

## CFP: “South Asian Untranslatables”

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The American Comparative Literature Association is now accepting proposals for next year’s annual meeting, which will be held in Chicago, Illinois, March 16th-19th, 2023. I would like to highlight the CFP (below) for a seminar on South Asian Untranslatables, co-organized by myself and Eesha Kumar (NYU). Proposals should be submitted online through the [ACLA Proposal Portal](#) by **Monday, October 31st**.

### **South Asian Untranslatables**

South Asian texts and cultures offer a panoply of terms that are difficult to translate. Consider *bhāva* — a keyword in premodern philosophy, dramaturgy, and poetics — which may refer to an emotion, a meaning, an essential characteristic, a physical object, a living being, or existence itself. In contemporary South Asia, numerous colloquial terms such as *timepass*, *jugaad*, and *aunty* evoke nuanced existential states, techniques, and relationships that call for careful (and playful) theorization.

Serving as a pilot for what we hope will be a long-term, collaborative project, our seminar seeks to gather an initial clutch of South Asian “untranslatables” — seemingly simple words with labyrinthine significations. We wish to explore their political, aesthetic, and translational histories, while searching for previously unnoticed networks between terms and across languages. We will consider what this broadened lexicon of critical concepts might offer to comparative enquiry and the interdisciplinary study of South Asia. We draw particular inspiration from Raymond Williams’s *Keywords*, Roland Barthes’s *A Lover’s Discourse*, the *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, and premodern South Asia’s rich lexicographical and commentarial traditions.

We welcome proposals for entries on untranslatable terms drawn from the artistic, cultural, intellectual, political, religious, and technological life of South Asia. Terms may come from any language with a history of usage in the region, including macaronic hybrids like Hinglish and Madras Bashai. Entries may also come from precolonial knowledge systems such as the culinary arts, the erotic sciences, grammar, jurisprudence, literary theory, and statecraft; philosophical traditions like Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā, Vedānta, and Yogācāra; as well as the subcontinent’s vast ocean of belletristic writing. We are particularly eager to hear from scholars of caste, Adivasi traditions, and queerness in South Asia.

More broadly, we envision this seminar as an occasion for navigating two longstanding forms of disciplinary untranslatability — between Indology and comparative literature as well as between precolonial and postcolonial approaches to the study of the subcontinent. We hope that this seminar will provide a space for languages and textual traditions with a history of underrepresentation in the American study of comparative literature.