

Reorienting oriental research in the transition to the digital medium

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25 April 2023

Two essential facets of undertaking research are: (1) researching a topic that makes a substantial innovative contribution to knowledge, and (2) making the results of one's research available to other scholars.

Over the past couple of centuries research topics in the study of the Indian linguistic traditions, the study of Indian culture, and the study of the humanities in general have gradually withdrawn from elucidating substantial linguistic and cultural phenomena into a small set of contemporary theoretical concerns. The study of India took place in Europe and America in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries under the term *orientalism* 'the study of the east' which sets the East, the Orient, opposed to the West, the Occident. Scholars in the discipline of orientalism and in the disciplines that have replaced the directionally biased term with neutral ones such as Indology and South Asian Studies in contemporary scholarship, have been accused of being outsiders who bear attitudes that subjugate Indian knowledge and culture to European knowledge and culture. Conversely, recent scholarship that purports to represent Indian knowledge from the inside has been accused of chauvinism and religious fundamentalism. Much recent scholarship that purports to be liberated from orientalist attitudes in fact is guilty of an insidious orientalism that subjugates Indian knowledge to a theoretical cultural anthropology by devaluing any investigation that is not set within that limited theoretical framework. Those who purport to represent Indian knowledge from the inside are likewise unknowingly co-opted into this new orientalism by allowing the themes of their research to be determined by the cultural anthropological framework. The present lecture series aims to bring to the attention of scholars anticipating to do research in the field of Indian grammatical traditions overlooked substantial issues that beg for attention.

The medium of communication of knowledge is undergoing a major transition from the printed text to the digital medium. This transition is not unique. History records similar transitions in the dominant mode of the communication of knowledge that occurred from the oral medium to the written, and from the hand-written to the printed. While early use of each new medium tended to imitate the older medium, each new medium offered its own facilities that allowed the newer medium to rise to dominance. As the new medium prevailed, the older medium receded from common public view and the knowledge embodied in it that failed to bridge the transition risked being lost entirely. Likewise the digital medium offers a number of powerful new technologies that ease access to knowledge. Yet its rise to dominance in the new generation which lacks the training and motivation to utilize the older medium threatens the existence of knowledge in manuscripts and printed texts. It is therefore essential that researchers learn to utilize these older media as well as the new technologies offered by the digital medium as they publish the results of their research in the digital medium.