

Statement regarding the Murty Classical Library of India

March 2, 2024

During the last week of January, 2024, we the undersigned were all summarily dismissed from the Editorial Board of the Murty Classical Library of India by the chair of its Oversight Board, Prof. Parimal Patil of Harvard University, without cause, explanation, or documentation.

The Library has been without a General Editor since 2022 after the founding General Editor, Prof. Sheldon Pollock, was forced to resign, also with no reason given, two years before his planned retirement. Prof. Patil determined that no successor would be appointed. We repeatedly expressed concern not only about that decision and its likely effect on the series, but about the lack of transparency in decision-making, in the acquisition and approval of new projects, and in the issuing of contracts; and about the opaque and uncollegial management style of Prof. Patil and Harvard University Press.

In the last eighteen months, even as the roles and responsibilities of the Editorial Board became increasingly unclear, and communication with Prof. Patil effectively stopped, we worked tirelessly with translators on their book manuscripts. Now we learn that in the view of Prof. Patil, we alone were responsible for the “breakdown of trust,” and—incredibly—that we are perceived to have “lost confidence in the mission of MCLI.” These accusations we utterly reject.

Together we were responsible for editing and supervising the translation and publication of 43 books under contract, in Apabhramsha, Bangla, Hindi (Brajbhasha and Avadhi), Kannada, Pali, Panjabi, Persian, Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu. Who is to undertake this work in the future and what is to become of the translations currently being edited? There has been no further communication from the Board or the Press; in particular, there has been no notion of the future direction of the Library or of the status of works already under contract.

In terms of the gift agreement establishing the MCLI, the Provost of Harvard University has ultimate authority over all appointments to the Editorial and Oversight Boards. In light of this, and because we are concerned about the fate of the Library, on February 14th, 2024, we wrote to the Provost’s office at Harvard University to ask that they conduct an external review of these developments and the future of the series.

Prof. Whitney Cox (University of Chicago),
Prof. Maria Heim (Amherst College),
Prof. Rajeev Kinra (Northwestern University),
Prof. Francesca Orsini (SOAS, University of London),
Prof. Archana Venkatesan (University of California, Davis).