

# ICGC SOUTH ASIA SEMINAR SERIES

## East of Delhi Multilingual literary culture and world literature

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**Wednesday, April 10 | 3:30 - 5:30 pm CT**  
**537 Heller Hall (ICGC) | Live stream @ [icgc.umn.edu](https://icgc.umn.edu)**

Abstract: How can we reassemble the languages and oral and written textual traditions that colonial ideas of language and modern literary histories have separated? This is not an exercise in nostalgia, but a way to account for literary texts and practices in ways more suited to the multilingual society from which they emerged and in which they circulated, and to imagine a different relationship to languages in the present.

Drawing on geographer Doreen Massey's definition of space as "the multiplicity of stories and trajectories so far" and on my recent book *East of Delhi: Multilingual Literary Culture and World Literature*, this talk employs space heuristically and at different levels, taking the "multilingual locals" of northern India in the early modern and early colonial periods as an example. Space directs our attention to the concrete location of literary practices, to different communities of taste, and to how texts and tastes circulated across them. Proximity in "multilingual locals" highlights dialogism in texts, explains choices in language register, and helps imagine audiences overhearing texts not directly meant for them. Moreover, the lens of space helps us bring together archives in different languages, search for multilingual clues, and probe the silences of each archive about the other languages, authors, and tastes around it.

Did colonial ideas about language and about indigenous vs foreign spell the demise of this multilingual world? Once again, a local and located perspective provides a more nuanced take on the colonial "epistemic shift" that shows the old and new ways in which people used their multilingual repertoires under conditions of colonialism.

Graduate student discussant:  
**Mukund Jha, PhD student, History**



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