The 48th Spalding Symposium on Indian Religions

April 21-23, 2023,
King's College London

'Lineage, Authority, & Schism'

Book of Abstracts

SCHEDULE

FRIDAY 21ST APRIL

Registration: 12.30pm-1.00pm
PANEL: Narrative Lineage Constructions in Early Hindu Literature 1.00pm-2.30pm
Sanne Dokter-Mersh (Leiden, Netherlands)
Purāṇic Influencers: Authoritative Lineages in the Bhaviṣyapurāṇa

Simon Brodbeck (Cardiff, UK)
'Taking Back the Disgraced Wife in the Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata'

15 minutes break

PANEL: Sikh Traditions of Authority, 2.45pm-5.00pm
Satnam Singh (Independent Scholar, Denmark)
Intellectual Authority in the Early Modern Sikh Tradition: A case study of Bhai Mani Singh

Julie Vig (York, Canada)
Imagining Early Modern Punjab in Gurbilās literature: Tensions, Affinities, and Conflicts

Nirinjan Khalsa-Baker (Loyola Marymount, USA)
Subjectivity, Sovereignty, and Authority in the Sikh Kirtan Renaissance

30 minutes break

OPENING KEYNOTE ADDRESS 5.30pm-6.30pm
Professor Tulasi Srinivas (Emerson College, USA) – ONLINE
The Lake of Fire: Water, Caste and Gender in India's Climate Apocalypse

SATURDAY 22ND APRIL

Postgraduate Panel 9.00am-10.30am
Arkamitra Ghatak (Heidelberg, Germany)
The Divine Mother as Vaishnava Guru: Female Leadership, Charismatic Authority and
Succession Dispute in the Nimbārka Sect in the early Twentieth Century

Imran Visram (Oxford, UK)
The Shi'a Imam as the Satgur: Religious Authority in the Satpanth Ismaili Muslim tradition

Tillo Detige (Bochum, Germany)
Successions of Sovereignty: Digambara Jaina Ascetic Lineages of Early Modern Western India

15 minutes break

PANEL: Constructing Authority on Texts, and Writing Texts on/for Authority, 10.45am-1.00pm
Nabanjan Maitra (Bard, USA)
Provincializing the Digvijaya: Jain Antecedents to Śankara's Rule at Śṛṅgeri

Rosina Pastore (Ghent, Belgium)
How does a King become a Philosopher? Jasvant Singh of Mārvāḍ (1626–1678) and his Vedāntic Writings

Avni Chag (SOAS, UK)
Sources of Schism Formations in the Svāminārāyaṇa Sampradāya

Lunch one hour (1pm until 2pm)

PANEL: Constructing Self-made Identity/Authority (1), 2.00pm-3.30pm
Taushif Kara (King's College London, UK)
The Imam between the Merchant and the King

Christine Marrewa-Karwoski (Columbia, USA)
The Political Dynasty of Gorakhpur's Godmen: The Nath Mahants, the Ramjanmabhoomi Movement, and a New Era for India

15 minutes break

PANEL: Constructing Self-made Identity/Authority (2) 3.45pm-5.15pm
Amanda Lucia (California-Riverside, USA)
'Self-styled God man': lineage versus criminality in media discourse

Jon Keune (Michigan State, USA)
Babasaheb's Heavy Mantle: Buddhism and Community Leadership after Ambedkar

15 minutes break

PANEL: Gender and Leadership, 5.30pm-7.00pm
Leah Comeau (Saint Joseph's, USA, and Hamburg, Germany)
Organic Leadership at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram: the Samadhi, the Mother, and her flowers

Dr Waithanji Mutiti (Gretsa, Kenya)
Patriarchy, Women and Leadership Contestations in Hinduism in Kenya

CONFERENCE DINNER (with ticket) – 7.30pm onwards close by King's College London

SUNDAY 23RD APRIL

Postgraduate Panel 9.00am-10.30am
Tushar Shah (Cambridge, UK)
'The Guru Never Leaves the Earth': Death, Transition and Continuity

Kirtan Patel (Texas, USA)
Politics of Piety: Schism, Sovereignty, and Obedience in Colonial Gujarat, 1870-1905

Lucy May Constantini (Open University, UK)
Evolutions in the Transmission of Kaḷarippayarr˘, a South Indian Martial Art

15 minutes break

PANEL: Tradition, lineage and succession, 10.45am-12.15pm
Jonathan Edelman (Florida, USA)
Lineage and Ontology: The construction of tradition and conversion in Hindu and Christian Scholasticism

Måns Broo (Abo Akademi, Finland)
Rupture and Reform of Succession: The Case of the Gauḍīya Maṭha

CLOSING KEYNOTE ADDRESS, 12.15-1.15pm
Professor Gwilym Beckerlegge, Professor of Modern Religions (Open University, UK)
From Gurus and Svāmīs to Workers, Trusts and Managing Committees

1.15-1.30 Closing discussion

1.30pm Conference ends

OPENING KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Professor Tulasi Srinivas (Emerson College, USA) [Online]
The Lake of Fire: Water, caste and gender in India's climate apocalypse

If water is life, as our popular understanding suggests, we ask what is a life *without* water? Highlighting the paradox between Hinduism's view of water as female, sacred and sentient, and the endemic pollution of water resources and climate- driven drought in contemporary Bangalore, India, this ethnographic and archival project considers the existential ethics at stake in apocalyptic climate change. Attempting to chart an ethics of repair to a world on the edge, the paper seeks to think about connections between anthropology and theology to deepen our understandings of climate justice, moving us towards an anthropology of grace.

CLOSING KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Professor Gwilym Beckerlegge (Open University, UK)
From Gurus and Svāmīs to Workers, Trusts and Managing Committees

In this paper I shall explore authority and leadership with reference to Hindu organizations that either were created or have taken their present form since the early nineteenth century, and in so doing offer some discussion of power, lineage, and schism. The paper will range over various Hindu organizations in India, some with a presence in the Hindu diaspora, during a period when changing legal requirements and expanding educational provision have been accompanied by the emergence of trusts and managing committees that have augmented the charismatic leadership of gurus and *svāmī*s.

      The paper will take as its main example Vivekananda's institutional legacy perpetuated by the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, which he created, and the Vivekananda Kendra, which was created several decades later by admirers of Vivekananda. As several scholars have acknowledged, certain features of the direction taken by the Ramakrishna Math and Mission have anticipated and influenced the course of development of other Hindu organizations. I shall examine how the Math and Mission have responded to internal and destabilizing challenges to their leadership in India, and in the Hindu diaspora to conflicts relating to succession and authority in Vedanta Societies when under the leadership of different *svāmī*s in the years after Vivekananda's death.

      Like the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, the Vivekananda Kendra also acknowledges Vivekananda as its inspiration and has been heavily committed to the provision of *sevā*. The paper's comparison of these two kindred organizations highlights, however, strikingly different understandings of the kind of organization necessary to be effective in Indian society and of the roles of guru and *svāmī*, a debate not simply about the nature of leadership and the exercise of power in a specific institution or situation, nor about alleged abuse of power, but rather about the nature and, possibly, the future of these roles.

Gwilym Beckerlegge has held professorial posts at the Open University, UK, where he is currently Professor Emeritus (Religious Studies), and at University College Cork, National University of Ireland. He has published extensively on Vivekananda's legacy, particularly the practice of sevā in the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and the Vivekananda Kendra, and has also written about popular Hindu iconography. Recent publications include studies of Sister Nivedita (in Bornet, ed, 2021) and the impact of the Vivekananda Rock Memorial at Kanniyakumari, now an increasingly popular tourist and pilgrimage destination, on perceptions of Vivekananda's mission and significance (Int Jnl of Hindu Studies 2022). Forthcoming publications include a study of 'engaged Hinduism' as this is understood by the RSS and the Vivekananda Kendra (Jnl of Dharma). He is currently editing Volume 5 Hinduism in the Age of Late Colonialism in the Bloomsbury Cultural History of Hinduism series to which he has contributed the Introduction. For fuller details, see Open Research Online http://oro.open.ac.uk/view/person/gtb2.html.

Satnam Singh (Independent Scholar, Denmark)
Intellectual Authority in the Early Modern Sikh Tradition: A Case Study of Bhai Mani Singh

The 18th century is popularly regarded as a chaotic period that witnessed the steady decline of the Mughal Empire and the Sikh community's political ascendance to kingship through military rebellion and conquest. Little scholarly attention, however, has been paid to the social methods of knowledge production, transmission of traditions and community consolidation within the Sikh community during this pivotal century of transition wherein the community, for the first time since its inception in the 15th century, had to survive and flourish without the guidance of a human Guru.

This research paper examines the enigmatic persona of Bhai Mani Singh (1644-1738, 94 years) who appears to have been a major contributor to consolidate the Sikh community in the chaotic post-human guru period. Intellectual authority and lineages of knowledge production in the early 18th century Sikh world is generally an understudied research subject in the western academia and a case study of Mani Singh may yield new insights into the formation and elevation of authority figures in a vulnerable period wherein the Sikhs had to construct new models of non-guru leadership in the absence of a living human Guru. Historical narratives portray Mani Singh as a devout Sikh, amanuensis of scripture, diplomat to governing Mughal authorities and a robust community leader during severe periods of schism as many aspirant individuals sought to establish themselves as Gurus and dominate the Sikh leadership vacuum. A close reading of narratives, colophons and genealogies in 18th and 19th century Sikh manuscripts and literature reveal that Mani Singh appears to have been a prolific educator for the early Khalsa Sikh community and the main source of information for many later authors who trace their scholarly lineages back to this esteemed scholar, thereby surpassing all other prominent Sikh intellectuals in the early modern period. The literature that emanated from the study notes of his students encompass such vast genres as hagiography and philosophy (Gurbilas Patshahi Chevi, Gurbilas Patshahi Dasvi & Gyan Ratnavali) exegesis of Sikh scripture and court poetry (Praya & Bhagat Ratnavali) as well as other miscellaneous genres that includes compilations of mantras and pujas etc.

Examining Mani Singh's career may contribute to current South Asian Studies scholarship by shedding new lights on, amongst other things,
• The development and elevation of new intellectual authorities in Indic traditions,
• Community formation and consolidation during periods of schism and power feuds,
• The nurturing of local intellectual milieus divorced from state and court patronage,
• Methods to conserve and monopolize knowledge through lineages tasked to preserve perceived normative traditions in response to rival gurus.
The paper works upon the scholarship of Pyara Singh Padam, Louis Fenech & Kamalroop Singh who are esteemed historians and scholars of the late 17th century Sikh world. Despite Mani Singh's impressive career, contemporary art and popular Sikh memory continue to limit Mani Singh's legacy into his final hours of martyrdom, celebrated and invoked daily across the globe during Sikh prayers. While he was alive, however, Mani Singh appears to have been the main intellectual authority to integrate and consolidate the dispersed and persecuted Khalsa community in the chaotic early 18th century Sikh world. Today, many orthodox and heterodox orders still trace their lineage back to this esteemed scholar-martyr.

My name is Satnam Singh and I am a 35-year-old Danish researcher with an MA in Cross-Cultural Studies from the University of Copenhagen (2013). I have been engaged in South Asian Studies and Sikh Studies since 2012 and I have published and delivered several papers across Europe and North America on the Sikh warrior and intellectual traditions. My research appears as chapters in books published by Brill, Routledge and Bloomsbury.

Julie Vig (York, Canada)
Imagining Early Modern Punjab in Gurbilās Literature: Tensions, affinities, and conflicts

Gurbilās literature—which means "the play or pastimes of the Guru"—refers to a collection of historical poems produced in the early modern period in Brajbhasha about the lives of the Sikh Gurus. One important point of contact between the Sikh cultural world and the wider landscape of Brajbhasha cultural field in early modern Punjab was with the Vaishnava world and more specifically, with the world of Krishna worship. The association between the Vaishnava and Sikh worlds in early modern Sikh literature has generated strong reactions and heated discussions among those today who perceive these worlds as distinct and unconnected. The eighteenth-century Gurbilās Pātshāhī Das, for example, has created uneasiness among some commentators, since its authors, Kuir Singh Kalal, fully embraces Guru Gobind Singh's association with the god Vishnu. Parallel controversy attends sections of the Dasam Granth as well, and figures more prominently (Rinehart, 2011). While Kuir Singh's gurbilās locates the Tenth Guru in a world which contains several Shaiva and Shakta images, it is his association with Vishnu and his depiction as an avatar of Vishnu that has caused most of the debates in Sikh historiography. In this paper, I examine the use of Vaishnava imagery in gurbilās literature by providing a close textual analysis of Vaishnava vignettes in three gurbilās texts: 1) the Gursobhā, attributed to Sainapati and completed ca. 1708; 2) the Gurbilās Pātshāhī Das, attributed to Kuir Singh Kalal (mid-to-late eighteenth century); and 3) the Prācīn Panth Parkāsh, attributed to Rattan Singh Bhangu (first half of the nineteenth century). These three texts, produced by authors not strictly united along religious, caste, and ideological lines, all interact to various extent with the Vaishnava world. The overall goal of this paper is to examine how the positionality of authors of gurbilās texts informs their discourses on the early Sikh cultural world and community (panth) and to interrogate how the points of tensions, conflicts, and affinities within these texts complicate how we imagine the Sikh past in broader terms.

Julie Vig is Assistant Professor of Humanities, Religious Studies, and South Asian Cultures at York University. Her research focuses on premodern Sikh and Punjabi cultural production and how it relates to wider cultural worlds and networks of premodern North India (c.1500-1850). Her particular focus is on gurbilās literature and its interactions with broader Brajbhasha literature in the early modern period. She also has secondary research interests in the reception of early modern Sikh texts in the colonial period and women, gender, and sexuality within the Sikh tradition. She is currently working on her first book tentatively called The Play of the Guru: Braj Historical Poetry in Early Modern Punjab.

Nirinjan Khalsa-Baker (Loyola Marymount, USA)
Subjectivity, Sovereignty, and Authority in the Sikh Kirtan Renaissance

In 2000 I began studying Sikh kirtan, particularly the drumming system (Amritsari Baaj) from a 13th generation exponent of the Gurbani Sangeet Parampara whose family had safeguarded and transmitted the tradition's spiritual-aesthetic knowledge since the Sikh Guru Era (1600s). While there are many cases of musical knowledge being passed within a family lineage similar to the gharana system, the Gurbani Sangeet parampara is also unique in that it is not a closed system, but rather accessible to all who are willing to become responsible custodians of Sikh intangible heritage. However, over the last century, this knowledge stream reached near-extinction due to British colonization, partition, and nationalist identity politics. The loss of performative and musical memory spurred a critical renaissance in the late 1980s to recover the remnants of Sikh's intangible knowledge contained in the musical heritage.

My extensive ethnographic research on this contemporary renaissance has revealed hermeneutic chaos within the revival due to divergent approaches with 1) reformist attempts to institutionalize and homogenize "classical" Sikh musical standards through the erasure of diverse practices, much like colonial-era religious reform; 2) nostalgic attempts to revive an ancient musico-aesthetic purity through the appropriation of "tradition" and creation of new histories; and 3) parampara attempts to preserve "uncolonized" knowledge, memory, pedagogy and practice that resist colonial and national attempts to homogenize, standardize, and appropriate Sikh (musical) identity.

In this paper I will examine differing notions of authority as they relate to Indigenous, imperial, institutionalized, and individualized conceptions of Sikh subjectivity and sovereignty. I will identify the tensions inherent in the movement between parampara - maryada and explore the rift at the heart of the revival of Sikh kirtan through Gerald Bruns' (1992) categories of authority of rule which coerce through power and force and authority of claim that "is not imperialized, cannot be institutionalized" (Bruns 211-12). This paper will argue that it becomes necessary to move beyond modern definitions of authority that rely solely on physical, temporal, and textual sources, to also acknowledge the intangible, spiritual, orally-aurally transmitted authority gained through embodied pedagogies and practices that have the potential to transgress hegemonic notions of authority altogether.

Nirinjan Kaur Khalsa-Baker, Ph.D., is Senior Instructor of Theological Studies at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, CA where she also served as Clinical Professor Jain and Sikh Studies and Acting Director Graduate Yoga Studies. For the last twenty years she has learned from 13th generation memory bearer of Sikh devotional music (Gurbani Kirtan) who honored her as the first female exponent of the Sikh drumming tradition (Amritsari baaj). Her ethnographic research and publications use a decolonial lens to explore Sikh knowledge systems through their pedagogy, philosophy, and practice. She currently serves as co-chair of the Sikh Studies Unit at the American Academy of Religion.

PANEL: CONSTRUCTING AUTHORITY ON TEXTS, AND WRITING TEXTS ON/FOR AUTHORITY

Avni Chag (SOAS, UK)
Sources of Schism Formations in the Svāminārāyaṇa Sampradāya

The Svāminārāyaṇa Sampradāya is one of the largest and most visible Hindu organisations across the world today. With its thousands of temples and community centres and millions of followers, the Svāminārāyaṇa Sampradāya represents one of the most distinctive and dynamic forms of contemporary Hinduism in India and the South Asian diaspora. However, it's shape and history is complex with several sectarian splits. Each denomination has distinctly interpreted the founder's teachings, and each claims to be the truest to the founder's own. In this paper, I explore the roots of these schism formations, which I understand to be embedded in different interpretations of leadership and succession. These interpretations rely on various sources of the tradition, or particular readings of them. By looking through the sources used by the different denominations in the tradition, it becomes increasingly clear that the authority placed on a text varies between the denominations. Commitments to texts and the commitments read from them, as well as the texts' positioning within a Svāminārāyaṇa textual canon are largely dependent on how these texts support a system of leadership and succession. My paper considers the authoritative place of texts in establishing religious and administrative practices, how textual canons take shape, what they include and exclude, and how even groups within a larger umbrella tradition like the Svāminārāyaṇa Sampradāya have different versions of a Svāminārāyaṇa textual canon.

Nabanjan Maitra (Bard, USA)
Provincializing the Digvijaya: Jain antecedents to Śaṅkara's rule at Śṛṅgeri

This paper sets out two principal objectives: by comparing specific rhetorical modes of asserting spiritual supremacy in Jain and Vedāntin narratives of spiritual conquests (digvijayas), the paper argues that, while the Vedāntins of Śṛṅgeri borrowed rhetorical strategies to assert their hegemony from their Jain antecedents, there are nevertheless a number of salient differences between the models of monastic governmentality that these two traditions promulgated. On the level of the specific, the paper compares identical rhetorics of universalization employed in Mādhava's Śaṅkaradigvijaya (a circa seventeenth century text chronicling the spiritual exploits of Śaṅkara, the purported founder of the monastic order at Śṛṅgeri monastery) with Jain inscriptions and texts drawn from contiguous regions in Karnataka in the four centuries that preceded the emergence of Śṛṅgeri as a center of Vedic religion. The paper draws out these salient differences between Jain and Vedāntin modes of monastic government by charting the trajectory of the monasteries' two vectors of dominance: the dominance of other religious schools, orders, and views, and the dominance of kingship. In so doing, the paper argues that, while Jain monastics in early second millennium Karnataka asserted their dominance of other sources of power–be these religious (as in the case of rival orders or religious viewpoints) or kingship–they did not develop a Jain model of power that sought to encompass and govern these other institutions. In simple terms, Jain monastics transcended sources of worldly power, but they did not subsume them. The non-dual (Advaita) Vedāntins, on the other hand, used the narratives and tropes of the digvijaya to bolster claims to the establishment of a universal Vedic order, which claimed to bring within its governance kingship as well as rival religious views, as long as they were appropriately rehabilitated into this Vedic order. Crucial to this view of monastic supremacy and governance was the sovereignty of the guru. The Śaṅkaradigvijaya marks one of the earliest sustained attempts to theorize the transcendent sovereignty of the gurus of Śṛṅgeri by constituting an unbroken tradition of monastic governance established at the site by Śaṅkara, the purported founder of the order. The most striking, and ignored, achievement of the Śaṅkaradigvijaya is that it renders in narrative terms the expansive vision of Vedic sovereignty

that was articulated in the corpus of scholastic texts produced by the monastery of Śṛṅgeri in the latter half of the fourteenth century. On this view, the guru, straddling the immanent and transcendent domains, embodies the Veda, which provides the blueprint for the model of monastic governance articulated and the implemented by the monastery. The paper examines how the Śaṅkaradigvijaya differs from its Jain antecedents in institutionalizing the transcendent sovereignty of Śaṅkara in the office of the guru of the monastery. Śaṅkara's biography, in particular his heroic campaign to absorb the disparate and often dissenting streams of Vedic orthodoxy under a single banner of Vedānta, thus serves as both a historic and eternally renewed assertion of Vedic sovereignty in the person of the guru.

Nabanjan Maitra is Assistant Professor in the Interdisciplinary Study of Religions at Bard College. His primary research project traces a genealogy of monastic power, ranging from experiments in monastic governmentally in medieval south India to modern day deployments of ascetic power.

Rosina Pastore (Gent, Belgium)
How Does a King Become a Philosopher? Jasvant Singh of Mārvāḍ (b. 1626 – d. 1678) and his Vedāntic writings
King Jasvant Singh of Mārvāḍ (b. 1626 – d. 1678), in present-day Rajasthan, was a significant political figure of North India in the early modern period. He is remembered, for example, for having fought against the future Mughal emperor Aurangzeb when he tried to overturn his father's rule in 1658/9. Jasvant Singh of Jodhpur was also a man of letters and dealing with philosophical topics is the singularity of the majority of his compositions. My project focuses on six of his texts, which have so far not been translated or studied extensively: the Ānanda Vilāsa; the Anubhava Prakāśa; the Aparokṣa Siddhānta; the Prabodha Nāṭaka; the Siddhāntabodha; the Siddhāntasāra. Looking even cursorily at these Brajbhāṣā writings, it is clear that the ideas presented lean towards a form of Vedānta. For this paper, I am interested, among others, in the following questions: did the king place himself in the Vedānta traditon-s and how? For example, did he mention his literary and/or conceptual inspiration-s? Are they detectable and to what extent? What about his teacher or other philosophical figures? What are the topics he was interested in and do they relate to the contemporary debates of Vedāntins?

This paper examines in particular the paratextual passages of the abovementioned works and the discursive strategies through which the king built his authority as philosopher. We know that the Kachvaha Jaisingh II (r. 1700–1743) was involved in theological disputes and religious patronage as part of a political strategy to project himself as an ideal Hindu king (Horstmann 2011). The major hypothesis is that, similarly, Jodhpur's sovereign aimed to build his spiritual authority as part of his self-fashioning as a perfect ruler. Kingship, then, is not only to be related to a warrior ethos.

From the perspective of the history of philosophy, this kind of analysis is crucial as it offers an exploration of Vedānta through understudied vernacular sources, in order to show how authors participated in the Vedāntic traditions with their works to reaffirm their ideas, challenge them, or to give their take about their meaning. Briefly, this paper contends as well that the production of philosophical knowledge in early modern times should be looked at also through these sources and not exclusively through Sanskrit knowledge systems (cf. Pollock 2011).

Rosina Pastore is FWO postdoctoral researcher at the Gent University. Since November 2022, she carries on her project "When the king does philosophy: the Vedantic writings of Jasvant Singh of Mārvāḍ (1626–1678)" in the Department of South Asian Languages and Cultures. She obtained her PhD in June 2022 from the University of Lausanne (Switzerland), with a thesis titled "Vedānta, Bhakti and Their Early Modern Sources: A Complete Translation of Brajvāsīdās's Prabodhacandrodaya Nāṭaka with a Critical Study of Its Philosophical and Religious Dimensions". Her research interests lie in early modern philosophical literature, concentrating on Vedantic traditions and their intersection with politics, religion and broader literary and cultural trends.

PANEL: GENDER AND LEADERSHIP

Leah Comeau (Saint Joseph's University, USA and University of Hamburg, Germany) Organic Leadership at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram: The Samadhi, the Mother, and her flowers

The Sri Aurobindo Ashram was founded in 1926. The central buildings of the Ashram are located in Pondicherry, South India, just steps from the beach and next door to the Arulmiga Manakula Vinayagar Temple. In addition to housing the main offices of the Ashram, this central campus is where spiritual teacher and prolific writer Sri Aurobindo and his collaborator Mirra Alfassa, known as the Mother, lived for many years before their physical deaths in 1950 and 1973, respectively.

My analysis will focus on the leadership of the Mother, a spiritual guru in her own right, especially during her embodied presence at the Ashram after the bodily death of Sri Aurobindo and before her own. I will focus on the following guiding questions: How is authority passed through and between two spiritual collaborators? Can spiritual leadership be (or, how is it) exerted through the use of organic material? And, to what extent can spiritual teachings be extended, memorialized, or embodied in something as beautiful yet transient as a flower?

During her residency at the Ashram, the Mother established a range of practices related to decorating the facilities with flowers, ascribing spiritual meanings to over 800 varieties of flowers, and distributing flowers to devotees. Upon Sri Aurobindo's physical death, the Mother also took great care to install the Samadhi in the Ashram courtyard. In the subsequent years, she established, monitored, and amended individual and community practices as they interacted with the Samadhi. Her material concerns included donation boxes, the use of fire and incense, and the selection and placement of flowers. At that time, she was both leading the Ashram community in its relationship to Sri Aurobindo and creating behaviors that would eventually be applied to her after her own bodily death. Today, their physical remains lie in repose in two separate chambers within the Samadhi which is decorated with flowers twice every day.

My presentation will explore both the embodied and non-embodied authority of the Mother (before and after her bodily death) as she established a culture of devotion through her flowers and at the side of the Samadhi. And, I will show that the contemporary life of the Samadhi and activities that take place in the courtyard today remain deeply tied to the Mother's views of flowers, nature, and religion.

Leah Comeau is Associate Professor of Religion at Saint Joseph's University (USA) and Principal Investigator at the Cluster of Excellence 'Understanding Written Artifacts' at University of Hamburg (Germany). She is the author of Material Devotion in a South Indian

Poetic World (Bloomsbury, 2020) and is currently writing a monograph about material religion and flower culture in South India.

Waithanji Mutiti (Gretsa University, Kenya)
Patriarchy, Women and Leadership Contestations in Hinduism in Kenya

This paper seeks to address the pertinent issue of leadership within the Hindu religious practice in Kenya. It seeks to explore whether Hindu religious leadership in the Kenyan context is hereditary, whether it is ascribed or contested. Using a multidisciplinary approach, the paper will utilize historical, sociological, and ethnographic methods to locate the place of women in leadership in the Hindu Kenyan context. The paper will also analyze the symbiotic relation between patriarchy and leadership within the Hindu society and context. Even though the woman holds a revered position in the Hindu culture and customs, there is need to establish why many ritualistic practices in Hinduism are headed by males, hence the patriarchal angle in the Hinduism leadership practices. The Kenyan Hindu population is as a result of a historical happening. It will be pertinent to assess the leadership in this diasporic context. For instance, have there evolved new forms of leadership in Hindu practices in the Kenyan context over the last century of existence in Kenya? Are the Hindu religious leaders in Kenya the same for all adherents, or do adherents follow and ascribe to different forms of leadership? In a nutshell, this paper seeks to assess how leaders are chosen or formed, how they are installed, and how leadership disputes are canvassed in the Kenyan Hindu context.

Dr. Waithanji Mutiti, PhD, Senior Lecturer in Religion, Gretsa University, Kenya

Taushif Kara (King's College London, UK)
The Imam between the Merchant and the King

This paper explores the question of authority in the modern Indian Ocean world through the intellectual history of one of its itinerant Muslim merchant communities: the Khojas. Drawing on a range of archives as well as visual materials, I show how ideas of messianism and sainthood combined with gendered notions of seva (service) as well as traditions of wealth redistribution rooted in caste in order to produce a new form of authority contained in the figure of the imam. The paper begins in the late nineteenth century by considering the relationship of the Khojas to the first Aga Khan. I demonstrate that the Aga and his heirs were compelled to map their authority out of rather than onto dynamic Khoja as well as Indian conceptions of sovereignty. Following decades of schism and tension, the figure of "the imam" finally crystallized in the early twentieth century not simply by tracing his genealogy to the Prophet or to Ali, but by erasing the differences between three forms of authority: the shah (king), the pir (saint), and the sheth (merchant-lord). I argue that the imam increasingly came to refer to a unity or triangulation of these three figures, one that was also delinked from territory for a dispersed oceanic trading caste like the Khojas. This unity functioned, I suggest, by bringing the figure of the shah closer to the merchant, and by making the guru or the Sufi pir more like a king, and in effect closing the gap between all three.

Taushif Kara is Lecturer in Modern Islam in the Department of Theology & Religious Studies at King's College London. He obtained his PhD from the Faculty of History at the University of Cambridge in 2021, where he was also a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Centre of Islamic Studies. His doctoral thesis, 'Abode of Peace: Islam, empire, and the Khoja diaspora (1866 - 1972)', received an honourable mention from the jury of the 2022 Bayly Prize, awarded by the Royal Asiatic Society to an outstanding thesis in Asian studies.

Christine Marrewa-Karwoski (Columbia, USA)
The Political Dynasty of Gorakhpur's Godmen: The Nath Mahants, the Ramjanmabhoomi Movement, and A New Era For India

Since the Gorakhnath temple complex's modern inception, the Nath mahants (leaders) of the Gorakhpur temple have been at the forefront of the Ramjanmabhoomi campaign. Scholars and journalists have written not only about the critical role that Mahant Digvijaynath (1934-1969) played in the placement of the Ram Lalla icon within the Babri Masjid (Jha 2012) but have also discussed the role that Digvijaynath's successor, Mahant Avaidyanath (1969-2014), had in the formation and leadership of two crucial Ramjanmabhoomi organizations: the Ramjanmabhoomi Mukti Yagya Samiti and the Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas Samiti (Rajagopal 2001, Gupta 2007, van der Veer 1987). In this paper, I examine the political role that the twentieth and twenty-first-century Nath mahants of Gorakhpur have played in the construction of modern India and, particularly, in the destruction of the Babri Masjid and the construction of the Ramjanmabhoomi Temple in Ayodhya.

Building on earlier conceptions of Nath yogic power or siddhis, Mahant Digvijaynath (1935-1969) asserted his political and religious authority by tying his position as leader of the temple to the divine powers of one of Gorakhnath temple complex's most respected and

renowned Yogi-Siddhas: Baba Gambirnath. However, while he harnessed popular conceptions surrounding yogic siddhis to garner power in the Gorakhnath temple complex, he positioned himself as a new type of political Yogi: a Rastra Yogi. In particular, Digvijaynath was crucial to the creation of the Ramjanmabhoomi movement and his successors, Mahant Avaidyanath (1969-2014) and Yogi Adityanath have followed in his footsteps utilizing the temple movement to embrace Hindu majoritarian politics and attempt to create a modern Hindu nation.

Christine Marrewa-Karwoski is an intellectual historian who works on the intersection of religion, identity, and politics in early modern and modern India.

PANEL: CONSTRUCTING SELF-MADE IDENTITY/AUTHORITY 2

Amanda Lucia (University of California-Riverside, USA)
'Self-styled God man': Lineage versus criminality in media discourse
In the past several years, the phrase "self-styled God man" has proliferated in Indian media and popular discourse. The phrase is usually used in conjunction with breaking news of the alleged or convicted criminal actions of a prominent guru. The frequency with which the phrase circulates suggests that the Indian public is becoming increasingly frustrated with the number of gurus who are believed to be manipulating their followers and using religion as a cover for criminal activity. This paper questions whether this signifies a rise in secularism in India (the dethroning of gurus in general), or merely the Indian public's attempt to separate true gurus from frauds.

I argue that the term "self-styled God man" calls into question the figure of the non-lineage guru and correlates his religious persona not only to fraud, but more explicitly to criminal behavior. In recent years, the phrase has been applied mostly to indicted – and largely convicted – gurus such as Nithyananda, Asaram Bapu, Daati Maharaj, Ram Rahim Singh, Shiva Shankar Baba, and Rampal, among others. Less frequently, it is used to challenge the authority of gurus with whom the speaker disagrees, such as Devkinandan Thakurji, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, or Sadhguru, or issued as a critique of religio-political governmental figures, such as Yogi Adityanath (MP, Uttar Pradesh). While these aforementioned gurus are mostly "headline stealing hyper-gurus" (Copeman and Ikegame 2008) with a global reach, the phrase is also applied to others who are quite local. In fact, sometimes this phraseology holds a connotation that the guru's local followers are more gullible and uneducated than the readership of the news media outlet, who more accurately sees the guru's fraud. As a series of gurus have been indicted and convicted in recent years, the phrase has mobilized a trenchant critique. In response, it has also generated substantive back-lash from staunch Hindus who see it as a form of anti-Hindu (and thus anti-national) aggression.

This paper analyzes the media circulation of this phrase: "self-styled God man" in efforts to reveal the ways in which it signifies a presumed correlation between lineage and authenticity, and inverted, an equivalency of non-lineage and fraud, or even criminality. Latent therein is the suspicion of the possibility of the spontaneous interruption of the sacred into the assumed fabric of the secular, what Max Weber understood as the "gift of grace" signifying charismatic leadership, or as Mircea Eliade imagined the hierophany, the spontaneous eruption of the sacred – or even the Hindu notion of the *avatār*, the manifestation of the divine on earth. The critical use of "self-styled God man" challenges the possibility of the eruptive sacred, and instead, with its secular gaze challenges those who would put themselves forward as specially charismatic,

sacred, or as *āvatars* (God men). The phrase "self-styled" conjures notions of production, performance, and fraudulent self-aggrandizement. It criticizes independent gurus, while simultaneously demanding religio-cultural context, including ethical systems of checks and balances like tradition, community, and lineage.

Amanda Lucia is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of California-Riverside. Her research engages the global exportation, appropriation, and circulation of Hinduism, with designated attention to global guru movements. She is author of White Utopias: The Religious Exoticism of Transformational Festivals *(2020), which analyzes yoga practice and the intersections of whiteness and religious exoticism among the "spiritual, but not religious" (SBNR) at global "transformational" events. Her previous publications include* Reflections of Amma: Devotees in a Global Embrace *(2014), and numerous articles. She is currently crafting a body of research on media representations of gurus, with particular attention to criminality and discourse.*

Jon Keune (Michigan State, USA)
Babasaheb's Heavy Mantle: Buddhism and community leadership after Ambedkar

The conversion of B. R. (aka Babasaheb) Ambedkar and some 400,000 followers in 1956 was a pivotal in the history of India and global Buddhism. Ambedkar invoked the Buddha's teachings to promote equality, fraternity, and liberty, which he argued was the original and essential dharma. Ambedkar's Buddhist vision was staunchly anti-caste, politically engaged, and oriented toward improving Dalits' material, social, and spiritual lives—all articulated in conspicuously modern terms. Seven weeks after converting, Ambedkar died, leaving behind a rough outline of doctrines, practices, and organizational structures. His followers have been working to flesh out and further realize his vision in ways that are decentralized, multi-threaded, politically charged, increasingly transnational, and connected to international labor-related migration. Questions about leadership naturally arise. A few followers call Ambedkar a bodhisattva; most intensely revere his writings. While respecting Buddhist monks' and nuns' spirit of self-sacrifice, exceedingly few Ambedkarites consider this as a relevant path for themselves. Through websites, Facebook groups, and weekly Zoom gatherings, Ambedkarites now gather and debate, which involves intellectual, social, and communicative leadership. Following Ambedkar's motto to "Educate, Organize, Agitate," they regularly promote education among community members and organize events that appear more social and political than religious in nature. I propose to explore what constitutes authority and leadership among Ambedkarite Buddhists today. The mantle of Ambedkarite authority is heavy with political significance, social concern, and economic awareness; no one wears it casually. Because its dimensions have an unusual cut—enfolding aspects of religion, spirituality, politics, and social work—this mantle of authority is difficult to put on and easy to slip off. Although emphatically Buddhist, this is not a traditional Indian religious formation. Ambedkar's Buddhism rejects many hallmarks of organized religion: it has practically no cosmology, orthodox lineage demarcation, expected rituals, or spiritually elite status. As an Ambedkarite engineer who I interviewed in Japan explained, "We converted to Buddhism, not Buddhist religion." Most Ambedkarites would chafe at the idea of an "Ambedkarite guru," since their discourse emphasizes disjunction with recent Indian society. Yet functionally, community leaders do emerge, usually linked to education and success in white-collar professions. My presentation draws on transnational fieldwork among Ambedkarites in Taiwan, Japan, India, Dubai, the UK, and the USA. This case study pushes

boundaries of sociological models for religious authority and its transmission to ask what constitutes a tradition and how authority operates in a diffuse environment. Is this a new religious movement, a nonmovement of semi-networked individuals, a collective organization, a socio-political identity, or something else? Acknowledging realities in India today, I focus on the Ambedkarites' transnational activity, in which cross-cultural translation and virtual modalities shape first- and second-generation migrants' lifeworlds. The transnational scope has special implications for how Ambedkarites identify leadership, and how they seek or eschew solidarity with non-Indian Buddhists. Cross-cultural encounter and international migration shift the fields in which leadership and authority are defined, as transnational Ambedkarites respond increasingly to challenges in new cultural contexts while negotiating their connections with communities in India.

Jon Keune is an Associate Professor in the Religious Studies Department at Michigan State University and a Fellow at the Max Weber Center for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies at the University of Erfurt. His earlier research was on social history, and Marathi literature in western India from 1500 onwards, especially caste and equality within bhakti traditions. His current work focuses on emergent networks among Ambedkarite, Taiwanese, and Japanese Buddhists that facilitate collaborative projects in Nagpur and transnational migration for education and work.

Sanne Dokter-Mersch (Leiden, Netherlands)
Purāṇic Influencers: Authoritative lineages in the Bhaviṣyapurāṇa

The *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa* is notorious for its continuous alignment with a new 'future' (*bhaviṣya*). It is one of the most extreme examples of Purāṇas as a living tradition. Topics vary from Saura worship to observances related to Gaṇeśa; from the inclusion of the Vetāla stories to descriptions of auspicious bodily characters of women. The Purāṇa as it has been published for the first time by the Veṅkateśvara press consists of four *parvans*, 'books'. There are various manuscripts of the *Brāhma-*, *Madhyama-* and *Uttaraparvan*. However, the text of the *Pratisargaparvan* (the third book in the edition) is based on just one manuscript about which very little information is known. This raises valid questions of authoritativeness. The content of the *parvan* is, nevertheless, fascinating. One of the interesting elements is the inclusion of three different lineages of teachers and their pupils. The first section relates nine pupils of Śaṅkarācārya (BhavP 3.4.11—13), such as Ḍhunḍhirāja, Bhairava and Bālaśarman. Śaṅkarācārya himself becomes a pupil of Rāmānuja (BhavP 3.4.14.85—119 and BhavP 3.4.21.64—65). The second section narrates eight pupils of Rāmānanda (BhavP 3.4.15—18), for example, Nāmadeva, Kabīra and Raidāsa. The final section contains thirteen pupils of Kṛṣṇacaitanya (BhavP 3.4.19—20), like Śrīdhara, Rāmānanda, Madhvācārya, Bhaṭṭoji Dīkṣita, Varāhamihira, Vāṇībhūṣaṇa and Jayadeva.

For this paper, it is not my aim to make a historical reconstruction of who lived where and who encountered whom. The text shows too many improbable scenarios for such study—after all, how could Varāhamihira have met Kṛṣṇacaitanya? Instead, I wish to investigate what the narrative purpose of these lineages might have been, by studying what we learn about the people mentioned and how this information is processed into a narrative, sometimes mythological, context. The lineages may seem miscellaneous at first glance, but are we able to find common denominators among the lineages, providing us with traces of particular traditions, places or periods? Having surveyed the people, I will focus on the three individual teacher-pupil lineages, analysing the role of the three teachers in this part of the text. What is the place of each of them, is there a hierarchy between them, and can we detect a tradition that the *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa* favours and promotes?

Sanne Dokter-Mersch holds a Postdoc position in the ERC funded project PURANA at Leiden University. She studies the composition and transmission of the Bhaviṣyapurāṇa*. She is specialized in Sanskrit, Purāṇa literature, classical Hinduism, in particular early Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism, Sanskrit manuscripts and mythological narratives. In 2021, she finished her PhD thesis, 'Revealing Śiva's Superiority by Retelling Viṣṇu's Deeds: Viṣṇu's Manifestation Myths in the* Skandapurāṇa*', in which she combined textual criticism with narratology to explore the adoption of narratives on Viṣṇu in a Śaiva Purāṇa.*

Simon Brodbeck (Cardiff, UK)
Taking Back the Disgraced Wife in the Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata

In the last chapter of the Harivaṃśa, which is the last chapter of the Mahābhārata, King Janamejaya's wife Vapuṣṭamā is sexually enjoyed by Indra at Janamejaya's horse sacrifice, when Indra takes the form of the suffocated stallion. Janamejaya initially renounces Vapuṣṭamā, but after listening to advice he takes her back, and they live happily ever after. This paper presents the story of Vapuṣṭamā as a commentary upon the story of Sītā in Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa, in which Rāma renounces Sītā due to public doubts over her sexual purity and is not able to take her back. Janamejaya's behaviour towards Vapuṣṭamā is compared with his behaviour towards the snakes, whom he sets out to annihilate but then spares. As well as comparing the stories of Vapuṣṭamā and Sītā with each other, the paper illuminates them with reference to the stories of Śakuntalā

and Draupadī, and with reference to the narrated futures of the royal lines (of Kakutstha and Pūru) into which these various women married.

Simon Brodbeck studied at the University of Cambridge and at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. He is a Reader in Religious Studies at Cardiff University, where he has worked since 2008. His books include The Mahabharata Patriline *and* Krishna's Lineage: the Harivamsha of Vyasa's Mahabharata. *His latest monograph is titled* Divine Descent and the Four World-Ages in the Mahābhārata – or, Why Does the Kṛṣṇa Avatāra Inaugurate the Worst Yuga?

Jonathan Edelman (Florida, USA)
Lineage and Ontology: The construction of tradition and conversion in Hindu and Christian scholasticism

The arguments of this paper are first, that a study of Indian and European scholastic lineages instructs how identity formation occurred by organizing an intellectual community, and second that these scholastics saw conversion as connected to concepts such as individuality and spontaneity. I begin by examining Jīva Gosvāmin's (sixteenth century) immediate and distal community, showing how he connected it to concepts outside itself and yet within a Vaishnava Hindu intellectual context in a manner similar to other scholastic types like Aquinas, Francis de Sales and Vedānta Deśika. I examine a few passages from these authors to show that their interventions could only exist after establishing their location within a larger intellectual structure, one that can be traced through lineage. The lineage further serves as the basis of and justification for interpreting texts within the tradition, and it establishes the position of the author in relation to the key people and divinities within their order of being. In the course of these descriptions I examine how readers outside the lineage are defined, and the ways that contemporary scholars rationalize their claims. By this comparative analysis, I ask the question as to whether scholastic reasoning is a form of therapy as in Greek philosophy, or if it is something different. In the second portion of this paper, I look at how Jīva and others discussed conversion as occurring within a layered ontology, from which I draw a comparison with concepts of sacred doctrine developed in Thomistic thought. To accomplish this I look at Aquinas on the sacra doctrina and I look at Jīva and other Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas on the yadṛcchā ("chance") doctrine. I connect this to a discussion on scripture and community: in theology the authority of scripture is often derived from the scripture's ontological status as the inerrant and eternal truth, which has led scholars to focus on apprehending the content of texts, and to examine the history of the causes and conditions that produced them. And yet the study of history reveals that what we call scripture is, "primarily a relational category, which refers not simply to a text but to the text in its relationship to a religious community for whom it is sacred and authoritative" (Holdrege 1996: 4). In conclusion, I revisit lineage in relation to categories in the study of religion like order, structure, and inclusion; and I revisit conversion to draw comparisons among scholastics on the differences between narrative and philosophy.

Jonathan Edelmann, Assistant Professor, University of Florida, Department of Religion.

Mans Broo (Abo Akademi, Finland)
Rupture and Reform of Succession: The case of the Gauḍīya Maṭha

In this paper, I will look at the case of succession after Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī (b. Bimalā Prasāda Datta, 1874-1937), the charismatic founder of the Gauḍīya Maṭha. After the founder's passing, a successor was duly appointed, but litigation, disenchantment and schisms eventually split the Gauḍīya Maṭhs into dozens of separate institutions, the founders of which used a whole range of strategies to avoid similar splits after their own passing -- often with little success. On the basis of this complicated case of succession, I will revisit Weber's famous opinion on the institutionally inherent instability of charisma, but also contrast this movement with others that did not fracture in the same way, such as the Ramakrishna Movement or the BAPS movement.

Måns Broo is a senior lecturer in the study of religions at Åbo Akademi University, Finland. His research has mostly focused on Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, both in history and in the present. His most recent publication is the first volume of a critical edition and annotated translation of the 16th century ritual text Haribhaktivilāsa *(Brill 2023).*

Tushar Shah (Cambridge, UK)
'The Guru Never Leaves the Earth': Death, transition and continuity

Pramukh Swami Maharaj, guru of the BAPS Swaminarayan tradition for 45 years, passed away on 13th August 2016. In the following days, two significant events took place. First, a special prayer assembly took place, wherein a letter written by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 2012 was opened. It named Mahant Swami Maharaj as his successor. Millions flocked to the small village of Sarangpur, in Gujarat, to have darshan of Pramukh Swami's body before his final rites took place on the 16th. The next morning, the new guru, Mahant Swami Maharaj, took centre stage to perform his daily puja while thousands did darshan of, and began to forge a new relationship with, their new guru. Emulating Orianne Aymard's study of the death of Ma Anandmayi, this paper considers the passing of one guru, and transition to the next, in the BAPS Swaminarayan tradition from two perspectives. First, I consider the guru's perspective—what I call the institutional perspective—where I explore the theological system of the tradition through its texts and authorised narratives of revelation that legitimise the guru lineage. Secondly, through interviews with practitioners, I survey death and transition through the perspective of the devotee. Here, I present the multiplicity of ways in which devotees came to terms with the unique and momentous juncture. I evaluate the boundaries between these two perspectives by analysing the impact each has on the other and critical points of crossover. For example, on the one hand, how narratives about the new guru are revealed to and shared with devotees, and, on the other, the varying successes of devotees to grasp and imbibe the theology of the guru. With reference to scholarship on the passing of gurus, I then consider the wider implications of transition from one guru to the next in terms of charisma, institutionalisation, continuity, and stability.

Tushar is a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Divinity at the University of Cambridge. His thesis focuses on the notion of the guru in the BAPS Swaminarayan tradition. He is currently Visiting Lecturer at University of Roehampton teaching undergraduate and postgraduate modules in Asian religions and theories of religion.

Kirtan Patel (Texas at Austin, USA)
Politics of Piety: Schism, Sovereignty, and Obedience in Colonial Gujarat, 1870-1905

In 1905, a Gujarati Hindu monk and scholar, Shastriji Maharaj, left the Vadtal gādi (seat) of the century-old Swaminarayan Sampraday. This was the first major schism within the tradition and perhaps one of the most significant, shaping not only the Swaminarayan Sampradaya but Hinduism in Gujarat, the Indian Ocean world, and subsequently the global Indian diaspora. This paper examines the prehistory of the schism and particularly the relationship between sovereignty, space, and obedience. Firstly, it demonstrates how religious powers of the Vadtal faction of the Swaminarayan sampradaya defined their sovereignty in geographical terms. When Shastriji Maharaj and other monks made the low-caste tailor, Pragji, their guru, religious authorities within Vadtal restricted their movement, temporarily excommunicated them, and split the community across Gujarat, Maharashtra, and northern India, to maintain "order". They conceptualised sections of Gujarat and Northern India as part of their religious territory within which they could control movement and settlement. Using theories of sovereignty, I explore how disobedience is managed and order maintained within religious formations . Second, I illustrate

how letters of devotion, despair and desire written by Pragji and his disciples across regions during this period represent miniature acts of resistance as they negotiated obedience and determined moral conduct when mobility and physical association was restricted. Sectarian clashes over authority and spiritual succession mean we need to explore how difference and conflict within nineteenth-century sects contribute to different forms of sovereignty, spatial-ordering, and boundary-negotiating.

Kirtan Patel is a PhD Candidate in History at the University of Texas at Austin. His research explores sectarian religion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries across the Indian Ocean World through frameworks of sovereignty, migration, moral economies and geographies. His research has been supported by the American Historical Association, the History Department, College of Liberal Arts and British, Irish and Empire Studies at the University of Texas at Austin.

Lucy May Constantini (Open University, UK)
Evolutions in the Transmission of *kaḷarippayaṟṟ˘*, a South Indian Martial Art

Kaḷarippayaṟṟ˘ is a martial art with an allied medical system from the Malabar region of the modern state of Kerala in South India, practised within a ritualised temple environment. A kaḷarippayaṟṟ˘ gurukkaḷ (lineage-holder) carries the responsibility for preserving and transmitting the system, and regardless of any reverence for inherited manuscripts, the final authority of a kaḷarippayaṟṟ˘ lineage is said to reside in a gurukkaḷ's body and practice. Knowledge is traditionally transferred somatically through a guru-śiṣya paramparā, (teacher-student transmission) of progressive initiations, with its near-complete form only given to a gurukkaḷ's inheritor. Even then, a portion of this was historically withheld, with the recipients of gurukkaḷs' authority exhorted to re-discover the missing knowledge for themselves. Aside from such tests, other challenges to lineage transmission arose from kaḷarippayaṟṟ˘'s fragmentation and erosion between its medieval heyday to its near-disappearance by the end of the nineteenth century. Its twentieth century revival emerged from the schism wrought between colonialism and the changing nature of warfare and politics in the region. Kaḷarippayaṟṟ's modern re-emergence made novel use of performance, and with the advent of social media favouring performative tendencies and increasing a focus on external and spectacular qualities, some traditional gurukkaḷs fear that other important aspects of kaḷarippayaṟṟ˘ are now disappearing as a consequence.

This paper draws on extensive ethnography, along with the study of lineage texts, to examine what aspects of kaḷarippayaṟṟ˘ are felt to be in danger of dilution or loss in transmission. I discuss what remedies traditional masters see as safeguards against this, in the light of contemporary social and economic pressures rendering historical forms of transmission ever-harder to fulfil. I ask what it is to hold and pass on authority in an embodied practice where texts are secondary, whose lineage is transmitted through direct somatic experience, and I question how this may reflect on our understanding of the relationship between text and practice in fields where that connection, where it existed, has ruptured. Finally, I consider the role my ethnography plays and its imbrication in transmission, noting that as I observe, practise and record, I am implicitly bound up in the change and continuity of my initiated lineage.

Since 2010 I have spent nine extended periods of study and training at CVN Kalari at East Fort in Thiruvananthapuram, and so my ethnographic data is concentrated on this lineage and kaḷari. However, in July 2022, I spent some weeks visiting different Malabar-style kaḷaris in

northern Kerala, filling in the wider landscape of the kaḷaris and giving context to my fieldwork.

Lucy May Constantini's PhD at the Open University explores the relationship between practice and textual traditions in kaḷarippayarr̆, funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council's Open-Oxford-Cambridge Doctoral Training Partnership. This interdisciplinary research encompasses ethnography, drawing on a relationship since 2002 with CVN Kalari Sangham in Thiruvananthapuram, where she has spent roughly 24 months over several intervals, and the study of manuscripts in Malayalam and Sanskrit. In April and August of 2022, Lucy studied kaḷarippayarr̆ manuscripts under the guidance of SAS Sarma at the École française d'Extrême-Orient in Pondicherry. Her methodology is informed by her background in dance and somatic practices, where her work investigates the confluence of her praxes of postmodern dance, martial arts and yoga.

Arkamitra Ghatak (Heidelberg, Germany)
The Divine Mother as Vaishnava Guru: Female leadership, charismatic authority and succession dispute in the Nimbārka Sect in the early Twentieth Century

The proposed paper will focus on Sobhā Mā (1921-2004), the female guru of the Nimbārka Vaishnava sect who was well-known as a spiritual leader in late twentieth century South Asia, although her career as a saint began well before the end of colonial rule. She was born in a non-Brahmin affluent family from east-Bengal who were worshippers of the mother-goddess (Śākta) before being initiated into the Nimbārka order by the 55th Mahant of the sect, Swami Santadās. She acquired considerable fame at the age of sixteen in Bengal for her spontaneously acquired spiritual wisdom and soon declared herself as a successor to her guru, Swami Santadās.

I would show in the paper how Sobhā Mā's claim to guruhood was challenged by orthodox sections of the Nimbārka sect within which the chain of transmission of spiritual authority or the Guru paramparā had predominantly been composed of male ascetics of Brahmin origin till the early twentieth century. I argue that the dispute reveals the ambivalence of orthodox members of the sect towards accepting women as spiritual leaders. I will be comparing Sobhā Mā with Gangā Mā, a senior contemporary of hers who was the widowed niece of Swami Santadās and also became a female guru of the sect. Through such a comparison, I will show that the spiritual authority of Sobhā Mā was contested on grounds of not only her gender but also her non-Brahmin caste background as well as lack of a reputation as a scholar and rigorous ascetic which Gangā Mā enjoyed within the Nimbārka circles.

I will proceed to argue that Sobhā Mā generated legitimacy for her claim as a Nimbārka guru through her association with the Divine Mother which bolstered her charismatic authority. Drawing upon elements from her Śākta background which strengthened her identification with the goddess Kālī, Sobhā Mā fashioned herself into a divine mother to her disciples, offering them miraculous protection, nurture and love, as well as moral and spiritual guidance towards self-realization in her capacity as the Guru. She also redefined the concept of guruhood within the Nimbārka sect by combining it with 'spiritual motherhood' which became the predominant mode of her charismatic authority and leadership.

Such charismatic authority also enabled her to bring about ritual innovations like including Śākta scriptural and ritual traditions alongside customary Nimbārki rituals among the regular observances performed in her Āśram and among the community of her followers. I will also show how she made strategic use of her non-Brahmin origin to reject and modify

Brahminical injunctions of the Nimbārka sect within her order.

Arkamitra Ghatak is a Doctoral Student at the Department of Cultural and Religious History of South Asia in the South Asia Institute, Heidelberg University. The tentative title of her project is "The Female Guru as Jagat-jananī: a Transcultural History of Universal Motherhood in Twentieth Century South Asia". Her project is funded by the DAAD Scholarship under the Graduate Programme of Transcultural Studies at the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies. Her research interests include global history of religion with focus on questions of gender and caste and South Asian intellectual history.

Imran Visram (Oxford, UK)
The Shi'a Imam as the Satgur: Religious authority in the Satpanth Ismaili Muslim tradition

This paper sheds light on structures of religious authority in the Indian Ismaili Muslim tradition by analyzing specific songs of the Satpanth genre. The Satpanth (lit. True Path) is a spiritual path—dharma, mārga, or tarīqah—that is associated with a line of Persian poet-saints who flourished during the northern medieval Bhakti movement, from the fourteenth century onward. The teachings of these poet-saints are preserved in a canon of songs that are known as the gināns (lit. knowledge). The lyrics of ginān compositions often infuse Sanskritic myths and symbols with Islamic ideas and popular stories. These songs are regarded as sacred by the Ismailis of the subcontinent, who continue to recite them and who attribute them to a list of authoritative pīrs.

Similar to several Sufi traditions, the teachings of the Satpanth Ismaili tradition are disclosed to adherents through channels of knowledge governed by key figures of religious authority. By examining the lyrics of specific gināns that Ismailis continue to recite, I discuss in this paper how the Satpanth Pīrs continue to live on in the collective memory and voices of South Asian Ismailis, and how the songs they composed reinforce the Ismaili belief in the need for a living Imam. Most importantly, I elucidate how the pīr in the Satpanth Ismaili tradition is understood to be a gateway to Muhammad's religion, and to the Shi'a Imam. And the Shi'a Imam—who is the bearer of the hidden (*batin*) mysteries of religion—is the True Guide (*satgur*) that provides adherents with knowledge of the True Path (*satpanth*) to God.

Imran Visram is a doctoral candidate in theology and religion at St Antony's College, University of Oxford. His doctoral research examines how Satpanth literature has been preserved by Ismaili Muslims into and over the twentieth century. Imran's broader research interests include Indo-religious mythology, Muslim devotionalism in South Asia, and the revival and regeneration of living, oral traditions.

Tillo Detige (Ruhr-Bochum, Germany)
Successions of Sovereignty: Digambara Jaina ascetic lineages of early modern Western India

The emblematic ascetic ideal of the Digambara Jaina tradition is that of the *muni*, a fully-initiated, itinerant, naked and quasi possession-less, male renouncer. Yet for most of the second millennium CE, the Digambara mendicant traditions instead consisted of teacher-pupil lineages of *bhaṭṭāraka*s who at least from the Mughal era (1526-1857 CE) onwards were clothed and more sedentary. Throughout the early modern period (1400-1800 CE), the Mūlasaṅgha and

Kāṣṭhāsaṅgha *bhaṭṭāraka* traditions saw repeated bifurcations, their seats (*gādī*, *paṭṭa*) coming to be established in towns throughout Western India, often associated to specific castes. This seeming spectacle of ascetic lineages for centuries led by individuals whom the tradition itself regarded as less than ideal renouncers brings up questions of authority and legitimatisation. Some answers can be gleaned from recent research on textual and material sources including song compositions, consecration manuals, *paṭṭāvalī*s or lineage lists, manuscript colophons, and memorials. While scholarship long conceived of the early modern *bhaṭṭāraka*s as 'administrator-clerics' or at most 'semi-ascetics', it is now clear they were perceived and venerated by their devotees as fully-fledged, ideal renouncers. In the late medieval period, the *bhaṭṭāraka* rank had been inserted atop the Digambara ascetic hierarchy, above the previously paramount *ācārya*. *Bhaṭṭāraka*s led ascetic *saṅgha*s which up to respectively the first half of the 17th and the late 18th century CE also included *muni*s and *ācārya*s, ranks hitherto thought to have disappeared already in the Sultanate period (1206-1526 CE). Instead of the postulated, sudden and singular switch from lineages of naked, itinerant *ācārya*s to those of clothed *bhaṭṭāraka*s, the observed changes in Digambara asceticism represent a much longer spun-out historical process consisting of a number of discrete developments. At the same time, several practices of the *bhaṭṭāraka* communities closely resemble those of the contemporary Digambara *muni saṅgha*s. This applies especially to the ritual veneration of both living and deceased *bhaṭṭāraka*s, the consecration rituals of new *bhaṭṭāraka*s, and lay communities' close engagement in their selection and appointment. The prevalent historiography of the so-called '*bhaṭṭāraka* era' as a distinct phase of Digambara history and the preconceptions of *bhaṭṭāraka*s as 'corrupted priests' or ritualists depended on multiple factors. These include colonial and Orientalist teleological tropes, an only partly correct understanding of contemporary South Indian *bhaṭṭāraka*s as temple managers prematurely projected on their early modern, North Indian counterparts, and an uncritical understanding of the contemporary Digambara *muni*s as 'forest-dwelling' ascetics, oblivious of their similarly deep engagements with lay society. Earlier scholarship presumed that the bifurcation of *bhaṭṭāraka* lineages depended either on individual *bhaṭṭāraka*s' charisma or on dissent among their pupils. Mapping the history of the *bhaṭṭāraka* lineages to imperial and regional political histories however indicates that a key factor in the relocation of *bhaṭṭāraka* seats and the bifurcation of lineages often was the arising of new opportunities at flourishing Sultanate, Mughal, and local kingdoms' capitals and trade centres. *Bhaṭṭāraka*s were lords at court interacting with other religious and secular polities.

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