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## Honorable Mention: René Wellek 2022-2023 (monograph)

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Preetha Mani, *The Idea of Indian Literature: Gender, Genre, and Comparative Method*  
(Northwestern UP, 2022)

Mani's brilliant debut work ambitiously sets out to reconsider the question, "How can a pan-Indian literature also account for the singularities of the many subcontinental languages?" (5) For scholars of the literatures of colonialism and decolonization, India has been and remains a paradigmatic example to the broader 'postcolonial' condition. Mani's work both elaborates upon the specificities of the Indian case, while providing a generative conceptual framework that will prove inspiring to scholars working on disparate other colonial settings.

Drawing upon world-celebrated Indian writers such as Rabindranath Tagore, but also major Hindi and Tamil literary figures such as Rajendra Yadav, Ka. Naa. Subramanyam, Ramchandra Shukla, Mohan Rakesh, Pudumaippittan, Premchand, Kamleshwar, D. Jayakanthan, R. Chudamani, C. S. Chellappa, and Mannu Bhandari, Mani traces the conceptual formation of a modern, national, Indian literature. She argues convincingly that the "idea" of Indian literature elaborated by the formative Hindi and Tamil writers in the decades leading up to and after Indian independence was in the first instance a project to buttress the national project against linguistic particularism: a concern in many colonized societies, and one of great urgency in the Indian case. She suggests that "the idea of Indian literature served as a means of contesting the fraught linguistic divisions that twentieth-century Hindi and Tamil ethnolinguistic movements sought to sediment ... It offered a platform for their efforts to make the boundaries of language more malleable and to create understandings of community based on literary, rather than linguistic, norms." (4)

In this methodologically elegant and engagingly written study, Mani draws upon the scholarship of a wide range of thinkers such as Gayatri Spivak, Subramanian Shankar, Aamir Mufti, Mary Louise Pratt, Francesca Orsini, Franco Moretti, and Aijaz Ahmad to establish how major Hindi and Tamil writers both sought to deemphasize linguistic difference though a common project of a shared, if multilingual, literature. She draws upon current critical conceptualizations of translatability, world literature, and gender theory to construct an innovative framework for tracing the evolution of an Indian national literature. Mani argues convincingly, "the Idea of Indian Literature can only be approached comparatively." (28-29)

This compelling study is a very promising first book, offering new pathways for comparative literary scholars to contribute to a reevaluation of the emergence of conceptions of national literature in multilingual colonial settings.

We are delighted to unanimously present a 2022 René Wellek Prize Honorable Mention to this work and look forward to the future contributions of Preetha Mani to the field of comparative literature.