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ABSTRACTS

Love and Compassion: Insights from Dharma Traditions

Convener and President: Kusumita P. Pedersen, St. Francis College (*Emerita*)

Samani Pratibha Pragma, University of London

A Comparative Study of Jaina Mitti-bhāvanā and Buddhist Mettā-bhāvana

Both Jainism and Buddhism religions share some religious practices which can be attributed to the impact of common Śramaṇic culture. The focus of this paper investigates the concept of reflection/meditation on friendliness and loving kindness in both traditions. The semantics of the terms “*mitti*” in Jaina Prakrit and “*mettā*” in Buddhist Pālī (Skt. *maitri*) will be explored. Furthermore, the philosophical and methodological investigation reveals that Buddhist tradition was more inclined towards *mettā* as an intense meditation which is absent in Jaina tradition. On the contrary, Jains pursued intensive philosophical and ritualistic practices of *mitti*. The Jaina tradition goes to the extreme of unifying the practice of *mitti* with right perspective leading to a gateway to liberation. I will then explore later developments where in the 16th c. CE Śāntisudhārasa-bhāvanā (detailed poems and verses) particularly on *maitri-bhāvanā* which became a tool for contemplation, though not in a strict sense of silent contemplative meditation with closed eyes. Furthermore, it is in the modern context we are able to trace Mahāprajñā’s *maitri-anupreksā* encapsulated within *preksā* meditation. This presents practical and pragmatic meditative features which is absent in ancient Jaina meditation.

Vineet Chander, Princeton University

Mā Śucah: Śri Kṛṣṇa’s Expression of Love and Compassion in the Bhagavad Gītā

In *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras*, scholar Diana L. Eck argues that the “meaning of the Bible is not to be found in its individual verses alone, but in its undergirding message as appropriated by the questions and struggles of each community of faith.” (Eck 1993: 94). For Eck, this message is a pastoral—and not polemical—one. In this paper, I seek to explore how Eck’s approach may shed light on the core teaching and ethos of the Bhagavad-gītā vis a vis love and compassion. In particular, I suggest that 18.66—widely held, within Hindu tradition, as Kṛṣṇa’s ultimate and final teaching in the Gītā —offers us a condensed and poignant glimpse into the Gītā’s undergirding message. I propose that this undergirding

message—implicit throughout the Gītā and made explicit in 18.66—is a primarily pastoral, rather than philosophical, one. That is to say, I submit that the Gītā culminates * in Kṛṣṇa’s radical expression of love and compassion for us, and his invitation to us to experience that love by accepting him as our sole refuge. Even more specifically, I suggest that Mā Śucaḥ, the final two words of 18.66, may be seen as paradigmatic of the Gītā’s core message—a sutra of sorts that encapsulates the heart of the Gītā. In doing so, I draw upon traditional Indian hermeneutical devices to discern the intention of the Gītā’s speaker, pre-modern and contemporary commentarial engagement, and my own lens as a Hindu chaplain engaged in the “on-the-ground” work of attending to the questions and struggles of this faith community.

Patrick Beldio, Catholic University of America

The Transformative Power of Love in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram

The Integral (*Purṇa*) Yoga seeks to integrate many traditional and non-traditional spiritual approaches like knowledge, love, and selfless service (*jñāna*, *bhakti*, and *karma yogas*) to manifest a new integration of spirit and matter. This integration is the basis of what they call a new transformed Earth and a new human species that lives the “life divine.” Sri Aurobindo writes, “To bring the Divine Love and Beauty and Ananda into the world is, indeed, the whole crown and essence of our Yoga.” One important way to understand how love and compassion are lived in this spiritual practice, is to focus on the lived relationships between Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) and his spiritual consort, the Mother (1878-1973); between the two Gurus and their students in their Ashram; as well as between the Gurus and the natural world. For this presentation, I will first critically examine the love and compassion between Mother and Sri Aurobindo in light of his epic poem *Savitri* and his book *The Mother*. Secondly, I will look at the way the Mother loved her students by focusing on Huta, one of her artist-sadhaks who collaborated with the Mother to paint images of beauty and love, which encouraged her to be more loving and compassionate in the Ashram. Lastly, I will critically examine the Mother’s use of flowers as forms of visual culture to shape the gaze and imagination of her disciples to love all of creation in a universal and yet personal way.

Veena Howard, California State University, Fresno

‘Love-Force’ and its Variations across Nonviolent Movements

Gandhi’s methods of Ahimsa and Satyagraha (Truth-force; popularly known as passive resistance or Love-force) has been utilized by nonviolent activists and movements across cultures to confront inequality, racism, and injustice. Gandhi uniquely equated *ahimsa* with love, and transformed this virtue and ascetic discipline into an active method of resistance to effect social and political change. Nonviolent activists and leaders, including Martin Luther King Jr. Cesar Chavez, Albert Schweitzer, Vandana Shiva, and James Lawson, creatively drew upon Gandhi’s principles in their strategies to fight against structures of social, political, and environmental violence. Focusing on select exemplary activists, this paper explores how the principle of Truth-force or Love-force, has been interpreted by activists for their respective goals. It becomes clear that philosophical principle of “Love-force” is dynamic (as Gandhi himself emphasized) and can be modified to mobilize movements that confront injustices in a variety of cultural contexts.

Karma Lekshe Tsomo, University of San Diego

Love and Compassion in Conflict Zones: Reimagining Two Tarnished Buddhist Principles

Love and compassion are hallmarks of the Buddhist tradition, yet in recent years, conflicts have sprung up in Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Burma that are marring Buddhism's reputation as a religion of peace. This paper attempts to tease out the thorny issues surrounding ethnic, religious, and political identity that are involved in the controversial treatment and recent displacement of the Rohingya people in Burma and theorize about traditional and potential Buddhist solutions. On the theoretic level, the principles of loving kindness and compassion are posited as antidotes to hatred and cruelty. On a practical level, these principles are at the heart of popular methods of contemplation that are incorporated into Buddhist practitioners' daily meditations. On an ethical level, love and compassion are taught as almost nonnegotiable guidelines for virtuous conduct in schools and temples in Buddhist societies. Recently, however, a serious disconnect seems to have emerged between these theoretical, contemplative, and ethical ideals and stark realities on the ground. Given the complicated histories of majority Buddhist nations and their ethnic and religious diversity, is it possible that the Buddhist trademark values of love and compassion are losing ground to ethnic tensions, racial injustice, and political dystopia, and are even being used to mask them? The critical questions now are whether and precisely how these fundamental values can be redeployed to address and potentially resolve contemporary misunderstandings and conflicts.

Pāñcarātra: Sources and Continuities

Convener: Joydeep Bagchee, Ludwig-Maximilians-University

Presider: Bruce M. Sullivan, Northern Arizona University

Jahnvi Bidnur, Independent Scholar

The Nārāyaṇa Aspect of the Mahābhārata: Insights from Its Earliest Known Commentary

This paper focuses on the earliest known reference to the Pāñcarātra—the Sanskrit Mahābhārata. I translate and present excerpts from Devabodha's eleventh-century commentary *Jñānadīpika* that illustrate the reception of the Mahābhārata as an Upaniṣad glorifying Nārāyaṇa. The *maṅgala* or benedictory verse is an invocation of the revered deity for the successful completion of the text. It also clarifies the subject matter of the text. I discuss three *maṅgalas*—of the commentary and the Mahābhārata and the *maṅgala* performed by Sauti (1.1.20–22). All three *maṅgalas* revere Nārāyaṇa as an incarnation of Viṣṇu. Devabodha invokes Nārāyaṇa in the form of cosmic energy, saying “*tattejaḥ nārāyaṇīyaṃ namaḥ.*” Mahābhārata begins with the invocation with “*nārāyaṇaṃ namskṛtya,*” etc. where Paramātman and Jīvātman are adored in the form of Nara and Nārāyaṇa. Sauti's benediction addresses Nārāyaṇa with attributes such as *ādya*, *īśāna*, *puruhūta*, *puruṣṭuta*, *ekākṣara brahma*, etc. Devabodha comments on this as follows: *utpatteḥ prākkālaḥ ādīḥ* (the time before creation is *ādīḥ*), *tatra bhavaḥ ādyaḥ* (one who exists in that time is *ādya*) *sarvotpattimatāṃ kāraṇam* (cause of all existences) *paramātman* (highest being) [...]

Vishwa Adluri, Hunter College

The Nārāyaṇīya and Later Pāñcarātra

The Nārāyaṇīya occurs in the Mokṣadharmā section of Book 12 (Śāntiparvan) of the Mahābhārata. In this philosophical and theological text, Janamejaya asks “knowledge systems namely Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Pāñcarātra, Vedas, and Āraṇyakas, and so on circulate in these worlds. Do they have the same aim or different ones, sage?” (*ekaniṣṭhāni pṛthanniṣṭhāni vā*, 12.337.1). The mention of Pāñcarātra raises important issues. Does it give us insights into the composition and history of the epic? How does Pāñcarātra, which develops into a rich theistic system in later literature relate to philosophies such as Sāṃkhya and Yoga? Through a close reading of this chapter (12.337), I aim to show how the epic organizes many perspectives around the conception of Nārāyaṇa which articulates the universe (*vyūhas*), text (Vyāsa) and various philosophical and theistic systems. Earlier scholarship (Schrader 1916) recognized the the Mahābhārata’s pivotal role as the earliest source for Pāñcarātra. However, it viewed the epic in an anthropological rather than a cognitive mode. Pāñcarātra especially was seen as one of several competing “standpoints” in the epic (Schreiner 1997). My paper corrects this imbalance by showing how the term *pāñcarātra* unifies and articulates a set of philosophical perspectives pertaining to the relationship of One–Many (Adluri 2011). My analysis will refer to both previous scholarship on these texts and the later traditional interpretations in the Āgama tradition.

Joydeep Bagchee, Ludwig-Maximilians-University

Pāñcarātra “Interpolations” in the Mahābhārata

The central obstacle to a coherent interpretation of the Mahābhārata as the foundational text of classical Hinduism has been the prejudice that the epic is a congeries of competing “sectarian” viewpoints that were “interpolated” into the original epic at various times. This conclusion holds *a fortiori* for the Nārāyaṇīya, so that, as Hildebeitel (2006) puts it, “it has become the axiomatic interpolation, and [...] the ultimate test for any argument that the archetype recovered by the Poona Critical Edition [...] could provide access to the work as it was originally conceived.” Hildebeitel sets out to show that the Nārāyaṇīya is not as late as is usually thought, but goes astray when he accepts, even if as a heuristic premise, Oberlies’s suggestion that the Nārāyaṇīya is actually composed of two parts—Nārāyaṇīya A and Nārāyaṇīya B. In this paper, I address the arguments for thinking the Nārāyaṇīya is a composite work deriving from several authors. I focus specifically on the work of Reinhold Grünendahl (1997) and Thomas Oberlies (1997). Both Grünendahl and Oberlies focus on chapter 326 of the Nārāyaṇīya—in Grünendahl’s words “the adhyāya on which the intellectual-historical interest is concentrated.” After evaluating their “text-critical” and “text-historical arguments” against the chapter’s organicity, I will consider why this chapter in particular has exercised such fascination on the German scholars. I will argue that, far from being deficient as regards unity, it is the text’s presentation of a coherent theology that has led them to focus on it. To demonstrate this, I will draw on Adluri’s interpretation and translation of the Nārāyaṇīya (in Adluri 2014, 2016, and forthcoming).

Arvind Jamkhedkar, Indian Council of Historical Research

New Epigraphical and Art-Historical Evidence from the Gupta-Vakataka Period for Sattvatadharma

My paper deals with epigraphical evidence presented by D. R. Bhandarkar (CII, vol. IV) on the expression ‘Jitan Bhagavatā Purushena’ occurring in the inscriptions of the Guptas, Kadambas and other royal families, and an image from Shamalaji.

Respondent: Bruce M. Sullivan, Northern Arizona University

Dharma and Anticolonial Solidarity with the Other

Convener: David Lawrence, University of North Dakota

Ayon Maharaj, Ramakrishna Mission and Vivekananda Educational Research Institute, West Bengal

Śiva jñāne jīva sevā: Reexamining Swami Vivekananda’s Practical Vedānta in the Light of Sri Ramakrishna

According to the influential German Indologist Paul Hacker, Swami Vivekananda was a “Neo-Vedāntin” who mistakenly clothed what were essentially Western values in superficially Indian garb in order to promote Indian nationalism. I argue that Vivekananda’s philosophy of “practical Vedānta”—which upholds the ethical ideal of serving all human beings as manifestations of God—has its roots not in Western values but in the teachings of his beloved guru Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna often spoke of his own spiritual experience of “*vijñāna*,” which revealed to him that everything in the universe was a manifestation of God. I show that Sri Ramakrishna derived from this *vijñāna*-based worldview a spiritual ethics of service—“*śiva jñāne jīva sevā*”—that directly shaped Vivekananda’s later formulation of practical Vedānta. This paper affirms an anticolonial solidarity with the Other by demonstrating the indigenous Indian roots of Vivekananda’s key philosophical ideas.

K. Gopinathan Pillai, Santhigiri Research Foundation, Santhigiri Ashram, Trivandrum, India

Paradigm Shift in Spiritual Discourse on Dharma: Santhigiri Model in The Emerging Context of Postcolonial – Post Modern Enquiry for Human Sustainability

According to classic authorities, Dharma, the cosmic will, design and eternal supreme truth that sustains universe and human life, is called Sanatana. However, it is Yuga specific and it is to be actualized in accordance with the cyclical movement and process of Yuga. It is in the context of Dharma approaches to spirituality that the mission of Santhigiri Ashram founded by Navajyothisree Karunakara Guru assumes global significance. Santhigiri movement drawing upon the teaching and mission of the Guru is a novel experience and

experiment that offers promise for the evolution of noble generations. This work invites DANAM scholars to consider the deeper meaning of the spirituality of their traditions and the teachings about that of Navajyothisree Karunakara Guru, along with how they may pursue solidarity with the spirituality of other colonized societies.

David Peter Lawrence, University of North Dakota, and Eddah Mutua, St. Cloud State

Dialogues and Solidarity among the Sages: Bimal Krishna Matilal and Henry Odera Oruka's Advocacy for the Philosophical Rationality of Nonwestern Cultures

Our paper builds on earlier research to show how Bimal Krishna Matilal and Henry Odera Oruka challenge dominant narratives of the West-centered progress of philosophical and other forms of critical rationality. On the basis of persisting colonialist prejudices, a majority of Western philosophers have ignored philosophical inquiry in non-Western cultures. The study of such thought has fallen primarily to--again Euro-centric--humanistic and social scientific research, often reductively interpreting intellectual expressions as "constructions" of quasi-scientific, socio-cultural factors.

While Matilal and Oruka might be criticized for treating modern Western thought as the standard, one must address prejudices to overcome them, and they provided bases for more substantive engagements with African and Indian philosophies. Oruka's analyses of the vibrant self-reflexivity of oral traditions also illuminates the Vedic resources of South Asian philosophies, and the Socratic method. Multi-centric narratives of philosophical inquiry are more accurate, equitable and facilitative for human advancement.

Emili Choge, Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya

The Making of a Kenyan Man and Woman: Comparative Studies of Rites of Passage across Kenya Communities

This paper identifies a vital topic of concern to African traditions, in pursuing solidarity of mutual assistance with other colonized societies.

Rites of passage are key in the formation of values and identity for young people of a community. In Kenya, each ethnic group had rites of passage that prepared young people for their responsibilities in adulthood. With modernity, colonization, urbanization, new religions like Christianity and Islam, these rites have been distorted or abandoned altogether. As such, young people are at risk of schizophrenic identity and illnesses like HIV and AIDS, alcoholism and substance abuse. This paper interrogates the relevance of modern rites of passage in preparation for identity formation of a modern Kenyan male or female. What are the strengths and weaknesses of these rites? What are the values and character virtues that are key for a Kenyan man or woman? What challenges face similarly colonized and marginalized communities?

Li Chenyang, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

Revisiting Harmony: A Confucian Perspective

This paper explores the value of Confucian ideas of harmony for postcolonial solidarity and a more equitable polycentric global academy. Imagine for a moment that Donald Trump takes harmony as an important value. Then he would consider balancing his pursuit of such a value along with other important things on his agenda. Then, working with him at every level would not be like what has been described in a joke among Trump Tower employees that the boss was like Manhattan's First Avenue, where the traffic goes only one way (20 April 2018, *New York Times*). Unfortunately, harmony is not a value for Trump. This is not surprising. In fact, harmony is hardly a cherished value in modern West. Contemporary Western philosophical discourse has totally overlooked the value of harmony. Does this philosophical deficiency have anything to do with the chaotic world that is largely dominated by the West today?

Respondent: Rita Sherma, GTU

Theme: Dharma and Animals

Convener: Tanya Storch, University of the Pacific

President: Tracy Tiemeier, Loyola Marymount University

Ramdas Lamb, University of Hawaii

Animals and Ahimsa in Hindu Traditions and Culture

While there are many differences between the Abrahamic religious traditions and the Dharma traditions of India, one most significant is the concept of divinity and how it translates into the way people live. The former essentially ground their theological conceptions on the biblical Book of Genesis in which humans alone are created in God's image. This has been interpreted by the traditions, specifically, by Christianity and Islam, to mean that humans alone have a divine eternal soul. While the believers of these traditions typically accept that there is a life force in animals, they see it as qualitatively different from a human soul. They generally hold that this life force ends with death, while the human soul is eternal. Some contemporary Christian groups now promote the view that some animals can also go to heaven. However, most believe that this is somehow confined to pet animals and not wild animals in the forests.

The Dharma traditions, and especially Hinduism, see divinity very differently. Not only do most adherents to these traditions not believe in a Christian-like heaven as the ultimate goal of human existence, they do not see the life force in an animal as being qualitatively different than that in a human being. The latter belief is the foundation for the concept of ahimsa as it relates to animals. When one sees all living beings as having a soul, which makes all living entities expressions of divinity, then, not just the murder of human beings, but the murder of animals and the destruction of the environment are also seen to be antithetical to dharma, to right action. Consequently, respect for all forms of life has been a traditional value in the Dharma traditions,

while vegetarianism has long been a traditional dietary preference for most practicing Hindus and Jains, along with many Buddhists. My talk will focus on these views and practices and how they help to construct an approach to living that is fundamental if we want to help create a less violent world.

Nawaraj Chaulagain, Illinois Wesleyan University

The Sacred and the Sacrificial: The Status of Animals in Hindu Religious Life

This paper investigates the status of animals in the sacred texts and religious practice related to two most important Nepalese Hindu festivals – Festival of Light (Tihar) and Navaratri (*dasain, dussehra*). The festival of lights is observed for five days, with each day set aside for the worship of specific beings – the crows, dogs, cows, oxen, and brothers-sisters; in contrast, in the Navaratri, certain animals are worshipped but for a different purpose – that of sacrifice – despite a very excellent portrayal in the ritual texts of the interdependent nature of humans, animals, and the divine. The paper also explores this apparent contradiction – of the worship and sacrifice – and discusses how the myths and rituals of these occasions attempt to resolve this conundrum, raising related questions, such as whether Hindu traditions envision such sacrifice and destruction as indispensable to perpetuate the operative process of the universe and whether the theological vision of equality, co-existence, and interdependence is, after all, subject to some form of destruction.

Michael S. Reading, Claremont School of Theology

Jain Perspectives Toward Animals: An Ethological Cross-Examination

Previous scholarship into Jainism and animals has touched upon a wide variety of investigative angles. These include (most notably): ahimsa ethics, animal symbolism at Jain temples, an advanced zoological taxonomy, and the inclusion of animals within the sacred past life narratives of the Jinās. In general, not only do Jain perspectives inherently value and protect the lives of animal subjects—who, just like humans, are considered possessors of an infinite 'soul' (*jiva*)—but they also often attribute a high degree of sentience and moral and spiritual agency to animals as well. While it is also true that Jains see human (and not animal) births as being most spiritually ideal, animals are nevertheless portrayed as potentially compassionate, moral agents, and as being receptive to Jain religious instruction and moments of deep spiritual awakening.

While briefly surveying this overall context, this presentation brings Jain perspectives on animals into a transdisciplinary conversation (or cross-examination, as it were) with the groundbreaking ethological work of Jane Goodall, whose insights from *The Chimpanzees of Gombe* (1986) and *Reason for Hope* (1999) provide rich fodder for comparative analysis. A leading voice of the relatively recent discovery into the deeper dimensions of animal consciousness, Goodall's many years of immersive study of chimpanzees reveal behavioral patterns strongly suggestive of both deeper moral (e.g. relational sentimentality, compassion) as well as religious (e.g. awe, existential wonder) significance. Ultimately, while Goodall's observations both ground and further support a Jain view of animals, they also fall short of affirming animal sentience and spiritual agency in such a pronounced fashion. Hence, until further ethological fieldwork arrives at even more radical conclusions, what Jain perspectives affirm about the high intelligence and spiritual agency of animals—while certainly praiseworthy in many respects—must still remain a matter of distinct religious faith.

Tanya Storch, University of the Pacific

Sinitic Mahayana and Preaching Dharma to Animals

As Buddhism has become an inalienable part of Chinese culture, it utterly transformed attitudes toward animals that were prevalent in that culture before the arrival of Buddhism. For instance, Emperor Wu of the Southern Liang dynasty (502-557 C.E.), who is often compared to King Ashoka (ca. 300-232 B.C.E.), abolished slaughtering animals in the country, simultaneously banning the use of animal ingredients in medicine. He utterly abolished animal sacrifices to the ancestors despite the fact that these sacrifices have been at the center of Chinese civilization since the Zhou dynasty (1046-221 B.C.E.), replacing them with flowers, fruit, and incense. In the following centuries, some of the emperor Wu's extreme forms of protecting animals disappeared, yet, overall, Chinese people embraced significant animal protection practices, such as eating several vegetarian meals a week, building animal hospitals, avoiding the unnecessary cruelty to the sentient beings, and releasing captured animals back into the wild. In addition to this, Sinitic Mahayana developed a curious approach to ensuring the wellbeing of animals, that is, it started actively preaching Dharma to them. I use examples from the Chinese Buddhist historiography, such as *Gao seng zhuan* (Lives of Eminent Monks) and *Xu gao seng zhuan* (Continuation of the Lives of Eminent Monks), to explain why and how Dharma was taught to the animals. I also examine lives and writings of modern Mahayana teachers, including Zheng Yan, Xuan Hua, Thich Nhat Hahn, and Xing Yun, because they continued teaching Dharma to animals in the 20th--21st centuries.

Cogen Bohanec, GTU

Mediation Between Animal Rights and Environmental Ethics from a Constructive Hindu Eco-Theology

There has long been a tension between the consequentialist-inclined approach to environmental ethics and the deontological tendencies of Animal Rights thinkers. This can be reframed in terms of a tension between an emphasis on systems (consequentialism, and environmentalism) versus the emphasis on individuals within the systems (animal rights, and deontology). This issue of non-human ethics is further challenged by the critiques of feminist thinkers, who propose a model of "care ethics" that emphasizes a more holistic approach to behavior that values the emotional as well as the intellectual.

Interestingly, Indian philosophical traditions have been wrangling over the ontological issue of part-to-whole relationships, and the role of emotional epistemologies for a millennium. This paper will show how the Gaudiya Vaisnava tradition reconciles part-to-whole paradoxes in a way that can afford equal valuation to the system and the individual within the system, and how emotional cultivation is an essential component to understanding and reconciling this paradox. When brought into dialogue with similar tensions between animal rights and environmental ethics, Gaudiya Vaisnava theology can provide a model for how one might propose a system of ethics and care that values the individual rights of animals through a cultivation and intensification of emotional connections, and can reconcile the part-to-whole tensions between environmental consequentialism and animal rights deontology – allowing for a Gaudiya Vaisnava eco-theology based on animal rights to emerge from this dialogue.

Respondent: Phyllis K. Herman, California State University, Northridge

Theme: Regional Bhakti Traditions

Convener and Presider: Ravi M. Gupta, Utah State University

Michael S. Allen, University of Virginia

Bhakti for Kings: Keśavdās's *Vijñān-gītā*

When we think of North Indian *bhakti*, the names of Kabīr, Sūrdās, Mīrābāī, and Tulsīdās come immediately to mind. One does not usually think of Keśavdās (fl. 1600), who worked at the court of Orchā in Bundelkhand, and who was one of the great masters and innovators of Hindi courtly poetry. It is true that Keśavdās is best known for his relatively “secular” works, the *Rasik-priyā* and *Kavi-priyā*. Near the end of his career, however, he also composed the *Vijñān-gītā* (VG), or *Song of Knowledge*, a *mahākāvya* on the theme of *bhakti*. This paper offers a preliminary study of the VG and its place in the history of North Indian *bhakti*. The VG, I argue, not only demonstrates that the worlds of *bhakti* poetry and courtly poetry could coincide, it also cautions us against assuming that vernacular traditions should be understood in opposition to elite, Sanskritic traditions. Although the VG was composed in a vernacular, it was by no means a “popular” work; it was written at a royal court, at the request of a king, and was intended for perusal by an elite, highly literate audience. Keśavdās's position on caste was likewise aligned with Brahminical values, with none of the egalitarian gestures often associated with *bhakti* poetry. Despite its status as a regional vernacular text, the VG promotes a pan-regional, non-sectarian vision of *bhakti* with roots in Sanskritic orthodoxy.

Kirtan Patel, University of Texas at Austin

Bhakti through Letters: Mediating Caste and Ashram Politics in Nineteenth-Century Gujarat

When a tailor assumed leadership over a group of monks and lay within the Swaminarayan Sampraday in the late nineteenth century, questions concerning theology, the locus of religious authority and monastic practices came to be both challenged and negotiated. Changing communication technology and institutional measures forced new methods of guru-bhakti to mediate caste and ashram politics. I demonstrate how bhakti came to be expressed through the medium of letters in a context which stifled public devotion to the tailor, Pragji, and how bhakti came to be adapted to a modernizing Gujarat. Letters conveyed emotion, tragedy, helplessness and confessions, forming a community of people bound by Pragji. Simultaneously, this paper demonstrates the necessity of understanding theology, and social and institutional structures to the expression and legitimization of devotion and religiosity.

Rodney Sebastian, University of Florida

Mapping the Manipuri Rāsālīlā: Theme, Ritual and Structure

From the 18th to 19th century in Manipur, religious themes, especially from Bengal Vaiṣṇava traditions fused with indigenous Meitei religious practices to produce culturally hybrid rituals, performances and festivals. The Manipuri rāsālīlā dance drama is one of the effects of this religious and cultural contact. In this paper, I attempt to answer the question: how does the

structure of the rāsālīla reflect the fusion of Meitei and Vaiṣṇava traditions? Based on ethnographic research of the rāsālīla, local Meitei performances in Manipur, and interviews with artists and scholars, I examine the fluidity of cultural boundaries in Manipur with respect to the flow of theology, ritual practices and aesthetics. I will show how that besides being derived from an array of Meitei and Vaiṣṇava rituals and themes, the Manipuri rāsālīla was also constructed with specific innovations that have been adjusted to suit Vaiṣṇava theological themes. Thus, local actors configured the religious imports of a colonizing religious tradition, in a way that resonated with their own sociocultural context, and simultaneously reflected the theology through performance. The popularity of the dance in turn structured the production of new texts, other devotional dance dramas, and institutions of religious and artistic specialists.

Methodologies for the Study of Modern Yoga: New Perspectives

Convener: Christopher P. Miller, Loyola Marymount University

President: Christopher Key Chapple, Loyola Marymount University

Amanda Lucia, University of California, Riverside

The Ephemeral Field: Ethnographic Research on Transient Spirituality

This paper discusses the ethnographic methodology that I have employed in crafting the field research for my forthcoming book *White Utopias: Transformational Festivals, Spirituality, and American Yoga*. This book telescopes on three genres of festivals and the utopias they create. I have collected ethnographic data at massive festivals like Burning Man and its derivatives (i.e. Lightning in a Bottle), devotional yoga (*bhakti*) festivals, like Bhakti Fest and Shakti Fest, and at various locations in the elite global circuit of Wanderlust yoga festivals. Between 2011 and 2017, I attended 29 festivals over the course of approximately 130 days. I have sorted, transcribed, and coded my audio recordings from 97 interviews, 74 spiritual workshops, and 52 yoga classes. As an ethnographer, I follow a “reflexive” qualitative sociological approach (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) and Michael Burrowoy’s understanding of Extended Case Method (Burrowoy 1991). I also engaged year-round local and global festival communities online using netographic methods (Boellstorff et al 2012). This project has grappled with and redefined traditional notions of “the field.” It extends the practice of multi-sited research, by problematizing the study of ephemeral and transient communities. In festival field sites, there are intense moments of what Renato Rosaldo called “deep hanging out” and unusually intimate interviews. But when the moment passes those relationships often escape into the ether of the festival. Similarly, when the festival ends, only a select few of the most prized relationships endure in the “default world.” This paper discusses the methodological issues in conceptualizing and working within the ephemeral field of post-modern spirituality.

Christa Schwind, University of Denver

Locating Contemporary Yoga: Theory, Method and Rhizomatic Genealogy

This paper argues for a methodological approach to the study of modern yoga that is contextually based, comparative, critically historical, genealogical and ethnographic. My primary question is

how can theory and method do the work of helping to understand the current global landscape of contemporary yoga? I believe that in order to properly trace and classify the moving concept of yoga at the macro and micro level the method must be both rigorous and flexible. Furthermore, as a scholar who is trying to understand the complex phenomenon of contemporary yoga, it is necessary to construct an argument that utilizes the best tools possible. Yoga is not representative of one modality of thought, Eastern/Western or religious/secular, but rather a dynamic and relational practice tied to historically shifting global and local religious and cultural worldviews, or, in other words multiple subjective palimpsestic re-orderings and mashups of moving trajectories and margins. Contemporary yoga exists as dynamic and relational, rather than dialectical and monolithic, encouraging the type of interdisciplinary research methods that mirror the overlap of influences occurring in everyday life. I believe it is imperative to situate yoga scholarship within the contextualities of multiple definitions, theories and ways of understanding, being aware of whose definitions get used, when, and why if we are going to analyze and define something as sticky and slippery as contemporary yoga. In order to do this work I employ the theoretical scholarship of overlapping discourses of the ‘post’ (poststructuralism, postcolonialism, the linguistic turn, the subaltern studies group etc.) to collapse a center/periphery dichotomy and create a more nuanced understanding of contemporary yogic identity. I also utilize a comparative method that allows for moments of definition while at the same time continuously situating these definitions within specific historical negotiations of socialized subjectivity.

Brita Heimarck, Boston University

Genealogies of the Present: Sacred Sound Practices in Yogic Traditions and the Underlying Philosophies

Drawing on in-depth interviews with sacred sound practitioners, I will lay out several key concepts within the sacred sound practices of yogic traditions within the American context. Ethnographic interviews will provide a range of sound stories based on people’s experiences. I will then seek to relate these experiential concepts of sound to published teachings within the same traditions. Finally, I will relate these sound concepts to philosophies of yoga as documented by Surendranath Dasgupta and Bina Gupta in several important books on this topic. Drawing on the work of Arjun Appadurai in his “Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology,” I refer to this methodology of tracing backwards from ethnographic experiences and contemporary views to ancient sacred sound concepts, as “genealogies of the present,” or sacred archaeologies of sound.

Anya Foxen, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

In Modern Yoga a Magic Dwells

This paper grapples with origins and definitions, taking modern transnational yoga as its point of departure. A serious examination of modern yoga, especially as it is practiced in the United States today, quickly reveals elements that are not easily reconciled with the practice's Indian roots. While recent studies have applied cultural analysis to explain modern yoga's entanglement with phenomena such as consumerism, neoliberal capitalism, and religious pluralism, I argue for the need to broaden our historical approach as well. Practice, both in its ideological and embodied dimensions, undergoes a necessary translation whenever it travels from one culture to

another—what, then, is the role of the host culture in this process? Is it possible to speak of a coherent transcultural practice? In tracing the history of yoga, I first question whether it is more utile to circumscribe the practice by its form (i.e. what “yoga” looks like) or its function (i.e. what “yoga” does). Historically, practitioners have done both, and both have been used as points of synthesis that have underpinned what the late J. Z. Smith would have fingered as “bad,” because “magical,” comparative methodology. A more systematic comparativism can help us to both untangle the historical conflations that have led to modern yoga’s identity crisis, and to point out the actual culturally-inflected analogies that have led to such conflations in the first place.

Christopher P. Miller, Loyola Marymount University

Transnational Yoga and the Mobility of Embodied Alchemy

This study in presented in this paper considers somatic practice as a primary source of data for the study of contemporary yoga communities in the present. I argue that collectively considering a number of somatic practices found in contemporary yoga communities which have, to date, received little attention in modern yoga studies, provides us with a novel framework for reinterpreting contemporary transnational yoga practices as we encounter them within specific field sites. While considering three distinct categories of yoga practice, the method I propose provides tools for the close study of the particularities of context shaping these practices within specific cultural circumstances while also suggesting an underlying alchemical logic. For illustrative purposes, we will visit Polestar Gardens, an intentional yoga community on the Big Island of Hawaii, where I conducted fieldwork in 2017.

Respondent: Christopher Key Chapple, LMU