasti*, which not only arose coevally with Sanskrit *kāvya* but, from the first, exploited the full range of resources of the language-centered aesthetic of literature. Inscribed on rock faces or copperplates or, at a later date, temple walls, and thus to varying degrees publicly available, the *praśasti* was the literary expression of political selfhood. To a large extent, the Sanskrit cosmopolis consisted of precisely this common aesthetics of political culture, a kind of poetry of polity in the service of what was in some measure an aesthetic state. To foreground aesthetics, however, is not to argue with Weber (or Clifford Geertz) that culture is all that constituted polity in the nonmodern non-West and that other core issues of power were never addressed. A case study of the pragmatics of inscriptional discourse among the Kalyāṇa Cālukya dynasty is meant to show how seriously matters of real power were taken and how carefully memory was manufactured in its interests.

Sanskrit philology was a social form as well as a conceptual form, and it was inextricably tied to the practices of power. Overlords were keen to ensure the cultivation of the language through patronage awarded to grammarians, lexicographers, metrists, and other custodians of purity, and through endowments to schools for the purpose of grammatical studies. They were also responsible for commissioning many of the most important grammars. For a polity to possess a grammar of its own was to ensure its proper functioning and even completeness, so much so that a competitive grammaticality, even grammar envy, can be perceived among kings in the Sanskrit cosmopolis, as

the narrative of Jayasimha Siddharāja of Gujarat illustrates. Kings also evinced a consuming interest in demonstrating their Sanskrit virtuosity in literary matters. An encyclopedia of royal conduct from early-twelfth-century Karnataka, the *Mānasollāsa*, demonstrates how literary-theoretical competence (*śāstravinoda*) was as central to kingliness as military competence (*śāstravinoda*). Episodes of grammatical and literary correctness such as these are not idiosyncratic tendencies of the persons or places in question. They point toward an ideal of proper rule and proper culture being complementary, an ideal in evidence throughout the cosmopolitan age, from the earliest recorded evidence in the second century and beyond into the vernacular epoch when so many cosmopolitan values of culture and power came to find local habitations and names.

Space and Comparison

Even if the transregional formation for which Sanskrit was the communicative medium was never named in the language, the transregionality of both power and culture was decisively manifested in shaping Sanskrit discourse. The analytical matrices employed in much Sanskrit systematic thought, from the typology of females in the *scientia sexualis* to instrumental and vocal music and dance, are effectively geocultural maps of this vast space. The basic geographical template by which culture was conceptualized was, for its part, established only in the early centuries of the cosmopolitan era, reaching its final form in a mid-sixth-century work on astral science, and was transmitted more or less invariantly for the next ten centuries. Of particular interest is the spatialization of Sanskrit literature itself, through the discourse on the “Ways” of literature, modes of literariness conceived of as regional styles within a cosmopolitan space. The regionality of the cosmopolitan language was qualified, however. It was the same Sanskrit everywhere—an elementary aspect of the language ideology of Sanskrit is its invariability across time and space—though differently realized in phonological, semantic, or syntactic registers. But these regional differences were in fact part of the repertoire of a global Sanskrit, with writers everywhere using them to

achieve different aesthetic ends (the southern style for erotic verse, for example, or the northern for martial), and thus they constituted a sign precisely of Sanskrit's ubiquity. This idea is beautifully captured in a tenth-century tale of the origins of literary culture: Poetry Man is pursued by his wife-to-be, Poetics Woman, and in the process creates literature across South Asia—and only there. Literature is decidedly transregional if not quite universal.

But where was this "South Asia"? As represented in such treatises, the Sanskrit cosmopolitan order appears smaller than the cosmopolis was in actuality, for aside from the very occasional mention in Sanskrit texts of Suvarṇabhūmi (Malaysia), Yavadvīpa (probably Java), Śrīvijaya (Palembang), and the like, Southeast Asia never formed part of the representation (the same holds true of Tibet and parts of central Asia, which participated in a more limited fashion in the Sanskrit cosmopolitan order). The conceptual space of Sanskrit texts was slow to adjust, or so one might think, to the new and larger circulatory spaces through which people had increasingly begun to move. Indeed, these actual spaces were vast and so was the spread of Sanskrit culture, enabled by the diffusion of *kāvya* and *prāśasti* on the part of peripatetic literati and the cultivation everywhere of a literarily uniform Sanskrit. Accordingly, in the first millennium it makes hardly more sense to distinguish between South and Southeast Asia than between north India and south India, despite what present-day area studies may tell us. Everywhere similar processes of cosmopolitan transculturation were under way, with the source and target of change always shifting, since there was no single point of production for cosmopolitan culture. Yet just as Southeast Asia was included in the circulatory space of the cosmopolitan order, so it came to be included in its conceptual space, thanks to the transportability, so to speak, of that space. In their own geographical imagination, the imperial polities of Southeast Asia—Angkor around 1000 is exemplary here—made themselves part of the cosmopolitan order by a wholesale appropriation of its toponymy. With Mount Meru and the Gaṅgā River able to be located everywhere, there was no spatial center from which one could be excluded; the Sanskrit cosmopolis was wherever home was. There is nothing in the least mystical about this replicability; it is a function of a different, plural, premodern logic of space.

While modern-day equivalents of the places mentioned in these spatializations are often provided here so that some geographical image will form in the mind's eye of the reader, establishing positive concordances is not the objective. The goal, instead, is learning to understand how people conceptualized macrospace in the past and what work in the spheres of power and culture such conceptualization was meant, or not meant, to do. To explore this topic is not to presuppose a seamless continuity from the sixth century to today's representations of Akhaṇḍ Bhārat, "Undivided India," that have produced the "cartographic anxiety" behind so much of contemporary Indian political action.⁴ The very appropriation and concretization of a sometimes imaginary and often vague geographical past in a precise and factual present is one of the deadly weapons of nationalism and a source of the misery of modernity. Premodern space, whether cosmopolitan or vernacular, is not the nation-space, and yet it was no less filled with political content than it was with cultural content. The attempt to recover knowledge of this space is not fatally distorted by the discourse of nationalism. Far from disabling a history of the premodern politics of space, the distortion of national narratives is precisely the condition that makes it necessary. Such a history need not be crippled by teleology; it can instead be seen as a history of the teleological. The national narrative is a second-generation representation made possible only by the existence of a first-generation representation, though one informed by a very different logic that nationalism often seeks to elide.

That the space promulgated by Sanskrit analytical matrices was conceived of not just as a culture-space but also as a power-space is demonstrated by the Sanskrit Mahābhārata. In this *itihāsa* (narrative of "the way it once was"), or "epic" in Western parlance (genre identity is no trivial matter, given the modern discourse on "nation," "epic," and "novel"), the transregional frame of reference structures the entire work. Moreover, the dissemination of its manuscripts and the distribution of royal endowments for its continual recitation actualized literary spatiality, turning representations into components of popular consciousness: people recited and listened to the Mahābhārata's story of a macrospace of power even while they inhabited that very space. The evidence assembled to demonstrate this claim aims to correct

errors old and new, for instance, that it was only on mountaintops that the language of the gods touched the earth or that it was nationalist modernity that invented the political-cultural salience of Indian epic discourse.⁵

Whatever else the Mahābhārata may be, it is also and preeminently a work of political theory: the single most important literary reflection on the problem of the political in southern Asian history and, in some ways, the deepest meditation in all antiquity on the desperate realities of political life. Thus to mention it in reference to the ecumenical culture of the Sanskrit cosmopolis naturally raises the question of how the cultural order articulated with political practice. As noted earlier, understanding the character of polity in premodern South Asia is far more difficult than describing its cosmopolitan culture, and scholars have generated wildly discrepant accounts of what polity meant. While some of these are examined briefly, more attention is given to the modes and character of political imagination. This is not, however, a *pis aller*. Almost as important as what polities did—and just as real—is what they aspired to do. In its aspirations, the imperial polity of the Sanskrit cosmopolis was marked by several consistent, if elusive, features. It was territorially expansive, though territoriality in premodern South Asia remains an underdefined concept. It was politically universalistic, though what political governance actually meant is hard to pin down. It was ethnically nonparticularized, if the term “ethnic” may be used when it is not even certain that “ethnies” in the political-science sense actually existed. The fact that these aspirations were embedded in a set of cultural practices like *kāvya* and *prāśasti* suggests that the practice of polity was, to some degree, also an aesthetic practice. *Kāvya* and *rājya* were mutually constitutive; every man who came to rule sought the distinction of self-presentation in Sanskrit literature, typically in the permanent public form of the *prāśasti*. This constitutive relationship, however, presents interpretive challenges. The single available explanation of the social function of Sanskrit cosmopolitan culture is legitimation theory and its logic of instrumental reason: elites in command of new forms of social power are understood to have deployed the mystifying symbols and codes of Sanskrit to secure popular consent. Absolute dogma though this explanatory framework may be, it is not only anachronistic but also intellectually

mechanical, culturally homogenizing, theoretically naive, empirically false, and tediously predictable.

The peculiar character of the Sanskrit cosmopolis as a cultural and political order becomes clear only through comparative analysis. “Beware of arriving at conclusions without comparisons,” said George Eliot. I agree, though perhaps not for her reasons. Comparison always implicitly informs historical analysis, given that the individual subjectivity of the historian inevitably shapes his research questions. And these questions can be more sharply formulated and better answered if the comparison behind them is explicit.⁶ Moreover, there is a natural proclivity to generalize familiar forms of life as universal tendencies and common sense, and comparison serves to point up the actual particularity, even peculiarity, of such supposed universalisms.

If some similarities link the Roman and the Sanskrit political-cultural orders, the differences are such that the one presents itself as a kind of countercosmopolis to the other. In both worlds, literature, after making a more or less sudden irruption into history, became a fundamental instrument for the creation of a cosmopolitan culture, with literati across an immense space being trained according to comparable standards and producing literature that circulated across this space. But Latin interacted with local idioms in a way radically different from that of Sanskrit. Radically different, too, were the origin and character of the empire form, as well as the modalities of affiliation to Roman culture, or Romanization.

The Sanskrit cosmopolis was characterized by a largely homogeneous language of political poetry along with a range of comparable political-cultural practices. Constituted by no imperial state or church and consisting to a large degree in the communicative system itself and its political aesthetic, this order was characterized by a transregional consensus on the presuppositions, nature, and practices of a common culture, as well as a shared set of assumptions about the elements of power—or at least on the ways in which power is reproduced at the level of representation in language. For a millennium or more, the Sanskrit cosmopolis was the most compelling model of power-culture for a quarter or more of the inhabitants of the globe. It ended, at various times and places in the course of the first five centuries of the second millennium, only under pressure from a new model. If the Sanskrit

cosmopolis raises hard questions for political and cultural theory, so do the forms of life that superseded it. The fact that this later transformation occurred at all, however, has been of scarcely more interest to historical research than to the Sanskrit cosmopolis itself.

Premodern Cosmopolitanism

What, in fact, is modernity? The concept is notoriously unclear even in social theory, the science of modernity; so, too, then, must its periodization be. For some scholars, modernity began with capitalism, for others, with industrialization or colonialism or nationalism (whenever each of these may have begun). For still others, it has yet to begin, since they do not believe there has been any great rupture at all, only "small extensions of practices, slight accelerations in the circulation of knowledge, a tiny extension of societies, minuscule increases in the number of actors, small modifications of old beliefs."⁷

Modernity is a contrastive historical concept and therefore implies some understanding of what is counted as premodern. But much of the work on modernity (from Karl Marx to present-day scholars such as Anthony Giddens, Jürgen Habermas, Niklas Luhmann, and so down the alphabet) offers little in the way of a convincing account of the nature of the "premodern," at least in the case of South Asia. The actual modernity of a number of phenomena included on lists of things considered modern remains uncertain. Some are probably modern beyond dispute: commodities that incorporate abstract labor as a unit of value, the sovereign state, and the abstract individual. But consider the following criteria: the preponderance of formal over substantive rationality (in, say, the organization of work or systems of accounting), the division of manual and mental labor, the abstraction of the social as a totality that can be acted on, the economy conceivable as an independent domain, "embedded affinity to place," a reflexive appropriation of knowledge, the rise of expert systems that remove social relations from particular contexts, the questioning of moral frameworks that had once been accepted unhesitatingly, a new worry about the meaninglessness of life, and loneliness. All these have been posited as elements of modernity, but none has been shown to be

unequivocally so, or to be entirely unknown to premodernity. By the same token, many of the properties ascribed to premodernity (e.g., "a just sense of security in an independently given world") seem to have been identified not through empirical historical work but by simply imputing counterpositive features required by the very narrative of modernity (with its "calculation of risk in circumstances where expert knowledge creates the world of action through the continual reflexive implementation of knowledge").⁸ Just as we often conceive of the premodern by uncritically accepting the discourse of modernity, so we sometimes transfer to the past ideas or practices originating in modernity itself and so produce a premodernity that is not premodern. Moreover, European modernity and South Asian premodernity are obviously uneven and not absolute categories; the former displays premodern features, the latter modern ones, no matter what definitions we invoke.

There are, as a consequence, entirely legitimate issues in cultural and political history to be raised through notions of "early modernities," "multiple modernities," "alternative modernities"; I have raised some myself. If one of the defining or enabling features of European modernity was the vernacularization of the cultural and political spheres, the same occurred in South Asia independently of European influence.⁹ Not only did Indian "premodernity" contain elements of European modernity, but in some key areas of culture, such as the analysis of language, it might even have stimulated the development of that modernity.

But there is no reason to set such received ideas on their head and find an Indian modernity (or nationalism or capitalism or whatever) *avant la lettre*. My concerns lie elsewhere. First, I want to understand the differences, if any, between the power-culture practices and their associated theories—legitimation, ideology, nationalism, civilizationism, and the like—that came into being in modern Europe and the world of South Asia before the arrival of these practices and theories on the heels of European expansion. These are what I have in mind when identifying what I contrastively and commonsensically call "premodern" South Asian materials, without fretting too much over how "premodern" or "modern" is to be defined or who has the right to define them. Second, I want to determine whether it is possible

to work conceptually around such theories of power-culture and to understand what alternative practices may once have been available.

From the Cosmopolitan to the Vernacular

Without the contrastive category of the vernacular, and the contrastive reality of both political and cultural self-understanding toward which it points, the cosmopolitan has no conceptual purchase. Like "cosmopolitan," "vernacular" is not something that goes without saying, and not only because of its own scalar ambiguities (how small qualifies as vernacular?). A range of conceptual and historical problems have combined to effectively conceal the very process of people knowledgeably becoming vernacular—what is termed here "vernacularization"—leaving it largely unhistoricized and even unconceptualized in scholarship. Until these problems are clarified and some reasonable working hypotheses framed, vernacularization itself cannot even be perceived, to say nothing of its political and cultural ramifications. The problems here are in fact not all that different from those presented by cosmopolitanism, though they are perhaps denser. Besides considering the pertinent relational boundaries, we need to be clear about what the process of vernacularization entails, in particular what role to assign to writing and to the creation of expressive texts. Only when we gain some clarity about the intelligibility and reality of the object of analysis, and how this object exists in time, can we begin to ask why it has the particular history it does.

Simply to define the vernacular over against the cosmopolitan and leave it at that—even to make unqualified use of any of the kindred terms or phrases adopted here, like "regional" and "transregional"—elides some important aspects of their relativity. An obvious one is the potential of a local language to become translocal, and the consequences of this for codes that are yet more local. The extreme case is offered by the cosmopolitan languages themselves. All of them began their careers as vernaculars: Latin in the third century B.C.E. was firmly rooted in Latium (central Italy) before setting out on its world conquest in lockstep with the advance of Roman arms. Sanskrit is the great anomaly here, since long before the onset of the cosmopolitan

era it had become transregional—though not yet cosmopolitan—through the spread of Vedic culture.¹⁰

The vernaculars in the postcosmopolitan era expanded, too, but on a different order of magnitude. If a certain transregionality thus characterized the vernaculars that attained political-cultural salience, this was on a different scale from that of the cosmopolitan codes they displaced. This difference can be plotted along both the axis of material practice and that of subjective understanding. Sanskrit literary texts circulated from Sri Lanka to Sorcuq in central Asia, and from Afghanistan to Annam in Southeast Asia (just as Latin literary texts circulated from Iberia to Romania and Britain to Tunisia). They filled all the available cultural space, their expansion as literary-political media limited only by other cosmopolitan cultural formations. In northern Vietnam, for example, from the fifth century on, Sanskrit's advance was arrested by Chinese, just as that of Latin had been arrested by Greek in the eastern Mediterranean a few centuries earlier. The vernaculars inhabited much smaller zones. The limits they confronted, or, rather, helped produce, were certain political-cultural isoglosses, so to speak, whose history and character are probed in the course of the second part of this work.

The objective dimensions of vernacular place over against those of cosmopolitan space also were registered in the subjective universes of the vernacular intellectuals. To participate in Sanskrit literary culture was to participate in a vast world; to produce a regional alternative to it was to effect a profound break, one that the agents themselves understood to be a break, in cultural communication and self-understanding. It was in conscious opposition to this larger sphere that these intellectuals defined their regional worlds. They chose to write in a language that did not travel—and that they knew did not travel—as easily and as far as the well-traveled language of the older cosmopolitan order. The new power-culture places they projected, which were the conceptual correlates of the isoglosses just mentioned, fully testify to this sense of limit and contrast sharply with the spatial matrices at work in Sanskrit culture.

The localization in question is reflected in the South Asian term for the vernacular. If "Sanskrit cosmopolis" is a phrase hobbled by its hybridity, its adoption is an adversity that cannot be avoided and that

anyway has uses in foregrounding the quasi-global, the political, and the cultural. "Vernacular" has similar liabilities and benefits. To be sure, a pejorative connotation haunts the Latin etymon—it refers to the language of the *verna*, or house-born slave, of Republican Rome—which has little political-cultural relevance to premodern South Asia. However, in a more common, indeed classical, sense the Latin *vernacularis* is "local," "native," "inborn," and even "Roman" (in contrast to *peregrinus*, "foreign"). Apart from the fact that the cosmopolitan culture of Rome could be conceived of as native (another of its radical differences from the Sanskrit order, deriving from Latin's very different history), the sense of local does map well against the South Asian idiom. In many South Asian languages, the conceptual counterpart to the cosmopolitan is *deśī*, the "placed," or "[a practice] of Place." Yet it is crucial to register at once the paradox that what was *deśī* was not often thought of as native, inborn, or sometimes even local. Not only was the creation of local places a cultural process consequent on literary vernacularization, but the very ubiquity of the self-same term *deśī* across South Asia also is a sign of the *cosmopolitan* origins of the literary vernacular itself.

Vernacularization is here understood—not a priori or stipulatively but from tendencies visible in the empirical record—as the historical process of choosing to create a written literature, along with its complement, a political discourse, in local languages according to models supplied by a superordinate, usually cosmopolitan, literary culture. The process can thus be broken down into three connected components: literization (writing, the symbolic elevation of what is written, and the internal transformations the literary text undergoes by the very fact of being written down); literarization (the production of boundary between the purely oral and *kāvya* on the basis of a relatively stable paradigm of literary properties that in addition to lexical, metrical, and thematic features included writing as a fundamental component); and superposition (the presence of a dominant language and literary formation).

If nationalists and other indigenists are predisposed to discover an ever deeper history for the literature of the Folk, reaching back to a golden moment of pure autochthony, historical analysis shows that literatures typically arise in response to other literature *superposed* on

them in a relation of unequal cultural power. In premodern India, this other literature was preeminently Sanskrit but also, to some degree, Prakrit and Apabhramsha (which were particularly rich sources of metrical forms for the vernaculars to appropriate), Tamil in some areas of south India, and, much later, Persian in some areas of the north. Conformity with the superposed matrix and its norms was the goal of those vernacular textbooks meant to "ornament" the language. Indeed, they were part of a literary apparatus that was adopted wholesale during the crystallizing moments of many vernacular literary cultures and formed a core component in the creation of what is here named the "cosmopolitan vernacular," that register of the emergent vernacular that aims to localize the full spectrum of literary qualities of the superposed cosmopolitan code.¹¹

To speak of a cosmopolitan vernacular is not just to acknowledge that "different languages are penetrated by each other, thus revealing every language's intimate discord with itself, the bilingualism implicit in all human speech"; nor even to try to update the idea of "vernacular humanism," of "using the ancient languages as models and so making the vernacular languages into worthy vehicles for literature and culture."¹² Instead, it is to point to the historical creation of a medium of culture that was not only new in itself but appropriate to a new vision of power. It was a medium of Place for a political vision of Place but fashioned according to the time-honored model of *kāvya* and *rājya* of the great Way, which had been tied to no one place but was inclusive of them all.

Whatever else it may be, the vernacularization of literature and political discourse is a social act, and one that typically bears crucial geocultural and political entailments. While it is no easier to understand the practices of power in the second millennium than in the first, it is clear that during the period from 1000 to 1500, these practices took on far more distinctively regionalized traits than ever before. Whether crystallizing culture spheres were the cause or the consequence of crystallizing power spheres, or whether the two arose through a kind of dialectical dynamic, a new symmetry between the domains was manifestly being created. Functional regions began to coincide with formal regions—those new and coherent representations of place in vernacular literature that superseded the vast geocultural

spaces prevalent during the preceding millennium. Understanding the nature of the new political order that arose with vernacularization is as difficult as understanding the nature of "empire" in the cosmopolitan epoch, and it has seemed preferable, therefore, to name this new political form neutrally as the "vernacular polity" rather than try to shoehorn it into some given European conceptual category (such as "protonation"). But one thing is certain: however much the fact may conflict with dominant social-science theory, especially of nationalism, power and culture had indeed a very considerable, if sometimes obscure, inclination for each other in premodern South Asia.

That the context of power fundamentally shaped the process of vernacularization in South Asia sits awkwardly with the unchallenged scholarly consensus regarding its origins as essentially religious, a kind of Indian Reformation. This view is as erroneous as is the one that locates the origins of European vernacularization in the real Reformation (sometimes Protestant presuppositions do not work even for Europe). Virtually all the reasons adduced for explaining vernacularization in South Asia as originating in a socioreligious rebellion are dubious. The presumed concomitance between Sanskrit and Brahmanism, on the one hand, and vernacularity and non-Brahmanism, on the other, does not hold for much of the period under discussion. The vision of Sanskrit as a sacred language "jealously preserved by the Brahmins in their schools" may not be the pure illusion of the colonial officer who gave it expression. Yet it is undoubtedly something that developed late in this history of the language, when, for reasons very likely having to do with vernacularization itself, language options shrank for many communities, and Brahmanical society reasserted its archaic monopolization over the language (the Catholic Church's eventual monopolization of Latin is an instructive parallel both historically and structurally).¹³ In most cases, vernacular beginnings occurred independently of religious stimuli strictly construed, and the greater portion of the literature thereby created was produced not at the monastery but at the court. Only after vernacularization had been consolidated, and in reaction to an already existing courtly literary and political culture, did a more demotic and often more religiously insurgent *second* vernacular revolution take

place (as in twelfth-century Karnataka, fifteenth-century Gujarat, sixteenth-century Assam, and elsewhere). Here the cosmopolitan vernacular was challenged and, in some cases, displaced by a regional vernacular, a register far more localized in everything from lexicon to metrics to themes. By foregrounding the role of power in creating both the Sanskrit cosmopolis and the various regional worlds that succeeded it, my account aims to redress an interpretive balance that for too long has been skewed toward the religious.

In the nexus of poetry and polity, we also encounter what is most salient and most neglected for a cross-cultural historical analysis of vernacularization. Between India and Europe, temporal, spatial, and other synchronies and symmetries abound. The tempo and structure of Dravidian and Germanic vernacularization, for example, form a striking contrast with those of north Indian and Romance languages. Many of the textual components in European vernacularization are comparable to those found in South Asia, such as the localization of superposed literary forms, genres, and themes. The social milieus are similar, too. The European vernaculars achieved literary expressivity—and often did so with astonishing abruptness—through the agency of courtly elites. Whereas vernacular culture was undoubtedly in some sense popular culture in its origins, the process of full vernacularization was decidedly not. Yet there are important differences, too. In Europe the vernacular's admission to literacy was more contested, both linguistically and ideologically. Vernacular distinction was slower in coming and was attended with greater anxiety; the cosmopolitan formation was more resistant in its claim to primacy. A far more significant divergence is found in the development of polity. In both areas, the political order that emerged in conjunction with vernacularization offered a regional alternative to the transregional imperial formation. But the specific character of the European form and its end point, the nation-state, was unlike anything found in South Asia. The cultural and political theory designed to make sense of the European nation-state is often, and too facilely, applied to the premodern world outside Europe, distorting thinking about language and identity, and identity and polity, and thereby occluding the specificity of the Indian case and its misfit with models designed to explain the

European. The comparative turn is therefore imperative for a history and theory of vernacularity in southern Asia.

The transformations in culture and power that began concurrently in India and Europe around the start of the second millennium were consolidated by its midway point. The rules of the new vernacular game of polity and poetry had largely been drawn up; the cosmopolitan power-culture order in both worlds was almost completely supplanted by the seventeenth century. If it is becoming possible to recognize vernacularization as a key historical problem only now that it is ending, the recognition is the easy part. Far more difficult is understanding the hard history of its origins, why across much of Eurasia the world abandoned cosmopolitanism and empire in favor of vernacularity and regional polities, and why this happened when it did. Whereas we can identify some factors that clearly contributed—reinvigorated trading networks in the early second millennium concentrated wealth in local power centers, and the expansion of Islam on its western and eastern frontiers offered new cultural stimuli—a unified explanation of the historical origins of vernacularism is as improbable as a unified explanation of the cosmopolitanism that preceded it. Yet the lack does not preclude us from learning lessons from these events, both for the theory of power and culture and for their practice.

To study the history of vernacularization is to study not the history of the emergence of primeval and natural communities of peoples and cultures but the historical inauguration of the naturalization of peoples and cultures through new conceptual and discursive practices. This naturalization took place by a double procedure of reduction and differentiation. As unmarked dialect was turned into unifying standard, heterogeneous practice into culture, and undifferentiated space into place, new regional worlds were created. What was inside these worlds would eventually be seen as the indigenous and natural; what was outside, as the exogenous and artificial. This did not happen everywhere in a similar manner. Not all ways of the cultural production of vernacular sameness and difference have been the same, any more than all cosmopolitanisms have been the same. Figuring out what may have been distinctive about these vernacular and cosmopolitan practices is a precious, if elusive, prize.

Notes

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1. See, for example, Sheldon Pollock, "Introduction: Cosmopolitanisms," in *Cosmopolitanism*, ed. Carol Breckenridge et al. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), 1–14.
2. Arjun Appadurai has rightly cautioned against a "rush to history" meant to neutralize the "special anxiety about its own not-newness" that contemporary globalization seems to provoke. Arjun Appadurai, "Globalization and the Rush to History," Sawyer Seminar lecture, Columbia University, 1999. An example is A. G. Hopkins, ed., *Globalization in World History* (New York: Norton, 2002).
3. Heine had a sense of this resistance 150 years ago: "Es ist zu wünschen, daß sich das Genie des Sanskritstudiums bemächtigt; tut es der Notizengelehrte, so bekommen wir bloss—ein gutes Compendium." Heinrich Heine, "Aphorismen und Fragmente," in *Sämtliche Werke* (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1964), 14:113.
4. The phrase is that of Sankaran Krishna, "Cartographic Anxiety: Mapping the Body Politic in India," *Alternatives* 19, no. 4 (1994): 507–21.
5. The first is Sylvain Lévi's assessment, cited in Jules Bloch, *Indo-Aryan from the Vedas to Modern Times* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1965), 14–15; the second is standard-issue postcolonial theory.
6. Curiously, little good theoretical work seems to be available on cultural and political comparison. See, for now, John Bowen and Roger Petersen, eds., *Critical Comparison in Politics and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1–19, and especially the chapter by Greg Urban, "The Role of Comparison in the Light of the Theory of Culture."
7. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 47–48.
8. For most of these properties, see Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990), 84.
9. See Sheldon Pollock, "India in the Vernacular Millennium: Literary Culture and Polity, 1000–1500," *Daedalus* 127, no. 3 (1998): 41–74.
10. On the early history of the transregionality of this culture, which is not addressed in this book, the work of Michael Witzel is central. See, for example, Michael Witzel, "On the Localisation of Vedic Texts and Schools," in *India and the Ancient World: History, Trade, and Culture Before A.D. 650*, ed. G. Pollet (Leuven: Peeters, 1987), 173–213.
11. Texts that "adorn" the South Asian vernaculars by framing grammatical and rhetorical norms (the *Siyabaslakar* of ninth-century Sri Lanka,

the *Kannaḍabhāṣābhūṣaṇam* of eleventh-century Karnataka, the [Braj] *Bhāṣābhūṣaṇ* of seventeenth-century Jodhpur) are precisely equivalent to those meant to "illustrate" the European vernaculars.

12. Giorgio Agamben, *The End of the Poem* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), 59; Erich Auerbach, *Literary Language and Its Public in Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965), 319.
13. For the citations, see George Abraham Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, vol. 1, pt. 1, *Introductory* (Calcutta: Supt. Government Printing, 1927), 1129. I mention the gradual decrease in language options in early modern South Asia in my "Sanskrit Literary Culture from the Inside Out," in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 39–130.

4

Joseph Banks's Intermediaries

Rethinking Global Cultural Exchange

VANESSA SMITH

This morn Tupia came on board, he had renewed his resolves of going with us to England, a circumstance which gives me much satisfaction. He is certainly a most proper man, well born, cheif *Tahowa* or preist of this Island, consequently skilld in the mysteries of their religion; but what makes him more than any thing else desireable is his experience in the navigation of these people and knowledge of the Islands in these seas; he has told us the names of above 70, the most of which he has himself been at. The Captn refuses to take him on his own account, in my opinion sensibly enough, the government will never in all human probability take any notice of him; I therefore have resolvd to take him. Thank heaven I have a sufficiency and I do not know why I may not keep him as a curiosity, as well as some of my neighbours do lions and tygers at a larger expence than he will probably ever put me to; the amusement I shall have in his future conversation and the benefit he will be to this ship, as well as what he may be if another should be sent to these seas, will I think fully repay me.¹

This citation comes from an entry in the journal of Joseph Banks, written from Tahiti on July 12, 1769. It records Banks's pleasure in learning that Tupaia, the Raiatean priest who had been a valuable guide and