

THE
SPALDING SYMPOSIUM
ON INDIAN RELIGIONS

'Consciousness, Death and Immortality'

Schedule 2022 (online)

Friday April 22

1.20-1.30pm opening

Keynote opening address: 1.30-2.30pm

Professor Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair (University of Michigan)

Death, Immortality & Time-Consciousness: Sikh Philosophical Perspectives

Break: 2.30-2.45

Panel cont.: 2.45-3.45

Claire Maes (University of Tübingen)

Fasting and the Ethics of Dying: Comparing the Jain Practice of Sallekhanā with End-of-life Option of VSED (the Voluntary Stopping of Eating and Drinking)

Break: 3.45-4.00

Graduate panel 1: 4.00-5.30

Manasicha Akepiyapornchai (Cornell University)

When Desire for Death Defines Your Liberation: The Śrīvaiṣṇavas' Soteriological Division between the Afflicted one and the Content one

Dhruv Raj Nagar (University of Chicago)

Corporeal Landscapes of Consciousness: Adhyāsa & Adhyāropa in Post- Śāṅkara Advaita

Valters Negribs (University of Oxford)

Voluntary Death of Sages in the Sanskrit Epics

Saturday April 23

Graduate panel 10.00am-12.00pm

Akshay Gupta (University of Cambridge)

Can the Bhagavad Gītā's Philosophy of Mind Account for Consciousness?

Alfred Ye (University of Oxford)

Maṇḍanamīśra's Epistemological Critique of Kumāriḷa Bhaṭṭa's Dual Nature Theory

Shivanand Sharma (University of Birmingham)

On Vedānta and the Fundamentality of Consciousness

Shree Nahata (University of Oxford)

Akalaṅka's Theory of Perception: A Jaina Critique of Buddhist Idealism

Break: 12.00-12.30pm

Panel: 12.30-2.30pm

Seema Chauhan (University of Oxford)

Immortal Goddess, Dying Nun: Religious Identity in Jaina tales of Durgā

Raj Balkaran (Oxford Centre of Hindu Studies)

Shadow and Light in the Devī Māhāmtya

Break: 2.30-2.45pm

Panel: 2.45-4.45pm

Caley Smith (Harvard University)

Self-Care and Its Consequences in Early India

Brenda Beck (University of Toronto)

A Unique Tamil Folk Epic Describes A Soma-Style Resurrection: For Its Twin (Aśvin-like) Heroes

Break: 4.45-5.00pm

Panel cont.: 5.00-6.00pm

Matthew Clark (SOAS University of London)

Soma, Haoma, Amṛta and Immortality: The Use of Ayahuasca Analogues in Antiquity

Social time: 6.00-6.45pm

Sunday April 24

Presentation: 9.45-10.15

Marilyn Edwards Leese (Independent scholar)

Following the Path of Bodhi: Buddhahadra's Caityagriha at Ajanta

Panel: 10.30am-12.30pm

Ananya Vajpeyi (CSDS, Delhi)

"Like a Lump of Salt in Water": Trajectories of the Self in Some Early Upaniṣadic Dialogues

Chiara Policardi (University of Milan)

Animal Images that Evoke Immortality: Urvaśī as an Aquatic Bird, from Ṛgveda X.95 to Kālidāsa's Vikramorvaśīya

Break: 12.30-1.00pm

Panel cont.: 1.00-2.00pm

Marged Trumper (University of Alma Mater, Bologna)

Bābul Morā: the Sufi Metaphor of Death and other Hidden Meanings in the Most Popular Ṭhumrī Composition

Keynote closing address: 2.00-3.00pm

Dr Naomi Appleton (University of Edinburgh)

Sacrifice and Giving on the Narrative Path to Buddhahood

3.00-3.15pm Closing

SPALDING SYMPOSIUM ON INDIAN RELIGIONS 2022
'Consciousness, Death and Immortality'
ABSTRACT BOOKLET

In order of presentation:

Opening Keynote Address:

Death, Immortality & Time-Consciousness: Sikh Philosophical Perspectives

Arvind-Pal S. Mandair (University of Michigan)

Despite extensive references to death and immortality in primary Sikh texts such as the Adi Granth, the development a coherent philosophical position on these themes has remained an elusive task. One reason is that this text appears to present logically contradictory images of death and immortality. To some extent this is reflected in popular Sikh attitudes towards death and dying which, on the one hand, treat death as finalist, thereby emphasizing the intrinsic value of finitude and living life in constant remembrance of death. Yet, on the other hand, the same Sikhs also cherish ideas about eternal wanderings of the thread of consciousness (*chētanā*) across innumerable lifetimes (*āvāgavan*), and eulogize states of deathlessness. How does one make sense of these apparent contradictions? Should we take them at face value as evidence of the lack of true philosophy in Asia (as philosophical Orientalism has assumed for over two centuries)? Or do such contradictions challenge the very *demand* for a coherent model of immortality, and by implication conventional models of the self/person?

In this paper I show how Sikh conceptualizations about death and immortality turn the very demand for 'coherency' on its head. They do so by projecting notions of death and immortality within a non-oppositional model of time-consciousness (*akāl*) – one that inherently resists being reduced to the kind of dualistic frameworks that require justification through empirical evidence or logically consistent argument. From the perspective of Sikh philosophy, demands for coherency or empirical proof are only valid within the everyday sequential frame of time (*kāl*) which is generated by the highly contracted and delimiting form of consciousness known as *manmukh*. However, in order to explain the expanded model of time-consciousness (*akāl*) that is crucial to any Sikh philosophy of religion, it is necessary to access a form of logic capable of synthesizing oppositions or contradictions (such as death/life, or time/non-time etc). This non-oppositional logic is intrinsic to a certain kind of personhood that Nanak calls *gurmukh*, whose state of consciousness is characterized by ego-loss. By resituating the investigation of death and immortality within this in/corporeal time-consciousness, this paper offers an alternative model not only for thinking about death and immortality, but for theorizing the nature of pluralism within 'global philosophy of religion'.

Friday April 22nd

Fasting and the Ethics of Dying: Comparing the Jain Practice of *Sallekhanā* with End-of-life Option of VSED (the Voluntary Stopping of Eating and Drinking)

Claire Maes (University of Tübingen)

Jains have a wide constellation of different types and lengths of fasts. Within this constellation, *sallekhanā*, or the soteriological practice of fasting to death, is the *summum bonum*. While the rite went uncontested for over two millennia, in recent years it became a matter of the courts. The Rajasthan High Court criminalized the practice as illegal on 10 August 2015. Soon after the Supreme Court of India lifted the stay on *sallekhanā*. While the final ruling is still pending, the Rajasthan Court case brought to the foreground pertinent questions around fasting and the ethics of dying. Is, for instance, *sallekhanā* a form of suicide? Or also, how to ensure that the practice of *sallekhanā* is free from coercion? In this paper, I seek to discuss these ethical questions by bringing the case of *sallekhanā* in conversation with the end-of-life option, known as the “Voluntarily Stopping Eating and Drinking” (VSED), a legitimate and widely available option to hasten death in various countries. Interestingly, the ethical debate surrounding VSED has many issues in common with the case of *sallekhanā*. By examining the ethical issues surrounding *sallekhanā* in light of VSED, this paper hopes to bring new perspectives and insights to the current legal controversies surrounding the Jain soteriological practice of fasting to death.

When Desire for Death Defines Your Liberation: The Śrīvaiṣṇavas’ Soteriological Division between the Afflicted One and the Content One

Manasicha Akepiyapornchai (Cornell)

What kind of mindsets one has when desiring liberation? Is one usually afraid of sufferings in this world? Or is it possible for one to feel content with one’s life and want to attain liberation still? In this paper, I investigate the division of mindsets one has in the soteriological context of the South Indian Vaiṣṇava religious community, the Śrīvaiṣṇavas. Given the Śrīvaiṣṇavas’ belief that one can reach liberation only after one’s death, different desires for death are central to the division and dependent on one’s ability to bear the delay in attaining liberation after death. In other words, while one who is afflicted by transmigration and cannot take the delay wishes to face death right away to quickly attain liberation, one who is content enough with the present life and expects liberation later whenever the current life ends. This division of the two groups of devotees is one of the defining factors in the soteriological practice of surrendering oneself to God, Viṣṇu. This paper charts varying ways the medieval Śrīvaiṣṇava intellectuals engaged with these two groups of devotees, the afflicted and content ones, in their theological treatises on self-surrender. More specifically, I explore the earliest occurrence of this division in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the moment when the two contemporary authors from the 12th to 13th centuries, Vātsya Varadaguru and Periyavāccāṅṅ Pillai, separately brought the division based on the *Rāmāyaṇa* into their discussions in the Sanskrit *Prapannapārijāta* and the Manipravalam

Sakalapramāṇatātparya (hybrid Tamil-Sanskrit). Although these two authors relied on the same source, they highlighted different dividing features. While Vātsyā Varadaguru emphasized the intensity of the grief of these two groups, Periyavāccāṅ Piḷḷai argued for the patience and desire as the main reasons for the division.

The definition of the division was also dynamic when we look at it in the *Nikṣeparakṣā* and the *Rahasyatrayasāra*, the Sanskrit and Manipravalam works of the fourteenth-century author, Vedāntadeśika. Following his predecessors, Vedāntadeśika classified those who surrender into the afflicted one and the content one according to the *Rāmāyaṇa* passage. Interestingly, unlike the earlier authors who suggested the difference in the result, which is liberation attained by these two groups, Vedāntadeśika stresses that there is no difference in the result, even if there is the division of place, time, condition, and eligibility. Thus, this paper shows the dynamic development of the mindsets in the soteriological process and argues that immortality is conditioned by desire for death according to the Śrīvaiṣṇavas.

Corporeal Landscapes of Consciousness: *Adhyāsa* & *Adhyāropa* in Post- Śāṅkara Advaita

Dhruv Raj Nagar (Chicago)

While the Advaitic recourse to ‘pure’ (*śuddha*) consciousness (*caitanya*), and its persistence as the eternal (*nitya*), immortal (*amṛta*) dimension of self, is well-known, its relationship to materiality and full personhood has received less attention. Post-Śāṅkara Advaita evinces an acute awareness of the ways in which consciousness inhabits the body and is deeply intertwined with it, entailing a recuperation of the phenomenological depths of bodily being. Śāṅkara inaugurated the Advaitic appeal to *adhyāsa* (superimposition) as an explanation of the relationship of conscious and material aspects of selfhood. Picked up by later Advaitins well into the early modern period, it shares an unstable historical relationship with another synonymous term, *adhyāropa*. I will explore this double register to parse out two different modes in which the relation of consciousness to body is construed, namely natural (*naisargika*) and deliberate (*śāstric*) superimposition, and the manner in which the latter is instrumentalized as a means to self-knowledge. Advaitic pedagogy presumes that these two modes of superimposition do not map onto each other. In other words, I argue that *adhyāsa* and *adhyāropa*, although mapping the same fundamental dynamics of bodily being, are different in their construal of the precise texture and form of superimposition. Failure to appreciate this distinction can obscure the precise work done by deliberate superimposition and the emergent relationship of consciousness and materiality in Advaita.

Voluntary Death of Sages in the Sanskrit Epics

Valters Negribs (Oxford)

This paper aims to present a comprehensive survey of related beliefs and practices pertaining to voluntary dying of sages in the Sanskrit epics. The first part of the paper will argue that the study of voluntary dying should not be limited to the yogic passages that have received considerable scholarly attention (White 2009; Malinar 2011; Yonker 2021; Gerety 2021). It will aim to map a range of beliefs. It will be noted that while some passages describe an ascent to the sun, others portray sages as becoming stars in the sky, and yet others talk about seers who shed their bodies and fly around in shining

vimānas (flying palace-chariots). While some passages discuss recognisably yogic techniques such as manipulation of *prāṇa*, meditation on a deity or om̐, others talk about sages who burn their physical bodies in order to ascend to heaven with a body of light. While some passages assume the tiny ātman described in the early Upaniṣads, others indicate a belief in an ātman that is coextensive with the physical body. The latter belief will be considered in the context of creation myths that portray the original humans as having only subtle bodies. It will be argued that in the Sanskrit epics such modes of dying are only available to highly virtuous characters who have sufficiently purified themselves through such practices as tapas or the observance of dharmic conduct. The second part of the paper will respond to Gerety 2021 by arguing that meditation on om̐ at the time of death was not a universal feature of the earliest forms of Brahmanical yoga but rather a later practice with clear links to the theistic traditions. Meditation on om̐ was probably presented as an important yogic technique to create a specifically theistic yoga with a Vedic pedigree.

Saturday April 23rd

Can the *Bhagavad Gītā*'s Philosophy of Mind Account for Consciousness?

Akshay Gupta (Cambridge)

Within the philosophy of mind, consciousness is a topic that has received significant scholarly attention. However, in this context, relatively little attention has been paid to the philosophical insights of the *Bhagavad Gītā* (c. 500 BCE – 200 CE), which, like the Sāṅkhya metaphysical system, maintains that there is a tripartite distinction between the physical body (*sthūla-śarīra*), subtle body (*liṅga-śarīra*), and immaterial self (*ātman*). In this paper, I aim to address this lacuna and illustrate how an account of consciousness that is informed by the *Bhagavad Gītā* can address various important questions within the philosophy of mind. My methodological approach is both textual and philosophical. I develop my view through a careful reading and exegesis of the *Gītā*, while also drawing on my own philosophical insights and reasoning to construct a coherent account of consciousness. The first question that I aim to address is the interaction problem – how can an immaterial self interact with a physical body, if these are two distinct types of substances? Drawing on *Bhagavad Gītā* 13.23, I highlight that the *Gītā* provides a response to this question by endorsing a type of occasionalism, according to which, a self's will and intention provide an occasion for God to move this self's physical body. The second question is: what is the interrelationship between consciousness and the brain? A related third question is: why does consciousness cease when the brain is damaged? In addressing these questions, I explicate the specific functions performed by the physical body, subtle body, and immaterial self. For instance, I argue that the relationship between the brain and the subtle body is analogous to the hardware and the software of a computer. While the brain and the subtle body are ontologically distinct, the latter requires the former in order for its functions to be expressed. Moreover, one of the subtle body's components, namely the *manas*, is responsible for categorizing and mentally representing the data acquired by

the senses, and the mental representation of this data is the object of conscious awareness for the self, which is the bearer of consciousness. Given the above points, I formulate a response to the third question by arguing that when the brain is damaged, the functions of the subtle body, including the manas, are no longer operative, and hence there is no data that is presented to the self to be conscious of, thus accounting for the absence of consciousness in such cases. I conclude my paper by noting the implications of my view and drawing attention to aspects of my view that can be explored in greater depth.

Maṇḍanamiśra's Epistemological Critique of Kumārila Bhaṭṭa's Dual Nature Theory

Alfred Ye (Oxford)

In the *Tarkakāṇḍa* of the *Brahmasiddhi* (BSi), Maṇḍanamiśra (660-720 CE) launches one of the most extensive and sophisticated criticisms of the dual nature theory of Kumārila Bhaṭṭa (600-650 CE) that is found in the *Ākṛtivāda* chapter of the *Ślokavārttika* (ŚV). This peculiar theory of Kumārila contends that every external object is in fact characterised by a dual nature (*dvyātmaka*) in that it comprises both universal (*sāmānya*) and particular (*viśeṣa*) aspects. In the BSi II.17-II.20, Maṇḍana presents several lengthy refutations of Kumārila's dual nature theory. These arguments, however, are not easy to follow. One of the difficulties lies in the fact that Maṇḍana never directly quotes Kumārila in the relevant section. Maṇḍana also tends to use his own language to paraphrase the arguments of Kumārila instead of using Kumārila's own terminology. In this presentation, I will show that Maṇḍana's criticism of Kumārila is carefully composed with reference to Kumārila's epistemological arguments for his dual nature theory. In order to understand the highly epistemological nature of Maṇḍana's refutations, one needs to first understand that Kumārila's main argument for dual nature theory--despite it being an ontological claim--has a strong epistemological orientation. Kumārila argues that things in the world have a dual nature because we clearly perceive them as such, i.e. our conscious perception always presents objects as both distinct from (*vyāvṛtta*) other objects and common with (*anugama*) certain other objects. While Kumārila's argument for dual nature relies heavily on the premise that our conscious perception is an indisputable source of authority, Kumārila also mobilises different epistemological theories to support this premise. These include his epistemological realist stance and his theory of intrinsic validity. As I will demonstrate in this presentation, Maṇḍana's writings in the BSi II.17-II.20 indicate a clear awareness of the epistemological arguments that Kumārila employs to support his dual nature theory as an ontological claim. This presentation has three parts. In the first section, I will show how three major epistemological stances held by Kumārila--the perceptibility of universals, epistemological realism, and the intrinsic validity of conscious cognition--serve as the foundation for his arguments for dual nature theory. In the second section, I will present Kumārila's main epistemological argument for dual nature theory in the *Ākṛtivāda* of ŚV. In the final section, I will analyse Maṇḍana's refutations of dual nature theory in detail, with the goal of illustrating that Maṇḍana's refutations of dual nature theory cannot be adequately understood in isolation from the wider epistemological context that Kumārila's dual nature theory engages with.

Akalaṅka's Theory of Perception: A Jaina Critique of Buddhist Idealism

Shree Nahata (Oxford)

While scholars have produced significant surveys of Akalaṅka's philosophical system and its place in the history of Jaina logic, a constructive reading of individual arguments in Akalaṅka's works is still in its infancy. This paper takes a step in that direction by presenting Akalaṅka's analysis of sensory perception (*indriyapratyakṣa*) and his subsequent critique of Dharmakīrti's idealistic theory of perception. Drawing on Akalaṅka's *Laghīyastraya* and *Nyāyaviniścaya*, I will begin by explaining the unique Jaina analysis of perception into four sequential stages of sensation (*avagraha*), cogitation (*īhā*), perceptual judgement (*avāya*), and retention (*dhāraṇā*). I will then show how many of Akalaṅka's arguments against Buddhist idealism, such as the argument from the restricted nature (*niyama*) of perception and the argument from perceptual error, are well-known objections anticipated by the Buddhists themselves. Akalaṅka's unique philosophical contribution, instead, lies in his refutation of Dharmakīrti's central argument for idealism: the rule of simultaneous perception (*sahopalambhaniyama*). Akalaṅka derisively mocks the Buddhist rejection of any mind-independent reality by noting that an idealist cannot account for the difference between life and death since thinking about poison, without actually consuming it, kills no one. Akalaṅka's meticulous analysis of sensory perception highlights the realist and empiricist orientation of the Jaina worldview whereas Dharmakīrti's idealism leads to a radical Buddhist deconstruction of our ordinary experience. In taking Akalaṅka's refutation of Dharmakīrti as my case study, my paper demonstrates the importance of the debate concerning the existence of an external reality outside one's consciousness in *pramāṇa*-style theories of perception. The question of whether we, as perceivers, can ever transcend the limitations of our own consciousness significantly influences both Dharmakīrti and Akalaṅka's understanding of their respective religious traditions. From a historical perspective, Akalaṅka's polemics against Dharmakīrti's "absurd" idealism seeks to carve out a unique Jaina philosophical identity in the intensely competitive milieu of religio-philosophical debate in early-medieval India.

On Vedānta and the Fundamentality of Consciousness

Shivanand Sharma (Birmingham)

According to the dominant view in the analytic tradition in contemporary Western philosophy, consciousness isn't part of our fundamental ontology. But according to the Vedānta tradition in classical Indian philosophy, it is. In this presentation, I defend the Vedāntic position by appealing to the philosophical doctrine of *sat-kārya-vāda*, according to which the effect pre-exists in its cause. First, in Section 1, I introduce the Vedānta tradition and its views on consciousness, elucidating three distinct but integrated aspects of consciousness that are often conflated in the analytic tradition: an experiential aspect, a qualitative aspect, and a perspectival aspect. Then, in Section 2, I outline the doctrine of *sat-kārya-vāda* and use it to defend the Vedāntic claim that consciousness is fundamental. In particular, I argue that, if *sat-kārya-vāda* is right, then consciousness must exist at the fundamental level if it is to exist at all at the macro level. Finally, in Section 3, I consider three important objections to that argument. The first is that consciousness falls outside the scope of *sat-kārya-vāda*, and hence the argument doesn't get off the ground. The second concedes the applicability of *sat-kārya-vāda*, but

rejects the argument as invalid on the grounds that *sat-kārya-vāda* doesn't actually imply that consciousness is fundamental. And the third grants both the applicability and validity of *sat-kārya-vāda*, but argues that it is philosophically incompatible with Vedānta, and hence inadmissible in its defence. In each case I argue that the objection fails.

Immortal Goddess, Dying Nun: Religious Identity in Jaina tales of Durgā

Seema Chauhan (Oxford)

The study of Śākta religion has long recognized the nebulous character of Durgā and her worship in the first millennium of the common era. Premodern Hindu texts are just as ambiguous about the relation between Durgā and other goddesses, such as Vindhyaśinī and Caṇḍikā, as they are about whether Durgā worship constitutes an independent religion or a practice enmeshed in Brahmanical, Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava theology. Understanding the contours of Śākta identity is only further complicated when we add Jaina texts to the mix. The Jaina archive preserves a wealth of unstudied representations of Durgā that are reduced to binary claims; previous scholarship understands Durgā as either a mark of religious difference that distinguishes Hindus from Jains or a mark of shared identity that connects Hindus and Jains. Put simply, how do we understand the boundaries of Śākta religious identity? This talk explores the construction of Śākta identity through the unique perspective of premodern Jaina narratives about Durgā, for these narratives reveal emic reflections on the construction of Śākta identity that have not been adequately accounted for in the study of Śākta traditions. I begin by sketching a history of Jaina narrative representations of Durgā from Prakrit and Sanskrit texts composed in the first millennium, revealing the diverse ways in which Jains understand the position of Durgā vis-à-vis Śiva, Viṣṇu and the Jina. Against the backdrop of this survey, I home in on Jinasena's *Harivaṃśapurāṇa* (783 CE), which reflects on the contemporaneous rise of Durgā worship through a subtale called 'The Origin of Durgā' (*Durgopapatti*). This subtale describes how a Jaina nun, who performs Jaina asceticism until her last breaths, is mistaken by a group of hunters to be an immortal goddess who demands blood offerings. I argue that the narrative form of the subtale examines representations of Durgā, her worship, and her devotees found in earlier and contemporaneous Hindu epics, *purāṇas*, *tantra* and *kāvya*, and unifies them into a single religious identity that is distinct from Jainism. Thus, aside from recovering a history of Jaina representations of Durgā in the first millennium, my paper casts Jaina narratives as a significant site in which the boundaries of Śākta identity are drawn and redrawn in the premodern era.

Shadow and Light in the *Devī Māhātmya*

Raj Balkaran (Oxford Centre of Hindu Studies)

Why is Viṣṇu unconscious in the first Episode of the *Devī Māhātmya*? What does this tell us about the relationship between the Goddess and consciousness? Although Episode I of the tripartite 5th century Sanskrit narrative *Devī Māhātmya* (Greatness of the Goddess) is told with "telegraphic brevity" – to quote Thomas Coburn – it is extraordinarily rich, and laden with signification for both the structure of the text and for the function of the Goddess it presents. Episode I commences with the well-known mythic motif of Viṣṇu slumbering upon his serpent couch between cosmic cycles, as

Brahmā is reborn anew from the celestial lotus emerging from Viṣṇu’s navel about to usher in the next cycle of creation. It is at this juncture that two demons, Madhu and Kaiṭabha, emerge from the ears of the sleeping Viṣṇu, and, intent on annihilation, make a mad dash towards the terrified Brahmā. Brahmā then hymns the Great Goddess as the power behind all things, petitioning her to release her grasp on Viṣṇu’s consciousness so that he may awaken and battle the demons, which she does. After battling Madhu and Kaiṭabha for five thousand years, Viṣṇu is unable to defeat them until the Goddess intervenes to delude them into offering Viṣṇu a boon. Viṣṇu accepts and requests as his boon that he should be able to kill them, which of course he does, restoring cosmic order by the grace of the Goddess. The DM hereby leverages the famous mythic motif of Viṣṇu slumbering on his cosmic couch in order to exalt unconsciousness as the work of the Goddess. It is her delusive power that lands Viṣṇu in his yogic sleep at the end of the age, and her illumining power which awakens Viṣṇu. To be the Goddess of all creation, she must embody dark and light alike. Drawing from Episode I (and corollaries in Episode III), this paper examines the extent to which the *Devī Māhātmya* pays homage to the Goddess’ power to delude. In according the power to occlude reality with an equally divine status as the power to illumine it, the DM tempers classical Hindu ideology to posit that māyā is as divine as mokṣa. Equally exalting embodied existence within the world of māyā and enlightened existence beyond its sway, the DM attributes consciousness and unconsciousness alike as attributes of the supreme Goddess.

Self-Care and Its Consequences in Early India

Caley Smith (Harvard)

*śrūyate dvividhaṃ śaucaṃ yac śiṣṭaiḥ paryupāsitam |
bāhyaṃ nirlepanirgandham antaḥ śaucam ahimsakam | (BDh 3.1.26)*

‘It is said that the purity which is achieved by the cultured elite is twofold. Outside, it is stainless and stenchless; Inside, purity is non-violent.’

The Vedic *yajña* was, among other things, a political event which promoted the *yajamāna* “sponsor of the sacrifice.” After the Vedic period, however, we see a host of new texts recommending practices not intended for elite patrons nor undertaken on their behalf, but instead for the sake of the individual ritual practitioner. In this talk, I will attempt to outline a genealogy of vulnerability of the self and practices of care for that self whose goals were prophylactic. This vulnerability appears already in the Vedic texts themselves, and is represented by the anxiety that priests, while sacrificing animals for their benefactors, were exposing themselves to certain reciprocal violence. A variety of solutions emerge in the post Vedic period, some we might categorize as forms of as askesis while others are more properly conceived of as hygienic practices. In so doing, my hope is to demonstrate that seemingly unrelated phenomena, for instance the Jain rejection of all violence, the Sāṃkhyā-Yoga essential dualism between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, and the Dharma traditions practices of ritual purification emerged out of a complex Late Vedic dialogue centered on the anxiety of reciprocity, culpability, and contagion.

A Unique Tamil Folk Epic Describes A Soma-Style Resurrection: For Its Twin (Aśvin-like) Heroes

Brenda Beck (Toronto)

Many say that the Vedic Aśvins have been forgotten in modern India, but evidence from a South Indian folk epic, along with its enactment through festival rituals, make it clear this is not so. First, the two heroes of this story comprise a complimentary set of twins. One is calm and concerned with cosmic well-being, the other focused on warrior power and dedicated to protecting the rights of his local community. Both men are horseback riders (echoing the Aśvins) and they proudly embody their mixed divine-human ancestry. These men are farmer-kings who control substantial tracts of land but are mere Shudras by social convention. As such they strive to raise their status to that of Kshatriyas. Near the end of this grand legend these two primary figures are accorded a ritual rebirth. The woman instrumental in achieving this transformation is their sister, a female who resembles the Vedic sister/wife of the Aśvins, Sūrya. The Vedic story parallels extend even further. With Vishnu's blessing, a wild boar is speared, echoing Emusa's story where Indra shoots a boar with an arrow. In the folk account the boar's carcass is quickly cut into large meaty chunks that are then offered to the gods on seven leaf plates. But the boar's head is set to one side (echoing the Aśvin story of exchanged heads) because it is made up largely of bone. Notably, Indra slays the Vṛtras with the bones of the horse head the Aśvins gave Dadhyanc and which Indra then cuts off and uses. In sum, severed heads are key in both story contexts. Furthermore, Varaha's three sons are punished and killed at Vishnu's request, but in the folk legend Vishnu does something different. There three sixteen year-old men are implicated in the boar's beheading. They are about to be punished by a wave of aboriginal hunters running at them to wreck revenge. To avoid that battle, Vishnu that makes the twin heroes believe they are killing forest hunters when really, they are just swinging their swords in the air. In Vedic terms, it is as if Indra believed he had just killed 99 Vṛtra enemies but in reality, does not eliminate any Vṛtras at all. In sum, the local epic uses Vedic themes but creatively champions lower class heroes. Soon, all three willingly die on their own sword points. But then an ascetic forest maiden climbs a pillar and delivers a soma-like liquid to them that she brings down from the sun. The heroes' sister uses this ambrosia to revive her brothers from death. Both heroes, plus their Dalit assistant, all stand up briefly to converse with her. Then, falling back into death, Vishnu arrives and quickly carries their "revived spirits" off to Kailasa. The heroes are now "twice-born" and deserving of added respect. This entire resurrection procedure described by this epic is reenacted annually, in a vivid festival context. Those rites have been photographed and the presentation will be illustrated with multiple unique images of this soma-elixir-related set of rebirth beliefs.

***Soma, Haoma, Amṛta* and Immortality: The Use of Ayahuasca Analogues in Antiquity**

Matthew Clark (SOAS University of London)

The *soma/haoma* extraction from plants is considered to be supremely sacred in the religious texts of both Zoroastrians (in the Avesta) and the Brahmins of South Asia (in the Vedas). Many dozens of theories concerning the botanical identity of *soma/haoma* have been proposed over the last 250 years. In several publications, including *The Tawny One: Soma, Haoma and Ayahuasca*, (Aeon Press, 2020) and *Botanical Ecstasies* (Psychedelic Press, 2021), it is argued that *soma/haoma* had psychedelic/entheogenic effects; and that it was never a single plant but was most probably a concoction of plants that acted as ayahuasca-like analogues. This was the nectar of immortality (*amṛta*). *Soma/amṛta* induced non-ordinary states of consciousness, which were central not only to Vedic religious practices in antiquity, but are also central to yoga and South Asian philosophy generally. It is suggested that experiences of timeless trance, an experience of *amṛta*, may be induced not only by psychedelic plants but also by yogic practices. The notion of *amṛta* may be said to lie at the root Vedic practices, yoga and Indian philosophy in general.

Sunday April 24th

Following the Path of Bodhi: Buddhahadra's *Caityagriha* at Ajanta

Marilyn Edwards Leese (Independent Scholar)

Ajanta's Cave 26 is famed as a noble testament to Buddhism. According to the c. late fifth-early sixth century donative record composed by the monk Buddhahadra—the patron of the *caityagriha*'s excavation— his gift was conceived as a “mansion” (*veshman*) for the Buddha. This paper explores motivations guiding Buddhahadra's endeavour and the relationship between his aspirations and themes portrayed within the cave's interior. Following upon work by Ajanta scholars such as Walter Spink, Richard Cohen, Rajesh Kumar Singh, Dieter Schlinghoff, Monika Zin and more recently, Vincent Tournier, the paper draws on a number of approaches—architectural, epigraphic, historical, iconographic and sculptural among them. In particular, it focuses on Ajanta 26's prominent depiction of the Buddha's *mahaparinirvana*. Consequently, it takes into account Ernst Waldschmidt's assemblage of Pali, Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese versions of the Digha Nikaya's Mahaparinibbana Sutta (notably read on-line during the past two years by Charles Li and his group of scholars), as well as fifth-century Chinese versions of the *Mahaparinirvana Mahasutra*. The paper thus represents an integrated approach toward uncovering patterns of conception and treatment within Ajanta 26—patterns that might speak to the patron's goal and its place in the development of Buddhist thought. Notably, this paper presents a case for considering the cave's interior sculptures as contributing to an essay on the nature of bodhi and its fruition. Positing that different areas of the cave convey different qualities of time and bodhi-consciousness, the paper suggests that the cave's sculptural program ultimately maintains that bodhi when realized, does not perish.

“Like a Lump of Salt in Water”: Trajectories of the Self in Some Early Upaniṣadic Dialogues

Ananya Vajpeyi (CSDS, Delhi)

I

In the Upaniṣads, questions of central importance are: What is the self, and how should it experience and negotiate its own existence and mortality? How should it relate to others, to the natural world, to society, and to the afterlife? How should it make sense of the web of relationships in which it is embedded; how should it deal with the body, its decaying home; how should it handle memory, dream, intuition, revelation – forms of knowledge pointing to space-time other than the here and now? Sometimes the quest is for a better life; at other times, for life to be better endured despite suffering. Or the seeker wonders if the apparent finitude of life may be transcended by some means. Identity, consciousness, death and immortality thus are at the heart of Upaniṣadic inquiry.

The archaic flavor of the language of the Upaniṣads, which hovers in an ambiguous zone between mantra, poetry and prose, and whose modes of sense and reference are often allusive rather than indexical, is as captivating to the modern reader as that which is sought to be conveyed. It is not just that imagery from the natural world enters into linguistic metaphors, but rather that nature itself is seen as a metaphor.

Of the different literary forms that appear in the Upaniṣadic corpus, two are striking: (i) the parable, and (ii) the dialogue between two characters. In the early Upaniṣads, we encounter a set of characters, some Brahmin, like the sages Yājñavalkya and Uddālaka Āruṇī; some Kṣatriya, like the King of Videha, Janaka, and some ambiguous, like Satyakāma Jābālī, who vacillates between Brahmin and Śūdra; Jānaśruti, who vacillates between Kṣatriya and Śūdra, or Raikva, a borderline Brahmin.

II

At least three female characters make their appearance – Gārgī Vācaknavī, Maitreyī, and Kātyāyanī – the latter two, wives of Yājñavalkya. It is in the stories about exchanges between these and other figures (like Uddālaka’s son Śvetaketu, or Satyakāma’s teacher, Gautama), that a world emerges “out of the myth-smoke”, historian John Keay’s description of the Vedic and post-Vedic period.

Olivelle lists different meanings of “Upaniṣad” – “connection”, “equivalence”, “secret”, “secret knowledge” and “hidden doctrine”. Upaniṣad is knowledge shared in an intimate setting, under conditions of proximity, by sitting close to someone and speaking together. The dialogues staged in many of the Upaniṣadic texts – between a king and sage, father and son, man and wife, teacher and student – reinforce this idea of knowledge that arises and is shared between people who are close to one another, both in space and in their relationships. This is not a revelation emanating from a source beyond our comprehension. It is knowledge imparted by those we are close to – our teachers, parents, partners, friends and children (sometimes also by our gods

and our rivals).

In this paper I choose specific conversations that occur in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and the *Chāndogya*: between Yājñavalkya and his wife Maitreyī, which occurs twice in the BU (2:4 and 4:5); between Yājñavalkya and Janaka, also in the BU (4:1-3); and between Uddālaka and his son Śvetaketu in the CU (2), reading all of this material closely for images and metaphors used. I then examine what kind of metaphysics, what picture of the self and its trajectory, in this world and the next, in body and mind, in wakefulness and sleep, emerges from these images.

Animal Images that Evoke Immortality: Urvaśī as an Aquatic Bird, from *Ṛgveda* X.95 to Kālidāsa's *Vikramorvaśīya*

Chiara Policardi (Milan)

As is well known, Urvaśī is an apsaras, the most beautiful of the women in the three worlds, and the protagonist of one of the most famous stories of love and separation in Vedic and Sanskrit literature, of which several variants are known. In the earliest attested version, a dialogic hymn in the *Ṛgveda* (X.95), Urvaśī states (X.95.9): “When a mortal, going to caress immortal women, mingles (with their bodies) amid their cries, as if by his intentions, like ducks they preen their own bodies” (*tá ātāyo ná tanvāḥ śumbhata svā*; translated by Jamison-Brereton 2014: 1550). The term here translated as “ducks” is *āti*, which according to Monier Williams means “aquatic bird”. The story of the two lovers is taken up in the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* (11.5.1.1-17), where the *Ṛgvedic* verses are embedded in narrative prose that illuminates the plot at several points. Here, after Urvaśī has seen Purūravas naked and disappeared, the king wanders through the world mad with grief. He thus comes to a lake where “apsarases in the form of water birds were swimming” (*apsarasa ātayo bhūtvā paripupluvre*, 11.5.1.4). Among them is Urvaśī, who recognises her former husband and decides to reveal herself to him along with her companions. The text thus alludes to a metamorphosis of the nymphs, who from aquatic birds take on human form so as to be recognisable to the king. Subsequently, Urvaśī appears in both epics and in various purāṇic texts, where it is often unclear whether references to the nymph’s water-bird nature are to be understood metaphorically or as descriptive hints at her aspect. Kālidāsa poetically elaborates on the dual nature of the apsaras, female and animal, in the play *Vikramorvaśīya*: through allusive games of metaphors, the poet paints Urvaśī with brushstrokes that leave room for the imagination. In one of the most eloquent images of the *Vikramorvaśīya*, Purūravas expresses his despair by declaring that the divine woman has torn his heart out of his chest, and she carries it away with her as she flies to his father’s heavenly realm, as a royal goose plucks a fibre from the tip of a broken lotus stem (*eṣā mano me prasabhaṃ śarīrāt pituḥ padaṃ madhyamam utpatantī | surāṅganā karṣati khaṇḍitāgrāt sūtraṃ mṛṇālād iva rājahaṃsī || VŪ 1. 18 ||*). The question arises whether Kālidāsa in this work intertwined conventional stylistic devices to express female beauty with the image of the nymph (and of the apsarases in general) present in the wider Indian narrative tradition (also oral). The identification of apsarases with aquatic birds, particularly migratory birds such as the majestic royal goose (*rājahaṃsa*, *Anser indicus*), is likely to derive from observation of the behaviour of such animals in the wild. As Dave (2005: 421) notes, “It is only the Flamingos, Cranes and the Geese that fly very high, almost at the level of the clouds”; these are birds that spend long periods

of time in the air, periodically returning to a particular location, which fits in well with female figures inhabiting celestial worlds who may nonetheless descend among mortals. Such an association, actually, is only one aspect of the well-known, very dense symbolism that in particular the *haṃsa* enjoys in Indo-Aryan literature. This paper aims to highlight an aspect of the figure of Urvaśī that has not received sufficient attention by scholarship so far: it will investigate how the allusion to the dual nature of a splendid woman and an aquatic bird is one of the privileged ways through which, diachronically in Indo-Aryan literature (in Vedic, Purāṇic and Kāvya sources), the incomparable celestial beauty of the apsaras and her immortal nature are evoked.

Bābul Morā: the Sufi Metaphor of Death and other Hidden Meanings in the Most Popular Ṭhumrī Composition

Marged Trumper (Alma Mater, Bologna)

My paper analyses the multi-layered meaning of perhaps the most popular *ṭhumrī* composition that has been sung by many well-known Hindustani music singers until today. Starting from the unusual bridal theme and family addressee in a romantic genre such as *ṭhumrī*, I will address the common explanations of the lyrics mostly as related to the historical figure of nawab Wajid Ali Shah (reign 1847-1856). The nawab, who is himself also commonly identified as the composer of this *ṭhumrī*, is credited for penning the lyrics at the time of his exile from Lucknow right before the first Indian rebellion against the British dominion known as the Mutiny (1857). Drawing from oral and written sources and my extensive research on the genre, I will discuss the strong Sufi component of this composition, especially in the symbolism of the bridal image, a typical metaphor for death in Sufi poetry, and how it is understood even by modern performers. After going through the already acknowledged meanings of the lyrical content I will consider an additional significance relating to the genre's most typical performers in history; courtesans. As this composition is already attested as a resistance repertoire associated with the last nawab of Lucknow, I will argue how the metaphor of death and the theme of departure found in this *vidāi gīt* (farewell song) inspired by folk songs for bridal rites also represent an example of covert resistance typical of courtesans' expression and not unique or new in their history, being them composers or only performers of such lyrics. Namely, I will consider how the association of these hereditary female musicians with Sufism, regardless of their creed or religious identity, and the creative use of Sufi themes of love and death in their music was part and reflection of their social fluidity and claim of agency, especially during historical crises.

Closing Keynote Address:

Sacrifice and Giving on the Narrative Path to Buddhahood

Naomi Appleton (University of Edinburgh)

This paper takes as its starting point the observation that, while tales of great bodily self-sacrifice are hugely common in Sanskrit *jātaka* literature, they are largely absent from the classical Pāli *jātaka* collection, the *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā*. The distinction is not

simply about Mahāyāna uses of *jātakas*, though certainly these do tend emphasise self-sacrifice as the paradigmatic deed of Śākyamuni Buddha on his long path to buddhahood. Non-Mahāyāna Sanskrit *jātakas*, and indeed Pāli *jātakas* outside the classical text, also celebrate such deeds, but the *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* takes another form of sacrifice – the relinquishment of family members – as paradigmatic instead. This lecture attempts to disentangle what might be going on here, including competing understandings of the *jātaka* genre, ritual and sacrificial frameworks, and the potentially different functions of the narratives themselves in relation to Buddhist practitioners.