Beyond exceptionalism: South India and the modern historical imagination

Janaki Nair

Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Kolkata

Despite many institutional restraints, several independent strands of research on south Indian history have developed and flourished in ways that significantly revise older and influential historiographical formulations. This article explores the ways in which historians of the geographical south have made productive use of the 'incommensurability' of geography and history. To begin with, I briefly sketch some of the historical and historiographical constructions of the 'south', usually as a space of difference from the dominant north (Section I). This has produced a series of 'inclusions/exclusions' vis-à-vis not just the north, but within the geographical south itself. I discuss three somewhat disparate sites in new and largely unpublished work on south India that move beyond the trope of 'exceptionalism' to generate new insights on Indian history: new modes of fashioning the self, as in new scholarship on Keralam; a new way of conceptualising a region such as Karnataka; and finally, new perspectives on even such well-known and researched historical figures such as Tipu Sultan. Such scholarship is relatively unencumbered by earlier laments either about the paucity of sources for histories of the geographical south, or about the 'politics of mention' in broader 'Indian' histories.

It is common, in discussions of contemporary Indian economic and political life, to emphasise the distinctive attributes of the geographical 'south' as a continuation

Acknowledgements: This article was presented by way of an inaugural comment at a workshop on South Indian history, entitled 'Recent Trends in South Indian Studies: Towards a Synthesis' held at the Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai, from 9–11 December 2004. The workshop was jointly organised by Lakshmi Subramanian, Sanal Mohan and Janaki Nair from the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Kolkata, and A.R Venkatachalapathy and S. Anandhi from MIDS, Chennai. For their support and encouragement I would like to thank the Directors, Partha Chatterjee of CSSS, Calcutta, and V.K. Natraj of MIDS, Chennai. The revised version of the article draws on many of the comments, interventions and other papers presented at the workshop. For their insightful comments on this version, I would like to thank Ramesh Bairy and Udaya Kumar.

***The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 43, 3 (2006)**
SAGE New Delhi/Thousand Oaks/London
DOI: 10.1177/001946460604300303

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of the historical 'exceptionalism' of the region. The measurement of these exceptions has occurred on a number of registers over which there may be broad agreement: the south constitutes a zone with a distinctive economic growth pattern,[1] an even more distinctive style of politics,[2] caste, family and kinship systems, which, though they have increasingly begun to conform with 'national' patterns, bear traces of the older forms. Historians, meanwhile, have developed questions for investigation that significantly alter the frames within which the question of historical exceptionalism has been enunciated.

There is growing scepticism about, and even trenchant criticism of, the supposed congruence between a geographical 'south' and its historically shared cultural and social unity. When this assumed 'geographical unity' runs up against 'incommensurable differences in the historical processes', it compels historians, as S. Raju has demonstrated, to develop a strategy of 'inclusion-exclusion' in defining the unit for historical analysis.[3] Kesavan Veluthat also emphasises the radically heterogeneous elements that compose the 'South India' of the historical imagination to assert the contingent nature of this construction.[4] Yet the idea of an historical 'exceptionalism' continues to animate the works of historians, particularly those attempting a broader 'south Indian' historical synthesis. The work of Burton Stein comes readily to mind,[5] and David Washbrook is only the latest to emphasise the 'peculiarities' of the south, at least in the early colonial period.[6] Therefore, the 'south' is defined in terms of an Indian whole, through reference to historical markers of 'difference'.

Despite its obvious limitations, 'the geographic/cartographic' south has had a long and creative career in defining the historical unit. There may even be socio-economic processes and formations that are shared by large parts of the region, though not through all historical periods, to warrant the name of a common heritage.[7] However, as long as either 'unity' or 'heterogeneity' is stressed against the dominating presence of an 'Indian' history with its already established themes and interests, such 'regionalism' will rise only rarely above being either instantiations of historical processes identified elsewhere, or notations of their

[1] For an instance of the pioneering forms of entrepreneurship in the region, see Kaul, *Caste, Class and Education*.

[2] See, for instance, Prasad, 'Cinema as a Site of Nationalist Identity'.

[3] Raju, 'South India as a Unit in Historiography'.

[4] Veluthat, 'The Idea(s) of South India: Questions from History'.

[5] Most recently, Stein, *A History of India*, p. 100, where he begins by elaborating a distinct 'peninsular' historical trajectory, then suggests a mutually constitutive 'north-south' mingling while admitting that 'perhaps the flow from north to south was greater'.

[6] Washbrook, 'South India, 1770–1840'.

[7] See Raju, 'South India as a Unit', p. 7 ; Veluthat suggests that a 'civilisational unity' encompassed the peninsula in particular during the early medieval period (corresponding to the time of the Rashtrakutas, the Chalukyas and the Hoysalas), but that unity dissipated in the period after the fourteenth century. Veluthat, 'The Idea(s) of South India'.

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absence; a more positive reading of such 'regionalism' could be to discover the value of 'micro history'.[8]

Over the last two decades at least, despite severe institutional restraints, many independent strands of research have developed and flourished in ways that significantly revise these historiographical formulations. This article explores the ways in which historians of the geographical south have made productive use of the 'incommensurability' of geography and history. To begin with, I sketch briefly some of the historical and historiographical constructions of the 'south', usually as a space of difference from the dominant north. This has produced a series of 'inclusions/exclusions' vis-à-vis not only the north, but within the geographical south itself. I will then discuss three somewhat disparate (but by no means the only) sites in new and largely unpublished work on south India that move beyond the trope of 'exceptionalism' to generate new insights into Indian history. They range from a growing interest in questions of the self and in historicising 'interiorities', chiefly pioneered by scholars working on Keralam (discussed in section II), to a consideration of the striking gap between genres of scholarship in English and that in regional languages, exemplified by, though by no means confined to, the case of Karnataka's history (section III), to a final section that considers the productive consequences of the re-periodisation of the 'modern' that is currently underway. Clearly, such scholarship does not have a programmatic focus or a unified intention, and may not even emanate from similar institutional spaces, though a surprising number of intersections are revealed in the concerns and questions. These are important signs that such scholarship is relatively unencumbered by earlier laments about either the paucity of sources for histories of the geographical south, or about the 'politics of mention' in broader 'Indian' histories.

I

'The idea of an Indian South', says Thomas Trautmann, 'that differs [sic] in kinship and language is a very old one.'[9] Yet, he continues, 'it does not have to do with a project for the classification of nations, races, or civilizations, but is situated within the question, "What is Dharma (duty)?"' To this question, dharma literature provided two types of responses, the first identifying the south as a land of cross-cousin marriages and linguistic difference, both regional peculiarities with parallels in north India. How, then, does the north gain hegemony? Important in the notion of Dharma is the reference to the behaviour of the 'good' on issues about which the oldest textual authorities, the Vedas and the Smritis, may have remained unyielding: 'it is the behaviour of the good in the north that constitutes

[8] In a recent article that examines the basis and value of regional histories, Sabyasachi Bhattacharya claims, among other reasons for focusing on the region, 'the need to study "history from below", the history of the historyless common man' to address 'regional or what may be called microlevel history'. Bhattacharya, 'Reflections on the Concept of Regional History', pp. 81–90.

[9] Trautmann, 'Kinship, Language and the Construction of South India', p. 181.

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the standard for those of other regions when the written record is silent' (p. 182). By this second yardstick, 'the north is central, the south by implication is peripheral and dependent' (*ibid.*).

It is Trautmann's claim that a pan Indian culture was forged from many southern and northern Indian particularisms in the *Dharmasastra*. Linguistically, the south enjoyed no more than a derivative existence, since its language was believed (until c.1800) to have been derived from Sanskrit: this presumed linguistic unity was first split open by the work of the Madras Orientalists, and then irrevocably transformed by the work of, among others, Robert Caldwell, who established the separate Dravidian linguistic family. This linguistic difference was, however, racialised, and became part of the colonial common sense with enduring consequences for our present.

Language and kinship systems apart, there were also the law-ways of the people south of the Vindhyas. Baudhayana's *Dharmasutra* (c. 500–300 B.C.) identified five customs as peculiar to the people of the Deccan, which, in addition to mentioning two types of cross-cousin marriage, included 'dining with one who is not initiated; dining with women; eating food kept overnight'.[10] J.D.M. Derrett cites the comments of the late eighteenth-century Pattacharya, author of *Datta Chandrika*, which was possibly written at the behest of the British. Pattacharya noted 'the strange customs of the wicked people of Malabar amongst whom the sister's son is the heir'.[11] These historical 'exceptions' that south India represented to the body of Anglo-Indian law that was forged through the nineteenth century were accommodated, especially following 1860, through concessions to the customary practices of the people of the south, whether relating to the rules of adoption or property ownership by women.

Nilakanta Sastri's *A History of South India* asserted that the geographical unities of south India—'south of the Vindhyas, Dakshina in the widest sense of the term'[12]—were self-evident enough to warrant a separate history. This was subtended by notions of a cultural and social unity, and perhaps even by an *empowering lack*. 'The South,' said N.K. Bose, 'was less open to invasions than the north; and it not only maintained the continuity of Indian culture, but also protected and nurtured it when it faced danger in the north.'[13] In portraying south India as being constituted not just by its peninsular autonomy, Burton Stein further defined 'a region characterized by a high degree of sharing of significant social, cultural and political elements and an order of interaction such as to constitute a viable unit for the study of certain problems'.[14] Among these, he identified as 'quite unique' the medieval *brahmadeya*, or powerful Brahmin villages, as well as temples endowed with huge revenue grants of villages. Yet, an empowering lack was

[10] Sastri, *A History of South India*, p. 70.
[11] Derrett, *Religion, Law and the State in India*, p. 103.
[12] Sastri, *A History of South India*, p. 1.
[13] Bose, 'The Geographical Background of Indian Culture'.
[14] Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India*, p. 32.

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not far behind such explanations: the flourishing of 'Vedic temples' in south India was partly ascribed to the 'fact of being outside the control of Muslim power'.[15]

However, this robustly constituted unity had to come to terms with 'peculiar' sub-regions such as the southwest (Keralam), a troubling zone distinguished by its kinship and land tenure systems as well as a 'low order' of interactions with the rest of the region, despite sharing distinctly Dravidian elements with the rest of the peninsula. In Stein's account, other exceptions were accommodated under the category of 'shatter zones' and included Telangana and Karnataka, so that what one is left with in his account of medieval 'south India' is the macro-region that comprises 'all of the Tamil country, and the southern parts of Karnataka and Andhra'.[16] The problem of 'inclusion-exclusion' had a long career in definitions of the historical Deccan, with R.G. Bhandarkar suggesting in 1895 that 'it is thus almost identical with the country called Maharashtra or the region in which the Marathi language is spoken, the narrow strip of land between the Western Ghats and the sea being excluded'.[17] For quite different reasons that had to do with the determining role of geography, Jadunath Sarkar emphasised in 1928 that since the 'Deccan proper' had been cut up by nature into 'small isolated districts', this region of the south had 'failed to exert any influence on other parts of India', succumbing instead to pressures from (the more strictly comparable regions of) Hindustan or the Carnatic.[18]

It is no doubt the vast inscriptional record of the medieval period in the Tamil and Karnataka (i.e., Vijayanagara) country that has led to the overwhelming focus on Tamil Nadu in the scholarship on early and medieval south India: 50,000 plus inscriptions from the Chola and Vijayanagara periods alone and still counting.[19] The rise to prominence of the colonial Presidency centred around Madras re-asserted the dominance of this sub-region, and is amply reflected in the scholarship on the south. Furthermore, the mobilising energies of movements for lower-caste assertion and the political institutions founded on these movements painted the region in very different colours from other parts of India in the late colonial period. For both historical and historiographical reasons, then, the region we recognise as modern-day Tamil Nadu bulks large in the historical imagination of south India, in turn producing other exceptions on its margins.

The focus on the medieval past of the Tamil region had another consequence. So closely is south India associated with a 'Hindu' past that even a striking characteristic of the Keralam region, its multi-religiosity, has done little to shake off

[15] Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India*, p. 53.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 57.

[17] Bhandarkar, *Early History of Dekkan*, as cited in Veluthat, 'The Idea(s) of South India'.

[18] Sarkar, *India Through the Ages*, p. 4. Confessing in his preface that all his examples were taken from the north and for the modern period from Bengal, Sarkar rued the fact that his book had not considered the south. Nevertheless, he 'hoped that some south Indian scholar will work out the cultural history of our country from the point of view of local knowledge, on the lines sketched by me in the following pages from the Northern angle of vision'. Preface, p. vi.

[19] Hall, 'Structural Change and Societal Integration in Early South India', p. 7; Frykenberg and Kolenda, eds, *Studies of South India*, p. 18.

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this association. Interest in the period of the Mapilla rebellions in nineteenth and twentieth-century Keralam brought some attention to the region's religious traditions. Similarly, an assortment of writings on conversion illuminated the colonial impact on religious practices in the region. However, Susan Bayly attempted the most systematic analyses of southern India's Christian and Islamic traditions in the period between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries, highlighting the complex negotiation of caste and cult devotion that resulted. Far from being a bastion of Hinduism, the south, she shows, was the location of thriving local religiosities centred on shrines, warrior-kings turned divinities, and goddesses, which were absorbed into rather than kept out of the convert communities,[20] and in which caste was remobilised, rather than abandoned. However, Bayly's attempt to trace the pre-colonial history of non-Hindu religions focuses perhaps too strongly on an understanding of conversion as 'prosecution of claims to higher status by other more militant means',[21] and reduces the importance of the promise of equality or 'progress' that accompanied conversion, as some more recent studies, discussed below, have shown.

'South India' reasserted its particularity among early scholars of political processes and institutions, this time as an administrative category of the British colonial regime. Once more, it was South India's presumed 'lacks' that led to the historiographic neglect of the south, since, says Christopher Baker, 'it did not figure so consistently or so spectacularly in the nationalist saga as did the other regions of India'.[22] Baker admitted to certain 'oddities' of the south, and the special character of caste politics that stalled the easy triumph of nationalist ideologies even among the nationalising elites, but went further in identifying the category called south India, or, more properly, the Madras Presidency, as a British creation: 'the British had not inherited a province in South India, they had created one 'out of the ruins of 18th century conflicts and fragmented local regimes.'[23] Indeed, the neglect of the region's modern history was attributed to its dull exceptionality, once more figured as a laundry list of lacks:

> its contributions to the great themes of Indian history were made in a minor key; early nationalists regarded it as 'benighted' and the spark of Gandhian politics failed to catch tinder; Hindu/Muslim conflict, except in the south western corner never attained importance; religious and cultural revivalism did not develop the strong political connotations of the cow-protection and Nagri movements in the North; rural class conflict in the form of kisan campaigns or landlord organisations, was a late starter. The south has tended to be written off as a political backwater.[24]

[20] See, especially, her discussion of the extraordinary persistence of caste hierarchy among convert groups in Vadakkankulam in Tamil Nadu, segregating worshippers and leading to bitter conflict, while influencing forms of worship and, indeed, church architecture as well. Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, pp. 420–52.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 458.

[22] Baker, *The Politics of South India 1920–1937*, p. ix.

[23] *Ibid.*, pp. 2; 3–5.

[24] Baker and Washbrook, *South India*, p. 5.

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David Washbrook is among those who has lately added his voice to the idea of an empowering lack, at least in the period of early colonial rule: in his view, south India had a longer acquaintance and exchange with the European powers, which laid the basis for the 'dialogue' with the Indian elites forged by colonial administrators. Moreover, colonial policies, notably those stemming from Utilitarian and evangelical doctrines, were slower to take effect in colonial south India where the administration privileged the 'local' in ways that forged a different trajectory which was often at odds with, and even opposed to, the centres of power at Calcutta and London. Furthermore, the south Indian elites actively cooperated with British officials to run and sustain the new colonial order.[25]

These are perspectives that remain rooted in visualising south India as a unity (though largely focused on the Madras Presidency) as well as a provincial margin, a place of wayward nationalisms. We have, however, travelled a long way from Nilakanta Sastry's lament that south India suffered from historiographical neglect and required the mobilisation of scholarly attention to redress the imbalance between the south and the north.[26] Few areas have been left unexplored, and the relevance of the category of 'South India', as it implies a subset of an Indian history that was coterminous with the North, has even been rendered somewhat irrelevant.[27] Now there exists work on robust caste movements that were quite different in their goals and methods from the Bengali social reform movements; some of the largest Indian princely regimes that produced, through their bureaucracies, a version of colonial modernity—though south Indian 'little kingdoms' have proved an attractive grazing ground, particularly for ethnohistorians; radical transformations of family forms that effectively re-wrote the power of women in ways quite distinct from the effects on domesticity and conjugality elsewhere; a religious landscape that had long included substantial minorities of Muslims and Christians, and which has lent itself recently to creative interpretations of the mutual borrowings, or newly-fashioned unities, that were thrust on it by an emerging print culture.[28]

[25] Washbrook, 'South India, 1770–1840'. Though Washbrook is anxious here to distinguish himself from the recent work of Eugene Irschick, he too stresses the 'borrowings' between the two cultures to de-emphasise even the use of the term 'colonialism' for the early period of colonial rule (p. 481). 'Southern Patriotism' thus is a structure of feeling shared by both local elites and colonial officials (p. 484)! Such a leveling of the playing field, illustrated with sometimes trivial examples (p. 485), is undertaken not to re-periodise the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries differently, but to dilute the emphatic break that was occasioned by British colonialism in India.

[26] Sastri, *History of South India*, p. 1.

[27] While suggesting that the economic history of South India is 'still at an exploratory stage' compared with the rest of India, Sabayasachi Bhattacharya et al., say, 'The term "South India" it must be stated has not been conceived with a view to counterposing its distinctiveness vis-à-vis other regions of the Indian subcontinent, neither is it perceived as being an economically homogenous region.' Bhattacharya et al., eds, *The South Indian Economy*, p. xvii.

[28] See, for instance, G. Arunima, 'Imagining Communities—differently: Print Language and the "Public Sphere" in Colonial Kerala'.

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Might we therefore retain the productive capacities of the geographical category south India not in order to stage an intellectual secession, or even to forge a new paradigm, but to generate insights that will perhaps result not so much in the fashioning of a new national history or in the production of more exceptions, but in a fresh thematisation of history? This would achieve two things. On the one hand, it will historicise the processes by which certain regions have come to have a hegemonic presence in historiography. Such a premise would inevitably lead to the provincialisation of the regions—Bengal or Tamil Nadu, for instance—in which notions of the 'national' or the 'sub-national' have long been founded and used as the template against which the congruencies, deviations or lacks of other regions have been plotted. On the other hand, the new thematisations will render irrelevant, or at least reduce in importance, the question of the ideal (and clearly unattainable) representation of all regions in an Indian historiography. I believe that the moment is ripe for some rethinking, despite the limitations imposed by the very uneven terrain on which the knowledge of south Indian history has been produced.[29]

II

It is perhaps not surprising that the first new area of work I wish to discuss has moved away from the grand themes of nationalism, the colonial economy, or accounts of the composition and goals of social reform movements[30] to focus on the multiple ways in which the modern self was constructed in the late nineteenth and the twentieth century. Attention to an interior realm has come from the most diverse of perspectives in a significant body of work, as yet largely unpublished. This work has been enabled not necessarily by access to new or previously unused sources or methods, but through using new interpretive strategies. Keralam was historically the most 'sexualized' region of the colonial period, attracting more than its fair share of attention for its unusual matrilineal family forms and modes of attire. In her recent work, J. Devika tracks the emergence of the gendered

[29] To turn briefly to these conditions of production, the Chennai workshop exemplified the difficulties of representing the different modes of scholarly production on the south, and the discrete spheres within which these productions circulate. More or less completely absent from this workshop for pragmatic reasons were the Trans Atlantic and Pacific scholars interested in south India, who are prolific and very visible in the English language journals emanating from India and elsewhere, for example, *Studies in History*, *IESHR* and *EPW*, among others. We may recall the impressive efforts of scholars of south India based in North America to take stock of the state of research on the region in 1969 and 1970, which led to the publication of two anthologies—Frykenberg and Kolenda, eds, *Studies of South India* and Stein, *Essays on South India*. The modern period was not the central focus, though there were important signs that the earlier absorption with the early and medieval periods was waning.

[30] In an article provocatively titled 'No, Not the Nation: Lower Caste Malayalam Novels of the Nineteenth Century', Dilip Menon makes an argument, quite similar to those works discussed in this article, for taking the refashioned 'caste self'—and not necessarily nationalism—as the grounds for colonial modernity in Keralam. Menon, 'No, Not the Nation', pp. 41–72.

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individual in the reform language of modern Keralam. Such a history becomes crucial in understanding the transition of the region from a 'sexualized' space to a space of womanly power, and to the resexualisation of the region in the contemporary period. Tracing the history of en-gendering, which Devika argues is central to the process of individualisation, involves a detailed sifting of literary materials to reveal how the categories of Man and Woman are newly sculpted, and not necessarily in ways that mimic the biological roles of males and females. These idealised sensibilities and subjectivities, she argues, are materialised in very important ways, leaving their legacies on institutional spaces, modes of dress and address, and the generation of new gendered capacities for work. Such an interpretive move radically questions the historical discourse on social reform, either in its pre-feminist phase of signifying the actual transformation of social life through the efforts of reformists, or in the feminist critique that foregrounded the ambiguous results of such reform, and the active silencing of women's agency that lay at the heart of such reform efforts.

Simultaneously, Devika also takes the inaugural step towards inverting the relative centrality that questions of caste have occupied in recent south Indian histories.[31] Going against the grain of caste histories, Devika suggests, 'the political aim of reformism was identified as the creation of an ideal social order in which *gender alone* would figure as the unsurpassable social division, other than inborn differences in capacities'.[32] Gender, moreover, was crucial to the process of making individuals governable, and may arguably have been the 'far more effective correlate of Individualising power than say self identities implied by *jati* differentiation'.[33] Indeed, the term *Swatantryam* itself, which signified 'possessing self-means for survival'[34] and called for the enhancement of capacities for regulation that were internal rather than externally imposed, was conceptually transformed to become an equivalent of 'freedom'. One of the material effects of such engendered individualisation was the early twentieth-century application of womanly capacities in a large number and variety of institutions, so that 'the relevance of the public/domestic divide as the organizing model of Manly and Womanly capacities relatively faded'.[35] With enduring historical consequences that characterise the space of Keralam to the present day, womanliness became associated with a 'specific non-coercive *power* and less with domestic space',

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[31] In her long review of two recent historical works presented at the Chennai workshop, S. Anandhi pointed to the discrete spheres occupied by studies of gender and caste to argue for a better cohesion between the two (Anandhi, 'En/gendering Caste or Recast(e)ing Gender: Reflections on some recent studies on Colonial South India'). Her suggestion that strengthening lines of enquiry into 'masculinity' may bridge this divide is born out by the recent work on Keralam, although the problematisation of caste and gender studies has a longer career than she has acknowledged. See, for instance, Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjana, 'Problems of a Contemporary Theory of Gender'.

[32] Devika, 'Engendering Individuals', p. 25.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 308.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 44.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 201.

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and permitted the entry of women into, and their hypervisibility in, certain professions and roles, and notably not others.[36]

This persuasive 'en-gendering' of history makes its case by drawing attention away from the visibility of 'caste' or jati identification in historical accounts of the modern period. We know, though, that a focus on gender that replaces a focus on caste is strategically fruitful only in the short term; only a 'doubled vision' of these identities will adequately address the complexities of caste/gender negotiations, and even forms of individuation, as the work of many other scholars indicates. From quite another optic, of those who were primarily male and lower caste, as opposed to those who were primarily female and upper caste, Sanal Mohan presents another moment in the construction of the self in modern Keralam. The achievement of this work is also to question the new orthodoxies that have called universals such as 'equality' into question. For the Parayas and Pulayas of Keralam, says Mohan, the resources for refashioning the 'liberated' self were provided by the twin processes of Protestant missionary activity and the abolition of slavery (1854), both resulting in an awareness of the habits of mind and body that became a hallmark of the new self-definition. This new self was founded on the notions of equality that were the theological bedrock of Christianity, even though they presented something of a paradox. For, after all, we must not forget that the long presence of an already existing Christianity in Keralam did nothing to offer the same potential for social change as the Protestant mission and its strivings for the spiritual salvation of the new lower-caste flock.

The forms of self-definition offered by conversion have been noted in other regions among similar castes, though enabled by the capitalist reorganisation of labour.[37] Mohan's analysis of how the erstwhile Pulayas and Parayas wrested dignity and self-worth from a hostile social order, which materialised in ways that reordered the space of the church itself and took to its logical limit the promise of equality that the Christian theology offered its adherents, points to the ways in which the moment of colonialism offered new possibilities. It had many effects in transforming the marriage patterns of the lower castes, changing their work habits, and providing routes of escape from the indignities of bonded labour. Above all, it provided the new converts with a language with which to memorialise the suffering and pain of slavery through a performative mode that bore extraordinary parallels with the ritualised enactments of the sacrifice and suffering of Christ. This new mode of individuation is predicated on keeping the memory of slavery alive, even amongst those who had never experienced it, while redefining, through transformed bodily practices, a new (heterodox) collectivity under the leadership of a charismatic leader (considered blasphemous by the church itself), Yohannan. Here, it is not altered material circumstances that allowed for this redefinition of the self; rather, it is the interior realm of the self

[36] Devika, 'Engendering Individuals', p. 210.

[37] I have, in my work on the working class of Bangalore and KGF, noted the consequences of conversion for lower castes. See *Miners and Millhands*, especially Chapters 3 and 7.

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that becomes the resource for a more robust persona extracted from the caste order to which it was condemned. Indeed, Yohannan claims that 'I annihilated caste in my body; now you have to realize it'.[38]

There is a striking parallel here with the reconceptualisation of the body that was enabled by a reform movement of quite another kind led by Sri Narayana Guru. Central to the movement that enabled another section of Kerala society, the Ezhavas, to assert themselves as a collectivity was the opportunity for a new kind of individuation. Here, too, the body was an important site of change, transiting from being the bearer of marks of a false differentiation to being the bearer of marks of true distinction. Outlining a two-stage process in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Keralam, Udaya Kumar suggests that to Narayana Guru the body was conceptualised not as a site to be despised, but cleansed, celebrated for the power it would enjoy as a sacral space when drawn away from the abuse of the senses. To Kumaran Asan, writing in the early twentieth century, the senses were foregrounded once more, this time interiorising the erotic without drowning in it, to achieve an intensified experience of the soul, 'irreducibly individual in its task of self articulation and in its self affirmation as desire'.[39] By making the female the bearer of inner agency in his poetry, in contrast to the 'male subject's immutable spirituality', Asan makes a richly ambiguous move that simultaneously claims and disavows female agency.[40]

By no means was the reconceptualisation of the self confined to the lower castes. Ramesh Bairy's sociological reconstruction of the dynamics of Brahmin identity in Karnataka, which is framed historically, is provocative in its very object of study. The constitution of a (defensive) Brahmin self, relatively autonomous of the hierarchies that it had long dominated, was occasioned in part by the forms of self-assertion that had emerged in opposition to the dominance of Brahminism, particularly in the spaces of modernity generated by colonial rule. Battered by the transformations of the south Indian hierarchical social order in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which were in part supported by the colonial regime, what were the new forms of subjectivity available to the community of Brahmins, or more properly a section of them (one might even say of those who did not dominate the secular domain)? Bairy argues that the new subject is formed under the sign of being besieged by non-Brahminism. It brings together elements for a new identity that in part mimics the strategies of the ascendant castes themselves. Methodologically, though Bairy relies on testimonies and autobiographical writings that clearly speak of a confident, even self-assured Brahmin presence in the colonial period, he avoids earlier modes of historical sociology that might have focused on the objective, and more correctly

[38] Mohan, 'Imagining Equality: Modernity and Social Transformation of Lower Castes in Colonial Kerala'.

[39] Kumar 'Self, body and inner sense: Some reflections on Sree Narayana Guru and Kumaran Asan', p. 270.

[40] Kumar, 'Inside the Subject: Kumaran Asan's Language of the Mind', p. 36.

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material, conditions that engender caste redefinition.[41] Bairy transits between tracking the emergence of a new Brahmin self within new associational forms (colonial and postcolonial civil society), and simultaneously through a kind of reflexivity that is occasioned by new work opportunities (say, in the bureaucracy or the New Economy).

In a sense, these works point to areas that have not been illumined by the metanarratives of nationalism, communalism or capitalism. However, metanarratives too have their uses in illumining the constitution of the self, as the work undertaken by V.J. Varghese clearly demonstrates.[42] Indeed, one might even say that his work calls attention to an element that is often overlooked in studies of the modern self in India, namely the arrival of capitalism and its effects on the constitution of an alert, hardworking, productive and attentive being, and the discourse on 'development' that it generates. Varghese provides a very different optic on processes that have been neglected by earlier scholars. The Syrian Christians who migrated to Malabar in the early twentieth century were possessed of the dream of turning a wild landscape into productive territory under the aegis of the colonial state. In the process, they were reconstituted by the ideology of the labouring self, at once the site of sacrifice and pain for the greater material goal of development. Work served to improve their self-worth and perhaps even character as migrants who went in search of the Promised Land. In his analysis of the representations of this important turning point in the history of the Travancore (largely Syrian Christian) migrant community, Varghese notes the formative influence of the ideology of hard work on the building of community as it was linked to material reward, and also in its intersections with Christianity, reconstituting (present) suffering as leading to (temporally deferred) rewards. Joseph Poovan, and many others like him, imagined a landscape transformed through human labour that defied even the wrath of the Bhagavathi (the deity of the Nairs) and the scourge of disease to conquer and cultivate the new territory. Once more, Christianity (new-found, in the Keralam context) displayed a capacity for mobilising the body for work by yoking the yearning for the promised land of Canaan to the migrants' struggle with Nature.

Taken together, these individual studies provide powerful insights into processes that might not have been the concern of scholars elsewhere, and yet point simultaneously to the specific conditions under which such forms of the self were nurtured. They also point to the myriad ways in which literary sources may be used in the writing of history, not only while speaking of the representations of certain communities, but also to invert the lens that has used individual testimonies and writings to speak of community identities. The contribution of literary scholars to the study of history has been more remarkable in those regions where the professional historian has tended to remain more closely tied to writing the 'biography of the nation' in regional terms, and has relied largely on the official archive.

[41] Bairy, 'Caste, Community and Association'.
[42] Varghese, 'Identity in Fashioning'.

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III

The corpus of historical scholarship on modern Karnataka exemplifies the constraints imposed by an official archive. Students of modern Karnataka history attached to regional institutions are content to stick to formulaic understandings of provincial nationalism: many use Confidential Branch records to track the careers of the Non-cooperation, Civil Disobedience and Quit India movements for each district of Karnataka. Nearly all the attention of such senior historians in the region as Suryanath Kamath and S. Chandrasekhar has been the history of the freedom movement.[43] There is a respectable body of work on the period of Tipu and Hyder to which we shall have occasion to return later. Yet, apart from M.H. Gopal's study of the finances of Tipu Sultan[44] and Nikhilesh Guha's study of the state and economy of the same period, [45] there have been few full-length studies of the economic history of the region. Indeed, a basic account of Karnataka's agrarian history remains to be written. The political history of the early twentieth century has been recounted through the efforts of a political scientist and a development studies scholar, James Manor and Bjorn Hettne, and is yet to be matched or challenged.[46]

S. Chandrasekhar's attempt to synthesise the history of the southern region remains firmly focused on the ways in which the national movement animated the movements of south India.[47] However, historical knowledge in Karnataka has been nurtured in different locations, through the efforts of literary scholars in particular. Some of the more provocative insights into the region's history have been produced by these scholars, which I shall discuss briefly below. It is also no coincidence that many of the works cited below have been written or published under the aegis of a new regional institution, the Kannada University at Hampi, which since the early 1990s has made concerted attempts to encourage new cultural and historical research.

Rahamath Tarikere combines ethnographic fieldwork with a detailed analysis of literary materials to give the fullest account of the cultural legacy of the Sufis in Karnataka history, right up to the present day. Tarikere's insights on Karnataka's unique cultural heritage are based on his reading of linguistic sources from the period of the earliest Sufi orders of the thirteenth century, their theological and linguistic minglings (*sankara*) with the other significant movement of medieval Karnataka, the Virashaiva movement, which produced an extraordinary flowering of Kannada literature beginning with the twelfth century. Tarikere questions the rather morbid absorption of cultural historians of Karnataka with the wounds inflicted by the fall of Vijayanagara.[48] Moving away also from the absorption with

[43] For instance, see Kamath, *Swatantra Sangramada Smritigalu*; *Quit India Movement in 1942;* and Chandrasekhar, *Dimensions of Socio-Political Change in Mysore*.

[44] Gopal, *Tipu Sultan's Mysore*.

[45] Guha, *Pre-British State System in South India*.

[46] Manor, *Political Change in a Princely State*; Hettne, *The Political Economy of Indirect Rule*.

[47] Chandrasekhar, *Colonialism, Conflict and Nationalism*; *Adhunika Karnatakada Aandolanagalu*.

[48] Tarikere, *Karnatakada Sufigalu*, p. 8.

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material artifacts of the southern kingdoms, he looks not merely at the literary, but also the oral traditions. From this, he is able to plot the Sufi/Virashaiva commingling at a number of levels: at the level of the mutually shared experience of spirituality (*anubhaava*), the profound impact the Sufis had on the Kannada language, their wide popular appeal, their musical traditions, and the shared structures of the Sufi/Virashaiva orders themselves.

What is the importance of studying the exchange, particularly for scholars of modern Karnataka? Tarikere argues that studies of *vachana* literature must be extracted from the parochial frames that have linked it too closely to the history of the Lingayats in Karnataka. His history is also extracted from the equally narrow frames of the secular/communal divide, since it is not an attempt to produce a history of unalloyed and ahistorical syncretism. This, says Tarikere, would be an anachronistic reading of cultural practice. Indeed, the familiar pairing between Sufi saint and Lingayat or Brahmin guru, recreated for instance in the guru–shishya relationship of Govindabhatta and Shishunala Shariff during the nineteenth century, would come as a surprise only to those who view religious identities as moored strictly in the terms 'Hindu' and 'Muslim', without paying attention to the cultural life worlds of which such pairings were a part. The real and imagined pairings of Sufi saints and *vachanakara*s, the similarity of the khanqah/matha orders, the mingling of temple and dargah styles, the borrowings of dress and forms of address, must all be taken as signs not of a desire to produce 'communal harmony', but of a deeply shared cultural universe.[49] There are mythical structures that are repeated throughout the territory of Karnataka to the present day, and animate popular forms of worship: a historic encounter between the saint mounted on the tiger and the saint on the platform (*katte*) stops short of becoming a clash when the *katte* itself moves forward to establish a bond of friendship, free of pride or condescension. Another series of myths refers to how Sufi khanqahs are established, and territory claimed through either forceful or peaceful means, through political patronage or as an act of charitable accommodation on the part of the resident Nath Panthis.[50] Only in the nineteenth century was there a hardening of categories into religious identities (the Lingayathisation of the Shirhatti Matha is a case in point, but there are many others).[51]

The effort of scholars such as Tarikere is to trace an alternative to the sectarian, secular or communal historians' versions of the long and complex cultural legacy of minglings between the Sufi and Hindu orders. This is largely accomplished through the analysis of language and its transformations. It is striking that Tarikere does not, unlike his counterparts among historians, accord significance to the period of colonialism. For instance, the establishment of the order of Deendar Chennabasaveswara by Moulana Siddiqui in the early twentieth century

[49] Tarikere, *Karnatakada Sufigalu*, p. 35ff.
[50] *Ibid.*, p. 96
[51] *Ibid.*

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is narrativised as another instance of the forms of theological and literary experiments that Sufi saints undertook.[52] There is a certain indifference here to the profoundly transformative nature of the colonial interregnum.

A similar indifference to the conditions under which the colonial archive was produced is in the major effort made by another literary scholar, M.M. Kalburgi, to bring together the vast collection of Colin Mackenzie's manuscripts on Karnataka.[53] In his introduction to *Karnatakada Kaifiyatugalu*, he likens it to a gold mine, relatively under-utilised by scholars of history or literature, and one that has to sifted and analysed to distinguish fact from myth. Kalburgi's concern here is with the methods by which the styles and formats of recording history, and in some cases much earlier histories, may be mined to yield new facts. He points to the ways in which we may determine authorship of the Mackenzie manuscripts, and remains attentive to the structures of language, the mixing of fact with fiction, and the difficulties of extracting a secular timeline from the coils of epic time. However, in re-assembling this archive for the convenience of scholars, there is no comparable concern with the power/knowledge framework that has become commonsense for those working with colonial materials.

Despite the compulsions that drive the literary critic to history, particularly of the early and medieval period, questions of colonialism, and, indeed, Indian modernity, provoke mild interest among those writing on Karnataka's cultural history. D.R. Nagaraj's sophisticated critique of Kannada's medieval literary history, based on inscriptional and literary sources, makes no more than a fleeting reference when speaking of the modern period. While speaking of Kannada's fate in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, he says that it generated a new mechanism[54] creating a cultural elite delinked from monastery and court, who produced a vital kind of lyric, one quite distinct from the productions of court poets. 'The Mysore court poets were secure in their lifestyles, clear about their conception of literature and confident about the circulation of their texts. The new authors were not fortunate enough to enjoy that, but as they wandered, they initiated an unprecedented kind of Kannada writing.'[55] But the conditions under which this transformation came about, and the nature of the transformation itself, remain tantalisingly unspecified, and the task is deferred at the end of this piece. M. Chidanandamurthy, another literary scholar, and B.S. Shastry have undertaken a reading of nineteenth-century historical writings in Kannada, but once again limit their analysis of this material to the *lacks* and *absences* of such an enterprise and not to the conditions of its possibility.[56]

[52] Tarikere, *Karnatakada Sufigalu*, p. 102ff.

[53] Kalburgi, *Karnatakada Kaifiyatugalu*.

[54] Nagaraj, 'Tensions in the History of Kannada Literary Culture'.

[55] *Ibid.*

[56] Chidanandamurthy, 'Historiography in Kannada during the Nineteenth Century' and B.S. Shastry, 'Historiography in Kannada 1900–1947'. Shastry's perspective on the output before 1947, notably the overwhelming presence of the nationalist framework in the study of modern Kannada history, remains substantially unchanged in the period that followed.

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The literary history of Kannada and the various settings in which it flourished, its relation to other languages, ethnicities and cultures, is therefore well-researched, though such histories understate the influence of colonialism and its new institutions. What of other cultural achievements of the period soon after the establishment of British rule? In his long introduction to the sumptuously illustrated compendium called *Sritattvanidhi*, a product of the Mysore court of Krishnaraja Wodeyar III in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, S.K. Ramachandra Rao is more than fully aware of the hollowness of Wodeyar's claim to power following Tipu's defeat in 1799, yet it forms no more than the backdrop to the appreciation of the artistic styles and practices of what was to become the Mysore school of painting.[57] The court of Krishnaraja Wodeyar III and the cultural efflorescence that occurred in his time is interpreted as a renaissance, even an act of 'self respect' that consciously distanced itself from the new regime of representation symbolised by the company style.[58] Certainly no European painters were employed in Wodeyar's court. However, the work's discussion of pictorial antecedents and borrowings, particularly from the Thanjavur court, are not carried forward into a discussion of the incongruence between the realms of political power and cultural production, particularly in the modern period. May this be a deliberate oversight to enable other histories to come through? May we also take this as a mode through which a *reperiodisation* of Indian history is taking place?

To be sure, there are literary histories that investigate the effects of colonial institutions, such as the law, the census or the print media, on community identity. Indeed, as Vijay Kumar Boratti shows, the period between the mid-nineteenth and the twentieth centuries was replete with struggles, both in Mysore and in Bombay Karnataka, over the definition of the Virashaiva/Lingayath identity, whether among its constituents or between communities.[59] These processes actively called for the intervention of the colonial state, whether in proscribing literary, dramatic or other representations that were 'offensive' to the sensibilities of one or another section of the newly-forming community, or in revising, extending or reinforcing boundaries between communities that were being drawn by state apparatuses themselves. However, here too, as in the many realms of redefinition that occurred in other parts of the south, the relationship of caste/religious communities to nationalism was not unambiguous, and moved from indifference or even active hostility to a closer identification in the twentieth century. Neither was colonialism perceived as necessarily oppressive vis-à-vis the local caste hierarchies. However, fissures among Lingayaths were sealed in the beginning of the twentieth century through the full-blooded embrace of non-Brahmin politics, especially after 1910, and through the invocation of a 'traditional' rivalry against the Brahmins. Community redefinitions (and in this

[57] Ramachandra Rao, ed., *Mummadi Krishnaraja Wodeyara Sritattvanidhi*.

[58] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

[59] Boratti, 'Narratives and Communities', especially Chapter III.

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case upward mobility) using the institutions and apparatuses of a colonial modernity were well underway before an entry into a secular, territorial nationalism.

If these literary histories attest to a range of possible engagements with colonial modernity in south India, new trends in scholarship have used literary archives to question the periodisation of the 'modern' by turning to its inaugural moments, particularly in the late eighteenth century. Fresh thematisations of modern Indian history have occurred in the works of those who have turned their attention to a period of flux, when pre-colonial forms and genres, whether of writing history, architecture, painting or even patronage, were in active conversation with emerging modes of establishing and portraying power. The most systematic exposition of the period of the early modern has been through the collaborative efforts of Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman, not least for their rigorous scrutiny of the literary record and its riches. Their effort to redefine the eighteenth century as containing more than a promise of modernity is evident in the historiographical possibilities opened by the term Early Modern. The effort of discovering a historical tradition that predates the colonial interregnum has been founded on an act of reading pre-colonial texts and material cultures.[60] These productive collaborations between scholars of literature and history may succeed in reperiodising the modern in a more programmatic way and with more success than other historiographical critiques.[61]

The last section discusses the possibilities enabled by such reperiodisation in the new historical research on arguably the most important south Indian figure, and one who has long been part of a national historical narrative, Tipu Sultan.

IV

If there has been a somewhat Magnificent Exception to south Indian history, it is the period of Mysore history that was dominated by Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan in Mysore (1761–99). Among the more obvious reasons for the fascination exerted by these late eighteenth-century rulers was their role in countering British territorial

[60] Most notably in Rao, et al., *Textures of Time*. Later nineteenth-century texts that have been analysed, travelogues for instance, also stress the gradual hold, and indeed acceptance, of the East India Company with its transformation of the countryside, the circuits of communication, and even crops. See Rao and Subrahmanyam, 'Circulation, Piety and Innovation', pp. 306–55. Returning the work of Shulman, Rao and Subrahmanyam to the realm of 'comparative philology' and 'subtle literary analyses', Sumit Guha suggests that the work's attempt to provide a 'History of regimes of historicity' is less successful. See Guha, 'Speaking Historically', pp. 1084–1103. Other scholars such as Noboru Karashima remain steadfast in their loyalty to the inscriptional record by suggesting engagement with 'the full text of inscriptions', so as to 'perceive their whisperings [and] have a dialogue with this pristine source material'. See Karashima, 'Whispering of Inscriptions', p. 58.

[61] The most important reperiodisation of modernity, though that is not its programmatic focus, is in the works of feminist historians, who have thoroughly critiqued the narratives of 'modernity' of the colonial period by reflecting on the ways in which modern institutions of law or reorganised production processes produced very different consequences for women, compared with men. The literature is too large and sophisticated to be cited in this brief article.

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ambitions in systematic and undoubtedly heroic ways. Indian nationalist historians have thus annexed Tipu Sultan in particular to a pre-history of nationalism, rescuing him from the historic and historiographic injustices that have been inflicted on him by colonialism and its historians.[62] The most recent instance of such a rescue is in the two volumes edited by Irfan Habib, respectively titled *Confronting Colonialism: Resistance and Modernisation under Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan* and *State and Diplomacy under Tipu Sultan: Documents and Essays.*[63] Countering the innumerable narratives of captivity by British soldiers who suffered defeat and the efforts of colonial historians who, despite a grudging admiration for the sultan, portrayed him as the dark medieval power that had to be defeated in order for tolerance and well-being to prevail, Tipu has been portrayed as the first Indian moderniser. His restless experiments with military styles and economic institutions, his curiosity and innovative nature are taken as proof of his ambitions to 'modernise' Mysore.[64] In tandem with those seeking a true, if frustrated, modernizer are those who attribute to Tipu the early markings of a secular nationalist. These narratives have no doubt been animated in large part by contemporary communal political concerns since at least the 1950s.

However, Tipu Sultan's legacy is deeply ambiguous, and there are those who portray him as the incomparable scourge of south India in the eighteenth century for his deliberate espousal of a virulently intolerant Islam and his violent subjugation of the people of Coorg, Keralam and Mangalore. In part, Tipu's availability as a national historical figure to a wide range of scholars, and not just historians, from all over India has been enabled by the sheer volume of sources that were generated in a multiplicity of languages. Still, there is no doubt that the use of Persian in Tipu's court has allowed medievalists a special claim to Tipu's historiographical legacy.

More recent attention paid to the symbolic economies of his reign challenge these otherwise polarised discourses. By focusing attention on the relationship between the ruler and the ruled in eighteenth-century south India more generally, Kate Brittlebank in her detailed discussion of the symbolic practices of Tipu Sultan inserts him firmly within the realm of the ideals of kingship that were common to the kingdoms of the south. In his search for legitimacy among primarily Hindu subjects, she argues, Tipu adopted the style and manners of a south Indian king. At the same time, his ambitions led him to draw on recognised ideals of Islamic kingship with some contradictory consequences.[65] Brittlebank's work points to the impossibility of extracting or separating the realms of the material and the spiritual within an integrated cosmos, characteristic of 'non-modern' societies.

[62] Among the most important and influential up to the present day is Wilks. *Historical Sketches of the South of India.*

[63] Habib, ed., *Confronting Colonialism*; also *State and Diplomacy under Tipu Sultan.*

[64] Some examples of the texts, old and new, which affirm Tipu's modernising and secular impulses, though with varying degrees of success, include Hasan, *History of Tipu Sultan*; Sen, 'A Pre-British Economic Formation'; Mohammed, *Sunset at Srirangapatam*; Ray, *Tipu Sultan and His Age.*

[65] Brittlebank, *Tipu Sultan's Search for Legitimacy.*

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She thus rejects the periodisation of the eighteenth century as the inaugural moment of the modern, and reasserts Tipu Sultan's place within universe that is unmistakably 'non-modern'.

Such a radical revision of this period and its historiography reduces nearly all of Tipu's experiments to his anxieties about the question of legitimacy among his subjects: thus his many experiments with new useful and luxurious products using European artisans are viewed as part of his overarching concern for the incorporative mechanisms of gift-giving.[66] Nevertheless, Brittlebank points to, and creatively interprets the realm of cultural symbols to provide a sense of coherence to the actions of a late eighteenth-century ruler. In a similar vein, ideals of kingship as they were expressed in architectural and painting practices, as for instance in the palaces of the Ramnad kingdom, have been discussed in terms of their essentially 'non-modern' character.[67] In this sense, Brittlebank, like her predecessors, wishes to produce a singular frame within which the reign of Tipu Sultan may be understood. This could lead to a neat but less persuasive argument about a period that was rich with ambiguity: what, for instance, does one make of the active borrowing of Islamicised ideals of kingship by Hindu kings that has been noted by scholars such as Susan Bayly?[68]

One may, moreover, treat the period between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a period of experimentation, yielding other possible routes to modernity than those eventually charted by the success of 'colonial modernity'. Tipu would thus be no throwback to the pre-modern, nor a representative of the 'non-modern', nor one whose modernising ambitions could only be fully realised under (the objective conditions of) colonialism. Rather, modernity in Tipu's time was envisaged quite distinctly from a colonial modernity, incorporating, without being dominated by, elements variously of European military practice, principles of statecraft drawn from Islam and Hinduism, or the virtues of state-run economy.

From the relatively restricted realm of late eighteenth-century artistic practices, for instance, it is possible to argue that Tipu's court was acquainted with and successfully deployed a number of the techniques and forms of not just Hindu and Islamic kingdoms of the south, but also those to which he was newly exposed, to produce a new, richly ambiguous blend of aesthetic practices.[69] This period of flux and experimentation extended even to the decades immediately following British rule, so that the decisive military and political victories of the British took longer to translate into the realms of symbolic and cultural practices. The careful nurturing of a specifically regional court culture in Mysore city by Krishnaraja Wodeyar III (1799–1868) may then be understood as occurring within spaces such as Mysore and Thanjavur, which were actively inventing 'traditions' to which

[66] *Ibid.*, pp. 104–5.

[67] Howes, *The Courts of Pre-Colonial South India.*

[68] Bayly, 'Cult Saints, Heroes, and Warrior Kings', pp. 193–210.

[69] Some of these possibilities are discussed in Nair, 'Tipu Sultan, History Painting and the Battle for "Perspective"'.

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a defeated political power could retreat.[70] K. Shashikant's recent enquiry into the origins of a Kannada music movement in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, for instance, returns to the decades of experimentation and extensive borrowings between two sites that pioneered this new 'invented' cultural ethos, the courts of Mysore and Thanjavur in the early nineteenth century. Yet the flowering occurred within a political framework that was severely compromised by colonialism.[71]

Artistic practices in the late eighteenth century thus provide important clues to a period of experimentation where the rules of perspective, for instance, were known and even tried, but not in any slavish sense. Following the defeat of Tipu Sultan in 1799, a wide range of writers commented in the early nineteenth century on the 'lack of perspective' in the large mural of the Battle of Polilur (1780) at the Dariya Daulat Bagh in Srirangapatna. There was, however, a grudging concession to the veracity of the historical details depicted. The critique, I have argued, which stemmed from a belief that the telling of historical truth was contingent on the use of the techniques of perspective, was thus not a critique of the work's failures, but of its very success in laying claim to the truth.

What was different about the colonial scopic regime was therefore not its *novelty*, but its aspiration to be hegemonic. Crucial aspects of knowledge about the newly-subjugated people and the control of territory relied on the use of drawing and mapping techniques that together constituted this new scopic regime. Its hegemony was achieved in a number of ways, but took far longer than the military and political successes. When the conventions of perspective began to gain ground, I suggest, not least because of the military and political successes of the British in India, representational practices came to be split decisively between a revived 'Mysore (decorative) tradition' and new forms of realism that later crystallised around the photograph. Shifting regimes of representation in the period between 1780 and 1850 may thus indeed be taken as an index of shifting power relations in eighteenth and early nineteenth century Mysore, though not in a linear or progressive fashion. Such a reconsideration of the visual practices of this period could therefore contribute to the 'reperiodisation of the modern' in Indian history.

A similar sense of experimentation is discernable in the multiplicity of historical narratives, and not just hagiographies, that were produced in the late eighteenth century before the systematisation and institutionalisation of the study of history. In 1930, a text called *Haidar Nama* was discovered by the Mysore

[70] Some tentative explorations into transformations of history writing at the end of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth century are undertaken in my 'Eighteenth Century Passages to a History of Mysore'.

[71] K. Shashikanth, 'Carnatic Music, Kannada, and Kannadigas: Certain Moments from Princely Mysore'. Shashikanth's concern is less with the failure of the movement to compose and perform in Kannada despite the Royal fiat in this regard than with the conditions of possibility for such a demand to be made. The Royal fiat to the court musicians, issued by Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV in 1926, appears to have been more or less contemporaneous, or perhaps even predated, the emergence in Madras of a full-blown Tamil Isai movement. See Subramanian, 'The Politics of Performance'.

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Archaeological Department. Attributed to Nallappa, a supplier of food grains to the Hyderi army who came from a family of karniks and rose to become a trusted courtier, the *Haidar Nama* was subtitled 'The affairs of the court of Nawab Hyder Ali Khan Bahadur, who established his rule at Srirangapatna'. By the time of its discovery, the battle over historiographic representations of Hyder and Tipu's regimes had largely subsided, and Mark Wilks' magisterial *Historical Sketches of the South of India*, which had fashioned both the region and its history out of varied biographies, commissioned memoirs and eyewitness accounts, ruled the roost as the single authoritative version of Mysore's past.[72] Wilks' effort dominated throughout the nineteenth century, and most accounts of the period that were discovered through the early nineteenth century were judged against his work.[73] The 1930 'discovery' of the manuscript therefore hailed Nallappa as a 'true historian, and not in any sense, an apologist or eulogist', and as a welcome corrective to the excesses of both '[Hyder's] enemies or of his own Moslem secretaries'.[74]

The historical productions of late eighteenth-century Mysore constitute a heterogeneous tradition in style and content compared with those analysed by Kumkum Chatterjee, for instance,[75] with some texts that did not share the literary accomplishments of the Persian writers. Nor was there a critique of colonial rule, though the ambitions of the British were amply evident by this time. Conforming in style to the Marathi *bakhars*,[76] *Haidar Nama* was written in colloquial Kannada, breathless prose liberally peppered with Persianate and Marathi phrases and terms. Shorn of the trappings of any literary distinction, the writing does not stray from a strictly chronological rendering of political and diplomatic history. As an exegesis on power, *Haidar Nama* does not mourn the justly deserved decline of Wodeyar power, or the dispossession of the Dalawais by Hyder Ali. The narrative of decline did not occupy the same centrality in their accounts as among their contemporaries in Eastern India.[77] Rather, it is the trials and triumphs of the usurper, and the possibility of a new ideal of kingship, that are discussed.

After the British conquest, and well into the nineteenth century, a division of labour quite similar to that achieved in the artistic practices of Mysore was also achieved between forms of official history. The masterly place occupied by Wilks' *Historical Sketches* remained unchallenged, while a large number of hagiographies were authorised by the Mysore court well into the late nineteenth century.[78]

[72] Wilks, *Historical Sketches of the South of India*.

[73] 'Punganuri', *Memoirs of Hyder and Tipu*, p. 1. 'Punganuri's' turn of the century account was unique precisely because it provided a much-needed perspective on the period from among those 'Hindus' who suffered, said Brown, who annotated his translation largely with reference to Wilks' *Historical Sketches*.

[74] Annual Report of the Mysore Archaeological Department for the year 1930, (Bangalore 1934), p. 97.

[75] Chatterjee, 'History as Self Representation', pp. 913–48.

[76] For an excellent description of the *bakhar* genre, see Raeside, *The Decade of Panipat (1751–61)*, p. xi.

[77] Chatterjee, 'History as Self Representation', pp. 923–26.

[78] For instance, Singarayya, *Srimanmaharajadhiraja Sri Chamarajendra Odeyavara Charitre*.

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They testify to a division of labour that was not overcome until institutionalised histories, and more properly nationalist narratives, defined the region anew. The literary critic M. Chidanandamurthy, for instance, hails Wilks as the 'first historian of Karnataka'.[79] He lists some of productions of the Mysore court in the time of Krishnaraja Wodeyar III, and notes the persistence of the loyal, hagiographical mode until the end of the nineteenth century, to suggest that nationalism alone could provide some vigour to the writing of Karnataka history.[80]

By way of conclusion, let me cite from the recent work of Sumathi Ramaswamy, who has excavated in all its fascinating detail the long career of the legend, and indeed the fabulous geography, of the 'lost continent' of Lemuria/Kumarikkantam among the 'devotees' of Tamil well into the twentieth century. How is one to evaluate this extraordinary investment, though by a section of Tamil 'devotees', in an antediluvian world where Tamil once reigned? Ramaswamy suggests that these preoccupations occupy a space that is 'eccentric', and deploys the term 'off-modern' to describe these endeavours, meaning 'ostensibly modern, but not wholly in it or even of it'.[81] Such fantasies, she further suggests, which fly in the face of historical or geological or paleogeographical evidence insofar as they are materialised in maps and textbooks and have an insistent presence, must be seen as contestory or oppositional, even subversive, knowledges.[82] Ramaswamy is only too conscious of the possible dangers, in the current political context, of valorising such subjugated 'knowledge' against 'rationalizing, imperializing and globalizing agendas'.[83] Moreover, one cannot help thinking that the real object of the Tamil 'labours of loss', whether by the devotees of the language or the historian herself, is still the Indian nation and its historiographers. Thus even the blank space assigned to the nation in the cartographic endeavours of the Tamil 'devotees', which Ramaswamy believes is an act of 'decentering', may in fact be a tacit acknowledgement of the nation-space.[84]

This brief article points to a few sites from which fresh interpretations of the geographical south are being launched. As is quite evident, there is little to suggest that there is a continuing preoccupation with the better-known narratives of colonial conquest and nationalist response. Nor is there an anxiety to confirm or deny south Indian 'exceptionalism'. Instead, the range of issues discussed in such writings testify to confident and independent strands of research that are evidence of a far more decentralised, and in turn 'radically decentering' though by no means 'eccentric', mode of historical production.

[79] Chidanandamurthy, 'Historiography in Karnataka During the Nineteenth Century', p. 160.

[80] *Ibid.*, p. 168. This theme is stressed further in the article by Shastry in 'Historiography in Kannada, 1900-1947', pp. 171–184.

[81] Ramaswamy, *Fabulous Geographies, Catastrophic Histories*, p. 16.

[82] *Ibid.*, p. 215.

[83] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[84] *Ibid.*, p. 215.

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