

DANAM 2024 AGENDA

Held in conjunction with the Annual Meeting of AAR
San Diego, California

All DANAM panels to be held at

OMNI SAN DIEGO GRAND BALLROOM, SALON A

Friday November 22, 2024

Session 1: 11:00am-12:30pm:

Critical Reflections on Ethics and Pedagogy in the Hindu Epics (M22-103)

Organizer/President: Jonathan Edelmann, DANAM Steering Committee, Chair

Presenters:

Brian Black, Lancaster University

Dialectics of Violence in the *Mahabharata*

This paper is about how violence is discussed, debated, and experienced in the *Mahabharata*. Much of the *Mahabharata* is a meditation on nonviolence, as the central event in the story is a massively destructive civil war in which 1,660,020,000 combatants are killed and only 8 people survive. While it is impossible for us to separate history from myth concerning the facts of the war, or whether the war ever actually happened sometime in India's distant past, the *Mahabharata*, nonetheless, offers a thoroughgoing interrogation of violence, from a wide range of perspectives, as different characters contemplate the tragic costs of the war, the religious and philosophical explanations for how such a horrifying event could take place, the possible alternatives there might have been, whether violence can ever be avoided or is a core aspect of human nature, the implicit harm that is caused by seemingly peaceful practices, and a wide range of emotional responses to nonviolence, including feelings of loss, grief, and remorse. In this paper I hope to highlight the many layers of perspectives through which the *Mahabharata* explores the problem of violence.

Rodney Sebastian, St John's University

Nonviolence (*ahimsā*) and war in the Mahābhārata: The journey of Yudhiṣṭhira

One of the central themes of the Mahābhārata (Mbh) focuses on *ahimsā* (non-violence), and its relevance for *kṣatriyas* (warrior kings). An often quoted verse from the war epic is *ahimso paro dharma* (Non-violence is the supreme dharma) (Mbh 3.198.69). Yet, the story culminates in a devastating war, that is overseen by God himself. The epic presents various perspectives of *ahimsā* and *himsā* (violence) which are articulated by different characters. In this paper, I explore how the *Mahābhārata* frames these diverse worldviews in conversation with one another with a special focus on how Yudhiṣṭhira dealt with the problem of violence that was ubiquitous in his

life. I will show that despite the multivalent views in the Mbh on *ahimsā*, it is possible to extract a coherent understanding through its sequential narrative of Yudhiṣṭhira's lifestory.

The main kṣatriya characters in the epic represent different archetypes. Duryodhana, the Kuru prince and Jarāsandha, the king of Magadha, represent kṣatriyas who are willing to achieve power and sovereignty by any means, including unethical violence. For Duryodhana, it's acceptable in ksatriya dharma to feel indignation at the success of one's rival and destroy one's enemies to safeguard one's interest. For example, when Duryodhana was questioned by Shakuni about the reason for his gloominess, he responded "what man of mettle in this world will have the patience when he sees his rivals prosper and himself decline?...when I see their fortune and that splendid hall and the mockery of the guards, I burn as if with fire" (Mbh 2.43.35).¹ When Dhṛtarāṣṭra admonished Duryodhana's hatred for the *Pāṇḍavas* he justified it by saying that it is proper for a ksatriya to be ambitious and resort to any means, including violence to achieve success, "Only he who reaches for the heights, king, is the ultimate politician. Should we not pursue selfish ways when we have power or are rich?" (Mbh 2.50.18)² ... "A ksatriya's duty is to prevail, great king. Whether by virtuous means or not..., he should go out like a charioteer and whip every corner of the earth into submission." (Mbh 2.55.8)

Vineet Chander, Princeton University

"Good Grief?": Re-examining the *Mahābhārata* critique of grieving in light of theologies of pastoral care and the *Kṛṣṇa* of the *Bhāgavata*

In key episodes of the *Mahābhārata* and well known verses of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Kṛṣṇa offers an apparent criticism of grieving, often presenting "grief" as weakness, distraction, or pitfall, and chiding his interlocutors--and, ostensibly, devotees reading the texts--to rise above it. Taken at face value, these references might lead one to assume that Hinduism adopts a categorically anti-grief stance. But is this an accurate or complete understanding? In this paper, I seek to interrogate that assumption in three ways. First, I draw on theologies of pastoral care which position grief as a healthy and important, if not indispensable, part of the healing process. I seek to question whether the type of grief spoken of by these theologies is indeed the same as the *śoka* (शोक) being criticized in the *Mahābhārata* and *Gītā*, or whether something might be getting lost in translation. Second, I hope to reframe the *Mahābhārata* references as contextual, situational, and pedagogical-- part of a strategy that is carefully deployed to stir one out of complacency or lethargy when action is warranted. Finally, I wish to complicate our understanding of Kṛṣṇa's apparent rejection of grief by contrasting it with the image of him offered by the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the devotional traditions based upon it. How might the pastoral care embodied by *this* Kṛṣṇa help us to revisit our understanding of what is presented in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Gītā*?

Justin W. Henry, University of South Florida

Historical Realism in Ramayana Literature

While boasting on-screen disclaimers explaining that the contents of the film do not depict actual events, Abhishek Sharma's 2022 *Ram Setu* reflects a vision of the verifiable historicity of the events of the Ramayana epic which currently has significant purchase within Hindu public imagination. The film, set in 2007, stars Akshay Kumar as Dr. Aryan Kulshreshtha, senior

researcher with the Archaeological Survey of India, who is invited on a paid expedition by the sinister director of the Pushpak Shipping corporation (the film's fictional analogue of the Setusamudram Project) to furnish scientific proof that the Palk Straight Isthmus is a natural geological formation. Having established his character as a secular-minded skeptic, Kulshreshta personally dives from the Pushpak research vessel to discover the intricate lattice of stonework supporting the Ram Setu, awestruck to discover this "engineering marvel." In the dramatic scene which follows, Kulshreshta ejects from his pressurized diving suit to retrieve a floating rock, emerging from the ocean to return to the research vessel literally walking on water. (The reveal is that Kulshreshta is in fact walking on a portion of the Ram Setu, which in this portion of the sea rests just six inches beneath the surface of the water.) Samples of organic matter extracted from a lighter-than-water rock used in the Ram Setu construction (itself representing fabrication technology unknown to us today) confirm that bridge is approximately 7000 years old, perfectly correlating with the lifetime of Lord Ram.

Amid politically fraught discussions over the empirical demonstrability of the events of the epic and multiform "quests of the historical Ram" in India today, the fact is often overlooked that the most well-known classical versions of the Ramayana never insisted that their contents were "histories" (e.g. works of *itihāsa*), while also keeping much of the geography of their renditions of the story topographically vague (e.g. the location of Ravana's Lankapuri, which according to both Valmiki and Kamban was situated 100 *yojanas* away in the southern ocean). Nonetheless, from Rajashekara in the 9th or 10th century onward, the Ramayana literary and commentarial tradition would occasionally insist on the historical veracity of the epic, as when Maheshvaratirtha writing in the 16th century proclaimed: "everything that happened in the [Valmiki] Ramayana was absolutely real." This paper considers what was at stake—devotionally, theologically, and politically—for those Ramayana authors who felt it necessary to pronounce on the historicity of epic, in whole or in part. In the interest of expending the discussion into Jain and Buddhist literary spheres, special attention is given to Vimalasuri's *Pauṃacariyam* and to a 19th century Sinhala prose version of the Ramayana, the latter of which has it that accounts of Rama, Sita, and Ravana "passed down through word of mouth" were, if not accurate in every detail, still rooted in historical events which took place in Sri Lanka thousands of years ago.

Session 2: 2:00-3:30pm:

Yoga in the Dharmic Traditions: Many Facets (M22-203)

Organizer: Stephanie Corigliano, Cal Poly Humboldt

Presider: Shivani Bothra, California State University, Longbeach

Yoga in the West is widely associated with a secular, bodily posture practice. The recent decade or so of scholarship in Yoga Studies has widely worked to bridge the gap between modern postural yoga, western esotericism, colonial influences, and Hindu roots for understanding the origins and future potentials of Yoga philosophy. Still, as with the study of Tantra, Yoga Studies is a pan-Indic phenomenon with influences emerging from and upon several diverse traditions. In this panel, we explore the interfaith and intertextual nature of yoga as it appears across the four Dharmic traditions. Each panelist engages with Yoga in specific contexts, terms, and practices as

they relate to Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and Hinduism in ways that are both historical and constructive, working towards an interreligious study of Yoga philosophy that can support individuals to navigate conflict, chaos, and spiritual development skillfully.

Presenters:

Blaine Patrick Werner, University of Virginia, PhD Candidate

Apramāda and Yoga in Hindu and Buddhist Traditions: Text, Theory, and Practice

Taking an integrated approach of text, theory, and practice, this paper considers *apramāda* (*heedfulness, conscientiousness*) in the context of yoga in dharmic traditions. The variably translated term implies a carefulness that is crucial to being diligent on one's path. This paper will initially compare yogic usage of *apramāda* in Hindu texts with Yogācāra texts. It will also consider how yoga theory in Mahāyāna Buddhism extends into Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhism. This paper primarily advances two claims: 1) that the concept *apramāda* demonstrates intertextuality between yogic disciplines in dharmic traditions, and 2) that for Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism it has a technical understanding that implies a crucial role for attention in the ethical cultivation of an embodied subject. In a "mad world," *apramāda* as a yogic concept in dharmic traditions offers a way to think about navigating conflict and chaos.

Balbinder S. Bhogal, Hofstra University, NY

Sahaj Jog and Zen: Yoga-less Yoga

The Gur-Sikh tradition promotes *yoga/jog* in various forms (*sahaj-jog, raaj-jog, gurmukh-jog, shabad-surat-jog*) – but with a particular emphasis that I argue can be best captured by phrases such as "yoga-less yoga", "zen yoga" or "everyday yoga". That is, although the Sikh Gurus are critical of yoga as an ascetic "technique" for liberation, their bhakti/bhagati and householder contexts re-frames *yoga/jog* beyond technique towards a praxis of the Word (*gur-shabad kamai*). Furthermore, there is something about the everyday – the familial, socio-political everyday – that goes beyond the merely private subjective domain – as "Sikh yoga" engages both temporal and spiritual dimensions of life (*jogii-bhogii, sant-sipahi, shah-fakiir*) as part of their "life-world." It does so by deliberately conflating the often-separated territories of the world of pleasure and politics, of justice and governance, of struggle and service, with the individual and private spheres of spiritual discipline and practice. Zen or Everyday yoga is not to do yoga everyday at set times, but to live the everyday as one's yoga practice that transcends the techniques of *aasana, pranayama, mantra* etc. Thus, I argue to "practice" *sahaj-jog* is to engage a yoga-less yoga within the context of a *sangat*/community. Connecting both temporal and spiritual domains into one sphere of action reveals Sikh jog as a new middle way – rekindling the erased Buddhist legacy in late medieval India.

Corinna Lhoir, Universität Hamburg, PhD Candidate

Influence and Integration: Tracing the Impact of Broader Yoga Traditions on Second Millennium Jain Yoga Texts

This presentation explores the rich landscape of Jain yoga texts from the 2nd millennium, unveiling the significant yet underexplored contributions of Jainism to the broader field of yoga studies. By examining texts such as the *Yogapradīpa* and newly discovered manuscripts, this research highlights the diversity of Jain yoga practices, their philosophical underpinnings, and

their interactions with contemporaneous religious traditions. My presentation will demonstrate how specific concepts (i.e. the approach to physicality and the adaptation of certain meditation practices) were actively discussed and seamlessly traversed across different sectarian boundaries. This analysis not only broadens our understanding of yoga's historical development but also underscores the importance of inclusive studies that recognize the contributions of all traditions to the complex panorama of yoga's evolution

Pratibha Pragma, Florida International University

Postural Practice in Jain Yoga: A Historical Overview

This paper provides a historical overview of postural yoga within the Jain tradition. The term *āsana* is formed by the Sanskrit root $\sqrt{ās}$ which means to sit down. Thus *āsana* indicates a sitting position. In the Jain context, instead of *āsana* the word used is 'sthāna'. Sthāna is formed by the Sanskrit root ' $\sqrt{sthā}$ ' which means to stay, remain or continue in any condition or action. It is argued that *āsana* in Jainism has been used for meditation, reflection and contemplative practices (*dhyānāsana*). The Jain practice of *āsana* is based on the conceptual framework of asceticism. Almost all early records are based on ascetic practices. Jain literature itself does not have a dedicated text on *āsanās*, but there are canonical texts in which the *āsanās* are occasionally recorded, for example, the Ācārāṅga-sūtras, Sthānāṅga-sūtras, Uttarādhyayana-sūtras and Aiupapātika-sūtras. A close examination of these sūtras reveals that *āsanās*, during the canonical period (4. c. BCE), were part of ascetic life; a part of ritualistic ascetic practices. Singleton categorically states "there is little or no evidence that *āsana* has ever been the primary aspect of any Indian yoga practice tradition (Singleton, 2010: 3)". The vast body of literature solely focused on *āsanās*, from various traditions of yoga, is thus a later development. In Jainism which can be seen in the Yogaśāstra of Hemaçandra during the 12. c. CE. The Jain tradition incorporates *āsana* as a component of *kāyakleśa*, literally defined as physical (*kāya*) mortification (*kleśa*). It is positioned as the fifth limb of outer tapas (*bāhya-tapa*). However, in its broader aspect, *kāyakleśa* does not refer to affliction or torture of the body. Rather, it serves as a tool for making the body capable, by the practice of various *āsanās*, for enduring hardships which are required on the path of spiritual advancement. Therefore, *āsana-yoga* has never been considered an independent limb in itself. This paper aims to investigate how this ancient monastic practice is included in a secular context and utilized as a tool for health and wellbeing. The focus of this paper is on the modernist evolution of postural yoga and the adaptation and introduction of new postures into Jain yogic traditions

Respondent: Stephanie Corigliano, Cal Poly Humboldt

Session 3: 3:45-5:15pm:

Demystifying Siddhis (M22-306)

Organizer: Loriliai Biernacki, University of Colorado, Boulder

Presider: Cogen Bohanec, Arihanta Institute

The idea of order and chaos within an Indian context is predicated upon the idea that the rule of order invariably entails its exception, chaos. No where is this more stridently exemplified than in

these Indian traditions' signature feature: the ubiquitous presence of *siddhi*, magical powers endemic within these traditions. I never cease to be astonished by the ease with which medieval Indian tantric texts use the miraculous, impossible feats of yogis in an altogether deadpan, matter-of-fact way to prove some unrelated, tangential philosophical argument. Yogis who can fly through the air, read other people's minds, hop into a dead body and bring it back to life—Indian thinkers routinely cite these with no fanfare, without even batting an eye. This panel proposes to think through the idea of *siddhi* as feature of Indian traditions as that which breaks the normative order—particularly our contemporary Western assumption of the laws of Nature determining the rules of how matter operates. *Siddhis* barefacedly break what we think of as the order of Nature, its laws and limitations. At the same time, they generate a larger sense of order, drawing on the magical powers on display in *siddhis* as a way in which a higher order is expressed.

Presenters:

Ramdas Lamb, University of Hawai'i at Manoa

Tantra as Seva in the Ramananda Sampraday

The first paper of this panel seeks to address the idea of *siddhi* in relation to the order of Ramanandi *sadhus*. In this case the Ramanandi approach to siddhis draws on Tantric practice to break through the proscriptive laws of nature, yet does so as a means for rendering service, *seva* to the larger community. While *siddhis* are at times rejected within Indian ascetic tradition, as Patañjali aptly illustrates in his *Vibhuti Pāda*, precisely because they take the practitioner back to an egoic relation to world as other, the Ramanandi yogi draws on the power of *siddhi* for larger than individual-self aims.

Loriliai Biernecki, University of Colorado, Boulder

Yoga? Science? Swami Vishuddhananda, a 20th century Yogi's Siddhis

The second paper in this panel draws on the work of the 20th century scholar Gopinath Kaviraj and his guru Swami Viśuddhananda to suggest that the seemingly impossible feats that Swami Viśuddhananda performed—creating fruit seemingly out of thin air, transforming roses into jasmine flowers—in fact look to a higher order of physics. Drawing from a Tantric conceptualization of materiality, as Swami Viśuddhananda tells us, “within each category of things in the world, the full compass of all categories of matter is present,”^[1] Swami Viśuddhananda used a synaesthesia of light and mantric sound to alter the structure of matter. This paper suggests the limit case of the yogi—who can directly, simply by the power of his or her mental concentration affect the material world, as Vishuddhananda did with his widely-known display of yogic powers, materializing tangerines, transforming a rose into jasmine—offers a compelling case study for parsing out the problem of mental causality. That is, what does it tell us about the relationship between the mind and the material world-- when a yogi, through the power of mind, can cause tangerines to appear inside sweets?

Patrick Beldio, University of Scranton

Meher Baba's Task for Spiritual Workers in the Travail of a New World Order

The third paper in this panel addresses the 20th century holy man and avatar, Meher Baba and his unique approach to siddhis. Meher Baba did not discount the existence of special “occult experiences,” as he called them, or *siddhis*, for they come to the spiritual aspirant in advanced stages of growth whether one wants them or not, according to his descriptions of the path of return to God. What role, if any, might they have in a world such as ours that is fraught with fear, conflict, and trauma? As Beldio has outlined in previous scholarship, Meher Baba described in his written materials the “ascendant path of return” to God, one that achieved liberation from the binding impressions of the lower nature and liberation for the infinite life divine but left the world and the body as it is, in a perpetually mortal and vulnerable state to the ravages of selfishness, hate, wanting, and domination. However, in Meher Baba’s active ministry, he worked on manifesting a new “descendant path of return to God,” one in which divinization of matter and its transformation and perfection is made possible while liberation is achieved. What are the roles of *siddhis* in either version of the spiritual path as Meher Baba understood this? How might they relate to transcending or transforming the world, society, and the body?

Jeffery Long, Elizabethtown College

Siddhis in the Tradition of Sri Ramakrishna

The fourth paper in this panel will investigate how *siddhis* are understood in the modern Vedānta tradition of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Particular attention will be focused upon (a) the manifestations of siddhis in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, as attested in the primary source material, (b) Swami Vivekananda’s conceptualization of siddhis, especially in his account of Raja Yoga, and (c) contemporary discourse about siddhis in the Ramakrishna Order based on the author’s field experience conversing with both householder devotees and monastic members of the Order. The consistent underlying theme that emerges within this material is that the Ramakrishna tradition, on the one hand, strongly affirms the reality of siddhis, while at the same time downplaying their importance on the spiritual path, even to the extent of warning against any display of undue interest in them. Such siddhis are seen to play a positive role in the paths of individual practitioners, but are regarded as an extremely private matter not for public consumption. Does this suggest that the idea of the social order entails that the miraculous be kept private? The author has sought to respect his interlocutors’ privacy while at the same time gathering material sufficient to present a substantive thesis on this topic.

Cogen Bohanec, Arihanta Institute

Jain Siddhis and Śrīmad Rājcandra

Around the turn of the Common Era, Buddhists, Hindus and Jains shared a common belief that asceticism would lead to super-ordinary powers, often called *siddhis*, or for Jains, *ṛddhis*. While the possibilities of the achievement of these powers were largely agreed upon, each tradition had its own unique metaphysical understanding of *how* these powers would manifest based on their respective ontological commitments. For the Jain tradition, the proposition of the early literature seems to have been that these powers are the result of the inner, infinite powers of the soul – powers of energy (*vīrya*), consciousness (*caitanya*) and bliss (*sukha*) – becoming unobstructed by the gradual diminishment of the obstructing effect of karmic accumulation. As one progresses spiritually, one removes karma, and these inherent powers of the soul manifest in multiple ways, including the *ṛddhis/siddhis*, which have a variety of enumerations, perhaps as many as sixty-

four, often arranged in categories of seven or eight. The purported presence of these powers served to legitimate Jain philosophical beliefs and may be cited as evidence of the spiritual exaltation of certain practitioners.

This legitimating effect of the *rddhis/siddhis* seems to have carried into modern times. For example, we can see allusions to the presence of these powers in modern Jain Ācāryas, such as Śrīmad Rājendra. However, in the teachings from Śrīmad and his tradition, we see a paradoxical nature to these *rddhis/siddhis*. With the teachings of Śrīmad and his key disciples, it is not so much that these powers legitimate one's spiritual status – which as indicators of spiritual progress that may be true – rather they become mostly regarded as a dangerous obstacle to *true* spiritual development. With self-realization, the tradition teaches, one gains infinite powers, and while they can be used extremely judiciously to help others in rare instances (which are mentioned in the literature), generally if one exercises these powers they exacerbate the egoistic condition that led to the accumulation of karma in the first place. Therefore, as practitioners advance they should be extremely cautious about exercising such powers—and there are a plethora of literary citations within the canon of the tradition that illustrate this. This paper focuses on the discourse around *rddhis* in the modern Jain tradition of Śrīmad Rājendra in his own biographies and hagiographies, as well as instances of this discourse in his writings, and within the tradition that has descended from his teaching—discourse which is at once legitimating and cautionary regarding these powers.

Saturday, November 23, 2024

Session 4: 9:00-10:30am:

DANAM Annual Book Review: (M23-103)

***Mirabai: The Making of a Saint*, Nancy M. Martin, Oxford University Press, 2023**

Organizer: Nancy M. Martin, Chapman University

Presider: Veena Howard, California State University, Fresno

Mirabai, an iconic sixteenth-century Indian poet-saint, is renowned for her unwavering love of God, her disregard for social hierarchies and gendered notions of honor and shame, and her challenge to familial, feudal, and religious authorities. Defying attempts to constrain and even kill her, she could not be silenced. Though verifiable facts regarding her life are few, her fame spread across social, linguistic, and religious boundaries, and stories about her multiplied across the subcontinent and the centuries.

In *Mirabai*, Nancy M. Martin traces the story of this immensely popular Indian saint from the earliest manuscript references to her through colonial and nationalist developments to scholarly and popular portrayals in the decades leading up to Indian independence as well as oral epic traditions. This book examines Mirabai's place as both insider and outsider to the developing strands of devotional Hinduism and her role in the contested and gendered terrain of debates around the education and independence of women and the crafting of Indian and Hindu identities.

Mirabai offers a comprehensive and multi-layered portrait of this remarkable and still controversial woman, who continues to be a source of inspiration and catalyst for self-actualization for spiritual seekers, artists, activists, and so many others in India and around the world today.

Reviewers:

Bhakti Mamtora, University of Arizona

Vasudha Narayanan, University of Florida, Gainesville

Loriliai Biernacki, University of Colorado, Boulder

Dalpat Rajpurohit, University of Texas, Austin

Gil Ben-Herut, University of South Florida

Respondent:

Nancy M. Martin, Chapman University