

Introduction

Nation in the Vernacular

Thou art the ruler of the minds of all people, Dispenser of India's destiny.

*Thy name rouses the hearts of Punjab, Sindhu, Gujarat and Maratha, Of the
Dravida, Utkala and Bengal;*

*It echoes in the hills of the Vindhya and Himalayas, mingles in the
music of Yamuna and Ganga and is chanted by the waves of the Indian
Ocean.*

They pray for thy blessings and sing thy praise.

The saving of all people waits in thy hand,

Thou dispenser of India's destiny. Victory, victory, victory to thee.

In the National Anthem, India is portrayed as a collection of images, some geographical and some linguistic. Written by Rabindranath Tagore in 1911, this poem staked out linguistic regions long before they were officially formed. By juxtaposing language-based regions such as Punjab, Gujarat, Maratha, Utkala, and Banga with geographical features of the Indian landscape such as the mountains of Vindhya and Himalayas, the Ganga and Yamuna rivers, and the Indian Ocean, the anthem endows these linguistic regions with a naturalness that can be belied by an attention to the history of how they came to be formed in modern India. Just as mountains, rivers, and oceans were seen as primeval features of the national landscape, so, too, were the territorial domains of these languages. Akhil Gupta has argued that in invoking these linguistic regions, the National Anthem also referenced the speakers, their culture, and social life.¹ In marking these fragments of the nation, the Anthem was therefore a site where difference in India was incorporated and domesticated even as such difference was assigned roles in the fortunes of the nation.

¹ Akhil Gupta, "The Song of the Non Aligned World: Transnational Identities and Reinscription of Space in Late Capitalism", *Cultural Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (1992): 63–79.

This neat schema produced a linguistically diverse but, at heart, a united India. What this neatness veils is the truly messy nature of the making of India, particularly from the linguistic and regional angles. Many tensions came to bear on this process: tensions between regional cultural nationalism and Indian unitary nationalism, tensions arising from claims and counterclaims for territory between regions, tensions between regional minorities and the majority linguistic groups and, finally, tensions between the adivasi and the caste Hindu, Indo-European language-speaking elites.

The province of Odisha serves as a particularly good site to see how these tensions and their resolution founded the Indian nation. Formed in 1936 as a linguistically defined province, Odisha constitutes a majority Hindu population with a large minority community of adivasis. The movement for the formation of a separate province of Odisha began in the mid-1860s amidst debates about the relative underdevelopment of the Odia language. This movement to amalgamate Odia-speaking areas from the Bengal and Madras Presidencies as well as the Central Provinces ran parallel to the increasingly popular Indian anticolonial movement. Therefore, the modern regional community of Odisha had to be imagined even as the Indian national community was being configured in the political, cultural, and literary spheres.

By tracking the history of Odia linguistic politics and situating it in the broader frame of colonialism and Indian nationalism, this book analyses two interlinking tensions that bear upon the making of regions in India. One, that contrary to governing anxiety about multilingualism often signaled by the refrain “our language problem,” regional linguistic politics functioned to strengthen the hold of Indian nationalism. The goal of rescuing regional “mother tongues” from colonial neglect became fundamental to the deepening of Indian nationalism—the aspirations toward distinct regional self and shared national community went hand in hand. Two, that this celebratory narrative needs to be interrupted by a more cautionary approach to linguistic politics that illustrates how being placed within the logic of the nation made regional formations on linguistic basis into sites of hegemonic power, where those who did not fit into the neat linguistic framework of India were absorbed into regional communities as second-class citizens. Thus, not only are regional languages written into the making of the Indian nation, but also written in are the exclusions inevitably involved in the reification of regional Indian languages.

To do this, we need to uncover the labors performed by major Indian languages in the making of modern India, supported by a



Map 2. Political map of India ca. 1956.

better understanding of the term “vernacular” as it is applied to these languages. Through a history of the making of Odisha, this book proposes that we should supplement our histories of how language produces community with more critical histories of how language is used to mark territory and bolster regional political power.



Map 3. Political map of India 2018.

Any attempt to destabilize the sort of naturalized primeval linguistic argument that the National Anthem makes would require us to think about the formation of the linguistic region in a nonpositivist manner. This history will approach these questions by thinking about the contre-temps of power, affect, and politics connected to major Indian languages that contribute to the making of regional and national community in India.

Rethinking “Vernacular”: Language and its Sublimation in the Construction of Regional Territory

Often, in histories of linguistic nationalism in India, an invocation of the term “vernacular” carries with it a suggestion of powerlessness.² This connotation of vernacular as powerless draws from the two dominant paradigms for the understanding of this term in contemporary Indian scholarship.³ In scholarship on early modern literary history of India, the vernacular is understood as a diminutive and local counterpart of more dominant cosmopolitan or classical languages such as Sanskrit or Latin.⁴ Then again, in the study of linguistic politics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the term vernacular is used to mark the subalternity of Indian languages and their speakers in relation to the colonizing English language and its speakers.⁵ Comparing vernacular languages to “civilizing” languages such as Sanskrit or “colonizing” languages, like English has defined contemporary Indian life in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as less than either their own past or the colonized present. In this framework, the major Indian vernaculars appear besieged by a sense of decline from the classical past and inadequacy in relation to the present.⁶ Although current scholars of regional vernacular languages explore the politicization of language in deeply nuanced ways, an a priori assumption about the powerlessness of the vernacular in general prevents

² I employ the term “nationalism” in the sense that Sumathi Ramaswamy uses it to understand linguistic politics in colonial Tamil Nadu. Ramaswamy explicitly configured linguistic politics in colonial India within the conceptual framework of nationalism and illustrated that even though such politics does not neatly map onto Western understanding of nationalism, linguistic politics could be understood as “nationalism but different.” Sumathi Ramaswamy, *Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India, 1891–1970* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997).

³ An example of such a discussion would be Rama Sundari Mantena’s essay on colonial Telegu, in which she makes explicit reference to both paradigms in explaining her use of the term “vernacular.” See Rama Sundari Mantena, “Vernacular Futures: Colonial Philology and the Idea of History in Nineteenth-Century South India”, *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 42, no. 4 (2005): 513–34.

⁴ The most prominent example of this school of thought is Sheldon Pollock’s definition of the vernacular in Sheldon I. Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009).

⁵ The most authoritative statement of this paradigm can be found in Ranajit Guha’s discussion of historiography in the vernacular in Ranajit Guha, “The Authority of the Vernacular Pasts”, *Meanjin* 51, no. 2 (1992): 299–302.

⁶ In his article on colonial translation, Michael Dodson has illustrated how colonial philologists imbued the Indian vernaculars with qualities of inadequacy and degeneration in relation to both English and Sanskrit. Through a brief reading of contemporary English discussions about the connections between language and civilization, Dodson demonstrated how such ascriptions reflected not just on the status of the vernacular itself but also involved a judgment on the civilizational status of the people who spoke it. See Michael. S. Dodson, “Translating Science, Translating Empire: The Power of Language in Colonial North India”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 47, no. 4 (2005): 809–35.

them from asking more exacting questions about the representative power of the vernacular.⁷

Even as scholars historicize the making of vernacular mother tongues in India, there is little attention paid to the hegemonic power of language in the formation of modern Indian territorial and political alignments.⁸ My reading of political rhetoric on community, history, and territory in the movement for the creation of a separate state of Odisha suggests that the vernacular became powerful precisely due to prevailing assumptions about its indigeneity and its ability to represent and speak for hitherto unrepresented groups along with elite groups.⁹ The capacity of the vernacular to act as a broad-based site of representation is, as I shall illustrate, the product of justificatory strategies employed by movements for Odia linguistic regionalism in negotiations for territorial entitlements of new linguistic provinces. These justificatory strategies, in turn, hinged on arguing for the primacy of language as a basis of community while ensuring that such a claim did not exclude non-Odia speakers from definitions of the Odia community.

⁷ Even as I question this investment for the purposes of understanding the role of vernacular languages in colonial and postcolonial Indian polity, I do recognize the political and ethical stakes in this stressing of powerlessness. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak mentions in her discussion of strategic essentialism, even though essentialism in academic writing can be ethically suspect, the strategic deployment of essentialism by groups such as the Subaltern Studies Collective to interrogate the structures of colonial power can serve a radical purpose. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Donna Landry, and Gerald M. MacLean, *The Spivak Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

⁸ Research on the politics of language has traced how the evocation of Indian vernacular languages as the locus of regional community in nineteenth and early twentieth century enabled the emergence of the earliest forms of anticolonial political radicalism in different parts of India. For instance, Farina Mir has illustrated how the colonial government's negligence of Punjabi in favor of Urdu sparked the emergence of an autonomous Punjabi public sphere in which more complex cultural negotiation between the Hindu and Muslim Punjabi-speaking public was possible. See Farina Mir, *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010). In her study of the politics of mother tongue in colonial Andhra Pradesh, Lisa Mitchell has illustrated how language emerged as a foundational category in the reorganization of South Indian public life. See Lisa Mitchell, *Language, Emotion and Politics in South India: The Making of a Mother-Tongue* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009).

⁹ Like other major languages in India, literature in Odia emerged in the sixteenth century as part of radical critique of caste discrimination. This history of Odia as a non-elite language accessible to lower caste, adivasi and Muslim populations of the Odia-speaking areas was often referred to in the rhetoric of the movement for the formation of a separate province of Orissa. For the connections between early Odia literature and social critique, see Satya P. Mohanty, "Alternative Modernities and Medieval Indian Literature: The Oriya Lakshmi Purana as Radical Pedagogy", in *Colonialism, Modernity, and Literature: A View from India* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 3–21. The vision of early Odia literature as fundamentally populist has spilled into academic writings on the Odia literary history. See Mayadhar Mansingh, *History of Oriya Literature* (New Delhi: Sahitya Academy 1978), pp. 9–12, where he describes early Odia literature as "essentially proletarian."

The case of Odisha illustrates how this move was enacted through what I call the “sublimation” of language as the basis of regional territorial divisions. The changing definitions of Odia community and territorial limits of the proposed province illustrate how the foundational nature of language was sublimated through a shift in the definition of regional community from one based on shared language to one based on shared space even as the salience of language in the definition of regional community was maintained. At stake in this sublimation of shared language to shared space was the attempt of Odia leadership to claim tracts of land populated by a sizable non-Odia-speaking adivasi population. The history of the institutional life of the Odia language is also, then, a history of boundary formation in the new state of Odisha. Through a focus on the history of the demarcation of territorial limits of the emergent Odia province in the 1920s and 30s, this book reveals that when it came to the regional organization of Indian territory, the vernacular was anything but powerless.¹⁰

To truly understand the role of major vernacular languages in the shaping of modern India, we need to revise and expand our assumptions about the implications of the term “vernacular” in nineteenth and twentieth century political and official rhetoric.¹¹ While existing definitions of the term take into account the history of linguistic and literary development in early modern India as well as account for the status of the vernacular as the language of the oppressed, these paradigms cannot be borrowed and deployed in the study of regional linguistic politics in nineteenth- and twentieth-century India. Even as Sheldon Pollock’s definition of the vernacular acknowledges the institutional status of the literary vernaculars in early modern India as fundamental to the emergence of regional polities, his notion of vernacular as a *language of place* cannot be directly applied to the modern period where the place-ness of

¹⁰ This argument applies to the politics of language beyond the case of Odisha. As an edited volume on language and politics in India indicates, scholars are noting that dominant languages in Indian do play a role in extending regimes of power and authority. See Asha Sarangi (ed.), *Language and Politics in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009). My understanding of the power of language is drawn from the discussion on language and power in Martin Pütz, Joshua Fishmann, and Joanne Van Neff Aertselaer, “*Along the Routes to Power*”: *Explorations of Empowerment through Language* (Berlin: de Gruyter Mouton, 2006). In the context of language, Joshua Fishman defines power in this volume as “control over scarce resources” (p. 5).

¹¹ “Vernacular” here denotes the major literary vernaculars of India that came to serve as the basis of the linguistic reorganization of Indian territory. As Sheldon Pollock notes, these languages are not the same as those that are deemed vernacular in sociolinguistics. These are standardized, literary, and historically powerful languages that often formed the basis of premodern regional polities; Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men*, p. 24.

language itself is being rigorously contested by the colonial state and various nonofficial pressure groups. Furthermore, even as languages like Odia, Telegu, Kannada, and Marathi functioned at a disadvantage in the linguistic economy of colonial India, these languages came to command profound institutional power as the colonial and postcolonial Indian state reconfigured Indian territory along linguistic lines.

Existing definitions of the term draw on either the translation of relevant Indian words or by reference to the Western origin of the term through a search for its etymological roots. In the first paradigm, best exemplified by Sheldon Pollock's famous treatment of the vernacular millennium, the meaning of the term is founded on Indian words pertaining to languages that are first called vernacular in the late eighteenth century by colonial philologists. Pollock has defined his use of the term by drawing on early references to the word *desi* or *of place*, which he notes has served as a "conceptual counterpart" to the cosmopolitan in Indian languages at the beginning of the vernacular millennium.¹² Through a discussion of early modern literary history, Pollock illustrates how the use of the term *desi* was embedded in contemporary efforts among local elites to demarcate their regional worlds from the broader cosmopolitan world in which languages such as Sanskrit and Persian operated.¹³ Through a discussion of how translations of the Mahabharata into various Indian languages are deployed in the process of linking language, space, and political order, Pollock illustrates how the *desi* languages of India were being used to establish the spatial boundaries of regional political praxis. Even as he rightly hesitates to provide a definitive explanation of the term vernacular, Pollock insists on the relational nature of the vernacular. Ultimately, he argues that a vernacular language can only be vernacular in relation to a cosmopolitan language.¹⁴ Therefore, in this framework, vernacular or *desi* languages were self-consciously local *languages of place* defined in opposition to cosmopolitan languages that transcended the local. As such, vernacular languages are understood as less than—in scope as well as power—cosmopolitan languages. And a fundamental feature of the vernacular is its "emplacement" in the local.

The second paradigm emerged from the postcolonial epistemological critique of imperial knowledge by the subaltern studies school of Indian historiography. In an effort to unravel the orientalist depictions of Indian languages as languages that are unable to sustain the progress of modernity, this paradigm made much of the nonmodernity of Indian languages. Rather than being a weakness, the nonmodernity of the Indian vernacular had the ability to house voices and ways of thinking that would have been

¹² Ibid, p. 22. ¹³ Ibid, pp. 380–97. ¹⁴ Ibid, p. 388.

drowned out by the increasing influence of colonial modernity. This paradigm takes the nonmodernity of these languages for granted—as though they escaped imperial intervention through the introduction of colonial philology or even European standards of literary criticism.¹⁵ In some ways, these languages were able to sustain older traditions and idioms. However, that was not the vernacular that came to be empowered in colonial and postcolonial India.

In the second paradigm, best exemplified by Ranajit Guha’s plea for the recognition of the authority of vernacular pasts, the etymology of the term is traced to its Latin root—*verna* or slave. Guha’s influential treatment of the term is an exposition of both the Latin root of the word and its English use in the nineteenth century. Guha argues that the modern Indian understanding of the vernacular draws from the English use of the term, which is hinged on the indigeneity of the vernacular even as it remains marked by a trace of enslavement left behind by its Latin origins. In the Indian context, Guha poses, the “vernacular” became a pejorative term that served as a “distancing and supremacist sign which marked out its referents, indigenous languages and cultures, as categorically inferior to those of the West or of England in particular.” As such this ascription of inferiority allowed it to uphold “in every invocation, the power, value and status of white civilization.”¹⁶ For Guha, every invocation of the term vernacular was an instance of the epistemological violence perpetrated by colonial disciplinary knowledge. An example of the postcolonial critique of colonialism and its instrumental knowledge of the colonized, Guha’s reading of the vernacular is very influential in contemporary postcolonial scholarship on Indian vernacular languages, historiography, and linguistic politics. As an important volume of essays on regional historiography in India reveals, histories written in the vernacular are seen as representative of an authentic subaltern voice.¹⁷

¹⁵ The impact of colonialism on the languages of the colonized has been extensively studied. See Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Monica Heller and Bonnie McElhinny, *Language, Capitalism, Colonialism: Toward a Critical History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017); Judith T. Irvine, “Subjected Words: African Linguistics and the Colonial Encounter”, *Language and Communication* 28, no. 4 (2008): 323–43; Judith T. Irvine, “The Family Romance of Colonial Linguistics”, *Pragmatics. Quarterly Publication of the International Pragmatics Association (IPrA)* 5, no. 2 (1995): 139–53; Joseph Errington, *Linguistics in a Colonial World: A Story of Language, Meaning, and Power* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2008); Michael J. Franklin, “Orientalist Jones”: *Sir William Jones, Poet, Lawyer, and Linguist, 1746–1794* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Javed Majeed, *Colonialism and Knowledge in Grierson’s Linguistic Survey of India* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2018).

¹⁶ Guha, “Authority of Vernacular Pasts”, pp. 299–300.

¹⁷ Aquil Raziuddin and Partha Chatterjee (eds.), *History in the Vernacular* (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2010).

In contrast to Pollock and Guha, this treatment of the institutional life of the vernacular in the making of modern Indian regional territory points to an expansion of our understanding of the term “vernacular,” which would compensate for some of the intellectual pitfalls inherent in the central implications of these two paradigms—that the vernacular is local, powerless, and indigenous. Rather than taking these three features of vernacular languages for granted, one can trace how major Indian regional vernacular languages came to claim a status of indigeneity and radical, representative powerlessness. Attention to the emerging official recognition of these languages as the basis of regional territory can reveal that these languages were not always indigenous to the territory that they claimed. As the case of Odia will reveal, in the movement for the creation of Odisha, arguments about the powerlessness of the Odia language and its people in relation to other groups was coupled with a systematic production of a historiographical orthodoxy portraying the history of Odia as an ancient, independent, Indo-European vernacular that was indigenous to the areas being claimed as Odisha. This seemingly contradictory narrative about the status of the vernacular as both powerless and linguistically singular was driven by an equally paradoxical imperative to appear as minority in a bid to become the majority group in the proposed province. This deployment of a minority discourse rooted in liberal narratives of emancipation, the rhetoric of state protection of minority rights and the threat of homelessness, effectively produced Oriya as a historically independent vernacular *of the region* fallen on hard times.¹⁸

By focusing on the institutional life of language, I seek to elaborate on the repressive power of the vernacular. My argument here hinges on recognizing the dual lives of the regional vernaculars in India—the quotidian and the institutional. Therefore, it is not my contention that the major Indian vernaculars function only as powerful classificatory tools of colonial and postcolonial governmentality. Rather, I pose that we need to recognize that even as vernacular language use enables the kind of radical politics being valorized by Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee, and others, it does so in parallel to its life as a hegemonic, institutional marker of identity recognized by the postcolonial Indian state. By “institutional,” I mean the ability of language to demarcate regional boundaries and hence determine individual access to provincial state resources through

¹⁸ My definition of liberal discourse of minority rights is borrowed from Amir R. Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007) p. 2. Mufti argues that liberal thought on the “question of minority existence” displays certain central tropes. They include, “assimilation, emancipation, separatism, conversion, the language of state protection and minority rights, uprooting, exile, and homelessness.”

the ascription of regional domicile.¹⁹ Accordingly, this discussion does not privilege the institutional life of language. Rather, it is a critique of its overriding influence in the understanding and definition of modern India.²⁰ It questions the authority of the vernacular by drawing attention to the complex nature of this authority.

The authority of the major Indian vernacular languages draws from their ability to do two things in India. First, as Ranajit Guha has suggested, their authority draws from their ability to represent the subaltern voice. In an ethical economy of ideas, the vernacular has authority precisely because it is powerless. Second, and this is my contention, the vernacular Indian languages have a peculiar ability to exercise their institutional authority through their sublimation.

The term “sublimation” carries obvious psychoanalytical connotations. In Freud’s use, “sublimation” denotes the process of turning socially unacceptable hidden desires into more visible socially productive actions.²¹ However, for Freud, this sublimation, which produces the most essential elements of “civilized” society from poetry to scientific invention, is a source of resentment, of discontent, and this resentment renders the process of sublimation always potentially reversible. In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud notes that “sublimation is a vicissitude which has been forced upon the instincts entirely by civilization.” Sublimation allows the individual to adapt to society and to reconcile her impulses with that of society.²²

¹⁹ In his path-breaking book on regimes of governance by high modernist states, James Scott has remarked on the institutional role of language as a means for the state to render its citizens “legible” or “visible.” See James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 72–3. As the colonial shift from Persian to Bengali, Hindi, and Odia as the official languages of the Bengal Presidency in the 1830s illustrates, even the colonial government, in its unprecedented effort to “see” its subjects, recognized that the institution of official languages was an important means of categorizing and ruling people. See Farina Mir, “Imperial Policy, Provincial Practices: Colonial Language Policy in Nineteenth-century India”, *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 43, no. 4 (2006): 395–427.

²⁰ David Washbrook noted that “new ideology (of modern linguistic ethnicity) dictated that territorial space itself must be culturally (or at least linguistically) homogenous” and thus India became a “a society of language jatis much as it has previously been one of the caste jatis competing for honor and status within a continuing multi-jati social order”; quoted in Asha Sarangi, *Language and Politics in India*, p. 6.

²¹ Freud’s discussions about sublimation are scattered and fractured. The clearest articulation of the idea is in his *Civilization and its Discontents*, in *The Standard Edition*, Vol. 21 (London: Hogarth, 1956–74), p. 97.

²² In his reading of Freud’s understanding of sublimation, Eckart Goebel suggests: “Freud’s concept of sublimation likewise covers both dimensions. It encompasses the individual balance between self-preservation and the demands of the drives, encountered in technical literature as ‘neutralization’, and also posits the necessary renunciation of the drives for the benefit of the society in which the individual lives, later given the term

Despite what seems like taking liberties with Freud's formulation, this notion of sublimation can be borrowed in a limited way to explain the transference of regional political allegiance from language to territory as regional political parties were under pressure to fall in line with broader majoritarian nationalism. In my use of the term, I seek to draw out two important moves that sublimation of language involves. The first is the repression of the increasingly unpopular drive to demand rights for a collective based on an exclusive linguistic definition of community. The move to territory enabled the Odia regional movement to continue to desire an Odia province without making a case for the exclusion of non-Odia speaking people from their imagination of regional cultural and political community. This move allowed the Odia elite to claim adivasi communities as Odia because they inhabited land that the movement claimed to be Odisha. Second, drawing on Freud's argument about discontent, I suggest that this sublimation was forced—instrumentally brought about to enable the Odia movement to adapt to Indian nationalism and to reconcile its exclusive linguistic politics with contemporary demands to imagine a universal Indian citizen. This “false sublimation,” as Nietzsche called sublimation that was based on only weakening of drives, was always precarious and essentially easy to undermine once political circumstances demanded it.²³ In the case of Odisha, the reversal of this sublimation of language by reference to territory would take place once the new province of Odisha was formed and the question of the allocation of state resources to “genuine” Odias was raised in discussions about the limits of domicile within the new province. Ultimately, I use sublimation as a means to uncover the process that Ayesha Jalal commends researchers to question—the given-ness of language as a category of analysis. Can we take the territorial domain of language for granted?²⁴

This is particularly evident in the process through which these vernacular languages become officially recognized as regional languages and come to be the basis of the territorial realignment of Indian regions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The conflation of language and territory is fundamental to this process. The history of the “landing” of the vernacular languages in India illustrates how they emerge as the most powerful representative category in postcolonial India that determines political and territorial alignments to the exclusion of other categories

‘adaptation’.” Freud himself refers once to sublimation as an “art”. Whoever masters this art is capable either of directing uneconomical instinctual impulses towards a higher purpose with greater social value or of neutralizing them; ultimately, he is able to adapt himself completely. See Eckart Goebel, *Beyond Discontent: Sublimation from Goethe to Lacan* (London: Continuum, 2012).

²³ Ibid, pp. 63–106. ²⁴ Quoted in Asha Sarangi, *Language and Politics in India*, p. 6.

such as class or caste.²⁵ In her book on Telegu linguistic politics, Lisa Mitchell has illustrated how language came to be a foundational category in India.²⁶ However, a reading of political rhetoric of the period shows that language could only serve as a foundational category being bypassed while maintaining its salience in defining regional territory. That is, the reason language can trump other registers of difference is because it can be used as a basis of territorial divisions and then neatly sublimated in ways that religion, caste, and class cannot. The capacity of language to be “landed” and its ability to be sublimated through a reference to it as simply a feature of territory and not as the predominant determinant of the scope of regional spaces allows it to not obfuscate other ways of being in the same land. This sets the regional vernacular languages apart in their capacity to serve as a foundational representational category.

In this way, the major vernacular languages of India are simultaneously able to define Indian regions as exclusive cultural spaces while enabling the inclusion of people who do not belong. However, this sublimation is the product of elite efforts to define Indian territory and community and often involves the imposition of a certain vernacular language on areas in which they are not spoken. This is particularly true of the areas inhabited by adivasi populations. The history of regionalization of vernacular languages reveals that they are local as well as translocal, elite, and fundamentally powerful.

The example of the formation of the territorial linguistic province of Odisha in 1936 is a particularly good instance for illustrating how the major regional vernaculars of India became powerful, translocal languages with clearly demarcated territorial domains. As one of the earliest linguistic state movements, beginning in the last decade of the nineteenth century and culminating in 1936 with the formation of a new state of Odisha, this movement necessarily involved complex justificatory strategies that would lay the groundwork for subsequent redistribution of Indian provinces along linguistic lines. As Odisha was to be culled from three different British provinces (Bihar and Orissa, Bengal Presidency, and Madras Presidency), the movement fell into a strangely dislocated discussion about reorganizing provinces where leaders representing different vernaculars were vying to lay claim to the same territories as

²⁵ Theorists argue that language is unlike other registers of difference in a multicultural society because of the “fact that language is the medium in which most social interaction takes place, the fact that most people can speak only one or several languages, the fact that learning new languages is very difficult for most adults, and the fact that translation is expensive, inconvenient, and always imperfect.” Alan Patten, “Political Theory and Language Policy” *Political Theory* 29, no. 5 (2001), 692.

²⁶ Lisa Mitchell, *Language, Emotion, and Politics in South India*.

Bengali speaking, Hindi speaking, or Telegu speaking.²⁷ This competition for territory led to further debates about which linguistic community would gain control over lands where none of these languages was spoken as the mother tongue. The Odia, Telegu, and Bihari claims to tribal areas that lay in the intersection of Odia-, Telegu-, and Hindi-speaking areas proved to be particularly contested.²⁸

More importantly, the disaffiliation of Odia linguistic regionalism from language resulted in the creation of a land-based vernacular that was always posed as though it was set to include other Indians who had made Odisha their home, but which politically allowed for the remaking of adivasis who lived in the middle of the Oriya language tracts and did not speak Odia into members of the 'natural' Odia community by dint of their landed vernacular. This book traces the history of the effort among the Oriya-speaking elite to situate the adivasi communities of the proposed province within the Odia-speaking community despite the linguistic, social, cultural and economic differences between the Odia-speaking people and their adivasi neighbors to expose the emerging ability of vernacular languages to speak for communities that were not necessarily allied to those vernaculars.

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As this book is about the making of a linguistic region, the question of language needs to be complemented by the question of how the region has been understood as a category in early Indian nationalism. For this, again, the National Anthem is a good starting point. The Anthem defined India as a collective of linguistic regions such as Punjab, Sindh, Orissa, Gujarat, and Bengal. By choosing this song as the National Anthem of the Indian republic, the Constituent Assembly in 1950 acknowledged the

²⁷ For a detailed history of border disputes in Orissa before and after 1947, see Nivedita Mohanty, *Oriya Nationalism: Quest for a United Odisha, 1866–1936* (Bhubaneswar: Prafulla, 2005).

²⁸ Public and official debates about this matter began as early as 1903 when the Bengal government started to consider plans for the territorial reorganization of the Bengal Presidency. Even as fervent opposition in the Madras legislature forced the Indian government to abandon these plans, the issue was raised again in the Montague Chelmsford reforms. Subsequent government established commissions such as the Phillip Duff Commission (1924) and the Orissa Boundary Commission (1931) surveyed the population of the Oriya-speaking Ganjam district to ascertain whether the Ganjam district should be detached from the Madras Presidency. See *Report of the Enquiry into the Attitude of the Oriya-Speaking Population of the Madras Presidency towards Amalgamation with Other Oriya-Speaking Tracts*, Orissa State Archives, Bihar and Orissa Secretariat Papers, B&O Doc 11216. Also *Report of the Orissa Committee*, British Library India Office Records, L/PJ/9/54.

constitutive nature of regional linguistic states in the normative understanding of the Indian Union. However, it was in the decades between 1911, when Tagore wrote the poem, and its adoption as the Indian National Anthem in 1950 that the linguistic regions it mentioned assumed this political and cultural significance for an independent India. In 1911, the precise linguistic nature of these areas was not considered their most dominant feature. At the national level, these areas were seen as merely geographical units not yet marked by the various meanings that the term “linguistic region” would evoke half a century later during the linguistic reorganization of the Indian provinces.²⁹ Indeed, for Tagore, areas such as Punjab, Sindh, and Odisha merely denoted parts of India. As actual efforts by the colonial government for the linguistic reorganization of British Indian provinces had not yet begun in 1911, Odisha and Sindh would not become separate provinces until a quarter of a century later. Furthermore, the Indian National Congress, the most influential all-India nationalist party, had not yet rethought its understanding of India as a federation of linguistic provinces. Therefore, when Tagore described India as constituted by these parts in 1911, he was referencing them simply as locales of the nation—the nation in the vernacular.

By 1950, the Constituent Assembly, with its concerns about issues of citizenship, federation, domicile, rights, franchise, and electoral constituencies, understood regions like Odisha and Sindh as more than just parts of the Indian nation. Regions were not merely considered as geographic areas but linguistic units; rather than just being part of the nation, the region and its language came to mark Indian citizenship and democracy. By the 1950s, the Indian citizen was imagined not only as Indian but also as a member of a particular region and a speaker of a particular language. Hence, by this time, both the Indian nation and the universal Indian citizen came to be marked by linguistic difference.

This transformation of the region from simply a geographical category to a linguistic and constitutional category is the focus of this book. I trace this transformation by investigating the formation of Odisha, a province in eastern India, as a linguistic, historical, cultural, and geographical region. Through this history of the formation of Odisha, I illustrate how

²⁹ The linguistic reorganization of the Indian provinces took place 1956 to 1970s. While the linguistic reorganization of the Indian provinces had begun in 1936 with the formation of Sindh and Odisha, the new postcolonial Indian state finally faced the questions of regional linguistic loyalties in 1956 when the new states of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh were formed. This moment in the history of the infant postcolonial state was one of great national anxiety as the Indian leadership saw the pressing need for the creation of linguistic provinces as a divisive move that would eventually jeopardize the basic unity of the Indian republic.

the idea of a linguistic region emerged both within the area that would eventually become Odisha and, at the national level, in the Indian National Congress.³⁰ In particular, I look at the changing relationship between the Indian National Congress, as a representative of the all-India nationalist attitude towards regional politics, and the Utkal Sammillani, a regional political organization that represented all the Odia-speaking areas established in 1903.

The relationship between regional linguistic politics and nationalism in 1903 was not the same as the comfort with the multilingual nature of India reflected in the Constituent Assembly's choice of the Indian National Anthem in 1950. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, anticolonial nationalism led by the Indian National Congress was accompanied by movements in various parts of the country for the creation of linguistically homogenous administrative provinces like Odisha, Sindh, and Andhra Pradesh.³¹ In its early years, the Indian National Congress remained indifferent to such movements and focused on creating a common national platform for anticolonial politics. However, even decades after the Congress officially acknowledged the demands of these regional linguistic movements and acquiesced to the reorganization of the Indian provinces on linguistic lines in 1920, the national leadership remained apprehensive of the divisive potential of the regional linguistic politics.

The early engagement of the Indian National Congress with the question of linguistic difference and regional politics based on language in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was marked by an anxiety about the divisiveness of such regional politics.³² This anxiety drew from pressure on the Congress to present to the colonial government the most representative and "authoritative statement" of the needs and desires of

³⁰ Odisha, in its present-day form, came into existence in 1936. Like other provinces in India, it is a linguistically organized province. That is, a majority of the population of Odisha speak the Odia language and these speakers of the Odia language are also called Odia. Prior to 1936, areas in which a majority of the people spoke Odia were scattered in three different British provinces. Hence, when I mention Odisha in a pre-1936 context, I mean the Odia-speaking regions. It is not my intention to naturalize a place that did not exist before 1936.

³¹ Such movements were particularly lively in the areas that eventually became Sindh, Andhra Pradesh, and Orissa. For a history of the movement for the creation of Sind and Andhra Pradesh, see Sarah F. D. Ansari, *Sufi Saints and State Power: The Pirs of Sind, 1843–1947*, Cambridge South Asian Studies; 50 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Allen Keith Jones, *Politics in Sindh, 1907–1940: Muslim Identity and the Demand for Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2002); G. V. Subba Rao and Movement Andhra Pradesh Committee of History of Andhra, *History of Andhra Movement* (Hyderabad: Committee of History of Andhra Movement, 1982).

³² Henceforth, the Indian National Congress will be called simply Congress.

the Indian people.³³ The success of the Congress as an all-Indian organization set up to negotiate political, legal, and constitutional reforms with the colonial state was contingent on its ability to present itself as the sole, most authoritative representative of all non-European inhabitants of British India. Hence, unity became the most central objective of the early Indian National Congress in the nineteenth century. To that end, as Gordon Johnson put it: “It was no good speaking to England with a babble of tongues.”³⁴ As national unity and establishing its own status as the most representative Indian organization became the Congress’ primary objective, the early Congress became very selective in its choice of issues. The deciding factor in the choice of Congress agenda of the nineteenth century was whether the issue would help unite the people of India or prove divisive.³⁵ Furthermore, it was essential at this stage to discuss only those issues that could evoke a consensus among the various members of the Congress. Hence, in 1888, Ananda Charlu—one of the early leaders of the Congress—noted in a speech to the delegates at Allahabad: “If we all agreed on any matter, then we will submit the universal view to government; but if we cannot come to a substantial agreement among ourselves then we drop the subject till we can.”³⁶

This stand precluded the Congress from discussing any issues that could cause divisions within the organization’s ranks. Also excluded from the Congress platform was any politics that was “provincial” rather than “national” – any politics that did not pertain to the whole of India. In effect, this effort to make the Congress an all-India organization resulted in the marginalization of more provincial and local brands of politics. In particular, the emerging regional linguistic identity politics in areas including the Orissa division of the Bengal Presidency or the Telegu-speaking area of the Madras Presidency threatened the effort to produce national unity within Congress. Hence the question of politics associated with vernacular languages was studiously avoided in Congress meetings at the time. In terms of regional politics, the Congress’ avoidance of regional issues resulted in the continued influence of regional political

³³ See Gordon Johnson, *Provincial Politics and Indian Nationalism; Bombay and the Indian National Congress, 1880 to 1915* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973). Johnson describes the political expediency of the early Congress claim about its representative status. He notes: “In order to influence English political parties it was essential to draw up a single all-India programme. There was no point in having several bodies working in London all claiming to represent Indian interests. As an English sympathizer wrote to Pheroze Shah Mehta, ‘Nothing would more strengthen the hands of your friends in this country than to have an authoritative statement which would show to all the world what people of India want ... To set the constituencies in motion will not be difficult as soon as we know for certain what the people of India wish for,’” p.13.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 35. ³⁵ Ibid, pp. 36–7. ³⁶ Ibid, p. 35.

organizations that represented regional demands to the colonial government. Even as this effort to avoid any involvement in regional/provincial politics ensured that Congress remained a purely national entity, the lack of a Congress presence in the provinces severely curtailed the efforts of Congress to build a popular following.³⁷

This avoidance of regional politics was sorely tested during the partition of the Bengal Presidency (1903–12) and raised serious questions about the representative nature of the organization. The governmental proposal to partition the highly politicized Bengal Presidency into a Hindu majority province of West Bengal and a Muslim majority province of East Bengal occasioned the first direct opposition to the colonial government by Congress.³⁸ The Risley Circular that first proposed this partition in 1903 was received with great consternation by the members of Congress at the annual meeting in Madras.³⁹ Congress opposition used the rhetoric of linguistic affinity to argue against the partition of Bengal on religious lines. Hence, the accusation that the British were separating “Hindu Bengali brothers” from their “Muslim Bengali brothers” came to dominate the rhetoric of the anti-partition movement. Here, the Congress rhetoric posed that the linguistic community centred on the Bengali language trumped the sway of Hindu or Muslim religious community allegiance.

This vocabulary of dissent represents a very crucial paradox in the Congress attitude towards regional linguistic politics. As a national organization, it was invested in ensuring that this kind of division between Hindus and Muslims should not be validated. Paradoxically, while avoiding such a religious division, the Congress was invoking a different kind of internally differentiated nation—an India constituted by linguistic groups whose unity was being consistently articulated by regional political movements.⁴⁰ As a consequence of the antipartition agitation in 1903–1908, the Congress had to acknowledge the importance of regional linguistic identity politics at the beginning of the twentieth century. However, even as this recognition marked the politics of the Congress in the early twentieth century, it was not extended to other regional linguistic politics in India. Congress ambivalence towards such politics is evident in the coupling of the denunciation of the partition of Bengal

³⁷ Ibid, pp. 35–6.

³⁸ For details, see Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903–1908* (New Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1973).

³⁹ For Risley’s statement about the reorganization of the Bengal Presidency, see Two Bachelor of Arts, *The Oriya Movement: Being a Demand for a United Orissa* ([S.l.]: H. H. Panda, 1919). Appendix A.

⁴⁰ See A. M. Zaidi (ed.), *Inc the Glorious Tradition, Volume One: 1885–1920*, five vols. (New Delhi: Indian Institute of Applied Political Research, 1987), p. 238.

with the criticism of the proposed partition of the Madras Presidency that would have allowed the unification of all Odia-speaking people under a single administration. Criticizing all government efforts to rearrange provincial boundaries the Congress resolved in Madras in 1903:

[T]his Congress views with deep concern the present policy of the Government of India in breaking up territorial divisions which have been of long standing and are closely united by ethnological, legislative, social and administrative regulations and deprecates the separation from Bengal of Dacca, Mymensingh, Chittagong Divisions and portions of Chotanagpur Division, and also the separation of the district of Ganjam and the agency tracts of the Ganjam and Vizagapatnam Districts from the Madras Presidency.⁴¹

In this critique of colonial policy, regional communities, and, by extension, the “region” in 1903 seems to be the product of the conflation of two different types of category. Region is a territorial unit “united” by “ethnological” and “social” bonds. But it is also united by “administrative” and “legislative” regulations. Thus, a region is both a social category that draws on native ethnic, social, and cultural commonalities and a geopolitical category that is founded on colonial administrative borders. The conflation of these two types of definition of region does not allow for the possibility that there may be a contradiction between them. This ignores the possibility that colonial regions may not necessarily be culturally, social, or ethnically homogenous. By espousing this dual definition of the region in 1903, Congress was able to illustrate that there was no contradiction between their disavowal of the Odia claim that the administrative boundaries were not “natural” and the avowal of the Bengali claim that the division of Bengal was dividing a region united by ethnological and social bonds.

Hence, even as Congress acknowledged the significance of the linguistic bond among the Bengali-speaking people, it was unable to uphold the broader demand for the creation of linguistic provinces being raised across British India. However, by raising the question of the “ethnological” and the “social” in the definition of the regional community, Congress rhetoric of this period inadvertently opened the door for future regional demands based on ethnic or linguistic homogeneity.

Historically, while these movements for the creation of linguistic provinces mobilized people around particular languages, the leaders of the Indian National Congress were attempting to inspire people of various provinces to transcend their regional differences and come together as a unified national community. In the minds of Congress leaders, the project of these regional linguistic identity movements was fundamentally at odds with their own project of producing a common Indian national identity.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 238.

Even as late as 1952, five years after the independence of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of Independent India from 1948–1964, argued that:

I have been overburdened with the thought that we must give the topmost priority to the development of a sense of unity in India because these are critical days. Any decision that might come in the way of that unity should be delayed till we have laid a strong foundation for it. The idea of linguistic provinces will intensify provincial feelings and that, undoubtedly, will weaken the concept of a unified India.⁴²

Despite these anxieties about divisiveness of the linguistic identity politics in the provinces, India remains, seven decades later, a federation of mostly linguistic regions. Paradoxically, also continuing is the divisive politics that had made Nehru so anxious in 1950. The Cauvery water dispute between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, the campaign by the Shiv Sena in Bombay to oust the Bihari “outsiders” from the city and similar attacks on Tamil speakers in the slums of Bangalore illustrate the continued use of regional “nationalist” rhetoric to argue local political, economic, and infrastructural difference between various Indian provinces. The relationship between the region and the nation remain, as ever, deeply fraught on many different registers.

This book poses the following question: What does this coexistence of profound linguistic difference and unitary nationalism reveal about the nature of the Indian nation and the relationship between the region and the nation? Is the region merely a subnation? Despite recent efforts by a new generation of scholars to decenter the nation from historical narratives of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century India, the idea of subnationalism continues to function as the dominant framework of analysis for studies of regional politics.⁴³ Studies of regional politics, prominently

⁴² Robert D. King, *Nehru and the Language Politics of India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 15.

⁴³ For a definition of subnational understanding of regional politics, see Sanjib Baruah, *India against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality*, Critical Histories (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999). Some recent revisionist histories are Farina Mir, “Imperial Policy, Provincial Practices: Colonial Language Policy in Nineteenth-Century India”, *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 43, no. 4 (2006); Sumathi Ramaswamy, *Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India, 1891–1970*, Studies on the History of Society and Culture 29 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997); Prachi Deshpande, *Creative Pasts: Historical Memory and Identity in Western India, 1700–1960*, Cultures of History (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Yasmin Saikia, *Fragmented Memories: Struggling to Be Tai-Ahom in India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Lisa Mitchell, “Parallel Languages, Parallel Cultures: Language as a New Foundation for Reorganization of Knowledge and Practice in Southern India”, *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 42, no. 4 (2005); Mridu Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam, Community, and the History of Kashmir* (London: C. Hurst, 2003); Chitrlekha Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging: Islam, Regional Identity, and the Making of Kashmir* (London: C. Hurst, 2004).

Sanjib Baruah's *India against Itself*, define regional politics as subnationalism – a regional iteration of all India nationalism. Baruah defines subnationalism as a “pattern of politicization and mobilization” at the regional level, which “coexist with and are occasionally in tension with the pan-Indian national community, are best located in the intellectual universe of nations and nationalism.”⁴⁴ Hence, according to Baruah, the prefix “sub” in subnationalism points to both the subordinate status of regionalism and its coexistence with all-India nationalism. However, he notes that: “[W]hile the qualifier helps to make a distinction between regional and pan-Indian national projects, the distinction should only be seen as provisional.”⁴⁵ In this study on Assamese “subnationalism,” Baruah argues for the recuperation of the initial utopian thrust in the formulation of the Indian Federation; that India is an egalitarian union of various identities.⁴⁶ He demands that the Indian Federation create institutional space for the articulation of and engagement with subnational dissent; thus resolving the separatist crisis in the northeastern province of Assam.

Such arguments are often invested in the federal nature of the Indian nation-state and use the term subnationalism to provide for both regional political particularity and the inherent integrity of the Indian Union, despite regional difference. The notion of the subnational presumes that the nation is reproduced on a smaller scale in the subnation/region, and that the subnation is structurally similar to the nation. The limitations of such a definition lie in the absence of clear argument about why such subnational politics does not eventually overwhelm Indian national efforts at maintaining unity and secede from the Indian nation.

Studies of regional history have branched out into the cultural history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of various regions in India. While there is an increasing attention given to the particularity of regional cultural politics, such histories remain within the problematic of subnationalism. Scholars of regional history, including Sumathi Ramaswamy, Lisa Mitchell, Yasmeen Saikia, Veena Naregal, Mridu Rai, Chitralkha Zutshi, Prachi Deshpande, and Farina Mir, have illustrated that cultural history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Kashmir, and Maharashtra respectively are integrally linked with the creation of a regional political identity that was used to negotiate with the colonial state on issues of local concern.⁴⁷ These

⁴⁴ Baruah, *India against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality*, p. 5. ⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 5.

⁴⁶ Assamese is the name for both the language spoken in the northeast Indian province of Assam and the people of that province.

⁴⁷ These studies vary in their methodological and thematic focus. Sumathi Ramaswamy and Lisa Mitchell investigate the relationship between cultural politics focused on mother

studies use the history of regional language, literature, print culture, religious institutions, and princely states to point out that identity politics in the various provinces of India emerged in response to colonialism and the administrative structures of the colonial state. Ultimately, these studies have attempted to prove through detailed cultural histories that not all politics in modern India was national. Cultural movements of the Indian provinces were fundamentally political. The histories of politics of Indian nationalism have to take into account these particular regional political movements that were not always animated by the need to create and sustain a homogenous Indian national community. As a result these studies have drawn attention to the relationship between regional, cultural, and political movements and all-India nationalism.

For instance, Prachi Deshpande shows through a reading of history writing in the province of Maharashtra how particular narratives of the Maharastrian past were used to justify the separate identity of the Maharastrian people while illustrating the significance of Maharashtra in the broader Indian community of linguistic provinces. She argues that the region cannot be seen as a “subset of nationalism with differing local flavors.” Rather, region as a category developed in *conjunction* with nationalism. However, this formulation of the region as something that develops in conjunction with nationalism remains bound within the problematic of subnationalism. That is, even as her discussion of Maratha historiography points beyond it, her explicit formulation of the region and the nation remains within the problematic of subnationalism. Studies like Deshpande’s reading of history in Maharashtra argue that regionalism is separate but subsumed within nationalism. What remains unclear is how such a relationship is sustained over time.

Hence, even as the scholarship on regional history has illustrated the particularity of regional politics and its simultaneity with nationalism,

tongues, Tamil and Telegu respectively, and the social movements in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. See Ramaswamy, *Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India, 1891–1970*; Mitchell, “Parallel Languages, Parallel Cultures: Language as a New Foundation for Reorganization of Knowledge and Practice in Southern India.” Saikai and Deshpande investigate how the formation of historical memory of the region Assam and Maharashtra enabled and informed the emerging relationship between the regional and the pan-Indian nation. See Saikia, *Fragmented Memories: Struggling to Be Tai-Ahom in India*; Deshpande, *Creative Pasts: Historical Memory and Identity in Western India, 1700–1960*. Chitralkha Zutshi and Mridu Rai investigate the relationship between religious politics in Kashmir and the situation of Kashmir within the Indian nation. Both argue that “Kashmiriyat” is a term coined to think about religious secularism that enables Kashmir to fit into the normative idea of the Indian nation. Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging: Islam, Regional Identity, and the Making of Kashmir*; Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam, Community, and the History of Kashmir*.

what remains relatively unstudied is the nature of the relationship between regional politics and nationalism. How do particular regional identity politics and the nationalist project for the creation of a united India come to be resolved even as the distinction between them remains fundamental to political discourse in India? This relationship can be best understood by tracing the formulation of region as a category in nationalist thought in the early twentieth century. To this end, I focus on the period when a tactical resolution between the demands of the region and the nation occurs in India. My contention is that at the root of this resolution is the need (both at the regional and at the national level) to imagine a new citizen of emergent India.

Through detailed studies of cultural and intellectual engagement of regional political, literary, and historical organizations in early twentieth-century Odisha, this book traces the resolution of regional and national interests. I argue here that in the period between 1900 and 1920, the emergence of the idea of a universal and politicized Indian citizen occasioned this resolution of the tension between the region and the nation. As the meanings of politics, statehood, rule, and subjecthood changed due to the colonial state's efforts to introduce franchise in India, both the Indian National Congress and the major regional political organization in Odisha, the Utkal Sammillani, were forced to elaborate a clear relationship between Odisha as a region and the broader Indian nation in order to define the universal Indian citizen.

The case of Odisha is particularly instructive in this investigation of the relationship between the region and the nation because of the simultaneous development of both Odisha as a region and India as a nation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This simultaneous emergence of Odisha and India as modern political and cultural categories marked Odia political life in the early twentieth century with conflicts between regional and national objectives. Hence, in this period, reflections on the engagement of regional political interests with the homogenizing tendencies of emergent Indian nationalism provide a very productive site for the investigation of the emerging political thought about the relationship between linguistic regions and Indian nationalism.

Historians of Odisha have read the early twentieth century, particularly the period between 1900 and 1920, as a period marked by a shift from insular Odia parochialism to a more politically "legitimate" participation in cosmopolitan Indian nationalism. Some have argued that even as the Odia political leadership was invested in regional interests, they did not necessarily oppose the gradual establishment of all-India nationalism – that the region and nation coexisted peacefully in the minds of early Odia

politicians.⁴⁸ Both these readings of early twentieth-century Odia politics are invested in the primary legitimacy of Indian nationalism and serve as explanations for regional difference that effectively efface regional specificity. I argue that regional politics in early twentieth-century Odisha should not be read as a mere preparatory phase in the emergence of unitary Indian nationalism. Rather, regional definitions of culture, heritage, history, and political life enable the formation of the Indian nation and are fundamentally constitutive of it.

At the core of my argument about the relationship between the Odia linguistic region and the Indian nation is the story of the making of the Indian citizen. As the last section reveals, in the 1910s the need to politicize larger sections of the Indian population came to occupy a central position in public discussions about politics. Compelled by divergent motives, both the colonial government and the anticolonial nationalist parties in India were involved in the project of thinking about Indian self-determination through the construction of a universal Indian citizen. Linguistic difference and its fervent articulation by various regional public associations threatened to disrupt this project. However, rather than efface this linguistic difference by arguing for the dominance of a single national language, the leaders of the Indian National Congress chose to work linguistic difference into the very fabric of the Indian nation. Hence the 1910s saw the emergence of a paradoxical figure of the universal Indian citizen who was marked by particular regional linguistic difference.

On Categories – Region, Space, Territory

As the confusion about categories in the 1903 Indian National Congress description of regional community suggests, the “region” as a category is somewhat hard to situate. In the 1903 definition of a region, it was both a space in which a socially and ethnically homogenous community lived and a geopolitical territory under a single administration. In this framework, it could be defined by the people who lived in the region or by the boundaries of the region. Therefore, the question arises: Is region a spatial category or a territorial category? That is, if as Henri Lefebvre argues,

⁴⁸ Bishnu Narayan Mohapatra, *The Politics of Oriya Nationalism, 1903–1936* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1990); Pritish Acharya, *National Movement and Politics in Orissa, 1920–29*, Sage Series in Modern Indian History 11 (New Delhi: Sage, 2008). Jayanta Sengupta’s recent book explores this theme through a nuanced narrative that elides these tropes by thinking the relationship between region and nation via the issue of development: Jayanta Sengupta, *At the Margins: Discourses of Development, Democracy and Regionalism in Orissa* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015).

geographical *space* is fundamentally social, then should we study the history of the making of the linguistic region in India as a purely social process of definition of space through lived experience, capitalist development, and social imagination? In other words, should we see the *places* that are the product of this social production (Odisha, Maharashtra, or Andhra Pradesh, for example) as the “locus of ‘imaginaries,’ as ‘institutionalizations,’ as configurations of ‘social relations,’ as ‘material practices,’ as forms of ‘power,’ and as elements in ‘discourse?’”⁴⁹ Or should we track this history of the making of the linguistic region in India as a history of territorial formations with a focus on the processes of boundary making and territorial division of the British presidency provinces of Bengal and Madras?

Thinking of the making of Odisha simply as a process of boundary making and the apportioning of Indian territory to particular linguistic groups runs the risk of falling into what John Agnew has called the “territorial trap.”⁵⁰ By trap, Agnew meant that often when we see territories we make false assumptions that they are “internally homogenous, externally bounded political communities that exercise uniform sovereignty across their domain.”⁵¹ Geographers and scholars of international law have suggested that we apply the spatial turn to our understanding of territory and recognize that, like space, territory is also a product of social debates and discourse. In his study of the formation of regions, Swedish geographer Anssi Paasi has argued that regions are “institutionalized” over time through a four-stage process that is not necessarily incremental or developmental.⁵² The four stages in which the region takes territorial shape, symbolic shape, institutional shape, and established shape produced by state power can be historically contingent and needs to be studied in order to establish the historical and sociological formation of the region. Paasi’s formulation allows us to combine the history of spatial imaginaries that produce both the territorial scale of the region and the identity of the inhabitants of the region with the history of territorial boundary formation, which are a result of the state supported

⁴⁹ David Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), p. 294.

⁵⁰ John Agnew, “The Territorial Trap: The Geographical Assumptions of International Relations Theory”, *Review of International Political Economy* 1 (1994): 53–80. For a recent rethinking of Agnew’s argument, see Ayelet Banai and Margaret Moore, “Introduction: Theories of Territory Beyond Westphalia”, *International Theory* 6, no. 1 (2014): 98–104.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁵² Anssi Paasi, “Constructing Territories, Boundaries and Regional Identities”, in T. Forsberg (ed.), *Contested Territory: Border Disputes at the Edge of Former Soviet Empire* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1996), pp. 42–61. For a discussion of how conceptualization of region had changed over the last few years, see Anssi Paasi and Jonathan Metzger, “Foregrounding the Region”, *Regional Studies* 51, no. 1 (2017): 19–30.

institutionalization of the regional spatial imaginaries. Simply put, for the purposes of our reading of the history of the making of Odisha, region is both a spatial and a territorial category.

In this history of Odisha, we will explore how the region of Odisha is formed through interventions from the colonial state, the regional elite, and the emergent nation-state of India. For the colonial state, administrative and educational imperatives caused the state to divide India into monolingual language zones where a single language could be used to mediate the individual's relationship with the state. This was a shift away from the more multilingual reality of precolonial Indian states. The production of exclusive linguistic zones in turn led to identity politics in areas such as Odisha where access to administration and education through Odia was seen as an essential factor in enabling the Odia community to engage with the development practices of the colonial state. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we see the emergence of the Odia movement for state formation that uses a range of spatial imaginaries to produce an argument for a "natural" Odisha, which was much larger than the "artificial" Odisha acknowledged by the colonial state in the shape of the Orissa division of the Bengal Presidency. In the early twentieth century, these spatial imaginaries of Odia space had to take into account the increasingly dominant demand for national unity from the Indian National Congress. For the Indian National Congress and, subsequently, the newly postcolonial state, the linguistic region became the only acceptable form of regional space. This choice was founded on the need to consolidate the "geopower" of the new nation-state by using the neat linguistic divisions of Indian territory to simplify and domesticate the overwhelming range of social, class, caste, religious, ethnic, and linguistic diversity amongst the Indian population.

Shape of the Book

This book is written as a linguistic history of both modern India and that of Odisha. Apart from the introduction and the postscript, it consists of six chapters. When taken together, the first and last chapters present a global, national, and local history of how language came to be the foundation of Indian territorial divisions. This story is told through a history of colonial language policy, local debates about boundaries between languages and their territories, and national-level discussions about regional linguistic identity and the formation of linguistics states.

At the core of this book, however, is the history of the making of Odisha as a discrete, linguistically organized territory within India during the period from 1866 to 1936. The origins of Odisha are examined

with a dual focus on the cultural politics of language and the spatial production of Odisha as a territorial category. These chapters chronicle the development of Odia cultural identity, its subsequent politicization, and its ultimate culmination in the establishment of the province of Odisha. Just as the national level discussion indexes the operations of elite power and nonelite exclusion in the neat linguistic division of India, the chapters on Odisha produce a critique of elitism in the linguistic, cultural, and political constitution of the province through an attention to how the adivasi or tribal populations of the state were absorbed into the regional community.

Chapter 1 describes the growing imperative in nineteenth-century India to carve out geographically distinct social-linguistic zones where only one Indian language could officiate. By doing a transnational history of the shifting understanding of the sociopolitical role of popular mother tongues, I show how the use of “vernacular” as a common epithet for some Indian languages came to imbue these tongues with meanings that drew from European debates on language and freedom. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, British debates about juridical and political language as well as education focused on the use of common speech as the most effective means of deterring elite exploitation of the masses. At the same time, the English colonization of the British Isles led to a radical shift in the status of English from vernacular to cosmopolitan, from local to translocal. The idea of colonized vernaculars, which needed to be cultivated into modern tongues as part of the broader civilizational mission, came to determine the relationship between the English and the Irish or the Welsh. Once Britain colonized India, major Indian languages came to be called vernacular. The “vernacular” in its Indian career was an underdeveloped mother tongue whose recuperation and use in education, revenue, and judicial administration was thought to be crucial to liberal governance. Through a history of successive colonial policy decisions to use vernaculars in education and governance in India as well as the concomitant local debates about boundaries between the geographical domains of Indian languages like the Odia/Bengali debate of the 1860s and 1870s, I illustrate the peculiar politics of colonial vernacularization. The very processes of insistent localization and denigration of Indian languages created the conditions of possibility of the simultaneous empowerment of these languages as languages of state. To be vernacular was to be both popular and elite in regional India.

The language debate of the 1860s and 1870s had a significant impact on the development of literature, literary criticism, and pedagogy in the Odia language. In Chapter 2, I describe how anxieties about the quality of “traditional” Odia literature served as a site for imagining a cohesive Odia

public who would become the consumers and beneficiaries of a new, modernized Odia-language canon. A renewed public controversy about the Odia language was initiated in the 1890s with the publication of a serialized critique of the works of Upendra Bhanja, a very popular pre-colonial Odia poet. The critic argued that Bhanja's writing was not true poetry, that it did not speak to the contemporary era, and that it featured embarrassingly detailed discussions of obscene material. These claims sparked responses and counterresponses in all the major newspapers in the Odia-speaking areas. I argue that the central theme in these discussions was a concern for linguistic community building that presupposed a new kind of readership of literature in the Odia language. This turn-of-the-century literary debate played an important role in the ongoing consolidation of an Odia-centric public sphere. Such consolidation came at the cost of the suppression of competing non-elite counter publics that were either contemporary phenomena or had preexisted the emergent mainstream Odia public sphere. Through a reading of contentious discussions about literary realism and prevailing critiques of literature produced in counterpublic spaces such as travelling theatres and millenarian cults, I argue that the vernacularity of Odia was established through radical exclusion of the non-elite.

The developing idea of a social identity based on the Odia language became politicized during the first decade of the twentieth century. In 1903 an organization called the Utkal Sammillani was created to lobby for the amalgamation of all Odia-speaking areas under a single provincial administration. The Sammillani quickly came to serve as the most prominent pan-Odia site for presenting Odia interests to the colonial authorities. In Chapter 3, I show that debates within and about the Sammillani frequently turned to discussions about the meaning of politics, citizenship, and the status of the Odia constituency in relation to the colonial state. I describe the ways in which the demand for an Odia province reconfigured nineteenth-century Odia cultural activism into a clearly articulated argument for the political representation of the Odia people as a unified constituency. By including a brief discussion of emergence of colonial franchise and the changing attitudes of the Indian national Congress towards linguistic politics during this period, I show that the politicization of the Odia public into a liberal representative category is part of a larger narrative of the politicization of the Indian masses.

As the Utkal Sammillani and similar organizations began to lobby for the formal political amalgamation of Odia-speaking areas, the prospect of a concrete territorial entity – a new province of Odisha – became an increasingly central concern. In Chapter 4, I analyze the development of Odisha as a newly imagined territorial entity. By the late 1910s, the

leaders of the movement had begun to call this proposed province “Natural Orissa,” presenting it as a historical reality that had been lost during centuries of colonial rule. This perspective was backed up by new histories of “ancient” Odisha that were written by Odia advocates. Drawing on the Odia leadership’s portrayals of their desired motherland and sketches of Odisha in the rhetoric of nationalist leaders such as Gandhi, I illustrate the emergence of a shared discourse about the underlying qualities of this imagined province. Odisha was conceptualized as a fundamentally religious land. In contrast to other Hindu religious centers, however, Odisha was seen as being marked by a propensity to absorb lower-caste people, tribal groups, and even Muslims into the Hindu fold – albeit without undermining the purported differences between such minority groups and the upper-caste, Odia-speaking population. By analyzing this religious outlook and other projected aspects of “Natural Orissa,” I show how the province came to be seen as a fundamentally local and yet simultaneously cosmopolitan Indian space. Such an imagined territory exerted a great appeal for both local and national leaders.

In Chapter 5, I discuss the more problematic ramifications of imagining “Natural Orissa” as a homogenous historical homeland. By 1924, the colonial government had begun earnestly discussing the formation of a separate province of Odisha, and, in 1931, the Orissa Boundary Commission was established to delineate the territorial scope of the new province. The formation of a geographical Odisha involved several contradictions that had to be resolved. Perhaps the most significance was the presence of the many “tribal” (non-Odia-speaking, adivasi) communities, whose members comprised almost one-fourth of the population of the proposed Odisha province. Through a reading of memoranda sent by various public organizations to the Orissa Boundary Commission I trace the developing justifications for the inclusion of adivasi communities into Odisha. Unsurprisingly, these justifications were largely based on claims about the exceptional ability of the “ancient” Odia community to absorb non-Odia populations into its fold. Couched in religious rhetoric, the memoranda display a paternalist civilizing discourse in which Odia-speaking people were presented as benevolent civilizers of the tribal communities. Such discourse was largely successful, as the diverse inhabitants of the region were subsumed into the emerging Odia political identity without being offered social parity.

Taking its title from Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar’s puzzling claim that the “Genius of India is to divide,” Chapter 6 tracks the career of linguistic difference in the making of modern India. I show how the effacement of adivasi pasts in the imagination of Odisha was mirrored in the way linguistic difference was managed through the language based division of Indian

territory. I analyze writings on multilingualism by three influential leaders of the Indian nationalist movement – Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. Representing three radically different perspectives on the question of language and nation, these writings allow me to track the passions, ideologies and anxieties inherent in imagining a nation with multiple mother tongues. Gandhi posed a nonliberal, affect-based argument for a multilingual nation-state. Building upon Gandhi's espousal of multiple languages on the Indian National Congress platform, Nehru forged an uncomfortable compromise with multilingualism based on an acknowledgement of the centrality of linguistic identity to liberal representation in India and a severely truncated notion of linguistic difference that only acknowledged fourteen major Indian languages. Ambedkar, as a representative of the non-elite lower-caste population in India, remained skeptical of the efficacy of using regional languages in state institutions. Even as he acknowledged that Indian territory had to be organized linguistically due to the influence of various language-based political movements in provincial India, Ambedkar called attention to the dangers of handing over institutional power to regional elites. However, in spite of his skepticism, he was unable to provide a sustained critique of linguistic provinces from the adivasi perspective. The chapter ends with a short discussion of the adivasi critique of linguistic provinces through a reading of speeches given by Jaipal Singh, the leader of the movement for the formation of the adivasi majority province of Jharkhand. The effacement of adivasi difference became established in both the imagination of modern Indian citizens and in the physical, territorial divisions of the emerging Indian nation. As vernacular languages became the foundational category for understanding representation and subjectivity in India, the concomitant exclusion of aboriginal peoples and the downplaying of alternative political possibilities were institutionalized into the very definition of the modern Indian community.

In the postscript, I remark on the tenacity of the narratives of regional linguistic identity that were produced in the early twentieth century and the way in which elite justifications for a homogenous, Odia-speaking community came to transcend the sites of their production to take a central place in the nation's imagination. Through a discussion of contemporary adivasi activism, I show how the Odia appropriation of adivasi pasts remains the central problematic through which the struggles between the Odia mainstream majority and the adivasi minority are enacted.