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Decolonizing the Modernist Mind

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Decolonizing the Modernist Mind

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Cataclysmic changes in the world require new accommodations to it, new ways of articulating the strangeness that abounds. Literary modernism of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries—the main period under study in this special issue—sought precisely to capture that sense of strangeness, matching it and expressing it with new aesthetic forms, styles, and subject matter. But these early forms of expression which delineated the contours of a startling new reality—the technologies of photography and cinema, scientific discoveries, new modes of transportation, global war, postwar trauma, new class and gender formations, the birth of the unconscious, the erosion of an imperial center, and the concomitant loss of a certainty that went into the formation of that very center, in short, modernity itself—were surely not simply reflections. With their radical questioning of the aesthetic correlatives of an “objective” reality (linear narrative, moral center, omniscient narrator, and consensual truth, for instance), these new utterances themselves shaped the world in which they circulated, providing the very lexicon with which people began to re-imagine their worlds.

This is the view of modernism—dynamic, constitutive and interactional as opposed to static and simply pre-given—that this issue of the *South Asian Review* seeks to capture. It presents the first-ever collection of critical essays spanning roughly one hundred years of South Asian modern and modernist literature, including languages other than English, and covering regions other than North India. Thanks to the dialectical processes of modernism, as these essays demonstrate, colonial and postcolonial writers were able successfully to

rewrite the colonial script that had hitherto placed them at the margins of history.

Modernism and Modernity

For the purposes of this issue of the *South Asian Review*, modernism is conceived both broadly, as the cultural articulation of modernity—modern conditions of being and ways of relating to the world that issued out of nineteenth-century Europe and traveled around the world thanks to colonialism and the imperial project—and narrowly (frequently designated by the capital M), as the bold experiment launched in the early twentieth century that effectively did away with all conventions of the arts that existed prior to it. Under modernism, all that came before was found inadequate to the expression of a distinctly modern experience, and literature, from having once provided a fixed point of reference for a culture, became a domain of active experimentation, a site upon which writers exploded notions of unity, objectivity, and self-coherence. The past decade has seen a renewed interest in (re)defining the scope and aims of modernism (the “new” modernist studies), as scholars from the margins of the field have interrogated modernism’s Eurocentric bias and questioned whether its originary terms of analysis are adequate to the complexities of a modernism that was, in practice, conceived and mobilized more globally. With its focus on South Asian modernism, this special issue fills an important gap in our critical understanding of the non-western reception of modernity, answering the call of such modernist critics as Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel for “a new set of multidirectional, postcolonial conversations in our scholarly work, conversations that enable a still fuller excavating of our mutually implicated histories and of geomodernism’s frisson within them” (Doyle and Winkiel 13).

No study of South Asian modernism can begin without acknowledging a hefty debt to Dipesh Chakrabarty’s decisive study, *Provincializing Europe*, whose most singular achievement is its resistant reading of Europe at the historical center of everything and its fruitful complication of European thought as at once “indispensable and inadequate” (Chakrabarty 6) for an understanding of the “elsewheres” of modernity. It is indispensable because of the constitutive and abiding nature of its “myths”—the nation-state, democracy, sovereignty, citizenship, the individual—and it is inadequate because of its failure to account for the myriad incipient forms of non-European modernities that emerged in tandem with it.

Hence, a strategic move by several postcolonial scholars of modernism has been the decentering of Europe in discussions of colonial and postcolonial literature, the destabilizing of the categories by which Eurocentric modernism defined its enterprise, and the

questioning of the logic of linearity by which Europe came first and the colonies after. Literary modernism itself hardly yields to a linear logic, given that its exemplars (T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, et al.) were crowned after the fact by a generation of liberal humanists and New Critics who were motivated by a different agenda entirely, namely the institutionalization of English studies. What a non-linear view of modernism in the colonial and postcolonial context affords, by contrast, is an alternative view of history and the human subject that does not simply take the place of the European one but interrogates the manner in which this latter view has come to stand as the benchmark for all modern(ist) literature everywhere. Additionally, this alternative modernism has a distinct literary idiom and tradition of its own, with writers dating at least as far back as the mid-nineteenth century and with a robust body of literature whose preoccupations range from the representation of outcastes in Punjabi English in the 1930s (as in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*) to the articulation of a modern divided subjectivity in Hindi-language literature (as in the mid-twentieth century poetry of Muktibodh). This other modernism requires us to re-imagine modernity not as a singular instance in time from which all other instances emanated, but rather as a global phenomenon of cultural production, dissemination, and exchange occurring synchronously and unevenly around the world, some of it even predating the European colonial project.

A synchronous understanding of modernism is precisely what animates Susan Stanford Friedman's conception of a "planetary modernism." Discussing the explanatory power of the adjective "recurrent" to describe some of the features of planetary modernism, she writes:

Human history cycles unevenly through periods of relative stasis and then explosive kinesis; between retrenchment and expansion, continuity and change, consolidation and risk; between inward and outward mobilities. . . . Different points of the globe flare up at different times as nodal points of transformational change across a wide spectrum of societal domains, each taking a particular form in its geohistorical location—from long ago systems to today's globalization. (481)

This planetary view of "recurrent" (which we may also perhaps imagine as "re-current," as in "repeatedly new") modernism is able to embrace a wider diversity of experiences and aesthetic modes of expression from around the world and across a longer expanse of time than previously imagined in modernist studies. Friedman's stress on relational, as opposed to nominal, definitions of planetary modernism, also has the advantage of inflecting our predominantly *temporal* understanding of modernism with a *spatial* dimension, such that we

may conceive of "an interactional set of relations throughout the globe that may also manifest differently in particular places and times. . . . provid[ing] a comparative framework that balances the commensurable—what different modernities share—with the incommensurable—how they are different" (478). The balance Friedman advocates between relations of similarity and difference is valuable to the kind of critical practice informing the essays in this issue, which do not contest the enormous impact of European modernism on the subcontinent but which refuse to let that impact dictate the course of South Asian modernism as it developed out of patterns of assimilation and resistance.

Similar to the relational impulse behind Friedman's "planetary modernism" is the locational concept of "geomodernism" promoted by Doyle and Winkiel. Their aim in the collection of essays gathered under the title *Geomodernisms* is, in their words, "to collapse the margin and center assumptions embedded in the term modernism by conjuring instead a web of twentieth-century literary practices, shaped by the circuitry of race, ethnicity, nativism, nationalism, and imperialism in modernity, and by the idea or commodity of 'modernism' itself" (6). The value of reconfiguring the center-periphery model as a non-hierarchical "web" that allows for unexpected connections across space and time and that enables comparative research, which in turn may lead to new insights into our collective embattled past, is amply evidenced by the scope of the essays included in *Geomodernisms*. Its global canvas expands beyond Europe to include the Black Atlantic, Africa, Brazil, Lebanon, China, Taiwan, and India, and its critique of narrow periodization allows us to reach as far back as the pre-Enlightenment period.

In these studies, what continually needs to be highlighted is the *constitutive*, which is also to say, *non-derivative*, manner in which these other modernisms infringed upon the domains traditionally staked out by Euromodernism. The fragmented subjectivities expressing themselves in syncopated rhythms and disjointed streams of consciousness across multiple registers of voice belonged equally to the colonized people who found their lives radically altered by colonialism and modernity. Additionally, modernism of the margins did not simply run its course at a remove from the metropolitan centers of London, Paris, and New York. It actively entered into these hallowed spaces with its own articulations of doubt, skepticism, and divided subjectivity. Over the past six years or so, scholars have debated the extent to which postcolonial modernism has rewritten the Euromodernist project and dislodged the primacy of its hegemonic status. As a result, we are now able to consider an array of critical positions on the subject. All, however, appear to attribute to

colonialism a kind of first-cause status. Colonialism would not be possible without modernity, of course, but some critics have gone a step further to suggest that *modernism* would not have been possible without colonialism. This important shift has consequences for how we read both the texts of metropolitan modernism and those of the postcolonial variety. For instance, Elleke Boehmer and Steven Matthews have invited us to consider the question, "If we suspend the allegedly axial relationship, and consider Modernism in its high period, 1910-1930, in a wider transnational, even world-scale context—a context shaped by colonial, and incipient global, forces—could modernism be said to have been *informed* by colonial experiences and energies?" (284-85). Boehmer and Matthews go on to suggest that "empire (alongside war, urbanization, modernity itself) *made Modernism possible*" (287; emphasis added). One has only to recall the "fascinated yet also frightened" encounter with the Other in the works of Pablo Picasso and D. H. Lawrence (286) to appreciate the extent to which the Other had encroached upon the western consciousness. Accordingly, Boehmer and Matthews re-read Joyce, Woolf, Eliot, and Yeats in the context of early colonial writers like Katherine Mansfield, Mulk Raj Anand, and William Plomer in order to suggest that the writings of the latter group actively engaged the metropolitan center and transformed it from within.

In a similar vein, Simon Gikandi asserts, "It is rare to find a central text in modern literature, art, or ethnography that does not deploy the other as a significant source, influence, or informing analogy. And the relationship between the institution of modernism and these other cultural spaces is not, as was the case in earlier periods of European art, decorative: it is *dynamic, dialectical, and constitutive* of the field of European and American culture" (421; emphasis added). But where Boehmer and Matthews stress the ability of colonialism and, by extension, colonials, to create an alternative modernism, Gikandi emphasizes the protean power of modernism itself to provide a vehicle for the aesthetic dimension of the colonial experience. He contends, "it was primarily—I am tempted to say solely—in the language and structure of modernism that a postcolonial experience came to be articulated and imagined in literary form" (420). Here, the emphasis appears to fall on certain inherent properties of modernism to empower those who found themselves in its margins. Hence, Gikandi feels the need to revivify the liberatory capability of modernism when he writes: "when it is placed in an uneasy relation to other spaces, modernism seems to recover its drive as the aesthetic of the international avant-garde and in the process to reject its ossification as the aesthetic ideology of high European culture" (422). In other words, when applied

globally, modernism loses its elite status and achieves a measure of its original revolutionary potential.

However we may debate the extent of the constitutive function of other modernisms in grounding or decentering normative definitions of the term, this function was and is unambiguously constitutive. Turning our attention now to South Asian modernism, what seems clear at the present time is its emergence in the midst of two mutually co-existing realities: the first is that three generations of westernized, educated South Asian writers spanning the colonial and postcolonial periods have risked reproducing the elitist nature of the modernist movement (often tagged as "High Modernism"); the second is that this elitism has failed to exhaust modernism's ability to shatter any unitary claims to truth, including the Truth of Empire. We may even say, on a careful reading of the early works of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Kamala Markandaya, Ahmed Ali, Sa'adat Hassan Manto, and Attia Hossain, that modernism is the natural idiom of these writers in so far as it provided them with a sharp-edged tool with which to chip away at the edifice of colonialism. Seeing colonial and postcolonial modernism as not simply an imitation but an ongoing critical interpretation and selective appropriation by those who were historically constituted not as modernity's subjects but as its objects, and, further, seeing how these writers even bypass some of modernism's most celebrated features, also entails that we heed the political content of the literature. As Gikandi reminds us, "[because we] are now so used to thinking about modernism either as an apolitical movement or as the aesthetic ideology of fascism . . . we often forget how its practitioners were at the forefront of the international struggle against colonialism and racism in the first half of the twentieth century" (423). Applying Gikandi's insight to South Asian modernism, we need to read it not as an apolitical aesthetic, but rather as the articulation of a difference—racial, ethnic, cultural, historical, gendered—that resides at the very foundation of the colonial and postcolonial experience.

South Asian Modernism

As a specific planetary eruption and geomodernist instance, South Asian modernism is itself the heterogeneous expression of a diversity of texts, genres, cultural contexts, and critical frameworks. Any attempt to fix its pluralizing potential into a singular truth is doomed to failure. Its greatest achievement is its refusal to be typified as simply derivative, as simply imitative of western aesthetic forms. At its best, it involves an active and extensive rewriting of originary terms. Even the early writers of the colonial period were not merely "precursor modernists," as Boehmer astutely points out. This is so because, as she puts it,

aspects of colonized and colonial expatriate reality were distinctly, perhaps in some cases even distinctively modernist. . . . [M]odernism as a body of discursive practices was not simply imposed on the Empire in the form of colonial trends or school curricula. We see in modernism signs of colonial writers critically engaging with the writing of the centre—its surrealism, its fragmentary forms. They appropriated its influences selectively, interpreting these to match their own experience. (*Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* 119)

It is precisely this selective appropriation of the dislocated idioms of modernism to fit the modern colonial experience that readers should be able to track in the essays included in this special issue.

One way of historicizing the South Asian difference is to affirm that there was a point at which the disillusionment of the Euromodernists with the Enlightenment project roughly coincided with both the colonials' hunger for a new language in which to express their fragmented, displaced, and dissonant selves and their disillusionment with the putatively progressivist yet blatantly racist ideologies of imperialism. Language thus posed a double bind from the very beginning: it was to be the means of both entrapment and liberation. Modern colonials were doubly split: split by virtue of being inherently estranged from themselves (the condition of self-alienation of the modern existential being) and split by virtue of being subjugated to the European bourgeois logic of the modern individual whose self further subdivided into "public" and "private." In the face of this double bind, writers chose to foreground the very cultural, local, and regional aspects that had rendered them different, performing a shift whereby the marginal was to become central. The emerging literature mixed influences from both western sources and indigenous traditions without being exclusively identified with one or the other. One notes the formulation of precisely this kind of variegated and selective modernism in recent critical studies by Jessica Berman, Aparna Dharwadker, and Jahan Ramazani, which, when taken together, suggest an exciting direction for South Asian modernist literary studies. Their genre-based scholarship (Berman studies the novel, Dharwadker drama, and Ramazani poetry) has the added benefit of suggesting, within South Asian modernism, how indigenous conventions of literature originating and developing out of specific and local histories merge with western literary conventions to produce a new kind of writing that is not reducible to either tradition.

Jessica Berman analyzes Mulk Raj Anand's early novels *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936) alongside Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The objective behind this parallel reading of two writers who were similarly positioned vis-à-vis British colonialism—both were its ambivalent legatees and antagonists—is,

first, to read Anand through the lens of Joyce, and next, to re-read Joyce through the lens of Anand, a critical practice that yields "new forms and categories of modern writing that respond to and refigure Joyce and also shift and extend the shapes, geographies, and political commitments of modernism writ large" (111). Berman situates her discussion of Anand in the context of a globally emerging modernity that produced "new and complexly rooted cosmopolitanisms" (111). K. D. Verma's study of Anand demonstrates the extraordinary range of his social and political sympathies, setting these against "the crosscurrents of major European thought, especially British socialism, communism and humanism." Yet, as Verma points out, none of these progressive movements detracted from Anand's anti-colonial stance on Indian independence (Verma 34). Read in the context of complex cosmopolitanism, Anand's colonially inflected use of the traditional *bildungsroman*—the story of the self-development of the individual as a subset of the larger story of the nation—testifies to the limits of this European genre and the Enlightenment logic of self-empowerment out of which it emerges. Berman shows how the subaltern character of Bakha, for instance, conceived as he is as an outcaste, fixed in his rank by birth as a lowly sweeper, cannot aspire to the ideal hero of the classic *bildungsroman* and how, as a complex cosmopolitan who was influenced no less by Indian than by European cultural values, Anand successfully yokes his social conscience and his political commitment to the aesthetic agenda of writing a new *bildungsroman*. Significantly, he conceived the novel during his stay in England, while immersing himself in the cultural activities of the Bloomsbury Group and reading Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*, both of which similarly interrogate the form of the *Bildung*. For both Anand and Joyce, says Berman, "recasting the matter of *Bildung* becomes part of their broad reengagement with colonial geopolitics, national belonging, and cosmopolitan identity" (121). Berman concludes from this that the two must be read together:

Reading Joyce and Anand together, from a transnational, comparative perspective helps make a case for Anand's work as a constitutive part of transnational modernism, one that brings the imbrication of modernist experimentation and politics to the center of the conversation and reorients our notions of modernism toward the political engagement that helps motivate it. (135)

In other words, Anand's modernist experiment, when read alongside Joyce's, places him at the center of a larger political discussion regarding questions of social justice, equality, and freedom. Additionally, Verma reads Anand's politics in the context of a new form of humanism, one that goes even further than these Enlightenment ideals in pleading the cause of human dignity and human compassion.

He writes, "In fact, Anand maintains that the new humanism must include the fundamental human values of 'the Buddhist karuna or compassion,' bhakti and truth and a deep commitment to the ideal of human dignity" (44). This statement aptly summarizes the radical promise (and challenge) of a genuinely political and engaged modernism.

Like Berman, Dharwadker draws attention to the political content of South Asian modernism. She studies the Hindi plays of late-twentieth-century modernist Mohan Rakesh to show that Rakesh was a modernist along lines quite different from those laid down by hegemonic modernism even though he may have favored Bertolt Brecht over commercial Parsi theatre and plays by the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA, the leftist-populist theatre of the 1940s). Like his contemporaries Dharamvir Bharati, Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar, and Girish Karnad, exemplars of the "cosmopolitan modernist fully cognizant of Western movements, but also fully committed to an indigenized aesthetic," (141) Rakesh embodies an "Indian-language modernism" that was, Dharwadker argues, "inevitable [rather] than deliberate: it is not so much that certain authors set out self-consciously to emulate Euromodernism in the mid-twentieth century, but that, given their cosmopolitan conditioning, aesthetic proclivities, and historical circumstances, they compulsively reinvented modernism for their own time and place" (145). Given the dearth of a viable tradition in Hindi theatre, he produces one in which the playwright is positioned as artist-author vis-à-vis his play, which is viewed as text. Within this textually conceived theatrical tradition in Hindi, Rakesh was able to dramatize aspects of modern urban Indian life—changing social attitudes toward marriage, for instance—which had not been seen before. Locating Rakesh's Hindi plays as products of a "global genealogy," Dharwadker is able successfully to challenge the center-periphery binary because, as she puts it, "modernism can no longer be approached as an exclusively western aesthetic, and non-western modernisms cannot be claimed as merely derivative or subsidiary versions of a hegemonic practice" (141). Instead of worrying about how margins define centers or centers margins, we may more fruitfully "reimagine the periphery as the center, and attend to the *internal* processes of modernist self-fashioning" (141).

Reimagining the periphery as the center is precisely what Jahan Ramazani does in *A Transnational Poetics*, a study of postcolonial poetry in the transnational context of globalization. Like Berman and Dharwadker, he reads modernism as a complex global phenomenon spawning patterns of assimilation and resistance. For instance, he positions the mid-century poets coming out of colonialism as neither antimodernist nor "Euromodernist wannabes" (100), reading their

poetry instead as vivid examples of “modernist bricolage” (101), by which he means “the syncretic use in early twentieth-century poetry of diverse cultural materials ready at hand” (99). This piecing together of disparate and disjointed material in the name of an equally displaced experience of reality was what the Euromodernists, many of whom were themselves exiles or émigrés, had pioneered, and it is this project that the first wave of postcolonial poets seized upon in order to express their own fragmented worlds. After all, what indigenous poets found most useful about Euromodernism was its ability to speak so eloquently to the “intercultural collisions and juxtapositions, the epistemic instabilities and decenterings, of globalization” (99). Hence, according to Ramazani, it would be erroneous to dismiss Euromodernism as a tool in the hands of imperialists: “To insist, in the name of anti-Eurocentrism, that Euromodernism be seen as an imperial antagonist is to condescend to imaginative writers who have wielded modernism in cultural decolonization” (99). Exemplary of such creative poets who have used modernism as an enabling strategy to give voice to the alienated identity of the displaced immigrant, even as they inspissate these articulations with their own indigenous, local histories, are A. K. Ramanujan and Agha Shahid Ali; their free borrowings from the Euromodernists help limn the contours of a rich and variegated postcolonial modernism. Ramazani takes issue with such postcolonial scholars as Harish Trivedi who have dismissed T. S. Eliot entirely because of his Eurocentrism and conservatism in the cultural arena of politics, art, and religion. Instead, suggests Ramazani, we might read in Eliot’s use of indigenous texts (for instance, the quotations from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* in *The Waste Land*) an interrogative space from which the non-West, though absent, yet speaks. In Ramazani’s words: “While Christian yearning plays a part in *The Waste Land*, to read back into the poem the logic of the salvific Christianity Eliot later embraced is to allow this telos to evacuate the melancholic specificity, the painful splaying across hemispheres, of this literary moment” (110). “The painful splaying across hemispheres”: perhaps no better poetic rendering of Friedman’s “planetary modernism” and Doyle and Winkiel’s “geomodernism” exists than this one.

The Essays

Turning our attention to the scholars featured in this issue, we will see how they continue the critical project of South Asian modernism as outlined by Berman, Dharwadker, and Ramazani, and how, like Rakesh Mohan, A. K. Ramanujan and Agha Shahid Ali, the writers they study are in one way or another benefactors of the literary legacy of decolonization launched by Mulk Raj Anand. The essays in this issue have been arranged roughly chronologically, beginning with Pramod K.

Nayar's study of Indian travel writers in the period 1870-1900 and ending with Sharon Pillai's diagnosis of the state of modernist studies in India in 2012. Periodization is an especially vexed topic among postcolonial modernists, and for good reason. Dharwadker points out the anomaly of the South Asian situation in which works seventy-five years apart can be called *adhunika* (the Hindi and Bengali word for "modern"), attributing this to the genealogical lack of a distinction in the Indian context between "modernity" and "modernism" (both signified by *adhunikata*; Dharwadker 142). Still, periodization matters because of the rupture posed by Independence and decolonization. Postcolonial writers do differ markedly from colonial ones. Dharwadker draws upon Sudipta Kaviraj's eminently useful term "travestic modernity" to describe the process by which one generation of colonial writers had their aesthetic accomplishments "canceled out" and "made impossible" by the next (144). Hence, mindful of the need to "[demarcate] modernism as a particular phase within the continuum of modernity," (144) I have preserved a rough chronology.

In his essay "Colonial Subjects and Aesthetic Understanding: Indian Travel Literature about England, 1870-1900," Pramod K. Nayar performs the all-important task of theorizing the subject position of the colonial native in the land of the colonizer, using the former's own language to read into it a certain discursive power. He advances the thesis that the Indian traveler to Victorian England created a "cosmopolitan aesthetic" that moved him from the position of "enchanted" admirer to "informed" insider. He adopts Michael Rothberg and Yasemin Yildiz's concept of "memory citizenship" to show that such travelers to England as G. P. Pillai, N. L. Doss, T. B. Pandian, Jagatjit Singh, Lala Baijnath, and Jhinda Ram were not simply gawking at England's visible signs of cosmopolitanism; instead, they were actively interacting with these to produce a "mediating cosmopolitanism" of their own, one that includes facility in both the Indian and the English registers. Nayar writes of the Indian traveler that "[e]ven as he responds to the English aesthetic as an Indian . . . he is able to position himself as a connoisseur of English sensibility as well. Mediating cosmopolitanism is the calculated detachment from both domains in these narratives. The traveler's memory citizenship offers multiple allegiances where both histories—Indian and English—work in conjunction" (49).

Meena Pillai contextualizes her study of the novel in Malayalam by attending to the exigencies of colonial modernity underwriting Kerala culture in the late nineteenth century. She maintains that the rise of the Malayalam novel occurs at the same time as the need for social re-engineering of caste and kinship structures, and that the novels of C. V. Raman Pillai participated in the production of the "chaste"

female who preserved the privatized values of the home. In Meena Pillai's view, "the project of modernity in Kerala became inextricably linked to the task of family reform resulting in the systematic effacement of matriliney in the early part of the twentieth century in favor of more respectable practices of monogamy, patriliney and patrilocality, all consolidated under a reformulated patriarchy" (57). Her essay invites us to consider how the emerging modernities of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries colluded with local indigenous and colonial patriarchies to restrict the roles of women and assign to literature the function of the (re)production of social values.

In his essay "Modernism and the Birth of Divided Subjectivity in Postcolonial India: A Study of Muktibodh (1917-1964)," Sanjay K. Gautam studies the Hindi poetry of Gajanand Madhav Muktibodh to make the compelling point that the source of Muktibodh's "divided subjectivity" lay in the split between the poet's political (Marxist, western) and poetic (Indic, spiritual) selves. Modernism, arriving as it did for Muktibodh with the political teachings of Marxism, precipitated a personal crisis, forcing a suppression of his prior grounding in the Indic poetic tradition that then erupts as a ghost. Hence, writes Gautam, "haunting is symptomatic of both the refusal of Indic poetic traditions to get interiorized and absorbed into the Marxist modernist project and their stubborn insistence on giving themselves a subject of enunciation once again. Haunting is the mode of being of non-modernist and non-western Indic intellectual and cultural traditions in their dormancy and subterranean existence" (89). Nor is Muktibodh's crisis exclusively his own; Gautam asks whether "the story of divided subjectivity—a haunted subjectivity—[may be] be the story of postcolonial India itself" (90).

Even though Muktibodh broke away from the Communist Party of India, he was a lifelong member of the Progressive Writers Association (PWA), the organization founded in 1936 by a group of left-leaning intellectuals. The literary genealogy of the PWA forms an indispensable chapter in the history of South Asian literature, and certainly no study of South Asian modernism can possibly ignore the enormous contribution of this group of Urdu-language writers to the articulation of a distinctly modern Indian sensibility through genres like the *afsana* and modernist devices such as interior monologue, multiple viewpoints, surrealism, and psycho-sexual imagery. Accordingly, Fatima Rizvi focuses on the short stories in *Angarey*, the representative collection that helped launch the PWA, and other writings by the Progressives, showing through textual analysis the innovative narrative techniques and unconventional subject matter that distinguished the modern(ist) concerns of Ahmed Ali, Ismat Chughtai, Sa'adat Hasan Manto, Krishan Chander, Rajinder Singh Bedi, and Upendar Ashk.

Arnab Chakladar's essay "Garbo and *Kuchela* at the Palace Talkies in Malgudi: Women and Modernity in R. K. Narayan's *The Dark Room*" calls for a reassessment of R. K. Narayan, an author whose name is frequently cited, along with Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand, in connection with the genesis of Anglophone Indian literature, yet who has suffered serious critical neglect over the years. Chakladar demonstrates that through Narayan's competing representations of femininity, the author participates in nationalist debates about the position of Indian women in a westernizing society. But the novel's unsatisfactory ending, which leaves unresolved the thematic of competing femininities, is not simply a stylistic or formal limitation. Rather, it is symptomatic of "the impossibility of resolving the contradictory cultural narrative of Indian modernity itself," (115) in so far as that the demands placed on women—to be at once traditional and modern—are themselves unsustainably contradictory.

According to Krishna Manavalli, such South Indian writers as R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, and Balachandra Rajan are privileged by caste and class and, as such, are bound to replicate a "pre-dominantly Aryan and Brahmin South" India which in turn functions metonymically as the "real" India (134). Like Meena Pillai, Gautam, and Rizvi before her, Krishna Manavalli mines the non-English terrain of modern Indian literature. Her essay "Modernism, Brahmin Angst, and Postcolonial Indian Writing in Regional Languages: The Case of U. R. Ananthamurthy's *Samskara*" meaningfully breaks from the critical hegemony of English in the formation of the field of Indian literature, for, in her words, "South Indian languages also contribute important insights into the complex and heterogeneous sociocultural formations in post-independence India" (135). U. R. Ananthamurthy, the writer under study, was a leading figure in the *navya* (new) movement in experimental Kannada literature of the 1940s through the '70s. His novel *Samskara*, controversial in its own time because of its unconventional exposé of the excesses of the South Indian caste system, is, according to Manavalli, nevertheless problematic because it reinscribes patriarchal and Brahminical values. As it attempts to rework Euromodernist and existentialist tropes to uncover the "angst" that lies at its core, *Samskara* stands to reproduce indigenous sedimented casteist attitudes toward "hyper-sexualized, low-caste female bodies" (140).

Varghese Thekkevallyara continues the valuable non-Anglophone emphasis of some of the other writers in this issue, taking to task the insufficiently theorized and ideologically suspect treatment of Sanskrit in Sheldon Pollock's edition of vernacular literatures and cultures, *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (2003). Factors contributing to this major drawback are first, Pollock's

bracketing of the categories of ideological, religious, and secular, such that Sanskrit, which Pollock assigns to the pre-modern era, is precluded from ideological examination and second, Pollock's privileging of Sanskrit over subaltern articulations in the pre-Sanskrit vernacular languages. The latter move is especially perplexing considering Pollock's seeming awareness of the political and representational imbalances due to issues of hegemony and subalternity as voiced by the Subaltern Studies historians and Gayatri Spivak. Thekkevallyara's nuanced critique serves as a cautionary reminder to readers that the kneejerk tendency to equate modernism with secularism and the birth of ideology is misguided at best. We may more fruitfully read this equation as oftentimes modernism's own ideological sleight of hand, its arrogating to itself the taxonomy of divisions and hierarchies among the terms "modern/pre-modern," "secular/religious," "public/private," and so on.

Aparna Mujumdar engages Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* (2000) in order to argue for the broadening of Eurocentric notions of modernity in the light of colonial engagements with Empire. Such experiences of modernization as sophisticated mechanisms of trade and commerce and rational civic and state discourse are often misread as universal and western. However, negotiations among colonial subjects in South Asia with both European modernity and other modernizing practices that did not emanate from Europe suggest a native, local modernity, one that assimilated the new, the western, by adapting it to the old, the indigenous. *The Glass Palace* covers the period from 1885, when Burma was annexed by Britain, to the 1940s, which saw the rise of Indian nationalism and the exodus of Indians from Burma. Mujumdar shows how Ghosh's characters are imbricated in networks of commercial travel, trade, and sociocultural interactions that signify a local, and not simply derivative, modernity. Drawing upon a range of postcolonial historians and the theories of Frantz Fanon, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Neil Lazarus, among others, she concludes that South Asian modernity is "a nuanced and variegated paradigm" (182).

Even as we are afforded glimpses of alternative modernities by such writers as Ghosh, Sreyoshi Sarkar's essay "Toward a 'Post-National' Community in Pakistan and the Failures of the Modernist *Bildungsroman*" reminds us of the class-bound privilege of the postcolonial intellectual who writes at a remove from the "non-intellectual others" occupying the margins of the story (and, by implication, of the nation itself). Sarkar's analysis of the Anglophone Pakistani novels *Kartography* (2002) by Kamila Shamsie and *The Geometry of God* (2008) by Uzma Aslam Khan addresses the dearth of genuinely geomodernist examples of contemporary literature. Certainly, Pakistan, with its beleaguered history of embattled national,

cultural, and religious positions ranging from secular to moderate to extremist, not to mention the skewed representation of these in the post-9/11 global imaginary, merits attention in any study of planetary modernisms. Given this reality, however, Sarkar reminds us that Pakistan's internal politics and self-representation are at least as important as, if not more so than, any apprehension of it from the outside. As she says: "In the context of Pakistan, the idea of the nation-space holds special significance, given that spatial configurations from territorial, provincial, agricultural, rural/urban and suburban to the body, especially that of the female body, have played an important role in the 'mapping' of Pakistan and in quarrels over national identity" (188). That being the case, it is surely unfortunate that the novels under study, in spite of their experimentation with modernist narrative form and technique, ultimately fail to deliver a genuine alternative to the nation-state as "exploitative, oppressive, and violent" (188-89); the characters and, by extension, Shamsie and Khan themselves, cannot move outside of the privileged zones of class and education to embrace a wider social or nationalist critique.

My own essay, "The Modernism of Shashi Deshpande," aims to situate the writings of Shashi Deshpande as modernist experiments in the relatively isolated terrain of contemporary English-language writing by Indian women. Anglophone women writers like Deshpande, who certainly does not write with a view to publication outside of the subcontinent, have a necessarily harder time imagining why they write and for whom they write. Drawing primarily from Deshpande's own essays on writing and secondarily from the few critical studies of her work that exist to date, I propose that Deshpande (re)invents the modernist trope of the writer-protagonist as a way of constructing communities of informed readership. Metafiction allows Deshpande to discover an agency that, while conceived in personal and idiosyncratic terms as an isolated woman's bid for independence, has ramifications extending beyond the confines of the home and the book to an outright challenge of patriarchy.

It is only fitting that the issue end with Sharon Pillai's trenchant critique of the current state of Anglophone Indian literary studies. Her essay is more than a polemic against entrenched literary valuations and biases; it is, or rather, creates, a timely intervention in the canon formation of South Asian modernist literature, which Pillai sees as circumscribed and limited by writers and critics who have closed ranks around the subject of aesthetic experimentation. Pillai shows a "critical consensus" at work in the field that has inadequately risen to the challenge of appreciating the complex cultural formations that lie outside of the purview of the modern (as the critical consensus has narrowly defined it). For instance, tradition does not exist as the

ossified other of modernity; it is as "real" as it is "invented," and it is not only archival, as the recent discovery of billions of dollars worth of gold and precious gems in the hidden vaults in the Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple at Trivandrum has proved. A broader, more flexible critical approach might yield fresh insights to the writings of earlier modernists, prompt a recuperation of previously marginalized writers, and make way for a more robust conception of the artist and of the artistic imagination. To take the example of the aforementioned author U. R. Ananthamurthy, Pillai points out that while critics have made much of his alleged misogyny, anti-traditionalism, and existentialism, hardly any mention is made of his reliance on indigenous myth and symbolism and his own admission of ambivalence regarding the legacy of modernism.

It was perhaps inevitable that modernity's objects would one day turn around and become its subjects, thereby exposing its internal contradictions, fissures, and fault lines. This, after all, is the founding contradiction of modernity, and also its most enabling feature: that it produces its own critique. In this spirit, I close with a series of questions, especially mindful of the pitfalls attending the ideologically and methodologically fraught enterprise of defining a field as it continues to unfold: How may we avoid the mistakes of the past as we engage in the work of canon formation? How may our definitions of South Asian modernism be generous enough, decentered enough, so as to move us beyond the hierarchies of center and margin? How may we be properly inclusive yet avoid paying lip service to the always urgent question of cultural difference? If we are to take seriously Sharon Pillai's point that the micromanagement of modernist discourse by its gatekeepers has culminated in a stultifying juncture that must be breached, then what is the nature of the self-reflexive work that is required of both the writers and the critics?

Hopefully, this issue of the *South Asian Review* is a step in the direction toward some answers.

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