History and Myth
Postcolonial Dimensions

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Preface

The idea behind the present anthology *History and Myth: Postcolonial Dimensions* is to bring to the fore the postcolonial perspectives on myth and history with the help of select articles by scholars and researchers from across the globe. This book seeks to discover the truth and restore the national pride of the colonially subjugated nations by reclaiming the meaning of their past strengthened by their myths and histories. It is a known fact that our current understanding of histories and myths of the former European colonies is primarily influenced by the colonially fashioned binaries like civilized/barbaric, valid/invalid, inclusive/exclusive, relevant/irrelevant, true/false, good/bad, and many more. These binaries continue to preserve the epistemological and the ontological citadels of coloniality and selectively promote such narratives that celebrate the superiority of colonial/Western ideologies and the inferiority of Rest-ern beliefs and practices. In this view, the authors herein interrogate the templates of colonial/western histories and myths in a multidimensional manner.

A look into the history of colonialism informs us that the European expansion over India, China, Southeast Asia, the Americas, and Africa initially began as a commercial expedition but soon acquired the traits of cultural imperialism. The Industrial Revolution resulted in an economic acceleration in Europe, which increased the demand for colonial expansion and naval control. In due course of time, it transformed the entire world into a ready market for the British manufacturers, which increased the need for technologies, discoveries, advanced modes of transport, new laws, and regulations to fulfill the trade needs.

The growing wealth of Europe was inversely proportional to the economic condition of Asia, Africa, and other colonies as they lost their power and glory under colonial impact and consequently became geographically, politically, and culturally subjugated. Hence, Europe continued to emerge as a reliable economic and military power that infused a sense of superiority in its people. The colonizers began to feel insurmountable and had a natural right to rule over the non-Europeans. This situation resulted in the racial supremacy of the Whites and developed in them the illusion that it was their responsibility being white men to civilize the inferior people of color residing in the non-European countries. Thus, the industrial mission, by and large, became civilizational, and the coercive and illegitimate measures began to be employed by the masters to teach and civilize the non-Europeans. This civilizational burden divided the

world into three categories – civilized, uncivilized, and barbaric, in which the Europeans represented the first category.

The principles of Christian morality became a prominent tool in the execution of civilizational missions and the strengthening of the imperial forces. The European colonizers exercised the agenda of church and colonization through various doctrinal means, such as the Papal Bull, *Terra Nullius*, Capitulation, the discovery of new lands, assault on indigeneity, and misuse of the rule of law. Papal Bull was a kind of public decree or charter issued by the Pope of the Catholic Church to encourage the kings to conquer the undiscovered lands, enslave their non-Christian populations and acquire their resources. The doctrine of discovery strengthened the project of colonization which sanctified genocide besides attacking the land and indigeneity of those people. Likewise, the colonizers unlawfully obtained many territories through the exercise of the doctrine of *Terra Nullius*. By considering the lands owned by non-Christians as *Terra Nullius* (nobody's land), this principle gave the Christian kingdoms of Europe a legitimate grant to claim and kill non-Europeans and non-Christians. The capitulation was another measure to annex territories through a unilateral pact, contract, or treaty by which a sovereign state gives away jurisdiction within its borders over the subjects of a foreign state. The Europeans' tools and strategic measures to conquer over others proved more effective than launching any battle. Above all, a decisive nail in the coffin was the historical Vienna Congress of 1815. With this, Europe declared itself the international legislator and hijacked laws to exercise aggressive imperialism.

The Christian missionaries that went to Africa promised the natives to show them the path of salvation by gifting a copy of the Bible. They acquired their land and territory, and declared Africa a dark continent by the 19th century. Similarly, Asia was portrayed as exotic, infidel, and vicious, and European colonizers developed various mechanisms to utilize this depiction to prove Asian culture inferior. This condition resulted in the mass killing and erasure of non-Christian natives and indigenous communities; their history, myths, rituals, traditions, language, and religion, along with their geopolitical identities. Knowing this helps us understand how the various forms of indigenous histories and myths have been dehumanized, and how the colonial/Western constructed narratives have undergone universal propagations across different segments of time and space.

It is pretty evident that the colonial masters not only imposed their language, culture, tradition, religion, lifestyle, and food habits on the subjugated people during colonialism and imperialism, but they also gave their interpretation of the history, culture, and myth of the indigenous people in the name of civilizing them. With a *modus operandi* to rule over others, they boasted of their racial superiority and induced inferiority in the minds of the colonized people.

Consequently, the subjugated people were forced to forget their national pride and accept the terms and conditions of slavery and capitulation imposed on them. In the post-second world war period, the independence of Afro-Asian countries brought about a kind of national awakening in the newly independent nation-states. At the same time, the postcolonial movement in humanities and social sciences in the form of discourses also gained a slow but steady momentum. One welcome outcome of this was the revival of the interest of the third world scholars in having a fresh look at their history, myth, culture, knowledge, and practices to redefine, restructure, and resurrect the same in a pristine manner to the extent possible.

Postcolonial consciousness, which emerged as a reaction to Eurocentrism, sought to produce counter-narratives to the grand narratives structured, imposed, and inserted in the non-European nations by the colonial masters. It has been realized over the years that the deeply rooted colonialism cannot be dislodged so easily unless and until the native history, myth, and culture of the former colonies are revived, regained, and re-established. Decolonial thinking and doing in this regard may be seen as a systematic study to analyze the theory, praxis, and politics of colonization. The voices of non-Western countries favor the redefinition of their identity and the need for self-determination to be articulated with great force. Hence, in recent years, postcolonial and decolonial discourses have gained much currency, and scholars and researchers in this field have given their best to dissolve the binaries erected by the West.

The book contains seven chapters based on the intensive and extensive study on the issues related to myth and history from postcolonial perspectives. It has been broadly divided into two sections. Section one, titled "Postcolonialism and/in Texts: Histories and Myths," contains four essays reflecting on the issues related to material development and human regression, postcolonial imaginary, ancient stories, and their current praxes; whereas the second section, "Decoloniality: Experiences and Engagements" discusses in detail the issues related to race, reconstruction of the myth of Hindutva, the notion of Indian patriarchy, dehierarchization and decolonization of postcolonial existence, and the Indian way of feminism from postcolonial perspectives. A separate and independent chapter as an introduction to this book has been written by Waseem Anwar, who offers critical exposition and theoretical account of the theme of the present work. It is followed by the essays of different authors who provide a new understanding of the history, myth, culture, tradition, etc.

Diptarup Ghosh Dastidar's chapter "Material Development and Human Regression: A Decolonial Reading of Orijit Sen's *River of Stories*" reflects how capital and capital-generating resources widely contributed to the evolution of

European colonialism in India. To justify the arguments, the author analyzes the conflicting lifestyles depicted in Orijit Sen's graphic novel *River of Stories* (1994). The novel's narrative deals with the construction of the Rewa Sagar dam and the reactions against it by the locals, as seen by a journalist from *Voice* who goes to cover the story. A parallel narrative voice of Malgu Gayan, the village singer, adds a fantastical element to the report by creating a myth-oriented history of the setting, which is then challenged by colonial voices, where history and facts have tampered to justify actions against the natives.

"A Tale of Things: Decoloniality of Memory in Orhan Pamuk's *The Museum of Innocence*" by Chand Basha explores the geopolitical memory of the city and its cultural location in the era of globalization in Pamuk's novel published in 2009. The article precisely addresses the lived experiences on the edge of Europe, the orientalist perspective attributed to it, and the decolonial gestures of Pamuk. While addressing the question of decolonizing the museum, the author clarifies that the process of decolonizing the museum does not propose the idea of eliminating museum culture from the axiomatic trajectory of the aesthetic and critical representation of cultures. However, it seeks to transform the museum as a source of story and space narratives. Altogether, Pamuk's criticism of the flashy stories of native cultures has been analytically highlighted, which opens another space between the decolonial museum and personal museum.

The chapter "Post-9/11, Cultural Amnesia and Representation(s) of Islamophobia in Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced*" by Abhisek Ghosal highlights the playwright's emphasis on the interactions among postcolonial ambivalence, security, and transnational resistance to divulge the possibility of putting up the global resistance to the act of distortion as practiced by the United States. Further, the essay interrogates as well as deflates the efforts of Akhtar to build up a postcolonial imaginary. The study shows that the play is a rant on Islamophobic discourses that are sponsored and propagated, according to the playwright, by the US authorities on the Muslim immigrants. The author also argues that Akhtar has taken up representational politics at a crucial moment when the US launches a war on terror policy and puts cultural amnesia at work.

Feroza Jussawalla's chapter "Ancient Stories, Current Praxes: Decolonial Myths in Contemporary Literature" posits that myths have always had a decolonial purpose of connecting culture with its indigenous or local stories both at the moment of contact and in the moments of stress. The scholar has attempted to distinguish between the notions of decolonial and decolonizing by underlining that the decolonial moment is the moment of interaction and awareness that later on leads to decolonizing. The author also refers to the Mexican myth of La Llorona through *The Little Mermaid* and instances from

Joyce to D.H. Lawrence (who also uses Mexican myths) to underscore the importance of the female voice in the liberation of the other.

The chapter "White as Paper, Black as Ink: Bilali Muhammad and the Transdisciplinary Imperative" by Adam Short studies the epic tale of Bilali Muhammad and identifies the tropes this story violates. It reveals how such stories are being prevented from being told even when Hollywood is looking for scripts that incorporate themes of black liberation. Further, it shows how the distinct Muslim characters of the Bilali Muhammad story make it incredibly dissonant with the fictionalized version of black history, usually presented by Hollywood. The author believes that it is necessary to transcend the boundaries of various academic disciplines and participate in preserving and perpetuating cultures.

The chapter "Beyond Western Eyes: Theorizing Feminism in the Indian Context" by Chandrakala Padia attempts to construct an Indian theory of feminism and foregrounds how due to ethnocentric and Eurocentric biases present in the Western Feminist discourse, an Indian theory of feminism could not evolve the way it should have; however, there was no shortage of literary and sociological writings in both classical and modern languages of India. The argument uncovers the misreading of ancient Indian texts by many Western as well as Indian scholars. It also brings to the fore how these scholars have distorted the meaning of *parampara* (tradition) in the Indian worldview, which led to the false representations of Indian and Third World Women, and how their limited understanding of the Sanskrit language led to wrong translations of Indian texts leading to the justification of many unhealthy practices in the Indian society.

The final chapter of this edited volume is Guni Vats' "The Reconstruction of the Myth of Hindutva and the Great Indian Patriarchy." It endeavors to read contemporary India's political scenario as a text to study how myths have been exploited to construct new Indian patriarchy. Every intellectual is busy saving the constitution, and women are on the back foot. Here, the postcolonial issues have been analyzed from the patriarchal perspective. The author believes that the semiology of myth dictates a specific meaning that is more often colored with hierarchy bias. The symbols are already loaded with hierarchical explanations, and the process of deciphering their intentions also clung to the structure responsible for constructing them.

The anthology, on the whole, is a humble attempt to enrich our understanding of postcolonial consciousness because of myth and history concerning theory, practice, and politics. The topics covered in this volume have regional and global relevance as they unravel the complex layers of biasedly framed narratives. Therefore, the anthology offers a symphony of select chapters expressive of diverse opinions from different spatiotemporal zones at one

place. Since it is difficult to cover all the dimensions of the postcolonial studies in a single book, only special issues have been taken up by the authors to indicate the possibility of new researches. We hope that this volume would make a meaningful contribution to the enrichment of existing studies and research in this area.

In accomplishing this book project, the contribution and support of many people need to be sincerely acknowledged. Professor B.C. Nirmal, Law School, Banaras Hindu University and former Vice-Chancellor, National University of Study and Research in Law, Ranchi (India) and Professor Chandrakala Padia, Department of Political Science, Banaras Hindu University, former Vice-Chancellor, Maharaja Ganga Singh University, Bikaner, and former Chairman, Governing Body, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla (India) suggested the idea of editing a volume of this kind. We are thankful to them for their encouragement and support. We feel indebted to Professor Diana Fox, Chairperson of Anthropology, Bridgewater State University, Massachusetts, for gracing the book with her illuminating Foreword and Professor Waseem Anwar, Forman Christian College Lahore, Pakistan, for contributing a highly comprehensive introduction to this volume. We feel incredibly grateful to Shankhadeep Chattopadhyay and Kathakali Sengupta for patiently and thoroughly proofreading the manuscript. We also express our gratitude to the authors interested in the present study who contributed their articles to be anthologized herein. The Vernon Press, USA, and its entire editorial team extended all possible support in the publication of this book. Their contribution is humbly acknowledged.

July 2021

Arti Nirmal

Sayan Dey

Foreword

Diana J. Fox
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The present collection pertains to myth and history. It includes an eclectic array of creative chapters adopting both postcolonial and decolonial frames to analyze a play, a novel, an ambiguously ethnic neighborhood, a novel about a museum, mythological narratives vis-à-vis the patriarchal state, a legal document crafted by a Muslim slave in North America, a critically reflective comic strip, the nature of lived-experience and more. The book is organized into two segments, first "Postcolonialism and/in Texts: Histories and Myths," followed by "Decoloniality: Experiences and Engagements." Together, these themes indicate the editors' intention of demonstrating the far reach of decoloniality into multiple arenas of cultural life and production.

The editors' pressing political purview is also clear: decoloniality is a necessary and urgent praxis for revealing and condemning the long reach of colonial distortions that have caused great suffering. Decolonial praxis is a prerequisite to building equitable and sustainable societies. Diptarup Ghosh Dastidar, in his chapter on "Material Development and Human Regression: A Decolonial Reading of Orjit Sen's *River of Stories*," a story in comic-book format, observes that the comic book serves as a form of visuality that humanizes the wretched and communicates sensitive concerns like human dignity and value for life. There is an idea gaining ground across the social and life sciences promoted by Julia Rhoher, a personality psychologist at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development, called "intellectual humility, the characteristic that allows for the admission of wrongness" (cited in Resnick 5). In a 2019 article about intellectual humility, Brian Resnick explains: "People who score higher on intellectual humility questionnaires are more open to hearing opposing views. They more readily seek out information that conflicts with their worldview. They pay more attention to evidence and have a stronger self-awareness when they answer a question incorrectly" (4). I find an exciting and essential overlap between the purviews of post- and decolonial scholars and intellectual humility: it is a necessary ingredient to challenge the matrix of ideologies that have created a vast hierarchical world of enormous inequality. Those who wish to preserve this inequality the most have the least intellectual humility—which tells us something about the kind of mindset training that decolonial pedagogies must adopt. Over time, these accounts have built portraits of those who came "under western eyes" (Mohanty 334)

that not only ignore and undermine pre-colonial worlds but twist and deform peoples' conceptions of themselves through what Gayatri Spivak has referred to as epistemic violence.

How is this collection relevant to what is happening right now in the world, as I write at my kitchen table in Providence, Rhode Island, a space that has been the epicenter of so many women's political activist movements? The world is in the global Covid-19 pandemic, a viral pathogen in company with other pandemics—SARS, Ebola, of the relatively recent past, with more to come, as climate crisis melts the arctic permafrost into our planet's shrinking biodiversity. Growing inequalities wrack the world, billionaires profiteering off the virus, but at the same time, the world's struggling majority is not sitting passively. Instead, we are in the midst of what many are calling the second civil rights movement in my own country. Black Lives Matter protests reverberate across the country, and mediascapes stimulate solidarity with like-minded protests, highlighting regional concerns such as Dalit Lives Matter marches in India and Nepal. In Portland, Oregon, a cross-section of the population spills into the streets to confront federal agents, Department of Homeland Security forces, deployed by the Trump administration to quash the protests. Fascism, nativism, and authoritarianism are rising globally from Brazil to India, across Europe, and back to the United States. And how are US universities responding? Many, including my own, are finally mobilizing into systemic action to bring about decolonized curricula and institutions, supporting platforms and widely distributed anti-racist and decolonial syllabi launched by this collective Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) social movement. This collection of chapters is suited ideally to be incorporated into these new decolonial syllabi across multiple disciplines.

The chapters reintroduce readers to many of the renowned writers in the field, including Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Anibal Quijano, and others, while bringing together many other scholarly voices specific to the particular topics of their chapters. This bibliographical expansion—including the authors of the chapters themselves—is one of the gifts of this volume not only to those specializing in the decolonial project as a genre of analysis but in the broader challenge that decoloniality poses to us in our historical moment: to remake a livable, sustainable world by continuing to conceptualize and actualize decolonial methodology.

Many of the chapters scrutinize 19th and 20th-century British colonial practices and ideologies. Yet, there is the clear implication that these are themselves products of a more extended foundational imperial history that demands unpacking. This is no easy undertaking since one of the most pernicious outcomes of colonialism is the hegemony of positivist, objectivist, heteronormative thought that has undermined, obfuscated, and delegitimized

pre-colonial, Indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge categories. At the same time, colonial knowledge systems were systematically entangled with particular, decontextualized features of pre-colonial thought and practice, reifying them as fixed in the historical and contemporary landscapes. This reality renders the decolonial project inordinately complex. It is tasked with reconstructing pre-colonial worlds of thought and practice and placing them into the flow of history with their contemporary liberatory possibilities through cultural revitalization movements. Therefore, the process of understanding the colonial psyche is a critical step in the creation of social movements that do not reproduce colonial mindsets or narratives that produce colonial renditions of history.

By way of example, it helps think about the value of the decolonial lens to consider how it can be helpful to understand that before British colonialism, India was characterized by a pluralistic, fragmented, cultural, and religious political structure in which there was no monolithic Hindu, Muslim or Christian authority. With the support of British power, the Hindu law expanded its lead across large areas of society that had not known it before "the codification movement of the 1880s brought the castes and tribes that were traditionally outside the Varna system into the Hindu fold, thereby broadening the scope of the Hindu law at a time when there was no real uniform understanding of the term Hindu" (Abraham 68-69).

This cementing of Hindu law was critical to fomenting and normalizing Hindu nationalism, which both fosters a mainly Indian version of Islamophobia and is intertwined with patriarchy, as Guni Vats argues in his chapter, "The Reconstruction of the Myth of Hindutva and the Great Indian Patriarchy." Vats refer to Parashuram, a masculine Hindu epitome, a revered Vishnu incarnation [who] became a crucial mythical character in realizing a Hindu national male identity. Tracing the ideological origins of this revivalist-nationalist tradition remains crucial to understanding contemporary Indian politics, particularly regarding the status of women and the problem of recent Hindu-Muslim violence. Vats focuses specifically on the ideological role of mythology in creating a Hindu patriarchal identity. At the same time, Sarkar argues that material changes in Indian society that introduced insecurity to middle-class landholders, squeezing them out of markets through British colonial policies, were also critical elements in forming Hindu nationalist patriarchy.

This feminist critique is critical in demonstrating that reconstructing pre-colonial and colonial realities is a necessary step in understanding contemporary hierarchies and their associated ideologies. Still, more than this, those contested accounts are part of the process of reviving Indigenous ways of knowing and narrating the world. Linda Tuhiwai Smith explains in *Decolonizing Methodologies:*

Research and Indigenous Peoples (1999) that "the idea of contested stories and multiple discourses about the past, by different communities, is closely linked to the politics of everyday contemporary indigenous life. It is very much a part of the fabric of communities that value oral ways of knowing" (33). Similarly, the decolonial lens is an opening for contestation among decolonial scholars to debate with one another, which is what I have sought to mirror here in the above explication, demonstrating the potential of this collection of essays toward robust decolonial debates across disciplines. One fascinating example of this methodology in the group is Adam Short's chapter, "Inadmissible Blackness: Bilali Muhammad and the Transdisciplinary Imperative." Through careful attention to historiographical reconstruction, drawing on archives, diaries, literature, and films (particularly Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*), Short unwinds more than two centuries of biased and false narratives surrounding the 19th-century Bilali Muhammad's *Meditations*.

Together, the chapters illuminate a range of epistemological strategies for constructing decolonial narratives. These included positioning the author's processes of inquiry and reflection as a challenge to the obfuscation of subjectivity in the educational process, a challenge that feminist thinkers have posed since the 1970s to assumptions of pure objectivity and introduced into decolonial methodologies. For example, feminist theorist Donna Haraway, in her essay, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" (1988), has sought to eradicate what she calls the "god trick" (580) – the positivist assumption that the knowledge of white Euro/American masculinity is universal instead of being situated.

I hope this foreword has offered readers a tantalizing taste through a few examples of what is to come as readers make their way through the chapters, unpacking and dismantling the many intertwining branches of colonialism through post- and decolonial scholarly praxis. In so doing, I urge readers to take steps toward embracing intellectual humility, a process that opens us up to knowing beyond our beliefs. In closing, I would like to encourage readers to reflect on some of the achievements of decoloniality and where we have yet to go. The recognition of this and other deep wisdom surfaced through decoloniality that this book seeks to impress upon us.

2021

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Contributors

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Waseem Anwar is Professor (English) and Director (ICPWE) at Kinnaird College, Lahore. He worked at Forman Christian College and Government College universities as Dean (Humanities) and Chair (English). A Fulbright scholar (twice), former President of the PUAN and Fulbright Alumni Association, he is the recipient of *Gale Group American Scholar*, "Salam Teacher Award – 2004" and HEC "Best Teacher Award – 2003." He is serving the SALA Executive Committee for 3rd time, and his academic credits include *"Black" Women's Dramatic Discourse*, *South Asian Review* (31:3), and a range of articles and conferences.

Diptarup Ghosh Dastidar is a research scholar working on Indian comics from Banaras Hindu University (BHU). His other areas of interest range from music, manga, and world comics to video games and tabletop games (deckbuilding and role-playing mostly), and he has publications in the domain of Indian comics and graphic medicine in reputed journals published by Johns Hopkins University Press and Routledge Taylor & Francis among others. Mr. Ghosh Dastidar is currently also an Assistant Professor in Amity School of Languages, Amity University, Chhattisgarh.

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Feroza Jussawalla is Professor Emerita of English at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. Her most recent co-edited book is *Memory, Voice and Identity: Muslim Women's Writing from Across the Middle East* (Routledge, 2021). She is also co-editor of *Emerging South Asian Women's Writing* (Peter Lang, 2017) and *Interviews with Writers of the Postcolonial World* (Mississippi, 1997), editor of *Conversations with V.S.Naipaul* (Mississippi, 1999), and author of *Family Quarrels: Towards a Criticism of Indian Writing in English* (Peter Lang, 1984). Her collection of poetry is entitled *Chiffon Saris*.

Adam Short is a mathematics student, soccer coach, writer, and father living in Richmond, Virginia. After being surprised to learn of the role of Black filmmakers in the early history of the film while he was researching an adaptation project, he resolved to do his part to advance the modern understanding of the essential contributions of black and indigenous people to the development of American culture.

Chandrakala Padia retired as senior-most professor of the university from the Department of Political Science, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India. She served the university in different capacities: Head, Department of Political Science, Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences; Director, Centre for Women's Studies and Development, B.H.U., and Director, Centre for Integrated Rural Development. She also served as Chairperson, UGC Standing Committee on Women's Studies, Vice-Chancellor, MGS University, Bikaner, Rajasthan, and Chairperson, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Rashtrapati Nivas, Shimla. Her academic credit includes twelve national and international awards and fellowships; nearly fourteen authored and edited books; and more than seventy research articles published in the journals and magazines of scholarly repute.

Guni Vats is a Research Scholar at the University of Lucknow. An avid researcher and a passionate feminist, she has been published in more than twenty books. Writing since an early age, she has developed a keen interest in Gender Studies and Indian Mythology. She has extensively researched the nuances of patriarchy and is trying to deconstruct Indian Femininity. She is a curious soul and aims to shift the center, one question at a time.

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