

THE SPALDING SYMPOSIUM ON INDIAN RELIGIONS

46th Spalding Symposium on Indian Religions

April 23rd, 24th, 25th, 2021

Held online

Schedule and abstracts

www.spaldingsymposium.org

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Schedule

Friday 23rd April

11.55-12.00: Welcome

12.00-13.00: Keynote Address

Jacqueline Suthren Hirst (University of Manchester)

When is a Blue Lotus not a Blue Lotus? Categorisation, Learning and Epistemic Shifts

13.00-13.15: Coffee Break

13.15-14.15: Arun Brahmhatt (St Lawrence University)

Debating the Scholastic 'Other' in Swaminarayan Literature

14.15-15.15: Heleen De Jonckheere (University of Chicago)

Vernacularising Jainism. The Dharmaparīkṣā by Manohardāss

15.15-15.30: Coffee Break [and Meet the Editor: *Journal of Hindu Studies*]

Postgraduate papers:

15.30-16.00: Szilvia Szanyi (University of Oxford)

The Changing Meanings of the Term Āśraya in Vasubandhu's Abhidharmakośabhāṣya

16.00-16.30: Ranjamrittika Bhowmik (University of Oxford)

Mystical Utterances of Sahaja: The Soul-Body Amalgam in Caryāgīti, Tukkhā and Bāul-Fakir Songs of Bengal

16.30-17.00: Seema Chauhan (University of Chicago)

Parodying Mīmāṃsā Epistemology Through a Jaina Rāmāyaṇa

Saturday 24th April

11.00-12.00: Ananya Vajpeyi (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies)

The Ethics of Poetry and the Poetry of Ethics: Bhartr̥hari's Three Hundred Reconsidered

12.00-13.00: Karl-Stéphan Bouthilette (University of Ghent)

Acknowledging the Philosophical and Spiritual Value of Doxography as a Literary Genre

13.00-13.15: Coffee Break

13.15-14.15: Christopher T. Fleming (University of Oxford)

Devasvatva: New Contributions to the Study of the Sanskrit Jurisprudence of Divine Ownership

14.15-15.15: Caley Smith (University of Washington)

What Kind of a Subject is the Vedic Śūdra?

15.15-15.30: Coffee Break [and Meet the Editor: *Dialogue in South Asian Traditions book series*]

15.30-16.30: Stuart Ray Sarbacker (Oregon State University)

Pātañjala Yoga and Buddhist Abhidharma on Extraordinary Perfections and Accomplishments: A Comparison of Pātañjalayogaśāstra 4.1 and Abhidharmakośa 7.53 on the Sources of Siddhi and Ṛddhi

16.30-17.15: Plenary

Teaching Indian Religions in an Online and (Post-)Pandemic Age

Reflections and discussion on the current state and future developments of online teaching.

Sunday 25th April

12.00-13.00: Charles DiSimone (University of Ghent)

Notes on Recent Buddhist Manuscript Discoveries from Mes Aynak and Greater Gandhāra

13.00-13.15: Coffee Break

13.15-14.15: Jonathan Duquette (University of Cambridge)

Power, Independence and Divinity: A Śaiva Response to Venkaṭanātha's View of the Goddess

14.15-15.15: Deepak Sarma (Case Western Reserve University)

Comparison as Means of Colonization, Comparison as Strategy to Controvert: Madhva Vedanta and Christianity

15.15-15.30: Coffee Break [and Meet the Editor: *Religions of South Asia*]

Postgraduate papers:

15.30-16.00: Radha Blinderman (Harvard University)

Why Kṛṣṇa and Śakti Have Their Own Grammars: Rivalry and Innovation in Sectarian Grammars of Sanskrit

16.00-16.30: Charlotte Gorant (Columbia University)

Nāgas in Early Buddhism: Fluidity and Framing Presence in Art

16.30-17.30: Keynote Address

Oliver Freiburger (University of Texas at Austin)

Comparing Religion Within and Beyond South Asia

17.30-17.35: Closing Remarks

To register for this event: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/46th-spalding-symposium-on-indian-religions-tickets-142207834461>

Friday 23rd April

Keynote Address

When is a Blue Lotus not a Blue Lotus? Categorisation, Learning and Epistemic Skills

Jacqueline Suthren Hirst (Honorary Research Fellow, University of Manchester)

On 14 January this year (2021), the original painting for the cover of Hergé's famous *Le lotus bleu*, a Tintin book deemed to have changed the nature of cartoons thereafter, was sold at online auction for €3.2m (2.6m plus fees). The "blue lotus" of the book's title has been taken as a key signifier in Egyptian and Chinese religious art and in modern exotica as well as in Sanskrit poetry and Indian philosophy. And yet, botanically, it does not exist.

Is it then a chimera? a mythical creation? an emblem of the other? a category error? or simply a mistranslation?

In this presentation, I use the "case of the blue lotus" to explore a variety of ways in which language is used to categorise and what happens when categories take on a life of their own, regardless of their validity. I affirm the importance of our work in critiquing this, and, as ever with the help of Śaṅkara, the eighth century Advaita Vedāntin commentator, recall how the language of categorisation can ultimately, in his view, yield its own destruction.

Debating the Scholastic 'Other' in Swaminarayan Literature

Arun Brahmhatt (St. Lawrence University)

In the early nineteenth century, as the Swaminarayan sampradāy consolidated its community in Gujarat, it was met by a variety of voices of critique and challenge. This paper examines representations of these challenges in Sanskrit literature composed sometime between 1830 and 1850, during the formative years of the sampradāy. These representations help us understand how educated ascetic scholars within the tradition envisioned the scholastic public within which the sampradāy sought to authorize its theology, practices, and its very identity as a sampradāy. In the early years of the sampradāy, Sahajānand Svāmī's disciples composed numerous sacred biographies in Sanskrit, Gujarātī, and Brajbhāṣā. According to tradition, Sahajānand Svāmī specifically charged one of his foremost disciples, Nityānand Svāmī, with the task of composing a sacred biography centered solely on *śāstrārthas*, or public scholastic debates, with various interlocutors. The result was the Śrī Hari Dig Vijaya (henceforth ŚHDV), a sizeable text of 3,609 Sanskrit verses distributed over 49 chapters. In the paper, I demonstrate how Nityānand Svāmī catalogues the various ways in which he perceived

the new sampradāy was being challenged: for its steadfast prohibitions against the consumption of meat, liquor, and adultery; for its unique interpretations of Vedāntic texts; and for its identification of the historical personage of Sahajānand Svāmī as *parabrahman*, or God incarnate. I argue that for the Swaminarayan sampradāy, it was important to demonstrate mastery over various groups for different reasons. Vaiṣṇavas are defended over and against Śaivas, Śāktas, and “atheists.” Vaiṣṇava-affiliated schools of Vedānta are defended over and against Advaita Vedānta. At the same time, there are also opponents within the broader Vaiṣṇava community, against whom the Swaminarayan sampradāy itself has to be defended. Though it is classified in the tradition as a sacred biography (*līlā-caritra granth*), it builds on the model of *digvijaya*, or “conquest of the quarters,” which has a long trajectory in Sanskrit literature. I suggest that it is most fruitful to bracket concerns about the historicity of the described debates by treating the text as a doxography. In doing so, we can see the text as an important documentation of the historical concerns of a developing sampradāy. The choice to render these scholastic polemics in Sanskrit when the majority of the tradition’s literature and internal reading public were Gujarati is deliberate, and I argue that it was intended for two strata of scholastic audience: internal and external. On the one hand, the careful and methodical scriptural defense Nityānand Svāmī provides is to provide a template for the Swaminarayan response from all variety of perceived and actual scholastic interlocutors. On the other, it is aimed at demonstrating the erudition of the sampradāy by making a splash on the broader scholastic scene. The text thus provides unique insight into a growing tradition’s envisioning of and engagement with its scholastic Others.

Vernacularising Jainism. The *Dharmaparīkṣā* by Manohardās

Heleen De Jonckheere (University of Chicago)

Within the vibrant religious and cultural atmosphere of seventeenth century northern India, Jain communities were reconsidering their tradition and were creating a vernacular intellectual culture to do so. The proposed presentation will discuss one product of that culture, namely the *Dharmaparīkṣā-bhāṣā* by the Digambara author Manohardās in order to illustrate the religious and social developments that were taking place at the time within the Digambara community. This so far unstudied text is a Brajbhāṣā vernacularisation of Amitagati’s Sanskrit *Dharmaparīkṣā* (eleventh century) which criticises by means of narrative Brahmanical myths and thoughts. Besides suggesting the continued concern of Jains with their Brahmanical opponents, this text is an excellent example of the many vernacular translations of Digambara textual heritage produced or sponsored by lay Jains to facilitate the study circles they were holding. Presenting a selection of passages from this text in a comparative perspective, I will highlight how Manohardās’ *bhāṣā* reframes the *Dharmaparīkṣā* within a vernacular religious setting, while also emphasising a spiritual-mystical interpretation of Jainism. Whereas the first focus leads to insights regarding the position of Jains and their literature among other vernacular religious traditions, the second adds to our knowledge of the newly arising mystical movement – known as *adhyātma* – and its influence within the Jain community. Furthermore, since it discusses a translation, the presentation also leads to conclusions on how early-modern Jains dealt with their own literary heritage.

Postgraduate presentations:

The Changing Meanings of the Term *Āśraya* in Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*

Szilvia Szanyi (University of Oxford)

The term *āśraya* (“support” or “basis”) is used in manifold ways in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (AKBh). This comes from the fact that its basic meaning, indicating anything on which something else depends or rests, is quite generic. Virtually any entity or event that supports another in any possible way can be considered an *āśraya*, ranging from how a pillar supports a building to philosophically more interesting ideas such as ontological dependence. Despite the plasticity of its usage, we can find some recurring and distinct technical applications of the term in the AKBh, which I will explore in my paper.

First, I will look at its usage of signifying a member of various asymmetric dependence relationships on which the arising and often also the persistence of the other relatum depends. In these cases, *āśraya* does not have a fixed referent, but it is determined by the context the term is used in. There are numerous examples of such relationships in the AKBh, for instance the simile of the fuel and fire, the relation between the great elements (*mahābhūta*) and derivative material forms (*upādāyarūpa*) or our conceptual superimpositions on a referential basis. After discussing these relationships, I will move on to those occurrences of the term in which, based on its first usage, *āśraya* comes to have a fixed referent standing for the body together with its faculties (*indriya*). In this context, as we will see, the attention of the text often shifts to either of the two elements, such as when talking about the body's decay, injuries, height, or beauty without any explicit reference made to the faculties, or when, in the context of perception, *āśraya* stands for the six sense faculties specifically. Lastly, I will look at some of those passages where *āśraya* appears in a soteriological context. I will argue that in these instances it is more natural to interpret *āśraya* as referring to the mind (*citta*) or mind-stream (*cittasaṃtāna*), the bodily connotations of the term being marginal, if relevant at all. At the end of the paper, I will also briefly touch on how these shifting meanings of *āśraya* are relevant to Vasubandhu's Yogācāra corpus.

Mystical Utterances of Sahaja: The Soul-Body Amalgam in Caryāgīti, Tukkhā and Bāul-Fakir Songs of Bengal

Ranjamrittika Bhowmik (University of Oxford)

My paper aims to study the Buddhist Caryāgīti (8th to 12th century), a collection of mystical songs of realization in Apabhraṃśa language attributed to the Buddhist Tantric mystic-saints also referred to as the mahāsiddhas, variously claimed as proto-Bengali, proto-Maithili, proto-Hindi, proto-Assamese or even proto-Oriya. I combine textual and anthropological methods in my studies of esoteric devotional traditions, through a diachronic comparative analysis of the songs of the Caryāgīti, the Tukkhā and the Bāul-Fakir songs influenced by the Buddhist Sahajayāna, Śaiva, Śākta, Vaiṣṇava and Sufi devotional traditions of north-eastern India. A unique part of my project is that through

extensive fieldwork in rural regions of Bengal, I have been collecting the Tukkhā songs, composed by the Rājvaṁśī community in the Rājvaṁśī lect, a living esoteric tradition, which relies on the medium of performance for the interiorization of the corporeal space as a means to express an aesthetic and spiritual sublimation of the soul. Most these songs have not been published or translated into English before. Through a comparative literary analysis, I have studied a number of common poetic metaphors, symbols and motifs in these songs. I discuss the importance of this figurative language in relation to the rhetoric of religious imagination and how the performance of mystical and poetic utterances could be addressed as a 'transgression' in their sociocultural and political context, while analyzing the complex structures of signification associated with mystic and poetic speech, while reflecting on limits of language on the threshold of mysticism. This paper would analyze the relationship between the yogic, liturgical, and literary keys to comprehend stages of sādhanā or worship, where metaphor of the body constitutes a key component in understanding religious imagination.

Parodying Mīmāṃsā Epistemology Through a Jaina Rāmāyaṇa

Seema K. Chauhan (University of Chicago)

Unlike the study of premodern Hindu and Buddhist texts, where scholars such as Brian Black, Jonardon Ganeri and Steven Collins have discussed the relation between narrative and philosophical thought, there has been little attempt to understand how narrative interacts with philosophy in Jaina texts. Indeed, the fact that Jaina narratives think through philosophical concepts and, more significantly, sustain deep engagements with rival philosophical traditions has gone relatively unnoticed in the study of South Asian Religions.

My paper takes up Raviṣena's *Padmacarita*, a Jaina Sanskrit retelling of Vālmiki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, which was composed in 676-8 CE during an era in which intersectarian, philosophical debates flourish through the medium of systematic texts (*śāstra*). More specifically, I concentrate on one particular subtale from Ravisena's *Padmacarita*: The story of King Marutta's Vedic sacrifice. In this tale, an epistemological debate on the validity of the *Veda* unfolds between a Jaina sage and the Brahmin officiant of Marutta's sacrifice. I argue that the claims levelled by the Brahmin inside this subtale voice the arguments that are expressed by the 7th century Brahmanical Mīmāṃsā philosopher, Kumārila, in his *Ślokavārttika*. The first half of my paper extrapolates the key points of convergence between Kumārila's arguments from his *Ślokavārttika* and those expressed by the Brahmin inside the *Padmacarita*'s subtale. Here, I explain what is at stake in the *Padmacarita*'s refutation of Kumārila's epistemological arguments. The second half of my paper presents the ways in which the content of *Padmacarita*'s philosophical refutation is expressed through the literary form of the subtale. What does the narrative refutation of Kumārila's epistemology convey that a systematic refutation in *śāstra* could not? And why does Raviṣena embed a refutation of one of the most famous Brahmanical philosophers into his Jaina retelling of a Brahmanical epic? In bringing to light and analyzing this subtale, I suggest how the study of such Jaina narratives can refine our understanding of the relationship between narrative and philosophical thought as well as the history of intersectarian philosophical debate in premodern South Asia.

Saturday 24th April

The Ethics of Poetry and the Poetry of Ethics: Bhartṛhari's *Three Hundred* Reconsidered

Ananya Vajpeyi (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies)

This paper draws from an ongoing project to prepare a new edition and translation of the Sanskrit poet Bhartṛhari's *Śataka-trayam*, an anthology of three hundred poems, a hundred each on *Nīti* (Ethics), *Śṛṅgāra* (Erotics) and *Vairāgya* (Asceticism). The volume is being prepared by Professor Sheldon Pollock for the Murty Classical Library of India; I am helping him with research and translation.

In the first part of this paper, I will touch briefly upon questions of authorial identity, biography, legendary accounts and historical period (most of which remain open). I will consider the *śataka* or century as a textual genre, and the triad of themes as a recurrent structure within Sanskrit epistemologies (*trivarga* / *triratna* / *triguṇa* / *trayī*). I will look at a proximate genre, the *subhāṣita-kośa* (compendium of sayings / proverbs). I will also describe in passing the editorial advance made by Pollock over an earlier archetype and standard edition prepared by D.D. Kosambi and published in 1959, based on the principal commentaries they respectively use to constitute the text.

In the second part of the paper, I will consider the problem of Bhartṛhari's poetic "voice" that has ensured the preservation and popularity of his *Triśataka* over the greater part of almost two millennia, all across the subcontinent. What is the essential quality of this voice, which keeps it recognizable despite a proliferation of verses that are included or excluded in different versions of the text? After a quick look at the views of major 20th century editors, translators and critics, including M.R. Kale, Daniel Ingalls, John Brough, Barbara Stoler Miller and most recently A.N.D. Haksar, I will address at length Kosambi's criticisms, made from a modern Marxist perspective.

Acknowledging the Philosophical and Spiritual Value of Doxography as a Literary Genre

Karl-Stéphan Bouthillette (University of Ghent)

Doxographical writings appeared early on in the Greco-Roman world. The genre of doxography never disappeared ever since. It can be found in Islamic and Christian literature, and even, in some ways, in some modern writings on the history of philosophy. My doctoral dissertation explored the genre in the Asian context, through three early Indian models. In Asia, doxographies are found pretty much anywhere philosophy developed, in Tibet and China in particular. Despite the widespread use of doxographical formats of writing in various cultures, modern philosophers tend to look down on the genre, which they perceive as an unreflective and by times even misleading presentation of philosophical ideas. Recent research in classical doxography, however, has shown that

there is more to be found under their covers than a mere listing of opinions. My own contribution to the discussion shows that early Indian models can even be seen as 'spiritual exercises' in their own rights. This paper will challenge the pejorative connotations some may entertain towards doxography and call for a renewed appreciation of the genre.

Devasvatva: New Contributions to the Study of the Sanskrit Jurisprudence of Divine Ownership

Christopher T. Fleming (University of Oxford)

My paper provides a much-needed update to the scholarly understanding of divine ownership in Sanskrit jurisprudence. Classical Sanskrit Jurisprudence (Dharmaśāstra) contains diffuse, but historically influential, discussions of the ownership (*svatva*) of deities (*devas*). Generally, Sanskrit jurists (especially commentators on Dharmaśāstra treatises) have argued – in concert with Mīmāṃsā theories of deities as phonological phenomena (*śabdamaṅtradevatā*) – that deities cannot own property because they cannot accept or use property. Nevertheless, the jurists contend that certain legal injunctions, such as Manu 11.26 – “he, who through greed, seizes the property of the gods (*devasva*)...lives, in the other world, upon the leavings of vultures” – rely on the existence of a figurative (*upacāra*) or hypothesized (*kalpita*) ‘ownership’ on the part of deities. India’s epigraphical records contain numerous examples of temple complexes owned explicitly by deities—with detailed and specific regulations on how the deities’ property will be used by temple staff and with invocations of injunctions such as Manu 11.26. Sometimes, these inscriptions record legal disputes between different deities (for example, in the 10th century CE the shrine of the goddess Daśamī came into conflict with the neighboring shrine of Bhillamāladeva). My paper explores this apparent tension between Dharmaśāstric commentators’ ostensible averment that divine ownership is a mere imaginary relation between deity and asset and the epigraphical record which demonstrates, incontrovertibly, that the ownership of deities held concrete legal implications in historical Indian society. Turning to the works of Dharmaśāstrins such as Kamalākarabhaṭṭa, Nīlakaṇṭhabhaṭṭa, Anantadeva, Raghunandana, Śūlapāṇi, and Śrīkṛṣṇa – and on the Vyākaraṇa, Mīmāṃsā, and Navya-Nyāya traditions that inflected their work – I argue for a more legally robust theory of hypothesized ownership on the part of deities than that which is accepted currently in Indological scholarship. That is to say that, even if deities cannot own property in a primary sense, nevertheless, their hypothesized ownership (much like an equitable interest in English Equity law) imposes legally enforceable fiduciary duties (duties based on a relationship of trust) on the deities’ earthly representatives (*sevakas*). Furthermore, I turn to the Dharmaśāstric theory of supplemental (*pāribhāṣika*) Dharma, which provides a juridical account of how epigraphic temple records functioned as normative legal charters which outlined the specific fiduciary duties of the temple representatives. My paper demonstrates that, rather than providing conflicting or competing accounts of divine ownership, Dharmaśāstra and temple records articulate a complementary and comprehensive jurisprudence. Consequently, scholarly (and contemporary legal) approaches to the ownership of deities (and the fiduciary duties of

their representatives) that emphasize a divide between jurisprudence and historical practice, will have to be rethought. The implications for my contribution to the Spalding symposium are significant: debates about the history of the Sanskrit jurisprudence of *devasvatva* lie at the centre of a series of highly contentious court cases in contemporary India – including those concerning Ayodhya, the Padmanabhaswami Temple, and Sabarimala. India’s legal past, it seems, is also its present.

What Kind of a Subject is the Vedic Śūdra?

Caley Smith (University of Washington)

Recent scholarship has shown the *āśrama* and *varṇa* systems appear to part of the new religious landscape of the Gṛhyasūtras and the Dharmasūtras, one that presupposes the existence of Buddhism, Jainism, and other renouncer traditions.¹ Thus, this religious (and socio-political) landscape is radically different than that of the Vedic period. This kind of work creates new space for inquiry, in which we can look at the Vedic texts themselves and attempt to see exactly what is said about *varṇa* and, notably, what is not said. In order to avoid making arguments from silence, I will closely examine one member of the *varṇa* system in order to suss out this early history: the *śūdra*.

I will argue that in the Saṃhitās and Brāhmaṇas, the *śūdra* represented a particular type of *ritual* subject. Never do the texts define the *śūdra* as a professional artisan, as a member of an ethnic or cultural or linguistic group, or as a servant class. The earliest texts envision the *śūdra* explicitly as a degraded ritual subject, one who is *not excluded* from the sacrifice but ideally relegated to a highly restricted role. When these restrictions are transgressed, the expiation is remarkably minimal. This minimal expiation suggests that *śūdra* participation did in fact occur. Notably, this state of ritual degradation is depicted as neither inherited nor immutable.

Having destabilized a great many assumptions about the figure of the *śūdra* in the Vedic texts, it remains a desideratum to discover who this figure really is. I will attempt to lay the groundwork of such a study by productively speculating about what kind of a figure the *śūdra* *could* be, given what *is* positively said about the figure and what we are able to infer from Vedic political history.

In so doing, I hope to tentatively proffer a view of the early development of *varṇa*, which I have come to see as a socio-political institution which distinguished clans in the Vedic tribal alliance as elite (*rājanya*), on good-standing (*vaiśya*), or merely petitionary (*śūdra*). This institution ranked clans and limited their role in ceremonies of social promotion. I failed to find is any evidence in any Vedic text that these categories of the *varṇa* system (that is, categories other than *brāhmaṇa*) are terms of self-reference or real identities. I will argue that they began life as grades of ritual participation because the texts depict them as only existing and relevant during a ceremony or when considering possibly patronizing a ceremony.

Pātañjala Yoga and Buddhist Abhidharma on Extraordinary Perfections and Accomplishments: A Comparison of *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* 4.1 and *Abhidharmakośa* 7.53 on the Sources of *Siddhi* and *Ṛddhi*

Stuart Sarbacker (Oregon State University)

The intimate relationship between the Pātañjala Yoga system, particularly as represented in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*, and Buddhist contemplative traditions is a subject that has been of considerable interest in the study of Indian religion and philosophy. This is evident in the work of generations of scholars from Émile Senart and Louis de La Vallée Poussin to Gerald Larson, Johannes Bronkhorst, and Koichi Yamashita, and, more recently, my own work and that of scholars such as Dominik Wujastyk and Karen O'Brien Kop. In this paper, I continue to forward this larger comparative project with a deeper examination of the parallels and discontinuities between the representation of spiritual perfection (*siddhi*) and accomplishment (*ṛddhi*) evident in select verses of and commentaries on the *Yogasūtra* and *Abhidharmakośa*. In particular, I will examine *Yogasūtra* verse 4.1, *janmāuśadhimantratapaḥ samādhijāḥ siddhayaḥ*, in comparison to *Abhidharmakośa* 7.53, *ṛddhirmantrauśadhābhyāṃ ca karmajā ceti pañcadhā*. These two verses and their commentaries exhibit a parallel set of conceptions of the achievement of *siddhi* and *ṛddhi*, framed within the respective Sāṃkhya-Yoga and Abhidharma (Sarvāstivāda/Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika) philosophical contexts. In addition to exploring this case of a shared or “borrowed” set conceptions and practices related to yoga, I will demonstrate how the larger discussion of *ṛddhi* in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* makes otherwise opaque passages in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* transparent, particularly with respect to the notion of the constructed mind (*nirmāṇa-citta*). I will also argue that these verses indicate that both Pātañjala Yoga and the “Classical Śramaṇa” traditions of Buddhism continued to be concerned with a range of techniques of mind-body discipline (*yoga*) that emerged during the earlier period of Brāhmaṇical Asceticism and Śramaṇa traditions. As such, these factors provide an opening to the discussion of larger comparative and contemporary issues regarding asceticism and contemplation in the study of religion in India and beyond.

Plenary

Teaching Indian Religions in an Online and (Post-)Pandemic Age

This session invites an open-floor discussion and reflection on the current state and future developments in online teaching of the religions of India.

Sunday 25th April

Notes on Recent Buddhist Manuscript Discoveries from Mes Aynak and Greater Gandhāra

Charles DiSimone (University of Ghent)

Quite recently in only the last years, new manuscript finds at the Mes Aynak archeological site in Afghanistan and nearby regions have presented new potentials for the study of Buddhist textual development. The manuscripts found, which I am presently in the process of editing, are preserved on birch bark folios and are copied in the Gilgit/Bamiyan Type I script and date from between the 6th–7th centuries of the Common Era. The texts uncovered so far at Mes Aynak indicate a cosmopolitan nature of the site with Buddhist material spanning both Mahāyāna and Śrāvakayāna (Mainstream) Buddhist thought as well as the presence of Bactrian documentation, a language that was not typically used in the transmission of Buddhist textuality. The presence of this Bactrian inscription possibly indicates that the site where the manuscripts were found was a secular area used for the storage of documents and not necessarily devoted to the exclusive storage of Buddhist material. This paper will discuss some of these manuscripts and their impact on our understanding of the textual development and transmission of canonical Buddhist *sūtra* literature. These Sanskrit manuscripts often display characteristics of what may be considered transitional qualities in the textual development of this Buddhist material perhaps diverging from extant earlier and/or later textual witnesses in Sanskrit and other languages. In this presentation I will analyze the potential textual curiosities found within these manuscripts while contextualizing their relationship to related literature from the area of Greater Gandhāra in the first millennium of the Common Era.

Power, Independence and Divinity: A Śaiva Response to Veṅkaṭanātha's View of the Goddess

Jonathan Duquette (University of Cambridge)

In this presentation, I wish to examine one point of controversy in Appaya Dikṣita's critical approach of Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta. Around the 13th century, the question of the goddess' nature and Her relationship to Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa emerged as a central philosophical problem in Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta literature, dividing its philosophers in essentially two camps: those who believed that She is on par with the Lord, sharing His infinite, creative and liberating nature; and those who held Her to be an eternally emancipated self (*jīva*) subordinate to the Lord. In his *Nyāyasiddhāñjana*, Veṅkaṭanātha (trad. dates: 1268-1369) touches upon this question in the last portion of his chapter on the nature of God (*īśvarapariccheda*). Since Veṅkaṭanātha has just established that Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa is the supreme reality upon which *everything else* depends and relates to, the question naturally arises as to how the goddess (Śrī-Lakṣmī) relates to Him. Does She share His powers of liberation and creation? Does She have a being of Her own? How

should we understand scriptural passages that declare Her to be the Lord's power or desire?

Such questions generated increasing interest among Viśiṣṭādvaita thinkers after Veṅkaṭanātha, and also came to occupy Appaya's attention in his Śivādvaita Vedānta work. Just like Vaiṣṇava theologians of Vedānta, Appaya, as a Śaiva, also acknowledges that the godhead (Śiva) is accompanied by a goddess (Śakti), and that the latter plays a central role in the functioning of the world and in the devotee's spiritual journey. However, different metaphysical premises about the nature of reality, consciousness, power, and relation, leads him to take a different stance on the goddess' nature and how She relates to the godhead. I examine here one of the arguments he puts forward contra Veṅkaṭanātha in his most important Śivādvaita work on Śakti, the *Ānandalaharī*.

Comparison as Means of Colonization, Comparison as Strategy to Controvert: Madhva Vedanta and Christianity

Deepak Sarma

In this paper I examine the ways that Indologists compared Madhva Vedanta to Christianity in order to subjugate it, and, the ways that Madhvas employed comparison to discredit their colonizers. Comparison, I demonstrate, is an activity that always has agendas, and, in this case, to control and to counter.

Madhva Vedanta has thus been both the target and the instigator of a series of comparisons with Christianity. The Madhva position, in direct contrast with the non-dualism proclaimed by the Advaita school, has caught the eye of many Indologists, beginning with A. Burnell and Collins who, in 1873, not only compared Madhva Vedanta with Christianity, but concluded that the resemblance was so uncanny that there had to have been influence. Since the publication of their article in *The Indian Antiquary*, many other Indologists have been compelled to compare in this way. In fact, its resemblance to Christianity confirmed, in their eyes, colonial authority and excellence and of “western” civilization.

This compulsion to compare was not limited to Indologists but was also found among Madhva scholars, though their intent was to subtly contradict and contend. In 1886, P. Sreenivas Row [sic], under the tutelage of Henry S. Olcott, the first president of the Theosophical Society, composed “The Hindu Dwaita Catechism” which continued this comparative endeavor. This connection with Christianity was further exploited between 1909 and 1926 by Major B. D. Basu whose translations of Madhva texts for the Sacred Books of the Hindus series were infused with comparisons between Madhvacarya and Christ, Ravana and Satan and so on. In these series of comparisons, beginning with Row's Catechism and culminating with Basu's, colonized scholars thus employed comparison and comparative language as way to co-opt and to taunt their colonizers. Perhaps these are instances of what Homi Bhabha described as mimicry in his *The Location of Culture*: mimicking the colonizers as a way of controlling them. This paper thus considers the use of comparison by Indologists to colonize, and by colonized Hindus to counterattack.

Postgraduate presentations:

Why Kṛṣṇa and Śakti Have Their Own Grammars: Rivalry and Innovation in Sectarian Grammars of Sanskrit

Radha Blinderman (Harvard University)

Why may a religious leader decide that their community needs a separate grammar manual or a separate system of education? While earlier texts like Bhartṛhari's fifth century *Vākyapadīya* viewed grammar as a neutral, non-sectarian (*sarvaparśada*) discipline like the Ayurveda, the closer India approached the early modern period, the more it saw Sanskrit grammars with new specialized target audiences and matrices of inclusion and exclusion based on religious identity. The target audience of the Pāṇinian school of grammar traditionally consisted of high caste individuals of various religious traditions, but in early modern Bengal distinct grammars were created specifically for *vaiṣṇava* and *śākta* religious communities: the *Harināmāmṛtavyākaraṇa* of Jīva Gosvāmin (16th century CE) and the *Prabodhaprakāśa* by Balarāma Pañcānana (17-18th centuries CE).

Both authors are famous for pioneering a hybrid genre of Sanskrit grammar that combines language instruction with theological edification by using the names of *vaiṣṇava* and *śākta* deities as grammatical terms. Moreover, the *vaiṣṇava* and *śākta* communities of Bengal to which they belonged had a long history of rivalry and at the same time shared many elements of the ideology of *bhakti*, emotional devotionism. Among the numerous Sanskrit grammars¹ produced after the 6th-5th century BCE (post-Pāṇinian period), Jīva Gosvāmin's *Harināmāmṛtavyākaraṇa* stands out in many ways: it is a pioneer in 'democratizing' Sanskrit for all *vaiṣṇavas* (devotees of Viṣṇu) regardless of caste status, gender or religion at birth; its exposition of language is uniquely attuned to the ideology of *vaiṣṇava bhakti*; it is first to introduce a pedagogical innovation in which Jīva, through the device of paranomasia (*śleṣa*), turns the names of Viṣṇu and his entourage into grammatical terms, thus creating a unique intersection of grammar, theology and mythology (e.g. consonants are called 'servants of Viṣṇu'). Many of Jīva's grammatical examples and counterexamples are also revealing of his critical attitude towards the *śākta* community, who worship the feminine divine, Śakti.

Balarāma's *Prabodhaprakāśa* is a similar project of paranomastic grammatical terminology, but this time it is attuned to the preferences of the *śāktas*. For example, Balarāma calls vowels *śakti* and consonants *śiva*, implying that the god Śiva is dependent on the goddess Śakti. His own grammatical examples and counterexamples reveal an attempt to build a common identity with the *vaiṣṇavas* by reaffirming the theological position that Kṛṣṇa and Śiva are one and are equally worthy of worship. A comparison of the chapters on syntax of these two grammars suggests that the only religious group openly criticized by Balarāma are the Buddhists, and arguably he targeted them in spite of their virtual absence in early modern Bengal in order to emphasize a common identity with the *vaiṣṇavas* as *āstikas* (believers in the authority of the Veda).

***Nāgas* in Early Buddhism: Fluidity and Framing Presence in Art**

Charlotte Gorant (Columbia University)

At early Buddhist sites on the Indian subcontinent, the nāga as cobra and human-hybrid being is illustrated in narrative stone sculptures as seeking the presence of a Buddha. These images help to enliven the Buddha's presence through the relics kept at the center of a stūpa, a Buddhist monument and stone mound intended for worship through circumambulation. According to Buddhist visual and textual accounts, the nāga has a transitory status marked by its extraordinary ability to inhabit cobra royal abodes beneath the water and also interact with humans above the surface. A comparison of nāgas in depicted forms across carved images reveals a remarkable conception of bodily fluidity, a defining feature that has been overlooked in previous scholarship. I argue that this fluidity demonstrates how the nāgas express an embodiment of self-transformation as a metaphor for the path towards enlightenment. At the sites of Bhārhut and Sānchī, in which the Buddha is indicated in absence between an empty seat and tree or as relics within a stūpa, the representation of nāga bodies in proximity to the Buddha illuminates the devotional path for worshippers before the arrival of the anthropomorphic Buddha image as an icon. Through their fluidity in visual depictions, the nāga thus highlights and makes visible the importance of seeking the presence of a Buddha to achieve enlightenment in this early period of Buddhism.

Keynote Address

Comparing Religion Within and Beyond South Asia

Oliver Freiburger (University of Texas at Austin)

While scholars of Indian religions have always compared elements within and beyond religious traditions such as Brahmanism, Buddhism, and Jainism, they often hesitate to identify as comparativists. This unease is rooted in the widespread notion that comparative religious studies was a superficial, cross-cultural endeavor that decontextualizes and essentializes phenomena and therefore leads to faulty conclusions. While there is ample evidence of such problematic scholarship, I wish to demonstrate that responsible and productive comparative research is possible, both within the context of South Asia and across cultures. I argue that a close epistemological look at the operation of comparison reveals that contextual and cross-cultural comparisons are, in fact, not substantially different but merely located at different points on the same continuum. Discussing, as an example, concepts of world renunciation in ancient India and early Christianity, I intend to show that a responsible comparative approach has the potential to yield important insights, both for the study of religion and for the study of South Asia.