Remembering Ourselves
Some Notes on the Counter Culture of Contemporary Tantric Studies

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This plenary lecture employs recent American-British history and a kind of structuralist analysis of "culture" and "counter culture" in an attempt to make better sense of the conservative backlash that has greeted some contemporary Indologists, including this one, over the last decade for their work on sexuality and Hinduism, the latter often involving Tantric texts and traditions. I propose that contemporary Indology's turn to Tantric texts and traditions and its occasional "excessive" focus on sexuality and gender do not derive in any meaningful sense from western colonialism, as is often claimed by a few vocal conservative critics. The exact opposite in fact is much closer to being the case. Such moves, after all, followed closely on the heals of a shared British-American counterculture that enthusiastically embraced Asian religious practices and doctrines in an effort to deconstruct and move beyond conservative forms of Western religious culture, which these same countercultural actors found stale, unbelievable and sexually repressive.

Put a bit differently, I wish to propose that, historically speaking, one major reason western scholars turned to Tantric subjects in the 80s and 90s is that the counterculture from which they had just emerged had similarly turned to these same traditions as "Asian countercultures" in which they saw their own American and British countercultural experiences accurately and ecstatically reflected. Basically, it had to do with counter culture, that is, with the attempted transgression of western conservative norms, and with a sincere desire to be transfigured by an encounter with the Asian other. Hence the eros of our scholarship.

As with any cross-cultural encounter, there were, of course, projections, transferences and distortions here, but there were also real comparative insights and real cultural and personal transformations. Volumes exist analyzing the former projections and distortions, mostly through postcolonial theory. I do not want to dismiss or deny any of this in any way. But I do want to point out that there is "another side" to this story, and one that is not nearly as dark or depressing. I want to point out that we have only begun to take the comparative insights and transformations of the counter culture as serious objects of study, perhaps because we lack a practice that grants the same integrity and agency to those among us as to those living in an "exotic" culture or an irretrievable past. It is all too easy to fetishize and divinize the dead. It is difficult to take the living so seriously, particularly when they are among us, or *are* us.

To demonstrate this thesis, I will trace out a particular cross-cultural genealogy of "Tantra" involving five different moments and nine individuals from the last half of the nineteenth century to the second half of the twentieth: (1) Pierre Bernard and Sylvais Hamati; (2) Sir John Woodroffe and Atul Behari Ghosh; (3) Henry Miller and the Beat poets; (4) Aldous Huxley and Timothy Leary; and (5) Agehananda Bharati. Finally, I will close with some reflections on our present situation and how we might better understand both ourselves and those who seek to censor and silence the counter-cultural echoes of our voices.

Eleanor Nesbitt
Issues in writing 'introductions' to 'Sikhism'

The paper sets the author's introductions – in particular *Sikhism A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press 2005) - in the context of earlier introductions to (and more substantial treatments of) Sikhism. After noting challenges intrinsic to representing faith traditions, and the particular task of the writer of introductions, my focus rests on reflexivity and the fact that context and conversation – both recent events and particular collaborations - shape agendas. Likewise, I suggest, critical attention needs to take account of the writer's disciplinary formation, as historian, linguist or, in my case, ethnographer.

The eruption, in the last quarter of the twentieth century, of hostility against Professor Hew McLeod and other scholars trained in critical methods receives comment, as this affects the decisions made in designing and drafting scholarly introductions. It is also a part of Sikh history, and as such receives a place in my own *Introduction*. The paper refers to some particularly sensitive aspects of Sikh history and to the balance of criteria in selecting visual images as well as in creating text. The 'world religions' paradigm of much religious studies and religious education comes in for scrutiny, as does the western matrix in which 'Sikhism' and other 'isms' have been named and conceptualised as discrete systems rather than unbounded traditions.

A range of decisions that I made as author are revisited such, for example, as the emphasis on the Punjab and on the international spread of the Panth, and the selection of exemplars. The elusiveness of spirituality, the dearth of Sikh material available on ethical issues and the possibility of engaging as author with recent, 'postmodern' approaches are considered. Finally the writer's responsibility is outlined – a responsibility which comprises introducing diaspora Sikhs to their heritage as well as introducing the faith to outsiders. Introductions, it is argued, have a contribution to make to interfaith dialogue.

Catherine Robinson

'[T]he intention of the author has been, in fulfilment of his promise to the Sikhs, to write from an orthodox Sikh point of view' (Max Arthur Macauliffe):

the Khalsa and Scholarship

Macauliffe may have offered an unambiguous declaration of his own sympathies with the orthodox interpretation of Sikhism but for various reasons, wittingly or unwittingly, many other authors have actually adopted a similar stance. However, some have been overtly critical, notably Ernest Trumpp to whose work Macauliffe's was a response and for which it was a compensation, while some in seeking to understand Sikhism in what they understand to be an academic manner have arrived at challenging conclusions, notably Hew McLeod who has been bracketed with the much-reviled Trumpp in Sikh opinion. Certainly, in the debate about the relationship between Sikhism and its study that in the 1980s and 1990s had Sikhs accusing scholars of attacking Sikhism and scholars accusing Sikhs of denying academic freedom, Sikhism seems to have been equated with orthodoxy and hence with the Khalsa (the Society of the Pure) which is generally regarded to be its defining characteristic. This is in no small part due to the campaigning activities of the Tat Khalsa (True Khalsa) in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century.

This paper begins with a discussion of the contrasting stances adopted by Trumpp and Macauliffe, two leading figures of early scholarship whose work contextualises the rise of Tat

Khalsa, before considering the now standard version of the inauguration of the Khalsa and the promulgation of the Rahit (code of belief and practice) in the light of Tat Khalsa's ideology. There is a comparison of the radical approach of the Tat Khalsa faction with the conservative approach of the Sanatan Sikh faction in the reforming Singh Sabhas as well as an examination of the impact and implications of Tat Khalsa's transformation of Sikh traditions.

Next this paper investigates the Five Ks as a case study of the origins and development of the Khalsa, applying McLeod's analysis of the Rahit to establish the modernity of current orthodoxy and the basis for reflection upon the representation of Sikhism in educational literature and education in general. A range of texts on Sikhism for use in school and some introductory works on Sikhism aimed at students or a wider readership are sampled, illustrating a tendency to perpetuate the hegemony of the Khalsa. The same bias emerges from an analysis of English examination syllabuses at GCSE and AS/A level alongside the SCAA/QCA model syllabuses and an example of a locally agreed syllabus for Religious Education. The marginalisation of Sikhism in British Higher Education is considered too, in part as explanation for the shortcomings of the curriculum and curriculum materials at all levels of education.

Finally, this paper returns to the opposition to McLeod's approach in the context of the crisis in scholarship on the Sikh tradition and conflict with the Sikh community which leads to some positive proposals for teaching and learning about Sikhism. The nature and importance of history is critiqued both in terms of the value attached to history by Sikhs and the dominance of history as a method of studying Sikhism. A way forward is suggested that recognises the significance of orthodoxy but accommodates aspects of diversity such as popular religiosity, sectarian movements and groups that challenge the validity of the world religions model.

ABSTRACT

The Pā ṇḍavas' five journeys and the structure of the *Mahā bhā rata*

Indo-European cultural comparativism postulates a proto-culture that spread out and differentiated alongside the Indo-European proto-language, and that was characterised by a pentadic ideology. Manifestations of the ideology include the *varṇa* schema as presented in its myth of origin and several prominent and large-scale features of the *Mahā bhā rata* – the Kaurava marshals from Bhī ṣma to Aś vatthā man, the sons or stepsons of Pā ṇḍu from Yudhiṣṭhira to Karṇa, and the wives or female contacts of Arjuna from Draupadī to Vargā and her friends. In such cases the five elements tend to fall into a ' central' triad, bracketed by valued and devalued extremes. When these lists are written as rows (the order being adjusted in some cases but not in others), the items in each column are found to share certain features (what Dumézil refers to as ' functions' , though the term is here avoided).

The argument proper starts from the fact that the epic is punctuated by and largely consists of a set of five journeys made by the Pā ṇḍavas. Brief summaries are provided. Three of the journeys hang together as ' exiles' : the initial semi-exile of the brothers, Arjuna' s Book 1 visit to the four quarters of India (his ' Penance'), and the major Pā ṇḍava exile for twelve-plus-one years in Book 3. The other two journeys are those made by Arjuna accompanying the sacrificial horse in Book 15, and by the Pā ṇḍavas collectively departing on their final journey to the Himalayas and Heaven in the last two books of the epic. Other journeys made by the Pā ṇḍavas are considered, but they are either involuted within one of the five (in fact within the third), or they stand outside the network of similarities that gives coherence to the five-member set.

The question posed is whether this particular set of journeys manifests the pentadic ideology. Three lines of argument are explored: the causation of the journey, the identity of the most significant traveler, and the nature of the journey as a whole and of the events that characterise it. For instance, Journey I is largely caused by Bhī ma' s strength; Journey II by the problem of ensuring domestic harmony in a polyandrous marriage; Journey III by the *rā jasū ya* ritual and Yudhiṣṭhira' s gambling. Moreover, during the traveling, the most salient figures are respectively Bhī ma, Arjuna and Yudhiṣṭhira, and if Journey II deals mainly with the hero' s relations with women, the overriding concerns of Journey III are pilgrimage, religious instruction received from sages, and dealings with gods. There are many complications (a good deal of ' noise'), but once due account is taken of certain less obvious interpretations of Journeys IV and V, the conclusion is reached that the five journeys constitute a meaningful set that is still recognisable as manifesting the old pentadic ideology, albeit not in exactly the standard order. Thus Journeys I, II and III would fall respectively in the same columns as the Kṣatriyas, the Vaiś yas and the Brahmans. The implications of this claim for theories about the history of the epic are briefly discussed.

510 words

Why tell stories? Five perspectives on a Buddhist narrative.

Naomi Appleton M.Phil.

Abstract:

This paper will use a particular cycle of closely related Buddhist stories to illustrate how the subtle changes in plot and character that occur as a story is transmitted can reveal the needs of the redactors and audiences.

The Aśvarāja story relates the adventures of a caravan of merchants shipwrecked on an island of demonesses where they are seduced (and nearly devoured) before being rescued by a flying horse, the *aśvarāja*, 'king of horses'. The Sinhala story continues this narrative to include the chief merchant, Sinhala, being followed home by a demoness, who tries to get him back before seducing and eating the king. Sinhala is crowned king and invades the island, expelling the demonesses. In the Aśvarāja story the saviour horse is identified as the bodhisatta; in the Sinhala story it is the heroic chief merchant who is the Buddha-to-be. Each story also has a Mahāyāna form where Avalokiteśvara is identified with the character of the horse. Both stories are very popular in Asia and are found in over twenty versions in Buddhist texts alone, in Sanskrit, Pāli, Newari, Tibetan, Khotanese, Japanese and Chinese.

In this paper I will briefly present the development of the plot and characters over time, focusing upon five particularly revealing forms the stories take. Firstly I will present the basic form of the Aśvarāja story, which is a standard Buddhist birth story with an ocean of samsāra metaphor. Secondly I will look at how the Sinhala story presents a political and quasi-historical narrative of the invasion of Sri Lanka by the Sinhalese people, which forms an alternative origin myth to that found in the chronicles (*vamsas*) of the island. Thirdly I will examine the declaration within some versions of the story that 'all women are demonesses'. Despite a clear misogynistic aim to these versions, and their occurrence in vinaya texts, the context of this declaration actually leads to a portrayal of women in a very positive light. Fourthly I shall examine the appropriation of both stories by Mahāyāna Buddhism. In these versions the saviour horse is identified with the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, who also appears earlier in the narrative to warn the merchant of his predicament. Thus the actions of the (historical) Buddha in a previous birth, are subordinated to those of the great bodhisattva of compassion in one of his manifestations. Finally I will present the Newar versions, which geographically transplant the story in order to transform it into a warning to merchants of the dangers of travelling to Tibet, and in particular the folly of taking a Tibetan woman as a wife.

Through an examination of some of the forms the stories take I will show what these versions reveal about the preoccupations of the communities that adapted them. These preoccupations include some of the most fundamental issues that humanity has to deal with, relating to soteriology, self-control, the need for a saviour, gender, politics, and race. It will be clear therefore that narrative can be a very useful tool in understanding the doctrine, culture and history of Buddhism.

"Love me two times." From smallpox to AIDS: contagion and possession in the cult of Śītalā.

Smallpox was eradicated in the 1970s but the cult of Śītalā, the Bengali 'smallpox goddess', has resisted. The goddess is still worshipped to prevent more common, and less lethal, diseases such as measles, malaria and TB. But with the spread of AIDS in the 1980s some modifications occurred. During my latest fieldwork in West Bengal, I was able to observe how Śītalā is going to be increasingly worshipped as an AIDS-goddess. A similar phenomenon has been observed in Karnataka where a new goddess, AIDS-āmmā (lit. "Mother AIDS") was created in 1997 by a local school-teacher to instruct the rural population on the risks of HIV. AIDS-āmmā and Śītalā are respectively an artificial and natural adaptation of local plague goddesses but also the response to a new threat. But if in the former case, contraception and hygienic norms are meant as *pūjā* (AIDS- āmmā does not heal; she just "blesses with information"), in the cult of Śītalā devotees tend to believe their faith will protect them and look at contagion as a (desirable) form of possession. As it was for smallpox, when variolation was preferred to vaccination, the contact with the goddess is looked upon as a form of love, in both maternal and sexual terms. The study of modifications, adaptations and transformations of a goddess like Śītalā bears witness to a new phase of the cult of protective-cum-malign deities and, at the same time, reinforce the concept of 'endemic' patterns of worship within popular Indic religions.

The relation between Śītalā and smallpox and, more recently, with AIDS will be analysed from an indigenous perspective as well as according modern ethno-psychoanalytical theories in order to present a new interpretative theory of protective-cum-malign goddesses in South Asia. The main purpose of this study is in fact to open a debate. The issues I intend to discuss are 1) the definition of Śītalā as a 'smallpox goddess' and her identification with the disease; 2) the existence of a pan-Indian 'plague goddess'; and 3) the consolidated presence of a 'smallpox myth'. I wish so to demonstrate the fallaciousness of those theories which look at Śītalā as a response to the irrational or as a manifestation of the untamed female nature. By identifying Śītalā with the fertility/agricultural cycle rather than with one or more diseases, I hope to explain the mechanics at the origin of Śītalā's worship, a ritual system grounded on the paradox of the "barren mother."

Véronique Altglas

Indian Gurus and their Western disciples
The diffusion of two Neo-Hindu movements in Britain and France

Long after the Beatles flew to Rishikesh to discover meditation in the ashram of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Indian gurus continue to be successful in attracting western disciples in India as well as disseminating their teachings all around the world. These gurus are a major force in the diffusion of Asian religious ideas and practices, such as reincarnation, yoga and meditation, which have become increasingly popular. The assimilation of these ideas seems to corroborate Colin Campbell's interpretation of these cultural changes as a process of the Easternization of the West, but have modern gurus really brought about a "meditation revolution" through the use of their own words? The objective of this paper is to give an overview of research that I undertook in France and Britain on Sivananda Centres and Siddha Yoga. Unlike Rajneesh or Hare Krishna, there are few researches on those two movements, nevertheless their

development has been as important as many other neo-Hindu movements. They spread all over the world and attract, in France or in England hundreds of disciples and sympathizers.

Two aspects will be covered: the diffusion process of these Indian-based movements that became transnational, and their reception by the host cultures. Light will be shed on the gurus' strategies for adapting their teaching to western societies by means of mass initiation, organization of workshops and retreats, simplification of Hindu doctrines, and emphasis on relaxed discipline. They endeavoured to supply "spiritual services" in order to satisfy individualistic, even consumerist, disciples who neither belonged nor believed. Besides, these neo-Hindu movements necessarily adapt and interact, at a national level, with their environment. As England acknowledges the reality of minority communities, neo-Hindus are torn between two contradictory forces: the institutional pressure to accentuate the reference to Hinduism, and their universalistic ideology which seeks to transcend their own ethnic and religious identity in order to target a western audience. In contrast, it is crucial for new religious movements or any other religious minorities in France to try to differentiate themselves from the so-called cults.

The second part's aim is to understand how and why westerners used Hindu-based practices and values. It is not so much a passive and total reception, but a selective, interpretative and free appropriation which occurs as they explored a wide range of heterogeneous religions and therapies. Their "pick and choose" attitude is nevertheless drawn to Eastern and Hindu-based teachings as they hold the image of a "mystical East" characterized by wisdom and tolerance. This paper will draw attention to ways in which westerners make selective interpretations of Hinduism and how they opt for a monistic view, an inward and intimate religion intertwined with the rejection of any outward codification of religious expression, and a pragmatic quest for a practical spiritual path leading towards self-development.

The inescapable conclusion which emerges from this study concerns the westernisation of these two neo-Hindu movements. Their adaptation to western expectations, involving the standardization of their teaching and their de-ethnicization, reinforces the process of cultural homogenisation that is connected with globalisation.

This illustrated paper is primarily a consideration of the erotic sculpture at Khajuraho; and more particularly those groups which might be called orgiastic, namely the eastern end of the southern frieze around the platform of the Lakshmana temple, and the large panels on the exterior walls between the sikhara and mahamandapa [antaralas] of the Laksmana, Visvanatha and Kandariya temples. Parallels from other temples will also be adduced. Previous attempts at explanation of the sculpture in question at Khajuraho will be reviewed; and the relevance of a play by the local dramatist Krishnamisra, the Prabodhacandrodaya, will be discussed. The question of interpreting Khajuraho is indeed a very vexed one, even though R Nath was exaggerating when he wrote in 1978 that "The raison d'être of the depiction of mithuna (erotic [coupling]) on Hindu temples is the most extensively debated subject of Indian history". Often quoted in relation to the topographically detached and isolated position of the temples at Khajuraho is Zimmer's remark that they are like "an army camp in enemy territory", but this comparison might also be applied to the position of Khajuraho's emphatic erotic statement in the midst of much current Hindu opinion. Objection is taken in some quarters to looking too closely at particular sculptures, to using a long range lens. Given the artistic quality of the principal temples at Khajuraho, this wished for restriction is rather like restricting views of the ceiling of the Sistine chapel. In addition to presenting detailed views of the sculpture, and also a simultaneous overview of the six antaralas of the three temples, my paper attempts to resolve the problem the sculptures pose

by placing them within the framework of a wider consideration of the notion of orgy. To that end, I begin with a brief look at the diasporan Hindu anger at the use of a verse of the Bhagavadgita as background to the orgy scene in Kubrick's film Eyes Wide Shut; and at nineteenth century missionary attitudes to Krishna worship; and follow up with some general remarks on the nature of orgy in light of recent studies in a non-Indian context, before turning to Khajuraho.

Peter Connolly (co-director of Turning Point Consulting)
Yoga and trance

This paper takes as its starting point the conflicting truth claims found in a number of texts on yoga. These are often presented as insights into truth, but since they are incompatible they cannot all be accurate accounts of the fundamental nature of existence. Two questions are posed: 1). How can the practitioners of these methods do similar kinds of things, come to have different 'insights' and become convinced that such 'insights' are actually 'truths'? 2). What effect does the realisation that many of them cannot, in fact, be teaching the truth of things have on our assessment of the value of these traditions? The first question is addressed by reference to research on the psychology of hypnosis and other trance states. Answers to questions such as what are the characteristics of trance states? how can they be created? and what can they be used for? will be provided. The second question will be answered by reference to what has recently come to be known as positive psychology. The relationship between well-being, illusion and truth will be explored and a tentative model for facilitating human flourishing will be outlined. Discussion will be welcomed.

Geaves, R.A (31st March-April 2 2006) 'The Community of the Many Names of God: Sampradaya Construction in a Global Diaspora or New Religious Movement', *The 31st Spalding Symposium on Indian Religions* Jesus College, The University of Oxford.

Abstract

The Community of the Many Names of God in Skanda Vale, Carmarthenshire has a number

of unusual features. Founded by Guru Subramaniyam, a Sri Lankan Tamil in the 1960s in

London, the Community moved to a valley in South Wales in the early 1970s since when it

has developed into a pilgrimage centre for British Tamils. Although based on a primal

understanding of Saiva Siddhanta, the community is formed of around two dozen male and

female monks who are converts to Hinduism but maintain certain features borrowed

creatively from the Order of St. Francis. The centre in Wales boasts three temples to Kali,

Murugan and Sri Ranganathan (Vishnu), and the sadhana followed is that of Agamic Saiva

Siddhanta without the usual caste restrictions in worship, but performs a Christian Mass on

Sundays. The paper will introduce the concept of 'border guardians' to describe a particular kind of charismatic authority These figures patrol their respective domains and closely monitor what takes place within the borders. Innovative, intensely counter-intuitive they creatively guard the border terrain. They will implement changes that can be perceived even by other border-citizens to be very radical, but they will never compromise the vision as they perceive it to exist in its primal condition. They are special figures in the religious domain and one problem for border country is the ability to replace them when they die. Without them the borders stagnate and cease to be borders any longer.

Whilst assessing the development of Skanda Vale into a sacred space for British Hindus, the paper will explore the contested relationship between Agamic and non-Agamic forms of Saivism in Sri Lanka, in particular looking at the influence of Kataragama, the well-known shrine to Murugan on the island. The conclusion will be that such movements that have developed in the West owe more to their beginnings and histories in the place of origin to determine their formation and should be understood as transplanted sampradaya rather than under the umbrella of the sociological study of new religious movements.

"Virtual Sacrifice and Internet Puja: Examining the Impact and Implications of Long-Distanced Ritual Practice from the Hindu Diaspora"

Religious participation on the Internet has been developing and changing at a rapid pace. People are going online to get information about religion, talk about religion, argue about religious beliefs, share their religious feelings and concerns, post pray requests, chat, and even conduct and participate in online religious rituals. This medium has been embraced by most of the world religious traditions, to the point that not having Internet representation is a rarity for a religious organization, even if it is luddite in its beliefs and practices.

In the early years of the Internet, diaspora groups began to use the medium to develop online forums and even virtual communities where they could meet and discuss issues related to their traditions. Whether communicating with people from their place of origin or from a number of diverse locations, the medium became an essential tool for networking despite being geographically dispersed. Although there were significant limitations concerning Internet access and the digital divide, many members of diaspora religious traditions began to use the Internet to communicate.

As the technology of the Internet developed, a number of diaspora religious organizations and religiously motivated individuals began to adapt the medium, to not only stay in touch with each other, but to also connect with their perceived place of origins. This was a technological development initiated through a desire among members of a number of diaspora groups to utilize the Internet as a tool for shrinking space, creating the immediacy of being present in real time at the worship site or sacred place, despite being thousands of miles away.

Although there are a number of religious groups that utilize the medium to connect with a place, I believe one of the most dynamic uses of the Internet and WWW for religious and spiritual activity of this type has been within the Hindu diaspora groups within North America and Europe. In 1998, when the World Wide Web was still relatively new, 20,000 people a day were going online from outside India to witness Durga Puja in Kolkata (Calcutta). In January of 2001, the Kumbha Mela festival was broadcast online in even larger scale, not particularly for people in India but rather for those in the UK and North America.

There was such a significant amount of online religious activity related to Hinduism that in 1999, Saranam.com was established as an online service that offered puja at hundreds of different Hindu temples to paying subscribers. At that time, 80% of those participating were Hindus living outside of India. In this situation, groups and individuals began using the

Internet to conduct specific rituals at many of the most sacred temples in India. So many people are now using the Internet for this form of religious activity that temples are being "wired" to receive orders and people are being employed to assist with technical support and IT development.

Due to this type of Internet supported religious activity, the home computer may be developing into a new form of home altar, which can be used to undertake virtual sacrifice and Internet worship. This is a new form of religious participation that is affecting both individuals and also institutions. My paper will introduce people to this online religious activity and examine some of the impacts and implications of this new religious practice.