

# Introduction

## *Concepts of Emotions in Indian Languages*

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### ABSTRACT

At first glance, a conceptual history of emotions appears counterintuitive. Unlike the concepts of democracy or liberalism, emotion concepts seem to refer to stable objects, rooted in the genetic heritage of the human race. However, answers to the question, “What is an emotion?” vary widely across time and space. It cannot even be taken for granted that our analytic concept of emotion is matched by corresponding concepts in the sources: the very question might be untranslatable. In the first section, the introduction will discuss the challenge a conceptual history of emotions faces from psychology’s perception of affective phenomena as objects that exist independent of their representation. The aim of this section is to clear the theoretical and methodological ground for an investigation of emotion concepts in South Asian traditions, which will be the central focus of the second section of this introduction.

### KEYWORDS

Bengali, common sense, emotion, orality, psychology, South Asia, Urdu

Everyone can lay claim to inside knowledge in the field of emotions: everyone has emotions and has lived with emotions for many years, handling, controlling, and evoking them not only in him- or herself, but also recognizing and managing the emotions of those he or she communicates with. The answer to the question the American psychologist William James asked in 1884, “What is an emotion?”<sup>1</sup> seems self-evident. We all know a lot about emotions and tend to feel rather strongly about this knowledge. Moreover, we can all

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1. William James, “What Is an Emotion?” *Mind* 9 (1884): 188–205.



distinguish spontaneously between emotions and nonemotions. Therefore, at first glance, a conceptual history of emotions appears counterintuitive. Unlike the concepts of democracy or liberalism, emotion concepts seem to refer to stable objects, rooted in the genetic heritage of the human race, and, in the case of some emotions, even linking us to animals. If concepts are not only indicators but also factors of a changing reality, neither the historicity of emotions nor the possibility that concepts might contribute to their transformation seem obvious.

Emotions certainly do involve the body and the brain (as do thoughts), but their relation to biological processes is more complicated than a unilateral causal chain. Diverse experiences change not only the interpretation, but also the materiality of bodies and brains. Emotions take part in a biological and a social and cultural reality at the same time, and to disentangle them—if at all possible—would probably not yield the most interesting questions. The material reality of emotions and their interpretation through concepts coproduce each other in an endless loop. The experience of materiality through the bodily senses is at the basis of the interpretation effected through emotion concepts; at the same time, these concepts transform the material world through practices endowed with meaning. Doing emotions—feeling them and practicing them—is premised on the possibility of conceiving emotions, either through language concepts or through nonverbal sign systems.<sup>2</sup> Not only do the answers to the question, “What is an emotion?” vary widely across time and space, it cannot even be taken for granted that our analytic concept of emotion is matched by corresponding concepts in the sources: the very question, as we understand it, might be untranslatable.

This special section investigates emotion concepts in Urdu and Bengali, two languages widely spoken and written in the South Asian subcontinent. The time frames for these concepts range from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century, and they draw on a large variety of sources: from moral philosophy and journal articles, the classical genres of conceptual history, so to speak; to literature and novels; to oral performances in interviews and sermons, which constitute quite a novelty in conceptual history. However, it is long overdue, if the need is taken seriously, to investigate the performative aspects of concepts in use and to gauge the way transformations in more theoretical texts were actually played out on the ground and in everyday communication. The common assumption guiding these articles is that changes in the concepts—always seen as formed by and shaping material reality at the same time—allow an insight into the emotional life of the contemporary actors, the writers and the readers, the speakers and the listeners of the texts under investigation. To-

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2. For an elaboration of this argument, see Margrit Pernau and Imke Rajamani, “Emotional Translations: Concepts Beyond Language,” *History and Theory* 55 (2016), 46–65.

gether they are a first step for further investigations into emotional practices these concepts make possible.<sup>3</sup>

Emotions are, of course, no newcomers to the writing of South Asian history. Works on gender history have included discussions on love; research on riots and revolts has examined fear, anger, and hope; the historiography on nationalism would not be possible without bringing in the emotions that prompt people to become active. Until recently, however, emotions have figured as a known category that could be drawn upon to explain other processes rather than as something that in itself would require an explanation. Drawing out the role that anger played in an uprising is important. However, if anger is itself not a stable category, but open to different interpretations, if these different ways of conceiving anger in turn play back on the emotion felt by the actors and on their ways of “doing anger,” conceptual history can significantly add to previous explanations. This holds even more true regarding the investigation of emotion concepts themselves, for the highly contested distinctions between emotions and nonemotions, and the answers emotion concepts provide to questions on where and how emotions originate, inside or outside a person; the possibility to control or evoke them willingly; the relation between emotion, cognition, and rationality; and finally, the way emotions and moral categories are delineated or conflated.

This introduction will proceed in two steps. The first section will discuss the challenge a conceptual history of emotions faces from psychology’s perception of affective phenomena as objects that exist independent of their representation.<sup>4</sup> It goes on to discuss some responses from history and their suggestions for an interdisciplinary dialogue. The aim of this section is to clear the theoretical and methodological ground for an investigation of emotion concepts in South Asian traditions, which will be the central focus of the second section. The secondary literature on this topic is still very uneven—a desert with a couple of exceedingly beautiful and rich oases. This section will therefore use some of this literature (mainly with reference to the Islamicate context since the Middle Ages) in order to place the articles of this special section in a larger historical context and offer suggestions for further research.

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3. For the notion of emotional practice, see Monique Scheer, “Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (And Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion,” *History and Theory* 51, no. 2 (2012): 193–220.

4. This does not apply to all schools of psychology, and the field seems very much in movement at the moment, with notions of plasticity gaining currency, which might in the medium run transform the notion of representation. But for now, this assumption seems prevalent for many, if not most, of the fields within the discipline.

## Conceptual History and the Dialogue with Life Sciences

The question of defining emotions has engaged psychology since the last decades of the nineteenth century. It has led to hundreds of competing definitions.<sup>5</sup> This emphasis on and need for a definition has two main roots, as I see it. The first is practical: in a field that is based on experiments requiring a division of labor, results can only be compared and accumulated if the objects under investigation are clearly defined and agreed upon—definitions no more, but also no less, ensure that different scientists mean the same thing if they use the same words. This need not involve any truth claim for one definition or the other and can be easily integrated into the assumptions of conceptual history on the relations between objects and their representations. Psychologists would in that case be one of the players in the construction of the object of emotion through the contestation of the concept. If agreeing on a definition helps their research, this is certainly not something conceptual historians would need to challenge or feel challenged by, though they would probably not, and need not, adopt these definitions for their own work, as they follow different logics.

The second root is more problematic from the perspective of conceptual history. Many of the psychological debates on definitions seem to be premised on the assumption that the object under investigation exists prior to and independent of its representation and interpretation. Emotional experiences, psychologists tell us, go deeper than languages. Self-reports miss an important part of the emotions, which are not accessible to the individuals who experience them. This means that culture only influences them to a limited extent: “the affects concerned with mammalian parental care seem as hard-wired in us as the upturned and downturned mouth expressions.”<sup>6</sup> Not all emotions are seen as universal, but humans do share a number of basic emotions across

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5. Paul R. Kleinginna Jr. and Anne M. Kleinginna, “A Categorized List of Emotion Definitions, With Suggestions for a Consensual Definition,” *Motivation and Emotion* 5, no. 4 (1981): 345–379. See also Kevin Mulligan and Klaus R. Scherer, “Towards a Working Definition of Emotion,” *Emotion Review* 4, no. 4 (2012): 345–357.

6. Leonard D. Katz, “Love, Loss and Hope Go Deeper Than Languages: Linguistic Semantics Has Only a Limited Role in the Interdisciplinary Study of Affect,” *Emotion Review* 1, no. 1 (2009): 19–20. Here the clash with emotion history is obvious. Historians started to investigate the history of parental love a generation ago and pointed to deep-reaching changes. See Elisabeth Badinter, *The Myth of Motherhood: An Historical View of the Maternal Instinct* (London: Souvenir Press, 1982); for recent works see Nina Verheyen, “Tears in Preprint: The ‘Diary of a Father’ in a German Family Magazine in the 1870s,” *History of Emotions: Insights into Research*, February 2014, <https://www.history-of-emotions.mpg.de/en/texte/tears-in-preprint-the-diary-of-a-father-in-a-german-family-magazine-of-the-1870s>, doi: 10.14280/08241.22.

time and culture.<sup>7</sup> Rather than relying on common sense interpretations of emotions or making way for different concepts, it would be psychologists who offer the correct definition of emotions, viewed as a stable object that is not influenced by the way it is interpreted: “The speakers of English know the meaning of anger, fear, etc., but it would be the scientists who would provide the criteria for recognizing if something is ‘really’ fear, anger or whatever.”<sup>8</sup>

This position has been challenged by various scholars from the humanities. Psychologists, they argue, are not distant observers, but actors in the conceptualization of emotions.<sup>9</sup> Their interpretations and the way a society perceives emotions condition each other. This in turn shapes the way people read their own emotions and act upon them. Psychiatry, as Jan Plamper has mentioned, not only gave rise to new ways of interpreting soldiers’ fears as well as to new treatments, but also to new legal regulations on what had been perceived at different moments either as cowardice or as trauma. These practices changed the ways soldiers themselves experienced their fears. This does not contradict the fact that fear is (also) a bodily reaction, leading to a raised pulse, muscle contractions, and cold sweat, but argues that these bodily reactions do not proceed independently from the appraisal of the fear-inducing situation. Fear as trauma is a different emotion than fear as cowardice and leads to different reactions, in spite of the fact that a smaller or larger part of the bodily symptoms overlap.<sup>10</sup>

Conceptual history, at least in its initial phase, has kept equidistant both from approaches that argue for a radical inaccessibility of material reality outside of language and hence for a decisive role of language and interpretation in the creation of the world, and from those that claim that language and culture are but a result of this material reality. Koselleck consistently resisted attempts to push him toward the linguistic turn and reiterated his famous formula over the years that concepts are at the same time factors and indicators—conceptual history and social history (in which we would today include studies of objects and material realities) are interdependent, but they cannot be mapped onto each other. In the same way that interpretation is always already shaped by the reality surrounding the interpreting actor, reality can also only be accessed as an always already interpreted reality.<sup>11</sup> Investigations on primates

7. Paul Ekman, “Basic Emotions,” in *Handbook of Cognition and Emotions*, Tim Dalgleish and Michael J. Power, eds. (New York: Wiley, 1999), 45–60.

8. Asifa Majid, “The Role of Language in a Science of Emotion,” *Emotion Review* 4, no. 4 (2012): 380–381.

9. Jan Plamper and Benjamin Lazier, eds., *Fear Across the Disciplines* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012); see also Ruth Leys’s article in that volume: Ruth Leys, “How did Fear Become a Scientific Object and What Kind of Object Is It?” 51–77.

10. Jan Plamper, “Fear: Soldiers and Emotion in Early Twentieth-Century Russian Military Psychology,” *Slavic Review* 68, no. 2 (2009): 259–283.

11. Reinhart Koselleck, *Begriffsgeschichten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006).

and babies do not invalidate these claims, as they are based on the assumption that the development of language and semiotic systems profoundly alter the way humans situate themselves in the world; the fact that humans can use language and reflect upon their fears makes these fears a different object from the fears of animals.

This link between emotions and their naming has been investigated in detail by William Reddy. Originally a historian of the French eighteenth century, he is one of the few researchers who combined historical research with an in-depth knowledge of current psychological research. His much-discussed *The Navigation of Feeling* came out in 2001, and aimed at overcoming the divide between nature and nurture.<sup>12</sup> What makes him interesting to conceptual historians is his theory of emotives, bringing together theories from cognitive psychology about the influence of attention on activation and enhancement of emotions with John L. Austin's speech act theory.<sup>13</sup> Emotives, according to Reddy, are "emotional utterances that take the form of first-person, present tense emotion claims ... constituting a form of speech that is neither descriptive nor performative."<sup>14</sup> Reddy claims that, unlike Austin's performatives, emotives are influenced by what they refer to, but unlike his constatives, they not only describe the world, but change it.<sup>15</sup> It might be debated whether this division still makes sense, whether a performative speech act is imaginable that is entirely independent of the reality it transforms and whether constatives really do nothing to transform the world by describing and interpreting it. But what is interesting about emotives is the active role they allot to the body in the interpretation of the material world. Emotives become "translations into ... language of a small part of the flow of coded messages that an awake body generates."<sup>16</sup> The bodily messages, however, are fluid and can be developed in different directions. It is only the naming process that allows navigation between emotions, the decision whether the vague feeling "is" anger or perhaps rather sadness and hence the closing down of its alternative possibilities and the elimination of its vagueness and hesitation.<sup>17</sup> Here cultural variation reenters the process in the shape of the different language vocabulary at the disposition of the actors: an undetermined feeling can only be transformed into a specific full-fledged emotion if a word and a concept exist for it in the language used by the actor.

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12. William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

13. John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962).

14. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling*, 104.

15. *Ibid.*, 105.

16. *Ibid.*, 110.

17. *Ibid.*, 118–122.

This is an important intervention, which can be combined with the history of emotion concepts. To take it beyond its European and post-Enlightenment moorings, however, three problems need to be addressed. The first concerns the exclusive role accorded to language in this model, what the medieval historian Barbara Rosenwein has called their logocentrism.<sup>18</sup> Though Reddy devotes a very short paragraph to the possibility of nonverbal emotives, it is clear from his entire framing that in almost all cases the emotive will be formed by a word, and not by any other semiotic sign. As Barbara Rosenwein has pointed out, this emphasis on language is itself already culturally marked—not all times or regions have the same faith in the power of the word as the only, or at least the best, way of interpreting and transforming the world. Emotives, however, do not need to be limited to language—their work can also be performed by other semiotic signs.<sup>19</sup>

The second problem is more difficult to overcome. In the way that William Reddy describes them, emotives are premised on practices of introspection. It is only when individuals are actually concerned with closely observing their inner lives and feel the need to correctly name these observations that a navigation of feelings sets in—emotional utterances do not in themselves do the work of an emotive, but they direct attention to the emotion and strive for its clarification. This in turn presupposes a certain emotion concept, in which emotions are located inside the individual,<sup>20</sup> and hence “belong” to individualized persons, rather than arising and floating in the interaction between them.<sup>21</sup> These assumptions are linked to a development that started in Western Europe with the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, both of which accorded a religiously motivated importance to the observation of internal states of being and feeling; other times and cultures had different emotion concepts that led to different practices. Though it might have an impact on the underpinning of the theory in cognitive psychology, it would be worth thinking about possibilities of delinking emotives from conscious and cognitive processes initiated by an individual.<sup>22</sup>

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18. Barbara Rosenwein, “Review of William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling*,” *American Historical Review* 107 (2002): 1181–1182; see also Barbara Rosenwein, “Worrying about Emotions in History,” *American Historical Review* 107 (2002): 821–845.

19. Pernau and Rajamani, “Emotional Translations.”

20. Monique Scheer, “Topographies of Emotion,” in *Emotional Lexicon: Continuity and Change in the Vocabulary of Feeling 1700–2000*, Ute Frevert et al., eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 32–62.

21. Gerd Althoff, “Ira Regis: A History of Royal Anger,” in *Anger’s Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages*, Barbara Rosenwein, ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 59–74.

22. A step William Reddy himself already seems to take in his empirical work on revolutionary France and even more so in his recent book *The Making of Romantic Love: Longing*

The third problem concerns the body. Though William Reddy historicizes emotions, he does not extend this move to the body, which provides universal cognitive structures seen within all emotions. Emphasizing the cocreation of the body and emotional experiences need not disrupt the dialogue between humanities and life sciences; recent studies on the plasticity of the brain as a result of experiences give rise to hopes that the move beyond the divide of nature and nurture might come from both disciplines at the same time.

### South Asian Concepts and Emotions

How can we conceive of a meaningful dialogue between a European and a South Asian history of concepts? Since the Enlightenment, comparison has been the favorite approach for the understanding and ordering of diversity on a global scale. However, in these comparisons Europe often took a dual role as an entity to be compared to and also as the standard for this comparison, thus reducing the rest of the world to a history of lack while underwriting and stabilizing existing power relations.<sup>23</sup> This remains a danger to be guarded against.

Commonsense knowledge of emotions is a part of the problem: emotion concepts seem so self-evident that it is difficult to imagine them being meaningfully conceived in any other way. At the same time, expanding our gaze comparatively can also be part of the solution: it involves nothing less than unlearning (at least partially) our common sense and becoming able to see other ways of conceiving the world. The history of concepts thus has to move beyond considering the sayable and the doable, in Willibald Steinmetz's famous formulation,<sup>24</sup> and to view them in relation to the thinkable. This need not imply an essentialization of cultural difference. Unlearning Western European, post-Enlightenment common sense about what is an emotion and what is not, what the semantic networks of emotions are, which emotions belong together and function according to similar rules and which are different, does not mean that South Asian concepts always are or should be significantly different. Empirical evidence can show similarity as well as difference, but letting go of our commonsense assumptions (as far as this is possible) permits recognition of different ways of meaningfully structuring emotional phenomena. These new possibilities of looking beyond established common sense bring

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*and Sexuality in Europe, South Asia, and Japan, 900–1200 CE* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

23. The standard text for this, of course, remains Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001).

24. Willibald Steinmetz, *Das Sagbare und das Machbare: Zum Wandel politischer Handlungsspielräume, England 1780–1867* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1993).



together European early modernists and South Asianists:<sup>25</sup> not in a reversion to the old and often criticized paradigm that the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in South Asia correspond to an earlier period in European history, but in a common endeavor to think beyond the universalizing claims of post-Enlightenment European middle-class men's worldviews.

The three articles in this special section start at a time when the colonial entanglement of different knowledge systems and concepts was already well under way. Margrit Pernau follows the transformation of emotion concepts from a moral philosophy based in the Aristotelian tradition to the translation and adaptation of mostly American psychology in the years before and after World War I.<sup>26</sup> The Indo-Persian tradition of moral philosophy was premised on the ideal of *'adl*. In its meaning as balance it is central for humoral pathology; in political philosophy it is implied justice; in morality it made for the difference between virtuous emotions and vices. This tradition was reconfigured in the later part of the nineteenth century, not least under the influence of high imperialism, and increasingly gave way to an exaltation of strong emotions as the way to the salvation of the individual and the nation. This went hand in hand with new perceptions of the link between emotions and the body, and in the end with giving up both their moral grounding and their cosmological embedding. The implications of these findings might be far-reaching. We have long learned to view the Enlightenment as a watershed in European history, leading to an increasing emphasis on reason and self-discipline, whether this is viewed as an achievement or rather critically as an impoverishment of human and humane faculties. Even if we are no longer overtly subscribing to the dichotomies of the rational British and the emotional South Asian, these assumptions still hold a shadow existence in the claim that colonial power brought about a disciplining process. Rather than inverting these theses and proposing that modernity was linked to emotionalization rather than discipline, these implications might require a more profound investigation of the concepts and semantic nets with which the actors interpreted modernity, but also a challenge to our commonsense oppositions between rationality and emotions, as well as between discipline/asceticism and excess.

Christina Oesterheld looks at early novels in Urdu, many of which were addressed to women or at least thematized female emotions in the context of the joint family.<sup>27</sup> Unlike the strong emotions men were encouraged to feel for each other and for the nation, for women emotional excess continues to draw

25. See, for instance, the intense reception of the work of the French *École des Annales* in India.

26. Margrit Pernau, "From Morality to Psychology: Emotion Concepts in Urdu, 1870–1920," this issue.

27. Christina Oesterheld, "Changing Landscapes of Love and Passion in the Urdu Novel," this issue.

strong censure. They are encouraged to love their husbands, but not indulge in passionate feelings, which might disrupt the household; to develop a tender devotion for their children, but a devotion that is always tempered by reason and avoids the danger of harmfully indulging their whims; and to bear the disappointments and enmities a joint family might bring with it with equanimity and patience. Nevertheless, the intensive suffering women undergo is depicted in detail in the novels, leading to a blossoming of the melodramatic genre, but this anguish is rarely expressed by the heroine herself. Tears and laments are more acceptable for men than for women. If emotionalization and emotional discipline can be linked to modernity, they are played out with significant differences for women and men. To a much larger extent than it has been done hitherto, concepts have therefore been analyzed for their gendered implications and overtones, even where the distinction between the language of women (*begmati zaban*) and of men is not as clearly voiced as in nineteenth-century Urdu.

The second aspect that this article brings out is the importance of genre. Conceptual history for a long time has focused on philosophical and political texts. The move away from canonical texts has enlarged the frame to include popular writings and pamphlets, but has until now rarely tapped into literature and poetry. This has brought about a strong emphasis on contestations of concepts within the same genre, but marginalized the fact that within the same time frame different genres might have worked with notably distinguished concepts, which need not even respond to each other. Love, as Oesterheld points out, might be such an instance where emotional restraint is less due to abstract moral evaluations than to the genre of the didactic novel, which stands in the tradition of other didactic and moral writings in prose. At the same time, the same people subscribed to notably different emotion concepts and emotional values in other genres, like the romance poem or the *ghazal*. Here the central emotion was not *muhabbat*, the love restrained by reason, but *'ishq*, the passionate love that led the lover to sacrifice not only the calm of his everyday life, but his mental peace, his rationality, and finally his life.

In the final article, Max Stille investigates present-day Islamic sermons in Bengali.<sup>28</sup> This opens up conceptual history in an innovative way to genres performed orally. Unlike sources that are either primarily meant to be read or are no longer accessible in any other form, sermons are primarily meant to be listened to collectively, which shifts our attention from an exclusive focus on their content to include sensory perceptions—the auditory quality of the sermon, shifting between different languages, but also between parts spoken in different registers and those recited in a melodious way; and the presence

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28. Max Stille, “Conceptualizing Compassion in Communication for Communication: Emotional Experience in Islamic Sermons (Bengali *wa'z mahfils*),” this issue.

of other listeners, the throng of bodies, the spontaneous responses, the tears, the sights, and the smells—all of which contribute to an intense emotional experience, which reinforces the message of the text. Even in sources primarily based on linguistic signs (as opposed to pictures or moving images), the meaning of concepts can only partially be deduced from the text and needs to be supplemented by its aesthetic qualities, generated in an ever more specific context. Moreover, the performative aspect of concepts is not a later add-on to an already established meaning, but cocreates this very meaning. The attention to aesthetic and rhetorical qualities of texts could be fruitfully used for other genres as well.

The sermons link up with the poetic genres in their appreciation and valorization of suffering—something that cannot easily be understood through twenty-first-century common sense, which tends to distinguish between positive and negative emotions, associating the first with pleasure and the latter with pain. The sermons not only delight in describing intensely painful experiences, they are also geared toward evoking the same sentiments among their listeners, dissolving the distinction between pain and love (but in a way quite clearly distinct from any form of masochism). True love can only be perceived as painful, and it is pain that gives depth and intensity to passionate love; if love is located in the liver, it is the liver that hurts in painful love, to the extreme of bursting.

This special section is consciously restricted in scope to the period between the late nineteenth and the early twenty-first century, that is, to a period marked by colonial and postcolonial globalization processes and an ever closer interaction between concepts, knowledge systems, and imaginations. Without themselves taking up a comparative agenda, the articles do provide material for a cross-regional comparison between different ways of conceiving emotions and hence feeling them differently. In order to give full weight to the comparison, however, we would need to account for what Koselleck called the different time layers, which are copresent in every moment of history. The authors/preachers and their audiences are not only interacting with their contemporaries, but are also continuing to read and listen to older texts.

The early novels in Urdu, for instance, are important sources for a shift in the concept of love. They were popular among both men and women, and they were not only printed in large numbers and read, but also read aloud and in this way shared beyond the small circle of literate persons. However, these readers and listeners for this reason were no less marked by traditional poetry. They listened to (and sometimes composed) *ghazals* singing of the beloved's cruelty, of the pain of love and the longing for reunion. They were fascinated by the medieval and early modern epics and romances, which created an ambiguous space in which the beloved could be both human and divine, and in which passionate love transcended the boundaries of the self. These texts in-

roduced their audiences to a concept of love marked by a different perception of the body and its relation to the world and the cosmos;<sup>29</sup> it was based on a different knowledge about the link between emotions and the body; it subscribed to a different notion of the self; and it was depicted with different images and metaphors and expressed through different practices.<sup>30</sup>

We know too little about how concepts and knowledge from different time layers interact. Koselleck's image of the geological layers piled upon each other is evocative, but it probably suggests too much immobility: the layers are not just "there," with an unchanging meaning that can be accessed at different points in time, but are constantly interacting, with the present and with each other. A romance or a *ghazal* from the fourteenth century will not be read in the nineteenth century in exactly the same way as it was read by its author's contemporaries, but in light of other reflections on love, which have evolved since. On the other hand, a concept like *'ishq*, passionate love, cannot be evoked in the nineteenth century (and even avoiding it where it would traditionally be expected is an evocation) without resonating with its older references. Not taking these resonances and connotations into account might lead to the assumption of more similarity between the nineteenth-century texts in South Asia and Britain—a similarity not only invented by today's historians, but also suggested by the authors themselves, given the importance of a civilized community to love in the "right" way.

Becoming aware of our own commonsense assumptions and putting them on hold thus has first to go hand in hand with an inquiry into the unspoken assumptions of the actors we are investigating, and the semantic net of concepts made of resonances across centuries. This is not an invitation to develop and rely on some uncontrollable cultural empathy. What we need is more knowledge on the texts—written and oral, Urdu and Bengali, but also Persian and English—that were circulating during the period under investigation. Which were the manuscripts that were being printed, and what were other forms of

29. On Sufi bodies, see Shahzad Bashir, *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); for the link between the body and emotions, see Sajjad Alam Rizvi, "Loving the Master? The Debate on Appropriate Emotions in North India (ca. 1750–1830)" (PhD diss., Freie Universität Berlin, 2012).

30. Francesca Orsini, ed., *Love in South Asia: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). The introduction, by Francesca Orsini (1–47), lays out a fascinating history of the concept of love in different linguistic registers. For the Sanskrit tradition of conceiving love in a courtly context, see Daud Ali, *Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early Medieval India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); for the way that emotions knowledge and concepts are based on the *rasa* theory and especially how *sringara*, the *rasa* of love, was adapted to Sufi romances, see Aditya Behl, *Love's Subtle Magic: An Indian Islamic Literary Tradition, 1379–1545* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) and Ramya Sreenivasan, *The Many Lives of a Rajput Queen: Heroic Pasts in India c. 1500–1900* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007).

circulation? The oral tradition certainly is very important up to the present day, but so are summaries, retellings, and allusions, which might not invoke an entire knowledge system, but perhaps only take up some elements or images: the link between the *rasa* of love and the monsoon is very much present in today's films and can easily be understood by the audience—for this they need not be aware of the subtleties of the *Natya Shastra*, where these links were laid out at the beginning of the Common Era.<sup>31</sup> Which English debates were accessible to the authors? In which language, in the original, in a translation or in an adaptation? Which libraries and booksellers facilitated their access?

Second, a quotation from Sa'ādi or Rumi would immediately be recognized by a nineteenth-century reader; a name or a metaphor referring to a scene from one of the epics or romances would be taken up and give a distinct emotional color to the text, which we need to be aware of if we want to capture the meaning of a concept in its fullness. Not many scholars trained in modern history, however, would recognize these intertextual allusions. Writing the history of emotion concepts for the nineteenth century and beyond needs sustained collaboration with specialists of the periods and regions our authors refer to (again, without assuming that their findings can be integrated immediately without investigating the changes in the reading of the classical texts). Modern history cannot do without a deep knowledge of what came before colonialism, as scholars as different as Christopher Bayly and Sheldon Pollock do not tire of pointing out.<sup>32</sup> As far as this is at all possible, we have to know what our authors knew.

A third step would be to look in more detail at the transformation of genres through time, and at movements across genre boundaries. Journalists viewed themselves as closely related to preachers—like them, they had the responsibility of educating their audience and guiding them to virtue. Moreover, many newspaper articles started as sermons and lectures, while religious sermons were at times collected and published separately. At the same time, novels, sermons, and other nineteenth-century prose texts could hardly be imagined without extensive quotations from poetry. More than that, to an extent we have hardly started to investigate, they also translated poetic images and metaphors into prose, thus changing the context and hence also the implications a figure like Majnun would carry, forsaking civilization and rationality for the sake of his beloved Leila. Only once the tension between a conceptual his-

31. Monsoon Feelings, a conference on this topic, was co-organized by the Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin (Margrit Pernau, Imke Rajamani) and King's College, London (Katherine Butler Schofield), and held on 25–27 June 2015 in Berlin.

32. Christopher Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Sheldon Pollock, ed., *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia: Explorations in the Intellectual History of India and Tibet, 1500–1800* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

tory closely bound by gender conventions and the cross-fertilization between these same genres has been mapped out will we be able to advance more solid claims about how concepts contributed to an interpretation of the world of emotions. It would be tempting to link this to assumptions regarding what Charles Taylor has called the transition from a porous self (which could be able to accommodate quite disparate emotion knowledge, linked to different situations) to a buffered self (which would need an emotion knowledge as consistent as it imagined itself).<sup>33</sup> What is at stake is our common sense about the way concepts and conceptual history work. We have developed highly sophisticated tools to trace contestation between concepts, but we have given much less thought to the possibility that ideas and practices of a buffered self, a self that aims at consistency across specific situations and across time, might be the basis of conceptual coherence. Links between the structure of the self and conceptual diversity need to come into our research agenda, but for the moment we know too little about the history of the South Asian self to advance more than guesses. This special section, therefore, cannot be but a very small step in writing a history of emotion concepts in Urdu and Bengali, but hopefully it is at least a step in the right direction, inviting others to take up and contribute to this agenda.

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33. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 25–43. For a detailed investigation on how the interiorized self was developed in European history, see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 111–211.