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ABSTRACT

The introduction to this special issue of *South Asian Review* assesses the history and present of South Asian studies and digital humanities. The essay begins by examining the South Asian Literary Association's early support for this scholarship, both through conferences panels and publications. It further details the emergence of initiatives such as the Digital Humanities Alliance of India (DHAI) that have contributed to research at the nexus of digital humanities and South Asian studies, as well as foundational digital humanities projects at these interstices. This introduction further situates South Asian digital humanities as an intervention in postcolonial digital humanities that expands, challenges, and complicates both South Asian technospaces and digital notions of home. The essay concludes with summaries of articles in the special issue, arguing that they demonstrate the possibilities of scholarship that bridges digital humanities and South Asian studies.

The first instance of digital humanities scholarship facilitated by the South Asian Literary Association (SALA) occurred in January 2013 when Rahul K. Gairola organized the "South Asian-izing the Digital Humanities" panel at the annual convention of the Modern Language Association (MLA) in Boston. Selected for the MLA's Presidential Theme, the panel was an early attempt to bring diverse insights of South Asian studies to this elusive yet booming area of study by including SALA members from various ranks, countries, and interests. The following year, Radhika Gajjala and Roopika Risam, with Rahul K. Gairola co-authored the essay "What is Postcolonial Digital Humanities (#DHpoco)?" which was published in *salaam: the newsletter of the south asian literary association* (Gajjala, Risam, and Gairola 2014, 4). Interest and enthusiasm in both of these initiatives led to a roundtable at SALA's 2015 annual conference in Vancouver, "Borders, Boundaries, and Margins," where Gairola built on the earlier momentum and organized the first digital humanities session to appear on a SALA program (Risam 2016, 356). The "Digital South Asia" session featured talks by Deepika Bahri, Sonora Jha, Roopika Risam, and Rahul K. Gairola. A wide-ranging discussion followed, facilitated by Alex Gil, encompassing representations of Partition in digital media distributed on YouTube, social media activism for Indian women through the #WhyLoiter campaign,

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and how postcolonial thought could be meaningfully integrated into the practices of digital humanities.

In the special issue of *South Asian Review* that emerged from the 2015 conference, edited by Jana Fedtke and Pranav Jani, Risam (2015b) contributed the essay "South Asian Digital Humanities: An Overview," which argues that while digital humanities is yet a relatively new methodology within South Asian studies, it offers significant, perhaps even revolutionary, possibilities for literary scholarship and cultural heritage. Risam's contribution examines a number of initiatives in digital literary studies, digital history, and digital cultural heritage, both in South Asian countries and among their diasporas. Risam further demonstrates the range of interventions that digital humanities facilitates: the *Bichitra Online Tagore Variorium*, a substantial digital archive of Tagore's writing based at Jadavpur University; the *Allama Iqbal Urdu Cyber Library*, the first digital collection of Urdu literature; Deepika Bahri's *Postcolonial Studies at Emory*, a website that has introduced postcolonial writers and theory to new audiences since the 1990s; *The Digital Himalaya* project, with ethnographic material from Nepal; *The 1947 Partition Archive*, which documents oral histories of Partition; and the *South Asian American Digital Archive* (SAADA), a project documenting South Asian immigrant experiences in the United States.

These projects, proposes Risam, are the foundations for what digital humanities can offer South Asianists. Elaborating on how these and other digital projects challenge the hegemonic afterlives of empire that facilitate silenced discourses, she writes:

> Existing projects have made primary literary and historical sources available for scholars. They transcend the geographical challenges of physical archives that circumscribe research within South Asia and the diaspora. They have made public the challenges and struggles of the South Asian diaspora, laying claim to new national identities that are rich sites of study. These projects have also challenged national and elite historiographies that have erased subaltern voices, bringing their stories to the center. But there are more projects to be created and more stories to be told. (Risam 2015b, 174)

Our work here to tell the stories that have long gone unheard at the intersections of South Asian studies and the digital milieu is indebted not only to the foundational scholarship that Risam (2016) highlights in her essay and the support of SALA, but also to the organizations and scholars that have facilitated digital humanities scholarship in and on South Asia.

The short-lived but significant South Asia Digital Humanities (SADH) network, an affiliate organization of Global Outlook::Digital Humanities (GO::DH), which fosters global connections among digital humanities practitioners around the world, was created to bring together both scholars within South Asia and South Asianists abroad who engaged with digital research methods. As one of the founders, Padmini Ray Murray, noted in an e-mail correspondence on March 24, 2016, SADH "aims to promote the digital scholarship and dissemination of scholars based in South Asia and elsewhere – and provide a space for this community of scholars whose work pertains to the region." Specifically, Ray Murray added, SADH also intended to address "questions of access, infrastructure, economic and governmental policy, the exigencies of working in languages other than English, rate of technological growth and obsolescence, and our different institutional histories to broaden these horizons." In practice, however, the broad scope of the network itself proved to be a challenge to sustain.

The lessons from SADH, however, gave rise to the formation of the Digital Humanities Alliance of India (DHAI) in 2016. Members of DHAI from its formation include Ray Murray (then at Srishti School of Art, Design, and Technology), Gairola (then at the Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee), Nirmala Menon (Indian Institute of Technology, Indore), Ashok Thorat (Institute for Advanced Studies in English, Pune), P.P. Sneha (Center for Digital Humanities, Pune), Dibyaduti Roy (Indian Institute of Management, Indore), Souvik Mukherjee (Presidency University, Kolkata), Maya Dodd (Flame University, Pune), and Ruchi Sharma (St. Xavier's College, Jaipur). Founding members of DHAI have been involved with the Digital Humanities Winter School held by the Center for Digital Humanities and the Institute for Advanced Studies in English in Pune. Other affiliates contributed to the 2018 "Digital Humanities in India" special issue of *Asian Quarterly: An International Journal of Contemporary Issues*, the first peer-reviewed journal in India to publish a special issue on this topic at the invitation of guest editor Dhanashree Thorat (2018, 4) and Ashok Thorat, Director of the Institute for Advanced Studies in English, Pune (India). Following the publication of this special issue, the constituency of DHAI voted to appoint an Interim Executive Committee of 11 scholars based in or with roots in India, and this resolution facilitated the first annual DHAI conference in June 2018 that was jointly organized by Nirmala Menon and Dibyadyuti Roy. To date, DHAI is based in Indore, India and is gaining national and international recognition for its will to examine the interface of the digital with contemporary India, especially in the arena of digital pedagogy and the creation of postcolonial digital archives.

Long before the emergence of DHAI, however, Gairola approached P.S. Chauhan, then Editor of *South Asian Review*, to request that the Editorial Board consider a special issue on South Asian studies and digital humanities. This issue of *South Asian Review*, "Digital Humanities and South Asian Studies," thus emerges from the research, efforts, and initiatives of a number of scholars interested in the intersection of South Asian studies and the digital milieu. Here, we shed light on new projects and stories that have emerged over the last several years, since the 2013 MLA panel in Boston and the 2015 SALA panel in Vancouver.

The essays in the special issue demonstrate a range of scholarly questions, theoretical insights, and practical considerations that digital humanities makes possible within South Asian studies and the kinds of urgent contributions that South Asian studies brings to digital humanities. In turn, they show how perspectives of South Asian Studies transform what digital humanities makes possible. What thus emerges from this special issue is a unique corpus of knowledge situated at the rich and fertile confluences of South Asian studies and digital humanities. We note, however, that the potential interventions at these intersections has only begun to be explored and have high hopes that this collection will facilitate a transnational dialogue on the futures of digital humanities in the geopolitical frame of South Asia.

Deviating from Definition

The move of defining "digital humanities" at the beginning of an introduction is as well-worn a trope as that of defining "postcolonial" in a postcolonial studies essay.

Because the essays in this special issue consciously avoid that move, we enact it here to situate the issue for both unfamiliar and skeptical readers. Notoriously resistant to definition, "digital humanities" is a reflection of the research practices undertaken at the intersections of humanistic inquiry and digital methodologies. The scholarship under consideration in the essays that we have curated for our special issue includes a diverse range of approaches perhaps best encapsulated in Kathleen Fitzpatrick's capacious definition of digital humanities:

> It has to do with the work that gets done at the crossroads of digital media and traditional humanistic study. And that happens in two different ways. On one hand, it's bringing the tools and techniques of digital media to bear on traditional humanistic questions. But it's also bringing humanistic modes of inquiry to bear on digital media. It's a sort of moving back and forth across those lines, thinking about what computation is, how it functions in our culture, and then using those computing technologies to think about the more traditional aspects of culture. (Lopez, Rowland, and Fitzpatrick 2015)

The essays in this issue push the boundaries of digital humanities, responding to what Élika Ortega (2015) has defined as the essential question for digital humanities – not what digital humanities is, but "What can digital humanities be?" Thus, our special issue continues the important work of articulating the modes of inquiry made possible when we bring digital humanities and South Asian studies together.

While avoiding the impulse to defend digital humanities inquiry in South Asian studies would be ideal, we recognize that digital humanities as an area of study has its public detractors, including those whose work is influential for postcolonial studies. In a widely disseminated essay in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Timothy Brennan (2017) argues,

> For all its resources, the digital humanities makes a rookie mistake: It confuses more information for more knowledge. The digital humanities ignores a nagging theoretical dilemma: The interpretive problems that computers solve are not the ones that have long stumped critics. On the contrary, the technology demands that it be asked only what it can answer, changing the questions to conform to its own limitations.

Brennan (2017) goes on to characterize digital humanists as succumbing to "the fetish of science, neoliberal defunding," thus becoming traitors to their academic comrades by joining "the corporate attack on a professoriate that has what they [untenured junior academics] want."

Although we would shy away from such sweeping character judgments of junior colleagues, we concede that Brennan's wariness of claims to use technology to understand humanistic inquiry is understandable. Integrated into our approach to digital humanities, however, are our own sympathies for Marxist analysis and rigorous training in cultural studies methodologies. This positions us to use digital humanities to interrogate, for example, the totalizing impulses of algorithms and the mechanistic reduction of human labor to bits and bytes of data. Further, it is this very training that positions us to ask critical questions of the practices of digital humanities, which include the quantitative textual analysis that Brennan critiques as well as myriad practices including digital archives, digital mapping, social media analysis, and more that digital humanities facilitates. We also note, with deep concern, how administrators within

neoliberal universities envision the deployment of technology within education to maximize profit while, in turn, devaluing human labor and lives.

But as scholars who see great potential in the ways that digital platforms can transform our pedagogy, and subsequently students' lives, we support the increased integration of digital humanities in both our teaching and research. These are issues that have been widely explored within digital humanities scholarship, which, like postcolonial studies, features no dearth of debates about its own values, practices, and utility. Therefore, we situate interventions in South Asian studies through digital humanities in what Roopika Risam terms "postcolonial digital humanities": "an intervention in digital knowledge production through theory, praxis, and pedagogy at the nexus of the humanities and sciences" and "an approach to uncovering and intervening the disruptions within the digital cultural record produced by colonialism and neocolonialism" (2018, 3).

This approach to digital humanities is informed by a variety of interventions within digital humanities, from the need for increased attention to the role of multilingualism in digital research methods in humanistic inquiry (Fiormonte 2015; Gil and Ortega 2016), to the role of cultural critique within the variety of digital humanities methods (Liu 2012; Berry and Fagerjold 2017), to the significance of intersectional feminist practices that explore connections between race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, nation, and other axes of privilege and oppression to digital humanities research and pedagogy (Risam 2015a; Losh and Wernimont 2018). As such, postcolonial digital humanities is a timely and necessary heuristic that demonstrates that digital humanities itself is and can be more than the caricature of quantitative textual analysis to which Brennan alludes. Instead, it raises the critical question of how the digital afterlives of colonialism shape the formation of the digital cultural record and, in turn, the cultural memory of humanity.

As digital humanities interventions continue to expand, they raise the question of where and how South Asians will be represented. In his book, *A New Republic of Letters*, Jerome McGann offers what he calls "a truth now universally acknowledged": "the whole of our cultural inheritance has to be re-curated and reedited in digital forms and institutional structures" (McGann 2014, 1). This system, for McGann, constitutes a new republic of letters, an allusion to the Enlightenment era intellectual community of scholars and writers in Europe and the United States who sought connections across national boundaries while also preserving both linguistic and cultural differences. Conversely, the new republic of letters that McGann articulates is comprised of digital actors and objects, facilitated through networks of knowledge and communication, as well as by digital media and technologies.

But there are no guarantees that these developments will ensure a place for South Asianists without interventions like those offered by contributors to this issue. By putting pressure on the relationship between digital humanities and South Asian studies, this special issue of *SAR* draws on the central questions that have been articulated within postcolonial studies. In this tradition, the scholarship in this issue engages with the central questions that postcolonial digital humanities asks: Who is, and more importantly, who is *not* legible in the new republic of letters? How do cultural objects, digitization, and cultural memory intersect to produce cultural power that creates value for particular voices and stories - and not others? Which ones are the priority in the

construction of a digital cultural record? And how do contemporary perceptions of what the humanities do shape our understanding of how we might intervene?

Digital humanities has shaped the digital cultural record, by virtue of the ways it has played a role in the digital transformation of cultural inheritance. Scholars who have used digital or computational tools to understand culture, for example through publicly available archives, mapping, and visualization projects, have added to the digital cultural record. Those who have applied humanistic inquiry to digital cultures and objects have been engaged in both theorization and critique of our digital cultural memory. However, this work has preserved canonical authors, traditions, and voices, reproducing and amplifying the biases of print culture. At stake here for South Asian studies is whether the influences of colonialism that have marginalized South Asian voices and cultures will be allowed to continue to thrive.

As Risam argues, those of us who bring knowledge of the effects of colonialism on knowledge production have a special, and we would add timely, role to play in the digital cultural record. Such scholars wield the skills to intervene in the production of the digital cultural record and, in turn, the cultural memory of humanity. She proposes:

> We have the ability, knowledge, and tools to build new worlds. The potential for digital humanities lies in its capacity for world making – for using digital humanities scholarship to create new models for knowledge and the world. These approaches must acknowledge how the cultural record has been shaped by racism and colonialism, and they must redress the ways that digital knowledge production is implicated in these forces … . What if we were to use these affordances of digital humanities in the service of communities that have been marginalized in digital knowledge production? (2018, 142)

To achieve this, Risam argues, we must "acknowledge how the cultural record has been shaped by racism and colonialism" and "redress the ways that digital knowledge production is implicated in these forces" (2018, 142). As publics look primarily to digital sources for information, scholars have a responsibility, as people equipped with both humanities knowledge and digital skills, to challenge the reproduction of an exclusionary print record in digital form. This is where South Asian studies has an opportunity to intervene, for example, in the ongoing hegemony of a whitewashed "canon" of male authors or heteronormative syllabus of Western poets, where knowledge production secures colonialism's role in the digital age. Risam's proposal for postcolonial digital humanities moreover compels us to think more critically about class relations in cyberspace and the intersectionality of marginalizations online.

Rewriting the Technospace

Therefore, in addition to being grounded in the approach to postcolonial digital humanities that Risam lays out, this special issue is influenced by digital media studies. Scholarship within South Asian studies is deeply intertwined with interdisciplinarity, where connections between literary and cultural texts, history, economics, sociology, and other disciplines proliferate from the material effects of British imperialism on South Asia and its spheres of influence around the world. We have the chance to work against the dominance of those narratives to emphasize how South Asians have and

continue to take advantage of the affordances of technology to forge connections and assert their humanity, histories, knowledges, and expertise.

In light of this, we are guided by the understanding that South Asia and its diasporas are deeply implicated in what Sally Munt calls "technospaces." Munt describes technospaces as "those temporal realms where technology meets human practice. Significantly, technospaces are lived, embodied fluctuations in human/machine interaction. At the momentary intersection of the human being and the machine there is spatial praxis: there is technospace" (2001, 11). In the context of technospaces, South Asia is a site where technology has indelibly marked both history and contemporary culture.

Taking a broader view of the history of technology, South Asia has long been a technospace. In postcolonial science and technology studies, scholars have sought to reframe colonialist narratives that downplayed the role of South Asians as technological innovators during the Raj (Nandy 1988; Gupta 1998; Anderson 2002; Harding 2008). In the contemporary moment, initiatives like "Digital India," the campaign to improve online infrastructure and increase rural connectivity, bespeak an attempt, however techno-utopian, to increase India's digital footprint. Further, Gairola (2018) has critically appraised the ways in which mobile devices facilitate urban movement that queers South Asian technospaces.

But there are also darker sides to South Asia's imbrication in technospace. Indians, for example, make up an increasingly large share of the workers behind Amazon Mechanical Turk, a mechanism for crowdsourcing cheap labor that compensates the "Turkers" mere cents for performing "Human Intelligence Tasks," such as data coding, that cannot yet be automated and thus require human actors (Ross et al. 2010). In addition to being an example of how globalization and technology have facilitated exploitation for South Asians, there is a curious intersection with digital humanities: a number of digital humanities projects, including high profile projects like Lev Manovich's *selfiecity* and Ryan Heuser's *Mapping Emotions in Victorian London* rely on Amazon Mechanical Turk to code their data, which raises both an ethical concern about the exploited labor of South Asians and others in the Global South propping up the digital humanities projects of the Global North, as well as an intellectual question about what it means to use an anonymous crowdsourced labor force to produce knowledge that should be situated in a cultural context (Risam 2018). Still another labor issue is the "brain drain" phenomenon where the availability of jobs in technology in the Global North propels often-temporary migration of diasporic subjects, such as those who work in Silicon Valley in the United States on H1B visas.

Diasporas, however, demonstrate the power, vitality, and complexity of South Asian technospaces. In the context of diaspora studies, the notion of technospace is highly significant for South Asians. Yet the idea of a technospace complicates spatiality, invoking displacement in even the most familiar spaces. Munt notes, "New digital communications technologies initiate new spatial practices but often carry with them nostalgia for old human orientations" (2001, 12). Accordingly, immigrant and emigrant communities are able to remain more easily connected than ever before – a phenomenon that Dana Diminescu (2008) terms the "connected migrant." The latest communication platforms become windows into time that may have faded into the past or spaces that lie in a different land. The connectivity of migrants in these "digital diasporas" is

characterized by their use of the Internet through mobile phones and social networking apps including Viber, Skype, WhatsApp, and Facebook Messenger voice and video calling features (Axel 2004; Brinkerhoff 2009; Everett 2009).

It bears remembering, however, that life in diaspora is as slippery as the connections that technologies facilitate. Flexible movement, coupled with time and space compression, compels us to experience inclusion and exclusion in far more sophisticated ways than ever before. In her Introduction to *Cyberculture and the Subaltern: Weavings of the Virtual and Real*, Radhika Gajjala examines "how voice and silence shape online space in relation to offline actualities" (2012, 1). She notes:

> Technocultural agency is produced in the interplay of layered literacies and nuanced identities as the user at the interface is forced into renegotiating his/her ability to act and define herself/himself at the online/offline and global/local interface. The process of unpacking how we become technocultural agents reveals to us how we are placed and in turn how we are clearly situated within unequal power relations manifested within the current continuum of local-global-local through hierarchies of literacies and connectivity. (Gajjala 2012, 8)

Gajjala's recognition of skewed power relations throughout the digital milieu with material effects around the globe testify to why postcolonial digital humanities is perhaps more urgent now than it has ever before been. Gajjala's call to carefully think through the meaning of technocultural agency reminds us that digital media and technologies do not only have repercussions within virtual spaces but have consequences for our lives offline. Over the last few years, we have seen ongoing evidence of these effects. Technologies of spatiality, movement, and migration have been increasingly deployed by security forces to police and monitor brown and black people. Borders, already imaginary lines drawn in sand, grow more recalcitrant as migration is aggressively positioned as a threat through a network of lies, fear mongering, coercion, and capitalist manipulation.

Transnational capitalism's flirtation with fear mongering was forcefully broadcast by former White House Chief Strategist Steve Bannon when he remarked that too many "CEOs in Silicon Valley are from South Asia or from Asia" (Fahrenthold and Sellers 2016). A dog whistle to white supremacists, this remark belies the fact that South Asians in the tech industry in the United States are frequently H-1B visa holders, with temporary residency status, and that South Asians – like employees of other Asian ethnicities - often struggle to rise above middle management (Gee and Peck 2018). Such institutionalized xenophobia has been encouraged by United States president Donald Trump, who has made clear his hostility towards the H-1B visa program, which largely benefits Indian workers from the tech sector (Laha 2017).

The conditions of contemporary immigration thus stand in sharp contrast to Asian migration to the United States following the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which invited highly specialized Asian immigrants to the country (Lowe 1996). While the opening of United States borders was a means of nation-building and maintaining strategic edge over Cuba and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, the very immigrants whose labor constructed Silicon Valley from the ground up through the technological expertise that facilitated their migration are now induced to return to their countries of origin as white supremacist hate crimes spike. In the United Kingdom, as

well, Brexit – Britain's tortured attempt to leave the European Union through a referendum held on June 23, 2016, a little over a year before the 70th anniversary of its hasty exit from India in 1947 – has further endangered South Asians. Even today, both the Leave campaign and its aftermath have continued tacitly institutionalizing the racism and xenophobia that has long been part of the British landscape.

Digital connections are thus indispensable to feeling "at home" when you are told to "go home" on the very streets where you have lived for decades. As Jillana Enteen notes,

> From the Dalits of India to the players of Silicon Valley, place and space, 'real' and "virtual," online and offline are revealed as artificial constructions that no longer are usefully conceived of as oppositional … Diaspora, dispersal and immersion in new cultures should no longer be read as singular processes following a particular set of physical, psychic, and material avenues. (Enteen 2007, xi)

Such dynamics greatly complicate the ways in which South Asian diasporic communities must negotiate their lives around the world. In this regard, South Asians – both within South Asian countries and across the global diaspora – experience home in multiple ways mediated by the digital milieu, which lead them – like other postcolonial and queer migrants – to pioneer new strategies of "homelanding," or arduously forging an inclusive home space in a hostile homeland, when they are at home or abroad (Gairola 2016).

The digital cultural record itself, we would assert, has a powerful role to play in both new and future strategies of homelanding within the digital milieu. For example, the development and establishment of new digital archives around South Asian studies not only allows us to create new archives of the past but also to remember and commemorate the past differently. New maps transform how we understand space and place. And new digital comfort zones facilitate connections for those whose family and loved ones are only accessible online. Such interventions are absolutely essential to the recuperation of the integrity and soul of a people who have lived through and continue to shoulder the fraught and painful legacies of the British Empire and the communal bloodshed wrought by its demise. Therefore, our issue demonstrates that postcolonial digital humanities has great possibility for creating some of the most important social justice scholarship in South Asian studies of the past century.

New Interventions in South Asian Digital Humanities

We thus offer the essays in this issue as innovative interventions that complicate the digital cultural record while lodging a "homelanding" for South Asians within it. Therefore, we position digital humanities as a method through which South Asian studies can strategically participate in the ongoing struggle for representation within digital knowledge production. Building on the important history of digital humanities scholarship in South Asia and its diasporas that precedes our work, we contend that South Asian studies is further positioned to offer a new genealogy of digital humanities, demonstrated through this collection of essays that reveal how the digital continues to shape notions of home, belonging, nation, identity, memory, and diaspora through a variety of methodologies.

Nishant Shah's essay, "Digital Humanities on the Ground: Post-access Politics and the Second Wave of Digital Humanities," commences this issue with a theoretical intervention in digital humanities influenced by South Asian studies. Shah's essay situates contemporary perceptions of digital humanities, particularly its emphasis on the production, distribution, and consumption of digital knowledge, as a "first wave" of scholarship that is focused on access. He argues, however, that at the heart of digital humanities discourse in postcolonial information societies like India is a subject that is also marked by connectivity and access. Shah, envisions a second wave of digital humanities marked by "post-access," which attends not to the digitally unconnected but to the digitally disconnected. Drawing from 1000 responses gathered in the wake of an Internet blackout in response to political agitation in the city of Ahmedabad, Shah sketches the new paradoxes of the disconnected subject. Shah's contribution offers a critique of the tropes of access, presence, inclusion, and participation to show how digital humanities in South Asia needs a more critical investment in imagining its subjects to take on post-digital human rights.

We then move to Porter Olsen's essay, "Emulation as Mimicry: Reading the Salman Rushdie Digital Archive," which situates efforts at Emory University to develop a born-digital archive based on their acquisition of Salman Rushdie's archive, including his computers. Bringing theories of mimicry from postcolonial studies to the praxis of digital archive development, Olsen raises critical questions about efforts to create computer-based emulations of the work of postcolonial writers. Drawing on Spivak's reading of the colonial archive in "The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives" and Homi K. Bhabha's theories of hybridity in "Of Mimicry and Man," Olsen argues that such emulations reveal digital spaces of slippage and partial presence that become important sites for reading. The limitations of emulations that he identifies raise new questions and concerns that position the postcolonial writer as one influenced both by the postcolonial milieu and by the evolution of writing technologies.

Taking up the question of how changing writing technologies influence Indian authors writing in English from a different angle, Tawnya Azar's essay, "Inside and Outside the Literary Marketplace: The Digital Products of Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, and Salman Rushdie" examines the influence of social media on postcolonial writing. In addition to literary fame, Ghosh, Rushdie, and Roy are well-known for public commentaries using digital platforms like social media and blogs on everything from popular culture to politics. These digital products and platforms function to extend the authors' literary products past the traditional literary marketplace and into the wider public, with the potential of dismantling certain barriers like income, language, and education levels that often shape the landscape of traditionally published work. For these authors, Azar argues, digital spaces provide largely unmediated avenues for reaching wider audiences, for cultivating their public intellectual personas, and for promoting issues which may or may not have an audience in the traditional literary marketplace.

Beyond well-known South Asian writers, new voices are embracing digital technologies to experiment with new genres and forms. Jana Fedtke examines these in her essay, "Gender-Based Violence in Contemporary Digital Graphic Narratives from India." She takes up two texts – *Priya's Shakti* (2014) by Ram Devineni, Vikas Menon, and Dan

Goldman and its sequel, *Priya's Mirror* (2016) by Paromita Vohra, Ram Devineni, and Dan Goldman. Set in contemporary India, these texts use the digital graphic novel form to examine violence against women, particularly rape and acid attacks. Complicating these digital texts, Fedtke argues that while they indeed attempt to validate gender empowerment through protagonist Priya's activism, they ultimately undercut their own argument by invalidating Priya's courage by attributing more power to her companion, the tiger, and to her reliance on deities such as the goddess Parvati. Situating the essay within digital humanities, Fedtke argues that the texts' accessibility, particularly in the context of the post-2012 Delhi rape crisis, may have wide-reaching effects on gender-based identity formation, both in India and beyond.

Moving into computational analysis for textual interpretation in South Asian poetry, A. Sean Pue's essay, "Acoustic Traces of Poetry in South Asia," examines how computational humanities methods can help us move beyond semantic meaning and the written word to address oral forms of performance and aural forms of recognition in South Asian poetry. The essay focuses on two significant figures in the history of modern "Urdu-Hindi" poetry: the contemporary poet Fahmida Riaz and the pre-Partition poet Miraji. Through computational metrical detection and visualization, Pue considers how poetic meter operates in their work and addresses their audiences in creative ways in their varied milieus. Through a contextualized elaboration of these literary figures' work, as well as a modeling of their poetic forms, Pue demonstrates that these methods expose the way that sound and rhythm carry meaning in their poetry.

Using computational methods in a different way, Amardeep Singh's essay, "Beyond the Archive Gap: The Kiplings and the Famines of British Colonial India," explores how creating digital archives can challenge the ideological and limited representations of life in the British Empire offered by Rudyard Kipling in the late nineteenth century. Singh discusses his work developing the digital collection, "The Kiplings and India: A Collection of Writings from British India." In the collection, he balances the presentation of digital editions of texts by the Kiplings (not only Rudyard but also Lockwood Kipling, Alice MacDonald Kipling, and Alice Fleming) with writing by Indian reformers and activists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including Pandita Ramabai, Rukhmabai, Behramji Malabari, and Dadabhai Naoroji. Here, Singh examines how his use of the Scalar digital publishing platform helps users learn about a series of thematic debates in British Indian life, focusing on differential representations of the late nineteenth-century Indian famines.

We conclude with Dhanashree Thorat's essay, "Colonial Topographies of Internet Infrastructure: The Sedimented and Linked Networks of the Telegraph and the Submarine Fiber Optic Internet," which links past, present, and future through an examination of the relationship between colonialism and technological infrastructures. Thorat identifies a critical tension in the Digital India initiative's framing of digital infrastructure as a universal service, namely that attempts to remedy the digital divide that has given Internet access to some but not others fail to recognize that Internet infrastructure developed within the state ignores the transnational and historical dimensions of infrastructure. The essay examines the relationship between the development of the telegraph as a colonial technology and the undersea cable network that forms contemporary Internet infrastructure and considers how that infrastructure

might be decolonized. Thorat argues for the need to create telecommunications pathways between postcolonial states to improve regional development and cooperation that operate outside of privatized initiatives by corporations like Google, Facebook, and Microsoft to promote global Internet infrastructure. Thorat's essay powerfully brings us back to the transnational infrastructure that facilitates digital homelandings for South Asian diasporas, anchored to both land and sea yet always inscribed by enforced borders, imagined affiliations, and conflicting notions of "home."

We note that the essays in this special issue comprise just a handful of the topics for intervention and ideas at stake at the interstices of South Asian studies and digital humanities. Thus, this special issue is not intended to be comprehensive, but rather to continue building a community of scholarship while demonstrating what is possible. There are so many topics within South Asian studies that are not reflected here but that would benefit from research that incorporates digital humanities. And while we recognize that there is so much more work to do, this issue is also an important reflection of how far we have come. Indeed, merely six years ago, a digital humanities roundtable at a SALA panel was an uncertainty, and the very idea of an essay on digital humanities in *South Asian Review* was a scholarly gamble. But our community has proven to be a receptive one, willing to recognize the possibilities that digital humanities can bring to South Asian studies scholarship in the twenty-first century. It is our hope that this issue sheds light on what is possible when we bring South Asian studies and digital humanities together, and that it helps move forward critical dialogues that continue to reveal the socio-political stakes of postcolonial digital humanities and future heuristics for re-thinking the role of technology in the field of South Asian studies.

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