

THE 34TH SPALDING SYMPOSIUM ON INDIAN RELIGIONS
MERTON COLLEGE, THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
27TH – 29TH MARCH 2009

Our keynote speaker is Ruth Vanita, Professor of Women's Studies, University of Montana. She is co-founder with Madhu Kishwar of the campaigning Indian magazine *Manushi*, and author of *Love's Rite: Same-sex Marriage in India and the West*, and *Gandhi's Tiger and Sita's Smile: Essays on Gender, Sexuality and Culture*. She will show how Hindu texts of different kinds (philosophical, epic, devotional, narrative) construct the figure of the disabled sage Ashtavakra as a critic of social injustice with regard to gender, same-sex relations, disability, etc. Hindu traditions critique social injustice not in as directly recognizable ways as some traditions, such as Buddhism, might, and the critique is therefore often overlooked. But it is nevertheless powerful and effective.

Several other speakers at the symposium will also address social and moral issues—gender, caste, marriage—with reference to textual traditions. We expect some passionate and well-informed discussion.

Friday, 27th March

4.30 p.m. Welcome, refreshments

Chair: Anna King (University of Winchester)

5.00 p.m. Catherine Robinson (Bath Spa University)
"O our India!" Towards a Reassessment of Sir Edwin Arnold

6.10 p.m. Ligeia Lugli (SOAS, University of London)
Towards an understanding of prapañca in early Mahāyāna

6.50 p.m. Dinner

7.50 p.m. Jameela Siddiqi (novelist, broadcaster and journalist)
Sufi Master Hazrat Inayat Khan (1882-1927)

Saturday, 28th March

8.15 a.m. Breakfast

Chair: Catherine Robinson (Bath Spa University)

9.10 a.m. Nick Swann (University of Wales, Newport)
Tibetan Wedding Poetry in a Diasporic Setting.

10.20 a.m. Ferdinando Sardella (Gothenburg University)
The Two Worlds of Navadvip and Mayapur

11.00 a.m. Refreshments

11.30 a.m. Hephzibah Israel (Lady Shri Ram College, University of Delhi)
*Religious Truth versus Poetic Fiction: Protestant Piety Dressed in Tamil
Bhakti in Colonial South India*

12.40 p.m. Lunch

Chair: Lynn Foulston (University of Wales, Newport)

- 1.40 p.m. Theodore Gabriel (University of Gloucestershire)
Religion, Ritual and Caste in Northern Kerala
- 2.50 p.m. Sarah Shaw (Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies)
The intriguing puzzle of the Buddha's wife
- 4.00 p.m. Refreshments
- 4.30 p.m. Simona Galatchi (Institute of Oriental Studies, Bucharest)
Gender Talk in Neo-Hindu Movements
- 5.10 p.m. Tamsin Bradley (London Metropolitan University)
Dowry: bridging the gap between theory and practice
- 6.20 p.m. Dinner
- 7.30 p.m. **Keynote speaker – Ruth Vanita** (University of Montana)
Full of God: Ashtavakra and Ideas of Justice in Hindu Texts

Sunday, 29th March

- 8.15 a.m. Breakfast

Chair: Dermot Killingley (Newcastle upon Tyne)

- 9.10 a.m. Hiroko Kawanami (University of Lancaster)
The Head or the Body: Identity Construction and Empowerment of Buddhist Nuns in Myanmar
- 10.20 a.m. Rashi Rohatgi (University of Chicago)
The Construction of a New Mauritian Hinduism in Abhimanyu Unnuth's Cactus ke Daanth
- 11.00 Refreshments
- 11.30 a.m. Simon Brodbeck (Cardiff University)
Solar and Lunar Dynasties in the Sanskrit Epics
- 12.40 p.m. Lunch, then departure

Venue: Merton College, Merton St Oxford, OX1 4JD

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<http://www.merton.ox.ac.uk/>

The conference meets in the Mure Room, in the Rose Lane building at the eastern end of the college (turn left as you enter the college, or right out of the hall, and go through two quads and a long garden). Refreshments (coffee and tea) will be available in this room at the times indicated.

Breakfast, lunch and dinner are served in the dining hall in Front Quad, up the steps facing you as you come into the college.