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Allison Busch, *Poetry of Kings: The Classical Hindi Literature of Mughal India*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. xv+339, US \$ 74.00.

Cultures, very often, imagine life in certain mono-cultural ways. But Indian culture, far from being a mono-culture of the sort we encounter in the western hemisphere, is

rather a conglomeration of cultures incessantly in dialogue within itself as well as with the outside world. The life of thinking, of being and of aesthetics which has evolved in such a constellation becomes multifaceted. Consequently, it is the strength of Indian culture that its indigenous thought and way of life, which reflect multiplicity of linguistic, cultural and religious influences and experiences, can boast of a multidimensional, hybrid intellectual worldview

Early modern period in Indian intellectual history, which is the focus of Allison Busch's book under review, *Poetry of Kings: The classical Hindi literature of the Mughal India* is a subtle and nuanced study of the Brajbhasha poetry from the Indian royal courts, which has long been an unmapped territory for the western scholarship. Consequently, it has been, so to say, up for grabs for literary and intellectual pursuits of the Hindi scholars the world over. Hence, like the late 18th century onwards that saw a dawn of the western interest in the Classical Sanskrit studies, the last quarter of a century, the period starting with the end of the 2nd Millennium till today, has experienced considerable growth in the western interest in the literary and cultural history of the early modern India, what has recently come to be called as Early Modern Literatures of North India.

With intellectual rigour and spatial familiarity with her subject matter Allison Busch, in her book focuses on the Riti poetry of the period between the 16th and early 19th Century produced at the local Indian royal courts. She brings fresh perspective and rare insight into this field which was largely dominated by Islamic influences. It extends from the emergence of Urdu as a language created at the confluence of multiple lingual and intellectual cultures and ends with the beginning of the colonial period in India. This is an age, which is characterised by a dialogue, though not always amicably pursued, between the Hinduism and Islam, which has given birth to a new language and a new architecture, but also to a composite new thinking, a new socio-religious culture.

Busch's book begins with contrasting the Indian attitude towards the pre-modern literature with the European attitude towards literature of the same period lamenting that "Indian courtly literature has been shunned by modern Hindi scholars" as it allegedly lacked classical qualities. She goes on to say that many Hindi scholars, in their discussion of the Riti literature, have not hesitated to show "their distaste for it." This intellectual rebuke, which sets the scope as well as pitch of what follows in the book, prompts me to put forward a *maxim* which would both lay open and sum up this extraordinary scholar's interpolations recorded in the

introduction of her meticulously placed argument. The maxim could be: *The knowledge of the world is complementary, but the approaches onto that are often contradictory, or at least they are in dissent even if the form is in consensus.* This maxim would postulate that it ultimately comes down to the 'approach' one chooses to apply in dealing with one's subject. *Approach* in the classical sense of the term means the path laid down by our forefathers. Hence it always appears to be safest if one walks the laid down path without deviating or questioning it. In this context Busch's argument lays bare that the scientific approach of the West is markedly different from what comprises a scientific approach in the East, at least in India. Contrary to the Greek objectivity, Indian thought subscribes to subjectivity. Objectivity believes in 'the' truth, and not 'your' or 'my' truth, whereas subjectivity helps accommodate different attitudes and imaginations.

Busch, who teaches Hindi and Indian Literature at Columbia University, has written and published extensively on Hindi literary culture of the Mughal period, which she has often referred to as early modern Hindi literature and intellectual history, concentrating thereby on the literary and intellectual life of seventeenth-century sub-imperial Indian courts. The literary-philosophical thought that was being formed during the period covered by *Poetry of Kings*, though greatly influenced by both the Hindu and Islamic lore, was neither purely Hindu nor purely Islamic. It gave rise to a number of analogously developing religio-intellectual social movements, whose main aim was to provide solace to the common man and promote tolerance. The movement with predominantly mystic Islamic elements came to be known as Sufism, and that with more devotional, Hindu-reformist elements, came to be known as Bhakti movement in Indian literatures. But Braj writings, often patronised by the local royal courts, were also employed to celebrate victory, as Busch's many examples illustrate. The first chapter of the book deals with Braj Poet Keshavdas's poetry in relation to the Bhakti literature which is more or less prevalent in all parts of India, but is predominantly a northern movement. There were other lesser known, though not less important, religious motivations emanating in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Kashmir, which are brought to light in *Poetry of Kings*.

The author further progresses like a careful traveller in an unknown country and tries to figure out how to give form to a literary epoch, rooted deeply both in devotion and indigenous literary craft. A compact discussion of the aesthetic background of Riti poetry, such as Alankarshastra, sets the pace. Her detailed

deliberations of Braj historiography, Riti literature at the Mughal Court, Riti literature at the Rajput Courts, logically pave way for the concluding chapter on the Fate of Riti Literature in Colonial India. The manner, in which she pursues her passion, while letting the literary works arise from a virtual oblivion, is phenomenal. In a span of six chapters Busch has discovered defining tools of a literary culture and shaped them into a persuasive work of art which is bound to go a long way to draw the attention of the English reading intelligentsia for greater engagement with India's literary wealth, the study of which is now gathering momentum.

Historically the book is organized around the complex literary socialization of India's pre-modern society, which was often referred to as feudal. However, there are a few problems with the terminology used in the book. The use of the term "classical" pertaining to a period literature, for example, is not without problems. The use of the term *Classical Hindi* in relation to Riti or Braj poses more serious problems. As we all know, every language has regional variations. So Busch has chosen to tread a path which is full of thorns. She has to deal with the subject matter of a period in India which is so complex that many a scholar would prefer to simply seal it in the way the ill-fated reactors in Chernobyl were sealed, once and for all. But, then, art isn't a static thing. Let the debate and discussion go on.

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Rosinka Chaudhuri, *Freedom And Beef Steaks: Colonial Calcutta Culture*, New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2012, pp. 212, price not mentioned.

The present collection of seven essays explores the making of modernity in Bengali culture through the examination of a variety of examples – some unusual, some domestic, some taken from 19th century daily urban life, and some from today's literary criticism looked at through an unconventional prism. The author, who is a fellow with the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, has traversed a wide area ranging from Bengali eating habits under the impact of colonial culture to Bengali poetry's changing response to that culture, from Bengali drawing room style to the Bengali interaction with the Anglo-Indian community (otherwise known as Eurasian, in the 19th century).

The initial search for modernity among the 19th century young educated Bengalis was, curiously enough, marked