

Introduction: Monarchism, Print Culture, and Language in Colonial India

SIDDHARTH SATPATHY 
University of Hyderabad, India

HOW was Queen Victoria represented in South Asian languages? A wide range of vernacular authors—from Bharatendu Harishchandra in Hindi to Kandukuri Veeresalingam in Telugu, from Bipin Chandra Pal in Bengali to Shad Azimabadi in Urdu, from Muttu S. Aiyar in Tamil to Iccharam Desai in Gujarati—wrote about the queen in a variety of genres. This vast body of literature on Victoria and other royals, both British and Indian, evolved into a complex language on monarchism. This language flourished before the emergence of popular anticolonial and nationalist movements in the early decades of the twentieth century. To a certain extent it survived during these anticolonial mobilizations and also spilled over to postcolonial times. To investigate how Victoria and others are represented in South Asian vernaculars, to study the language of monarchism at large, is to inquire into the confluence of India's political and literary cultures at the height of imperialism. In the process, Victoria enables this special issue to contribute to a more global understanding of the field known as Victorian studies.

1. VICTORIA IN THE VERNACULAR

Taking the queen as its point of departure, this collection of essays seeks to explore the political and literary lives of the citizen-subjects of the British Empire. It proposes to employ the term “vernacular politics” in order to demarcate its broad field of inquiry. We use the term on two interrelated registers. On one hand, vernacular politics refers to a particular phase in the history of colonialism in South Asia—broadly between the 1870s and 1910s—when the practice of loyalty to monarchical forms of authority enabled Indians to forge public and private roles for themselves, to create and inhabit their diverse lifeworlds. We call this practice of loyalty vernacular in the sense that this mode of fashioning political subjectivities increasingly came to occupy a marginal position vis-à-vis anticolonial popular nationalist imagination. Practices of loyalty often led to discursive constructions of what can be described as “hyperreal”

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queens or kings. These were figures of the imaginary who acquired a concrete presence in the phenomenal world of the colonized Indians.¹ As we engage with such discursive formations in a variety of Indian languages, the broad aim is to re-create the lifeworlds in which they carried significant value. That is, we propose to explore how Indians mobilized the language of monarchism so as to create and inhabit their local worlds. Here, we work with two theses. Indians were not a homogeneous category—social, economic, cultural, and gender differentials deeply marked how they responded to and mobilized monarchism. Also, local did not mean an isolated existence—the sense of the local was often in varying degrees in conversation with the regional, national, and global. We focus on monarchism or *rajabhakti* as a form of loyalty and belonging that deeply informed the political imagination of the period. The essays that follow identify it as a language that enabled Indians to eulogize as well as criticize imperial government. At the same time, we propose that it helped Indians to constitute and occupy a variety of positions, including reformist and conservative, vis-à-vis their own traditions. The role that monarchism played in the formation of colonial modernity in South Asia is a relatively understudied field. The figure of Victoria in this context enables a fuller reckoning with its historical significance.

On the other hand, vernacular politics also refers to the world of print, both elite and popular—to the urban townspeople who created an emerging print market in the vernacular languages as writers, editors, readers, patrons, subscribers, publishers, and sellers. At the heart of this world stood the complex question of how people came to experience vernacular languages, how their relationship with languages evolved in the course of colonialism.² This world of print is where discursive reconstructions of Victoria and monarchism unfold. This special issue aims to engage with the queen's specific location in South Asian print spheres. We do not work with a notion of a singular print sphere. Print spheres in the plural emerged at varying points around the various vernacular languages of South Asia. In some languages, print culture emerged much earlier than others. In some languages, it was more closely in touch with the imperial-global circulation of ideals and tastes than others. Given the uneven development of print culture in South Asia, we explore how the nature and condition of the “public sphere” of a specific language shapes the particular articulation of monarchism within it. In other words, our exploration of monarchism affords us an opportunity to study the trajectories of print capitalism in South Asia.

2. INTERVENTIONS

We situate “Vernacular Victoria” in three specific constituencies of scholarship. The first concerns those studies that locate the queen in nonmetropolitan histories of the empire. They help us explore how Victoria enabled nonmetropolitan actors to make sense of their positions in an imperial world. Sarah Carter and Maria Nugent study the ways in which indigenous people in settler colonies incorporated Victoria into “their intellectual thought, political rhetoric, and narrative traditions” and analyze “the ideas and interpretations . . . which Indigenous people have formulated and articulated *about*—or, more accurately, *through*—Queen Victoria in response to the colonial encounter.”³ This focus is supplemented by analyses of how Queen Victoria “viewed her Indigenous ‘subjects’” and how colonial officials “employed the figure of the monarch in their dealings with the peoples.”⁴ What emerges from these explorations is a richer history of colonial relations and “Indigenous politics.”⁵ Most relevant to the present volume is Miles Taylor’s revisionist history, which explains a complex question of imperial political theology: “Indeed, the nascent years of Indian nationalism saw the apotheosis of Queen Victoria’s popularity. Why was this so?”⁶ He responds by arguing that “Loyalism was deployed as a political device, a language of politics, enabling Indian reformers to push back the envelope of colonial power as much as possible.”⁷ As a language of politics, loyalism tells less about an unqualified attachment to Britain and more about the local philanthropy and civic patriotism of Indians. In Taylor’s final analysis, the “figure of the queen-empress offered a way of articulating citizenship without talking about the nation.”⁸ Also relevant is Milinda Banerjee’s argument that the colonial regime’s larger move toward centralization of political power in India involved a royalization of governance. That is, it involved the formation of a discourse on monarchic authority and its particular suitability for the government of the colonized Indians.⁹ Consequently, Queen Victoria and others after her were projected as the benevolent monarch. This monarch, the argument went, would effectively usher in progress and propel primitive Indians into the realms of modernity (51). Indians, the argument continued, could not relate to state authority in an abstract sense and needed a personal manifestation in the figure of the monarch to relate to (52, 67–68). Banerjee excavates a fundamental contradiction at the heart of this royalization of colonial governance, which he calls “the problem of ‘the absent Sovereign’” (72). On one hand, the colonial state indulged in

“economic exploitation and racial subordination” of India, and on the other hand, it sought to position the British monarch as a benevolent father figure who cared for his subjects (73, 72). This contradiction led colonized Indians to experience the British monarch as a sovereign whose paternal care is largely absent. “Many Indians,” he concludes, “therefore critiqued the British monarchy as a fake kingship that masked Britain’s impersonal and institutionalized exploitation of Indians” (52). These notions of indigenous politics, loyalism, or the absent sovereign point toward the ways in which nonmetropolitan inhabitants of the empire created their meanings of the unequal world they lived in. The essays here, as we will see shortly, are in sympathy with this line of inquiry.

A second constituency addressed by these essays concerns works on Indian princes and their relationship with colonialism and modernity. Monarchism evolved and acquired new lives in colonial India. Victoria was a crucial part of the story. In her classic study, Barbara Ramusack observes that colonial rulers and the Indian princes developed a patron-client relationship in which they “used each other” to work toward their goals.¹⁰ If the former chased “imperial dominance,” the latter sought “greater control over their internal allies and challengers and a larger share of local revenues.”¹¹ Progressive native princes were hailed as “living examples of the Indian ability to govern themselves and to do so with wisdom and innovation.”¹² Manu Bhagavan investigates “princely modernity” and situates it within a larger story not of collaboration with but contestation of colonialism.¹³ Inspired by “nationalist imaginaries,” princely reformers in Baroda and Mysore brought in improvement in their internal institutions of government and education so as to contest the rhetoric of colonialism.¹⁴ In the process, they unfurled a vision of “‘native’ modernity,” mounted a fundamental rejection of “the Westernness of modern institutions,” and questioned “the modernity of the British themselves.”¹⁵ In her turn, Janaki Nair explores “the role played by the bureaucracy in lieu of an absent bourgeoisie” in the reformation of Mysore’s princely state in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁶ The bureaucracy derived its power from “the despotic colonial regime” and presided over the process of modernization in the name of “indigenous princely authority.”¹⁷ It sought to substitute the nationalist political project with the promise of state-sponsored good governance.¹⁸ Whichever plot device we may employ to describe the history of monarchism in colonial India—collaboration, contestation, or bureaucracy—reform remains the most crucial theme. Victoria often acquired her vernacular life, some of our essays point out, in this milieu of monarchical reformism.

The third intellectual constituency in which we locate vernacular Victoria concerns cultures of printing and literary production in colonial India. Studies most relevant to our present discussion pose questions about the role of royal and state patronage in the formation of print markets in Indian languages, about the social composition of the print spaces, and about literary forms and their usages. There is room here to discuss two classic interventions of recent times. In her wide-ranging study of Hindi- and Urdu-language markets in North India in the nineteenth century, Ulrike Stark underlines the “complex transactional relations” between private Indian print entrepreneurs and colonial state authority.¹⁹ Successful collaborations as well as long-drawn economic disputes marked this transactional relationship. She shows how the largest private print entrepreneur of the period, the Naval Kishore Press of Lucknow, relied heavily on the patronage of the colonial state, “in the various forms of a license grant, technological and material support, and printing contracts,” for its phenomenal success in the market (226, 82). In return, the colonial state sought to turn the printing press into “an instrument of colonial rule” and deploy it “in the dissipation of information and the spread of ‘useful’ knowledge in the Indian languages” (226). Most interestingly, the colonial state’s patronage of the press peaked during the high noon of Victoria’s reign in the late 1880s.²⁰ In a return gesture of sorts, Naval Kishore’s contributions to various state-initiated philanthropic projects during the 1880s was liberal in the best sense of the term. He donated large sums of money to the Lady Dufferin Fund to open a hospital in Lucknow. He also donated handsomely to establish the Lucknow Jubilee High School, whose inaugural marked Victoria’s jubilee (132–34). In short, the private print entrepreneur, the colonial state, and, if we may add, Victoria were embedded in a “symbiotic relationship” (226). A. R. Venkatachalapathy’s history of print space in Tamilnadu in South India is organized around the rise of the Tamil middle class and the accompanying evolution of the bourgeois art form of the Tamil novel. In this narrative, traditional forms of patronage offered by native princes, *zamindars*, and religious monasteries continued to operate though on a reduced scale until at least the close of the nineteenth century. A middle-class consumer public gradually replaced them in the second and third decades of the twentieth century. This transformation in the social and economic circumstances of literary production was accompanied by a transformation in literary taste. Readers no longer valued traditional literary forms such as *thala puranams* and eulogies and began to invest their resources in popular

novels.²¹ Afterward, the Tamil novel acquired respectability when the literary form lent its services to the dissemination of Indian nationalist sentiments in the late 1930s.²² This short review helps us locate two general historical trends. The relationship between Indian print entrepreneurship and the colonial state was often of a transactional nature. And it was seen in the best lights during specific imperial occasions such as a jubilee. In addition, the social composition of the print space went through transformations—the middle-class public came to jostle with the traditional patrons. And social composition had its impact on literary taste and forms. Some of our essays engage with these trends.

3. NOVEL DEPARTURES

The story of vernacular Victoria is thus one of nonmetropolitan histories of the British empire, of India's princely modernities, of the uneven socialization of print and the complex cultures of literary production in colonial India in the long nineteenth century. The present collection learns from the studies available. It also seeks to extend scholarship in two directions. First, it seeks a fuller exploration of the political languages of loyalty and belonging to monarchical forms of government. Miles Taylor takes note of the "formulaic" nature of the language.²³ For Milinda Banerjee, vernacular texts about the British royalty demonstrate "some success of the colonial state in imprinting veneration for British pageantry among the ruled."²⁴ The present volume seeks to move beyond the paradigms of the formulaic and the state and to study how the hyperreal Victorias they constructed helped Indian authors to inhabit their colonial lifeworlds. The essays employ a range of terms—"negotiated loyalty," "provincial Victorians," "sonic incorporation," "colonial secularity"—to reconstruct complex histories of relating to Victoria's empire.

First and foremost, these histories are about Indian aspirations and negotiations. Ayesha Mukherjee explores local projects of cultural recovery among the Parsi intelligentsia in Bombay. Authors like Dastur Behramji Sanjana, Dosabhai Bahmanji, and Sohrabji Kuvarji Jivaji Taskar produced Persianate laudatory poetry that situated Victoria and her children in a pantheon of ancient Zoroastrian religious and historical figures. This laudatory response to the empress and her family went hand in hand with a larger project by the literati to recover a pre-Mughal Zoroastrian theological-textual heritage and to assert linguistic, historical, and political "priority" over the Mughals. Ancient Zoroastrian

tradition, the poetry implied, furnished better models of just imperial governance than the Mughals. Articulation of loyalty was thus less about the empress and more about local Parsi politics and aspirations.

In a similar vein, Arti Minocha reconstructs the world of Hardevi. A member of the reformist Arya Samaj circles of Lahore, Hardevi edited an early Hindi-language periodical for women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She traveled to London to attend Victoria's jubilee celebrations in 1887 and subsequently brought out two commemorative narratives in Hindi, *London Yatra* and *London Jubilee*. Minocha studies how these narratives enabled the author to fashion a modern gendered autobiographical subject who is both fascinated with and critical of the empire. She shows how this gendered self imagines herself to be part of a local "society of sisters in the Punjab" as well as a "global community of women."

Pramantha Tagore draws our attention to music history in Calcutta and shows how early musicologists such as Kshetramohan Goswami and Sourindro Mohun Tagore composed songs for Victoria in Sanskrit, and how such compositions enabled them to inaugurate a modern project of music education in the colonial metropolis. In Victoria, Sourindro Mohun and other reformists of the generation discovered the themes they most cherished, purity and power. Weaving music around her provided them with a way to belong to the local projects of cultural reform as well as to the empire.

Reading Victoria as "a sign taken for wonder," Vijay Kumar Tadakamalla shows how the queen was embedded in both reform and counterreform projects in colonial Andhra. He brings two Telugu public intellectuals of the nineteenth-century, Kandukuri Veeresalingam and Kokkonda Venkatarathnamu Pantulu, into dialogue with each other. The first produced a biography of the queen, and the latter wrote a laudatory verse narrative for her. Their reformist and counterreformist aspirations congealed around Victoria, the multivalent sign.

These histories of local aspirations and negotiations invariably involve a wide variety of translations. Brannon Ingram shows how Indo-Persian political-theological vocabulary was deployed along with British Protestant idioms to translate Victoria's promises of secularity and toleration into Urdu. His close reading of the queen's proclamation of 1858 draws out two larger arguments. First, the proclamation unfurled a governmental project to normatively distinguish between what falls under the category of the religious and what could be safely described as the nonreligious. Second, in the process of defining what counted

as religious, the colonial regime ended up reconceptualizing it as private conscience or experience. Brannon shows how this reconceptualization led the colonial state, ironically, to interfere in the more public manifestations of the religious.

John McLeod draws attention to Mancherjee Merwanjee Bhownagree's translation of Victoria's *Leaves from the Journal of Our Life in the Highlands* (1868) into modern formal literary Gujarati in 1877. He shows how the translation addressed itself to two specific classes of audiences: the princes of the autonomous states including those of Bhavnagar, Kutch, Wadhwan, Morvi, and Junagadh on one hand, and the wealthy Gujarati-speaking Parsi merchants including Sir Cowasjee Jehangeer Readymoney on the other hand, who were the leading lights of Bombay's colonial civil society. The narrative, Bhownagree hoped, would furnish examples of Victoria's "habitual kindness and regard" toward "all classes of her subjects" and would thereby deliver "many a salutary and much needed lesson" to the Indian princes. McLeod argues that such translations from English were an integral part of the history of modern Gujarati literature.

In my essay, I study how a language of monarchism evolved in Odia in the urban print space of nineteenth-century Cuttack. The core terms of the language—Providence, market rationalism, and character—had long metropolitan histories. I show the ways in which they were translated into Odia and acquired colonial lives at Cuttack. Baptist missionaries deployed the idiom of Providence to construct conservative as well as radical modes of belonging to the monarchical empire. Urban entrepreneurs and civic leaders mobilized the language of market rationalism to negotiate with the local representatives of the British queen. Princely states patronized literary projects to represent the modern character of the royals as the best assurance of good governance. Victoria was at the heart of this Odia language of *rajabhakti* or monarchism.

Ellen Ambrosone's essay revolves around a central question: Why would M. R. Madhava Warriar, a Travancore State Congress activist and editor of the newspaper *Malayali*, write a laudatory biography of Victoria in Malayalam at the height of the civil disobedience movement in 1931? An adaptation of Sidney Lee's biography of Victoria, Warriar's life narrative aimed to educate not only the noble women of Kerala but also possibly hoped to provide counsel to another queen, Sethu Lakshmi Bayi of Travancore, in the art of governance.

These vernacular histories of Victoria are about the celebrations, lamentations, ironies, disappointments, and disruptions that attend

them. That is, we draw attention to the uneven texture of the archives. Shraddha Kumbhojkar describes the language of acquiring human rights in which Marathi writers in the circle of Jyotirao Phule celebrated the reign of Victoria. Attention to this as well as other political idioms prevalent in colonial Maharashtra, she argues, helps us acquire a more heterogeneous understanding of the multiple ways in which colonized Indians responded to the liberal promises of the empire.

Swapan Chakravorty studies a host of Bengali *littérateurs*, from Dinabandhu Mitra to Saratchandra Chattopadhyay, who consistently draw the reader's attention to the gulf that existed between the liberal promises of Victoria's proclamation and the everyday reality of life in a colonized society that was marked by race, class, and gender inequalities. For instance, Saratchandra's short story "Mahesh," published in 1922, has an allusion to the queen. The protagonist, a poor peasant in rural Bengal, protests against the summons of an irascible zamindar and says, "Under the Queen's reign, no one is a slave. I pay my rent, I won't go." The peasant is duly beaten up. "Victoria's absent presence," Chakravorty argues, "was a necessary figment of an immature hegemony."

Brannon Ingram shows how evangelical missions hoped to bring a note of disruption into Victoria's language of noninterference. They questioned, for instance, whether intervention in caste-related practices counted as interference in religion or not. As they questioned the norm of noninterference itself, they sought to acquire "a religious exceptionalism" for themselves that would legitimize their continuing interference.

Ellen Ambrosone argues that M. R. Madhava Warriar's biography of Victoria also spoke to a history of reform in Travancore. Though her position as the Maharani regent was directly based on the history of matrilineal law in Travancore, Sethu Lakshmi Bayi ironically ushered in "reform" that replaced the matrilineal inheritance system with a patrilineal one. Her ironical position resembled that of Victoria, who was herself a powerful woman monarch and a staunch critic of women's rights.

Pritipuspa Mishra mobilizes an "active" understanding of lamentation and explores the political work this mode of literary articulation performs in an elegy composed for "mother Victoria" in early twentieth-century Odisha. It enables the poet, the well-known Brahmo public intellectual Madhusudan Rao, to vernacularize Victoria and locate her within an Odia discursive tradition. At the same time, it helps him situate the Odia-speaking people and their political demands in a larger global framework of good imperial governance.

Second, most available studies of colonial cultures of print and literary production in India concentrate on one or two language traditions. The hyperreal figure of Victoria had a wide circulation in a range of Indian languages and beyond. Our choice to mobilize Victoria as a lens helps the present issue bring several language traditions into the same field of analysis and, in so doing, acquire a comparative perspective on the uneven nature of print's socialization in India in the long nineteenth century. Diverse kinds of patronage networks were crucial to this world of print. Native princely states played significant roles. John McLeod furnishes a history of the publication of Victoria's *Leaves from the Journal of Our Life in the Highlands* in Gujarati. The translator was the Bombay representative of the prince of Bhavnagar. Of the 490 copies of the book sold in advance, 276 were purchased by Bhavnagar and other princely states of Gujarat. Ellen Ambrosone shows that Kerala Varma, of the royal family of Travancore, and his close associates wrote and published a number of verse narratives on Victoria in Sanskrit. These included a *mahakavya* or epic narrative on the history of the British Empire. The material histories of printing also varied. In the high Anglo-Parsi circles of Bombay, Ayesha Mukherjee observes, "coterie texts" containing laudatory verse for the royals were printed on fine paper with photographs, and copies of it were framed, mounted, and presented to grand officials. In the less affluent circles of the landed elite of southern Odisha, I point out, printing was more functional. Slim biographies of British royals were printed and distributed free of cost. Wide plebian dissemination was aimed at and accomplished. The networks embedded in this print world operated on diverse scales. Arti Minocha shows that Hardevi's Hindi-language accounts of Victoria's jubilee celebrations in London were reported in metropolitan English-language digests and thus became a part of what has been termed the "imperial commons," that is, a common collection of textual resources, which inhabitants of the British Empire could draw upon.²⁵ Pramantha Tagore shows that Sourindro Mohun's collections of lyrics dedicated to Victoria—*Victoria Gitika*, *Victoria Samrajyan*, *Victoria Giti-Mala*, and *Srimad-Victoria-Mahatmyam*—were part of a global network of music libraries. Most of them included English translations of original lyrics in Sanskrit. Most of them also featured both Indian and Western notation systems. These songbooks could thus appeal to an imperial global audience. Some of the other Indian-language publications related to Victoria circulated along more limited networks. Finally, Mandakini Dubey turns to the material traces of vernacular Victoria in her epilogue.

4. CONCLUSION

Vernacular Victoria helps us in some measure to reimagine Victorian studies. Many of the language traditions these essays draw upon have deep histories of their own. An account of the Victorias embedded in these language traditions not only lends a global perspective to Victorian studies but also creates room for Victorian studies in these South Asian literary and political histories. The essays we present to the reading public thus seek to create a dialogue between colonial and metropolitan discursive traditions and emphasize the many languages in which the inhabitants of the British Empire made sense of the worlds around them. We will be rewarded if they draw and retain the reader's interest.

NOTES

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1. I borrow the term "hyperreal" from Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 27–28.
2. For work that engages with these questions, see Mitchell, *Language, Emotion, and Politics*.
3. Carter and Nugent, *Mistress of Everything*, 1.
4. Carter and Nugent, *Mistress of Everything*, 2, 1.
5. Carter and Nugent, *Mistress of Everything*, 14, 9.
6. Taylor, *Empress*, 210.
7. Taylor, *Empress*, 211.
8. Taylor, *Empress*, 233.
9. Banerjee, *The Mortal God*, 55. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
10. Ramusack, *The Indian Princes*, 6.
11. Ramusack, *The Indian Princes*, 6; also see 130–31.
12. Ramusack, *The Indian Princes*, 166.
13. Bhagavan, *Sovereign Spheres*, 5, 6.
14. Bhagavan, *Sovereign Spheres*, 7.
15. Bhagavan, *Sovereign Spheres*, 8.
16. Nair, *Mysore Modern*, 15.
17. Nair, *Mysore Modern*, 15.

18. Nair, *Mysore Modern*, 17–18.
19. Stark, *An Empire of Books*, 225. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
20. State patronage declined sharply thereafter, reaching a nadir during the opening years of the twentieth century. Stark, *An Empire of Books*, 264–65.
21. Venkatachalapathy, *The Province of the Book*, 47–48, 75.
22. Venkatachalapathy, *The Province of the Book*, 95–96.
23. Taylor, *Empress*, 232.
24. He argues that the texts represented “the sovereigns as virtuous human beings” and thus “Colonial power was anthropomorphised to render it innocuous.” Simultaneously, they “implicitly deprived the colonial rulers of their racial superiority and presented them as instruments of a celestial order . . . where ultimate authority rested with Indic gods.” Banerjee, *The Mortal God*, 76.
25. Burton and Hofmeyr, *Ten Books*, 4.

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