



DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND CULTURE
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Literary Cultures and History in South Asia

South Asia is home to vibrant literary traditions. However, it is only in recent years that historians have begun to study the history of the multiple literary cultures that emerged in the subcontinent. The study of literary cultures focuses on the dissemination and contestations involved in the invention of a tradition. This in turn involves the study of the relationship between power and literary production. The exploration of these intricate connections are necessarily inter-disciplinary, cross-cutting between anthropology, media and communication studies, literary criticism, geography, philosophy, sociology and politics. The study of literary culture is designed to explore the meanings and assumptions inscribed in the texts and practices of a literary genre.

Notions of truth constructed by literary cultures might not conform to the positivist notions of reality grounded in archival descriptions of the mundane past. Their burden is to explore human possibilities: ideas of goodness and evil, how humans *ought* to deal with each other, their virtues and vulnerabilities and large questions, unembarrassedly asked, about the meaning of life. The interplay between literary culture and history can help us deconstruct the assumptions of times past and present. Narratives located in different spaces and times are

manifestations of cultural ideologies that have a historical presence. A perspective on the historical moment not only explains the conditioning and reception of a literary culture but also tells us about what the makers of that tradition believed to be historically significant. Cultural symbols, idioms and icons change in differing historical contexts. Understanding a literary item historically involves comprehension of what it was identified with and the ideology which it represented. Literary cultures relate to the dominant ideology in various ways: sometimes endorsing, at others, confronting it. The making of a literary culture is a dialogue with the past. That is why literary cultures have the quality of a palimpsest.

In the last two decades, a significant shift has occurred in the ways in which historians and scholars of literary traditions have studied the growth of classical and vernacular literary cultures in South Asia. This shift became more pronounced with the publication in 2003 of a collection of important essays edited by Sheldon Pollock (*Literary Cultures in History; Reconstructions from South Asia*). This work contained seminal contributions of a number of scholars like Sheldon Pollock, Muzaffar Alam, Velcheru Narayana Rao, Sudipta Kaviraj, Shamsur Rahman Faruqi and Stuart McGregor among others. In the subsequent years, sustained investigations into this area of study by Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Francesca Orsini, Vasudha Dalmia, A. R. Venkatachalapathy, Purushottam Agrawal, Yigal Bronner and David Shulman have paid rich dividends and opened up the field for further research.

In contrast to the conventional focus on the linear, self-contained surveys of literature based on historical periods, the new genre of the history of literary cultures addresses itself to the exploration of the ways in which the study of their emergence, growth and transformation can be linked to historically evolving socio-

political and cultural circumstances. Rather than writing descriptive accounts of poets/authors and their works, the new trends have been characterized by attempts to examine the changing modes of literary consciousness, practices and institutions. The new branch of historical study has led its practitioners to explore afresh the two-way relationship between linguistic and literary developments and different historical phenomena such as the processes of state formation, colonialism, book history and print- culture, nationalism and nation- building, formation of regions and regional cultures, making of court cultures, religious movements, creation and perpetuation of hierarchies of politics, gender, caste and ethnicity, and various forms of social and cultural dissent.

Given the historiographical importance of this field of study, the Department of History and Culture, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi proposes to hold a conference under its UGC-DRS programme on March 11-12, 2015. **Abstracts of the Papers should be submitted latest by January 15, 2015. Abstracts may be mailed at confhist.jmi@gmail.com**

The organizers invite you to present a full length paper relating to any of the themes listed below:

Cosmopolitan literary cultures—Sanskrit, Persian and Indian-English.

Buddhist/Pali literary cultures.

Vernacular literary culture; Bhakti and Sufi traditions of writing.

Production, growth, transmission, transformation and ‘ fall’ of literary cultures.

Changing modes of literary consciousness, practice and institutions.

Literary cultures and the formation of political, regional and religious identities.
Representations of caste, gender and the 'other' in literary cultures.

Print culture and the coming of the book.

Literary cultures of nationalism, 'sub-nationalism' and nation-building.

Literary cultures of marginalized social groups; forms of resistance and contestation in literary cultures.

Interaction between literary cultures.

Literary cultures and systems of patronage; role of literary cultures in the making of courtly societies.

Construction of 'Hindu-Hindi' and 'Muslim-Urdu' literary traditions in North India.

'High' and 'Popular' literary cultures.

Literary culture, oral culture and folklore

Papers on an aspect not listed above but broadly related to the central theme of the conference can also be presented.

The DRS programme will reimburse your travel costs by rail and arrange for accommodation for outstation participants. We look forward to your positive response and participation.