

1 Literature, Otium, and Emotions: Conceptualising Leisurely Feelings in Modern Urdu and Bengali Prose

What does it mean to write on the concept of otium? Why does conceptualising otium entail constant reference to a couple of associative synonyms like *idleness*, *laziness*, or *leisure* to make meaning(s)? Or rather, to turn the question around, why do I, as the author of this study, use this archaic Latinate word beside its more relatable, recognisable English substitutes? Why or how do I use it as the subject of this study on modern South Asian languages and literatures? These and several related, significant questions will be explored and answered in this chapter, paving the theoretical path for this book. As already stated in the Introduction, the concepts of leisure and idleness have altered over the centuries with various societal changes in Europe, (South) Asia, and elsewhere across the globe. However, it is crucial first to pinpoint the term otium and arrive at an understanding of what it means to work on otium today and why this word represents the central concept of this study, even at the risk of anachronism. The following section will demonstrate that a conceptual approach to studying otium must consider the overlap between aspects of leisure, idleness, and related concepts, as well as the absence of otium's essential connotations in these lexemes if independent of context. At the same time, to understand otium in its historical evolution, we must unavoidably explore its relations with work, efficiency, and utilitarianism – concepts that form the central narrative of modernity, colonisation, global capitalism, and the present-day conceptualisations of acceleration and exclusion. For otium, even historically, contained exclusion as an integral aspect of the concept. Slaves and soldiers in Roman antiquity are not reported to have enjoyed otium; instead, fear of excessive idleness amongst them has been deemed pejoratively as lazy and idle by the Roman elite (Vickers 1990: 7–9; Dobler, Wilke et al. 2020: 1). One may take the argument forward to claim that a life of creative leisure and contemplation for the elite in this context was, in fact, made possible due to the existence of a slave society. Simultaneously, its descriptive use to express the idleness of soldiers in its earliest record also directs us to the layers of ambivalence in the concept, already containing the axis of alienation and exclusion. Let us turn now to the ambivalence that informs the history of the concept.

1.1 A Brief Outline of the Conceptual and Semantic Histories of Otium, Leisure, and Idleness

While otium in its earliest literary record, in Quintus Ennius's *Iphigenia*, has been used to signify a rest or reprieve from the occupation of war, its connotations have been argued to vary. Brian Vickers (1990) contends that although in modern accounts of seventeenth-century English poetry and literature, otium has been interpreted as a positive form of leisure prevalent in Roman antiquity, a diachronic semantic approach, as was carried out by Jean-Marie André, reveals a more 'ambivalent' connotation of the word.³⁸ For the Romans, otium was distinguished, according to Vickers, into "*otium negotiosum*, leisure with a satisfying occupation" and "*otium otiosum*, unoccupied and pointless leisure" (Vickers 1990: 7). In the context of *Iphigenia*, where the word was first used (as recorded), this ambivalence with a tendency towards 'pointless' leisure is expressed in the emotional experience of the soldiers – translated for our modern understanding as "unoccupied, resting and bored, wanting to return home" (1990: 6). Let us note, here, that in translating the mood of soldiers as "bored", semantic formulations are adapted to express an emotional condition that we now identify as 'bored', arguably, a modern condition that has a very recent history, at least in the western world.³⁹ Simultaneously, otium has often been linked to the Greek term *scholē*/σχολαί (Ltn. *schola*, Eng. school), while gradually itself coming to acquire certain scholarly and intellectual connotations, following the fashioning of this leisurely time not as bored but as contemplative and intellectually productive. The varying connotations of otium, retrospectively, can range from rest, relaxation, and boredom for individuals and groups, to political tranquillity and sustained peace. It is often argued that the German *Muße* (or Italian *ozio*, French *l'oisiveté*) is closer to the Latin otium when compared to the English renditions.⁴⁰ However, we must keep in mind that *Muße* is construed to have a more definitely positive connotation compared to the other lexemes, as elaborated by Monika Fludernik and Miriam Nandi (2014), Heidi

³⁸ On the ambivalence of otium in ancient Latin literature, see Franziska Eickhoff, "*Otium*, *Muße*, *Müßiggang* – mit Vorsicht zu genießen" (2021), 35–55.

³⁹ See Barbara Dalle Pezze and Carlo Salzani, 'The Delicate Monster: Modernity and Boredom' (2009), 10. Lars Svendsen diagnoses this emergence in conjunction with Romanticism, when demands are made on life to be *interesting*. See Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom* (2008), 27–28. See also, Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* (1995), ix.

⁴⁰ The CRC/SFB *Muße*/Otium at the University of Freiburg argued that leisure and idleness are not seen as appropriate equivalents. This already highlights the breach in semantic history. See further discussion in Noor (2021), 300–7.

Liedke (2018) and myself (Noor 2021: 206). *Otium*, on the other hand, as Vickers has demonstrated, appears to be more ambivalent and contested in its meanings. Its negative connotations can vary from wasteful leisure, inertia and sloth to excessive idleness, luxury, and even avarice.

Registering the ambivalence in connotations of positive and negative *otium*, let us now turn to the English words *idleness* and *leisure*, which were often used interchangeably in the Victorian age (Liedke 2018). Like *leisure*, *idleness*, too, has had a contested trajectory in its implications in the modern era. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in particular, witnessed various debates around idleness in Europe, especially in Great Britain. In English literature, the period spanning the Romantic era and the Victorian era has seen a revolution in the attitudes of philosophers and writers towards idleness (Adelman 2011, Fludernik & Nandi 2014). Tracing the relevant meanings of the lexeme to examples from works of modern English writers, *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines “idleness” in its modern usage as “the state or condition of being idle or unoccupied; want of occupation; habitual avoidance of work, inactivity, indolence; an instance of this”. Although idleness is perceived as unfavourable in early modern literature and only attained a more positive connotation with time, particularly amongst Romantic writers⁴¹, it was broadly seen as a vice, a negative disposition, and the source of many crimes (Bentham 1983 [1816/7]). However, it is also the eighteenth century, as Fludernik argues, which presents “a threshold opening to a society of leisure” (2017: 133), with the availability of more free time and social actors from different classes. Fludernik demonstrates the “conflicted nature” (Fludernik 2017: c.f. title) of idleness in the eighteenth century through a perceptive analysis of the *Spectator* essays (1761) by Addison and Steele and Samuel Johnson’s essays in *The Idler* (1758–60) and *The Rambler* (1750–52). She notes the heightened negative portrayal of idleness in Johnson’s essays, compared to those of Addison and Steele, where the former emphasises the “psychological and physiological dangers of idleness”, which threaten the individual and can transform him into a “vegetative state of inactivity” (Fludernik 2017: 150).

Brian O’Connor (2018) has shown how eighteenth-century thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, and Friedrich Schlegel, among others, have contributed to a highly complex and contested reading of idleness as hedonism, savagery, reluctance to work, the cause for boredom, and play, as well as the enjoyment of a particular idea of freedom. O’Connor’s exploration of idleness is expressed as “idle freedom” in contrast to many eighteenth-

41 For instance, see Richard Adelman’s reading of idleness and contemplation as poetic meditation and aesthetic engagement in William Cowper and Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s poetry in *Idleness, Contemplation and the Aesthetic* (2011), 68–101.

century thinkers' attitudes who demonstrate that "idleness is a [*sic*] bad, whereas busyness, self-making, usefulness, and productivity are supposedly the very core of what is right for beings like us" (O'Connor 2018: 3). In his in-depth study of Jeremy Bentham's 'utilitarian education' and Friedrich Schiller's 'aesthetic education' as well as in the analysis of the attitudes of Romantic poets (particularly Coleridge) towards idleness, Richard Adelman has demonstrated that for most thinkers, idleness or idle thought is portrayed "as containing elements of several different, often antithetical faculties" (Adelman 2011: 8). These varying connotations of idleness evidently depend on the context, culture, and period. Heidi Liedke (2018) argues that "idleness has to be defined more precisely for the period, namely always in connection and in contrast to the terms leisure (which underwent a conceptual change in Victorian England) and work, and can only be understood when the specific semantic context it is employed in is taken into consideration" (Liedke 2018: 19). Fludernik differentiates leisure and idleness in the class-exclusions of eighteenth-century English society, focusing on the class of the speaker (2017: 133). Elsewhere, she also argues that the dynamics of social exclusivity and the performativity of the same "tends to go hand in hand with discourses of recrimination against the excluded other", contextualising the British experience in India (2014: 131).⁴²

Conceptually, however, leisure, which has come to acquire a meaning of filling one's idle time (in the sense of leisure activities and consumption) in the last two centuries, is understood to be quite different from idleness and its variants. The discipline of leisure studies demonstrates this by the sheer topics and foci, particularly, consumption and activities with which to fill one's free time, such as games and sports, alcohol, tobacco, and fast food, casualisation of work, and the heightened allure of travelling and vacation spots (Rojek, Shaw & Veal 2006). Leisure has also become a much-admired concept at highly efficient workspaces, where regulated activities and experiences of leisure between periods of work are designed to increase efficiency and enhance productivity. More significantly, leisure in English has now acquired the connotation of 'free time', a period *allowed* as free and devoid of work. This is where leisure differs largely from otium and idleness – in its sense of disciplined, permissible, *acceptable* reprieve from work and its connotations of consumption. Infused with the idea of enhancing 'work' and productivity, disciplined leisure can "renew our capacity to perform" (O'Connor 2018: 7). Concerning these contemporary 'uses' of leisure, O'Connor has theorised idleness in the "notion of *idle freedom* – where work is no kind of virtue

⁴² There are also, of course, plenty of records of amicable and shared leisure activities indulged in by both Indian aristocrats and English officers during their time in India. See Spear (1998), 127–36.

or path to worthiness". He argues that idleness is in itself "meaningful and real enough to deserve protection" (O'Connor 2018: 3). This definition of idleness is closer to otium than contemporary notions of leisure, but it does not build on the flow of creativity, contemplation, and artistic experiences that can often emerge from or lead to a state or experience of otium.

Let us now turn to otium in relation to work, efficiency, and utility. As mentioned before, otium does not entail the opposite of work. Vickers (1990) pertinently points out, quoting Ernst Bernert⁴³ that unlike what many modern scholars tend to believe, otium is not conceptually opposed to *negotium* (life of busyness or activity), "but to *officium* or *occupationes*" (Vickers 1990: 5). *Officium* is explained to be different from *negotium* as it entails an obligation, duty, and official service. This misplaced opposition also explains the seemingly paradoxical phrase of productive leisure, in Latin, *otium negotiosum*. As Fludernik (2020) and Gregor Dobler (2014) explicate, otium *may* include activity or work, but *it does not have to*. Fludernik elaborates that the time during an experience of otium (identifying it with *Muße*) can be used to "meditate or to listen to music; to relax while hiking, dancing or swimming; one can also engage in a burst of musical composition or in a work flow of concentrated reading or writing" (Fludernik 2020: 17). Thus, what emerges as central to the meaning of otium is a feeling of freedom from obligations or restraints, as well as the freedom to indulge in voluntary activities, inactivity, or musings. This focus on the feeling of 'freedom' reaffirms Vickers' argument that otium is not the opposite of *negotium*. In fact, Dobler has demonstrated repeatedly that work and otium are not necessarily contradictory but can be intertwined and enmeshed experiences (Dobler 2014: 54–68; 2020: 305–14). Otium, then, is a concept opposed to an obligation towards work, to constraints of official perceptions of efficiency and utilitarianism, the modern gospels on which enlightenment philosophy rests. These complex and ambivalent aspects of otium with work further enhance its deep connection with a consciousness of the self and self-determination, often lost in contemporary debates (mainly due to rigid connotations in English) between leisure, work, and idleness/indolence. However, its relevance to modernity and the modern condition is evident.

In light of these intellectual and semantic contrasts and conflicts, I use the term '*leisurely*' to denote what is understood as the felt experience of otium, idleness, and leisure. This experience of *dwelling in the leisurely*, although not devoid of all contours and boundaries, can free actors from societal and struc-

43 See Vickers, n9: "auch der Gegensatz zu otiosus [ist] niemals negotiosus, sondern occupatus". C.f. Ernst Bernert, 'Otium', *Würzburger Jahrbücher für die Altertumswissenschaft*, 4 (1949–50), 89–99.

tural obligations, various degrees of exclusion, and enable them to pursue idle pleasures, artistic or literary creativity, reflective contemplation and enjoy the leisureliness of doing nothing. Such an experience can also embody resistance and a protest against a societal drive towards productivity and progress. Thus, focusing on the essence of the experiential quality of otium, it seems fruitful to be concerned with the 'leisurely' as an emotional qualifier, often interchangeably used with 'otium' in instances where 'leisure' and 'idleness' cannot fulfil the intended meanings in the context. As such, the conceptualisation of 'leisurely', though not at odds with work, is more than often opposed to a manner of *feeling, dwelling* and *(not)doing*; it is a sense of the self against obligations of efficiency and utilitarianism, but one that responds to the community and habitus it inhabits. Such feelings are not necessarily individualistic in nature but can and often do have deep anchors in shared collectives and a sense of community, especially when we move away from individualistic and utilitarian perceptions of societies and the idea of a contained self.

Amongst the eighteenth-century proponents of utilitarianism, the most notable for our context was Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832). Bentham's views on idleness and the role it played in his conception of activity and reward for inmates in the *Panopticon Letters* (1791) and his plans for radicalising school education in *Chrestomathia* (1816) have defined essential understandings of efficiency that are reflected in disciplinary formulations in the modern and the present. His ideas around practical and useful instruction and efficient work, posited in opposition to idleness, ennui, and leisurely states of being, resonate with recent and contemporary global work structures. His thoughts on utilitarianism are also significant for our focus on the context of colonial India, where English liberals, championing colonialism as a despotic (but argued as necessarily humanitarian) form of enlightenment, were staunch advocates of utilitarianism. Javed Majeed (1992) has argued that Bentham's language of utilitarianism had an immense impact on the complexities of British imperialism in India. As Erik Stokes (1959) has shown, Bentham, along with James Mill, John Stuart Mill, and Thomas Babington Macaulay, can be seen to represent the "transformation of English mind and society, as it expressed itself in liberalism" through the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This transformation, as Stokes highlights, "was brought to bear on the Indian connexion", which makes Indian history as significant for British Intellectual History as the latter was for India and its history. Furthermore, the notion of utilitarianism for such British politicians was always apparently conflicting, based upon an exclusion and otherisation towards the 'natives' and 'barbarians', and claiming, on the other hand, to include them, through colonisation, coercion, and discipline, in the European ideals of enlightened civilisation. In fact, the two aspects complemented each other towards the ideals of colonial capitalism.

1.2 Contextualising Leisure, Idleness, and Otium in Colonial South Asia

Studying otium in the context of colonial South Asia entails a double reading of the concept. Firstly, one needs to consider comparable discourses of otium, semantically, conceptually, and temporally, within the context of what can be broadly understood as South Asia. Secondly, one has to acknowledge the dual forces of racial domination-driven colonisation and rapid industrialisation emergent in the European notion of empire. These forces have benefitted exponentially, hand-in-hand with surplus economic profits from the colonies and quick, constant material-production processes in these spaces and societies, entailing a new perception of the work-otium dichotomy. These forces need to be recognised as significant disruptions as well as influences in the extant concepts of experiential time within various cultural contexts in South Asia. Recognising the significance of colonial capitalism and the emergence of work-leisure binaries is central to exploring the axis of colonial encounter in the evolution of these concepts. Within the colonial encounter, the significance of otium is naturally one of asymmetry and inequality. Colonialist discourses and approaches to the production of knowledge further accentuate this disparity. In addition, the significance of utilitarian thought that encompasses British rule as necessary despotism requires special attention, for utilitarian thought also plays a vital role in the way concepts of leisure transform in the wake of post-Enlightenment notions of progress and the Industrial Revolution in England and Europe. These ideas of progress and taboos around idleness had an overarching influence on extant notions of leisure in the cultures of the colonies where concepts of English leisure and idleness were often directly imposed.

1.2.1 Otium and the Colonial Encounter

In her essay on ‘Indian’ aspects of otium or otiose leisure, Fludernik mentions the “motif[s]” of “urban flânerie” in ancient Sanskrit dramatic genres, alongside the pre-colonial “courtly traditions” of artistic performances and poetry compositions in the courts of “*nawabs* and *rajas*” as “native traditions” (Fludernik 2020: 18). Kumkum Bhattacharya mentions leisure represented as “activities” in ancient Indian epics and social accounts like Vatsyayana’s *Kāmasūtra*, Kalidasa’s *Meghadūtam* and a few other texts (2006: 75). She also discusses leisure as “entertainment” through her reference to the Sanskrit word *vinoda*, “synonymous with pleasure, entertainment, enjoyment, and so on” (Bhattacharya 2006: 80). Seema Bawa, and contributors to the edited volume (2023) explore aspects of leisure in early and premodern South Asia. While Fludernik and Bhattacharya

attempt to look at histories of leisure in India through reading “motifs” and “activities” in various literary texts, the approach for this study positions the research problem from a different vantage point. With reference to the late colonial period, the focus needs to be on discourses of leisure, idleness and, significantly, laziness that have emerged in interactions between the British colonial authorities and the ‘Indians’. These emergent contestations are particularly important, not only due to the complex power-nexus of colonial encounter, but also because, as Keith Thomas has argued, the nineteenth century was a time when “English attitudes to leisure” were “exported all over the world, introducing into India, for example, a dichotomy between work and leisure which had not previously existed there” (1965: 98). This rupture is also signalled by Kumkum Bhattacharya in her suggestion that those communities that are “yet to be inducted into the mindset that goes with industrialisation cannot draw distinctions between work and non-work or work time and free time in their daily lives” (Bhattacharya 2006: 78). Thomas recaps Ranajit Guha’s contribution to the seventh ‘Past and Present Conference’ of 1964:

Summarising a pre-industrial attitude to labour and leisure, R. GUHA (University of Sussex) described India before the 1850s. Neither in the written codes of Hinduism nor in practice was there a clear-cut distinction between labour and leisure, or a moral and social objection to idleness, or a clear distinction between free and servile labour. Montesquieu and other Europeans, therefore, described Asians as averse to labour. Thrift was not regarded as a virtue by the Indian elite and extravagance was the fashion. The dichotomy between work and leisure, and the condemnation of leisured life even for those who could afford it, only appeared after 1850 as the result of European influence (Thomas 1965: 99).⁴⁴

Guha’s reported claims ignore the influences of Islam and Christianity in early modern India and their possible impact on time or its management along lines of labour and leisure. Ishwar Modi foregrounds leisure as deeply intertwined with social structure; while social structure formulates leisure, leisure also influences new structures and social norms (Modi 2012: 387–88). While Modi also identifies leisure in India as transforming through social changes in various historical periods (ibid.), Bawa’s edited volume highlights case studies of leisure in visual arts, literary representations, and performative forms in a *longue durée* view of ‘premodern’ South Asia (Bawa 2023). The present study on

⁴⁴ The Conference was held in London on 9th July 1964. Thomas’s paper cited here summarises the discussions of the afternoon sessions on that day of the conference, published by Oxford University Press on behalf of The Past and Present Society in 1965. See Keith Thomas, “Work and Leisure in Industrial Society” (1965), 96–103.

leisure in modern South Asia, picks up the narrative, acknowledging “the result of European influence” in the industrial-colonial period as a seminal moment in the history of leisure in South Asia. Sumit Sarkar has argued that during this period of colonial encounter, transformations due to the impact of clock-time and print culture led to the emergence of consciousness of the self in relation to temporality (Sarkar 1997b: 186–90). This consciousness can be seen in several Bengali books he discusses, where writers from varying social strata reflect upon and evaluate their perceptions of temporality. Sarkar’s study of *cāk’ri*, too, responds to the discussion of the self in relation to temporality within the experience of Bengalis pertaining to salaried jobs, especially that of the petty clerk of colonial bureaucracy. While these studies directly lead us to the significance of transformations under colonial rule, there is a scarcity of secondary sources in Bengali or Urdu that discuss leisure or related concepts, except, perhaps, a couple of sources on *āḍḍā*.⁴⁵ The swell in Bengali and Urdu literature (especially in the nineteenth century) that discuss and debate idleness or other leisurely states of being needs urgent attention and the present study hopes to address that requirement and initiate conversations on these topics.

As Fludernik (2014 and 2020) has argued, one crucial aspect of colonial interactions is the emergence of leisure and idleness as analytical terms used to identify the colonisers and the colonised as exclusive communities. A strategic use of these terms results in the semantics of leisure as instruments of *othering*. In his reading of ideology and colonial capitalism, Syed Hussein Alatas (1977) has demonstrated how orientalist stereotypes and ethnic prejudices on the part of the coloniser gave rise to the ‘myth of the lazy native’⁴⁶ in the context of Southeast Asia. Fludernik’s reading expands on this theme in the context of India, making the apposite point that just as class, social status and gender can make leisure an exclusive experience, the prejudice of race and ethnicity in the context of colonisation can likewise recriminate the excluded other (Fludernik 2014: 131). At the same time, from such constructions of exclusion and othering, a counter-narrative is evident in which “the orientalist allegation of idleness with regard to the so-called ‘lazy native’ is counterpointed by British aspirations to become rich and to imitate the style of living observed among the native elites” (2014: 130). Thus, on the one hand, encounters with the so-called indolent and lazy natives in Mughal India gave rise to aspiring ‘nabobs’ (mimicking courtly representations of pleasure and the indolence of the *navābs*); on

45 For example, the compendium of Bengali essays on *āḍḍā*, *Bānālir Āḍḍā* (2009), ed. Lina Chaki.

46 C.f. Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (1977).

the other hand, the leisurely attitudes of the 'natives' were seen by (self-proclaimed) industrious British colonisers as suspicious and even dangerous.

This suspicion and caution did not only emerge from moral prejudice and fear of laziness or sloth amongst the godless lazy natives that could infect Puritan Christian work ethics. Another significant threat posed by the laziness of the natives, I would argue, was its possibly damaging impact on colonial capitalism and the expansion of the empire. While colonial capitalism, on the one hand, thrived on the principle of exploitation of indigenous people and their resources, the project of expanding the empire was intricately linked to attempts at understanding, however (in)adequately, the cultures and civilisations of the governed. As such, a reading of the discourses of leisure and idleness in this context cannot avoid questions of power and knowledge, cultural and epistemological concerns that were, in the context of colonialism, deeply entangled with politics and political language. As Javed Majeed has reasoned through a pertinent reading of James Mill's *The History of British India* (1817) and of the orientalist imagination in the works of Romantics like Thomas Moore and Robert Southey, imperial desires to critique such orientalist imaginations as "undisciplined" complemented the desire to control and govern the empire overseas efficiently (Majeed 1992: 5).

While some colonial historians and administrators like William Jones (1746–1794) attempted to "define an idiom in which cultures could be compared and contrasted" through a committed interest in the languages, literatures, and laws of the 'natives', others like Mill and Bentham made attempts to fashion an idiom through which these cultures could be criticised (Majeed 1992: 43–44). Majeed elaborates on this tension between the varying epistemological perceptions of the colonised other by the coloniser in his reading of Bentham's language of utilitarianism and the profound impact it had on James Mill and his understanding of India. Although Majeed cautions us to read Mill's *History* as a direct application of utilitarian values to the case of India, what becomes evident in his arguments is the variety of approaches towards what Edward Said has termed 'Orientalism' amongst British philosophers, colonial administrators, and historians (and writers). While they all saw the 'native cultures' through lenses of constructed representations of the other, attempts at 'redeeming 'Indian culture' (made by William Jones) conflicted with attempts of 'reforming' the same (Mill and Bentham).

Such conflicts played a central role in conceptualisations of leisure discourses in the Indian subcontinent, in the wake of colonial upheavals, of course, but also in relation to the larger framework of *civilising* the barbarians and *disciplining* the idle. Simultaneously, colonial interactions have also often resulted in appreciation and admiration for the leisurely ways of the East. One must be cautious of a simplistic reading of attitudes towards leisure in such a multifaceted context as merely divided between groups as 'colonisers' and their conceptualisations of the 'colonised'. The history of colonial interactions in

India is entangled and, at times, multi-directional. Not only is the term ‘colonised’ applicable to vastly different communities with varying relations to colonising authorities, but as Saugata Bhaduri (2020) has shown, the idea of labelling a single colonial authority as the only colonialist regime for a contested region like Bengal is problematic when read against the entangled history of competing colonial powers, or in his terms, ‘polycoloniality’ (Bhaduri 2020). In the case of academic interests among colonial officers, as Majeed (2019) has demonstrated, even over-arching and standardised projects like Abraham Grierson’s *Linguistic Survey of India* reveal a “loose and flexible” relationship with the colonial state (Majeed 2019: 1–12, 17–41). Likewise, it is imperative to remember that the changing attitudes to leisure discourses are bound to be far more complicated and contested than naïve and simplified binaries. The literary landscape of the nineteenth century provides for a nuanced exploration of these discourses from South Asian perspectives, thus enabling a bi-directional conversation beyond the restrictions of semantic history, colonial forms of knowledge production, and dangers of epistemic violence.

1.2.2 Semantics of Otium in South Asia and the Role of Literature

Leisure in Bengali is denoted by the words *abakāś* or *abasar*. These lexemes also embody the notion of ‘space’ or an ‘opportunity’; *furṣat* is used in Urdu and Hindi (as well as in colloquial Bengali) and can be understood as ‘leisure’, but also ‘opportunity’, ‘rest’ or ‘ease’; *chutti* in Urdu and Hindi or *chuti* in Bengali can refer to a “release or freedom from something” connoting the end of some engagement or occupation, a holiday.⁴⁷ However, as discussions on lexemes of leisure in Indian languages by Melina Munz (2020) and myself (2021) have demonstrated, these words do not precisely express the “various experiences and practices” of what we interpret as otium in the texts – neither in English nor in Urdu/Bengali/Hindi. The words for leisure, for example, both the Bengali *abakāś* and the Urdu *furṣat*, imply being free from regular business, but they also have – and this is how they are mostly used – a connotation of having an opportunity, similar to the German *Muße*⁴⁸ – that is, to be able to do something else in the absence of regular business of life. As Munz correctly derives, the concept

⁴⁷ For an elaborate discussion of otium lexemes in Bengali, Hindi, and Urdu, see Noor (2021), 302–7.

⁴⁸ An etymological reading of *Muße* would be fascinating in this context, with its associations with the verb *müssen* (‘to have to’) that seems to have evolved from the sense of the verb *können* (‘to be able to’) with its earlier connotations of “*Gelegenheit, Möglichkeit*”

“excludes ‘mere’ idleness and instead denotes something fruitful and thoughtful” (Munz 2020).

I have claimed that “words like *furṣat*, *rāhat*, *ārām*, *avakāś*, *śānti*, *sukūn* are closer to otium than the English leisure in its present-day meaning”, mainly because they all imply a “sense of ‘opportunity’” (Noor 2021: 306–7). But it is not through a semantic investigation of such lexemes in the literary that we can arrive at a reading of otium and related concepts. Often, different lexemes, especially pertaining to emotion, feelings, and mood – for example, the Urdu *śauq/śauqīn* (see Introduction) or the Bengali rendition, *śakh/śakher* (see Chapter 5) – describing a leisurely/vocational mood or attitude can be seen to embody such conceptual formulations of otium in a more comprehensible manner. Similar lexemes are *āvārah* (footloose, itinerant, aimless; Chapters 4 and 6), *māyā* (allure, love, enchantment), *ālasya* (indolence, laziness; see Chapter 3), and *yād* (remembrance; Chapters 2 and 4), among others. The word for idleness, *bekār* (derived from the Persian compound, *bi* – privative, *kār* – ‘work’) is used by all three languages – Hindi, Urdu, and Bengali to connote idle, unemployed, and even useless. In Bengali, *alasadā* or *ālasya* connote laziness, sloth, and indolence. A significant difference in the connotations of a word like *bekār* or *ālasya* with European terms like the English idleness, the Italian *ozio*, and the French *oisiveté* is that, unlike these words, the Urdu and Bengali lexemes did not have an inherent association with “religious morality”, or “sin” (Noor 2021: 306–7). In response, Munz claims that in the “European context and in capitalist societies, the protestant work ethic has strengthened this association” (Munz 2020: n.p.). Contemporary references to unproductive time in the northern part of the Indian subcontinent (but also in Hindi-Urdu speaking parts of the southern peninsula like Bombay and Hyderabad) are embodied in colloquial expressions like *khālī* in Urdu or *khālī* in Bengali and Hindi, meaning free, without occupation. *Vehlā* (Punjabi) is a slang used casually in Hindi and Urdu to refer to someone idle and unoccupied, and useless, synonymous with the above-discussed *bekār*. In Bengali, the expression *lyād khāoyā* (literally, consuming laziness, for even feeding oneself takes effort) is ubiquitously used to refer to feelings of lethargy, procrastination, and idleness, considered typical of inefficient and lazy Bengalis.⁴⁹ However, it is the Indian-English expression of ‘time-pass’ that is understood across the length and breadth of the subcontinent to express both indifferent as well as enjoyable states of unproductivity, as not doing

(opportunity, possibility). See entry in *Kluge Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* (2002 [1883]).

⁴⁹ See entry ‘lyād khāoyā’ on the Facebook page *Characters of Calcutta*, where it is expressed as ‘taking rest before feeling tired’. <https://www.facebook.com/CoFCal/>

something productive to ‘pass the time’, but as participating or indulging in useless or unproductive actions, mostly talking, strolling, and socialising without any regard or attention to time or schedule, just passing the time.⁵⁰ These contemporary expressions are not discussed in literary expressions as much as they are used in digital spaces and colloquial speech in public spheres. A committed study of these expressions would require a different approach and corpus from the present study.

Like other early colonial dictionaries, John Gilchrist’s *English-Hindoostanee Dictionary* (1786) emphasises the sense of negative sloth in South Asian languages. Gilchrist translates idleness as “*tu’uttool*”, “*byathao*”⁵¹, describing the practice of sitting around idle. Idle or idler have many denotations, decidedly negative, including “*nikumma*” (useless), “*kumchor*” (literally, *stealing away from work*) and “*tumash been*” (an idle spectator, or someone who sits around *doing nothing*). Indolence is translated as “*soostee*”, “*kahilee*” and “*mujhoolee*”, while Gilchrist retains “*foorsat*”, “*furaghut*”, “*chootkara*”, “*chootee*” and “*khula-see*” for leisure. Descriptions of the body and the senses play a significant role in formulating lexemes and semantics of laziness, particularly the allegedly idle and lazy native’s body. On the other hand, positive connotations of leisure, as an opportunity, a gift, a blessing is used in the preface to the dictionary, albeit in reference to European ‘mankind’:

Mankind had a right to expect the fullest, and most accurate information, on the Indian dialects, from a quarter in which, they must have been employed as the medium of sublime moral doctrines, for a long series of years, by a regular succession too of able men, all versed in the ancient, and modern languages of Europe, surrounded by native disciples, *blessed with leisure*, and many *opportunities* which never fell to my lot, in the course of a distracted weary pilgrimage here. (Preface, i.)

[photos/lyadha-quintessential-bengali-term-that-bongs-cannot-do-without-in-the-city-that/650879425114549/](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tx4FIYvqKw) accessed on 30th March 2020.

See also the recent Bengali comic short film, titled *Lyād* (2021), directed by Amlan Dutta. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tx4FIYvqKw> accessed on 15th October 2022.

While such colloquial expressions do not feature in dictionaries, they are communicated across the linguistic community based on shared culture and sensory experiences.

⁵⁰ See, for example, a comic, self-derogatory discussion of Indian “time-pass” in the stand-up comedy set, *Yours Sincerely*, by Indian comedian Kanann Gill on Netflix. Alternately, ‘time-pass’ is also used to describe a value judgement on an event or an experience that is not good enough to be taken seriously.

⁵¹ Words in double quotations are retained in Gilchrist’s transliteration, which is different from the transliteration system I have followed.

Later in the same paragraph, Gilchrist mentions that it is not the Church and the European missionaries who had any role in the development of or had success in communicating with the languages of ‘Hindoostan’, but that it was the East India Company and its “permanent power” that had been the “grand source of information” in Indian Philology and study of “the other branches of Indian lore” (Preface, ii). The East India Company and its many administrators demonstrated an insatiable interest in colonial projects oriented towards ‘production of knowledge’. This interest was amply expressed in the number of dictionaries and grammars of Indian languages and several historical and philological treatises compiled by members of the Company – from William Jones and John Gilchrist to James Mill and George Abraham Grierson, to name a few. Simultaneously, their keen interest served to promote the study of Indian languages and literatures to such an extent that not only did they establish centres for learning and translation of classical texts from Indian languages, but in some cases, attempts were also gradually made to censor the kinds of books that were written, translated, and published for British officials in India as well as for Indian readers (see [Chapter 2](#)). These extensions of interest and involvement had an impact (if not always directly) not only on literary discourses in colonial India but also on discourses of leisurely learning, i.e., on otium as practices of reading, writing, and composing poetry, performative, or literary works.

As such, any study of leisure/idleness/otium has to position itself within the semantic networks presented in conflicted and complex literary discourses in colonial India. Literary texts in this context are seen to respond to debates on idleness, indolence, or leisurely states, with reference to these impositions of utilitarianism and reform. For example, Altaf Husain Hali critiques idleness and excessive leisure as intertwined with his criticism of Urdu poetry, particularly the *ghazal*; however, he also expresses an impossible longing for the leisurely past and the glorious tradition of Urdu poetry before the events of 1857 (explored in [Chapter 2](#)). Likewise, Bankimchandra Chatterjee’s satirical critique of Bengali *bābus* and their emulation of European ideas of Enlightenment in the voice of his brilliant literary creation, the idle, undisciplined and opium-consuming Kamalakanta, can be read in contrast with his admonitory commentary on the lazy, idle ways of new/modern Bengali women, *nabīnā*, who do not work enough, wasting their days in the leisurely pursuit of reading novels.⁵² The next section follows these ambivalences and contestations in the context of English notions of utilitarianism and its influences on the vernacular literary fields in colonial South Asia.

52 Chattopadhyay, “Kamalākānta” and “Prācīnā ebaṃ Nabīnā” (1954), 49–112, 249–354.

1.2.3 Utilitarian Discourses in Colonial India and Otium as Literary Creativity

Several factors played critical roles in developing literary discourses in India under the aegis of colonial administration, leading to influential encounters between various literary communities and interactions within public spheres.⁵³ Along with the rise of print and new media, standardisation of certain regional languages, and the flourishing of several genres, literary processes also acted as the platform wherein encounters between the colonisers and the colonised took place. The literary sphere became a space of contestations between communities for socio-political and intellectual discussions and reflections regarding civilisation, politics, and culture. If cultural expressions of play were misunderstood and mistranslated by colonial authorities, the literary fields emerged as platforms for expressions of creativity and play for many Indian writers. This book proposes that literature, in its multiple contestations, attains an agency which incorporates the freedom and possibilities of the play-element of otium in response to colonisation (as a hindrance to the possibility of otium).⁵⁴ We have to be open to reorienting our understanding of the self under colonial/alien rule if we are to understand otium in its contexts of ambivalence and exclusion. After all, it is only as a function of the consciousness of the self that otium can be recognised, experienced, and historicised. Racial and civilisational otherising are significant aspects of British colonial rule in South Asia. The contending and contested consciousness of the self are to be read as reflected and expressed in literature and literary discourses. This is the proposition from which I argue for a reading of otium as entangled and deeply interlinked with the literary in South Asia.

On the part of colonisers, the early interactions often led to admiration and interest in ‘the languages and literatures of Hindoostan’. Gradually, however, this interest went on to take the shape of direct intervention through the disciplining and regulation of literary output. Likewise, the responses and reactions from Indian writers often led to various challenging, chaotic, and fascinating innovations within the literary. Two important early events, both in 1800, are the establishment of the College of Fort William in Calcutta by Marquess Wellesley and the founding of the Serampore Mission Press by William Carey and William Ward; the Serampore Press printed a massive number of texts in

⁵³ For a concise overview, see Harder (2021), 412–23.

⁵⁴ The idea of play is not in opposition to seriousness but to the play aspects of cultural and civilisational expressions, often strategically formulated in language, literature, and art forms. Huizinga (1949), 5–6.

numerous South Asian languages and provided much of the textbooks for study at the Fort William College. Several scholars, particularly Sisir Kumar Das (1978), have shown that the purpose of the establishment of the college was “to help towards the growth of an efficient civil service in India”, by educating new recruits of the East India Company in the languages and literatures of India (Das 1978: 1). The Press was set up by missionaries and it worked towards the production of several translated versions of the Bible in Asian languages. Both these events had an immense impact on the development of vernacular literary spheres, as Indian writers and intellectuals began to respond to and utilise these platforms – especially that of print technology (Harder 2021: 413–14).

Literary-cultural interests of the early colonial administrators were often intertwined with a desire to understand and appreciate Indian languages and literatures. But these curiosities and affinities were more than often “pragmatically” linked to the efficient governing of the empire and its people. As C M Naim (2004 a) has shown, such engagements gradually evolved into definitive forms of intrusion, which in turn can be seen to shape certain literary discourses in India, especially for the Persianate-Urdu sphere. One instance is that of the 1813 mandate whereby the East India Company was to set aside funds for “the revival and improvement of literature, and the encouragement of the learned natives of India, and for the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British territories in India” (Naim 2004 a: 120). Similar strategic support (and thus intervention) increased rapidly in the coming decades. Eventually, English became the chosen medium of higher education in India, replacing the classical languages, Persian and Sanskrit. In turn, these languages became irrelevant as languages of instruction in modern India due to the more common use of standardised regional languages, like Bengali, Hindi, and Urdu, at the primary and secondary education levels (Naim 2004 a; Harder 2021: 415). It has been aptly noted that reading such myriad developments in the vernacular literary spheres must venture beyond the notion of colonialist discourse and clear space for the agency, influence, and activities of the vernacular intelligentsia within this context (Harder 2021: 414–16). Simultaneously, it is also important to note that the interventions of the British authorities were not felt the same across the breadth of the subcontinent. In Bengal, for example, such interventions and innovations were often met with enthusiasm. However, it remains undisputable that both – Bengali and Urdu – and almost all standardised regional modern languages of India underwent immense and rapid transformations under colonial modernity, especially through the nineteenth century, in a compressed (or condensed) form. In these transformative processes, strategic creativity and leisurely playfulness were as persistent as ideas of utilitarianism and reform.

Scholars have seen the British attitude towards Indian languages and literatures as falling into two categories: the ‘Orientalists’ (who argued for the revival of Sanskrit, Persian and other ‘native languages’) and the ‘Anglicists’, who debated for the need to establish the centrality of English as the language of learning. In a decisive victory of the latter, Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800–1859) appealed for an amendment in the 1813 clause for funding the education and knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of British India. He argued that the government would pay, not for “reviving literature in India” as the Orientalists had proposed, but for the promotion of knowledge in subjects and languages that would be ‘useful’. In his 1835 *Minute on Education*, Macaulay drew a direct link between utility and literature as follows: “The grants which are made from the public purse for the encouragement of literature differ in no respect from the grants which are made from the same purse for other objects of *real* or *supposed utility*”.⁵⁵ As is only too well-known, he refuted the need for learning in Arabic and Sanskrit, deeming the “vernaculars” to be “poor and rude”, containing “neither literary nor scientific information”.⁵⁶ He decreed infamously that “the whole native literature of India and Arabia” was merely worth “a single shelf of a good European library” and that the only aspect of literature at which the learned Indians were competent was poetry. Since, in his view, the poetical tradition of Europe was no less valuable, he claimed:

But when we pass from works of imagination to works in which facts are recorded and general principles investigated, the *superiority* of the Europeans becomes absolutely immeasurable. It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanscrit language is *less valuable* than what may be found in the most paltry abridgments used at preparatory schools in England. (Emphases mine)

Macaulay’s minute had two significant arguments: one was to abolish centres of learning in Arabic and Sanskrit and simultaneously impose English as the *lingua franca*; the other was not to pay the Indians to teach the British these languages but to utilise the government funds towards a transformation of the education system, so that the natives could benefit from the ‘truth’ and ‘pro-

⁵⁵ Emphasis mine. From Macaulay’s *Minutes*: http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealcac/pritchett/00generallinks/macaulay/txt_minute_education_1835.html accessed on 27th May 2018.

⁵⁶ Although he attacked the ‘vernaculars’, he was discussing the ‘classical’ languages, Arabic and Sanskrit. See Hans Harder’s detailed discussion on this strategic switch (2024), 9–10.

gress' of European and English education. The languages, literatures and texts of India were deemed 'useless'; so were the demands to preserve and revive them on behalf of the Orientalists. Macaulay's arguments in designing such policies and their implementation demonstrate a fine interweaving of racist-colonialist bias towards Indian languages and literatures – either in the classical languages or in the regional languages – and a rigid adherence to utilitarian policies in connection with the 'proper' and 'justful' use of government funds. Thus, the earlier colonial interest in Indian literatures and languages, stemming from cultural affinities and literary engagement was gradually replaced by a firm, utilitarian, and disciplinary administrative hand.⁵⁷ The crux of colonial education and learning has been seen by several historians as focused on the use of literature and language as tools for the efficient administration of the British territories in India in serving the empire, both at home and overseas. Macaulay's utilitarian policies and Mill's "scale of civilisations", based on *utility*, formed the framework within which the despotic rule over 'lower'/'barbarous' societies was justified (Majeed 1992: 135–36).

These influences of the colonialists on the literary discourses of colonial India have been noted by several scholars of both Urdu and Bengali (and other modern Indian) literatures. Nevertheless, it is imperative to note, as Sudipta Kaviraj emphasises, that the relationships that colonial authorities had with the Indian-language intelligentsia were often varied and thus had varying effects on the different language-literary fields. The differences in the case of Bengal and North India lay majorly in the perception of the British amongst the Indian intelligentsia. While the Bengali intelligentsia, at least in the early days, saw the British as a trade power, in North India, the perception was one of contending empires (even if on different scales). Both Delhi and Lucknow were seats of political power, reigned over by emperor and king with established ancestries. The British rule had threatened and finally overthrown these symbols of power, represented by the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar (1775–1862) and the last king of Lucknow, Wajid Ali Shah (1822–87).⁵⁸

For literature, a concrete difference was that patronage under the king and the court was no longer possible.⁵⁹ Instead, monetary support (in the form of

⁵⁷ See also Percival Spear, *Twilight of the Mughuls* (1991 [1951]), 50–51.

⁵⁸ And they were merely symbols, titular rulers at best, with real administrative powers in British hands by this time. However, their symbolic value was the last straw for the Indo-Muslim civilisation and its glorious history. And such symbols had kept the peace despite rapid foreign colonisation.

⁵⁹ For a good understanding of literary patronage and the place of the court, see Frances Pritchett's *Nets of Awareness* (1994), especially "The Lost World".

meagre prize money) from the British government entailed direct intervention from the alien and powerful adversary, as seen in Macaulay's policies (see [Chapter 2](#)). On the other hand, the nineteenth-century boom in print technology encouraged many writers to become entrepreneurs (and thus, to a certain degree, independent and indifferent towards authorities), as several writers juggled journalism and printing/publishing along with literary creativity. The intelligentsia's relationships with colonial authorities in these linguistic-cultural centres were thus varying and in flux. While in Bengal one may (primarily) see an emergent relationship based on strategic compromise and cooperation, even enthusiasm for English and European learning, in the Urdu-Persian linguistic-cultural centres of North India after 1857, this relationship was fraught with distrust and suspicion. The conflict was reflected in the mourning for the lost glory of a world influenced by court culture and a scepticism for and even reluctance towards the English language and foreign methods of learning. These already dynamic relations changed rapidly through the events before and after 1857 as they were influenced by the many political upheavals as the colonial rule transitioned from that of the East India Company into the direct reign of the Crown.

Despite influences and impositions of colonial authorities, literature and the literary saw magnanimous developments in the regional languages owing to the innovations on behalf of Indian writers, print entrepreneurs and publishers. One significant change was the confirmative emergence of prose genres. The nineteenth century witnessed a boom in the genre of the vernacular novel (see [Chapter 2](#)). Some literary spheres, like Bengali, also witnessed the emergence of the modern short story already in the late nineteenth century while a condensed rise and growth of the modern short story in Urdu took place a couple of decades later ([Chapter 4](#)). Personal prose ([Chapter 3](#)), essays, sketches, and autobiography surged with the proliferation of and access to printed texts. Literary practices amongst women became common – in fact, the nineteenth century witnessed a great change in the quotidian connection of women with reading and writing, especially in the vernaculars. Print media infiltrated the homes and lives of readers of these regional languages.

While it can be argued that the earlier focus on poetry had now shifted towards prose, poetry, too, benefitted greatly from the literary innovations of the time. Elite, as well as popular literary pastimes like the traditions of the spontaneous flow of poetry at poetic assemblies – the Urdu *muṣā'irah* and the Bengali *kabigān* – underwent significant transformations. As poetry was now more available in the visual form of the print, rather than the earlier popular forms of the oral and the aural, engagement with poetry had become a reflective, private, and solitary experience within a few decades. Kaviraj notes that the pleasurable literary pastimes (social in nature) were “fatally undermined by

a more introspective literary culture, marking a fundamental shift in the nature of the literary itself” (Kaviraj 2014b: 79).⁶⁰ A significant aspect was brought into the technical structure of poetry as its value changed from the aural and the oral to the semantic and the thematic to suit the modern silent reader (ibid). Literary criticism also emerged in the poetic tradition in a completely new manner (see [Chapter 2](#)). *Muṣā‘irahs* or poetic symposiums, too, were renewed with a utilitarian intention, influenced by British officials like Colonel Holroyd and G W Leitner, where instead of the earlier spontaneity that allowed a flow in poetic compositions, now a premeditated theme or subject was chosen, more ‘connected to real’ life (Pritchett 2003: 35–36).

Thus, through a complex program of ‘instruction’ and ‘improvement’, certain English notions of puritan work ethic, utilitarianism and efficiency in education, literature, and learning took hold of colonial India in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Such developments are manifest in various social and literary-cultural phenomena, for example, the proliferation of print and useful literature in the vein of ‘self-help’ that catered to a growing consuming middle-class readership; in the standardisation of English as a language for scientific study at higher levels; and the widespread induction of a section of the population into clerical or salaried jobs, where reading and writing became monotonous experiences. In his concise overview of literary developments in India during the colonial rule, Hans Harder (2022) has suggested that for certain literary innovations with respect to the vernacular fields, colonialism could, with the necessary caution, perhaps be seen as a “rather contingent outer frame with little influence on the dynamics of the linguistic and literary fields”, instead of simply attributing the new literary and linguistic developments at this time merely to the colonial situation (Harder 2022: 413). I agree with this proposition regarding the enormous and varied literary developments in South Asia and South Asian languages, as Harder appropriately demonstrates and as the following chapters in the present study also argue. While the backdrop of colonialism had a significant impact and influence on these processes – as a provocation or catalyst – they did not necessarily “directly encourage” literary production (Harder 2022: 421). My proposal is to tweak the reading of colonialism and literature in reading otium in this context, for the opposing force – colonialist utilitarianism – was vocalised loud and clear, particularly in the form of misguided critique of South Asian literature as ‘useless’ and ‘wasteful’. Many Indian writers agreed with the colonialist critique (see [Chapter 2](#)), and many of

⁶⁰ Simultaneously, new forms of literary pastimes emerged, for example, the literary *āqḍā* of the nineteenth century, often surrounding literary journals like Bankimchandra’s *Baṅgadarśan*. See [Chapter 3](#).

them refuted such claims (see [Chapter 3](#)) – all of them contributed towards developments and innovations, thereby negotiating the literary as a space of playful innovation, politics of insurgence, and self-expression.

Chronologically, we witness a decline in such ‘responses’ to the notion of useful literature as propagated by colonial authorities and can observe a more independent attempt at carving a distinct literary space for possibilities of otium through the century. As the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries reaped the fruits of these origins of utilitarianism in literary, political, and social discourses, writers responded to these debates in a variety of ways, establishing their literary creativity, engaging literature with the consciousness of freedom and playfulness, and fashioning themselves as constituents of autonomous, modern, and often cosmopolitan literary and emotional communities. Literature, thus, has to be read as a concept intricately linked with otium in contextual frameworks historically constructed around imposed notions of utilitarianism. I propose that otium be read, in this context, as manifested in emotional ties to the literary, in the mood of literariness and creative freedom, and the sociability (and/or solitude) of literary experiences as resonance. Literature – in Bengali, *sāhitya* and Urdu, *adab* (both lexemes containing a sense of sociability and etiquette/way of living already constitute the component of otium as creative experience (rendered as free and/or regulated). Literature and otium then formulate an entangled concept – not only that which is transformed but also the vehicle which transforms the meanings of these concepts for the reading, writing, and feeling communities.

1.3 Approaches to the Study: Concepts, Translation, and Emotions

Against colonialist methods of conceptualisation, the approach of this book is intensely conscious of how concepts, words, and meanings meant different things to different communities within the colonial encounter. Bernard Cohn has suggested that “meaning” for the English was “something attributed to a word, a phrase, or an object, which could be determined and translated” (Cohn 1996: 18–19). For “Indians”, meaning was more than something with a specific referent, and it often included “effect and affect” (ibid.). From such a vantage point, this book also addresses the problem of our present postcolonial, Western/global academic methodologies bound within strict disciplinary considerations. My approach to reading otium and literature as entangled concepts relies on the intersection of multiple fields in this study, locating the literary-conceptual-emotional within this system of effect and affect. I conceptualise the study from a historical vantage point, alternately comparing the two literary contexts but not to draw distinct and specific results to quantify or qualify them;

instead, the approach is to explore what moods and trends affected the discourses of otium and how these influenced the history of otium in South Asia. In principle, the discipline of comparative literary studies is a useful approach to reinstate that not all South Asian literary studies are bound to understand or express literature, literary developments, or a literary-cultural concept in the same way, within or beyond colonial contingencies. The differences and similarities in the two traditions of Urdu and Bengali as modern Indian languages, with regards to their individual and collective responses to colonial (and at times English) understanding of literature and otium, are significant for this study. However, for comparison to result in fruitful understanding between languages, traditions, and histories, “the objects of comparison have to be clearly defined. This definition, moreover, has to remain stable throughout the period under investigation” (Pernau 2012: 2). While the focus of this study, and the base of such a comparison, is the concept of otium, and because it is such a contested and dynamic concept teeming with ambivalences and issues of rhetoric and semantics, not to mention translation, comparative methodology in this context needs to be reconsidered.

Since the concept is at the centre of these histories and encounters, I argue that this history is best explored through the discipline of conceptual history, which shares multiple tenets with intellectual history or the history of ideas. The shift from national history to entangled histories has also played a significant role in understanding encounter and transfer that are now more adequately traced within conceptual history in a global framework (Pernau 2012). It would thus be helpful to approach this study through the reconsiderations in the discipline, which has come to name itself ‘global’ conceptual history, which also shares certain commonalities with global intellectual history. As Andrew Sartori and Samuel Moyn (2013) explicate, global intellectual history attempts to “create a more inclusive intellectual history that respects the diversity of intellectual traditions and broadens the parameters of thought beyond the narrow limits defined by the traditions institutionalised in the Western or Eurocentric academy” (Sartori & Moyn 2013: 7). Global conceptual history does the same by focusing on the transformation of concepts through transnational historical encounters in various periods and regions. A central aspect of this approach is the ‘translation processes’ of words and concepts, which undergo encounters and evolution and eventually have lasting impact on their meanings. These translations do not merely pertain to words and concepts but also to cultures and contexts and can be extended across languages (Pernau & Sachsenmaier 2016: 2) and other modes of expression. This section clarifies my methodological take on the study of otium in modern Urdu and Bengali prose, encompassing the issues of translating concepts across cultures, chronotopes, and language(s), and how they provide a way of reading concepts in their entangled formulations.

1.3.1 Conceptual History in a Global Framework and Entangled Concepts

Traditionally, the sub-discipline of conceptual history or *Begriffsgeschichte* deals intensely with historical semantics of concepts and terms, focusing on their transformations, sometimes from antiquity to modernity and the present day.⁶¹ In his ‘Introduction’ (2016 [Ger. 1972]) to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (Basic Concepts in History), Reinhart Koselleck explicates that to a considerable extent, the lexicon [GG] is “oriented to the present”: “Its theme is how the modern world has been registered through language; how, in other words, it was comprehended and articulated through concepts which we still use” (2016 a: 33). The central problematic of the lexicon has been pivoted around “the dissolution of the old society” and “the development of the modern world” (ibid.). For Koselleck, the transformation of concepts from the old society to the modern world could only happen during a “threshold period”, which he termed the *Sattelzeit* (literally, *saddle period*), a time of profound change in social and political histories.⁶² Many articles in the lexicon, although focusing on German (and sometimes a broader European) society and its social and political concepts, have revealed how the “significance of old concepts was altered to fit the changing conditions of the modern world”, demonstrating a profound change in the meanings of concepts and their terminology (ibid.).

However, Koselleck also warns us about the superimposition of language in the study of concepts. Influenced by Hans-Georg Gadamer’s theory of hermeneutics, Koselleck was deeply aware of the significance of sociocultural context, and language and identity in relation to the interpretation of and transformations of concepts in question (Koselleck 2016 a: 44). Taking the concept beyond its linguistic boundaries, he illustrates that a concept may be attached to a word, but it is not reducible to the word alone; it is much more than the word (Koselleck 2016 a: 45). Beyond the impact of spoken or written language, he has argued for systems of communication like semiotics, behavioural patterns, and other systems within which language is embedded. While such systems may be reducible to language, they can also “evoke or control the corresponding actions, attitudes or patterns of behavior” (Koselleck 2016 b: 60). Here, the idea of doing conceptual history beyond the mere study of semantics and lexicons can be observed. In fact, moving beyond a mere history

61 C.f. *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (Basic Concepts in History, 1972–90), a dictionary in eight volumes, on key concepts in social and political terminology, compiled by Otto Brunner and Reinhart Koselleck.

62 Koselleck locates the eighteenth century as such a period in European history.

of words, the discipline of conceptual history can adequately engage with literary systems to locate conceptual transformations within literature and the literary. Referring to the occurrence of events in the present and their records in the form of past experiences, Koselleck points at the nature of ‘linguistic evidence’ of literary genres like mythology, drama, and novels, which “all presuppose and thematise the original connection between speaking and doing, of emotion, speaking and silence” (Koselleck 2016b: 63). Koselleck’s approach is that of interdependence. While the scientific terminology of social history for him should remain directed to the history of concepts, “conceptual history must continue to consult the results of social history in order to keep the difference in view between vanishing actuality and its linguistic testimony which is never to be bridged” (Koselleck 2016b: 72).

British intellectual historian Quentin Skinner, on the other hand, focuses on what he terms ‘rhetorical change’ or ‘rhetorical redescription’ in the transformation of concepts. Unlike Koselleck’s view of the diachronic transformation of a concept in the *longue durée*, Skinner approaches the question of conceptual change through synchronicity, of short-term changes, or “sudden conceptual shifts”, in the way in which words are used in an argumentative structure. He contends that “the transformations we can hope to chart will not strictly speaking be changes in concepts at all. They will be changed in the use of the terms by which our concepts are expressed” (Skinner 2016: 138). He illustrates this through various examples of complex vocabularies that are still extant in English historical dictionaries but have lost their connotations in the sense of either “condemnation” or “commendation” since our ways of evaluating such behavioural patterns have changed (*ibid.*). For Skinner, such short-term changes are indexes or reflections of “deeper transformations in social life” (*ibid.*). In Skinner’s understanding, a sudden conceptual shift is caused by attempts to persuade an audience of alternative or new ways of applying or using vocabulary. It is not just the meaning of a particular word in context that is altered, but the fundamental values regarding the particular word (Skinner 2016: 141). This idea can be applied in the present study to see how, for example, in the cases of Rabindranath Tagore and Altaf Husain Hali, the idea of ‘aristocratic leisure’ is expressed and posited, argued for and against in entirely different ways while using lexemes from the same field (*nabābī* and *śuraḥā*, respectively,) that have influenced their literary communities (see [Chapters 2](#) and [3](#)). Koselleck and Skinner’s approaches to conceptual change can be instructive for our study of the transformation of otium, leisure, and idleness as individual and overlapping concepts in South Asia’s colonial and post-Independence contexts. As Kari Palonen has claimed, although both approaches differ in certain significant ways, they are not necessarily incompatible; Skinner’s

approach can be seen as an aspect of Koselleck's more ambitious project.⁶³ This study then considers the approaches of semantic and rhetoric change in leisure/idleness/otium concepts in Urdu and Bengali literary spheres, over time, experienced as encounters, transformations, and translations. Furthermore, as this book demonstrates, such encounters and transformations in both semantics and rhetoric lead to an entanglement within a concept itself, where the discourses within encounters imbibe a concept with connotations of the past and the present, the foreign and the indigenous, the original and the translated. Otium can be read as one such entangled concept, where the essence of the concept retains multiple connotations – of idleness and leisureliness.

If concepts evolve from encounters between communities, the actors who translate concepts are positioned within these encounters. They work with at least bilateral meaning formations, if not multilateral. This does not necessarily entail the treachery of translation or threaten the integrity of a concept – it acknowledges that concepts that evolve within encounters attain a characteristic of entanglement, containing asymmetrical influences in their transformation. This entanglement in concepts is a logical process within encounters, as can be witnessed in the global resonance of several concepts today, for instance, democracy or secularism, even if many of these concepts have regional, linguistic, and historical particularities. Entanglement in concepts is inevitable in the 'global conceptual history' framework. Although, as a field, conceptual history has focused on European national histories for quite some time – in particular, historically powerful nations like Germany, Britain, and France – recent instances of scholarship have shown how the field has evolved as a useful approach to study concepts cutting across many languages and regions of the world (Pernau & Sachsenmaier 2016: 3). Such studies focus on the historical "connections", "encounters" and "entanglements" between various regions of the globe and the significant impact such meetings – harmonious or otherwise – have had on actors, shaping the very categories through which we study history:

Global history has shown not only the extent of encounters and connections across different regions but also the measure to which these very encounters brought forth nations, societies, and cultures. It almost goes without saying that such entanglements also had a formative influence on concepts and languages. Moreover, global historians are increasingly becoming aware of the mutuality of influence between colonial powers and their colonies. If we

⁶³ Here, quoted from Skinner (2016), 145–46. For Palonen's original work, see "Rhetorical and Temporal Perspectives on Conceptual Change: Theses on Quentin Skinner and Reinhart Koselleck" (1999).

proceed further on this route, we discover that this bidirectional pattern impacted the development and transformation of the concepts as well. (Pernau & Sachsenmaier 2016: 3)

A significant aspect of global conceptual history is the malleability of the concept 'global' itself, which refers to a "framework of analysis", replacing nations, regions, and languages, which are instead seen as "products of historical interactions" (Pernau & Sachsenmaier 2016: 8). For such an approach, the object of study is the interactions and encounters which act as agents of conceptual change. These studies focus alternately on micro and macro levels of encounters and trace the bidirectional flow of knowledge that allows exploration of the relations of power and hegemony between two 'entangled' or unequally related/asymmetrically positioned communities. At the same time, the field is also interested in "changes within the local languages of colonised societies, as well as the conflicts surrounding these changes" (Pernau & Sachsenmaier 2016: 4). As Pernau & Sachsenmaier explicate, contrary to what the term 'global' seems to imply, many projects within the rubric actually focus on sample cases from different world regions while situating the research within a global framework of analysis (2016: 7–8).

Koselleck himself laid the path to such a transregional or translinguistic approach for the field in his conceptualisation of asymmetric counterconcepts/"*asymmetrische Gegenbegriffe*" (Koselleck 2004a: 155). When a certain group or community uses a linguistically universal concept to establish its own generality and universality, defying all comparisons, this "kind of self-definition provokes counterconcepts which discriminate against those who have been defined as the 'other'" (Koselleck 2004a: 156). Although traditions of historiography like 'world history' or 'global history' are indeed, and not without reason, susceptible to various controversies of wishful ambitions, the surge in transnational histories, entangled, and connected histories shows them to be a fertile approach of study as well. As Sanjay Subrahmanyam warns us, "it is impossible to write a global history from nowhere"; and as he rightly suggests, such histories often focus on detailed first-hand research on archives and texts where perhaps synthesis does not always prevail.⁶⁴ Taking the study of conceptual history through comparisons in a global framework, recent historians have focused on translation as the impossible but necessary process in understanding the transformation of concepts as well as in comparing them. The dialogues between conceptual history and global history, intel-

⁶⁴ See Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "On the Origins of Global History" (2013). <https://books.openedition.org/cdf/4200> accessed on 19th June 2020.

lectual history, and transnational history have opened up multiple ways of reading historical encounters and conceptual transformations in the recent past, directing the field towards fruitful investigations in non-European contexts.⁶⁵ As Hagen Schulz-Forberg (2014) points out, conceptual history can fruitfully operationalise global history when “it is based on an epistemological horizon towards which European and Asian, or indeed any agency and semantics, are related on an equal basis and with equal validity” (2014: 1). The context of South Asia provides for a vibrant field for transregional, transnational, trans- or multilingual or connected histories. In fact, scholars of South Asian literary and cultural histories inevitably work with borders between communities and categories of languages, regions, and nations. Trained in methods of literary and cultural histories of various regions with expertise in at least one regional/classical South Asian language and English, along with a background in subaltern studies, area studies, postcolonial studies, and/or colonial histories of the Portuguese, Dutch, French and the British encounters with various parts of the subcontinent, many South Asian scholars recurrently engage with connected or entangled histories.⁶⁶

Recent decades have seen a movement towards intellectual and conceptual histories on the subcontinent.⁶⁷ These examples of scholarship show that intellectual and conceptual history can lead to fruitful explorations of the historical transformation of ideas and concepts in a multifaceted society, especially one constantly in contact with various other societies in a continual process of entanglement. At the same time, for scholars of leisure, idleness or otium, this approach can also lead to some significant rephrasing of questions concerning the (now obsolete) Latin otium, or the German *Muße*, or the English idleness,

⁶⁵ For reference to various research projects around conceptual history in and outside Europe, see Willibald Steinmetz’s essay, “Forty Years of Conceptual History – The State of the Art” (2016). See also *Civilizing Emotions* (2015), co-authored by Margrit Pernau, Helge Jordheim, Christian Bailey, et al.

⁶⁶ For example, Sanjay Subrahmanyam’s works, particularly *From the Tagus to the Ganges: Explorations in Connected History* (2011). See also Saugata Bhaduri (2020).

⁶⁷ *An Intellectual History for India* (2010), ed. Shruti Kapila; Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History* (2008); it looks at entangled histories of culturalism that underwent a transformation from eighteenth-century Germany to early nineteenth-century England and nineteenth- and twentieth-century Bengal where the significance of the genealogy is not imitation but a social and intellectual transformation of culturalism within the framework of global capitalism. Margrit Pernau’s interdisciplinary study, *Ashraf into Middle Classes* (2013), examines the given identity of ‘Muslims’ in this context through various analytical categories of identities, drawing from multilingual and multi-genre sources to explore the transformation of *asrāf* society into the middle classes, through the concept of citizenship.

and locate ways of unpacking the multiple meanings of shared and entangled concepts in multiple contexts. The present study hopes to trace a conceptual history of otium in South Asia through an entangled, multidirectional reading of the concept in Bengali, Urdu, and English.⁶⁸ Without delving into “transnational” literary histories, it locates the transfers between and within the multilingual context of North India and Bengal. The transfer of concepts and ideas is seen as not only occurring between these two literary spheres, but also through their different and entangled associations with British colonialism and English literature and language, as well as English notions of distinct work and leisure experiences, further engaged with key concepts like progress, civilisation, and discipline/regulation.

In India, as this study hopes to show, notions of regulation were interwoven with various attitudes on the part of the Indian intelligentsia; sometimes, they were challenged, and at times, they were championed. What is certain is that these entangled histories led to a transformation of the ideas of leisure, work, and time, for both the English as well as the different ‘native’ communities involved. Earlier works on these histories are few and even fewer from the vantage point of literary sources in regional Indian languages. Percival Spear’s account *The Nabobs: A Study of the Social Life of the English in Eighteenth Century India* (1998 [1932]), shows a gradual change in attitudes to ease and freedom in daily activities in the lives of British officials during the various phases of governance in India, and the transformation of the extravagant ‘nabob’ into the disciplining *sahib*. Jeffrey Auerbach’s book *Imperial Boredom: Monotony and the British Empire* (2018) challenges the notion of the exciting lives of ‘nabobs’ and colonial officers, as well as men (and sometimes women) stationed overseas, and argues instead that the experiences of ennui, monotony and boredom were central to their lives, lived in unfamiliar landscapes. Pia Masurczak’s dissertation *(No) Excuse for Idleness: Leisure and Idleness in British Colonial Discourse, c. 1770–1900* (2016) makes a strong case for studying these conceptualisations of colonial idleness, leisure, and laziness in India through a postcolonial critique of material like travel writing and colonial photography. These studies posit themselves from the vantage point of British experiences. Sumit Chakrabarti’s recent work *The Calcutta Kerani and the London Clerk* (2021) offers a historical study of the conceptual entanglements in monotonous work, discipline, colonialism, and race in the figures of the British clerk in London and the Indian/Bengali *kerāni* (clerk) in Calcutta. As mentioned,

68 See Pernau, “Whither Conceptual History? From National to Entangled Histories” (2012), 4–8.

some studies by Sumit Sarkar and Dipesh Chakraborty have also analysed the discourse of *cāk'ri* (salaried job) in colonial Bengal.⁶⁹

The present book attempts to bring together some of the overlapping concerns of these extant studies in the field. It also primarily aims to address the proverbial elephant-in-the-room by situating the study of otium in the regional languages and literatures of colonial India, locating the corpus and concept within the literary spheres of Urdu and Bengali. It thus provides a substantial discussion of the debates around leisure, idleness, otium, play, boredom, and work and the transformations they undergo. It analyses the layers of entanglement in concepts of leisureliness, idleness, laziness, and introduces new ways of thinking through these concepts. The methodology is to approach the transformations through a reading of various emotional manifestations of the entangled concept of otium (See [Section 1.4](#)). Rolf Reichardt has argued for a socio-historical semantics as a middle course between 'lexicometry' and conceptual history (2016: 75–78). While problems of sheer lexicometry have already been addressed, documenting the frequency of concept-words in Bengali and Urdu texts with the help of computers is challenging partly due to difficulties in digitising processes. Language (Reichardt mentions particularly everyday language) is then seen as the medium through which social knowledge is propagated. Although not doing a sociology of literature proper, but because the literary is embedded within the public sphere, creating a platform for mass propagation and interaction of social knowledge, to acknowledge the wide range of debates that have been influential within contemporary discourses of otium in South Asia, this work addresses Urdu and Bengali literary texts. It also demonstrates how literature and the literary undergo conceptual transformations vis-à-vis semantic fields surrounding the notion of otium.

Sudipta Kaviraj draws our attention to the interdisciplinarity of literary texts approached differently (though not incompatibly) by 'literary criticism' and 'sociology of literature'. While literature is to be "enjoyed" (and literary enjoyment is an experience of otium), it "also helps us think about its own worlds in interesting and unprecedented ways"; "it is important to reflect on the way the text sees the world, and, as far as possible, the way the world saw the text" (Kaviraj 2014a: 1–2). Enjoyment, and other feelings, I argue, are extremely significant in reading experiences of otium, as idle, leisurely, or indolent are states of feeling, judgements, and perception, the corporeal and the cerebral, encompassing the emotional. The history of emotions has drawn

69 Sarkar, "Colonial Times" (2002); Chakraborty, "Family, Fraternity, and Salaried Labor" (2000).

great attention in recent years, largely from the discipline of history. However, the deep connection of literature and writing with emotions and feelings are as old as literature itself, and this study contributes to the wider study on emotions from a literary-historical perspective. The method of reading otium as a transforming (or transformative) concept in relation to literature can fruitfully be explored through the translation of otium in its emotional manifestations, in each particular context; but also, by placing emotions at the centre of the experiences of otium in these texts, my research brings the literary in close contact with recent research on emotions. The attempt here, however small, is to study, as Aijaz Ahmad proposes, “across disciplinary boundaries, and through undertakings which submit ‘literary criticism’ to a whole range of the expressive arts and the human sciences” (Ahmad 1992b: 254). Before delving into the emotional association of otium, the question of translation requires some attention.

1.3.2 Translating Concepts and Contexts: Between Untranslatability and Multilingualism

The issues and processes of translation are central to the study of concepts and ideas. Translation is a significant challenge while looking at concepts that become central to historical encounters; in such cases, often, translating a concept transforms it. Concepts can be expressed through not only language but also other semiotic as well as sensory systems (Pernau & Sachsenmaier 2016: 3). Actors interpret these systems through acts of translation. One of the most significant challenges of this research and other works on otium (see Munz 2020, for instance) is the problem of translating otium as experiences of leisureliness, idleness, or laziness. Jochen Gimmel and Tobias Keiling (2016) point out the difference between the connotations of the English lexemes, leisure and idleness, and the German words *Muße* and *Müßiggang* in the German translation of Bertrand Russell’s essay “In Praise of Idleness” (1935) as “*Lob des Müßiggangs*” (Gimmel and Keiling 2016: 19–20). Translation of overlapping concepts like leisure, idleness, laziness/indolence are further entangled in different languages according to the semantic fields they inhabit and often depend on the speaker-actor dynamic. Semantic histories of such concepts also show a change in the connotations of specific terms over time.

While otium slipped out of usage, the terms leisure and *Muße* underwent various transformations. Friedrich Engels’ Introduction to *Condition of the Working Class in England* (*Die Lage der arbeitenden Klasse in England*, 1845) shows the blurring of work and leisure for a rural weaver in pre-industrialised England:

So it was that the weaver was usually in a position to lay by something, and rent a little piece of land, that he cultivated in his *leisure hours*, of which he had as many as he chose to take, since he could weave whenever and as long as he pleased. True, he was a bad farmer and managed his land inefficiently, often obtaining but poor crops; nevertheless, he was no proletarian, he had a stake in the country, he was permanently settled, and stood one step higher in society than the English workman of today. [...] They did not need to overwork; they did no more than they chose to do, and yet earned what they needed. They had *leisure* for healthful work in garden or field, work which, in itself, was *recreation* for them, and they could take part besides in the *recreations* and games of their neighbours, and all these games – bowling, cricket, football, etc., contributed to their physical health and vigour.⁷⁰

In the German original, Engels uses the word *Mußestunden* (p. 12) in the first instance, and in the second, *Muße*, the opportune leisure for healthful work (“*sie hatten Muße für gesunde Arbeit*” p. 12). The semantic shift in these words, as Engels also makes explicit, occurred through the industrial revolution in England, as work and non-work became the dominating categories of people’s daily lives.⁷¹ The massive influence of this binary in conceptualising lived and felt time in England since the industrial revolution can be witnessed in the transformed meaning of the word ‘leisure’, demarcating it as the opposite of work. Through this transformation, the essence of ‘opportune leisure’ or *Muße* for the rural weavers in the above-quoted passage became obsolete in some ways. The fundamental values through which such concepts were understood had changed (in a Skinnerian fashion). As Peter Burke (1995) explicates, the rise and spread of ‘leisure’ in modern England of industrial capitalism “was connected with the process or processes which Norbert Elias called the rise of ‘civilisation’, and Michel Foucault the rise of ‘discipline’ in “a history of regulation” (Burke 1995: 149). As has been made amply evident, these ideas and practices of disciplinary regulation were exported to and imbibed in many parts of the world. They were simultaneously in dialogue, however asymmetrically, with other histories of lifestyles in the colonies and elsewhere. Like in pre-industrial England, in many parts of the world, as in South Asia, the modern idea of “leisure” was not necessarily conceptualised or intellectualised as opposed to work

⁷⁰ Here, quoted from *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1987), 2. Emphases mine. References to the German original are from the microfilm version of the text published in 1845.

⁷¹ See Gimmel & Keiling for the difference between *Arbeit* (work), *Freizeit* (leisure time/free time) and *Muße* (condition of opportune leisure/otium) in *Konzepte der Muße* (2016), 11–23.

but was intertwined with life and work, blurring the opposition between work and leisure.⁷² The history of modern leisure, in different contexts, is now seen retrospectively, through binary lenses today, in contradiction to, or in conjunction with the history of labour.

The Urdu/Hindi and Bengali words that could possibly connote otium or leisure, as discussed before, are *furṣat*, *rāhat*, *farāḡat*, *ārām*, *abasar*, *abakās*, and *chuṭṭī/chuṭī*. At the same time, lexemes from the semantic field, for example *śauq* or *śānti* can often carry the inherent meanings entailed by otium in certain situations. Such translations are not enough for understanding the concept in the South Asian texts and contexts, and translations need to go beyond finding the lexicometric equivalents. We need to approach these ideas and concepts through a contextual and textual focus on rhetorical change, which influenced the literary communities. The failed revolt of 1857 and its aftermath saw an upheaval in the way ‘leisure’ and ‘idleness’ were regarded by the Urdu intelligentsia in North India, often intertwined with depictions of aristocratic exuberance as well as a flair for traditions of poetry like the *ḡazal*, which came under much criticism at this time. The old-world ways of living leisurely were severely attacked by influential writers such as Altaf Husein Hali, Syed Ahmad Khan, and Nazir Ahmad, all of whom were closely associated with the British authorities in some way or another. In their works, the words to describe leisure or leisureliness lean more towards the English equivalent of idleness; thus, *ḡaflat* (carelessness), *farā ḡat/fāriḡ* (leisureliness), *sair* (recreational excursion, amusement), *havākhorī* (taking the air, strolling, wandering) were used in strong opposition to European notions of toil and hard work (*mihnat*) as well as in opposition to religious reformation. These lexemes are posited in contrast with Europe’s progress (*taraqqī*) and success for Hali. For Nazir Ahmad, they are presented as wasteful, as sin, and are yoked into an irredeemable reformist binary with penitence (*taubah*) and religious morality (see [Chapter 2](#)).

The sense of taboo surrounding the old ways of living idly, leisurely, with a carefree attitude towards time pervaded literary and intellectual discussions. These ways of living were critiqued, often, in conjunction with colonial impressions of the ‘lazy native’ and the reformist approach of several Indian intellectuals. On the other hand, many nineteenth-century writers, like Ratannath Sarshar, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and Kaliprasanna Sinha, satirised colonial urban culture of hustle, and the confused Indian imitators for copying British notions of progress, civilisation, and efficiency⁷³; some also presented scathing

⁷² See Ishwar Modi, “Leisure and Social Transformation” (2012), 389–90.

⁷³ See Hans Harder, *Verkehrte Welten* (2011), especially “Einleitung” and the entries on Bhabanicharan Bandyopadhyay, Basantak and Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay.

criticisms of the monotonous and exhausting work culture embodied by administrative clerks or *kerāni* jobs. However, both these reactions are embedded in ambivalences and complexities and must be explored in literary and emotional analysis. Literature emerged as the field where the new connotations of leisure and idleness as decadence (Urd. *zavāl*, Bng. *patan*), laziness (Bng. *alasaṭā*, *ālasya*, Urd. *sustī*, *kāhili*) and wastefulness (Urd. *gavānā*, Bng. *apacay*) were played out, often, as means of mobilising or educating readers and communities. For the Urdu and the Bengali literary spheres in the nineteenth century (as with possibly other literary spheres), the conceptual transformation of leisure needs to be explicated within particular contexts and conflicts. Immediately after 1857, on the one hand, it is difficult to find literary texts that discuss leisure or idleness in any positive light. On the other hand, debates surrounding related concepts like work and efficiency, decadence, and hedonism point to the significance of these absences. This can be read as a manifestation of an asymmetric counter-conceptualisation from a Koselleckian point of view. From a Skinnerian view, this is symptomatic of a rhetorical redescription, entailing a change in values and attitudes. While one way of addressing such asymmetries is to look at communities in interaction on an equal footing, equivalence can be proposed through careful and sensitive comparisons and textual-contextual translations.

Although translation remains a significant aspect, multilingualism, or at least bilingualism is the other important linguistic and mediational aspect of communication in the South Asian landscape. When we speak of translating concepts across cultures, we inadvertently adhere to notions of monolingual nationalisms in Europe – which itself is a recent phenomenon. Words like *bekār*, *furṣat*, *abasar*, *ārām*, *śānti*, *chutṭi* and *śauq* are notions intelligible to speakers of Bengali, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Punjabi, Oriya, Bhojpuri, and Urdu – to list only some of the official languages of the northern half of India. In addition, in the postcolonial context, one observes a strong strain of “vernacularising” English as a unique South Asian language (Saxena 2022) that further complicates this already dynamic multilingualism. What role does multilingualism play in the transformation of concepts? What does the concept of translation in this context mean? As Rita Kothari asks, “Is translation a testimony to the difference between languages, or constitutive of one?” (2018: 2). The question opens an immensity of possibilities, for the multilingual context of South Asia (or even India) remains unquantifiable and undisciplined. What is the source, what is being translated, for whom, and how does translation change and alter a concept? These are some questions that require consideration while working with the translation of concepts in this context.

In reading, concepts across asymmetrical communities, for instance, in the context of colonial relations, translations, transformations, and encounters, need to be addressed through dual sensitivity to two possible viewpoints. Firstly, it

needs to be accepted that certain civilisations or cultures are based on specific concepts that are exclusive so that translating such indigenous concepts could be accepted with their particular challenges. Secondly, and directly linked to the first point, it is important to keep in mind that such concepts are hardly formed in isolation and that histories of civilisations are to be seen in interaction with each other. These two viewpoints are not contradictory but, in fact, complementary in the making of history. Languages are also sites of power relations, particularly in any context of colonialism. While translation is necessary in colonial-indigenous contexts, it is a process fraught with challenges and questions (Pernau & Sachsenmaier 2016: 14). Similar to doubts expressed about World History (Pernau & Sachsenmaier 2016: 9–10), Emily Apter (2013), has argued against the notion of ‘World Literature’ in the aftermath of the rapid globalisation movement and recent market tendencies. Apter’s primary argument is that while comparatist studies of histories and languages rely on “a translatability assumption”, “incommensurability and what has been called the Untranslatable are insufficiently built into the literary heuristic” (Apter 2013: 3). Referring to the many problems of philosophical, theological, and cultural translations, Apter’s argument is to keep in mind the specificities in these various directions that, more often than not, are glossed over by vague equivalences, resulting in “‘lost in translation’, the mistranslated, unreliable translation and the *contresens*” (Apter 2013: 9–10). Also significant is Apter’s expression “history of translation”, which signifies a “decided emphasis on when and where translation happens, and, especially, on how and why it fails” (ibid.). These problems become further magnified in the entangled and asymmetric colonial and multilingual context of the (North) Indian subcontinent in the nineteenth century. Moreover, as Willibald Steinmetz points out, three distinct aspects of translation need to be considered: “the problem of equivalence at the synchronic comparative level”, as well as “in diachrony”, and finally, “the problem of the Eurocentrism, or modern bias, of the metalanguage we require in order to be able to communicate with each other about equivalence and translatability” (Steinmetz 2016: 354).

How can we then proceed beyond this ‘*traduttore, traditore*’ imbroglio? How do we deal with the selective lexical asymmetry of otium that this work observes in the texts and contexts of colonial (and post-colonial) South Asia? Translation processes are not simply between two communities and their encounters in this work. The processes of translations should be sensitive to encounters and transfers between both eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English ideas within the Urdu literary and intellectual sphere as well as the Bengali counterparts in this period of heightened encounters and self-definitions. Simultaneously, the transfers and translations between Bengali and Urdu concepts should also be considered. Urdu and Bengali, however under-represented, have also been hegemonic languages. The suppression of Bengali

as the people's language in East Pakistan under the cultural-political supremacy of Urdu; and the earlier, nineteenth-century decline of Persian/Urdu among Bengalis also have to be considered while understanding shifts in South Asian multilingualism. The power garnered by Hindi as a language of political discourse in the twentieth century should also be kept in mind. The plurality of the work and the multilingual situation already helps us address some questions of blind categories and narrow definitions of paradigms. Hans Harder has demonstrated this in the context of nationalisation and literary historiographies; although various claims to such constructed unification are presented, none of them can hold since "the constituting triangle of language, literature and nation, is more or less dysfunctional [...] None of the language-literatures of India can, as it were, claim to represent India as a whole" (Harder 2018b: 14). Neither can the idea of an Indian nation represent the whole of Urdu or Bengali literature, literary debates, and concepts that have developed in Pakistan and Bangladesh where each language and literary tradition enjoy prestigious positions. While such borders remain porous and contested, the multilingual aspect of this work is also its advantage. As Pernau & Sachsenmaier have pointed out, translation must be sensitive to "relations between languages and also between their respective speakers and translators. After all, translations usually neither occur symmetrically nor do they carry the same meaning in both directions" (Pernau & Sachsenmaier 2016: 17). Especially in a shared linguistic space, communication – either through translation or through multilingualism – is bound to remain indeterminate. This inequivalence and indeterminacy must be acknowledged and incorporated as a method of reading multi-linguistically, multi-culturally.

If all these cultural, conceptual, and contextual significance are kept in mind, mediation can be a successful endeavour "if and in so far as it permits the communicative action to go on" (Pernau & Sachsenmaier 2016: 19). For such communication, sometimes reading beyond languages is necessary. With reference to extra-linguistic systems and their emotional expressions and experiences, Margrit Pernau and Imke Rajamani (2016) have also argued for centring the body and the senses in the emotional translations of concepts. Many such concepts, for example, the South Asian concept of monsoon rain, deeply intertwined with romantic love, are seen as translated into practice and then impact reality; such emotional processes are often mediated through images, sounds, food (tastes), scents, and other sensory experiences. Emotions are deeply involved in translation and mediation processes and can expand our understanding of concepts and their transformations in particular texts and contexts. Such emotional translations, I argue, are extremely significant in unpacking an ambivalent concept like *otium*. Preferring emotional translations over linguistic equivalences within the literary is not necessarily a paradox; it can, as this

study hopes to demonstrate, enhance a literary-cultural communication and understanding that linguistic translations may restrain. As seen from the historical and conceptual development of otium, leisure, idleness, the experiences in each context can entail different phenomena. The sensory, the bodily (as Pernau and Rajamani remind us, the 'mindful body'), and the materiality of leisurely experiences are central to their emotional translations, beyond the constraints of lexemes, linguistic translations and semantic asymmetries within colonial encounters. But such translations are also helpful beyond the colonial experience, as certain cultures are often perceived to privilege the sensory or the lyrical over the linguistic and the textual.

1.3.3 Emotions in Translating Concepts

As we have seen, although imperative and ubiquitous, linguistic translations are often not enough to mediate the transformations and debates surrounding a concept. That such a concept – with or without semantic qualifiers – can be expressed in multiple languages that they can be used interchangeably, also needs to be historicised (Pernau 2012: 9). This is why a historical approach is required to mark the conceptual translations and transformations in the semantic networks of otium. Elsewhere, I have argued that in this asymmetric field of power hegemony and bidirectional flow of ideas, historical semantics is necessary but not sufficient. Especially for contested and ambivalent concepts, we need to look for their manifestations in the affective, the sensory and the emotional (Noor 2021). Attention must also be paid to the wide semantic fields and networks within which the concept can be located. The method must consider the relationships, attitudes, and reactions between these contexts – both diachronic and synchronic, as felt and expressed. As this book argues, a fruitful and sensitive method to approach this study is a dual manoeuvre of reading the transformation of concepts vis-à-vis the study of emotions surrounding these concepts. The relationship between concepts and emotions and how the study of one can enrich the other has been demonstrated by Pernau (2015b) and others in their study of 'civilising emotions' in a global framework. As Pernau has shown, the English/imperial enterprise of civility itself is intricately linked to the regulation and 'teaching' of emotions (Pernau 2015b: 50–54); reading emotions in the context of colonial South Asia becomes an undebatable and necessary approach to read otium within the nexus of various civilising forces – colonialist/ Christian/ missionary, but equally significantly, Indian reformist notions of civility like reformist Islam or reformist Brahmo ideals.

For the present work, translating otium through an analysis of emotions can be further justified by two significant factors. Firstly, the semantic concept

of otium already contains emotional signifiers from its recorded use in antiquity (significantly translated as ‘the boredom of soldiers’). This being the case, it is surprising how few studies on the topic place emotions as central to the meaning-making of otium through its various manifestations. After all, ennui, boredom, idleness, yearning for leisure, longing, and refusal/resistance to work are expressions of emotional states. Secondly, the literature this work reads and analyses and the discussions and debates surrounding leisure, laziness and idleness are all expressed in terms of conflicting and negotiating emotions, affects and feelings; as they remain the product of a time of conflicts and debates about civility and civilisation. As Melina Munz has already pointed out in the context of contemporary English novels from India, experiences of otium are not identifiable in any specific manner. Rather, such experiences are expressed through feelings of purposelessness, a freedom to act, and a sense of lingering or dwelling in the present, apart from narrative techniques and an exception to everyday temporality (2021). Monika Fludernik (2020) has further shown how, in certain contemporary English novels from India, the essence of an “Indian” tradition of leisure is claimed through an idealised past and is now dwelled on in the yearning for this past in the emotion of nostalgia. A contextualised study of emotions is therefore an appropriate and necessary method to fruitfully translate the concept of otium in the context of the present work. Moreover, it also helps us address the importance of focusing on emotions in studies on literary concepts, which, I argue, needs urgent attention. It has been argued that emotion words we use today do not necessarily reflect an enduring genealogy (Dixon 2020). Considering the conceptual ambivalence in emotions, an exploration into the feelings associated with laziness and leisure in literary discourses can give us a better understanding of how actors and writers understood these emotions and concepts, which had different implications compared to ours in the present.

Emotional qualifiers, expressions of feelings and sensory descriptions are central to the concept, experience, and representation of otium. With the Industrial Revolution, leisure and idleness became strictly demarcated in their conceptual meaning and acquired narrow, categorised emotional and sensory qualifiers. The fear of lethargy and criminal activities associated with idle minds and hands intensified in the works of philosophers like Bentham and Kant. At the same time, Jean-Jacques Rousseau made a contentious case for physical and philosophical wandering/strolling in his *Rêveries* (1782). With time, as leisure attained overlaps with bodily activities like sports and material consumption, idleness became closely associated with words like ‘ramble’, ‘saunter’, and ‘drift’. Brian O’Connor lists the phenomenological features of idleness in its sensory and behavioural details and descriptions (2013: 186). One of the central contestations between idleness, laziness and leisure, as illustrated

by Fludernik (2017), is the allegations of lethargy in the behavioural and sensory depiction of the *other*. I have reiterated and explored this point in relation to nineteenth-century conceptualisations of work and toil, laziness and leisure vis-à-vis a racial differentiation between the allegedly progressive Europeans (alternately depicted as soul-sucking service-oriented Europeans) and ‘lazy’ Indians in the writings of Urdu and Bengali intelligentsia (Noor 2021: 295–99). Particularly regarding the understanding of the self and the other vis-à-vis the ideas of agency and autonomy that are central to the concept of otium in a field marked with racial, cultural, and linguistic encounters, it becomes clear that a fruitful method to explore the trajectories of otium is through a deeper exploration of its emotional, sensory and affective coding and the various manifestations, meanings, and influences.

This is also a sensible methodology that considers the interdisciplinary approaches in this study, namely literary history, textual analysis, and conceptual history. The study of emotions has been a force to reckon with in recent decades. Conceptual historians have been working with the history of emotions to adequately expand the semiotics of concepts beyond language and translate emotions as central to the formulations, transformations, and interpretations of concepts (Pernau & Rajamani 2016: 46–65). Traditionally, conceptual history focused on the strong linguistic basis of concepts.⁷⁴ However, following Koselleck’s description of ‘semantic field’, later historians have strongly suggested working with ‘multimedial semantic nets’ (Pernau & Rajamani).⁷⁵ While this study is based on literature as its source and since we are not invested in anthropological research, the method is to borrow from the linguistic basis of semantic nets while focusing on emotional expressions, descriptions of feelings and affective dispositions. Although not focusing on a multimedial context, I incorporate the multiple aspects of emotional, sensory, and affective experiences in the study of otium.

Furthermore, this decision is strengthened by my observation while working with literary texts of various periods starting from the 1850s. Although otium or what are perceived as its antonyms, are at the centre of various literary discussions, it becomes incredibly challenging to grasp the essence of the concept as it becomes highly contested but also elusive in a lexicometric sense. The reasons for this elusiveness are many. As Kumkum Bhattacharya and Ranajit Guha have pointed out, in a non-industrialised or rather pre-industrialised

74 See Jan Ifversen, “About Key Concepts and How to Study Them” (2011), 65–88.

75 The idea of ‘semantic networks’ was already formulated by historian Rolf Reichardt, in “Revolutionäre Mentalitäten und Netze politischer Grundbegriffe in Frankreich 1789–1795” (1988). For a discussion of the same in English, see Ifversen (2011).

context, people did not have strict differentiation between experiences of work and non-work; activities of leisure and recreation along with hours of dwelling in unaccounted-for temporal states were often finely woven into working time. The sudden intrusion of the rigid opposition between categories of work time and time without work, along with allegations of laziness and uselessness from a colonial-racial bias, was liable to give rise to several confusions regarding experiences and states of otium. The confusion, along with epistemological control and civilisational assertions of race hierarchies, I have argued, creates a sense of “taboo” regarding the slow, unhurried pace of pre-industrialised lifestyle. We see this amply portrayed in contrast with the Western ideals of industrialisation, utility, and progress (Noor 2021: 302–3). Due to such asymmetries, confusions, and misunderstandings or mistranslations between linguistic and cultural communities, the intricacies and meanings, often coded in emotional, affective or sensory expressions, remain suppressed. At the same time, construed counterconcepts like progress, work, and speed begin to attain a high currency within social knowledge structures that are debated and reflected in literary texts.

By unpacking the emotional aspects of the concept, we can also better understand how emotions themselves undergo a transformation and how they also impact the re-interpretation of these concepts. Cultural contexts within literary texts often depend upon an emotional appreciation of sensory depictions, narrative styles, behavioural patterns, and voices of characters. For example, in the context of Manto’s pre-Partition Bombay stories (Chapter 4), the recurring behavioural trait of some of his central characters – idle men from the lower strata of society – is to wander aimlessly in the city. While this may share characteristics with what is understood by *flânerie*, it is a distinct and separate practice when compared to the European cultural capital associated with the figure of the *flâneur*. Such states of idle wandering are better described in the Urdu concept *āvārahgardī*, closely linked with the emergence, at the time, with the figure of the vagabond or the *āvārah*. While the figure of the *āvārah* appears much further back in time, often associated with Sufi/ascetic practices of renunciation or with the wandering of lovers, in the context of colonial capitalism of the twentieth century, it is closely linked to ideas of (national and individual) independence and autonomy. This itinerant figure is portrayed in literature and cinema of the time as an unlikely protagonist – a defiant and rebellious agent who resists capitalist forces and social structures within the colonial regime. Unpacking this particular aimless wandering for Manto’s characters needs to be nuanced through the discontent emotion of colonial melancholy, theorised by Ranjana Khanna (2003). Without the contextualisation of colonial melancholy and its subversion of agency and critique of colonial capitalism, the mere literary reading of aimless wandering cannot explain the intricate questions of agen-

cy and autonomy that are central to aspects of otium. Such acts of reading emotions with nuances can then help us translate from language, context, text, and literary as well as historical discourses.

1.4 For a Methodology Based on Emotions

Conceptual historians have already successfully collaborated with the history of emotions in recent years. As a field, the history of emotions has grown exponentially in the past decades, reorienting research into emotions as historicised, cultured, and learnt. Barbara Rosenwein and Riccardo Christiani (2018) aptly summarise the major aspects of the history of emotions as a study of “the emotions that were felt and expressed in the past”, asking “what has changed and what ties together their past and present” (Introduction). The topic of emotions has drawn keen interest from researchers in almost every field today, generating curiosity about what emotions mean and how various research disciplines can have different questions, explorations, and understandings of the impact of emotions on their fields. Although several studies focus on contestations regarding what an emotion is, most historians come to the rather open conclusion that today, as before, there is no singular definition of emotion that is unanimously agreed upon. Jan Plamper (2015) poses the pertinent question of whether “we” all mean the same thing by the word emotion in different research contexts, varying from neurosciences, experimental, developmental psychology, philosophy, and history. He appositely places the questions across different historical periods or moments, cultures and languages: “is there a unity of meaning sufficient to permit us to deal with these very different terms originating in very different fields, times, and cultures as ‘emotion’?” (Plamper 2015: 11).

For researchers in the Humanities, the most significant questions surround the relationship between emotions and the related words in its semantic nets – moods, sentiments, feelings, affects, judgements, or behaviours (Rosewein & Christiani 2018: Intr.; Reddy 2004: 3; J. Robinson 2005: 5). While there seems to be an array of disagreements on equating emotion with feeling and emotion as judgment (or ‘evaluation’ or ‘appraisal’, as cognition of some change that leads to a certain feeling and/or action), many historians, as discussed by Jenefer Robinson (2005), agree on two main tenants: firstly, some kind of judgment or evaluation of emotion is necessary and, secondly, that there is a strong connection between emotions and our interests, goals and values (Robinson 2005: 26). Peter and Carol Stearns (1985) provoked a significant intervention in the field on the distinction between emotions and emotiology, or “emotional standards”, clarifying the difference between thinking about emotions and the experience of emotions. For them, all societies have

emotional standards or collective attitudes towards emotions that “change in time rather than merely differ, constantly, across space” (Stearns & Stearns 1985: 814). William Reddy (2004) has provided an approach for historians in emotion studies through a dialogue with researchers in psychology and anthropology. For him, emotions transform through historical events and impact these events as well. While historians agree on the obvious process that history (historical periods or events or institutions) fashions (limiting or liberating) emotions and vice-versa, the distinction between emotions as natural and as learned or constructed seems to be a recurring debate through the history of emotions themselves, what Plamper describes as the “nature-nurture dyad” (Plamper 2015: 73–74). Literature, this book argues, has a significant and particularly transformative role in questioning this apparent dyad.

1.4.1 Emotions, the Arts, and the Literary

In her work on the role of art, music, and literature, Jenefer Robinson explores emotion as a “process” involving “a special kind of automatic ‘affective appraisal’” that occurs before reflection or the opportunity to rationalise the emotions. She argues that emotions are, therefore, “deeper than reason” (Robinson 2005: 3). She further develops this argument concerning literature, focusing on our attachment to characters and arguing that interpretation of texts often depends upon prior emotional responses to these texts. In her widely acclaimed book *Upheavals of Thought* (2001), Martha Nussbaum insists on “the intelligence of emotions”; for her, the interpretative dimension is bound by the cognitive or evaluative dimension. She argues that much of what we learn and understand through literary works stems from our emotional involvement with them. Thus, a turn to psychology, literature, and music is necessary for the study of emotions (Nussbaum 2001: 6–7). Patrick Colm Hogan (2011) remarks on the relative absence of literary and verbal art in the interdisciplinary research on emotion “despite the fact that millennia of storytelling present us with the largest body of works that systematically depict and provoke emotion, and do so as a major part of human life” (2011: 1). He argues that literature provides the largest and most unexplored body of data for interpretation in the research of emotions and that it is “a valuable site for interdisciplinary study that integrates psychological, sociological, neurological, and other approaches in the context of nuanced, complex depictions of human emotional experience – specifically, depictions that have had deep and enduring emotional impact across time periods and cultures” (Hogan 2011: 6).

In the annals of ‘Western’ history, the significance of literature in the study of emotions and vice-versa has a complex and rich trajectory that I will

not delve into here. A mere glimpse at the modern history of English literature can elicit varying examples of forceful ties between literature and emotions. For examples, one could look to Shakespeare and his most memorable and successful tragedies⁷⁶, or the sentimental novel and the fashioning of sympathy as a force against enlightenment rationality⁷⁷, the Romantic poets and their affinity towards fancy, imagination, sublime, melancholy, and so forth. In ancient Indian theories of aesthetics and dramaturgy, as explicated in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, it is through an emotional engagement that the characters and/or actors (in a literary and/or performative piece) successfully transfer the audience to a state of not only enjoyment but a mindful awareness of their consciousness through the experience that is explained in the gustatory lexeme of *rasa* (taste, flavour, essence).⁷⁸ *Rasa* (depicted in English as ‘sentiment’) is attained through a synthesis of *vibhāva* (determinants/factors), *anubhāva* (consequents/reactions) and *vyābhicārībhāva* (transitory emotions). At the same time, they are largely based on *bhāvas* (emotional states) (*Nāṭyaśāstra* 105–6, Pollock 2016: 7). While *bhāvas* or emotional states give rise to the sentiments, the sentiments also express or embody the emotional states. For example, *śṛṅgāra rasa*, or the erotic sentiment in a literary or performative text, stems from the emotional state of *rati* or love and is embodied in the bodily and facial expressions of *rati*. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* mentions eight kinds of *rasas*, or eight primary sentiments: *śṛṅgāra* (erotic), *hāsyā* (comic), *karuṇā* (pathetic), *raudra* (furious), *vīra* (heroic), *bhayānaka* (terrible), *bībhatsa* (odious) and *adbhuta* (marvellous). However, later theorists have suggested and incorporated the ninth *rasa*, *sānta* (peace or tranquillity) (*Nāṭyaśāstra* 102). Here, unlike in several Western generalisations, being calm or at peace is not seen as devoid of emotion or/and passion, but tranquillity itself is understood to be one of the major *rasas*. The nine emotions are together expressed famously as *navarasa*, considered to be the range of emotions or sentiments with which the audience/reader/the *rasika* can be transported from the mundane world into the world of art.

This very brief introduction to the place of emotions in ancient Indian aesthetics is only meant to reiterate that the inherent relationship between lit-

76 For a reading of Shakespeare as the “psychologist of Avon”, see Keith Oatley (2009).

77 See Roman Alexander Barton, *The Making of the Sympathetic Imagination* (2020).

78 Although *rasa* is oft translated as juice or essence or taste (see entry in Monier-Williams Dictionary online: printed dictionary, page 869), in terms of poetics and aesthetics, the meaning is closer to taste or flavour and entails a more complex process akin to the preparation of a flavourful sauce – involving various ingredients, cooking processes and the right amount of spices for the right duration, to then arrive at a sauce (literary or performative aesthetic) the taste of which can transform the one who tastes – i.e., the audience/spectator/reader. See chapter six of *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

erature (and other works of art) and emotions was recognised since ancient times and spread across civilisations. Although the *rasa* theory, like Aristotle's conceptualisation of *pathē*, was composed in a pre-modern world, it allows us to understand and read literature and performance with emotion or, as Pollock puts it, "it allows us to admit that we have such experiences in the first place" (2016: 44). Recent scholars of literature and research on emotions have made a strong case for "putting emotions back into literary interpretation".⁷⁹ Until recently, the trend against reading emotions, literature, and literary criticism, termed as "affective fallacy", has prevailed due to the mere focus on *affect* and affective reading as subjective and unreliable. The recent so-called "affective turn", or, as Suzanne Keen terms it, the "Affective (Re)turn", takes us back to the earlier unresolved questions rather than making space for departures (Keen 2011: 18). While a distinction between emotions and affect has been significant, the emotional dimension of literature and literature's affective impact on readers remain indisputable.

In the modern West, there appears to be a certain reluctance amongst scholars to read literature and literary texts as the source for the study of emotions. In contrast, history or historical texts are preferred as source material. This line of thought emerges, perhaps, due to the understanding that literary texts are works of imagination and art, in what Sarah McNamer describes as "the problem of literariness" – that they are seen as too *literary* (2015: 1435–36). She elaborates on this issue, where the "more literary the text, the less likely it is to be regarded as a valuable source for the history of feeling", for such "literary" (artful) literature is seen as "both not enough and too much" (McNamer 2015: 1435). The flamboyancy and imagination in such texts are seen as "unstable and untrustworthy" reflections of people's feelings, while the dependency of history on the artfulness of literature – "wordplay, juxtaposition, rhythm, rhyme, irony, allegory, metrical complexity" – has also been questioned. The apparent historicity (or authenticity) of history, already questioned by Michel Foucault, among others, is worth mentioning in the refutation of the 'literariness of literature' (Foucault 2005: xvi–xxvi). Going beyond the conflicts of historicity and textuality of history, I believe that the literariness of literature is not necessarily a disadvantage for the study of emotions. As has already been mentioned, literature and one may add its literariness, has been a key influence on the development of emotions, guiding readers and presenting them with conflicts about feelings, to say the least. Literature has also been a space for reflection on these emotions, engendering changes and developments in the history of feelings. Moreover, as McNamer has rightly pointed out, literature

⁷⁹ Jean-François Vernay, *The Seduction of Fiction* (2016).

attains a function of “play”, “an arena of creativity” that helps readers to think and feel “beyond the given” (2015: 1436). This function of literature as *play* not only strengthens the need to read the coded emotions and feelings in the literary texts but also reasserts the deep interconnection of literature and emotions with the play-element of otium. I will not belabour the point, but one cannot deny the persistence of rhetorical art in several historical sources, especially war, conquest, and political upheaval. Literary art, naturally, infiltrates most sources of history and forms of history writing. A similar reckoning is also observed in the gradual turn of emotion research towards medieval literary studies.

Bringing a departure in the way otium as a research topic has been approached so far, the present study contributes to the study of emotions and literary studies in modern South Asia. Twentieth-century South Asian studies have so often focused on histories of trauma, war, famine and riots – and other experiences of struggle, and rightly so – that it is rare to find research on topics like aesthetics or emotions of otium, leisure, or idleness. Evidently, a study of otium in the South Asian context is not, and cannot be devoid of conflict; instead, such an approach of reading otium, leisure and idleness can, in turn, relate to many wider cultural and historicised conflicts and struggles. An emotional-conceptual-literary enquiry of otium will reaffirm that it cannot be bound merely within negative and positive experiences of pleasure and pain. This book probes into the very nature of otium as expressed in complex historical-emotional manifestations like nostalgia and melancholy, and topophilia, among others. Such expressions do not necessarily culminate in semantic equivalents like *yād* (remembrance) or *yādgār* regarding nostalgia, for instance. Instead, through a focused reading of literary debates and texts, such an investigation can guide us to the study of semantic networks within which emotional expressions work, where, in reading nostalgia, a resurgence is witnessed in lexemes of ‘loss’, like *ākhrī* (last, final), *guzaštah* (past, bygone), and *ānsū* (tears), to list a few (see [Chapter 2](#)). However, the pain of nostalgia is also intertwined, in these cases, with rage and despair, thus challenging the notion that emotions are universal. Through these various explorations, the idea is also to locate the transformations (where they occur) in the concepts of leisure and idleness and how literary works express and deal with the feelings surrounding otium. As such, the study will focus on how otium is discussed, felt, debated, and expressed in literary texts, but will refrain from detailed discussion on how these texts affected individual readers. While such an investigation is beyond the present scope, the conceptualisation of literary platforms as public spheres and the close association of literature with socio-political upheavals in this context, particularly that of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, can help us with a required understanding of readers’ relations to these selected texts.

1.4.2 Feelings as Practices? Emotions, Time, and Space

Several scholars insist that we need to differentiate between emotions and feelings. While we feel emotions like love, hatred, happiness, grief, and laziness, feelings are also physiological states, like hunger or feeling cold, conditions that may not relate to what we understand as emotions (Robinson 2005: 5). Are emotions then behavioural responses or dispositions? However, many emotions often do not necessarily accompany overt behavioural responses – for example, being secretly in love. Moreover, multiple emotions can have similar behavioural expressions (*ibid.*, 6). The ‘Stoics – Aristotle, Descartes, Spinoza and many current theorists (neo-Stoics) – see emotions as evaluative judgements or cognitive appraisals. Martha Nussbaum writes of emotions as “acknowledgements of neediness and lack of self-sufficiency” (2001: 22). For Robinson, an emotion is not simply identifiable or defined around judgment theory but is a more complex “process” “involving a number of different events, and, in particular, involving both affective and cognitive evaluations” (2005: 59). Emotions cannot be attributed to either the realm of thoughts/judgements/awareness alone or to the realm of physiological expressions and bodily experiences. It seems very clear that a strong correlation between the two is undeniable, and the dialectic of mind-body has to be done away with to understand and work with emotions.

Emotions and feelings have often been segregated based on ‘intentional objects’⁸⁰. That is to say that emotions have intentional objects – fear *of* something, love *for* someone. Antonio Damasio and others have differentiated them as bodily changes (emotions) and mental perception and interpretation in the brain (feeling).⁸¹ William Reddy (2004) famously proposed his concept of “emotives” as a form of utterance, a speech act that is neither descriptive nor performative, where such emotives help actors navigate their vague feelings into particular emotions. While this is a very fruitful approach, particularly with regard to describing the various vague feelings experienced in states of otium, Reddy’s understanding of emotions and feelings is entirely based upon the logic of language and does not explore emotions in their variable cultural contexts. One cannot rely on language solely to gauge emotions. Similarly, some understandings of affects, although not logocentric, constitute a certain universality where it is mostly seen “independent of, and in an important sense prior to, ideology—that is, prior to intentions, meanings, reasons, and beliefs—because

⁸⁰ See Demian Whiting, “The Feeling Theory of Emotion and the Object-Directed Emotion” (2011).

⁸¹ Antonio R. Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (2003).

they are nonsignifying, autonomic processes that take place below the threshold of conscious awareness and meaning”.⁸² The present study is interested in understanding and addressing the particularities of emotional experiences and feelings in states of otium in their cultural and temporal-spatial-historical contexts. Simultaneously, it also translates otium in emotional manifestations, depending upon contexts, reflected in texts.

Monique Scheer (2012) convincingly approaches emotions as practices. She argues that “practices not only generate emotions, but that emotions themselves can be viewed as a practical engagement with the world”. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*, she contextualises the body as socially situated, adoptive and historical: “Conceiving of emotions as practices means understanding them as emerging from bodily dispositions conditioned by a social context, which always has cultural and historical specificity” (Scheer 2012: 193). Scheer’s approach insists that emotions are not only something we *have* but also *do*. She further explains: “Viewing emotion as a kind of practice means recognising that it is always embodied, that an emotion without a medium for experience cannot be described as one” (Scheer 2012: 209). Access to emotion-as-practice, i.e., experience and expression, in sources, according to Scheer, “is achieved through and in connection with other doings and sayings on which emotion-as-practice is dependent and intertwined, such as speaking, gesturing, remembering, manipulating objects, and perceiving sounds, smells, and spaces (ibid.). The experience and expression of emotions and feelings are taken up in the context of research on literature and emotion by Hogan (2011). He writes of emotions as experiences that are “encoded” and “represented” in literary texts. In these texts, writes Hogan, the study of emotions through this approach of exploring the encoding and representations can be done by two methods: a detailed and sensitive readers’ response theory and the interpretation of texts themselves. This representation happens through the process of encoding, which entails a certain degree of selection, not a narration of direct experience. The interpretation of these representations is based on the understanding that literature is *neither entirely spontaneous nor entirely artificial*. At the same time, it reflects a social and cultural condition and has lasting impact on our understanding of emotions. For example, the kind of romantic love that is expressed in *Romeo and Juliet* may not be something many readers experience in real life. Still, it impacts how they emotionally perceive and cope with

82 Ruth Leys, “The Turn to Affect: A Critique” (2011), 437. This is a criticism of the way affect has been understood by scholars like Nigel Thrift and Brian Massumi. This view of effect as prior to cognition has also been discussed by Robinson as “affective appraisal” (2005), 41–43.

romantic love and what they come to expect of it. From such a view, the significance of literary works is that their depictive validity “derives from its *production* of such an experience” (Hogan 2011: 22).

Representation, interpretation, and production of emotions in literary texts are not necessarily to be seen as cognitive or judgmental experiences alone. Scheer’s theory of emotion as practice suggests four different practices involving the body, subjected to “specific social setting” and “power relations”. These are: “mobilising, naming, communicating, and regulating emotion” (Scheer 2012: 193). All four practices are, I believe, manoeuvred through literary texts, particularly in the context of colonial South Asia. In fact, the genres and texts this book deals with actively produce and indulge in these practices. The early Urdu novel is seen to be attempting to mobilise emotions of remorse, grief, and guilt through an emphasis on ideas of reformation while struggling with emotions of loss, despair, rage, and longing (Chapter 2). In Manto’s stories, the emotion of melancholy/*udāsī*, the sensory and bodily experiences of his characters and their psychological circumstances are not only named but also explored in depth through a critique of colonial capitalism and selective notions of progress (Chapter 4). Tagore’s letters are seen to be communicating certain emotions of poetic melancholy and idle leisure not only for a primary specific reader but a larger anonymous readership through the epistolary form. They do not only communicate these emotions as felt by the poet, but their genre specificity, that of self-writing/epistolary, also plays a role in guiding readers on how to express abstract love for space and place, which can be read in the emotion of topophilia (Chapter 3). The detective novellas of Satyajit Ray are seen to constantly excite while also regulate emotions of adventure and thrill, further directing readers towards a masculine discipline of calm and intelligence through a pedagogical approach (Chapter 5). These examples are also involved in the other practices to a certain extent, although they may focus on one emotion-practice. The interpretation of otium manifested in each text dealt with in various chapters of this study is also based on the practices of leisure, idleness and ennui depicted in the literary texts, in the “use of language that links the body with the mind” (Scheer 2012: 218). Pernau and Rajamani have also discussed the study of emotions via “processes of emotional translations”. That is, the role of the body and the senses in the translation between reality (represented) and interpretations; different media of translations and their impacts on shaping the concept; and that concepts, in turn, translate into practices that impact reality.

Integrating the body and the senses in the study of emotions of otium does not only help in these translations but also allows us to understand and theorise the literary texts’ relationship with material reality, temporality, and spatiality; aspects of otium that are centrally linked to its experience and practice. The abstract and embodied or felt aspects together constitute an emotion

concept. Although emotion concepts have been classically understood as “having a simple structure and minimal conceptual content”, i.e., “just enough content to distinguish each emotion concept from every other emotion concept”, as Zoltán Kövecses (1990) has shown, they have a complex and elaborate structure, and are conceptually richer and more nuanced. But moving away from a strictly linguistic study of emotion concepts, the aim here is to locate emotion concepts – like nostalgia or topophilia, for instance – as embodying specific and yet entangled, contextualised, even conflicted leisurely feelings. In various depictions of otium, in experiences of ennui and laziness, as well as in relishing a leisurely state, time is felt to have slowed down (Chapter 4). In experiences of artistic creativity or poetic/musical compositions, time is felt as still or motionless; alternatively, it can also be felt as immersive or transcendental (Chapter 3). In experiences of nostalgia, time is depicted as caught between the past, present and future (Chapter 2 and 4), where the present and the future as spent in re-membering and recreating memories of the past, as the consciousness of current and impending temporalities fade. In the context of fashioning an enjoyable autonomy through recreational pedagogy in detective fiction, time is ambivalently experienced as a process of disciplined but simultaneously leisurely learning outside the global temporal regimes of office work and school education (Chapter 5). Furthermore, experiences of time in longing for otium, represented in aimless wandering, resistance to socially-economically structured temporal grids, in musical and literary immersion are expressed as transcendental, beyond a purely humanist conception of linearity (Chapter 6). Experiences of otium are seen to have a distinctly different feeling surrounding time, the sense of time being different from its hegemonic linearity, but focused on the relationship of the self with time and space. The very concept of linear, hegemonic time has been critiqued through a reading of it as constructed (West-Pavlov 2013) and, much earlier, as confused (Bergson 1913). In the context of colonialism, notions of cyclical time in high Hindu philosophy of *yuga* have been posited against colonial temporal regimes (Sarkar 2002). Simultaneously, for many Muslim writers in the nineteenth century, time is a pressing concept, in fear of being wasted (Pernau & Stille 2017) and to be caught up with (Hopf 2017). A reading of otium vis-à-vis its experiences, feelings and practices of time is aptly expressed by Munz (2020) in her use of the term “alternative temporality”, conceptualised as different from the normalised, historicist linear temporality. This is further explored here, often, as a dissonance of emotions and temporalities in each chapter where emotions of otium are seen in relation to didactics and normative surrounding the concepts of reform, utilitarianism, and global capitalism.

The experience of different temporalities in relation to otium is indispensably connected to the experience of a different spatiality for the self. Spatiality

is often entangled within the temporal experiences charted in the texts explored in the following chapters. The idea of ‘timespace’ has already been proposed by Jon May and Nigel Thrift with the understanding and acknowledgment that “spatial variation” is a “constitutive part rather than an added dimension of the multiplicity and heterogeneity of social time” (2001: 5). They use the example of ‘work’ time that gives shape to ‘leisure’ time while insisting that such conceptualisation of “time only acquires full meaning when enacted in the appropriate setting” (May & Thrift 2001: 4). For example, in the context of overcrowded urban spaces in cities in South Asia, like Delhi, Calcutta, Dhaka or Lahore, a temporal aspect of experiences of otium is often seen to be inherently linked to the spatial dimensions of such an experience, be it in spaces like monuments or ruins in their association of the past, or in spaces of immersive sociality like cafes and tea houses (spaces of *āḍḍā*, the practice itself taking the name from the sense of space, an *āḍḍā* – a place of gathering or meeting). Overcrowded streets, too, can be read in the context of urban South Asia, as spaces enabling immersive experiences in deep engagement with the sensory and the physicality of the feeling mind-body (Suvorova 2011: 140–42).⁸³

Alternately, the full meanings and experiences of such time can also be intertwined with what they term “spatial variations”. For example, the conceptualisation of emotions like nostalgia is itself entangled with its historical expression as a longing for home that has shifted to a longing for an irretrievable past. In feelings of nostalgic longing, the desired past is also imagined within a framework of a desired space. Nostalgic explorations of the past in colonial Urdu literature are always seen to be closely tied to the bygone days in an aesthetically evoked, lived and imagined place – be it Ghalib’s mourning for the delights of Delhi (the area around the court – *Qil’ah-i mu‘allā*) before the Rebellion of 1857 or Wajid Ali Shah’s laments for Lucknow – again, a glorious Lucknow as experienced before the Rebellion and imagined after it. Spatial entanglements with temporalities constitute a central aspect of such leisurely feelings. This spatio-temporal entanglement – or spatio-temporality/*Raumzeitlichkeit* has been addressed as a significant aspect of otium/*Muße* by German scholars in the Research Cluster on Otium.⁸⁴ Jeffrey Auerbach’s *Imperial Boredom* (2018) provides an example of how the spatiotemporal association of emotions can be read as its central aspect. In Auerbach’s work, the emotion of boredom experienced by the British communities overseas is closely linked to the perception that this community “grew progressively more isolated from indigenous people and customs”. The feeling of boredom is

⁸³ Being ‘at ease’ as well as ‘participating’ in the playfulness of the alive street.

⁸⁴ See Figal, Hubert & Klinkert eds. *Die Raumzeitlichkeit der Muße* (2016).

explored vis-à-vis the difficulty of passing the time for British men and women through the various spatial journeys in “voyages” and “landscapes” as well as through the everyday experiences and practices of soldiers, governors, travellers, working and visiting men and women.

In the context of colonisation, the very idea of the colony is based on the conquest of territories followed by the civilising of these allegedly ‘dark continents’. Records of such experiences are too many and too evident in the genres of colonial travel writing to list here. Spatial designs and planning of colonial cities have often been studied vis-à-vis the architecture of power relations (King 2007 & 1995). The responses to spatiality or rather urbanity in the context of colonialism as represented in vernacular literary genres and styles have been explored by Hans Harder (2016). Multiple volumes on the postcolonial city have emerged following the ‘spatial turn’ (for example, Boehmer and Davies 2015; Chambers and Huggan 2015). Gaston Bachelard’s book *The Poetics of Space* (1958) focuses on the emotions and sensory responses to spaces – built and designed as well as open and abstract. Bachelard builds upon the sentiment of “strong love” for space or topophilia, which was later taken up and made popular by Yi-Fu Tuan (1974). Tuan describes topophilia as a culturally embedded feeling link between people and places. Steven Feld (2014) asserts that places themselves are made sense of through ‘intersensorial’ perceptions. Soundscapes and aural sensations, like visual and olfactory aspects contribute towards the feeling link people have with places. Several emotional manifestations of otium are embedded and embodied in these various spatial frameworks as an integral aspect of the experience of temporality.

Rabindranath Tagore’s experiences and expressions of topophilia, his love of place (rural Bengal) and open natural spaces is likewise connected with the temporal aspects of the romanticised rural landscape (Chapter 3). The spatial aspects are seen to affect the feeling of time for him – slow, passing by lightly, depicted as similar to the rhythmic flow of water at times. These associations are further heightened in his depictions of spatiality and temporality through his expressions for classical music – as day (Western) and night (Indian) – and the depictions of weather, wind, light, and storms in relation to various *rāgas* from the repertoire of Hindustani music. The hilly landscape of Mussoorie and Dehradun recur in the short stories of Qurratul’ain Hyder as lived, remembered, and imagined spatial potential for nostalgia for a time of togetherness before the 1947 Partition of the subcontinent. The microscopic community of people from mixed backgrounds – elite Muslim and Hindu officials, low caste servants, indigenous hill people, humble Anglo-Indians, and performing travellers – is shown to inhabit the space of the small hill station in harmony. This spatialised community is nostalgically idealised and imagined as an alternative to the separation of the old, historical country (*vaṭan*) into two modern nations,

India and Pakistan (Chapter 4). For Satyajit Ray's protagonists of his popular detective fiction, while time is of the essence in the solving of mysteries, it is also experienced as an enjoyable duration of adventure and leisurely learning for the narrator, Topshe, as they travel across cities and suburban spaces in India and abroad, observing and participating in these spaces, in a kind of appropriation of the European *flâneur* as intelligent and intellectual. Each adventure is crafted through an attraction of a new spatial discovery for the three central characters that results in a linear logic of knowledge repository and cultural accumulation. At the same time, the linear progress of these adventures defies the common sense logic of age and continues to return as timeless, located in an unchanging setting of Calcutta after Independence (Chapter 5).

The emotional experiences of otium are necessarily entangled in practices, interactions, and perceptions of an intertwined spatio-temporality where one impacts the other and builds upon the experiences and vice versa. Through such a reading of practices located in a spatio-temporal framework, investigations of otium in its various emotional manifestations could lead to a profitable understanding of the concept as it undergoes transformations and also plays a central role in the very transformation of the emotions it embodies. I explore this further in the final section of this study (Chapter 6), where haunting and/or being haunted acquires the emotional manifestation of a longing for otium, as embedded in spatio-temporality of these feelings. Such expressions are harnessed spatially in the ruins of old abandoned houses and lost sweet shops in small cities in pre-Partition India, as remembered by a migrant writer in the works of Intizar Husain. They are embodied in dysfunctional and dirty parks claimed as spaces of insurgence amongst surreal flying humans, or in the lonely universe accessed on the rooftop terrace for the alienated psychic in the fiction of Nabarun Bhattacharya. The spatiality of longing for otium, as expressed in haunting, allows us to look at not only a critique of dystopian redescrptions of an unfair, unfeeling world but also provides us with an artful expression of requiem where spatial variations and temporal reconfigurations are embodied in the practice of mourning, longing, and grieving.

1.4.3 The Literary Conception of Otium in South Asia and Feeling Communities

Before this section is concluded, a brief understanding of contextualising these emotions within their cultural contexts and communities is essential. As mentioned earlier, many researchers on literary studies in South Asian modern language literatures tend to work with single languages and literary spheres. This

demarcation points towards understanding these literary spheres as linguistic and literary communities. However, these literary communities can be quite heterogeneous, even though they can be construed as formed around a single interest. Let me offer two distinct examples to illustrate the understanding of such communities. The Urdu literati and intelligentsia in the aftermath of the Rebellion of 1857, responding to a civilisational-literary crisis, can be retrospectively understood as a community. But they were also aware of each other as constituting a community through their responses to the situation of Muslims. Christina Oesterheld (2017) has shown how Urdu writers of the period, who were highly influenced by Syed Ahmed Khan, attempted to engender a new spirit in literature “with the aim to ‘awaken’, revitalise and mobilise the Muslim community” (*qaum*).

A different example that shows the extent of heterogeneity in such a literary community can be perceived in the several generations of Bengali readers who grew up reading the most popular children’s magazine *Sandés*, initiated by Upendrakishore Raychaudhuri (1863–1915). Through its various shutdowns, restarts, and generational gaps, many older readers found a culmination of emotional attachment in the extremely popular science fiction and detective novellas of Upendrakishore’s grandson, Satyajit Ray. More contemporary generations of readers who grew up with Satyajit Ray’s stories and novellas, in turn, go back to read extant copies of the magazine to link Satyajit’s work with the pleasure-pedagogical project initiated by his grandfather and fostered by his father, Sukumar Ray. At the same time, readers continue to create a futuristic market for Satyajit’s detective series in trans-medial platforms, constituting a genealogy of curiosity and wonder for the postcolonial Bengali juvenile readership. Within this community of texts, their trans-medial renditions and readers, the emotional network surrounding the original texts, calm curiosity, disciplined intellectual engagements, and sheer cool-headedness are transformed into heightened thrill, physical action and affective consumption (Chapter 5). The understanding of a community here, although spanning several generations is based on the notion of being faithful to original texts and simultaneously, in imparting them with varied, new departures.

In addition, it has to be acknowledged that literary communities and/or feeling communities may often overlap with social communities across age or gender, caste or class, for instance. For instance, children provide a very special understanding of community in this context. Childhood is often seen as the most free or unburdened phase of life where idleness, leisureliness, and the joys of holidaying are projected. In addition, as some chapters in this book, for instance, Chapter 3, but more elaborately, Chapter 5 shows, children, especially children-readers, are perceived as an *imagined community* by adults, as expressed in the latter’s pedagogical endeavours. These pedagogical endeavours

address intellectual stimulation and moral upbringing, almost always hand-in-hand with a keen sensibility towards the emotional education of children, especially through reading.⁸⁵ The pedagogical project of engendering leisurely feelings among children is not only a difficult task, but also one that goes against the educational project after Enlightenment. Chapter 5 addresses this difficulty in the latter half of the twentieth century in a recently independent post-colonial nation under the burden of unemployment and corruption by addressing emotional potentials that are also community identifiers, particularly curiosity and the thrill of adventure. However, children can create quasi-community or group status beyond this imposed imagined community by pedagogues. This is a recurrent theme in leisurely narratives from South Asia where children of similar age groups, and often social classes, in the form of cousins, extended relatives, friends, and neighbours are depicted as ‘gathering’ to spend summer holidays or such periods of allowed leisure (see Chapter 4). However, the understanding of ‘community’ in children in such ‘free’ scenarios is beyond literary communities in that official sense of adult communities and tend to collaborate with communities who inhabit the same narratives in children’s observations, the creation of such shared narratives themselves engendering a leisurely community.

Regarding literary communities, regional literatures in the context of colonial times have had a strong community base as is prevalent in the multiple formations of collectives like *sabhā* (assembly, council), *samāj* (society) and *samiti* (committee, association) in nineteenth-century Bengal. This can be seen as a trend amongst both Bengali and Urdu literati. While a detailed comparative study of these community formations is yet to be attempted in a focused manner, acknowledging these community tendencies forms a central aspect of the present work. An underlying assumption is that through strong bonds and emotions in these literary communities, the breach between different linguistic communities is extended over periods of time. Such communities and their mobilisations are seen to have resurfaced in various literary movements. The Progressive Writers’ Movement was perhaps the single example that provoked the idealisation of a ‘national’ movement, given its ‘towards independence’ spirit. However, most literary movements are composed of a smaller community. For example, the *Ḥalqah-i Arbāb-i Zauq* (Circle of men of good taste) that was set up in Lahore in the late 1930s or the even smaller communities like the ‘Hungry Generation’ of Bengali poets who were active in the 1960s. Restricting

⁸⁵ See Ute Frevert, et al. *Learning How to Feel: Children’s Literature and Emotional Socialisation, 1870–1970* (2014). See, especially, “Introduction” by Pascal Eitler, Stephanie Olsen, and Uffa Jensen, 2–7.

the study of such official literary communities, I now move towards the relevance of communities in this study through what Margrit Pernau calls “feeling communities” (2017). While communities have largely been seen as constructed after the work of Benedict Anderson and others in the frameworks of nationalism and religion, as Pernau draws attention to, they seem to be studied through the focus on interests. Arguing for the entanglement of emotions with interests and their impact on each other, she calls for “a sustained focus on the importance of emotions in the construction of communities” (Pernau 2017: 6).

Barbara Rosenwein proposed the idea of “emotional communities” as “groups in which people adhere to the same norms of emotional expression and value – or devalue – the same or related emotions” (2006: 2). In her understanding, multiple emotional communities exist contemporaneously within a society. They also change over time as “some come to the fore to dominate our sources, then recede in importance” (ibid.). While Rosenwein’s postulations are helpful in arguing against a homogenous reading of emotions in broadly labelled societies – in this case, South Asia – these emotional communities are also seen as unified in certain goals, norms, and ethics. Pernau points out that the stress on shared norms is not sufficient and insists on the “importance of shared experiences (which transcend norms), interpretations (which include norms and values, but are not limited to them) and practices (which are shaped by norms but cannot be reduced to them)” (Pernau 2017: 10). For Pernau, the “performative power of emotions” and their potential to trigger and create communities is crucial to research on communities. Although the focus of the present work is not the creation or operation of such communities, the understanding of certain literary communities as “feeling communities” informs the chapterisation of the book. Thus, each chapter focuses not only on authors and texts but also contextualises them as feeling actors and expressions within the community they are embedded in. Such a reading is motivated to understand the transformations of concepts and emotions in texts that are in dialogues with the communities they inhabit and give shape to. It is also useful to consider this understanding of literary communities as feeling communities in reading the oft-complementary and oft-dissonant emotional manifestations of otium as the chapters alter between communities in Bengali and Urdu literary histories. The aim is to understand the interactions, translations, or silences between the different literary discussions on concepts and emotions of otium.