

Decolonial Subversions

2023–24

Introducing a new, radically
inclusive, decolonial knowledge
landscape

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with
Vimala Katikaneni

Special Issue *Vernacular Cultures of South Asia*

Editorial: Introducing a new, radically inclusive, decolonial knowledge landscape

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*Naan anju maram valarthen
Azhagana thottam vachchen
Thottam sezhithaalum en thonda nanaiyalaye*

I planted five trees
Nurtured a beautiful garden
My garden is flourishing
Yet my throat remains dry

From the Tamil song 'Enjoy Enjaami', Dhee feat. Arivu

A threefold process: Production, legitimisation and inclusivity

This Special Issue has been a long time in the making. Its seeds were first sown about three years ago, when Vimala, from her home in Hyderabad, India, and I, at that time based in London, UK, started envisioning ways in which we could bring the innovative publishing options offered by *Decolonial Subversions* to their full potential, in particular with respect to South Asian vernacular cultures.

Vimala and I met at the end of 2016, when I was attempting to learn Telugu in preparation of my fieldwork in South India and Vimala, a qualified Telugu teacher, had some free time in between her teaching commitments with the American Institute of Indian Studies (AIIS). For a few months, we met daily at her home, where grammar classes intermingled with popular folk songs, words like అన్నము (*annam*, rice, but also food in general), పప్పు (*pappu*, dal), కొబ్బరి కాయ (*kobbarikāya*, coconut) and పచ్చి మిరపకాయలు (*pacci*

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mirapakāyalu, green chillies) became alive in Vimala's kitchen as we cooked ఇడ్లీ (*idli*, a type of savoury rice cake), and our shared passion for the rich cultural expressions of the region led us to visit local handcraft exhibitions and stroll amidst the architectural marvels of Hyderabad's old town. As Vimala encouraged my first clumsy conversations with Cheriya painters and the friendly guardian of the Indo-Islamic Paigah tombs and we exchanged books on folk gods and goddesses, the deep entanglement between everyday life and academics, language and lived culture, crafts and social empowerment became increasingly obvious.²

When, a few years later, *Decolonial Subversions* was established, the idea of a Special Issue on South Asian vernacular cultures emerged during one of our phone conversations. We started to envision bringing together poetry and academic articles, photo essays and opinion pieces, notes from the field and narratives about handcrafts, in a way that could reflect, even if ever so partially, the rich and eclectic landscape of South Asian vernacular cultures. We also wanted to juxtapose different mediums of expression and the contributions of academics, activists and artists, so as to profoundly challenge conventional Eurocentric canons of knowledge production and legitimisation. Most importantly, however, we wanted to publish, side by side, the voices of those who have had the means to acquire and master the skills necessary to partake in mainstream academic discourse and the voices of those who, instead, have never had the opportunity to access such learning environments and, therefore, have persistently been excluded from influential centres of knowledge creation and dissemination. In fact, what is termed 'decolonial' knowledge in academia today, still consists, almost exclusively, of the *representations* of marginalised voices by established authors, as opposed to first-hand accounts of those who are directly concerned. And while the work of such established authors is crucial to shake the ivory tower of mainstream academia from within, we believe that, for academia to become effectively decolonial and inclusive, it is necessary to uproot its very foundations, so that diverse voices can coexist and, importantly, express their thoughts in and on their own terms.

One may ask why any voice that wants to be heard and considered authoritative should at all aim at becoming part of the academic discourse, when academia is inherently seriously flawed and struggles to live up to many of its own foundational values, such as objectivity, meritocracy and justness. It is well-known that with knowledge comes power. It is no surprise, then, that the dynamics underpinning knowledge legitimisation tend to conform with the regimes of truth of those who have historically been in power, and that any attempt by marginalised voices at becoming part of the mainstream discourse have to subscribe to said dynamics. Since, however, criteria of truth and legitimisation are fundamentally arbitrary, whenever marginalised peoples adopt the legitimisation strategies of the

² In a way, Vimala's immersive teaching style anticipated the *guruśiṣya* relationships that I experienced soon thereafter at the temple-complex where I lived during fieldwork. The enmeshed nature of apparently distinct knowledge domains and the propensity to learn by living together are fundamentally different from the compartmentalisation that generally prevails in Western learning contexts; importantly, they inform the critique of various dichotomies in the domain of knowledge, that we wish to exercise through this Special Issue.

domineering discourse, they ultimately reinforce the very power discrepancies that maintain them at the margins.

With this Special Issue, Vimala and I want to move beyond such limitations and create a model of knowledge production and legitimisation that is *effectively* inclusive and overcomes the contradictions plaguing mainstream academia. To be radically inclusive and decolonial means, on one side, to provide marginalised contributors with the technical support they may need but often have no access to; on the other side, crucially, it means to be receptive of oppressed peoples' specific modes of existing in the world and their respective criteria of truth and legitimisation—in practice, this means to formulate processes of knowledge evaluation that are attuned to these modes of being. To do anything other than this means to either perpetuate the marginalisation of oppressed peoples or to condemn them to their own ontological disowning. In fact, because knowledge is also—if not primarily—the result of lived experiences that are informed by one's existential coordinates, to assess different knowledge systems against one same, universalised, Eurocentric backdrop constitutes, not only, epistemic violence but, essentially, an existential threat. We would like to see knowledge, from being a tool of power in the hands of a few, becoming a process of effective empowerment for everyone.

We want to turn the tables around and show that a new, more just and inclusive knowledge landscape is possible, without therefore compromising the rigour that is provided by peer review. This knowledge landscape is the result of a **threefold process** that puts each contributor at the centre and builds around their unique positionality, as opposed to applying standardised parameters indiscriminately.

The **first step** of this process is to facilitate an inclusive environment for knowledge **production**; this translates into adopting techniques that comprehensively counterbalance the disadvantages that contributors and potential contributors face in view of disparities rooted in systemic discriminations, such as colonialism, casteism, classism, ableism and patriarchy, as well as in personal circumstances (such as health conditions and financial constraints).³ This largely entails *technical* support that spans assistance with language, writing-structure and proofreading; it can also entail sidestepping written and, even, digital communication, if a contributor is unlettered, does not have access to internet facilities or possess internet literacy, or if mediated communication simply does not offer the level of comfort necessary to treat certain topics.

The **second step** revolves around knowledge **legitimisation** and is, till date, dreadfully neglected. We believe that this is where the most radical change needs to happen in order to allow for an inclusive knowledge landscape to emerge, and where the most revolutionary input of this Special Issue as a whole lies.⁴ As shown above, matters around knowledge

³ Of course, challenges faced due to systemic and personal circumstances are not reciprocally exclusive and, often, aliment each other generating a ruinous vicious circle.

⁴ Of course, this is only the first attempt at implementing such a model and, as such, remains imperfect and a work in progress. We hope, however, to improve it over time—provided there are resources—and to inspire other publishers to explore this *modus operandi*.

legitimation are of an *ontological* nature and can have existential repercussions. Hence, a thoroughly inclusive and decolonial process of knowledge assessment needs to accommodate a variety of ontological configurations and, importantly, embrace their respective regimes of truth, so that worldviews can be accurately expressed in and on their own terms, as opposed to being reduced or adapted to dominant Eurocentric paradigms. Consequently, reviewers have to be carefully selected based on their ontological attunement with the contributors,⁵ while editors need to cultivate a profound self-reflexivity that leads to the temporary suspension of their own parameters of evaluation, so that unfamiliar regimes of truth can emerge as legitimate.

Since, for the most part, editors working in Eurocentric or otherwise hegemonic environments subscribe to dominant modes of being-in-the-world, this process, if carried out thoroughly, allows non-dominant regimes of truth to move from the margins to the centre.⁶ Of course, such an exercise can be highly disorienting since, to be successful, it requires a sincere effort to deconstruct one's own most elementary notions of beingness and the conceptual framework through which one views and makes sense of the world. I call this an epistemic-ontological dislocation and have illustrated how to actualise it elsewhere.⁷ In addition to self-reflexivity, this process requires humbleness, genuine curiosity and receptiveness towards foreign modes of being-in-the-world; it also necessitates the concerted engagement with an Other and the desire to bridge this 'otherness' through empathy and sharing. Ultimately, it is a labour of care and love, which needs to develop over time and be protracted indefinitely.

Some readers may wonder whether the proposed epistemic-ontological dislocation is at all feasible. In fact, it is highly questionable whether academia, in its current form revolving around neoliberal market demands and fierce competition, offers a space for the labour of reciprocity and love necessary for such diverse flourishing. I want to emphasise, however, that an epistemic-ontological dislocation has been imposed ruthlessly for centuries upon marginalised peoples, demanding that they adopt foreign (and, therefore, alienating) modes of being and regimes of truth, whenever they want to be heard. This means that an epistemic-ontological dislocation, as frightening as it may seem, is far from impossible. Since here we wish to radically turn the tables around, the onus of the emotional and intellectual

⁵ It should be noted that sharing ontological dispositions and their respective regimes of truth does not necessarily correspond with sharing the same geographical background; as such, step 2 of this process is a novel addition to *Decolonial Subversions'* general guideline that foresees that at least one reviewer is from the so-called Global South.

⁶ As step 3 of this threefold model shows, we do not suggest that, eventually, one type of legitimation is substituted by another type, as this would mean to perpetrate current centre–margin hierarchies, only in reversed order. Instead, we envision one inclusive centre (or, ultimately, the absence of a centre) where different models of knowledge legitimation, which reflect different modes of being-in-the-world, coexist side by side with each other in an effectively inclusive manner.

⁷ See Hirmer, Monika. 2022. "Let us now invoke the three celestial lights of Fire, Sun and Moon into ourselves': Magic or everyday practice? Revising existentiality for an emic understanding of Śrīvidyā." In *Tantra, Magic, and Vernacular Religions in Monsoon Asia: Texts, Practices, and Practitioners from the Margins*, edited by Aciri and Rosati, 116–136. London: Routledge.

labour and the likely disorientation deriving from suspending one's paradigms of truth is, for once, on those occupying the centre, who have historically enjoyed and benefitted from ontological primacy.

The **third step** of the threefold process towards a decolonial knowledge landscape is a *collective* one and directly concerns **inclusivity**. It would not have been possible to bring about the type of inclusiveness this Special Issue stands for without the participation of both contributors positioned at the centre and contributors relegated to the margins. Each of the scholars who either master the skills to access mainstream academia or are already partaking in it could have published their contribution in another, more conventional journal with a faster turn-around and a more influential readership. Had they not embraced the cause for a radically decolonial publishing model (and the challenges coming with it) and published elsewhere, this Special Issue's aims could have been fulfilled only partially. In fact, a collection dedicated to the works of marginalised authors alone would have been valuable in its own rights, but could not have challenged centre–margin dichotomies at their root. Separating these publications from others would have meant to still subscribe to binaries—even if within a value-system that appreciates 'alternative' worldviews—with the risk of cascading into old and new hierarchies.

Here, we not only want to cherish vernacular worldviews but, importantly, we want to create a radically inclusive space where centres and margins eventually cease to hold meaning. We hope that this Special Issue, in juxtaposing the works of contributors with vastly different levels of privilege and worldviews—which, crucially, are legitimised according to their inherent regimes of truth—brings across the point that a decolonial space is one that, not only, welcomes a variety of perspectives but, also, allows these to be expressed in and on their own terms. Since this goes fundamentally against the grain of the rules to which several established contributors of this volume are customarily required to subscribe, our gratitude to them could not be more. Their support, patience and openness throughout this process have been vital in ensuring this Special Issue's inclusivity.

To sum up, we believe that an effectively decolonial knowledge landscape can be achieved through a threefold process that addresses the complementary aspects of knowledge production (providing necessary technical support), knowledge legitimisation (concerning aspects of ontological nature) and knowledge inclusivity (resulting from collective openness). This Special Issue is our sincere attempt at implementing this model; we are however aware that at the moment its execution is imperfect, and that for it to flourish more support is required. Whether it is possible to fulfil this model's potential within academia or whether, to cite the song in the epigraph of this Editorial, our throats are bound to remain dry, remains an open question. Even though, theoretically, nothing should prevent the knowledge revolution we are calling for, from our experience thus far, we regretfully need to admit that, practically, academia does not yet offer the premises for it to

be realised in a sustainable manner;⁸ therefore, we would not be surprised if future battles for epistemic–ontological justice were increasingly fought on other, more promising, grounds. After all, as we saw at the beginning of this piece, knowledge unfurls, first and foremost, as lived experiences, be they behind kitchen stoves, between handcraft stalls or in the form of architectonic marvels.

The process in practice

Having illustrated the theoretical background informing the threefold process identified to actualise an effectively decolonial knowledge landscape, in this section I want to present the practical steps that Vimala and I have taken to set it in place.

Of the three steps, the first one, addressing **knowledge production**, is, perhaps, the most straightforward one in terms of the tasks it foresees; these tasks are primarily of *technical* nature, and their successful implementation depends, to a large extent, on the availability of time and material resources. Despite being in itself rather unequivocal, this step's operationalisation is, unfortunately, not easily achievable, given the scarcity of funding and time that mainstream academic and publishing domains are willing to allocate towards a seriously decolonial knowledge production that is conceived from the bottom upwards.

Since several aspects of this phase have been discussed elsewhere,⁹ here I focus only on elements that have not yet been addressed, which Vimala and I encountered with regards to this Special Issue. Because issues of technical nature are context-specific, the following outline is in no way exhaustive, but is meant to provide suggestions that can inspire others to undertake a similarly decolonial knowledge production.

Among the most obvious aspects that may require technical support are language and stylistic choices; while these have already been discussed amply, it is worth adding that both aspects need to be dealt with carefully in a manner that keeps the contributor(s) at the centre. In the case of works in a language that is not the first- or working-language of the contributor(s), it is necessary to identify whether certain stylistic choices are purposeful or, instead, result from lack of fluency in the foreign language; while in the latter case a supportive intervention is desirable, in the former, it may result in an unwarranted superimposition. Therefore, the final linguistic and stylistic format of a contribution results

⁸ Due to lack of funding, competing priorities, time constraints and work precariousness commonly faced by marginalised peoples and academics (especially at early career stages), the publication of this Special Issue, which is an entirely unremunerated work of passion, has seen numerous delays. This translated, among other things, into disadvantages for contributors within the academic system, who are generally expected to achieve a certain number of publications per year (as the famous dictum goes, 'publish or perish'); it also meant that peoples at the margins, who are already exposed to numerous uncertainties, had to allocate precious time to this exercise, as opposed to potentially remunerative activities.

⁹ See Isrtatii Romina and Hirmer Monika. 2023. 'The Role of Language in Diversifying Knowledge Production: Reflecting on the Experience of Decolonial Subversions as a Multilingual Publishing Platform'. *Decolonial Subversions* Special Issue: Decolonising the university and the role of linguistic diversity: 77–95; and Hirmer Monika. 2020. 'A Manifesto for Decolonial Subversions'. *Decolonial Subversions* I: 120–30.

from a careful negotiation that takes into account, on one side, the author's intended message and, on the other, the audience's receptive capacity, so as to ensure maximum accuracy and readership. To implement this, reviewers may also have to be adequately sensitised, so that they do not penalise manuscripts that deviate from mainstream standards. With regards to this Special Issue, we have encountered different responses, with some reviewers enthusiastically embracing unexpected linguistic and stylistic expressions, others neutrally taking notice of them and, finally, some finding them unsuitable. Of course, such a process requires dedication, time and a caring and nurturing disposition from all parties involved.

Another aspect, more basic and perhaps even more important, concerns literacy in the first place, both in terms of reading and writing as well as in terms of technology. While, despite our best efforts, we were unable to include the unmediated voices of non-lettered people, Vimala and I had to deviate significantly from prevailing email-based means of communication and tailor our approach to the varying levels of telematic comfort of the contributors. Since many contributors are located in South Asia, this meant that, in the case of those who have no literacy in or access to the internet, Vimala had to either discuss contributors' work and reviewers' feedback over the phone or by paying visits to their homes. Often, contributors' younger family members and friends also intervened to provide technical support where possible. Vimala, who favours oral over written communication herself, in turn, relayed these messages to me mostly over the phone. The lesser familiarity with IT instruments also meant that several contributions needed substantial work with regards to the formatting of footnotes, references and similar matters at each of the reviewing and proofreading stages. It goes without saying that this unconventional and more inclusive way of undertaking editorship comes with unforeseen challenges and, more often than not, timings that extend beyond commonly expected deadlines.

Another challenge in the process of facilitating a thoroughly inclusive knowledge production is posed by the amount of time that peoples from different backgrounds and levels of privilege have at their disposition. Since with this Special Issue, and *Decolonial Subversions* in general, we want to defy the idea that valid knowledge is primarily academic, it is paramount that contributors come from a variety of walks of life. As is widely known, unfortunately the academic system by and large foresees no remuneration for the writing, reviewing and editing of articles; this means that authors, reviewers and editors, who do not enjoy a permanent post, are particularly disadvantaged in this respect. And while, as unjust as this system is, those who work in academia or aspire to do so still have something to gain from offering their work for free (such as citations and readership), those active in other sectors may have few incentives to do so. Therefore, our gratitude towards non-academics, who have engaged in this process in the absence of incentives, and academics, who have patiently endured exceptionally long timelines, is unparalleled.

The second step of our threefold process towards a decolonial knowledge landscape regards **knowledge legitimisation** and revolves around *ontological* matters. As already indicated, this step is the one that requires the most profound work, and that is likely to

encounter the strongest resistance, since it implies the unsettling of some of academia's most highly regarded and taken-for-granted tenets. To our knowledge, this step is thus far unconceptualised or entirely ignored and, therefore, constitutes the most significant contribution of our new approach to decolonial knowledge.

Mainstream academia is, essentially, embedded within a Western, Eurocentric framework that has been made into the background against which knowledge legitimacy is measured universally. As such, across Western *and* non-Western academia, truth and validity are measured according to modes of being-in-the-world that originated in specific and, therefore, arbitrary, historical and geographical contexts. At the cost of generalising,¹⁰ these modes of being can largely be identified as revolving around the notions of individualism, fixed and therefore predictable and controllable categories and linear, relentless growth. These notions, which largely arose in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries in conjunction with the Industrial Revolution and Modernity, fuelled particular modes of production and conceptions of the body and time, which, in turn, created the premises for the capitalist and neoliberal systems within which academia is today embedded. Especially over the last few decades, the emphasis on privatisation and competition within the University has made the production, legitimisation and diffusion of knowledge a matter of demand and supply akin other market businesses, further marginalising epistemic-ontological configurations that value collectivity over individualism, cooperation over competition, and fluidity over fixity.

It follows that, if knowledge systems that do not subscribe to these hegemonic values are to be considered valid and flourish, it is necessary to suspend mainstream criteria of legitimisation and create a model where collective beingness, cooperation and fluidity are central. With regards to some of the contributions of this Special Issue, this meant to forego, at least partially, dominant ideas around plagiarism, referencing and consistency. Plagiarism, understood as presenting as one's own the ideas of others, builds inherently on the concepts of isolatable individuals and confined ideas, either as original sources or secondary recipients; it also implies the problematic notion of authenticity and the idea that knowledge is the result of a progressive accumulation of information that either perfects and, therefore, surpasses, or confutes one original source. It is easily recognisable that such a *modus operandi* fuels competition—not surprisingly, 'competitiveness' is one of the highest-valued aspects in mainstream academia.

How does a model that, instead, does not build on individualism but on collectivity look like? First, the dichotomy between source and recipient and, along with it, the concept of an authentic source recede to the background; second, antagonistic competitive attitudes are supplanted by reciprocally nurturing dispositions, which engender a knowledge landscape

¹⁰ Of course, it is reductive to conflate the so-called West into one sole epistemic-ontological paradigm: without doubt, within Western Europe and Northern America there are complexities that defy a reified, homogenised notion of 'West', which I cannot discuss here for lack of time. It should be remembered that here I wish to critique the *dominance* of certain traits, which have marginalised non-conforming modes of being within the West no less than elsewhere.

that is collective and diffused across time and space. We could observe the unfolding of such dispositions towards knowledge in some contributors' rather lax attitudes towards attributing credits or tracing the sources of certain ideas; crucially, this was complemented by a similar renunciation to claims of originality regarding the presentation of one's 'own' (for lack of a better term) ideas and, even, individual authorship—this clearly manifested, for example, in authors' omission of their full names in favour of the sole initials at the time of the submission of manuscripts.¹¹ It is paramount to explicitly unpack the fact that, when knowledge unfolds within a collectively oriented existential framework, neglecting to attribute credits to others is not met by one's own appropriation of such views as, instead, could be the case in an individualistically driven setting: the underlying idea is that knowledge is not made of isolatable bits and pieces or that one's own contribution is in any way more relevant than that of others; consequently, knowledge is conferred legitimacy not through originality but through its propensity to being shared, and authorship gains value not by standing out but by rendering homage to the larger, diffused epistemic landscape to which one belongs.

To further illustrate how fundamentally different a collective approach to knowledge legitimisation is from an individualistic one, I present a personal anecdote where the two systems meet—and, incidentally, the exploitation of the former by the latter emerges clearly. As a scholar working predominantly on South Asia, I asked permission from my friends and teachers at the Indian temple where I was working to use an image that depicted the architecture envisioned by Guruji, founder of the temple, in one of my publications with a prestigious Western academic publisher. I was given permission without hesitation and, moreover, I was told that since I was a welcome participant in the temple's activities, I could use any material freely at my own discretion. A very different approach was followed by the publishers: when I wanted to use the same image in a new publication, the former publisher demanded that I pay them a hefty fee of £200.00 towards property rights over said image, since they now claimed it as *theirs!* In a despicable move, the publisher had, not only, appropriated an image they had not created but, also, engineered a way to profit from it. Besides the fact that, as is customary in the academic publishing world, I received no compensation for the article I wrote and was even expected to pay in order to reuse some of its material, the original repositories of this knowledge, namely my South Asian mentors, had been completely excluded from any decision around the use and legitimacy of their own knowledge; even more disturbingly, would they want to use that image anew, which directly concerns them and which they allowed me to use free of charge in the first place, they would now have to pay the same £200.00 fee to the publisher. The original creators of that image have been robbed of their own work in the exact same dynamic that fuelled extractive colonialism. I have narrated this episode in full because it illustrates clearly how the two different modes of being-in-the-world approach knowledge legitimisation and, importantly, how colonial dynamics not only govern but are enshrined in copyright and anti-plagiarism

¹¹ Because *Decolonial Subversions* operates internationally, we had to mitigate some of these aspects and abide by dominant rules to a larger extent than we wished to. Credits for photographs have therefore been clearly specified and authors' names written in full for the protection of their ideas where they chose to do so.

laws under the false pretext of protecting authors' intellectual property rights. One can easily imagine the deleterious effects that this system has on anyone subscribing to a collective notion of knowledge and on a decolonial, inclusive epistemic landscape at large.

The collective approach to knowledge legitimisation can also have repercussions on how referencing is dealt with. When knowledge is understood as manifesting in a diffused manner that fluidly extends across intersecting domains of everyday life that cannot easily be separated from one another, it is clear that tracing pieces of information back to specific, confined sources is an artificial exercise that, rather than adding transparency to the process of knowledge legitimisation risks distorting it. As likely also those who conform to mainstream academic standards can attest, most ideas result from an amalgamation of disparate research avenues, fortuitous encounters and inspirations that cannot straightforwardly be attributed to distinct sources. The common praxis of referencing identifiable and isolatable sources as a way of legitimising knowledge obscures the complexity of this organic process of accumulating information, which spans well beyond those references. Such a *modus operandi* is also problematic because, more often than not, legitimacy is sought by referencing a restricted group of authors, who are associated with credibility, not necessary because of the originality of their works but because, having enjoyed certain privileges, they could become part of influential institutions. Without wanting to deny the acumen of those people, it has to be kept in mind that, with all likelihood, other thinkers with less privilege working at less acclaimed institutions are no less perspicacious and noteworthy of attention—yet the dominant system condemns them at the margins and, in a self-fulfilling manner, reaffirms old power structures.

In practice, renouncing mainstream referencing requirements meant that, in at least one instance, we could adopt a more fluid system where a number of resources have been added collectively at the end of the contribution, as opposed to being linked to specific paragraphs or sections thereof. These references, regardless of whether they may be considered authoritative according to dominant paradigms, are meant as a starting point for the reader, who desires to discover more, to delve into the material in a manner that flows into more than one direction, reflecting the diffused and always-in-progress nature of knowledge.

Finally, I would like to draw the attention to one more parameter that is usually considered paramount within mainstream academic publishing, namely consistency. While consistency can make it easier for the audience to follow an argument, it does not always reflect the fluidity of the experiences and/or protagonists that populate certain works. Especially in the case of peoples who emphasise orality and a concept of time that privileges present moments that expand moderately into the past and future, as opposed to evolving linearly, coherence may be secondary or, even, hinder the representation of their modes of being in-the-world and ideas. On the other hand, when authority is conferred primarily to texts, fixedness, coherence and predictability are favoured, largely matching Western ways of relating to existence and knowledge. Insisting on consistency—be it in the form of names, styles, languages, referencing and so forth—is, then, once more in the interest of mainstream expectations and at the disadvantage of marginalised contributors. In order to subvert this

disproportionate power distribution, in the instance of at least one paper, we have welcomed the inconsistency with which the author spells the names of the protagonists, to some reviewers' surprise. While, at first, this may cause some disorientation in the reader, we believe such inconsistency captures better the fluidity and unpredictability of everyday life and, also, the primacy that orality holds for some of the peoples concerned; not insisting on coherence destabilises the dominant aptitude to engender fixed categories that confer the impression of being able to identify, confine and, ultimately, control what is other.

Of course, the list of provisions here proposed to uproot mainstream methods of knowledge legitimisation is inspired by our work towards this particular Special Issue and, therefore, is in no way exhaustive; other realities and modes of being-in-the-world will likely challenge other aspects of domineering processes of knowledge evaluation and validation. Overall, I hope that it emerges clearly that, despite having been universalised, the Eurocentric framework of knowledge legitimisation is only one of multiple ways of defining reliable and authoritative knowledge. Moreover—and crucially—I hope to have demonstrated that the legitimisation of knowledge is not only a matter of epistemic nature but, essentially, a matter of ontological concern: to impose a foreign system of knowledge validation can condemn peoples not only to intellectual marginalisation but, ultimately, to non-existence. By introducing new modes of legitimising knowledge and proposing these alongside established ones, we want to engender a new, effectively inclusive knowledge landscape that is radically decolonial and hopefully inspire others to follow suit.

We are extremely grateful to those contributors, who are accustomed to subscribing to dominant knowledge paradigms, for having opted to publish their work side by side with works that follow other paradigms. We are equally grateful to those contributors, who are not usually exposed to lengthy peer review mechanisms and/or do not primarily write in English for having patiently subscribed to this experimental publishing model. Without both their support, our aspiration for a thoroughly **inclusive knowledge** landscape—the third step of this process—would have remained unfulfilled.

The content of Vernacular Cultures of South Asia

I conclude with a few words on the content of this volume. Originally, Vimala and I wanted to publish all the contributions of this volume together at once, as is customary for the majority of publications. Over time, however, as the different circumstances and needs of the contributors made it increasingly difficult to stick to one common timeline, we began to envision two volumes, so as not to delay the publication of those pieces that were ready any further. Yet, we soon realised that the distribution of the works over two separate volumes would largely recreate the dichotomies that we want to challenge, since the contributions of authors who master the skills expected by mainstream academia tended to be ready for publication when others were still in the process of being completed. Eventually, we opted

for a more flexible format: we decided that all contributions should feature in the same Special Issue but, at the same time, we would publish the pieces as and when they reach their final stages, so as to put an end to the long wait endured by some of the authors. In the name of the inclusivity we wish to actualise, we therefore invite the reader to refer directly to the abstracts of the contributions that will cumulatively be published, as opposed to discussing here only those contributions that are being published in this first stage. This modus operandi makes this Special Issue an open-ended work-in-progress, just like the development and implementation of the process of knowledge production, legitimisation and inclusivity here presented.

We conclude this Editorial with a poem that has been transmitted orally in South India since premodern times. In a cryptic conversation, it emerges that a goose, living far away in a noble place, misses out on important aspects of life that a common heron instead experiences—in a way, concisely reflecting the gap between academic and vernacular knowledge that *Vernacular Cultures from South Asia* aims to bridge.

*evvaḍaḍ' īvu kāḷḷu mōgam' errana haṃsaman' edun' unduvo
daḍḍuḷa mānasambunanu dāna viśeṣamul' emi telpunṇā
maḍḍuḷu kāñcanābjannulu mauktikamul kalav' andu nattalo
avvi erunṇagan' annan ahahāy ani naḍḍe bakambul anniyan*

A Goose among Herons

'Who are you, Red-Face, Red-Feet?'
'I'm a goose.'
'Where do you live?'
'Far away, in Mānasa Lake.'
'Tell us something about it.'
'It's full of golden lotuses and lovely pearls.'
'What about snails?'
'Never heard of them.'
So said the noble bird,
And the herons sneered: 'Aha!'¹²

We hope you thoroughly enjoy Vernacular Cultures of South Asia!

Chief Editor: Monika Hirmer

Assistant Editor: Vimala Katikaneni

¹² Collected and translated by Rao Velcheru N. and David Shulman (eds.). 1998. *A Poem at the Right Moment: Remembered Verses from Premodern South India*, 42. London: University of California Press.