

Śākta Traditions Symposium II

Friday 1 June 2018

OCHS Library (10.00-13.15) and Campion Hall (15.00-18.00)

Hinduism cannot be understood without the Goddess (Devī/Śakti) and the goddess-oriented Śākta traditions. The Goddess pervades Hinduism at all levels, from aniconic village deities to high-caste pan-Hindu goddesses to esoteric, tantric goddesses. Nevertheless, these highly influential forms of South Asian religion have only recently begun to draw a more broad scholarly attention. Taken together, they form 'Śāktism', which is by many considered one of the major branches of Hinduism next to Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism. Śāktism is, however, less clearly defined than the other major branches and sometimes surprisingly difficult to discern from Śaivism in its tantric forms. These sometimes very complex and challenging forms of Śākta religion provide a test case for our understanding of Hinduism and raise important theoretical and methodological questions with regard to the study of religious traditions in South Asia.

The Śākta symposia series at the OCHS include state-of-the-art contributions by a number of scholars to the Śākta Traditions research project (saktatraditions.org) and its endeavor in tracing developments in the history of goddess worship in South Asia among the orthoprax brahmins, among the tantric traditions and at village level. Thus, the symposia act as historical explorations of distinctive Indian and Nepalese ways of imagining God as Goddess (and goddesses) contributing to a survey of important origins and developments within Śākta history, practice and doctrine in its diversity as well as offering an insight into the fascinating Śākta religious *imaginaire* and ritual practice that is distinctive and sets 'Śāktism' apart from other forms of South Asian religion. The symposia will also include contributions on the reception history of Śākta and tantric elements in global religious history and diaspora Hinduism.

Programme

10.00-13.15 Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies (<http://www.ochs.org.uk/>)

13-15 Magdalen Street, Oxford, OX1 3AE (Tel: 01865 304300)

10.00-10.15 Welcome by Professor Gavin Flood (Oxford)

10.15-11.00 Dr Bjarne Wernicke-Olesen (Oxford): *Mapping Śākta Traditions*

11.00-11.15 *Tea and biscuits*

11.15-12.15 Professor Knut Jacobsen (Bergen): *Tamil Śākta traditions in Europe*

12.15-13.15 Dr Astrid Zotter (Heidelberg): *Durgā and the Kings of Nepal*

13.15-15.00 *Lunch*

15.00-18.00 Campion Hall (<http://www.campion.ox.ac.uk/>)

Brewer St, Oxford, OX1 1QS

15.00-15.15 Campion Hall small tour with Professor Gavin Flood

15.15-16.15 Dr Silvia Schwarz Linder (Leipzig): *The Doctrinal Teachings of the Tripurārahasya*

16.15-16.30 *Tea and biscuits*

16.30-17.30 Dr Julian Strube (Heidelberg): *Modern Śākta Identities in a Global Context*

17.30-18.00 Jesper Moeslund (Aarhus): *Philosophy as a Meta-language in Tantric Studies*

ABSTRACTS

Mapping Śākta Traditions: On the State of the Art and Conceptual Modeling in the study of Hindu 'Śāktism'

Bjarne Wernicke-Olesen

This paper will go up from the particular and examine some of the challenges we face regarding an emic working model of what we refer to as 'Śākta' and 'Śāktism'. With research history and conceptual history as the point of departure an example will be given of how such a model and definition could be formulated, relating textual details with metatheoretical questions and the *longue durée* of the history of Śākta traditions. The aim of this paper is therefore to discuss and provide a model of how we can begin mapping the particularity of the text and fieldwork with bigger issues and problems in the study of the history of religious traditions in South Asia. Finally, the usefulness of a better working model and definition of Śāktism is suggested by showing how such a model backed by new research presents a solution to some of the old problems formulated by André Padoux concerning the relationship between Śāktism and tantra.

Dr Bjarne Wernicke-Olesen is a Research Lecturer at the centre and teaches courses and tutorials in Sanskrit, Pali and Indian religions at the OCHS and at the Theology and Religion Faculty, University of Oxford. He is the leader and manager of the Śākta Traditions research project at the OCHS together with Professor Gavin Flood and the founder of the OCHS research office in Kathmandu. His main areas of research include Śāktism, tantric traditions, yoga and asceticism. He has published a number of books and translations and conducted fieldwork in Nepal.

Tamil Śākta traditions in Europe: The Worship of Thurkkai Amma in Hindu Temples in Norway

Knut A. Jacobsen, University of Bergen

This paper presents the worship of the goddess Thurkkai/Durgā in Hindu temples in Norway. Hindus in Norway are mostly from Punjab and Tamil Eelam and Thurkkai/Durgā is the most popular goddess in both these regions of South Asia. The paper focuses in particular on three Eelam Tamil temples in the capital Oslo, and the different constellations of mūrtis and their worship. The focus in the temples is on Thurkkai as mother, and on the relationship of mother and son. Śiva has only a minor presence in the temples and the paper discusses whether the focus of the temples are on the independent Goddess (Devī) rather than on Śiva's power (Śakti).

Professor Knut Axel Jacobsen is a Norwegian scholar of the history of religions and professor at the University of Bergen. He has a PhD from the University of California, Santa Barbara, and has been professor at the University of Bergen since 1996. Jacobsen's main areas of research include Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Pilgrimage in South Asia, and South Asian religions and migration. He is the founding editor and editor-in-chief of the six volume Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism (2009–2015) and editor-in-chief of the Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online.

Durgā and the Kings of Nepal: Goddess Worship on Dasāī

Astrid Zotter

The period of the autumnal Navarātra has formed a culmination point for worshipping goddesses through and for Nepalese kings. With the rise of the Shah dynasty from the 18th century onwards and

the attending state building process this festival, commonly known by its Nepali name Dasaī, grew into the state ritual *par excellence*.

This contribution will focus on the situation in Kathmandu Valley where in 1768/69 the Shahs ousted the earlier Malla kings from power. The Shahs took over the earlier dynasty's palace(s) and with it the royal goddesses residing there. Though broadly speaking, the two royal houses in question had common religious affiliations—their Brahmins following the same Vedic school and their court religions centre-staging the worship of female divinities according to Tantric liturgy—they promoted distinct ritual practices and relied on different ritual specialists. In remodelling the courtly Navarātra rituals to cope with the new political situation two seemingly opposing and yet interwoven tendencies seem to have been at work. Though new goddesses, specialists and rituals were introduced, the pre-existing ones were partly or entirely left in place, the two sets being tied together by recalibrating each of them. Such processes become evident when engaging with texts dealing with the pragmatic dimensions of religion, including ritual handbooks, court diaries and historical documents on the logistics and organisation of the rituals. Goddess worship there appears as a primarily practical concern, in which it is meaningful who is sponsored by whom to worship which form of the goddess where, when and how. Apart from the question of how the Shahs' Navarātra ritual built upon that of the Malla kings the paper will also look at practical and administrative steps taken to impose the celebration of Dasaī on all subjects and indeed advance it as an integration measure in the rising national state.

Dr Astrid Zotter studied Indology and Religious Studies at Leipzig. She has been doing research on Hindu traditions in the Kathmandu Valley (Nepal), combining textual studies with fieldwork. Her research and publications deal with topics such as the use of flowers in worship, life-cyclic rituals, and festivals. Currently she is a post-doctoral researcher and the deputy leader of the research unit "Documents on the History of Religion and Law of Premodern Nepal" at the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

The Reformulation of the *svātantryavāda* and *ābhāsavāda* in the Doctrinal Teachings of the *Tripurārahasya*

Silvia Schwarz Linder

The aim of this paper is to highlight a specific, crucial element of the teachings of the *Tripurārahasya* (TR) ("The Secret [Doctrine] of [the Goddess] Tripurā"), a Sanskrit work of South Indian origin, probably composed between the 12th and 15th century and associated with the Tantric Śākta religious tradition of the Śrīvidyā.

The element in question is the reformulation, to be found in the TR, of the Pratyabhijñā twofold doctrine known as *svātantryavāda* and *ābhāsavāda*. According to this doctrine the world is an image reflected (*pratibimba*) in the mirror of the divine luminous Consciousness which, on account of her reflective awareness (*vimarśa*) and her sovereign freedom (*svātantrya*), projects the reflection of the world within herself as her own manifestation (*ābhāsa*).

By examining the relevant passages from both the *māhātmyakhaṇḍa* and the *jñānakhaṇḍa* (the two extant sections of the work) in light of the evidence of the sources of Kashmirian non-dualist Śaivism that influenced the author(s) of the TR in their treatment of this topic, I hope to provide a coherent account of the main features of this doctrine, as it was recast in the TR.

Dr Silvia Schwarz Linder has lectured in the past at the Leopold-Franzens-Universität in Innsbruck and at the University Ca' Foscari in Venice. Presently she is Research Associate at the Institut für Indologie und Zentralasienwissenschaften of the University of Leipzig, and is affiliated with the Śākta Traditions project at the OCHS led by Professor Gavin Flood and Dr Bjarne Wernicke-Olesen. Her interests focus on the Tantric religious traditions of the Śrīvidyā and of the Pāñcarātra, specifically on the philosophical and theological doctrines expressed in the relevant South Indian Sanskrit textual traditions. She has also translated into Italian texts from the Sanskrit narrative and devotional literature, for editions aimed at a general readership.

Modern Śākta Identities in a Global Context: Bengali Tāntrikas and John Woodroffe

Julian Strube

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Indian pandits made different attempts to revive a tantric tradition that they regarded as corrupted by the influence of foreign domination and modernisation. Tantra had long been denounced as superstition, black magic, or sexual excesses by orientalist, missionaries, and colonial administrators; notions that were often adopted by Indian anglophile reformers. In contrast, learned *tāntrikas* argued that tantra was not only a noble philosophy, but that it formed the core of the true Hindu religion appropriate for the present age. Stressing its scientific and rational character, they presented tantra as a means, not only to confront the materialistic and sceptic degenerations of modernity, but to revive the *śakti* of India, thus making it a key element of Hindu nationalist discourse. In their defence of “orthodoxy” against the corrupting “reformation” by English education, their stress on science and nationhood arguably represented a thoroughly “modern” interpretation of tantra itself.

These modern Śāktas entered in close dialogue with originally Western movements such as the Theosophical Society, which proclaimed very similar ideas. This exchange laid the foundations for interpretations of tantra that are predominant among the public at large until the present day. As is well known, the writings of John Woodroffe/Arthur Avalon were instrumental in this process. Not only did they initiate the serious academic study of tantra, but they also formed the basis for Western esoteric, and later New Age, interpretations of *śakti*, *kunḍalinī*, or *cakras*. They established concepts such as the “six plus one” cakra system as the most widely accepted ones in modern tantric and yogic cultures. In this lecture, it will be argued that Woodroffe’s/Avalon’s writings were a direct outcome of the aforementioned developments at the end of the nineteenth century, especially in a Bengali context. It will be shown that the emergence of these modern Śākta identities can only be comprehensively understood in the light of a complex global exchange that revolved around the contested meanings of religion, science, and national identity.

Dr Julian Strube focuses on the relationship between religion and politics, specifically in the context of esotericism. He has previously worked on the relationship between esotericism and socialist, National Socialist, and völkisch context in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His current project focuses on the role of Tantra in colonial Bengal, against the background of global debates about religion, science, and national identity.

Heidegger and the Netratana: Using Philosophy as a Meta-language in Tantric Studies

Jesper Moeslund

Based on selected passages from the Netratana this paper will investigate how the tantric practitioners perceive reality through the esoteric anatomy of the yogic body. With a focus on Śākta anthropology and the yogic technique of the *khecarīmudrā* I will show how the body is utilized as an instrument in a tantric context. Through the application of Heideggerian terminology I will investigate how philosophical concepts such as *Dasein*, *Vorhanden*, *Zuhanden* and *Angst* are helpful in enhancing our understanding of such complex ideas as met with in the *Netratana* and Tantric Studies more generally. As an example, I will demonstrate how the application of the concept of *Dasein* in a *Zuhanden* relationship with one’s own body can work as a model for understanding the pragmatic aspects of the esoteric anatomy. Simultaneously, philosophical concepts may be further developed and gain new features through their application on such foreign material. The Study of Religion is indeed in need of such a metatheoretical vocabulary of carefully developed philosophical concepts in relation to a more in-depth and intellectually stimulating study of Indian religions and philosophies - at the

same time pointing toward a new vocabulary that may work in more general and comparative contexts as well.

Jesper Moeslund is pursuing an MA in the Study of Religion at Aarhus University with a minor in Philosophy. Jesper's interests are primarily related to the study of esoteric anatomy in a tantric context and how the body is understood and used in a religious discourse. He is a visiting student at the OCHS and a participant in the *Haṭhapradīpikā* translation project led by Dr Bjarne Wernicke-Olesen and Silje Lyngar Einarsen.