

# Spalding Symposium on Indian Religions

12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> April 2019  
Storey Institute, Lancaster

[www.spaldingsymposium.org](http://www.spaldingsymposium.org)

Generously sponsored by the Spalding Trust

## Schedule

### Friday 12<sup>th</sup> April

2:00-2:15: Arrival; Welcome – Brian Black and Naomi Appleton

2:15-3:30: Keynote Speaker: Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad (Lancaster University): Gender and Emotion: Bhima's mirroring of Draupadi's anger

3:30-4:00: Break

4:00-5:00: Lidia Wojtczak (SOAS): Menstruation, Transgression and the Othering of the Female Body in the Sanskrit Tradition

5:00-6:00: James Mallinson (SOAS): Women and early haṭhayoga

6:30 Dinner at the Sun restaurant, 63-65 Church St

### Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> April

9:00-10:00: Veena Howard (California State University, Fresno): Queen Gāndhārī's Mapping the Battlefield through the "Divine Eye:" Toward the Hermeneutic of Reversing the Masculine Gaze and Resisting Violence

10:00-11:00: Emily Hudson (Independent Scholar): Hard-Hearted Kings and Their Abandoned, Long-Suffering Queens: Gendered Aesthetics in the *Vālmīka Rāmāyaṇa*

11:00-11:30: Break

11:30-12:00: Katie Work: (Lancaster): Gender Balancing in *Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa*

12:00-12:30: Joanna Gruszevska (Krakow): Dialogues between women and Brahmins in the *Therīgāthā*

12:30-1:00: Annalisa Bocchetti (Naples): Gender constructions in the theological dimension of the Sufi *premākhyāns*: a look at Usmān's *Citrāvalī*

1:00-2:00: Lunch

2:00-2:30: Monika Hirmer (SOAS): Becoming the Goddess: Reimagining Gender and Motherhood in a Contemporary South Indian Śrīvidyā Tradition

2:30-3:00: E. Sundari Johansen Hurwitt (CIIS): The Goddess and Her Shadow: Gender, Menstruation, Purity, and Power in Kumārī Worship in Assam

3:00-3:30: Ruth Westoby (SOAS): *Rajas*: female principle of the yogic body

3:30-4:00: Break

4:00-5:00: Ofer Peres (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem): Worldly Affairs: Femininity and Divinity in a Premodern Tamil Literary Work

5:00-6:00: Simon Brodbeck (Cardiff University): Patrilocality in the Harivaṃśa

6:15 Dinner at the Blue Moon restaurant, 6 Rosemary Lane

### **Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> April**

9:00-10:00: Marzenna Jakubczak (Pedagogical University of Cracow): The motif of tree goddess and women's empowerment in contemporary India

10:00-11:00: Paolo Rosati (Sapienza University of Rome): The origin of the *yoni pīṭha* in Tantric mythology: Gender dialectic and *śakti*'s supremacy at Kāmākhyā

11:00-11:30: Break

11:30-12:45: Keynote Speaker: Sondra Hausner (University of Oxford): Gender, Ritual, and Hierarchy: Ascetic Inversions at the Great Indian Kumbh Mela

12:45-1:00: Closing Remarks

1:00-2:00: Lunch, then departure

## Abstracts (in order of programme)

Keynote Speaker: Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad (Lancaster University): Gender and Emotion: Bhima's mirroring of Draupadi's anger

Recent analyses have provided a critical inflexion point in our awareness of the gendered discourse on vivid emotions like anger. I look at two episodes in the *Mahābhārata*, one an expression of anger, the other an argument for the moral imperative of anger, and the role of Draupadī and Bhīma in each. In the martial world of the text, there is no question over the differences between how each will or is to act out of anger, differences due to their being a royal woman and a man respectively. At the same time, what is striking in both episodes is the faithful way in which Bhīma mirrors the anger of Draupadī. A careful reading shows us how we can find in this faraway literary world a depiction of the phenomenology of this potent emotion that represents gender in a startlingly subtle way compared to the shrill masculinist presumptions so dominant in popular language today about the constitution of men's anger in contrast to women's. At the same time, because this reworking of gendered phenomenology occurs within a conventionalized world of social gender norms, this analysis shows that even if one grants men assumptions about their conventional roles, one can still interrogate assumptions about the gendered phenomenology of emotions that accompany them.

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Lidia Wojtczak (SOAS): Menstruation, Transgression and the Othering of the Female Body in the Sanskrit Tradition

The menstrual taboo prevalent throughout South Asia today is a phenomenon that has its roots in the most ancient Sanskrit literature. There are many passages from the Sanskrit normative, religio-legal dharmaśāstra texts which aim to stress the ritual and social impurity of menstruating women. These dharmaśāstric prescriptions tend to be based on a masculine anxiety relating to the threat of the unsubdued female body and female sexuality. The history of the subordination of women, especially menstruating women, within the Brahminical patriarchy has, of course, much older roots than the Manusmṛti and its sister texts. There are early, Vedic passages connecting the impurity of menstruation with transgression. For instance, in the second chapter of the Taittirīya Saṃhitā of the Black Yajurveda (2.5.1 ff) we learn that women chose to accept one-third of Indra's guilt as a Brahmin-killer and were thus defiled. They received a boon in return but were thereafter known as "wearing defiled

garments” (málavadvāsā) during menstruation. Thus, women willingly took on themselves the “original sin.” However, this is a sin which does not defile or define all of mankind but remains the burden of women – willing participants in the transgression – exclusively. This paper will serve as an overview of the approaches to menstruation found in various genres of Sanskrit literature – the śruti, smṛiti, itihāsa and some āyurvedic texts. I will attempt to provide a gendered reading as I concentrate on the othering of female bodies and the trope of the defilement that menstruation inherently carries. I will bring attention to the identification of women with their sexuality and the concept of strīsvabhāva, “inherent nature of women” in contrast to women’s duties, strīdharmā.

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James Mallinson (SOAS): Women and early haṭhayoga

Globalised modern yoga is predominantly practised by women, but premodern textual sources on haṭhayoga (the variety of yoga practice in which physical methods predominate) have very little to say about women practitioners and in some cases instruct their readers (who are assumed to be male) to avoid them altogether. There are, however, a small number of passages in Sanskrit haṭhayoga texts and vernacular works pertaining to the yogi traditions which indicate that there were women practitioners of haṭhayoga and shed some light on their practices. In this paper, after explaining why women are for the most part ignored in textual sources, I shall summarise what we can learn from them about women practitioners of haṭhayoga during its formative period (the 11th to 15th centuries CE) and add information gleaned from material sources, in particular Mughal painting and temple statuary.

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Veena Howard (California State University, Fresno): Queen Gāndhārī’s Mapping the Battlefield through the “Divine Eye.” Toward the Hermeneutic of Reversing the Masculine Gaze and Resisting Violence

Within the *Mahābhārata*, the reader encounters the battlefield through three characters, and in each instance it is through their Divine Eyes (*divya chakṣus*). Primary access to the account of the battlefield and the war is through Saṁjaya, who was bestowed the divine eye by Vyāsa. Secondary access is through Arjuna, who was given the divine eye to see the Cosmic vision of Kṛṣṇa on the battlefield. Arjuna feels dejected by witnessing his kinsman arrayed against him

and is shown the Cosmic form and the battlefield with dead warriors being devoured by Kṛṣṇa. Arjuna is asked to perform his warrior duty to kill, putting aside his familial emotions and any concern about the ensuing massacre.

The third view of the field is by Queen Gāndhārī at the end of the fierce eighteen-day battle. She is the mother of a hundred sons, the Kauravas, all of whom have been killed in the war. Intriguingly, Queen Gāndhārī acquires the power to see the battlefield because of the power of her severe penance. Though sitting far from the site of the great battle, by means of her divine eye, Gāndhārī surveys the battlefield of Kurukṣetra—now reduced to a land filled with the dead bodies of once powerful warriors and preying vultures and jackals—and provides the women’s post-war perspective. Interestingly, in both Arjuna’s and Gāndhārī’s visions of the battlefield, Lord Kṛṣṇa is the interlocutor. In his dialogue with Arjuna he gives a sermon on many strands of philosophy of disinterested action; however, in Gāndhārī’s lament, Kṛṣṇa is a silent listener to her vivid description of the reality of human suffering caused by war.

In this paper, I will focus on Queen Gāndhārī’s mapping of the battlefield in the “Book of the Women.” I will focus on the following issues that have been overlooked by scholars: first, how Gāndhārī’s divine vision of the battlefield reverses the gaze from the masculine prowess of the war and callous heroism, to the reality of destruction and pain caused by this prowess; second, Gāndhārī’s lament affirms a wide array of emotions arousing concern and compassion, which apparently contradicts Kṛṣṇa’s message in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* of rising above emotions; and finally, I suggest that the *Anu Gītā*—the so-called recapitulation of the *Gītā* by Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna in Book 14 (which neither resembles the original *Gītā* in structure nor content)—can be read as a text rectifying the machismo ethic of war. I argue that the *Anu Gītā*’s literal structure of narrative dialogues between different characters—not in the form of a discourse—as well as its emphasis on non-slaughter can be viewed as a way to corroborating the wisdom of Gāndhārī. Apparently, through a female divine sight, the *Mahābhārata* provides a new insight into the reality of suffering, the power of human emotions, and the futility of war, privileging life-affirming ethic.

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Emily Hudson (Independent Scholar): Hard-Hearted Kings and Their Abandoned, Long-Suffering Queens: Gendered Aesthetics in the *Vālmīka Rāmāyaṇa*

This paper offers a rereading of a central text in the classical Hindu tradition, the *Vālmīka Rāmāyaṇa*, by focusing on the theme of the abandoned, rejected wife who is forsaken by her hard-hearted husband often in the name of dharma. Through reading the text as a work of

literature (here I will be utilizing the ideas of the 9th century literary theorist Ānandavardhana, particularly his understanding of *dhvani*, or meaning-without-saying), we will investigate Vālmīki's depiction of Sītā in Books 5 (in the *aśoka* grove), 6 (in the trial-by-fire scene), and 7 (in the banishment scene and the scene of her vanishing) arguing that through the characterization of Sītā, Vālmīki gives voice to a feminine poetic tragic essence that both ruptures Rāma's formalistic understanding of dharma as well as exposes the cruelties of a patriarchal system that insists that a woman "is without an abode" if she is not under the control of male protection (*rakṣaṇa*). While this paper will focus predominantly on Rāma and Sītā's heart-rendering relationship, it will also touch upon other star-crossed couples in the pre-modern South Asian epic tradition: Nala and Damayantī, Yudhiṣṭhira and Draupadī, and Vessantara and Maddī. Ultimately I will argue that Vālmīki fashions a "gendered aesthetics," one that renders compassion for the abandoned wife and alienation from the hard-hearted husband. Is this where the moral heart of the epic lies?

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Katie Work: (Lancaster): Gender Balancing in Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa*

The *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa* is a telling of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in which Sītā is the hero. Also attributed to Vālmīki, the *Adbhuta* follows the plot of the Epic, until a battle scene in which Rāma fails to kill Rāvaṇa's larger brother. At this point, Sītā transforms into the goddess Kālī, and in a terrifyingly gruesome scene, destroys the very demon that Rāma could not. In this paper, I will explore the *Adbhuta* as one of a number of tellings that offer critiques of *Rāmāyaṇas* that have come before. The *Adbhuta* addresses the Epic's conception of femininity, providing a not-so-subtle criticism of the gender imbalance in Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*. Firstly, I will provide a brief summary of the *Adbhuta*'s events before engaging in a discussion regarding how the telling attempts to 'right' the 'wrongs' of Vālmīki's portrayal of gender. Here, I will discuss the issues that the *Adbhuta*'s composer found with Vālmīki's Sītā, and address the differences between the two depictions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s heroine. I will then explore the representation of gender through Sītā and Rāma's relationship, and understand that the problem of gender imbalance in Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* may lie with Rāma's treatment of Sītā, as opposed to her character itself. As I will argue, the *Adbhuta*'s critique of gender in the *Rāmāyaṇa* is most evident and effective in the reconfiguration of Rāma's character and masculinity. In analysing the portrayal of Sītā and her relationship with Rāma in both texts, we will see that the *Adbhuta* is conscious of the injustices present in Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, and with this awareness, the telling aims to demonstrate female empowerment and gender balance through a different conception of femininity. More poignantly, however, it does this through changes made to Rāma's character

and his treatment of Sītā, which attempt to rectify the Epic's power imbalances in a surprisingly progressive manner.

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Joanna Gruszevska (Krakow): Dialogues between women and Brahmins in the *Therīgāthā*

The *Therīgāthā* is a collection of poems traditionally ascribed to elder Buddhist nuns (*therīs*) and is considered one of the oldest texts attributed to female authorship. Although the *Therīgāthā* contains poems traditionally regarded as monologues uttered by nuns at the moment of their enlightenment, many include verses articulated by someone else than the nun herself and some even bear form of dialogue or debate. The dialogue-shaped poems are in most cases conversations between nuns (or prospective nuns) and men or Māra (a supernatural male being). Several dialogues result in the religious conversion or changing the approach towards reality by the person to which a Buddhist nun or a future Buddhist nun talks to. The paper examines two such dialogues, namely conversations between would-be-*therīs* and Brahmins: verses of Puṇṇā (*Therīgāthā* 236-251) and of Rohinī (*Therīgāthā* 271-291). The aim of the paper is to analyse the rhetoric strategies applied in the aforementioned dialogues, with special consideration of the definition of "Brahmin" they present, and to compare them with notions of Brahminhood found in Buddha's dialogues with Brahmins from the *nikāyas*. I will also reflect upon how the gender of interlocutors influences the discussion in the different types of dialogues that can be found in the *Therīgāthā*.

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Annalisa Bocchetti (Naples): Gender constructions in the theological dimension of the Sufi *premākhyāns*: a look at Usmān's *Citrāvalī*

This paper will focus on *Citrāvalī* (1613 AD) by Usmān, a key text belonging to the Indian genre of the Sufi romances (*premākhyāns*) written in the Avadhī vernacular language by the Indo-Islamic intellectuals, who became the mediators between the indigenous population and the Mughal Court. Their texts are written against the background of premodern North India, portraying an allegorical love tale born within the aristocratic Rajput environment, which conveys the concept of the mystical love that links the Sufi seeker with God.

The authors of the *premākhyāns* depict the female protagonists as reflections of the divine beauty towards which the hero is attracted after a first direct encounter with her or after learning about her through a variety of means. The woman's beauty leads the prince to abandon his kingdom and take on the yogic garb going through a journey both physical and spiritual in

order to reunite with her. In these romances we can perceive the subtle contrast between the yogic configuration of the hero's body and the description from head to toe of the eroticized female body of the heroine, represented in *Citrāvalī* by a young woman artist. This paper aims at analysing the elaborate interplay between asceticism and eroticism, respectively embodied in the hero and the heroine of *Usmān's* romance, demonstrating that the poet's choice of the masculine gender for the mystical seeker and the feminine gender for the object of the quest is intentional and not accidental. It unveils deeper gender dynamics that are implied in the Sufi theological narratives, which are constructed by male Sufi devotees and generally presented to a male audience in multiple places (courts, religious shrines, the streets of the market, etc.), requiring such different forms of interpretation.

Moreover, this specific form of Sufi poetics as *Citrāvalī* is set against the framework of the local religious and social establishment of the early 17th century North Indian landscape, represented by the Rajput clans and the *Hindū* and, more specifically, the *Nāthpanth* sects, whose codes and agendas are applied by the Sufi authors to the relationships between the characters of their romances. Therefore, this paper will look at the way in which in *Usmān's* composition the Islamic mystical idea of erotics and spirituality intersect with the social constructs and the role models of the *Hindū* society, reflected in the practices of the hero's polygamy and the implied heroine's monogamy, in the meticulous nuptial procedure, in the reference to specific idealized female figures of the Indian mythology and the analogous representation of the ideal wife devoted to her husband (*pativrata*) and much more. By exploring these farther aspects of the romance, this paper will help understanding to which extent the Sufi intellectuals, and the Muslim kings behind them, culturally approached the indigenous community reasserting and reinterpreting their ritual practices and customs.

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Monika Hirmer (SOAS): *Becoming the Goddess: Reimagining Gender and Motherhood in a Contemporary South Indian Śrīvidyā Tradition*

While scholars have engaged with Hindu goddesses for a long time (Hawley and Wulff, 1982, 1986), consensus regarding their feminist potential is far from unanimous (Hiltebeitel and Erndl, 2000). Debates diverge especially in view of *Śrīvidyā*, a tradition around goddess *Tripurasundarī*: on the one side, its rituals are understood to serve primarily male practitioners (White, 2003), whereas on the other side it is maintained that women are *Devī's* earthly counterparts and celebrated accordingly (Khanna, 2002). Building upon one year of intensive anthropological fieldwork—living as an initiated *Śrīvidyā* student among practitioners in South India—I will explore concepts of gender and motherhood as they

emerge within the local cosmological framework and argue that questions about the Goddess' feminist potential are fundamentally inappropriate, as they fail to build upon emic ontological notions.

Śaktipur is home to Devī in her various guises, from Tripurasundarī—anthropomorphic sensual female being—to *yoni*—ultimate *creatrix* origin and end of everything manifest and non-manifest. Worshipped as Mother or Lover, Devī is female yet transcends genders: as Tripurasundarī she inhabits the world of differentiation and duality and is accompanied by Śiva, while as *yoni* she pertains to the undifferentiated realm of ambiguity and incorporates both, male and female sexual organs. The ultimate, omnipresent femininity is reflected in the appellative “Amma” (Mother), with which practitioners address each other independently of their gender, whereas the gender non-differentiation transpires from anatomical accounts describing every *linga* as equipped with a *yoni* and vice-versa.

Of Devī's complex ritual corpus, *kalāvāhana* is particularly relevant. Unique to the Śrīvidyā lineage studied, *kalāvāhana* consists of an adaptation of the more widespread *śrīcakra pūjā*, whereby adepts themselves operate as yantra and become ritual receivers. Undertaken by men and women alike, it reconfigures them as Devī: sitting in a shrine identified as Devī's womb, on a stone-formation the shape of a *yoni* from where emanates a *linga*, they are touched on various body parts where the rays (*kalās*) of fire, sun, moon and all deities are invoked at the chant of mantras. The serpent energy Kuṇḍalinī is thus aroused and can rise from the genital area to the headcrown where *amṛta*, consisting of Śiva's semen and Śakti's menses, flows. Once Devī is awakened, she is worshipped as she/the adepts wish. Pleasing Devī is crucial, for it nurtures her creative impetus, which manifests as the renewal of auspicious life.

In becoming Devī, Śrīvidyā practitioners transcend the manifest, differentiated world of binaries and come to experience a world of pre-manifest, undifferentiated and all-encompassing femininity where maleness and femaleness are but potentialities. Additionally, by becoming conduits of Devī's creative pleasure, practitioners directly and fundamentally participate in her generative outpour, thus becoming ultimate Mothers.

An analysis of *kalāvāhana* in light of Śrīvidyā cosmology brings to the fore emic notions of gender and motherhood. Since gender and motherhood are concepts inherent to feminist discourses, questions about Devī's feminist nature that neglect their local ontological premises are misleading and often reduce the understanding of Devī and her worshippers to Eurocentric epistemologies.

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E. Sundari Johansen Hurwitt (CIIS): The Goddess and Her Shadow:  
Gender, Menstruation, Purity, and Power in Kumārī Worship in Assam

The Kāmākhyā temple complex in the far northeastern state of Assam in India is arguably one of the oldest and most important seats of Tantra and goddess worship in the world. The modern community represents a unique religious tradition that has been, as Urban has argued, carefully negotiated between Hindu orthodoxy and more antinomian Kaula traditions over the course of many centuries.<sup>1</sup> Local beliefs and practices thus represent a thorough mixture of orthodox and Tantric practice and thought. One of the most important rituals practiced at the site is the kumārī pūjā, the worship of a pre-menarche, virgin girl as the goddess.

The kumārī pūjā is rooted in ancient practices, and thoroughly Tantric in character, creating a direct, face-to-face connection with the omnipotent goddess. The ritual plays an important role in daily worship, as well as initiation and in the spring and fall Navarātri and Durgā Pūjā observances. However, the structure and performance of the ritual simultaneously carefully adhere to orthodox sensibilities of purity and propriety. The kumārī's body is, for the duration of the ritual, at once the host of the wild, raw power of the untamed creative force, and the site of worship of that goddess. Upon the onset of menarche, a girl is no longer suitable to sit for the kumari puja. But why? What is it about the onset of menstruation that suddenly makes her unacceptable as the object of worship?

The menstrual taboo is strictly enforced at Kāmākhyā, and has a powerful hold on the entire community. It is a major, defining feature of female life for local women. Kāmākhyā is also the site of Ambubasi (Ambuvācī), an annual monsoon festival observed in June, which celebrates the yearly menstruation of the goddess. Menstruation and menarche are seen as powerfully auspicious, but also carry an undertone of danger. This liminal place in a young woman's life thus holds a kind of tension. Does menstruation render her impure, and thus no longer a suitable container for the energies of the goddess? Or, as some elite local practitioners insist, does it not render her impure, but instead signify a much more complex physical and psychological transition? These ideas are reflective of a more complex system that rigorously enforces the menstrual taboo and traditional gender roles, while in many ways quietly subverting them.

This paper uses ethnographic data collected during the course of several years of intensive fieldwork at the Kāmākhyā temple, including interviews with priests, local women, and young girls, and further supported by significant textual research in the Kaula Tantras. It explores the modern menstrual taboo and its relationship to the transitional period that

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<sup>1</sup> Hugh Urban, *The Power of Tantra: Religion, Sexuality, and the Politics of South Asian Studies* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 27.

makes the kumārī's body no longer fit for worship, and shows how the tension inherent in the transition of menarche represents critical concepts of divinity and power in the Kāmākhyā kula.

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Ruth Westoby (SOAS): *Rajas*: female principle of the yogic body

The c. eleventh century CE *Amṛtasiddhi* conceives of a bindu-oriented (semen) model of the yogic body which may be leveraged for yogic ends. Verse 7.8 teaches *bindu* to be of two kinds: *bīja* is male *bindu*, *rajas* is female *bindu*; when united internally, one is a *yogi*. This paper reads the *bindu* passage in the *Amṛtasiddhi* to explore the function of *bindu* and *rajas* in this text: the conception of these constructs as physical and psycho-spiritual power substances, the methods with which they are to be manipulated, and the ends towards which this effort is directed. In order to probe the nature of the female element, *rajas*, the paper will seek to historicise the *bindu-rajas* oriented model within textual precedents such as Āyurveda and bring the *Amṛtasiddhi* into conversation with the later *haṭhayoga* corpus.

The characterisation of *rajas* is a key aspect of the overall research project which is to study constructions of gender within the premodern *haṭhayoga* corpus. Gendered yogic body models are both esoteric and corporeal, where the female principle is at once physical and power substance - generative, divine, and impure. An overarching research question is the extent to which gendered models are generated by socio-historical factors or have an inherent function in *haṭhayoga*'s soteriology. The project considers the scope of gender as an explanatory model in researching *haṭhayoga* and what these findings can illuminate of the lacuna of female practitioners.

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Ofer Peres (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem): Worldly Affairs: Femininity and Divinity in a Premodern Tamil Literary Work

Throughout the classical Indian literature, and to this day in Indian culture, the *Rāmāyaṇa* heroine Sītā is considered to be the model of the perfect wife, by virtue of her chastity and loyalty to Rāma. One of the most dramatic moments in the epic is Sītā's "fire ordeal," which she takes upon herself in response to Rāma's doubts regarding her loyalty, and which serves as a *tour de force* of purity. Despite the vast scholarship on the occurrence of this episode in the

various “Rāmāyaṇas,” other pre-modern texts that use the same theme received little attention. This is unfortunate, since the re-use of such a prominent motif often functions as a commentary on its source, and in this case—a reconsideration of the feminine model provided by Sītā.

My paper addresses this issue by examining a fire-ordeal episode from a sixteenth-century large-scale Tamil poem. The *Purūrava-caritai* (“The Life of Purūravas,” hereafter *PC*) is an unstudied Tamil adaptation of the famous Vedic legend of Urvaśī and Purūravas. Yet its account of the legend, including its Puraṇic sub-episodes, serves only as a mere introduction to a much longer Tamil addition to the story. In this addition, Purūravas marries a human wife named Puṇḍarīkavalli, who is very soon kidnapped and eventually, before reuniting with him, goes through a fire ordeal that clearly draws on Sītā’s ordeal both in Vālmīki’s Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* and Kampan’s twelfth-century Tamil retelling of the epic (the *Irāmāvatāram*). Apart from introducing some departures from Sītā’s ordeal(s), the *PC*’s author also associates Puṇḍarīkavalli with the well-known folk motif of “the girl-locked-in- the-box,” which, with regard to its use in Tamil literature, hints at a different feminine model: the virgin goddess. I argue that the use of the fire-ordeal motif in the *PC*, through its conjunction with the “girl-in-the-box” motif, forms a conscious literary reflection on Sītā’s model. This reflection, in turn, corresponds with the ancient love story of Purūravas and Urvaśī, which provides a third feminine model. I discuss the implications of the author’s intertextual dialogue and show that it concludes with creating a complex matrix of values of ‘proper’ femininity and ‘true’ divinity. In conclusion, this paper sheds new light on the ways in which classical literary gender roles and gender models were reimagined in premodern south India.

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Simon Brodbeck (Cardiff University): Patrilocality in the *Harivaṃśa*

Patrilocality is the phenomenon whereby children grow up where their father is from, rather than where their mother is from. If iterated in successive generations the pattern it produces resembles that of a royal patriline where fathers and sons serve sequentially as kings in the same capital city. Nonetheless, in a family with such a royal patriline it is in principle possible that some non-crown princes may move away and have matrilocal children elsewhere, and/or that some princesses may stay put and have matrilocal children at home. So matrilocality and patrilocality may often be mixed, the tendency towards one or the other being partial, or temporary, or dependent on which parts of the family one focuses on or knows about. At the extreme, full matrilocality would not require a social concept of father.

This paper explores the phenomenon of patrilocality in relation to Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva's political career as described in the critically reconstituted *Harivaṃśa*. One focus will be upon Kṛṣṇa's opposition to Kaṃsa and to Kaṃsa's father-in-law Jarāsaṃdha: here an interpretation will be proposed and explored whereby Kaṃsa's marriage, though not matrilineal, is one in which the competition for influence between his father and his father-in-law is won by the latter, the effect being detrimental to the Yādava-Vṛṣṇis (Kaṃsa's father's family) in general.

A second focus will be upon the marriages of Kṛṣṇa himself, his sons Sāmba and Pradyumna, and his grandson Aniruddha. It will be shown that where there is conflict or doubt over where a couple will settle as parents, the resolution of that doubt in favour of the patrilineal option serves as a cause for narrative celebration within the text.

A third focus will be upon a particular type of story that recurs in the *Harivaṃśa*, whereby sons are lost or abducted, and Kṛṣṇa intervenes to return them to their fathers. It will be argued that such stories can be interpreted in terms of Kṛṣṇa's opposition to matrilineal tendencies.

Putting these three foci together, it will be argued that between them they can integrate the vast majority of Kṛṣṇa's political career, as the *Harivaṃśa* presents it, within one interpretive frame, and that the politics of patrilocality can thus be seen as a major theme within the text, with implications for the gendered interpretation of the *Mahābhārata* as a whole.

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Marzenna Jakubczak (Pedagogical University of Cracow): The motif of tree goddess and women's empowerment in contemporary India

The paper aims at critical reconsideration of a motif popular in Indian literary, ritual, and pictorial traditions – a tree goddess (*yakṣī*, *vṛkṣakā*) or a woman embracing a tree (*śālabhañjikā*, *dohada*), which points to a close and intimate bond between women and trees. At the outset, I present the most important phases of the evolution of this popular motif from the ancient times to present days. Then two essential characteristics of nature recognized in Indian visual arts, literature, religions and philosophy will be distinguished: (1) a dynamic, creative, self-sufficient and inexhaustible power, and (2) a passive, merely reproductive or vegetative, and dependent field of potentiality. The paper is to demonstrate the interdependence of the popular concepts of nature identified with femininity, and their iconic representations circulating for centuries in Indian culture, with a specific line of argument repeatedly used in

social practices and public debates. While doing so, I consider the semiotic function of a cultural *topos* which proves to be an effective instrument for construing and supporting the gender roles and gender identities. As a modern example illustrating vitality and persuasive power of the motif of *yakṣī* and *śālabhañjikā*, I refer to the Chipko Movement, a group of rural women based in the Garhwal Himalayas (state Uttarakhand), who fought against the mass cut of trees in the 1970s. They were involved in the wide-spread environmental campaign which significantly affected the ecological policy of the local and state authorities. Thus, a traditional motif of the visual arts has been revived and re-elaborated by the activists of this ecofeminist movement through converting the symbolic potential of *yakṣī/śālabhañjikā* into social and political power.

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Paolo Rosati (Sapienza University of Rome): The origin of the *yoni pīṭha* in Tantric mythology: Gender dialectic and *śakti*'s supremacy at Kāmākhyā

According to the early medieval *Kālikāpurāṇa*, a text compiled in the North-eastern part of India, the Tantric network of the *śakti pīṭhas* was originated when Satī burned her body in the sacrificial fire. Afterwards, the gods dismembered her corpse, whose limbs fell on earth (India), each originating a different *śakti pīṭha*. Then, Śiva reached the Goddess in his *liṅga* shape in every *śakti pīṭha*, permeating them with sexual symbolism.

The male role in the Puranic description of the cosmogenesis of the Tantric network of the *śakti pīṭhas* is subsidiary, although still necessary. Kāmākhyā, in the Brahmaputra Valley (Assam), emerged as the greatest among the *śakti pīṭhas*. There, indeed, the *yoni* of Satī – the most powerful female organ – has been preserved. This Puranic myth traced back a connection between the *śakti pīṭhas* and the Kaula sexual rites. More specifically, the Yoginī Kaulas believed the human *yoni* to be the source of religious gnosis and an instrument to obtain *siddhis*.

In a previous study, this Puranic story emerged to stratify various Vedic mythologems blended with non-Brahmanic traditions, thus underlining, the cross-cultural dialectic standing at the origin of Kāmākhyā as the *yoni pīṭha*. Kāmākhyā, hence, was the place where purity and impurity, asceticism and eroticism, norms and violation of the norms coexisted. There, the *yoni*, concealed inside the sanctum, is primarily a sexual symbol that needs the male phallus to seed the world.

This concept of sexual union was overwhelmed in the late medieval Yoginītantra, another North-eastern text involving the origin of Kāmākhyā. It narrates a very different

origin of the *yoni pīṭha*, which was created by Kālī without any male help. Yet, the myth, stratified a number of ancient Vedic and Puranic mythologems, but underlines the *yoni* as the source of everything.

This paper aims, through an interrelation of textual sources and ethnographic data (ethno-indology), not only to introduce the less-known late medieval myth of the Kāmākhyā temple's origin, but also to shed light on the late medieval interpretation of the fundamental *yoni* symbol. It, indeed, was transformed from a sexual symbol that remembered the endless union with the Śiva's *liṅga* to a cosmogenetic symbol, the only one being able to start the cosmogonic process. The myth, thus, deprived the Kāmākhyā-pīṭha of every obvious sexual connotation, placing the *śakti* as the main actor in the primordial scene.

Thereof, it is supposed that early medieval gender dialectic on the origin of Kāmākhyā-pīṭha will be identified; while a subsequent, late medieval, clearer establishment of the *śakti* supremacy within the Assamese Tantra ideology will be identified as the ground where an interaction between implicit and explicit sexual acts developed in the religious context. This dialectic will be equated to the fundamental dialectic between pure and impure which is the core of Tantra.

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Keynote speaker: Sondra Hausner (University of Oxford): Gender, Ritual, and Hierarchy: Ascetic Inversions at the Great Indian Kumbh Mela

At the great Kumbh Mela festival of north India, the social distinctions between ascetics and householders are exposed in a classic example of ritual inversion: ascetics take centre stage while householders attend as worshipping pilgrims. By contrast, everyday hierarchies between women and men appear reified rather than reversed: women ascetics generally remain on the margins, behind the scenes or erased from view. Does the hierarchical relation between the genders ground the capacity for ritual to test the relation between ascetics and householders? Ritual is famous in its capacity to invert relations, but apparently not all elements of the social world are equally fluid. Using the greatest festival of them all, this lecture asks why some social distinctions are inverted and others remain static during occasions of ritual activity.