PREFACE

Several purposes informed the collaborative work behind this volume. First, it provides a sustained examination, from a variety of viewpoints, of one urban place. Banaras was chosen primarily because it had attracted a sufficient "critical mass" of new scholarship to be especially suggestive. (The extent to which it can be considered "typical" is examined below.) But even though the contributors sketch the outlines of north Indian urban history over the preceding two centuries, they do not claim that their essays provide a definitive picture.

Rather, the essays explore new vistas, either methodologically or topically. Our second purpose, then, was to suggest by these juxtaposed examinations new ways to approach the history of South Asia. The topical implications of such new approaches are discussed in greater detail below; here it will suffice to note that the authors have shared as a focal point the participation of nonelite groups in the developments, events, and political narrative that previously have constituted "history." As a collective effort to expand the methodologies and topics that constitute history, these studies are intended not only for South Asianist scholars, but also for scholars of other cultural regions interested in comparative discussions of what has been called "popular culture," as well as undergraduate students just learning about South Asia. (Given the limits of space, however, the volume does presuppose a rudimentary familiarity with the decline of the Mughal Empire, the initial infiltration of the East India Company into the subcontinent, and the general outlines of the South Asian political narrative for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.)

The third purpose in putting together this collection of essays is suggested by the topics included. The authors have shared an interest in looking at everyday activities to see what these could tell us about

shared values and motivations, processes of identity formation, and the self-conscious constructions of community that have marked the last century and a half in South Asia. Most of us shared as well a conviction that these elements of everyday life have significance on two levels: taken on their own terms, they identify the important building blocks of South Asian urban culture; and, related to the larger geographical, ecological, and political worlds in which they operate, they provide rational explanations for the actions of the ordinary person in these larger contexts.

The working title of the volume used a shorthand term, "popular history," to imply that we were interested in the role of popular participation in the processes of history. As a group, we also often used the term "popular culture" in our discussions, without worrying overmuch about the analytical problems the term has presented to scholars, or the debates that have emerged, particularly among Europeanists. Because the term is so imprecise, however, we ultimately decided not to use it. The analytical problems inherent in the concept may have been best expressed by Roger Chartier, who pointed out that "no one questioned the basic assumption, . . . namely, that it was possible to identify popular culture by describing a certain number of corpora (sets of texts, gestures, and beliefs). [But] . . . they made no critical examination of the categories and the intellectual distinctions on which they were based." Moreover, the study is often shaped by a dichotomous understanding of the uses made of these corpora; perhaps Chartier's greatest contribution to the discussion is his nuanced analysis of the ways in which printed matter, for instance, could be used by semiliterate, or even illiterate, consumers (Chartier 1984:229 et seq.).

Nevertheless, from the literature developed by Europeanists on so-called popular culture, two contributions emerged that have proved useful to this volume. Chartier's work makes clear the extent of overlap in the meanings imputed by those who participated from different levels in society. This provides a very helpful gloss on Peter Burke's discussion of popular culture as "majority culture," suggesting that the significance of such collective activities, while similar, need not necessarily have been precisely the same. In his definition Burke posited, as well, a withdrawal over time of the European literate elite into a "minority culture," which worked to distinguish itself from the common culture, previously shared, that had characterized activities in public spaces (Burke 1978:28, 270–81). As the essays included here make clear, this definition (particularly as nuanced by Chartier) is appropriate for South Asia in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century as well, because it highlights the process by which the elite withdrew from a shared, or more precisely an overlapping, popular culture.

Similarly, a more recent definition of "popular culture," which emphasizes the underlying power relationships and social conflicts inherent in these work and leisure activities, has proved particularly helpful (Yeo and Yeo 1981). The collection of essays by the Yeos emphasizes the importance of focusing on change, power, and conflict—three characteristics that quickened the "cultural and associational forms" of English public life between the sixteenth and the nineteenth century. This volume, too, focuses on cultural activities in order to reveal power relations in a particular urban space and to see how these change over time.

Change is, indeed, at the heart of our enterprise, for it is through change in "popular culture" activities that adjustments to the power relationships in Banaras were accomplished. Each of the essays that follow deals with change differently. Taken together, however, they suggest how important a continuously evolving structure with a changing content can be for expressing popular convictions. As Chartier noted, popular religion (or culture, writ large) is "both acculturated and acculturating" (Chartier 1984:233). I mention here only a few of the structures examined here for change: these include the alterations in *Mānas* recitations to accommodate both changes in patronage and in the audience's own view of the *Mānas;* evolution of the *birahā* folk music form to a more professionalized genre with an appeal beyond a particular lower caste (but, significantly, retaining the ability to incorporate lyrics about recent and localized scandals and stories of great interest); changing perceptions of particular city spaces and the ceremonial (and historical) significance attributed to these; elaborations of certain associational forms—particularly *akhāṛās*—used to mobilize people who see themselves as connected. Each of these adjustments may also be used to chart changes in the nuanced power relationships in the city: culture and power are thus, as our title suggests, inextricably entwined in the history of Banaras.

To those familiar with the historiography of nineteenth- and twentieth-century India, this pairing of culture and power will also signify a very straightforward commentary on what previously has been treated as a dichotomy between studies of cultural activities and discussions of political developments. It may be argued that, in this juxtaposition of essays, we have tried to make one additional historiographical comment to distinguish this collective work from what has gone before. Many of us were concerned that our work demonstrate that both culture *and* environment made up a single, coherent whole. Beyond approaching both topics in several guises in the following essays, we wanted a dynamic way to organize the essays, in order to avoid the traditional division into ecological, cultural, and political topics: many felt that such an organization assigned more "reality" to either culture or

environment, depending on the order. To solve this problem, the volume treats as a single whole the variety of topics that provided interest and order to everyday life in Banaras. The essays are organized around three related focii. In Part 1 the essays focus on performances that would have drawn audiences from throughout the city; these performances—by taking place in public spaces and attracting citywide patronage—express an essential aspect of Banarsi public life and thus reveal important aspects of the belief systems and world views of the city's residents. Part 2 turns to the more localized constituents of identity in an urban space—those of neighborhood, leisure, and work—to examine the processes by which urban residents use a sense of identity to make sense of life and to organize activity. Part 3 links these experiences within Banaras to the larger world. It is hoped that this different format will juxtapose subjects (that otherwise have been treated as discrete) in a productive and provocative way. The environmental setting, the material conditions of life, and the changes in both of these have figured as important pieces in the cultural puzzle we are trying to reconstruct historically.

As this summary of our discussions suggests, this volume—much more than is usually the case—has been a collaborative enterprise. The editor began by consulting widely to discover scholars working on Banaras and its environs. Thanks are due to all those who enthusiastically participated in this process. Special recognition goes to Nita Kumar, whose dissertation provided much of the original inspiration for the project, and whose suggestions proved particularly helpful in initiating the volume. Those invited to contribute agreed as well to begin by presenting, in different combinations, preliminary drafts at scholarly gatherings: these included the Southeastern Association for Asian Studies (Raleigh, January 1985); the South Asia Conference sponsored by the University of Wisconsin (Madision, November 1985); and the Association for Asian Studies (Chicago, March 1986). We wish to thank those in the audience and the commentators in each of those venues for their contributions to our individual essays and to the volume as a whole. Because of considerations especially of length, some of the essays originally prepared for the volume could not be included here. We thank those authors for their insights and participation in the discussion: their work contributed much to the collective whole. Special references to these papers are included where appropriate in the text.

Following on these preliminary presentations, contributors met for a weekend workshop (Berkeley, March 1986) to discuss one another's essays and to set certain guiding principles to inform their revisions. The most important of these, as was suggested above, involved the interplay between culture and environment and the fact that we wanted to em-

phasize what was "typically urban" about Banaras, rather than what was unique. On the basis of this latter decision, some subjects that would otherwise have seemed essential to a discussion of Banaras were ignored—including death specialists and dying, pilgrimage, and the like—and certain additional essays were solicited to illuminate processes and values essential to understanding an urban environment. This workshop was open to other interested scholars, and we thank them for their friendly participation in this process. As she worked on revising the volume, the editor continued to consult freely with appropriate contributors, particularly David Arnold, Philip Lutgendorf, Scott Marcus, and Kathryn Hansen, and appreciates their comments and responses to her drafts. It should be noted, however, that much of the introductory material that follows reflects her own work and interpretations and may not be shared by all the authors included herein.

Collectively, as our citations will attest, we also owe a great debt to the three scholars who sufficiently mined the field of classical and historical Banaras to enable us to concentrate on these refinements: Diana Eck for her elegant description of the Kashi of Hindu high culture philosophy and practice; Chris Bayly for his inspired vision of economic and political change in the region—we each found him there, before us, during moments of discovery; and Barney Cohn for his pioneering, still unmatched lucid insights into the processes that formed early colonial Banaras. We refer readers interested in these particular subjects to their work.

Finally, we wish to thank those who provided the green support necessary to make this collaborative project successful in an astonishingly short two years. The South Asia Council of the Association for Asian Studies provided seed money that not only covered the inevitable costs of communication and revision that go into creating a volume, but that also encouraged contributions from the University of California to support a weekend workshop. To cover the costs of the latter, we also thank three institutions located on the University of California–Berkeley campus: the Center for South and Southeast Asia Studies; its parent organization, the Institute for International Studies; and the Graduate Division. Tangible support beyond the green was provided by Steven Gilmartin, Barbara Howell, and Christine Noelle, for whose research assistance and wordprocessing skills we are very grateful.