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Introduction: The State of India Studies in the United States, 2006

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Halfway through the first decade of the twenty-first century, interest in India has exploded in the United States in a very public way. In years past, India occupied so marginal a position in the American imagination that Asia meant China, Japan, or occasionally Korea—excluding the whole of India from that continent. By 2005, however, breathless cover stories of news magazines featured India as a rising power second only to China; the business press, it seemed, could not get enough of India and its opportunities for growth; and President Bush and India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh signed a series of agreements that poised India and the United States for a new relationship of strategic partnership.

The transformation in public perception of India in the United States has been welcomed by many scholars who for years had been compelled to argue what precisely India's relevance was to American, and global, interests. That India's importance now appears self-evident marks a new phase for India studies in the US. Indeed, taken in its broadest possible sense, the study of India has percolated beyond the narrow confines of academia to include broad public audiences through titles published by major trade presses, as well as public discussions such as those convened by World Affairs Councils in cities throughout the US.

This growing American interest in India comes at a time of shifting India interests in the US academy as well. The essays in this volume represent an effort to understand this changing balance of interests both within academic disciplines, as well as beyond the academy. Even with the palpable upswing in perceptions of and interest in India,

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however, there is still room for growth. As the essays in this volume show, while the study of India has in some spheres been growing, in others it has been experiencing a stagnation if not retrenchment in comparison with previous decades. A wide-angle lens on this landscape thus reveals challenges and opportunities in variegated ways.

India and the Disciplines in the US Academy

There is no doubt that India studies in the US academy has grown to become a substantial subfield over the past fifty years. As Maureen Patterson noted in her comprehensive history-of-the-field essay, “The path has not been easy or straight, but that it has been successfully blazed should be clear from the . . . outstanding academic programs established in the US.”¹ From what had been a narrowly philological pursuit located at only a handful of elite US universities in the early twentieth century, India studies has now extended into many of the newly emerging “studies” fields, in addition to its focus within the more traditional disciplines. But this extension has not been uniform, and it is partly linked to the complex history of India studies in the US from the late nineteenth century forward.²