

## **37th Spalding Symposium on Indian Religions**

**Merton College, the University of Oxford**

23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> March 2012

**Naomi Appleton (University of Cardiff)**

*Stories of the Animal Realm: Instinct and Karma in Buddhist and Jain Multi-life Narratives*

According to Buddhist and Jain teachings, the animal realm is a bad place to be reborn, since animals suffer greatly, are ruled by instinct, and have little or no ability to progress on the religious path. This basic position is nuanced by the many stories, preserved by both traditions, of animals acting in certain ways and experiencing the results of those actions in future lifetimes. In this paper I will explore a selection of these stories from early Indian textual sources and attempt to answer the following questions: Do the instinctive actions of animals reap karmic fruits? Are animals capable of rising above their instinct and performing morally and religiously significant actions? Can animals commit actions bad enough to earn a rebirth in hell? This investigation will shed light upon the subtle differences between Buddhist and Jain understandings of the mechanisms of karma, the importance of intention, and the role of religious teachers in helping animals improve their situation.

**Hannah Bartos (School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London)**

*An Organizational Approach to Modern Yoga: Social Structure in the Sivananda and Krishnamacharya Lineages*

Despite a widespread familiarity with the concept of yoga, there is surprisingly little discussion regarding the development of the social organization of modern yoga practice. Correspondingly there is an absence of analysis on the institutions that have provided the platform for the popularization of yoga teaching and its spread to new geographies. With modern yoga emanating from a just a handful of figures, both renunciators and householder yogis, it is only by evaluating the parallel development of these traditions that we can enhance our understanding of their mutual co-existence. Thus, this paper aims to provide an outline for a comparative survey of the primary lineages in modern postural yoga from the perspective of organization. Based upon empirical and documentary research in India and the UK, the paper will also investigate methods of institutional growth, such as publication, touring and the sending of envoys. All three areas fall into the category of 'dissemination of information' and account for major spurts of growth in each of the organizations, ultimately leading to a sustained following of their particular style of yoga practice on a domestic and

international front. The five yoga schools considered are those of Sivananda and Satyananda ('North School' of Yoga), alongside Krishnamacharya, Iyengar and Ashtanga ('South School' of Yoga). Each school was founded in India during the twentieth century, subsequently establishing an institutional framework within India and beyond, and includes *asanas* (yoga postures) as an element of prescribed practice. In assessing the organizational differentiation between the modern schools, the paper argues that increasingly complex strategies emerge over time, reflecting the divergent attitudes of leaders regarding the importance of the *guru-shishya* role and on methods of communication and interaction with the laity. Concurrently, the schools are marked by convergence on grounds of the central role of charisma and its subsequent Weberian-style routinization via the advent of institutionalization. This paper intends to highlight prominent features of social organization, attempting to draw yoga studies more closely into an engagement with social theory and taking tentative steps towards a sociology of modern yoga.

**Thomas Dähnhardt (Ca' Foscari University of Venice)**

*Winged messengers, feathered beauties and beaks of divine wisdom: the role of birds in the allegorical love romances of mediaeval Hindi and Urdu literature*

As the title indicates, my contribution to the proposed book on non-human animals intends to investigate the role played by different kinds of birds in the narrative scheme of the mediaeval Indian love romance (*premakhyān* or *mathnawī*), a literary genre used by Sufi poets aimed at conveying an esoteric message through the allegorical language of war and love. Although the protagonists of these poems are of course human beings, the functional role played by different categories of animals such as birds (e.g. parrot, peacock, red-finch etc.) appears both as symbolically illustrative and intrinsically didactic, a feature typical for the Indian mentality which attributes a specific identity and related function to all kind of creatures. An analysis of this kind seems particularly interesting as the authors of this literature, which flourished during the sixteenth century CE but continued till the beginning of the modern age, are credited with successfully charging the adopted imagery and figurative language of their native Indian environment with the sophisticated teachings of the spiritual lineages deeply rooted in Islamic esoterism (i.e. Sufism).

As with regard to Hindi, the works investigated belong to the linguistic and cultural environment of Awadh, a historically important region in the heart of the Ganges plain which was at the centre of *premakhyān* production (e.g. the *Candayana* by Maulana Daud, the famous *Padmavat* by Malik Muhammad Jayasi and the *Madhumalati* by Sayyid Manjhan Rajgiri). The role of birds emerging from these works will be further illustrated by and compared against their description in the literary productions of the Deccan where the *mathnawī*, an important literary genre imported from Persia, was one of the predominant expressions of early Urdu literature cultivated at the court of the mainly Shi'a dynasties characterized by a strongly indigenous identity.

The aim of the investigation is to show how through the channel of animal characters, the cross-cultural symbiosis operated in the Indo-Islamic environment appears through the language of symbolism that demonstrates the potential of unification inherent in the realm of imagination.

**Sangeeta Dasgupta (Jawaharlal Nehru University)**

*From 'Heathen Aborigines' to 'Christian Tribes': Locating the Oraons in Missionary Writings on Chhotanagpur in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*

This paper seeks to historically examine representations of the Oraons in nineteenth and early twentieth century missionary writings on Chhotanagpur. From a rich description of the close interaction of the Fathers of the Gossner Mission and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, both Protestant missions involved in evangelical work in the region, with the subjects of their conversion, the Oraons, I trace a journey that the latter traversed in missionary accounts across the category of 'heathen aborigines' to become 'Christian tribes'. This paper, then, stands at the intersection of two broad historiographical debates: one, the link between Christian missions, the growth of Empire and colonial rule, and two, how the 'tribe', as a category, came to be constituted in missionary perception. On the first, I am aware that much has been written. On the making of the category of the tribe in missionary discourse however there is relatively little work done in the Indian context. Most historians have accepted the 'tribe'/'adivasi' as a given, even as they have discussed the missionary encounter with such communities. The purpose of this paper is somewhat different: it tries to understand how in changing temporal contexts, universalistic ideas were played out in the locale of Chhotanagpur, and illustrates the many different ways in which the missionaries created, grappled with and restructured their notions of the 'Oraon' and the 'tribe' across the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

**Mekhola Gomes (Jawaharlal Nehru University)**

*Dharma and Danda: The Representation of the Kshatriya-as-king within the Dharmashastras and Valmiki's Ramayana.*

Although, historically, not all kings were kshatriyas in early India, the normative brahmanical textual tradition unequivocally asserts that the rightful wielder of political authority is and must always be a kshatriya. This paper attempts to explore the idea of the kshatriya-as-king in

early India through an analysis of the representational strategies employed by two specific genres of texts, the Dharmashastras, representing the prescriptive and normative brahmanical tradition and Valmiki's *Ramayana*, representing the creative and often exemplar-normative tradition. I focus on these two genres of texts since, historically, there have been seen as inherently different, given their divergent histories of composition, transmission, communicative strategies and reception. At the same time, these two genres are also intimately connected as it has been argued that the epic tradition often borrowed from the normative, shastric tradition. The convergences of, as well as the divergences between, the representational and rhetorical strategies of these two categories of texts, I argue, demonstrates that the definition of the ideal kshatriya-as-king, as it existed in early India was multi-vocal, fluid as well as contextual, rather than unitary and monovalent.

The definition of the ideal kshatriya-as-king within the Dharmashastras dovetails in several ways with the way in which the kshatriya-as-king has been envisioned within the *Ramayana*, especially with regard to the didactic sections in both. However the fact that the brahmanical textual tradition grappled with various models of kingship is apparent when looking at the divergent ways in which the practice of kingship has been conceptualized within these two categories of texts. Thus while the Dharmashastras unequivocally argue for the concentration of political and punitive authority within the person of the kshatriya-as-king and its untrammelled exercise, the *Ramayana* seeks to emphasize moderation and restraint in the exercise of political and punitive authority by the kshatriya-as-king.

In this paper will look at some of these convergences and divergences in representational and rhetorical strategies as well narrative techniques between these two genres of texts when it came to delineating the archetype of the kshatriya-as-king and the implications that this might have had on political practice in early India. I will argue that the nature and concerns of the literary genres as well the historical conditions of their composition, transmission and existence led to the prescriptive norms as contained within the Dharmashastras being reconfigured within the *Ramayana*, a text one of whose main concerns was to moralize as well as universalize a certain brahmanical model of political authority and power.

**Annette L. Heitmann (IOA, Bonn University, Leuphana University, and Hephata Akademy, Treysa)**

*Indian notions of substance (dravya)*

In course of time the term *dravya* has been made multiple use of not only in all Indian philosophical traditions but also in a variety of different fields such as the arts, medicine, the vernaculars etc. with various connotations. Its unreflected use in modern scholarly circles is evidenced by their publications with unconscious translations of the term and the

concepts it carries. It is, therefore, more than necessary to investigate the terms many facets, an intriguing task for the readers of philosophical texts.

In order to facilitate the longstanding need to bring light to this aspect of Indian thinking philosophical sources belonging to the Samkhya, such as the *Samkhyakarika*, *Yuktidipika*, *Samkhyasutra*, and the *Samkhyatattvakaumudi*, were looked at. Also sources of the Vaisheshika, Abhidharma, and Madhyamaka tradition from the earliest period to the late tenth century have been studied and in particular analyzed for the traditions handling of the term. The findings based on philological methods of research will be presented in this paper. The conclusion of this paper will not only delineate the stark differences of the term's use within the above-mentioned classical schools, but also forward tentative proposals for possible translations.

**Bharati Jagannathan (University of Delhi)**

*Rejoicing in the Lord; Rejoicing in His Creation*

The sixth to ninth centuries in Tamilnadu saw the flowering of a deeply emotional form of religion known as bhakti. Bhakti saints focussed exclusively on one of the two deities, Vishnu and Shiva, considered supreme by the Vaishnava and Shaiva traditions respectively. The saints sang of their chosen lord in specific shrines across the Tamil land, mapping, in the words of A.K. Ramanujan, a 'sacred geography'. The description of these centres of pilgrimage in the poems/ hymns of the bhakti saints is replete with motifs from the natural landscape—the rivers or streams near the temple-town, the fertile, green fields of sugarcane and rice, and the herons, other birds and fish therein. While an occasional hymnist does display actual botanical discrimination, most of the other mentions of plants or trees are formulaic in nature.

This use of nature is particularly interesting as Sangam Tamil literature dating from the beginning of the Common Era had a tradition of using various natural phenomenon as signifiers of emotional states. The bhakti saint-poets demonstrably borrowed Sangam literary patterns and conventions, reworking them in complex ways to convey a new sensibility.

Several scholars have made detailed compilations of the flora and fauna mentioned in Sangam poems and in the bhakti literature, identifying them, wherever possible, with the modern Latin equivalent. It has been the custom of traditional scholars to speak of the

exceptional sensitivity of the bhakti saints to the natural world but it appears that these descriptions were more often a trope for the prosperity and abundance of the ‘residence’ of the lord. I suggest that, despite the mention of about two score plants and rather fewer faunal species, the poets of both the Sangam and bhakti corpuses are in general less interested in nature for its own sake than as a literary device. Unlike some European Romantic poets of a much, much later period who cultivated and expressed an almost exaggerated communion with nature, the Tamil poets of the first millennium had a far less intense relationship with nature, even as they invoked it frequently in their compositions, and even as they most certainly had a far more substantial material relationship with it, depending on it directly, like most of their contemporaries, for the sustenance of life. Thus, other than cultivated crops and common trees, domestic creatures, meat-animals, and those that live closely with humans such as dogs, crows and sparrows, they were largely unconcerned with the variety of flora and fauna in their environment, with the exceptions of trees, animals or birds that were in some way spectacular. Even in this, the Sangam poets display a far greater variety than do the poet-hymnists of the late-first millennium, since the primary concern of the latter was the exaltation of the dwelling of the Lord.

I am thus arguing for a radical de-romanticisation of the Tamil bhakti poets as super-early celebrators of unspoiled nature. Instead, it would be far more fruitful to examine through their poems, the degree of awareness of botanical variety that the average person of the age might have possessed.

I propose to test my hypothesis through a selection of about a hundred representative poems of the Sangam period and (considering the greater abundance of the latter), about four hundred poems of the bhakti hymnists.

**Dermot Killingley (University of Newcastle)**

*Vivekananda as a Yoga Teacher to the West*

Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) was the first Indian to teach yoga in the West. This study examines his life and background, and his participation in the 1893 Parliament of Religions, showing that teaching yoga was not part of his plan in going there, but rather a response to local demand. This is confirmed by the lack of emphasis on yoga in his subsequent talks in India. The demand for yoga teaching in the United States calls for investigation; it depends on ideas that were current in a general expansion of popular knowledge about India, and also in the particular milieu of the Theosophical Society—though the Theosophists’ interest in yoga was limited, as De Michelis has shown. Vivekananda had a critical attitude to yoga, particularly to the development of supranormal powers; he had textual authority for this in Patanjali’s *Yoga-Sutra*. He used the *Yoga-Sutra* as a basis for his yoga teaching, but there are

parts of it in which he showed little interest. The other text he uses as an authority for yoga is the *Bhagavad-gita*. With these two texts, or selected parts of them, he develops two recurrent and interrelated themes of his teaching: a hierarchy of religions, and a distinctive interpretation of the theory of evolution.

### **Iftikhar Malik (Bath Spa University) Key Note Speaker on Saturday Evening**

#### *Islam in South Asia: Historical and Contemporary Strands*

Iftikhar will be discussing Islam in the context of Indian religions, examining the continuities and discontinuities with other religions on the subcontinent. The focus will be on different strands of intellectual history, examining relationships and interactions across religious traditions.

(Professor Iftikhar Malik, a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, teaches History at Bath Spa University, Bath. Earlier, from 1989 to 1994, he was the Quaid-i-Azam Fellow at St. Antony's College, Oxford. Eight years back, Professor Malik was elected to the Common Room at Wolfson College, Oxford. His areas of research are mainly intellectual history and politics with special reference to Modern South and Southwest Asia, the British Empire, Muslim communities in the West, and the U.S./Western-Muslim world relationship. He has published 17 books, several monographs, 75 scholarly papers and more than 230 review articles.)

### **Eleanor Nesbitt (University of Warwick)**

#### *Sparrows and Lions: Fauna in Sikh Imagery, Symbolism and Ethics*

This paper suggests that an examination of the roles of animals in the Sikh universe illuminates the community's history and would narrow a gap between many twenty-first century Sikhs and both their scriptures and their faith's cultural context. Discussion of the association of animals with places of pilgrimage and the representation of animals in Sikh art is followed by an examination of the place of animals in traditional Sikh narratives. Ethics also receive attention – both the ambivalence of Sikh attitudes to vegetarianism and the contemporary need for more environmental concern. Meanwhile, it is suggested that the Guru

Granth Sahib's abundance of animal images can provide a basis for heightened ecological awareness among Sikhs.

**Geoffrey Samuel (University of Cardiff)**

*Tibetan ritual dance as public performance and state ceremony: the evolution of the Tsechu in Bhutan and the 2011 Dochu La festival*

The core elements of Tibetan ritual dance derive from Indian Vajrayana (Tantric) Buddhism. They involve the dancers acting out and materialising a mandala of Tantric deities which is created imaginatively by the lama and other Tantric adepts, and focussing its power on the destruction of internal and external obstacles to welfare and spiritual progress. In Tibetan cultures, these dances, which have parallels in other parts of Buddhist and Hindu Asia, developed into large-scale public events. They were performed on an annual basis or more frequently by most major monasteries, acquiring additional layers of meaning and symbolism, as well as further dance-sequences with a primarily narrative rather than ritual orientation.

The rulers of the Bhutanese state, which was founded by a refugee Tibetan lama in the early seventeenth century, mobilised this performative complex further to serve as a key representation of the state's political and religious authority. These annual *tsechu* (tenth-day) rituals are now performed annually by most major centres of political authority in Bhutan, despite the marginalisation of the monastic establishment within an increasingly secularised Bhutanese state. The paper examines the transformations of Tibetan ritual dance and attempts to assess its meaning in contemporary Bhutan. It also discusses a recent attempt to update and further transform the ritual dance tradition in the context of the commemoration of a complex and problematic episode in modern Bhutanese history, the 2003 campaign of the Royal Bhutanese Army to drive out several Indian separatist groups which had set up encampments in southern Bhutan.

The paper will include video material showing excerpts from Tibetan ritual dance performances in Bhutan.

**Romila Santosh (University of Winchester)**

*The practice of Ayurveda in the UK environment and the role of spirituality. A practitioner perspective.*



The literature on ‘global Ayurveda’, mainly from the US and Germany, suggests that Ayurveda has been modified and a number of models exist in the West: Spiritualised Ayurveda, Simplified Ayurveda and Hybrid Ayurveda. Some academics argue that it was intentionally spiritualised to appeal to a western audience.

This research explores Ayurveda practice in the UK, identifying the changes and factors affecting them from the practitioner’s perspective, using a grounded theory approach, qualitative interviews with practitioners, and participant observation.

The definition of Ayurveda in the UK has been extended to include universal elements. Authenticity is redefined in this context and simultaneously located in practices in India as well as in the UK. The lack of traditional formulae, a lack of shared culture between the patient and practitioner, and regulatory restrictions impact on the nature of the consultation and therapeutic recommendations, which have changed from complex to simple. Treatments have changed from standardised to individualised, and the practice has changed from a learnt system to a principle-based system. Religion is detached from Ayurveda in the medical context, where spirituality takes its place. Practitioners have a range of definitions for spirituality, and its mechanisms for healing.

A model of global Ayurveda needs to recognise how Ayurveda adapts to a new environment. The practitioner is no longer a prescriber, but negotiates treatment plans with the patient. The patient-practitioner relationship moves from a hierarchical to an egalitarian approach. Contrary to the popular idea that the UK version of Ayurveda is a spiritualised one, Ayurvedic practitioners perceive themselves as medical practitioners. A bottom-up, patient-centred approach is required to shape education and training for Ayurveda in the UK, rather than an approach based solely on the Indian curriculum or the classical texts.

### **Dhrubajyoti Sarkar (Vidyasagar College and University of Kalyani)**

*Sri Ramakrishna and Colonial Encounter: Reinterpreting Ecology in Tirtha,*

*Kshetra and Vana*

Nineteenth-century Hindu mystic Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886) spent most of his adult life in and around the British Indian colonial capital, Calcutta. This paper proposes to look at the ecological perspectives in *Srisri Ramakrishna Kathamrta* (1902-1932), a seminal Bengali text that records events and conversations of last five years of Sri Ramakrishna’s life.

Sri Ramakrishna's life has often been analysed as an interesting site that records traces of cultural contact between traditional Hindu culture and colonial modernity, predominantly the *Bhadralok* (colonial literate elite) world. This analysis can be rather productively extended to Sri Ramakrishna's redefinition of the new human geography and colonial spatial allocation in the imperial city of Calcutta. In extension, this paper proposes to look at how all three major Hindu pilgrimage loci, *tirtha*, *kshetra* and *vana* were also transformed by Sri Ramakrishna's colonial contact.

**Rohana Seneviratne (Oriental Institute, University of Oxford)**

*Divine, Panacean & Emancipative Water in Vedic Religion*

Fused with ancient Indian ethos, water was highly revered for its unparalleled prowess and multiform presence and taken to be more than an essential need for all forms of life both in this very life and the hereafter. Whereas water's being, at the same time, both a divinity and a daily consumable to Vedic Indians helped them build up stronger trust in and more sensible familiarity with it, its detrimental faces like deluge maintained an unsurpassable gap necessary for being considered mightier than humans. The present study examines the role of water broadly in the context of the Vedic religion in the light of the Samhitas and subsequent literature up to the Sutras. While the *Rigveda* highlights Vedic views on the origin of water, its sacrificial and practical import in addition to its recognition for the deeds beyond human capacity, the therapeutic plus salvational/ emancipative strength of water, aqua-related spirits and their influence on humans are vividly depicted in the *Atharvaveda*, which is arguably less contributive to the classical interpretation of the Vedas and 'the religion' formed out of them. Moreover, in the Brahmana and early Upanishadic literature, a number of Brahmanic perspectives on water which unveil diverse aspects of the Vedic religion can be traced. An attempt is thus made here to cover a scope as broad as pertinent and possible so that a richer picture of water in the Vedic religion can be formed.

**Nick Swann (University of Wales, Newport)**

*Indra's Net and the Ritual Imagination*

The internet has a thirty-year history of use by faith groups, and in the past two decades this use has increased in sophistication. Improved bandwidth and ever-developing hard- and

software have meant that diasporic faith groups can use the internet not just to keep in touch and maintain a sense of cohesion, but as an environment in which the rituals of a faith can be practised. Expressions of these practices are not uniform, and neither are they uniformly accepted by those within a given faith, but most faiths have some presence on the internet which explores this potential. The more immersive areas of cyberspace – such as the avatar-mediated virtual world of Second Life – provide some of the more intense examples of this (e.g. the Buddha Centre meditation group, or ISKCON's Bhaktiville). However, there are also websites which offer opportunities for online *puja* and virtual Christian churches where the sacrament of the Eucharist is offered in a computer-mediated manner.

Beginning with a brief overview of the encounter between religions and information and communication technology, and addressing the issue of the concept of 'cyberspace', this paper then discusses coherences between the immersive nature of cyberspace experiences and the immersive nature of religious ritual more generally. Focusing on the role of the imagination, and using specific examples, the works of anthropologists such as Appadurai and phenomenologists such as Bachelard are used to frame this discussion. Furthermore an attempt is made to suggest a Buddhist framework of interpretation through which these coherences can be understood.