

THE 27TH SPALDING SYMPOSIUM ON INDIAN RELIGIONS

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22 March-24 March 2002

Friday, 22 March
5.00 pm

Reconstituting *Gurmat*:

Time, Transcendence and Subjectivity in Sikh Reformist Discourse

Dr Arvind Mandair (Hofstra)

Although it is rarely considered in this way, the central factors in the current debate on Sikh identity -- namely, the reform movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the construction of a theologico-political imaginary and the shift towards Sikh separatism -- are indissociably linked to the 'successful' enunciation in the 1920's of a systematic concept of God ('Sikh theology') and an authentic Sikh narrative ('Sikh history'). Together these neo-colonial knowledge formations comprise the intellectual core of the response by reformist Sikhs to the project of colonial translation instigated by Ernest Trumpp's *The Adi Granth* (1877). The definitive neo-colonial response, coming almost fifty years after his translation was first published, appeared in the form of short treatises on Sikh history and longer more systematic works of scriptural exegesis (*tikas*) which were of a broadly theological nature. One of the most far reaching effects of these works was the crystallisation of a particular way of representing the central teachings of the *Adi Granth*, in which the terms '*gurmat*', 'theology' and 'tradition' become interchangeable.

In this paper I attempt to trace the complex interweaving of time and ontology in the enunciation of an authentic Sikh narrative and theology by leading Sikh reformist scholar such as Bhai Vir Singh, Principal Teja Singh, Kahn Singh Nabha, Sahib Singh and Dr. Jodh Singh whose respective works are widely regarded as the basis of modern and 'orthodox' Sikh thinking. My focus will therefore be restricted to the discussion of two aspects that become central to future treatments of modern Sikh ideology. In the first section I touch briefly on the first narratives outlining the emergence of Sikhs as a nation ('Sikh history'). In the second section which comprises the major part of this paper, I focus on the construction of a systematic concept of God ('Sikh theology'). Linking history and theology is the conceptual dynamic of transcendence which becomes foundational to both. As a conceptual tool the dynamic of transcendence is specifically outlined according to the following threefold process: (i) the historical justification of the reformist project as the fulfilment, i.e. nationalisation, of Sikh tradition, (ii) the reconstitution of *gurmat* as 'Sikh theology' i.e. the construction of a systematic concept of God within the exegetical commentaries, (iii) the enunciation of a peculiarly modern Sikh subjectivity, a move whose consequences are as much theoretical as political.

7.30pm

The Impact of Saivism on the Religions of Asia

Professor Alexis Sanderson (All Souls, Oxford)

Certain general similarities between "Saivism and Esoteric Buddhism have long been recognized. Indeed the expression Tantrism has been coined to accommodate this recognition. But until now the question of how they came to resemble each other has not been taken up with any rigour. There are several reasons for this. Partly responsible may be a reluctance among scholars of Buddhism to look beyond the boundary of their literature, if not out of a prejudice that Buddhism is an entirely self-contained phenomenon then out of an understandable unwillingness to overextend themselves. But a greater difficulty awaited anyone interested to examine this question. This was that most of the materials on which a comparative analysis would have to be based appeared to be lost or hard of access. I refer to the scriptural literatures of the two traditions. In place of the relevant "Saiva sources we seemed to have only a tantalizing body of citations preserved in the learned exegesis that imposed itself on and tended to replace the primary texts. Most of the Buddhist literature seemed to have survived only in Tibetan translations. In my work on the development of the "Saiva religion over the last twenty-five years I have turned up a substantial part of the "Saiva literature that I had presumed lost, mostly in Nepalese manuscripts, many of which, thanks to the climate of Nepal, are as old as or older than the learned "Saiva literature. The collections that contained these materials also contained manuscripts of many of the relevant Buddhist works in their original Sanskrit. Though my work has been primarily on the "Saiva materials it has included studying these Buddhist sources and their early commentaries in the hope of shedding light on the question of their relationship to each other. In this paper I shall present in brief outline some of the conclusions I have reached or am presently considering through this comparative reading.

I shall argue that there is incontrovertible evidence that the latest phase of Tantric Buddhism (c. 10th century), evidenced in the Tantras that teach the cults of Heruka/Cakrasamvara and Vajravaaraahii, is so closely dependent on a parallel "Saiva tradition that the greater part of its principal scripture, the Herukaabhidhaana, also called the Laghu"sa.mvara or Cakrasa.mvaratantra, has been redacted directly from materials extracted from these "Saiva sources, and that this use of "Saiva works was repeated for certain later works in the same tradition.

The earlier Buddhist Tantric systems represented by the Vairocanaabhisambodhi and Tattvasamgraha were the substance of the Esoteric Buddhism that flourished in China in the eighth century and passed to Japan in the ninth through Kuukai, where they survive down to modern times in the Shingon and Tendai schools. Were these too the product of "Saiva influence? There is no evidence of the redacting of "Saiva textual materials in this case. However, I shall propose that this phase is the result of a creative remodeling of Buddhist practice based on "Saiva prototypes.

Why did Buddhism develop in this surprising direction? The last part of my paper will offer some suggestions for further thought on this question.

Saturday, 23 March
9.30am

Stupas and Stupa worship in Mahayana Sutras: New Evidence

Dr Ulrich Pagel (SOAS)

This paper aims to examine the role of stupas in Mahayana Buddhism, mainly based on the sutras collected in the mDo sde section of the Tibetan Kanjur. While scholarship has spent a fair amount of effort to identify the function of stupas in the origin of the Mahayana, relatively little is known about the Mahayana perception of stupa worship in the middle and late phases. Although we do not have any sutra that gives a comprehensive account of the roles played by stupas in Mahayana soteriology, there are many texts that contain scattered references to the worship of stupas, their construction and maintenance. The purpose of this presentation is to survey the available evidence, to formulate a hypothesis about the use of stupas in Mahayana Buddhist circles and to contrast my findings with the views held on stupa worship in the early period.

11.15am

Staying with Brahma: the history of an important misunderstanding

Professor Richard Gombrich (Oxford)

While it is essential, in interpreting any ancient Indian text, to take account of what the commentarial tradition has said, it should be obvious that interpretations change over time, so that there is also room for us to exercise judgement by examining other kinds of evidence to derive an interpretation. Since the Buddhist commentators seem to have known little or nothing about the Upanishads, whereas the Buddha addressed many of his arguments to brahmin opponents, we may well gain insight into his meaning by interpreting his words in that context. Sometimes he flatly rejected, and even ridiculed, the views of his opponents; sometimes he accepted them; most often he ironised or reinterpreted them. The case of the Brahma-vihaara, "boundless" states of kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity, is particularly interesting. Scrutiny of the texts makes one wonder whether the Buddhist tradition that ethics is a pre-requisite for enlightenment but that enlightenment itself transcends ethics does justice to the Buddha's intention.

3.00pm

Meditation in early Buddhism: the *jhana*s and their position in the *Sutta Pitaka*

Alexander Wynne (Oxford)

In an important list of meditative states found in the *Sutta Pitaka* of the Pali Canon, the four *jhana*-s are followed by the four formless spheres (the infinity of space, the infinity of consciousness, nothingness and 'neither consciousness nor non-consciousness') and 'the cessation of ideation and feeling'. In this list of nine meditative states, the four *jhana*-s are often called 'ideations' (*sa—a*). The term 'ideation' is commonly associated with the formless spheres throughout the *Sutta Pitaka*. However, the *jhana*-s are not known by this term when listed apart from the formless spheres. When listed alone, the four *jhana*-s usually lead directly to liberating insight. It seems that the list of nine meditative states (*jhana*-s and formless spheres) has been artificially constructed out of two

quite different meditative practices. A study of the various occurrences of the nine-fold list in the *Sutta Pitaka* might support this idea.

3.45pm

The Last Amoghapasa Across All Asia

Will Douglas (Oxford)

Amoghapasa, 'He who has an infallible lasso', is one of the earliest distinct forms of Avalokitesvara to emerge. He is the patron and guarantor of a Mahayana fasting rite which spread very rapidly across the Buddhist world, extending from the Indic region to Central Asia and Japan with 150 years. The early cult is a good example of what would later be called a Kriya Tantra within Vajrayana, and is remarkable for its insistence on the widest possible participation.

A second wave of propagation occurs in the 12th century. Although the old Silk Road centres of Buddhism were defunct, this time Amoghapasa's cult spread within Indic Vajrayana from Kashmir to Indonesia. The later cult is bound up with Buddhist royal rituals and iconography. However, roughly contemporary Kashmirian developments saw Amoghapasa displaced from his role in the ritual fast for those lineages which survived in Tibet, to be replaced by the more familiar thousand-armed Avalokitesvara.

Today Amoghapasa survives in isolated images and texts, mostly forgotten by contemporary Buddhists, scattered across South, Central and East Asia. Only in Nepal do we find an enduring and vivacious Amoghapasa cult which preserves features of both the earlier and later propagation.

5.00pm

From Totapuri to Maharaji: Reflections on a Parampara (lineage).

Dr Ron Geaves (Chester)

During the early years of the 1970s, Divine Light Mission experienced phenomenal growth in the West. The teachings of the young Guru Maharaji (now known as Maharaji), based upon an experience of fulfilment arrived at by four techniques that focused attention inward, spread quickly to Britain, France, Germany, Holland, Switzerland, Spain, Italy, Scandinavia, Japan, South America, Australasia, Canada and the USA. Today, the teachings have gone worldwide to over 80 countries.

This paper will firstly demonstrate that these various scholars who identify Maharaji's roots as Sant Mat, or more specifically Radhasoami, are mistaken. Secondly, it will show that a more accurate exploration of Maharaji's historical background provides an excellent opportunity to study the complexity of the various ways of organising such lineages and can demonstrate how intricately major strands of Hinduism can interweave with each other to create new paradigms to assert an ancient teaching capable of transcending discrete religious borders. Thirdly, this investigation of lineage will throw light on the relationship between charisma and institutionalisation in the Indian context and will allow for a revisiting of Gold's classification of Sant tradition in particular.

7.30pm

Such a Pretty Face: The Sexualization of Durga in 19th-20th Century Bengal

Dr Rachel McDermott (Barnard)

This talk examines the rise of the contemporary image of the Goddess Durga as she is found in Bengali homes and public *pandals* during her annual festival. The presentation opens by tracing the development of the image as a means of representing the Goddess; historically, as a deity of agricultural plenty, she was first invoked in grain, then in a water pot, then in colored drawings, and finally in clay *murtis*. The remainder of the talk focuses on the image itself: a comparison of the old-style, eighteenth- to nineteenth-century depictions of her face and body (huge, elongated eyes; small mouth; frontal, static body) with current styles featuring supple bodies and realistic, youthful, even glamorous faces; an investigation of the artistic revolution in the 1920s which led to this humanization of Puja images; and interviews with present-day artisans, elite family scions, and *pandal* organizers on their preferred types of image, and why. The chapter closes by proposing two theoretical lenses through which one might understand the increasingly sexualized Goddess: the universalization, humanization, and popularization characteristic of rising urbanism; and the influence of individualism, romanticism, and nationalism -- in literature, art, and popular attitudes from the late nineteenth century onwards -- on conceptions of women.

Sunday, 24 March

9.30am

Seeking Bauls of Bengal

Dr Jeanne Openshaw (Edinburgh)

Images of Bauls of Bengal underwent a complete reversal towards the end of the nineteenth century, in which godless and depraved entertainers of the common folk were transformed into isolated (male) mystics, intoxicated by music or dance, with 'only the wind as their home'. In the eyes of most scholars and the Bengali educated classes, this familiar icon has come to represent the 'authentic Baul'. The recent provenance of the image, and the total contrast it presents with those called 'Baul' in rural areas will be considered in the light of discussions on Orientalism. How far is it appropriate to see this image as a creative appropriation of the myth of the Spiritual East by the Bengali elite?

11.15am

**A Hindu-Related New Religious Movement as Sponsor of an Educational Programme:
Issues and Perspectives**

Dr Elizabeth Arweck (Warwick and King's College, London)

The paper will report on current research regarding the educational programme of the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, a Hindu-related new religious movement which has an international membership and which seeks to work towards world peace through personal change. Under the aegis of the World Spiritual University, an educational programme has developed

which is inspired by and organised around a set of what are regarded as universally applicable 'Living Values'. The material is designed for use in school and in parents' groups and the paper will therefore look at the way in which this approach is used in classrooms by focusing on schools in the UK. The paper will also explore the perspective which informs the programme as well as raise issues regarding research in this area.