history deeply marked by multiple modalities of diaspora. She finds this complex diasporic history figured in the stories of Jhumpa Lahiri's collection *Interpreter of Maladies*. Gajarawala, on the other hand, notes that the Dalit texts she examines refer to the Partition rarely and that when they do they challenge its centrality in the conventional narrations of South Asian history. Because of this "unreading" of nationalist historiography, she says, the Dalit texts complicate historicist strategies of literary analysis.

Koshy and Gajarawala, then, read the Partition in contrary ways and to contrary ends. The differences between their readings are instructive for my purpose, which is to suggest extensions and emendations of their arguments. My inclination, emerging out of an attention to the vernacular, is to refuse—like the Dalit texts examined by Gajarawala—what may be called the exceptionalism of a Partition-oriented account of South Asian history. It cannot be denied that the Partition, sometimes described as the largest displacement of humanity in the shortest period of time, is one of a handful of pivotal events in the twentieth-century history of South Asia. It is also true that vast segments of South Asia remained relatively untouched by it and that in parts of the region (e.g., South India) the Partition is more an abstract and bureaucratic than an experienced or viscerally felt reality. A vernacularized approach to South Asian history—attentive to the differing experiences of different regions—is one way to expose Partition exceptionalism: the view of the Partition as a singular event set apart from and above others.

A critical approach routed through the vernacular might also throw useful light on Gajarawala's reading of Dalit texts. Is it really true that Dalit texts are mainly characterized by a rejection of "the overwhelming weight of the historical in our systems of interpretation" (587)? Or might it rather be that alongside an unreading these texts advance an alternative history sometimes hard to recognize without a sensitivity to vernacular forms of knowledge? The Buddhism recovered and constituted as a version of history by Dr. Ambedkar and, before him, by the Tamil Dalit intellectual Pandit Iyothee Thass suggests the latter possibility. As, in a different way, does P. Sivakami's Tamil Dalit novel *The Grip of Change*. This alternative history, I would suggest, is more easily recognizable when we attend to the vernacular, for it is in vernacular forms of knowledge above all that such a history has persisted, often for centuries. Can a similar argument be made about the texts that Gajarawala reads? I cannot say, because I have not yet read them, but the question is worth asking. In any event, her particular reading should not be generalized into an argument about Dalit texts as such.

I hope it is clear that my aim is to suggest, in a spirit of commendation and dialogue, how a robust notion of the vernacular might extend intriguing aspects of the arguments initiated by Koshy and Gajarawala, or else resolve vexatious conundrums in them. While I have focused on these two critics, my remarks are made possible by a form of comparison across languages and cultural contexts. I thank Koshy and Gajarawala as well as Friedman for their contributions.

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Repl

Like S. Shankar, I wanted to read some of the essays in *PMLA*'s May 2011 issue immediately. I would add that I thoroughly approve of the changes that Marianne Hirsch and Patricia Yaeger brought to the journal as its editors. *PMLA* now regularly highlights new fields (witness the essays on oceanic studies in the May 2010 issue and on animal studies in that of March 2009) and includes special sections addressing issues shared across many subspecialties in these fields.

Shankar's letter performs the kind of juxtapositional comparative reading that I advocated as one fruitful method of comparison—that is, the setting of two (or more) texts side by side, paratactically rather than hierarchically, to see what new general insights such a juxtaposition might enable. Susan Koshy's argument about "minority cosmopolitanism" arising out of South Asian diasporas assumes a historicity for which the Partition of India in 1947 is foundational, Shankar argues; conversely, Toral Gajarawala's analysis of Dalit writing, Shankar maintains, exhibits a different historicity, for which Partition is peripheral. That Partition could carry two such radically different meanings raises the issue of how history is represented and to what extent its representation operates within an epistemology produced through nineteenth-century European realism (based in the bourgeois subject and the nation-state) or within what Shankar calls "vernacular forms of knowledge" (in Dalit literature, based in a collective identity excluded from full citizenship within the nation-state).

What new insights emerge from the juxtaposition of Koshy's and Gajarawala's arguments? For Shankar, the comparison is productive because it fosters an interest in the vernacular, the subject of his forthcoming book. In his letter, the term *vernacular* refers at different points to language, region, and "forms of knowledge." I eagerly await the book for more-sustained discussion of the term's meanings. But in the letter, its spectrum of meanings parallels current notions of translation that range from linguistic to cultural. In this broader sense, comparisons of all kinds are a form of translation—a putting of one term into the context of another, a form of cognitive crossing over from one to the other. However, I wonder how *vernacular* as a geographic marker signifying different regions of South Asia (regions defined by their language group but geographic nonetheless) relates to the term as a "form of knowledge." The vernacular mode of knowledge Shankar invokes seems akin to what many in native studies are calling indigenous knowledge, an epistemology contrasting sharply with the hegemonic ways of knowing imposed by conquering peoples. Since many people in India speaking or writing what are known as vernacular languages are not Dalits and are in fact associated with elites or more-privileged castes, I worry about the imprecision of the term *vernacular* as Shankar uses it in his letter. I also wonder how his use of the term relates to Sheldon Pollock's fascinating argument that vernacular writing and culture have paradoxically been inspired and enabled by the existence of such lingua francas as Sanskrit, Latin, and English ("Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History"; *Cosmopolitanism*; ed. Carol A. Breckenridge et al.; Durham: Duke UP, 2002; 15–53).

Aside from the question of the vernacular, I see other insights emerging from Shankar's interesting juxtaposition of Koshy's and Gajarawala's arguments. First, Shankar's observation about the different meanings of Partition in each essay highlights the fluidity of centers and peripheries, whose meanings depend heavily on shifting perspectives and epistemologies. What is central to one group is peripheral to another—an insight that I believe ought to inform more postcolonial, diasporic, global, and minority literary studies. Second, both vertical and horizontal scales in the relation between the global and the local are significant. No historical phenomenon is purely local or purely global; the narratives about such phenomena are "glocal," with traces of the global in the local and vice versa, a logic I first learned from Edward Said's seminal chapter "Jane Austen and Empire" in *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1993; 80–96). The particularities of Dalit history in Dalit narratives are affected by global historical forces (like Partition) whether or not such large-scale events drive the Dalit narratives; similarly, the global cannot exist separate from its situated articulation in time and space, as is evident in narratives by diasporic South Asian writers like Jhumpa Lahiri.

Third, the juxtaposition of the two essays brings into focus the dialogic relation between the "minority" and the "cosmopolitan" (to pick up the terms that Koshy conjoins) and, through this relation, the tension at the heart of all comparison between commensurability and incommensurability. By "minority cosmopolitanism," Koshy means the "translocal" identifications that diasporic people maintain as they experience their status as minorities (594), forever foreign, in their new countries. But as Garajawala's essay brings vividly to life, Dalit writers are also minorities within the caste society of India. As citizens of India, they too feel or are treated as forever foreign, though as a result of caste, not national origin. What then is the meaning of *minority* in these two essays? How is the purely local and particular related to the cosmopolitan? Is the affirmation of the local nature of Dalit knowledge different in epistemological terms from the affirmation of the uniqueness of Partition? Historically and politically, they are different. But in epistemological terms, each depends on a notion of pure particularity or exceptionalism. Entirely local or unique knowledge inherently resists comparison. But the insight that comparing Koshy's cosmopolitan minority with Gajarawala's Dalit minority brings is that phenomena so different in kind nonetheless share a related epistemological logic. They are "in/commensurable," the slash signifying the connection of similarity and the disconnection of difference.

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Reply:

I appreciated S. Shankar's comments regarding the recent issue of *PMLA* on Asian writing and, in particular, regarding my essay "Some Time between Revisionist and Revolutionary: Unreading History in Dalit Literature." Shankar fleshes out how attention to the vernacular—linguistic and contextual—is a crucial part of any demand for new theoretical practices and new models of reading. The questions that guide my own work have also been determined by this attention. In the case of Dalit literature, reading not only Hindi but also the many "hindis" within Hindi has worked in concert with the global anglophone to produce a comparatist project of all my intellectual endeavors. The project of "unreading," then, is particular to the relational work I see these texts doing vis-à-vis Indian historiography and the challenge they pose to hegemonic tropes of historical agency. Attention to the vernacular also demands, I would suggest, a careful attention to the various aesthetic forms in which South Asian histories might be embedded, often made legible only by new methodologies.

I would like to take a moment to address Shankar's other concern, which, I believe, offers an opportunity to have a dialogue on the production of theoretical knowledge. Shankar questions whether it is possible for all Dalit texts to be read in the way I suggest: as complicating or challenging outright a historicist literary discourse. My reading of Dalit literature, he writes, "should not be generalized into an argument about Dalit texts as such." Shankar seeks to remind us here of the self-difference of the Dalit—indeed, any subaltern—project, the treelike lineages that vary regionally, linguistically, and politically. But it seems that Shankar's argument is less about what some or all Dalit forms of textuality do or do not do than about the kinds of claims that can be made about subaltern literatures. In some sense, then, his question is about what can only be termed, in our postmodern times, the politics of generalization alongside the will to particularize. Not only is the Dalit text read as the social location of a particularized and nontransferable ethnographic specificity; it is also only fit to comment on its own self or selves. I argue that we should challenge this critical impulse. In a moment that has generated a discourse of "world literature," for the Dalit text to move beyond its particularity it must demonstrate its own worldliness for the sake of its legibility. While particularism is to some degree the water in which Dalit literature swims (particularism of caste, of history, of language), its critical imperative (my own, as well) is to surpass it. I read the Dalit text not simply as self-reflective but also as productive of a certain metanarrative—in other words, "fiction as theory." It is when we read the Dalit text relationally—in dialogue with, or as a dialectic response to, its many others (the novel, uppercaste culture, a hegemonic "Indian" history)—that we can speak of the Dalit text as such. The "Dalit text as such" refers as much to the individual text as to the larger ideologi-