

South Asian Studies: Futures Past¹

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Origins:

South Asian studies in the United States began in the conjuncture between Sanskritic scholarship and the strategic concerns and contexts of World War II.² This conjuncture has had vast importance in the shaping of South Asian area studies, which in its early years was dominated by concerns having to do on the one hand with ancient Indic civilization and on the other with contemporary society, politics, and economy. Only in recent years, in the wake first of the critique of Orientalism, and subsequently of the rise of Subaltern Studies, have the fields of colonial and postcolonial studies, modern history, and contemporary cultural studies emerged as a new conjunctural foundation for the study of South Asia, albeit one still unevenly represented in some of the principal area centers. It is the aim of this paper to tell the story of this transition, and to speculate in preliminary ways about the larger implications of this transition as we look towards the next century.

The person at the heart of the original conjuncture was W. Norman Brown,³ founder of the University of Pennsylvania's Department of South Asia Regional Studies

¹ The subject of this paper is South Asian Studies in the United States, and thus the story told here is incomplete. The paper was written for a conference on "Rethinking Area Studies," organized by David Szanton and funded by the Ford Foundation, held at New York University on April 24-26 1998. It is because of this context that I conclude the paper with some institutional recommendations.

² Any review of dominant trends in a field as complex and differentiated as South Asian studies is bound to be partial, to focus on certain players at the expense of others, to critique certain configurations of knowledge while leaving others out of the picture altogether. Besides, this review is intended to highlight certain moments in the formation and working out of the field and not to provide a complete account. Nevertheless, I apologize in advance both to those who feel their work is unfairly singled out and subjected to symptomatic critique, and to those who feel neglected by this highly personal and specific review.

³ For information about Brown, see Rosane Rocher's introductory essay in Rocher, ed., *India and Indology: Selected Articles*, by W. Norman Brown. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978; see also Richard J. Cohen,

and Professor of Sanskrit at Penn between 1926, when Franklin Edgerton vacated the Sanskrit Chair and moved to Yale, and 1966, when Brown retired. Along with several specialists of the Near East, Brown founded the Oriental Studies Department in 1931, and he played a key role in initial discussions in the 1930s, some of them sponsored by the Committee on Indic and Iranian Studies of the American Council of Learned Societies. But it was the war, and the dearth of personnel trained to deal with issues in contemporary Asia, that crystallized these discussions, both for South Asia and other area studies initiatives. The University of Pennsylvania was the only University conducting any courses of intensive language and area study during the war, and it was at the University of Pennsylvania that South Asian studies was to be born soon after the war was over.

In 1944 Brown advocated the serious development and funding of Oriental Studies in a draft document in which he wrote: "During the course of the war the US govt. agencies have needed information about the Orient to a degree far beyond anticipation... Our nation must never again be caught so ill-equipped with knowledge and specialists on the Orient as it was at the end of 1941. The postwar Orient will also probably be freer than before to engage in trade with the Occident... To meet this new situation America will need to acquire information and develop personnel able to handle the increased political, business, and cultural relations."⁴ In 1947 he revised this draft and expanded his vision of Oriental Studies: "It is... possible for us in the West to view the Orient as a large area with a certain number of problems and cultural movements

⁴"Historical Notes: W. Norman Brown," in South Asia News, the bulletin of the South Asia Center at the University of Pennsylvania, Spring 1992, pp. 16-18; and Jerome Bauer and Richard Cohen, "Historical Notes: Insight into the Origin of 'South Asia Regional Studies' at the University of Pennsylvania," in South Asia News, Autumn 1991, p. 14. I am grateful to Bob Nichols for the references.

common throughout its major divisions. This has been the condition in the Orient throughout 5000 years... Today the whole Orient has a common political problem of reaction against occidental colonialism; it has a general economic problem of developing its natural and human resources to produce an industrial civilization which can exist beside that of the West; it is bound to expand trade relations between its different divisions; it has inner social and cultural adjustments to make between its own great divisions, and then with the West.”⁵ It was with this intellectual argument and rhetorical justification that Brown advocated Asian studies. The context for interdisciplinary regional studies was in large part the result of this broad based sense of world civilizational areas in which the present – however embedded in the historical experience of colonialism and no matter how quickly drawn into the spiral of modernization and technological transformation – could not be understood without taking into account the great sweep of the civilizational past.⁶ The broad contours of Edward Said’s critique of “Orientalism” fit the case precisely.⁷

Soon after rewriting this draft document, Brown abandoned the idea of regional Oriental studies and argued instead for the development of a more bounded version of South Asian regional studies. No doubt this decision correlated with the announcement of India’s independence in the summer of 1947, the very summer that the University of Pennsylvania offered a summer school in Indian studies for the first time. This summer session, funded by the ACLS among other sources, served as the basis for the establishment of the Department of South Asia Regional Studies in 1948, an institutional

⁴ Cited in Bauer and Cohen, *ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 14.

⁶ Indeed, despite the manifestly salutary character both of area studies and interdisciplinarity, it is important to remember the extent to which both activities seem rooted in a particular colonial moment and mentality.

development that was funded by the Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Ford Foundations.⁸ Brown recruited a number of scholars who had worked with him first during the war in Washington, where they furnished South Asian expertise for military and strategic purposes, initially in the Research and Analysis Division, later in the planning staff of the Office of Strategic Services: Holden Furber, a British imperial historian, Daniel Thorner, an economist who was later fired by Penn as a result of McCarthy's red scare, and Dorothy Spencer, an anthropologist. By the academic year 1949-50, a complete program for South Asia Regional Studies, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels, had been established under Brown's leadership, and an affiliated faculty of twenty one scholars, covering such fields as geography, linguistics, Hindustani, sociology, and other affiliated fields in Asian studies, were listed in the catalog.

The Department of South Asian Studies (and the area center that subsequently developed out of this initiative once federal funding was established for area studies in the 1950s) at Penn both trained many of the first generation of U.S. South Asianists and provided a model for and a set of institutional and intellectual concerns critical to the development of South Asian studies across the United States. Additionally, graduate students interested in South Asia but working at other Universities often went to the summer sessions at Penn and established ideas and contacts that carried Penn's influence far and wide. In the summer of 1948, according to the reminiscences of Robert Crane,⁹ four scholars who went on to play major roles in South Asian studies all attended the

⁷ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage, 1978. See my edited, *Colonialism and Culture*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993.

⁸ See the *University of Pennsylvania Bulletin*, South Asia Regional Studies, Announcement for the Academic Year 1949-50 and Summer Session, 1949.

⁹ Although he also notes that this was the first summer session, so perhaps he was thinking of the summer of 1947. See Robert Crane, "Preface on Richard L. Park," in Paul Wallace, ed., *Region and Nation in India*, New Delhi: Oxford and IBH Publishing Co., 1985.

summer session and began close professional and personal associations that were to last for some thirty years and affect developments at Universities as various as Chicago, Michigan, and Duke, as well as at Penn. One of these was Richard Lambert, a prominent sociologist who later succeeded Brown as Chair of the Penn Department in 1966, and was one of the chief advocates for South Asian studies in the 1960s and 70s. Also in Philadelphia that summer was Richard Park, a political scientist who earned a Ph.D. from Harvard in 1951 for work on India before joining the faculty at Berkeley that same year, later becoming the first Director of the Berkeley South Asia Program where he also created the Modern India Project, which was sponsored by the Ford Foundation and ran between 1954 and 1957. In 1959 Park moved to the University of Michigan, where Crane had begun teaching Indian history in 1956. According to Crane, the South Asia Program at Michigan was “designed as a multi-disciplinary program, a format already well established... in the Center for Japanese Studies. The Asian Studies Committee of the University was creating a new, multidisciplinary undergraduate core course in comparative Asian civilizations. This new core course received Foundation and University support and this enhanced our need for qualified South Asianists on the faculty. That facilitated a challenging offer to Richard Park who, in 1959, became an Associate Professor of Political Science and Director of the new Center for Southern Asian Studies.”¹⁰ Park not only continued to play a major role in the development of South Asian studies at Michigan and elsewhere (ultimately becoming President of the Association for Asian Studies in 1978), he soon became one of Norman Brown’s key collaborators in the establishment of the American Institute for Indian Studies in 1961.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

In many ways, then, W. Norman Brown set the tone and the most prominent institutional context and agenda for the early development of South Asian studies in the United States, both through his intellectual vision and his institutional investments. His legacy continues to be seen at Penn, and perhaps even more importantly in the American Institute of Indian Studies which since its origins has been the primary funding agent for U.S. doctoral and postdoctoral research on South Asia. Given his preeminent importance in the establishment of South Asian studies, it is worth dwelling for a moment on Brown's own scholarly interests and commitments. Brown was classically trained as a Sanskritist, earning his Ph.D. in 1916 under Maurice Bloomfield at Johns Hopkins (six years after his father, who had been a missionary in India, also attained a Ph.D. in Sanskrit under Bloomfield at Hopkins for a thesis on the human body in the Upanisads).¹¹ Norman's thesis had been on the relationship between the Pancatantra and modern Indian folklore, and was part of a broader collaboration that included Franklin Edgerton's more philologically based work on the classical text. Brown's own work bridged philological and contemporary issues, demonstrating, according to Rosane Rocher, "a basic interest in studying the Indian tradition from its most ancient sources to its most recent manifestations."¹² Rocher also notes that this mix of interests seemed based in part on the fact that Brown had spent a number of years in India as a young boy with his missionary father, and could never completely adapt to the European based philological classicism of Sanskrit studies as it existed in the U.S. at the time. Although he established a formidable reputation as a classical scholar, he was interested in addressing contemporary issues from an early stage in his career. During the 1930s he wrote a

¹¹ See Rocher, "Biographical Sketch," in Rocher, ed., *India and Indology*.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

manuscript entitled, "Why Conflict in India," which described political developments in the Indian subcontinent and, according to Rocher, "evinced strong sympathies for the nationalist movement." Doubtless it was because of this interest that he was called to Washington during the war, at which time he was assigned the task of collecting information and preparing reports on various aspects of the contemporary Indian scene by regional area.

It was on the basis both of the unpublished manuscript prepared before the war, and his wartime experience in Washington, that Brown ultimately wrote a book entitled *The United States and India and Pakistan*, published in 1953 in the American Foreign Policy Library by Harvard University Press. In 1954 it was awarded the Watanull prize, given by the American Historical Association, for the best book in the history of India, a sad commentary on state of Indian historiography at the time given its general textbook character. The book provided a basic summary of Indian history, from the Indus Valley, through British colonial history, to partition, and presented a great deal of material about contemporary politics, economic development, and relations between the United States and both India and Pakistan. However, Brown's scholarly background and interests emerge at various points in the narrative. For example, he writes early on in the book, "The greatest achievements of characteristic Indian civilization are in religion and philosophy¹³." And for him, these achievements are not only Hindu, they refer in particular to an abstract form of monistic philosophy associated with the term *advaita* and the thinker Sankara. Brown's Orientalist perspective also shows through when he discusses language groups in India. He calls Sanskrit the "cement that bound together diverse linguistic groups in a cultural unity, and though the Aryan language complex is

an immigrant in India, we commonly call the country's culture Aryan..."¹⁴ He goes on to say that, "the preeminence of Sanskrit as a medium of educated communication throughout India was impaired by the Muslims as they spread over the country... In the period of their power the position of Sanskrit declined."¹⁵ In the wake of partition and within the context of major tensions both between India and Pakistan and between Muslims and Hindus within India, such scholarly statements are simultaneously unexceptional and deeply problematic. In fact, it would be difficult to claim that Sanskrit was ever a cement of the kind adumbrated by Brown. It would further be simultaneously wrong and politically dangerous to suggest that "Muslims" as a community "impaired" the preeminence of Sanskrit. And although Brown was sympathetic with the cause of Indian nationalism, his fundamental lack of suspicion and critique about the role played by colonial power in the prelude to partition allows him to follow up his pronouncements about the role of Muslims in disrupting the cultural unity of India with the following, even more problematic, statement: "By far the most effective force in separating Indian communities from one another and so producing national disunity has been religion. At the same time religion, at least in the case of Hinduism, contributed to the formation, growth, and power of nationalism."¹⁶ In the aftermath of the destruction of the mosque in Ayodhya, these are precisely the kinds of statements that are being actively contested for political and scholarly reasons by intellectuals, activists, and scholars in India as well as the West.

¹³ *The United States and India and Pakistan*, p. 24.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

While Brown's intentions were framed within his own larger goals to increase understanding and exchange between India (and Pakistan) and the United States, it seems obvious now that his sense of modern Indian history was profoundly shaped by his disciplinary concern with issues of religion and classical Sanskritic (and in his terms "Hindu") civilization. Given his founding role in South Asian studies, as well as his own popular writings about South Asia, these views both established their authority on the weight of colonialist and Indological knowledge and worked to further establish, within the context of postwar/cold-war American liberalism, a whole set of fundamental "truths" about the essential nature of religious identity and ontology in the Indian subcontinent. In his book, Brown explains the partition of India as "a direct result of communalism... The Muslims in pre-partition India disliked the beliefs and ways of the Hindus, distrusted them, and as a minority feared for their treatment if they should have to live in a state where the Hindu majority had power. The Hindus in their turn disliked the ways of the Muslims, and, though a majority, feared the rise to power of the Muslims under whom they had experienced centuries of oppression... The basis of Hindu-Muslim communalism lies in cultural differences."¹⁷ Brown goes on to give potted versions of Islam and Hinduism, in which Islam is represented as requiring a strident form of monotheistic uniformity, whereas Hinduism is open to an endlessly proliferating array of diverse possibilities.

In promulgating these views of religion, and of the implications of religious life for political and cultural outcomes and convictions, Brown, with the greatest of authority, naturalized the partition of India even as he recognized it as a disaster and a source of perilous insecurity for the subcontinent. Brown purveyed similarly Orientalist

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 130.

constructions of India with equal conviction and authority in the remaining pages of the book, averring that Hindus had no theory of the state and precious little in the way of a history of the state outside of standard assumptions about oriental despotism, that caste was an ironclad social fact destined to influence politics in much the way as predicted by the colonial ethnographer H. H. Risley¹⁸ and that women were horribly backward. All this served as the frame for Brown's review of the depressing condition of agricultural production, oppressive poverty both in the countryside and the cities, and the many problems confronting the establishment of democratic politics across the subcontinent. Nevertheless, Brown was convinced that greater knowledge about the subcontinent, as well as cultural exchange between its nations and the United States, would lead to a happier and more prosperous world. He was tireless in his criticisms of those Americans who out of ignorance or malice (or both) had contributed to negative images of the subcontinent, and convinced that the natural, though frequently difficult, friendship between the United States and India would be furthered significantly by educational and cultural developments. Thus he saw his work with University programs, as well as in the solicitation of foundation support for the development of South Asia (and other) area studies, the constant lobbying for government support for programs in education and culture, as a life work that was simultaneously political and academic. And in this endeavor, the establishment of the American Institute of Indian Studies, financed principally by Indian rupee repayment for loans to India from the U.S.¹⁹ and by a start-up

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 316.

¹⁹ The reference here is to Public Law 480, which even more significantly used loan repayment in the non-convertible rupee currency for the development of library resources on South Asia in twelve participating U.S. libraries, including 10 University libraries, the New York Public Library, and the Library of Congress.

grant from Ford, and dedicated to the support of American academic research in South Asian studies, was his crowning achievement.

Norman Brown's life not only documents many of the most important aspects of the early formation of South Asian studies in the United States, it also helps to explain why area studies at the University of Pennsylvania, and elsewhere, privileged a combination of classical Indological scholarship and modern political and economic concern in the early history of the field. Penn was soon joined by a number of other institutions that sought to introduce the serious study of South Asia into their programs of research and teaching during the postwar academic boom years, among them Berkeley, Michigan, Chicago, Columbia, and Wisconsin. In the early years, the most important institutional developments outside Penn took place at the University of Chicago, where the study of South Asia emerged principally out of the efforts of Robert Redfield and Milton Singer to introduce a comprehensive program in the comparative study of civilizations. Singer, who began teaching social science core courses in the college at Chicago after completing his Ph.D. under Rudolph Carnap in philosophy, became a close associate of Robert Redfield's in the late 1940s, just as Redfield was attempting to develop an integrated plan for the study of culture and civilization. At that time, Redfield was a major figure in social science and in anthropology at Chicago, having served as dean and principal advisor to Robert Maynard Hutchins for many years, and having written important work on folk cultures, the folk-urban continuum, and the civilizational contexts for understanding local communities.²⁰ In the late 1940s, Redfield drafted a

²⁰ Redfield had done his Ph.D. under Robert Park, the great Chicago sociologist, and had taught in the anthropology department since 1928. For a thorough study of the life and career of Robert Redfield, see Clifford D. Wilcox, *Encounters with Modernity: Robert Redfield and the Problem of Social Change*, Doctoral Dissertation in History, the University of Michigan, 1997.

plan for an Institute in Cultural Studies that he saw as the basis for a comprehensive and “comparative study of the principal systems of values of the societies that have mattered most in history.”²¹ Upon hearing that the Ford Foundation would support his project in 1951,²² he recruited a number of colleagues to help him run the program; most important among these was Singer.

Milton Singer had first become a close intellectual colleague of Redfield's when he wrote a paper on the study of American civilization in 1949 titled “How the American got his Character,”²³ and, by the fall of 1951, was co-teaching courses with him in cultural anthropology. In large part through this association, Singer came to see himself as an anthropologist, and in 1955 accepted a formal position within the department of anthropology at Chicago. In the early 1950s, Redfield and Singer used their grant money to sponsor a series of conferences in “civilizational studies,” collecting the proceedings in a book series entitled, “Comparative Studies of Cultures and Civilizations” published by the University of Chicago Press. During this time Redfield worked out many of his earlier ideas about great and little traditions, civilizational process, and the role of anthropology in investigating folk cultures within a larger civilizational context. Singer worked with Redfield in the preparation of a methodological treatise, never finally published, that began to chart out a set of disciplinary procedures privileging context based anthropological fieldwork and local study for little traditions and the text based study of language, literature, philosophy, cultural history and the history of civilizations for understanding great traditions. In the early phase, they were especially influential in

²¹ Cited in Wilcox, p. 210.

²² Largely because Hutchins left the University of Chicago at that point and became Associate Director of the Ford Foundation.

²³ In *Ethics* v. 60, October 1949.

the field of Chinese studies. But soon Singer turned his attention to the study of India, and he became primarily interested in the development of South Asian civilizational studies.

In the academic year 1953-54, Singer engaged in a year long postdoctoral study of India, spending the fall term at Penn studying with Brown, and the winter term at Berkeley working with the anthropologist David Mandelbaum.²⁴ While at Berkeley, Singer was especially influenced by the work of M.N. Srinivas, an Oxford trained anthropologist who had published his *Religion and Society under the Coorgs of South India* in 1952. Singer quickly grasped that Srinivas' idea of sanskritization, in which notions of Brahmanic Hinduism spread in part through a process of status emulation, could be seen as an illustration of Redfield's ideas about the interactions of great and little traditions. Inspired by Redfield and Srinivas, Singer committed himself to a plan for field studies in India that led to many years of sustained research and publication on India. At Chicago he began immediately to orient the Chicago civilizations project toward the study of India. Singer and Redfield planned a symposium on the Indian village that brought eight social anthropologists to work with graduate students in Chicago, leading to the volume edited by McKim Marriott entitled *Village India: Studies in the Little Community* (Chicago, 1955). The papers all argued that villages in India were not self sufficient units, isolated in conventional anthropological terms from larger civilizational forms and processes, and established India as a primary site for the working out of Redfield's and Singer's programmatic agenda. Marriott's paper argued that

²⁴ Mandelbaum was the first American social scientist to do field research in India. Patterson, 2.8 For an account of his career, see Milton Singer, "David Mandelbaum and the Rise of South Asian Studies: A Reminiscence," pp. 1-9, in Paul Hockings, ed., *Dimensions of Social Life: Essays in Honor of David G. Mandelbaum*. Amsterdam: Mouton de Gruyter, 1987.

classical and folk forms, and by implication civilizational and village sites, were vitally connected, through processes he labelled particularization and universalization. Shortly after the volume's publication, Marriott was recruited back to Chicago, where he had done his Ph.D., from Berkeley, and once there he went on to advocate the importance of empirically based long term field work studies in India.

If the University of Pennsylvania was dominated by Brown's combination of Indological scholarship and current events, and Berkeley's South Asia initiatives were activated principally through the work of the anthropologist David Mandelbaum,²⁵ Chicago's history reveals a combination of these two tendencies in the working out of Redfield's and Singer's civilizational agenda for the study of South Asia.

Anthropological concerns and fieldwork methods were linked to the textual concerns first of Sanskritists and then, increasingly, specialists in modern languages, to provide a particular disciplinary framing for South Asian studies.²⁶ As for other areas, political science played an important role in the first postwar decades (before methodological concerns in the discipline began to challenge the importance of comparative politics). Indeed, among Asianists in the United States, anthropology played a more significant role for South Asian studies than any other sub-area with the exception of Southeast Asia. And it is noteworthy that when the University of Chicago decided to hire a tenured

²⁵ As at Penn, Yale, Columbia, Hopkins, and Chicago, Sanskritists arrived long before South Asian Area Studies. Arthur W. Ryder was appointed to a chair in Sanskrit at Berkeley in 1905 in the classics department. Murray Emeneau succeeded him as Sanskritist in 1940, and went on to become the key person in the establishment of the Linguistics Department at Berkeley in 1953. Emeneau, who did fieldwork in the Nilgiris of Southern India and studied Dravidian philology, collaborated with Mandelbaum in the establishment of a Center for South Asian Studies in 1957, along with Richard Park, as mentioned above.

²⁶ While in 1991, the average percentage of anthropologists among all disciplinary specialists in Asian studies was only 9.6 [and only 5.0 for China and inner Asia and 6.5 for Northeastern Asia], the percentage of anthropologists for South Asia was 14, surpassed only by Southeast Asianists where anthropology was even more dominant, at 25 percent. For Eastern Asian studies overall, history was the dominant discipline; for South Asia, religion and philosophy claimed greater proportions of scholars than anywhere else, followed closely by history, political science, and anthropology.

historian of South Asia to develop a serious graduate program in this field, it recruited an anthropologist with historical interests rather than an historian who would have been, as was the case with Holden Furber at Penn, initially trained in the history of the British empire. Bernard Cohn, an anthropologist trained at Cornell²⁷ and later the chair of the department at University of Rochester (he had been one of the contributors to the volume *Village India*), was invited to Chicago in 1963, and he soon became the pioneer for the development of the social history of India in the U.S. Although Cohn has introduced a powerful note of critique to the position of anthropology in area studies, he has also maintained a close interdisciplinary relationship throughout the years between developments and projects in history and anthropology.

This review of historical and disciplinary origins has suggested ways in which South Asian studies has been produced in the United States out of a curious conjuncture between Indology and anthropology, in the context of a recognition of the strategic importance of South Asia and the growing need to educate Americans, academics and others alike, about a place that was populous but poor, largely democratic but politically fragile, and likely to be of growing military and political significance in a postcolonial cold-war world system. These conjunctures both reflect and were in large part responsible for installing a set of dominant tropes for the representation of South Asia, perpetuating colonial and Orientalist forms of knowledge and producing new American ones. Specifically, serious academic study in the U.S. of the contemporary political, social, and economic predicament of the new postcolonial nations of South Asia was initially mediated by forms of knowledge focussing either on ancient India or its most

²⁷ Where he studied under Morris Opler, who ran a village studies project and trained a number of the early postwar anthropologists in the U.S., including Pauline Kolenda, John Hitchcock, and Michael Mahar.

remote hinterlands. It is hard to imagine a group of Hellenic scholars being called together with fieldworkers experienced for the most part only in the village life of peasant societies to found, say, a modern European studies program. But there was a long history of representing India in ways that made this history seem unexceptional, and current political and economic dilemmas were accordingly approached in part through assumptions about India predicated principally on readings of classic texts and backwater contexts. Thus it was that essential statements about the nature of Hinduism and Islam could be accepted as either true or relevant in regard to understanding contemporary South Asia; and thus it was that questions about the political stability of a nation and the economic viability of a society could be evaluated in relation to timeless truths about Indian culture. Further, this history reveals how many components of colonial knowledge about India could be appropriated with only minor modifications in the formation of a new postcolonial academic orthodoxy.

The Middle Period

The establishment of federal funding for area studies programs in 1959 (the National Defence Education Act, Title VI allocation, was passed in late 1958), and the steady increase in support for the study of foreign area languages and cultures (in the late 1950s and 60s the Ford Foundation played a critical role in providing this support),²⁸ provided a great boon to the development of South Asian studies during the 1960s' and 70s'. The University of Pennsylvania continued to be an important center for South Asian studies and expanded in a number of disciplinary directions, though like other

²⁸ The Ford Foundation gave the University of Chicago 5.4 million dollars for area studies in the 1960s, including 1,786,000 specifically earmarked for South Asia.

Universities with separate departments for South Asian studies (e.g. Chicago and Berkeley) it was able to hire an unusual concentration of language and literature specialists. Penn became known for its powerful group of Sanskritists (including linguists and textualists) at the same time that it continued to be strong in social science fields such as history, sociology, and economics. Berkeley became an important player in a wide range of fields. Wisconsin emerged as another center for South Asian studies with faculty appointed in fields such as political science, sociology, and history, as well as across the humanities. Programs of various sizes developed during these decades in places as various as the Universities of Michigan, Washington, Minnesota, Virginia, and Texas. Columbia had a small but well placed group of South Asianists led by figures such as Ainslee Embree in history and Howard Wriggins in Political Science. And Chicago grew rapidly to become what perhaps was the most active center during these years, certainly in the social sciences. As can be noted even in this incomplete inventory, these were years when social science disciplines across the board discovered the importance of South Asian studies; although today it is difficult to locate South Asianists in disciplines such as sociology and economics, and indeed even, increasingly, in political science, these were years when figures such as Richard Lambert, Richard Park, Joseph Elder, and Leo Rose played central roles.

Perhaps the most important contribution of the NDEA funding of South Asian studies was the growing stress on language study during this period, in large part because of the direct linking of graduate funding to serious language learning. Many of the great early figures of South Asian studies, with the exception of the Sanskritists, had little if any knowledge of South Asian languages, and engaged in research on South Asia using

either English or local interpreters. Often this was because these scholars had been “re-tooled” as South Asianists after initial training in other fields, as well as because research in areas such as election analysis involved a combination of statistical methods and interviews with high level officials, usually in English. Increasingly a new generation of scholars were trained specifically in South Asian studies with language skills and cultural expertise. At Universities such as Penn, Chicago, and Berkeley, faculty were hired during these years to teach Hindi and other Indian languages, sometimes in conjunction with other disciplinary interests. While language skills never became as important for South Asian Studies as they did for East Asian Studies, the sense of South Asia as a region that could be approached solely through English (with the occasional Sanskritist) changed dramatically during these years.

The 1960s witnessed the growing seriousness and quality of work on South Asia in a number of different regards. Amateurish prognostications about India’s democratic viability were increasingly supplanted by serious analyses of political and social change. Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph, who had been hired by Chicago to teach political science, published an important study in 1967 entitled *The Modernity of Tradition* that complicated social scientific conceptions of “modernization” as well as of the constituent categories of modernity and tradition, at the same time that it built powerfully on the work of other scholars (some completing their doctoral work on South Asia under the Rudolphs, as for example Robert Hardgrave) on subjects as various as caste politics and legal change. Bernard Cohn developed a history program at Chicago rooted in interdisciplinary methods and serious attention to language and culture. In 1970 he published an essay reviewing the state of the art in South Asian history, and noted that

"the historian's contribution has largely been a negative one. The historian sensitive to social components in South Asian history has contributed to a questioning of the timeless view which social scientists have used in their discussion of modern South Asia. The historian has pointed to the complexity of the process of political change, especially in the study of the nationalist movement, by pointing to regional and caste differences in participation in the movement."²⁹ However, he suggested a bright and powerful future for South Asian history, based both on his assumption of fruitful interchange among social science disciplines, and the recent and promising work of younger scholars in the field, including J.H. Broomfield, Eugene Irschick, S.N. Mukherjee, John Leonard, Peter Marshall, David Kopf, Ronald Inden, and Tom Kessinger (some of whom were or had been his students).³⁰ Cohn was as excited by the discovery of new kinds of sources for the writing of Indian history as he was by the new historical writing itself.

Bernard Cohn's work and influence on the field more generally was innovative and highly significant not only because of his enterprising rethinking and dramatic expansion of the sources, methods, and questions of historical work, but for two other, though related, reasons. First, as mentioned before, he had been trained as an anthropologist and thus brought to his historical sensibility a lively sense of social theory

²⁹ "Society and Social Change under the Raj" in Bernard Cohn, *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays*. Delhi and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 195.

³⁰ See for example J. H. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth Century Bengal*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968; Eugene Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The Non-Brahmin Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916-1929*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969; S.N. Mukherjee, *Calcutta: Essays in Urban History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970; John Greenfield Leonard, *Kandukuri Viresalingam, 1848-1919: A Biography of an Indian Social Reformer*. Ph.d. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1970; Peter James Marshall, *Problems of Empire: Britain and India, 1757-1813*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1968; David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773-1835*. Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1969; Ronald Inden, *Marriage and Rank in Bengali Culture: A History of Caste and Clan in Middle Period Bengal*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976; and, Tom Kessinger, *Vilayatpur, 1848-1968: Social and Economic Change in a North Indian Village*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974.

as well as direct experience of village fieldwork. Indeed, many of his writings over the years have argued for new collaborations between history and anthropology, with the aim of making history more adventurous in theoretical as well as empirical terms, and of making anthropology grapple with the essential *change/fulness* of South Asian society. Second, Cohn early on developed a critical sense of British colonial rule. In a set of early papers he wrote about the history of western knowledge about India, and began to subject western social science to serious criticism. He noted in 1970 that not only was the idea of an autonomous village world in India a myth, it was a myth specifically created by the British.³¹ In his early writing he focussed more on the creation of new institutions by innovations in areas such as land policy; in later writing he focused increasingly on British colonialism and its forms of knowledge. Indeed, long before the powerful critical work of Edward Said and the new field of postcolonial studies, Bernard Cohn had suggested ways in which colonial rule would not have been possible without the development of certain forms of colonial knowledge, at the same time that he critiqued the implication of western social scientific knowledge about India in the maintenance of basic colonial categories and assumptions.

Cohn's inventive sense of how to study different aspects of colonial history not only anticipated many recent theoretical developments well outside South Asian studies, it has also directly inspired a great deal of historical and anthropological work on the character of the colonial state. In Cohn's own writing, colonialism is no longer an historical irruption that has to be stripped away to get down to the real subject of anthropology, but rather the focus of the study of social transformation in all societies touched by world systems of colonial rule. For Cohn, colonialism played a critical role in

the constitution of the metropole – in the formation of the state and in the development of its basic forms of knowledge – even as it shaped, through its cultural technologies of domination, much of the modern history of colonized places and peoples. Cohn has consistently written brilliant and innovative articles on various aspects of his research, ranging in focus from the massively orchestrated darbars in Delhi to the enumerative technologies of power deployed by the census, from the specific careers of terms like “village,” “tribe,” and “caste” to the anthropology of the colonizers as well as the colonized. Beyond his writing, Cohn has also exerted important influence on the shaping of South Asian studies through his students, his role in teaching and research at the University of Chicago, as well as through professional networks and scholarly collaboration, as for example in his early recognition of and participation in the Subaltern Studies history project. Cohn also participated in the 1983 Subaltern Studies Conference in Canberra, subsequently publishing his paper, “The Command of Grammar and the Grammar of Command,” in the fourth volume of the publications of the Subaltern Studies Collective.³²

If Cohn’s critique of western social science led both to wide ranging critiques and an intense interrogation of colonial genealogies of knowledge, it for a time seemed that it was also part of an allied movement based principally in Chicago that attained a great deal of influence, particularly in anthropology, during the decade of the 1970s. I refer here to a new set of proposals made under the banner of an “ethnosociology of India.” The principal architects of these new ideas were McKim Marriott and Ronald Inden.

³² Cohn’s major works include *An Anthropologist among Historians* (1987) and his more recent *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996; see also “The Command of Grammar and the Grammar of Command,” Ranajit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies*, Vol IV. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985, pp. 276-329.

After Marriott's work convening new scholarship on village India and expanding the insights of Redfield, Singer, and Srinivas in relation to his own intensive fieldwork experience, first in Uttar Pradesh and later in Maharashtra, Marriott had become interested in the question of how to understand the nature of hierarchy in caste society. After focussing on the question of caste ranking, and the relationship of attributional statements concerning status to empirical practices in the domain of food exchange, Marriott became increasingly intrigued by cultural questions around the meaning of caste. In one sense, he built on the generally accepted understanding of the goal of social anthropological research, at least at Chicago, that Singer articulated in the following passage: "The understanding of another culture or civilization, as social and cultural anthropology rightly teaches, requires that the foreign traveler rid himself of ethnocentrism and look at another culture in its own terms. Malinowski's axiom that a major aim of ethnology is to understand the "native" from his point of view, his relation to his world, has been accepted by anthropology since the 1920's."³³ Marriott worried about how this might be accomplished with unusual intensity. Influenced in part by his colleague David Schneider that cultural domains had to be identified and described in terms consistent with the cultural object of study, Marriott began to collaborate with the historian Ronald Inden, whose 1972 Chicago dissertation had established an innovative model for the cultural analysis of early Indian texts. Deriving "native" terms and categories from classical sources such as the *Mam Dharma Sastras* (Hindu prescriptive texts about social duties and orders), Inden and Marriott wrote a series of papers in the early 1970s which argued that Indian society could be properly understood in relation to a monistic world view. Their papers combined a rigorous critique of prevailing social

³³ Introduction to *When a Great Tradition Modernizes*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1972, p. 3.

scientific theories and procedures – ranging from American empiricism to French idealism – with a programmatic set of recommendations for a new kind of cultural analysis, to be pursued both in textual analysis and contextual fieldwork. The primary emphasis was to be on “native” terms and categories. Ethnosociology was to mean “Indian” sociology, rather than western.

The ethnosociology project was in ascendancy for quite some time, propelling many a graduate dissertation at Chicago and elsewhere, and defining a number of important conferences organized by the Social Science Research Council and other research organizations.³⁴ Ethnosociology was certainly an outgrowth, at least in part, of serious language study, and it was a consequence of serious frustration with a social scientific inheritance -- from Weber to Durkheim, and from colonial ethnography to comparative social stratification studies – that offered little genuine guidance in the quest to understand the complex social and cultural realities of a much mystified subcontinent. However, it soon became clear that Cohn’s initial support gave way to greater and greater qualification, that the Rudolphs among many others had residual commitments to comparative social science that they did not wish to relinquish, and that scholars outside of Chicago, even in nearby Michigan, failed to accept the “Indianness” of this new endeavor. In a review of a book on Bengali kinship by Ronald Inden and Ralph Nicholas,³⁵ Tom Trautmann, an historian of ancient India at the University of Michigan, asked whether anyone outside of Chicago believed any of this.³⁶ And although some

³⁴ Four of the first workshops to be sponsored by the Social Science Research Council, beginning a long tradition of conferences, seminars, and workshops, were organized around Marriott’s ethnosociology project. On the one hand, Marriott worked to diagram the major dimensions of a Hindu ethnosociology; on the other, philosophers such as Karl Potter sought to explore the philosophical dimensions of major Hindu themes, for example the question of Karma.

³⁵ *Kinship in Bengali Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

³⁶ “Marriage and Rank in Bengali Culture” in *Journal of Asian Studies*, v. 39, no. 3, 1980, pp. 519-521.

scholars in India were intrigued by this new work, including T.N. Madan and Veena Das, most “Indian” social scientists were unclear why these Chicago anthropologists were informing them of the realities of Indian social science. In retrospect, ethnosociology was a peculiar product of a certain strand of American liberal social theory (which stressed cultural relativism as the antidote to historical and political issues of power) that in some ways was more of the same: a heady stew made of equal parts Indology and cultural anthropology. And while ethnosociology took advantage of, and further encouraged, serious language study, encouraging full immersion in classical texts and ethnographic contexts, it represented a retreat from earlier area studies agendas. For example, there was no room within ethnosociology for a critical engagement with “modernity”, since all modern forms were signs of the contamination of the west; likewise, there was no interest within the project in contemporary politics or social-economic dilemmas. And, ethnosociology involved an essentialization of India which rendered Indian cultural truth both timeless (i.e. ancient) and religious (i.e. Hindu). Viewed today, ethnosociology appears, despite its many claims, not only as another mainstream manifestation of western social science, but as an academic movement that ignored modern India not least in its steadfast refusal to consider how it collaborated in the naturalization of India as a Hindu land devoid of history.

At the same time that ethnosociology played such an important role in Chicago, a number of scholars in the U.S. were engaged in serious study of Islamic history, institutions, and identities in South Asia. Among many other examples, Barbara Metcalf, who taught at Penn for much of the decade, wrote a study of the Deoband revival

movement,³⁷ John Richards, who taught at Wisconsin before moving to Duke, wrote on Mughal rule in Golkonda in southern India,³⁸ Richard Eaton of the University of Arizona published an account of Sufism in Bijapur,³⁹ Richard Barnett published his work on the history of Awadh in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries,⁴⁰ and David Lelyveld of the University of Minnesota finished his own study of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and the making of Aligarh Muslim University.⁴¹

There were other scholarly voices engaged in very different kinds of research and teaching during these years. Burton Stein, an historian of ancient south India who taught at the University of Hawaii but was a visiting Professor at places such as Penn and Chicago, inspired a group of students who worked on different aspects of the social, cultural, and economic history of southern India, especially in the Tamil country.⁴² Stein, who like Cohn had interests that bridged history and anthropology, never completely shed his interest in material determinations (even when he failed to identify them in much of his own work on medieval south Indian peasant state and society), also attempted for a number of years to establish a dialogue with a group of historians trained at Cambridge, among them Chris Bayly and David Washbrook. Stein shared with Bayly a Braudelian interest in long term change, with Washbrook a concern to chart the history of capitalism in India. He was more patient with Cambridge suspicion of Indian nationalist ideology

³⁷ *Islamic Revival in British India, Deoband, 1860-1900*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982.

³⁸ *Mughal Administration in Golconda*. London: Oxford University Press, 1975.

³⁹ *Sufis of Bijapur, 1300-1700, Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978.

⁴⁰ *North India between Empires: Awadh, the Mughals, and the British, 1720-1801*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980.

⁴¹ *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978.

⁴² Among Stein's own works see, for example, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980; *Thomas Munro: The Origins of the Colonial State and His Vision of Empire*. Delhi and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985; and, *Vijayanagar*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

than most other American historians of India, most notably Leonard Gordon, Eugene Irschick, and Stanley Wolpert, despite his extremely non-Cambridge interest in the subject of community. Stein's interest in the *longue duree*, and his fascination with the connection of cultural questions and material logics, exercised an important corrective for a number of scholars given the dominance of abstract cultural analysis brought about by the institutional centrality of certain people at the University of Chicago and the continued weight of Indological interest. He provided the basis for important connections between American and British scholarship after moving from Hawaii to London, while playing a continuously innovative role in the development of workshop ideas and research projects. He also inspired a great deal of work on Southern India, the Tamil country in particular, and gave rise to a number of studies that attempted to link premodern and modern questions. Not only did Stein influence my own attempt to write about political authority in Tamil Nadu between the seventh and the nineteenth centuries, he also influenced the work of David Ludden, a Penn trained historian⁴³ who focussed on agrarian issues and wrote a powerful study of peasant society and institutions in the southern Tamil region. Stein also encouraged the economic historian Sanjay Subramanian – who later collaborated with the religious and literary scholars David Shulman and V. Narayana Rao in a study of Nayaka cultural history⁴⁴ -- to think about cultural issues.

South Asian studies in the United States in its first thirty years was for the most part a very American affair. There were multiple relations with England, not only

⁴³ Ludden's advisor was Tom Kessinger, an anthropological historian who had been trained by Bernard Colin at Chicago, and who had written an ethnohistorical study of social relations within a north Indian village between the mid nineteenth and mid twentieth centuries, titled, *Vilayatpur, 1848-1968: Social and Economic Change in a North Indian Village*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974.

because of the close relationship of academic institutions and disciplines between the two nations, but because South Asian studies was more firmly rooted in British history than it was in the U.S., where Asia typically means East Asia. However, in the early decades, very few scholars from South Asia were actually hired to teach in North American Universities. Granted, the study of India meant that certain Indian scholarly interlocutors became particularly important (e.g. M.N. Srinivas in anthropology, Rajni Kothari in political science, Romila Thapar in history, and a whole host of distinguished development economists) at the same time that increasing levels of exchange, collaboration, and institutional participation led to closer and closer intellectual and social ties among academics. Although as time went on there was steady growth in the numbers of South Asians who secured positions in the U.S. academy, in the early years many of these examples figured in language study rather than the mainline social sciences and humanities. And many of the debates held by American academics – over the significance and impact of green revolution technologies, over questions about the relationship of agricultural and industrial development, about social redistributive policies, about levels of state control over economic growth, over the stability of the Indian state and the future of democracy, and over the perdurance of caste, untouchability, and communal tensions in Indian society and political life – were also held with and in close relationship to debates within India itself. But these debates were frequently characterized by various tensions: over the relationship of American academics to U.S. state policies (e.g. at the time of the Bangladesh war), over the relationship between academics in India and the U.S. to the emergency called by Prime

⁴⁴ *Symbols of Substance, Court, and State in Nayaka Period, Tamilnadu*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Minister Indira Gandhi between 1975 and 1977, in relation to the place of Marxism in the Indian academy and the resilient concern about the role of U.S. cultural, political, and economic imperialism, and over the role of development and its perceived connections to U.S. interests, international markets, and the continued commitments of Indian state socialism. There was still a marked divide between knowledge in situ and in the academy. For most American academics, it was as it had been both for Milton Singer and for McKim Marriott: the key questions in the social science of India were still motivated by the general problematic of how do “we” understand “them?”

I have so far said little about some of the fields that played extremely important roles in the history of South Asian studies in the U.S. The largest percentage of active academics, according to statistics maintained by the Association for Asian Studies in 1991, were in religion and philosophy. In earlier years, these fields were dominated by missionary connections and backgrounds. The Divinity School at the University of Chicago, for example, regularly trained missionaries about to go off to do church work in India, at least up to the point that missionary activity in India began to be controlled and then curtailed after Indian independence. But in later years the fields of religion and philosophy maintained a strong interest in things Indian. It requires only a casual survey of departments in recent years to realize that when religion departments think of hiring a “non-Western” position they often turn to India – or at least to Hinduism and Buddhism – before turning to most other areas/world-religions. The concentration of these kinds of positions are skewed in part by the complex history of institutional relations between the church and the university; Divinity Schools are sometimes set off from other academic departments, and public institutions such as Michigan have no religion departments.

Additionally, few philosophy departments hire in non-Western areas, and Sanskritists are usually hired in departments in one aspect or another of Asian studies, or in religion, rather than in classics or comparative literature. But the study of Indian religion is alive and well, though frequently partitioned in the sense that Islamists tend to be specialists in the Middle East rather than South Asia (which has many more Muslims), and South Asia religionists tend to be specialists in Hinduism. Happily, there are exceptions in this last regard, for example in the concentration of South Asia scholars at Duke and the University of North Carolina.

While much important scholarship and teaching has been done in areas defined in one way or another by religion, there are obvious problems with the disproportionate attention paid to religion rather than, say, contemporary politics. And given the fact that contemporary politics in South Asia has problematized, and politicized, the study of religion to an unprecedented extent, the disciplinary concentrations and divisions have all too often exacerbated basic problems of knowledge. If it is the case that the most likely exposure of students in U.S. Universities to the subcontinent would be in courses on world religions, it is also the case that South Asianists have played important roles in stressing the need for curriculum reform around, for example, the requirements in Western Civilization, long before multiculturalism and identity politics inaugurated culture wars on American campuses. At Universities such as Chicago, where Singer concentrated his early attention not just on conferences but on the development of a year long course in South Asian Civilization, and Columbia, which produced the famous source books for the study of both East Asian and South Asian traditions, some of the first requirements for study in areas outside the west concerned South Asia.

Despite the classicism of much South Asianist scholarship, there was widespread recognition from the start that academics had to address questions of modernity. W. Norman Brown's recruitment to South Asian studies was mediated in important ways by the security considerations of the U.S. state during the war and in the cold war era. But it is also the case that nationalism in India, and the long heroic struggle against British colonial rule, fell on sympathetic ears in the U.S., from the reporting of William Shirer for the Chicago Tribune, to W. Norman Brown's own predilections, to Martin Luther King's admiration for and use of the non violent methods of Mahatma Gandhi. Historians in the United States for many years focussed on issues around the nationalist movement, and tended to take serious issue with British academic trends that worked to disparage the integrity of nationalist mobilization. And academics from a variety of disciplines took particular interest in the lives and works of Gandhi and Nehru. An inventory of works on Gandhi over the last fifty years would touch every discipline and betray a steady fascination with the man who still appears to many as emblematic of the best of modern India. Interestingly enough, however, only recently has Gandhi once again become central to debates over political theory and cultural history within contemporary India itself.

Modern Times

The modern era of South Asian studies might be said to have begun in 1978, with the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Although Said wrote principally about the Middle East, and from the disciplinary position of literary studies, his critique could be directly transposed onto South Asian studies, both in relation to the colonial past and the

scholarly present (and the myriad relations between the two). In the early years after the publication of this magisterial work, a number of South Asianists reacted sharply against Said's critique,⁴⁵ but it soon became clear that there was no going back to an age of pre-Orientalism innocence. Although there were many contentious arguments about the status of the Saidian critique and its relevance for South Asian studies, as for example at the year long seminar held at the University of Pennsylvania in 1988-89 entitled "Orientalism and Beyond: Perspectives from South Asia," Said's extraordinary intervention has now become a canonical prelude to most contemporary writing in the U.S. about South Asia.⁴⁶

In an essay I published in 1992,⁴⁷ I wrote that, "During the last decade, it has been impossible to engage in the study of the colonial world without either explicit or implicit reference to [Said's] charge that not only our sources but also our basic categories and assumptions have been shaped by colonial rule." The power of the Saidian critique was precisely that it linked colonial knowledge with contemporary scholarship, and that it did so with far more polemical fervor and historiographical range than even the earlier suggestions of Bernard Cohn. Orientalism, in the paraphrase I gave back in 1992, "whether in the guise of colonial cultures of belief or of more specialized subcultures of scholarship, shared fundamental premises about the East, serving to denigrate the present, deny history, and repress any sensibility regarding contemporary political, social, or cultural autonomy and potential in the colonized world. The result has been the relentless

⁴⁵ See for example David Kopf's "Hermeneutics versus History" in the *Journal of Asian Studies*, v. 89, no. 3, 1980, pp. 495-506.

⁴⁶ The volume that ultimately came out of this seminar was edited by Carol Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer, *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993.

⁴⁷ "Introduction: Colonialism and Culture," in Dirks, ed., *Colonialism and Culture*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992, p. 9

Orientalization of the Orient, the constant reiteration of tropes conferring inferiority and subordination....”⁴⁸ In a review essay first published in 1990 considering the question of what a post-Orientalist history would look like, Gyan Prakash wrote that, “The attention to the historicity of knowledge demanded by the invitation to chart post-Orientalist historiography, therefore, runs counter to those procedures that ground the third world in essences and see history as determined by those essential elements. It requires the rejection of those modes of thinking which configure the third world in such irreducible essences as religiosity, underdevelopment, poverty, nationhood, non-Westerness; and it asks that we repudiate attempts to see third-world histories in terms of these quintessential principles.”⁴⁹ Prakash went on to propose what he called a post-foundationalist history, in which attempts to grapple with the fundamental historicity of modernity in South Asia would necessarily be combined with critical attention to the historical formation of basic categories for the representation of South Asia.

Prakash’s critique both echoed and advanced a critical consideration of a great deal of writing on South Asia, in the U.S., in Europe, and in India. Part of the specific merit of the paper was his sympathetic review of various genres of nationalist and Marxist history in India, which worked against Orientalism both as a structure of rule and a source of authority but found itself implicated nevertheless in some of the key categories of Orientalist thought.⁵⁰ The paper also worked to place the contributions of Subaltern Studies history in relation to historiographical events and questions both in India and in the American academy. Prakash also invoked my own critique of scholarly

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 9-10.

⁴⁹ “Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, v. 32, April 1990, p. 384.

literatures on caste in the context of an attempt to rethink what a history of caste (through a study of political authority and social relations in the Tamil countryside from the seventeenth century to the present) might imply about dominant assumptions in the field. From the standpoint of *Orientalism*, it was even clearer than before that the proposals by Louis Dumont in his classic anthropological treatise, *Homo Hierarchicus*, were virtual parodies of Orientalist knowledge, even within Dumont's claim that he was critiquing notions of individualism and egalitarianism in the West.⁵¹ And it became equally clear in retrospect that the entire ethnosociological project was deeply problematic in precisely the registers laid out by Said.⁵² Ronald Inden wrote an ambitious book in 1990 in which he debunked the Indological essentialization of India, claiming that he wished "to make possible studies of 'ancient' India that would restore the agency that those histories have stripped from its people and institutions. Scholars did this by imagining an India kept eternally ancient by various Essences attributed to it, most notably that of caste."⁵³ Given Inden's pre-eminent importance in mapping an ethnosociological project in which caste, defined first and foremost by Manu,⁵⁴ was the distinctive feature of Indian civilization, it

⁵⁰ As pointed out by Partha Chatterjee in his provocative book *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* London: Zed Books, 1986.

⁵¹ Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970.

⁵² See the new preface to the second edition of my book, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom*, University of Michigan Press, 1994, where I wrote, "Edward Said's revolutionary critique of Orientalism worked to problematize both colonialism and the anthropological conceit that one could get around colonial epistemology by constructing the essential categories and meanings of the 'other'. Reading Said was like reading a direct refutation of ethnosociology; the ethnosociological inattention to the politics and procedures of interpretation and representation could now be seen as genealogically predicated in colonial forms of Western knowledge. We had not been decolonizing the epistemology of India after all. I came increasingly to realize that colonialism was not just a historical stage and an epistemological problem but the crucible in which the category of 'culture' itself had been formed." (p. xvii).

⁵³ *Imagining India*. Oxford and Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1990, p. 1.

⁵⁴ See McKim Marriott and Ronald Inden, "Caste Systems," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th edn, III, 982-91.

is hard to read this book without the sneaking suspicion that it was written at least in part as a fervent attempt at self-exculpation.⁵⁵

Prakash's critique was not universally admired, even by those who accepted the force of Edward Said's critical intervention. Two English historians of India, David Washbrook and Rosalind O'Hanlon, wrote a spirited reply to Prakash,⁵⁶ sparking off a debate on such matters as the importance of Subaltern Studies, the status of Marxism in Indian historiography, the place of cultural analysis and reflection in the American academy, and the implications of poststructuralist theory and postmodernist dispositions in the writing of history and anthropology.⁵⁷ O'Hanlon, whose about-face on matters of theoretical perspective and historiographical sympathy seemed bewildering to many given her earlier sympathetic review of Subaltern Studies history, and Washbrook, one of the earliest polemicists of the Cambridge school, pilloried Prakash's advocacy of post-foundational history for the theoretical and political entailments of poststructuralism, declared Prakash's approval of Ranajit Guha and Subaltern Studies history to be contradictory given his/their primordial and exclusionary commitment to the foundational category of the nation, and argued that even Prakash's use of the work of historians such

⁵⁵ He does say, "I, too, was lured in earlier research by the siren of caste (p. 82)." Now, however, he uses the historiographical charter of R.G. Collingwood, and his own research on a text concerning Hindu kingship, to restore Indian agency, albeit solely of a Hindu kind (Islam is said to be another region of the world, like Africa or Eastern Europe, on p. 3), and articulated in the classic anthropological terms of a totalizing view of kingship and an emphasis on cosmological baths and cosmogonic time. Inden, *Imagining India*, Oxford University Press.

⁵⁶ See "After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism, and Politics in the Third World" in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, v. 34, Jan. 1992, pp. 141-67.

⁵⁷ Thus joining a growing number of vitriolic debates over the politics of history, whether in relationship to postcolonial writing, as in the interventions of Aijaz Ahmed in *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (Oxford 1985), and Arif Dirlik in "Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism" in *Critical Inquiry*, v.20, Winter 1994, pp. 328-56; or more generally in contests between old left/Marxist commitments to historical truth and the contention that such a commitment is the only way to ground any genuine political activism. For a variation on the latter see the Sokal debates, specifically Allan Sokal, "What the Social Text Affair does and does not prove" in *Critical Quarterly*, v. 40, no. 2, Summer

as Bernard Cohn and myself was flawed because of our interest in the relationship between culture and power rather than on questions concerning class and wealth. Washbrook and O'Hanlon took glee in pointing out what they identified as the myriad contradictions and confusions of Prakash's position, arguing that Derrida is really a closet essentialist, that neither postmodernism nor identity politics -- assuming that these characterizations are at base what Prakash is really all about -- has claim to anything like an emancipatory political project, that Said's use of Foucault is undermined by his residual commitment to a humanist critique, and that Prakash's historiographical position is an expression of the same tendencies displayed by James Clifford and other anthropological critics who displace the true domain of politics into the American academic theater of self-representation. Instead, we are told that politics can be preserved only by taking class, and historical materialist analysis, as foundational for any historical project, and that postcolonial critics such as Prakash ignore class so as to disguise their own position as victors rather than victims in a world capitalist system that produces, *inter alia*, the ideological underpinnings of American academic political culture.

Washbrook and O'Hanlon were ostensibly most concerned by Prakash's sense of inadequacy in the work of Marxist historiography on the political economy of India, though they seemed especially defensive of the work of the Cambridge School, and used the work of C.A. Bayly, a reputed historian of South Asia who is no more a Marxist than he is a Subalternist, to exemplify their own sense of what should be done. Without going further into the thicket of argumentation over politics and postmodernism, what really seems to be at stake in this debate is the place of colonialism in the historical

98, pp.3-18. For a review of some of these debates, see my, "The Politics of Location" unpublished manuscript.

representation of South Asia. Washbrook and O'Hanlon only referred to British colonialism once, to disparage James Clifford and the operations of liberal ideology. In this single reference it becomes clear that while the great sin of colonialism was to develop the idea of culture to argue for cultural difference, the great sin of the American academy is to accept "culture" in any sense, even inverted and transformed through nationalist struggle, as anything more than a mystification. Historiographical attention to colonialism, rather than identifying key political dynamics behind the exercise of capitalist domination by England of India, instead merely licenses postcolonial anxiety about cultural rather than core economic matters. In turn, a history focussing on world capitalism belies the possibility of such difference under the weight of global forces that differentiate among peoples based on access to the means of production rather than the epiphenomenal questions of ethnicity, nationality, and race. The problem then with the historical anthropology of Cohn, Dirks, and Prakash or the historical rhetoric of Subaltern historians is that colonialism – and questions precisely of ethnicity, nationality, and race – becomes the primary category of modern historical analysis. And here is where a foundational Marxism blends seamlessly with Cambridge School history, for the latter -- whether in the hands of Anil Seal, John Gallagher, or David Washbrook ⁵⁸ -- used networks of material interest and "class" analysis to disparage nationalism and ultimately deny the historical reality of colonialism (which in this view was just another ruse to justify and disguise the world operations of capitalist exploitation).

⁵⁸ See for example Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1968; John Gallagher, Gordon Johnson, & Anil Seal, *Locality, Province, and Nation: Essays on Indian Politics, 1870-1940*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973; and David Washbrook, *The Emergence of Provincial Politics: The Madras Presidency 1870-1920*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

Prakash replied to his critics in equally polemical terms, suggesting not only that it was unfair to place his views in a relation of “strange resemblance to colonial strategies of knowledge,” but that if anything, there was a strange resemblance between the downplaying of the historical significance of colonialism and the insistence on one kind of totalizing historical mastery.⁵⁹ More to the point, Prakash⁶⁰ wrote that “The Cambridge School’s long dormant historiography of India, which sought in the 1970s to delegitimize nationalism’s challenge to colonialism by portraying the former as nothing but an ideological cover for the elite’s manipulation of power and profit, comes roaring back once again to salvage colonialism, this time by subordinating colonialism to the logic of unfolding capitalism.”⁶¹ And while Washbrook and O’Hanlon tried to oppose both colonial history and culture as a category of analysis (or of history) to questions of material reality and class formation, it is certainly the case that Cambridge School history in its origins was neither Marxist in the sense that it was allied to a politically emancipatory project nor self-conscious in any sense about its own uncritical relationship to colonial sources and assumptions. Cambridge school history saw Indian elites as British collaborators, Indian nationalism as elite self-interest, and Indian politics as something that British colonial administration was justified in treating as illegitimate at best.

In fact, the antinomies of the above debate hardly capture the range of attempts to integrate analyses of culture and political economy over the course of the past twenty

⁵⁹ “Can the ‘Subaltern’ Ride? A Reply to O’Hanlon and Washbrook” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, v. 34, no. 1, p. 171.

⁶⁰ Prakash’s first book was an anthropological history of bonded labor in Bihar, and emerged out of a long term engagement with Marxist theory and politics stemming back at least to the first phase of his graduate studies in history at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. See *Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labor Servitude in Colonial India*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 177-178.

years. Additionally, whatever else is involved in the return of interest in colonialism, it provides a rubric for exchange and collaboration among many new players in South Asian studies, without the invidious subordination of the "East" (now always in quotation marks) that was part of earlier interests in imperial history (or imperial literature). The recognition that colonialism has been the historical vector both for world domination and for the South Asian encounter with modernity (as well as with modern forms of capitalism) has opened South Asian studies to theoretical and substantive issues that have taken South Asianist scholars far away from the initial agendas, and commitments, of area studies. It has also become part of a theoretically sophisticated interrogation of the fundamental nature of modernity, and what happens to the categories of the modern when introduced as part of a structure of colonial power.⁶²

These reflections can be traced by a cursory look at the workshops and conferences sponsored by the South Asia joint committee of the Social Science Research Council over the last two decades. The South Asia Political Economy Project (SAPE),⁶³ organized by scholars such as Michelle McAlpin, an economic historian, Veena Das, an anthropologist from Delhi University, Paul Brass, a political scientist, among others, attempted to link critical political economy concerns with cultural analysis. A similar

⁶² I refer here principally to the work of scholars such as Ashis Nandy, Partha Chatterjee, and Dipesh Chakrabarty.

⁶³ Between 1979 and 1986 SAPE held fourteen conferences, some co-sponsored by the Indian Council of Social Science Research and the Ford Foundation with additional support from NSF. According to Maureen Patterson, "With its focus on development in post-Independent India, the SAPE planners wanted to go beyond a purely economic approach and 'envisioned a research alliance' to 'approximate a more contextual understanding of economic processes' (S. Rudolph, p. 2). They looked for 'anthropologically oriented scholars attuned to 'indigenous conceptual systems as bases for understanding, explaining, and interpreting South Asian institutions and behavior'.... And the planners looked for economists.... Thus the project assembled anthropologists, economists and political scientists plus a few historians and proceeded to delineate three major areas to work on: ... relationships between local power structures and agricultural productivity; ... problems of health and nutrition at the household and family levels;... societal responses to crises, or order and anomie in South Asian history and culture" in "South Asian Studies: Our Increasing Knowledge and Understanding," mimeographed manuscript, January 1988, p. 21.

venture on agricultural terminology was organized by Arjun Appadurai, an anthropologist then at Penn, and Pranab Bardhan, an economist at Berkeley. Barbara Stoler Miller, a Sanskritist, organized a conference on patronage with art historians, historians, and anthropologists. Susan Wadley, an anthropologist, collaborated with Pranab Bardhan on a workshop concerning, "Differential Mortality and Female Healthcare in South Asia." Appadurai, along with fellow scholar Carol Breckenridge, historian and founding editor of the journal Public Culture, organized a series of conferences in the late 80s and early 90s around questions concerning the transformations of modernity in South Asia in relation to global developments and influences.⁶⁴ A series of conferences linking feminist scholarship and activism began to introduce serious feminist concerns into areas as diverse as anthropological research on violence to historical research on migration and political change to women's political participation in and recruitment to Hindu fundamentalist movements. Humanist scholars (among them, the Sanskritist Sheldon Pollack of the University of Chicago) concerned with South Asian languages, classical as well as modern, organized workshops that attempted to stimulate new forms of research in literary history, the sociology of literature, and the implications of critical theory in the humanities for the study of South Asian literatures. Historians, anthropologists, art historians, political scientists, and others collaborated in efforts to understand the transformations affecting debates over and sentiments relating to the history and future of nationalist ideology and institutions. Other leading scholars arranged for collaborations between medical practitioners and a range of social scientists

⁶⁴ Appadurai's early work was on the history of temples in southern India, but in recent years he has made important arguments – basing many of them in relation to South Asia – for the globalization of academic inquiry. See his *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

to investigate questions concerning disease and epidemic, health care and international medical crises. In recent years, the committee has begun to organize an ambitious project on the study of industrialization, and its social effects, in South Asia, at the same time it inaugurated a project on the oral history of partition and war in Bangladesh. More recently, the committee has begun a long term project on the question of governance in South Asia.

Part of the success and excitement of SSRC sponsored workshops and research initiatives has been their necessarily interdisciplinary character. The joint committee, which has aimed to represent different disciplines as well as different regions related to the study of South Asia, typically has approved no project that has not had interdisciplinary framing and ambition. The interdisciplinary character of area studies has had much to do with the history of social science funding, from Ford interest in interdisciplinary program development in the 50s' and 60s' to SSRC commitments ever since the joint committee was formed in the 70s'. This interdisciplinary context has more often than not been responsible for the innovative and exciting work done in areas such as South Asian studies. Recent assaults on area studies from the disciplines, and the hard social science disciplines in particular, have represented area studies as devoid of theoretical engagement and innovation. Such views are only possible from within autonomous and confined disciplinary spaces, spaces that have been increasingly isolated in terms of theory, even as they have turned more and more to the study of the modern West itself (and increasingly the global extension of the West through world capitalism). It is worrisome indeed that despite decades of interdisciplinary programming and rhetoric, the disciplines seem stronger, and more defensive, than ever. In the leading

departments of political science and economics it is becoming almost impossible to think of hiring someone whose primary research interests are locatable in a particular area of the “third” world, despite the rhetoric about the need for comparison.

Perhaps the most important change in area studies activities in the U.S. over the last few years, now clearly visible in the SSRC, has been the recognition that area studies can no longer be a solely U.S. based institutional or intellectual activity. Only in the last few years did the SSRC include more than one South Asia based scholar, and last year for the first time the annual SSRC area committee meeting was held in South Asia itself. These developments in part reflect significant changes in the way in which knowledge is organized, but they also highlight the need for formal changes at a variety of different levels. It should no longer be possible to think of U.S. based area studies as either autonomous or privileged (except perhaps still at the level of resources), and comfortable academic communities of reference and rhetorics of relevance have had to change or be betrayed for the provinciality they exhibit (and in retrospect have always exhibited). “Us” and “them”, “we” and “they”, have finally become italicized and problematic, and there are new levels of concern about why the trajectories, stakes, and politics of knowledge shift fundamentally across areas, as well as about what might be the implications of breaking down first world communities of scholarship. On the one hand, the Indological and anthropological trajectories of South Asian scholarship in the U.S. have been seen to provide support for the development of fundamentalist politics in South Asia; on the other hand, new intellectual and political movements in South Asia are challenging, sometimes fundamentally reworking, academic positions that had previously been evaluated solely in terms of their meaning for debates within the U.S.

academy. And of course, the more things break down, the more the limits of globalism – the continuing disparities between resources available to academics within South Asia and the west, the relentless entailments of academic disciplines in the dominance of western knowledge, the residual ambivalences inherent in a western academy that still reveals its hegemony when sponsoring precisely the right kinds of collaborations and exchanges – become clear. There is no doubt that the current attack on area studies is at least in part an attempt to restore the unchallenged ascendancy of American social science.

Some aspects of the above story can be seen in the career of Subaltern Studies. Ranajit Guha, who had turned to a major study of peasant rebellion in colonial India after completing his magnificent study of the Bengal permanent settlement,⁶⁵ convened a group of promising young historians working on their dissertation research in various Universities in Britain while teaching at Sussex in the 1970s; among these students were Gyanendra Pandey, Shahid Amin, David Hardiman, and David Arnold. Dipesh Chakrabarty, Partha Chatterjee, and Gautam Bhadra were soon recruited to the collective, which began publishing volumes of essays in 1982. The volumes began with a straightforward charge, to combat elitism – both colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism – in the writing of Indian history. This movement, which as Prakash noted challenged various institutionally dominant modes of Indian historiography, both in India and in Britain, quickly emerged as a major intervention, combining excellent examples of the writing of Indian history “from below” with an increasingly theoretically self-conscious exploration of the implications of taking “subalternity” as the principal

⁶⁵ Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal*. Delhi: Orient Longman, 1982 (1963); *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983.

object/problematic of historical analysis. When Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, a poststructuralist literary critic known for her translations of Derrida, began writing in the pages of *Subaltern Studies*, an historical movement – seen within India as a dangerous anti-nationalist enterprise, within Britain as an attempt to oppose Cambridge historiography, and within the United States as a model for a progressive social history of nationalism – became increasingly recognized as a political intervention in fields as diverse as cultural studies, comparative history, and the emerging field of postcolonial studies. And while *Subaltern Studies* has become within some U.S. circles an ambivalent symbol of the way identity politics can challenge conventions of history writing, the movement has both stimulated enormous interest in South Asian studies and facilitated further connections between disciplines in the humanities and the social sciences.

The career of *Subaltern Studies* confronts us again with the limits of globalism. Within South Asia, *Subaltern Studies* has become an active site for debate about the nature of modernity, the failure of the enlightenment, the violence of the state, and the place of “traditional” culture in contemporary political theory. Within the United States, *Subaltern Studies* continues either to mean new kinds of authentic histories from below or even newer kinds of postmodern excesses in the representation of history and society from above. Whatever the differences, *Subaltern Studies* has exercised growing influence on research and teaching here. Nevertheless, as many of the practitioners of *Subaltern Studies* spend increasing amounts of time in the United States, and as their intellectual influence increases here, their political credentials for waging certain kinds of battles within India weaken. Interestingly, recent tensions within the community of *Subalternists* reflects a growing shift in South Asian studies in the U.S., namely over the

level of attention to pay to the question of the diaspora. While this question seems somewhat removed to some scholars who still locate their intellectual commitments, if not their only professional affiliations, within South Asia, it is increasingly clear to “South Asianists” in the U.S. that the diaspora is working to fundamentally change the nature of South Asian studies, both in terms of research, and in terms of new pedagogical constituencies.

Indeed, perhaps the single most important development on U.S. campuses in South Asian studies is not the growing intellectual exchange and collaboration among scholars but rather the growing numbers of students in language, civilization, and area studies courses who come from South Asian backgrounds, most of them children of immigrants who moved here from India after the change in the immigration act of 1965. The success of most South Asia programs in ensuring regular funding for the teaching of Hindi and Urdu is the direct result now not of pressure from graduate programs but rather from undergraduates who are overwhelmingly South Asian American. The experience I had of teaching South Asian Civilization at the University of Michigan, where in the last few years 80 percent of the students who took this course came from immigrant backgrounds, is no longer exceptional. As South Asian students are both more numerous and more active on campuses across the country, regularly claiming significant proportions of student activity funds for South Asia related programing, and increasingly advocating South Asia courses in terms of the rhetorics of multiculturalism and identity representation, colleges and Universities are paying a different kind of attention to South Asian studies. Where once arguments for courses and faculty were made for strategic reasons combined with the goal of international understanding, arguments are now made

through constituency representation on the part of a vocal and talented community. And funding for South Asia related activities is increasingly coming from community gifts and endowment projects. In the last few years new programs have begun to spring up on campuses such as the University of California at Santa Cruz, Rutgers, and the State University of New York at Stony Brook; funds have been raised for chairs in Sikh and Tamil Studies as well as Indian studies more generally; and the politics of nation, community, and culture have begun to erupt at Universities such as the University of British Columbia, Berkeley, Michigan, and Columbia.

The growing relationship between South Asian Studies and South Asian Americans has been a great boon to the field, and has provided both a constituency and an urgency to a field that had previously been restricted for the most part to graduate studies and undergraduate courses in religion and philosophy. However, the new situation has also introduced new tensions and questions for the field. While the “us” and “them” distinction has been further eroded (to be replaced by a sense of panic on the part of many non-South Asian students about whether they can keep up in undergraduate classes), there have already been elements of identity politics that raise questions about who can teach South Asia (beginning with the categories of Americans on the one hand and South Asians on the other, but also introducing categories of nation, e.g. Pakistan and India, as well as religion, e.g. Hindu and Muslim). Additionally, the question as to whether South Asian Americans should be included within the field of South Asian Studies – whether for example linkages should be forged with Asian American studies more generally – have been raised both within Universities and in funding agencies. While South Asian Americans have typically maintained very close relations with South

Asia itself, reflecting a new kind of immigration and a very different situation than has applied, for example, in the relations between African and African-American studies, the American experience is not merely a continuation of the middle class experience in South Asia. Indeed, one of the consequences of these new collaborations has been a tendency to focus even more on some of the cultural questions noted above than economic ones, let alone questions concerning the poor in South Asia, whether in the cities or the countryside. And the politics of middle class India, for example in the domain of rising communalist tensions and the strong role played by organizations such as the VHP in the United States, have begun to play themselves out very powerfully in the American context where the immediate stakes of these tensions -- as in proximity to riot situations or palpable communal conflict -- are largely invisible. Additionally, disagreements emerge between donor communities and Universities, as happened at the University of Michigan when the first occupant of the Chair in Sikh Studies was declared by many devout Sikhs as blasphemous because of his doctoral dissertation work in which he subjected the Sikh scripture to historical hermeneutics. The endowment to Columbia University by the Hinduja family for an Institute focussing on ancient Hindu belief systems and medicine produced serious tension both within the University and across the greater New York City area.

Communal tensions both in South Asia and by extension among South Asians in the United States are also reflected in a growing transnational form of nationalism. For many years it has seemed necessary in the United States to label the subcontinent South Asia rather than India to encompass Pakistan and later Bangladesh, as well as Nepal and Sri Lanka. On occasion in the current climate, fundraising for South Asia seems

suspicious, and fundraising for India a cover for something other than Pakistan. Coming back to the question of South Asian studies, it is in fact frequently the case that academic studies privilege India, and for that matter Hinduism, despite the fact that two of the most populous Muslim nations are in South Asia, given that Islam is a world religion with deep roots in South Asian culture and history. Because of its political instability, Pakistan has attracted particular interest among political scientists,⁶⁶ and because of its poverty, Bangladesh has been a special province for development economists. Sri Lanka has been entirely left out of my discussion above, despite deep ties between southern India and the island, both historically through Buddhism and the Tamil migrations. For reasons that are not entirely clear, Sri Lanka has produced four of the finest anthropologists currently teaching in U.S. Universities,⁶⁷ and has occasioned more interest within anthropology generally than has been the case for other disciplines, tied as many of them are to the importance of the nation-state as an object of study. Nepal has also been a site for important anthropological work,⁶⁸ though increasingly it is attracting interest on the part of development students and applied social scientists in areas such as forestry and water

⁶⁶ There are, however, significant exceptions. Perhaps the most important historian of Pakistan is Ayesha Jalal, whose book, *Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) is a major contribution to the rewriting of the history of partition.

⁶⁷ Stanley Tambiah at Harvard, Gananath Obeyesekere at Princeton, Valentine Daniel at Columbia, and H.L. Seneviratne at Virginia. All of these figures have been known not just for their excellent empirical studies in Sri Lanka, among other places, but also for their theoretical power and influence. For example, Tambiah has made important contributions to political anthropology, the anthropology of Buddhism, and the study of ethnic violence. See his *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986; *Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics, and Violence in Sri Lanka*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992; and, *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996. Obeyesekere is one of the most creative psychological anthropologists practicing today and raised many eyebrows when he bested Marshall Sahlins in a debate over Captain Cook in *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European mythmaking in the Pacific*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. Valentine Daniel, in addition to his early ethnosociological work and current work on the anthropology of violence among many other things, is a specialist in the philosophy of Charles Saunders Pierce. See in particular his *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in the Anthropology of Violence*. Princeton: Princeton University, 1996.

⁶⁸ Cornell is a major center for Nepal studies, though students have worked in a number of other institutions, among them Michigan, Washington, Columbia, and Virginia.

management. Once again, smaller nations tend to attract more attention from anthropology than they do from history, though there are even fewer historians working on Nepal than on Sri Lanka or Bangladesh.

These problems notwithstanding, South Asian Studies is in some ways in better shape today in the U.S. than it has ever been before. Thanks to Subaltern Studies and trends in comparative history, South Asian history is thriving; and thanks to postcolonial studies, South Asia has become important in the humanities well outside the traditional Indological niches of earlier years. While South Asia is not faring very well in the hard social sciences, neither are other areas outside North America and Europe. Although the growing population and interest of South Asian Americans has led to new issues and problems in the field, there is little doubt that this new constituency will continue to grow and demand greater representation for South Asia in University life. South Asian cultural studies – in areas such as film, music, the arts, and popular culture -- will grow in part because of this kind of connection.

Nevertheless, all is not well. It is peculiar, for example, that even recent economic expansion and liberalization in India have had little impact on the academy. The problems of area studies in disciplines such as economics, political science, and sociology, have further rendered many aspects of the study of South Asia in the United States relatively insignificant. At the same time, although the teaching of Hindi and Urdu has received support from new students, the teaching of most other South Asian languages has steadily succumbed to budgetary pressures. Funds for research in and about South Asia have been cut back due to the diminution of federal funding for area studies and the loss of PL 480 funds for AIIS and Fulbright Hays. Without ample

research funds for graduate students and scholars, all fields that require serious empirical work will begin to atrophy. And in an age of academic downsizing, South Asianists are often the first to go, or at least not be replaced. New appointments, outside of the few growth areas mentioned above, are rare.

Futures Present

While in 1990, the Universities of Chicago, Pennsylvania, and California at Berkeley had what many observers believe to be leading programs in South Asian studies, the situation is rather different now. This is both because of some the trends just mentioned (the rising importance of undergraduate programs, the spread of South Asian studies to fields like colonial and postcolonial studies, the general vitality of South Asian studies across many campuses, but also the growing marginalization of Indological studies vis a vis other developments in the field) and because the big three are not equally strong in all disciplines (e.g. Penn had some key departures, Chicago some significant retirements, and Berkeley unfortunately retrenchments) Wisconsin continues to have a strong program, and hosts an annual conference on South Asia that has become the major academic venue for many South Asianists rather than the Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies. Texas has become a leading player in recent years, with strengths in Sanskrit, linguistics, and language study, among other fields. Michigan has once again become very strong, particularly in history and anthropology, and was recently awarded NRC status for the first time. Columbia has once again become a major center despite a relative paucity of full time faculty; it is also the leading center for postcolonial studies. Cornell has strengths in applied social science as well as in studies

of Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. Virginia has become an undergraduate center, and the Triangle Consortium made up of Duke, North Carolina, and North Carolina State have impressive strength in a number of areas, among them the historical, textual, and ethnographic study of Islam in South Asia.

In thinking ahead to the future, it is likely that South Asian Area studies will continue to prosper even if they will be vulnerable to a variety of factors, ranging from disciplinary trends to the continued perception of South Asia's marginality in the world. There will be many challenges -- both new and old -- in the years ahead. In conclusion, I will address these challenges by making some suggestions regarding potential institutional mechanisms and research areas for future attention.

Institutionally, it is likely that those area centers that draw strength not only from their local institution but also their metropolitan constituencies -- including other colleges and universities (and institutions such as museums) as well as the growing numbers and interests of South Asian Americans -- will do particularly well, both in maintaining interest for separate programming in South Asian studies and for persuading University administrators to invest resources. Of course, these centers must continue to argue for strong support for top faculty, for regular support for a full menu of areas classes in fields such as history, culture, politics, literature, and language, and for support for graduate students, especially South Asian students who are not U.S. citizens. There are obvious possibilities for fundraising in these arenas, but the problem is that there are typically too few faculty, with limited administrative time, to engage usefully in fundraising; faculty need foundation support, both for funds, and for help in community endowment, a very tricky business as mentioned above. Additionally, I would

recommend that centers should become increasingly connected to institutions within South Asia, working to collaborate on research projects among faculty and students, establishing mechanisms for regular exchange, identifying both issues and individuals worthy of support.

Increasing connections between scholars in South Asia and the United States will continue to provide urgency to questions around nationalism, modernity, the politics of culture, and the character of tradition. It seems necessary to anticipate a future in which the terms of these debates will be set as significantly in South Asia as they are in the U.S. academy, though there will continue to be tensions and differences, not to mention continued problems of U.S. academic hegemony. Given current disciplinary configurations and interests, it is likely that the fields of history, anthropology, comparative literature, and art history will continue to provide important opportunities for South Asianist research and participation. It will be important to work against the usual boundaries between Asian language and literature departments and comparative literature departments, even if the existence of separate departments has traditionally protected Asian subjects. Art historians will have to realize that some of the most important and interesting work in the field now concerns modern art – the participation of art in the formation of the national modern, the rise of new forms of contemporary aesthetic expression⁶⁹ -- rather than assume that Indian art history can only mean early Hindu and Buddhist art; by the same token there is a pressing need to work against the usual periodizations of art historical time, divided as it is among “Hindu”, “Islamic”, and

⁶⁹ See for example Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a new 'Indian' Art: Artists, Aesthetics, and Nationalism in Bengal, c. 1850-1920*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992. Also, Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India 1850-1920: Occidental Orientations*. Cambridge and

“British” times. Other art forms should also be included in a menu for projected growth, most importantly music, given the salience of South Asian musical systems and their implication in the history of modernity and the nation. There will also be opportunities for expansion in what might be called “comparative cultural studies.” Some wonderful scholarship on Indian cinema has been produced in recent years,⁷⁰ and it is likely that some of the most interesting work on South Asia will continue to concern questions around popular/public culture, television and the media, global culture and social change. Massive technological and cultural changes are taking place through a variety of cultural media that are currently being studied in arresting ways in South Asia. Of course, cultural studies can only be done if language skills continue to occupy pride of place in the agendas of area programs. It is becoming increasingly clear that cultural homogenization cannot be assumed even when cultural images, whether in soap operas or fashion advertising, seem to have become global; as always, research that is exclusively in English misses much of the story.

Despite the abdication of fields such as economics and political science, it is also urgent to maintain serious research interests in areas around political theory and political institutions, the effects of economic liberalization on political, social, as well as local economic phenomena, and the implications of new state forms and ideologies for other aspects of contemporary life in the subcontinent. Areas of increasing interest include questions having to do with governance, with rethinking the relationship of state and society, state and nation, nation and inter-nation. At the same time, no study of

New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994; and, *Much Maligned Monsters: A History of European Reactions to Indian Art*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

⁷⁰ See, for instance, Sumita Chakravarty *National Identity in Indian Popular Culture*. Austin: University of Texas-Austin, 1993.

contemporary politics can be done without looking as well at global forces such as the IMF and the World Bank, U.S. foreign policy, the U.N. and issues on the flip side of world legitimacy that have to do with the role of international “mafia” groups in the underworld economy of currency smuggling, illegal weapons trades, drugs, etc.

Unfortunately, the hard social science disciplines that would seem particularly relevant here have not only lost interest, they have so far been largely impervious to foundation attempts to encourage “area” study through special grant initiatives. It is likely that the kind of work envisaged here will increasingly be done by historians, sociologists, and anthropologists, as well as perhaps in departments of communication, geography, or even business.

If the picture I paint is not particularly dire, the fact remains that the kinds of research projects, exchange programs, and collaborative enterprises alluded to above are expensive and typically beyond the reach of single Universities, no matter what their historical commitment to South Asian Studies. I would encourage the development of a fund for the development of a new kind of South Asian Studies in the twenty-first century. It is time to go beyond the originary visions of W. Norman Brown, Milton Singer, and Richard Lambert, to set up an organization that would complement but by no means duplicate the American Institute for Indian Studies. This organization would provide mechanisms for genuine collaborations, exchanges, and reciprocal research, as well as providing seed money for seminars and workshops. And the organization would be genuinely international, made up of scholars from North America and Europe as well as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal, hosting events in North America, Europe, and South Asia. If such an entity – an International Institute of South Asian

Studies – could in fact be launched in the next few years, and then funded at levels that would give it scope for impacting teaching and scholarship across multiple sites and institutions, it is likely that South Asia could play an even greater role in establishing new models for the rethinking of area studies more generally in the century to come.