Jnanapravaha

JNANAPRAVAHA MUMBAI
QUARTERLY

OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2019

CONTENTS

Director's Note

At the risk of sounding repetitive, what an extraordinary quarter it has been, bookended by two memorable happenings – the first is the start of our academic year marked by the 21st iteration of the flagship Indian Aesthetics course, with an unbelievable number of sign-ups (we are indeed sorry to have been unable to accept several applications due to time and space constraints), and the second, a rare lecture, conversation and discussion between two legal eagles, Justice Srikrishna and Arghya Sengupta, on judicial accountability and transparency, a perennial topic of civic concern. Needless to say that the full house had much fodder for thought, and many such future discussions await.

Yoga & Tantra 2019, a certificate course over three months has also been embraced by a large number of seekers who want to understand and unravel the complexities, in both the theory and praxis arenas, of topics as varied as Pancharatra, Shaktism, Bengal Vaishnavism, Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism, to name a few, through texts, meta theologies and philosophies. Participating scholars, international and national, have unequivocally supported and championed this one-of-its-kind course. Since it is still in session, a detailed report will be carried in the next Quarterly.

The largely unknown connections between Freud & Egypt, as well as the frames for multilingual literary study during the Roman Empire, were themes over two sessions. Meanwhile, a talk chronicled the faith and material concerns that went towards shaping the identity and ecology of the Ganga. Insightful details are carried inside these pages, though some write-ups of this quarter will be carried only in the next because of time compulsions.

October-December is promisingly replete with four varied seminars, ranging from Methodologies of Art History, Gandharan Sculpture, and Indian Temples and Texts, to Great Buddhist Stupas. These will give us pedagogical handles to the Seeing-Making-Meaning of monuments, art objects and texts through varied prisms. The calendar year ends with the flourishes of Dancing Women in Popular Hindi Cinema, and begins with an immersive 10-day course on The Making of Safavid Iran: History, Art, and Architecture. We are also pleased to announce a fresh certificate course in Aesthetics, Criticism and Theory from February-April 2020, and a new initiative on South Asian Painting which will be launched in March 2020. All in all, much to look forward to, so do stay tuned in and keep visiting our website www.jp-india.org for updates.

With my warmest wishes,

Rashmi Poddar PhD.
Director

AESTHETICS
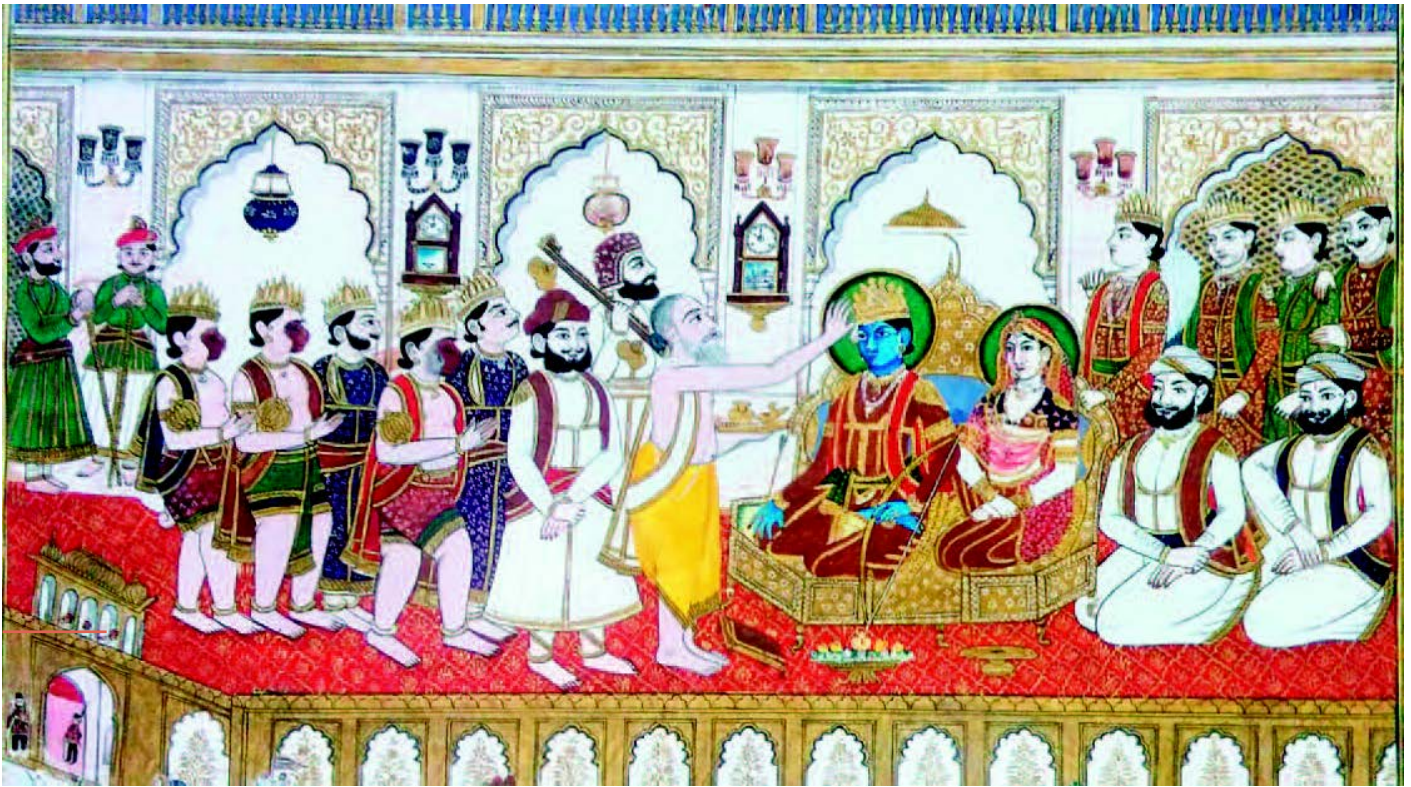
Detail of Scene of a Rama Darbara in a Shekhavati, Haveli, Shekhavati, Northern Rajasthan, c. 1850

JPM's Aesthetics offerings include:
(1) an academic year-long Postgraduate Diploma/Certificate course in Indian Aesthetics, as well as ongoing public seminars and lectures in the field; (2) a quarterly Postgraduate Certificate course in Yoga and Tantra, as well as ongoing public seminars and lectures in the field; (3) a quarterly Postgraduate Certificate course in Southeast Asian Art and Architecture, as well as ongoing public seminars and lectures in the field; (4) a fortnight of public seminars and lectures in Islamic Aesthetics; (5) an ongoing series of public seminars in Buddhist Aesthetics; and (6) occasional academic conferences and workshops in these fields.

Indian Aesthetics
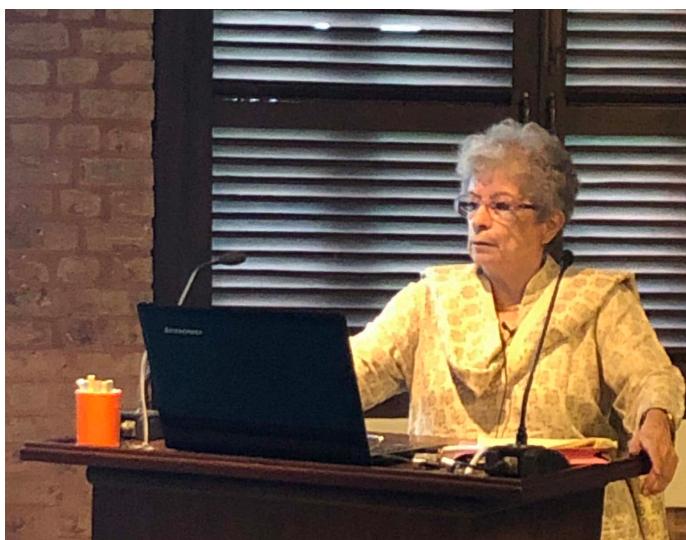
Dr. Shereen Ratnagar speaks during 'Political-Cultural Background of India Harappan Civilisation'

This year, the Indian Aesthetics (IA) course was inundated with enquiries, with a final enrolment of 57 students exceeding all expectations and affirming the strength of the course. IA has evolved continuously despite retaining a loose structure aligned with *Rasa* theory, and underpinnings of a roughly chronological framework of history, archaeology, architecture, anthropology, literature, philosophy, and religious tenets. This wide base ensures the course's interdisciplinary nature, which affords its students special insight into the development of aesthetics in the Indian subcontinent across 5,000 years. More than half the students have enrolled in the challenging diploma programme which involves academic writing.

The course began in July 2019 with an introduction to the principles of classical Indian aesthetics by

Dr. Rashmi Poddar, who later engaged the class in foundational sessions that elucidated how form, content and meaning emerge in Indian art, with special emphasis on *Rasa* theory. The idea of *rasa* first arose in relation to dramaturgy, and though it has been applied to other arts, such transposition is naturally complex and requires careful thought.

Theoretical paradigms in ancient and medieval subcontinental texts freshly interpreted by 20th-century scholarship formed the backbone of Dr. Poddar's sessions. The extensive use of illustrated lectures exposes students to rare and well-known masterpieces of Indian art. The fascinating history of classical poetics was explored ably by Sanskritist Dr. Veena Londhe. The examination of the highly enigmatic, proto-historic Indus Valley Civilisation by Dr. Shereen Ratnagar, an archaeologist and a well-known authority on the subject, gave students new food for thought as her approach is anthropological rather than antiquarian. It forged connections between objects, some familiar to students and others lesser known, and their possible meaning and use.

Dr. Supriya Rai, both a scholar and practitioner of Buddhism, used Gandharan images depicting various *mudras* to introduce students to the Buddha and his life. She delved into Theravada and Mahayana Buddhist philosophy, underlying these aesthetic representations and the concept of *trikaya* or the three bodies. Images displaying *Shanta Rasa* related to the Buddha's practice of stillness, silence and meditation, and those displaying *Karuna Rasa* or compassion were connected to the Buddha's resultant action in the world. Dr. Rai explained how wrathful deities in Vajrayana Buddhism nevertheless fit the Buddhist paradigm of compassion. She also discussed *paramita* or the virtues emphasised by the Buddha. Dr. Leela Wood's highly effective illustrated session showed the development and aesthetics of the early Buddha image in relation to philosophical tenets of Buddhism.

Dr. Pushkar Sohoni's elucidation of temple architecture in the subcontinent explored classical forms along

Dr. Rashmi Poddar speaks to the new full batch of Indian Aesthetics 2019-2020 students

with adaptations found in Maratha temples, creating an engaging juxtaposition. The basics of academic writing were discussed by Dr. Jaya Kanoria in a session open to the entire class, though specially catering to diploma students. This session is designed to train students in alert and analytical reading of academic texts and involved an engagement with a piece of academic writing.

Since the last three years, in addition to synopses, bibliographies and glossaries, readings are posted on our student portal in advance of each lecture to enable an immersive academic experience. An invaluable resource providing authentic material, the student platform archives each year's course and results in an expansion of its scope.

At the end of September 2019, students of Indian Aesthetics are poised to engage further in Buddhist aesthetics with Ms. Swati Chemburkar, in Brahmanical aesthetics with Dr. Kirit Mankodi and Dr. Poddar, and dip into the pool of Jain aesthetics with Dr. Viraj Shah and Ms. Kamalika Bose. *- J.K.*

PAST PROGRAMMES

Connected Worlds: The Rashtrakutas and their Coinage

April 16th, 2019, 6:30 pm | Shailendra Bhandare (Assistant Keeper, South Asian and Far-Eastern Numismatics and Paper Money Collections, Ashmolean Museum)

The evening began with Dr. Rashmi Poddar warmly introducing Dr. Shailendra Bhandare, his work and career, after which the illustrious historian took the podium to deliver an illuminating lecture titled 'Connected Worlds: The Rashtrakutas and their Coinage'.

Dr. Bhandare, who has held lectures at Jnanapravaha in the past, is the Assistant Keeper, South Asian and Far Eastern Numismatics and Paper Money Collections in the Ashmolean Museum. He's also a Fellow of St Cross College, and a member of Faculties of Oriental Studies, Oxford. He began his career as a numismatist with a visiting fellowship at the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge, and was later appointed as a post-doctoral fellow of the Society for South Asian Studies, and worked as a curator at the British Museum on the coins of later Mughals and their Indian princely states.

Dr. Shailendra Bhandare speaks during 'Connected Worlds: The Rashtrakutas and their Coinage'

He's been published widely, and to quote the blurb for his current presentation: "The Rashtrakutas emerged as a preeminent power in 8th – 10th centuries and dominated the so-called 'Age of the Three Empires' in early medieval India. They influenced the political scene, they were patrons to great temples like Ellora, and facilitated a new wave of trade and commerce with the world of Islam which now commanded the regions across the Arabian Sea. Given historical wisdom dictates there were no Rashtrakuta coins. This view was articulated by Marxist historians like RS Sharma. However, in recent times, this widely held belief has come under very close scrutiny. Coins that can be attributed to the Rashtrakutas have come to light, and they throw a very different and welcome light not only on prevalent theories of how the early medieval period in India should be viewed and studied, but also provide an interesting and textured context of India's connections with the wider world through maritime and commercial links."

This lecture unravelled some of these closely held notions with the help of data which has not been published elsewhere in its appropriate context. Dr. Bhandare began with the acknowledgement that he welcomed opportunities such as this one at Jnanapravaha, to showcase works in progress, where the audience serves an invaluable sounding board.

The scholar spoke of the conceptualisation of his lecture topic, which, as it turns out, was prompted by the discovery of a small horde of gold coins last year. On being shown these coins that had turned up in the market, he realised they were a significant find, and began to delve deeper, tracing their history. The results of this research was what his presentation encompassed.

Dr. Bhandare referenced the fact that most textbooks on Indian history claim that great medieval dynasties didn't issue any coins. But interestingly, there were an abundance of exquisite monuments existing during this time, such as the Kailash Temple, which the Rashtrakutas were credited with creating. The question that arose at this juncture was 'How did people manage to create and engage in works of such incredible artistic beauty without having an economic or monetary basis for it?'

This conundrum became the springboard for Dr. Bhandare's quest for information. He traced various trade routes that were popular during this period, which connected India to different parts of the wider world, and he began to look for numismatic evidence linked to these regions.

He analysed previous historians' methods of research and provided details on how the misbelief of paucity in coinage came to be. He used a preponderance

of epigraphic evidence as his mainstay to trace the material remnants of the Rashtrakutas. From coins to biographies of medieval rulers and written remarks of geographers, information was drawn from various sources to debunk the popularly held misbelief, and to corroborate his theory.

A fascinating interactive session followed the talk, with Dr. Bhandare answering a burgeoning number of queries from an enthralled audience, and the evening drew to a close with the promise of further clarifications after the lecture had formally concluded. - *S.P.M.*

Ganga: The Living Pulse of Indian History

August 19th, 2019, 6:30 pm | Sudipta Sen (Professor of History and Director of the Middle East/South Asia Studies Program, University of California, Davis)

In a wide-ranging talk offering vignettes from his recently published book *Ganga: The Many Pasts of a River*, Sudipta Sen mapped the connections of the Ganga with India's long civilisational history. An unconventional history with an anthropological slant, the study delves into the cultural meanings and social practices surrounding the Ganga as well as its current paradoxical ecological crisis (the revered river is extremely polluted). The Ganga connotes both a physical and mythical river linked to the religious, political and cultural life that developed on its banks, and Sen has mapped these complexities through space and time.

Archaeological digs have revealed human and ceramic remains, religious architecture and artefacts that tell tales of a long and varied past. The Ganga basin was not settled very early in paleontological terms because it was a zone of seismic activity. Since antiquity, the Ganga has been surrounded by tales of other-worldly manifestations which emerged from the human urge to give life meaning. In poetic and imaginative renditions, the Ganga was variously imaged as a goddess, a bountiful, beautiful and fecund maiden, a maternal, compassionate figure who washes away the sins of the fallen as well as the geographical river.

Despite the variation, the scholar teased out two iconic archetypes that blended to create a composite figure: one, an enigmatic goddess, fickle like many deities in the Indian tradition, the other, an embodiment of natural plenitude. The sacredness of the Ganga is not just an affirmation of its geographical and environmental importance to the ecosystems and communities it nurtured. Displaying a photograph of the stunning gorge of the Kali Gandaki, a pre-Himalayan river which joins the Ganga and carries ammonite fossils that are revered as *shaligram*, the aniconic form of Vishnu, the scholar asserted that the Ganga is viewed as Vishnu in pure liquid form and is associated with both Shiva and Brahma. He examined stories generated by multiple texts, both classical and popular, which combine to create an elaborate mythos surrounding the river that has always preoccupied the people of the land where it flows.

Such preoccupation is not surprising, considering that after the proliferation of hunter-gatherers and cultivators gave way to *janapadas*, powerful polities established themselves around the river. Jainism and Buddhism were born, nurtured and spread in and from these environs and their founders walked extensively in the region to teach their beliefs. Stories of the Buddha's life tell of his crossings of the Ganga. Extant depictions of the Jataka tales show lush riverine landscapes, providing a clue to the common image of the Ganga valley at the time. Representations of mythical inhabitants such as *Nagas* and *Yakshas* reveal the continued prevalence of nature worship. The adoration of the relics of the Buddha, which according to legend were distributed to the eight

Dr. Sudipta Sen signs copies of his book titled 'Ganga: The Many Pasts of a River'

great kingdoms of the Ganga valley, was also seen in stupas built in smaller towns and cities that sprang up all along the river. Trade, urbanisation and agriculture were supported by the great river, leading to material prosperity and the proliferation of large kingdoms with massive armies, extensive mercantile activity, travel as well as pilgrimage, all intimately connected to each other.

The Gupta empire established the Ganga as an emblem used to describe imperial prowess, and as an auspicious river which brought prosperity and good fortune. A similarity between the bountiful Lakshmi, consort of Vishnu and the goddess Ganga, who became indispensable to rites of consecration or *abhisheka*, is discernible in plentiful carved images. Kings from the south also vied for control of the Ganga valley, and a Chola king took the title 'the conqueror of the Ganga' when he succeeded. The speaker emphasised that *madhyadesa* or the 'middle country' evoked in contemporary literature was the land watered by the Ganga and its tributaries. The reign of the Guptas in this region and the Ganga valley continued to exercise a tremendous hold over the imagination of imperial regimes of the future. - *J.K.*

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

Gandhara by Design

November 22nd & 23rd, 2019, 6:30 - 8:30 pm | Naman P. Ahuja (Curator of Indian art, Professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University and Co-Editor of Marg Publications)
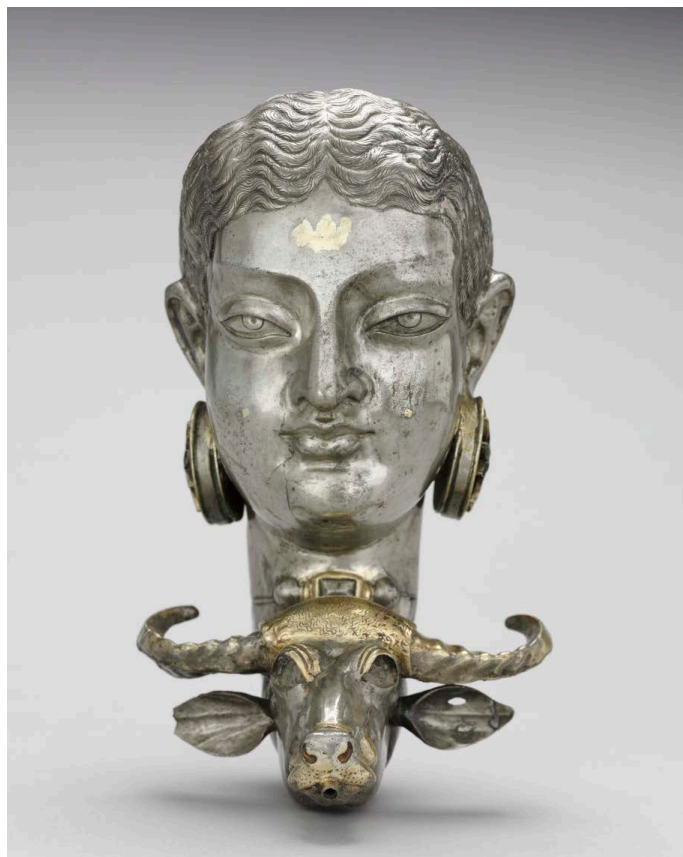
Durga on Mahishasura in the form of a silver rhyton for ritual use; probably Turkoshahi, 7th century CE, © Cleveland Museum of Art

How have the extraordinary new discoveries in museums across the world, new photographs of the treasures from Kabul, and objects now in private collections enhanced our understanding of the art of Gandhara? Using the recent issue of Marg, *Gandhara: A Confluence of Cultures*, as a core text, in four detailed lectures Prof. Ahuja will explain how objects tell us a story of the history of conflict, how can their design and technique tell us about trade, society and religion.

Day 1:
• Early history [BMAC, Swat graves and Bactrian Greeks]
• The Cultural identity of a person from Gandhara [200 BCE- 200 CE]

Day 2:
• Buddhism in Gandhara [1st- 4th centuries CE]
• From Hindushahi Gandhara to Ghaznavid/ Ghorid Kandahar

Temples and Texts

November 25th, 26th, 27th, 28th & 29th, 2019, 6:30 - 8:30 pm | Adam Hardy (Emeritus Professor of Asian Architecture at Cardiff University)

The traditional Indian texts on architecture, *vastushastras*, are often characterised as rulebooks to be followed rigidly, or conversely as abstruse treatises divorced from practice. Neither proves to be the case if, knowing the relevant architectural languages, we draw the temple designs as the texts invite us to do. This seminar series will explore the main traditions of Indian temple architecture and their respective texts, presenting worked examples from their instructions. It will show how practice and theory are intertwined, and that both are creative and dynamic.

Day 1
• Indian temples and their typological origins
• Latina temples: measure, proportion and the myth of the *vastumandala*
Day 2
• The medieval blossoming of the Nagara tradition
• Evolving temples in evolving texts

Day 3
- Dravida temples: the language of aedicules and the palette of mouldings
- South Indian texts: Manasara, Mayamata and others

Day 4
- Varata temples: the lost tradition in-between
- Kashmiri temples and the Vishnudharmottarapurana

Day 5
- Bhojpur, the Bhumija and the Samaranganasutradhara
- Bhumija temples and the principle of *parivartana*
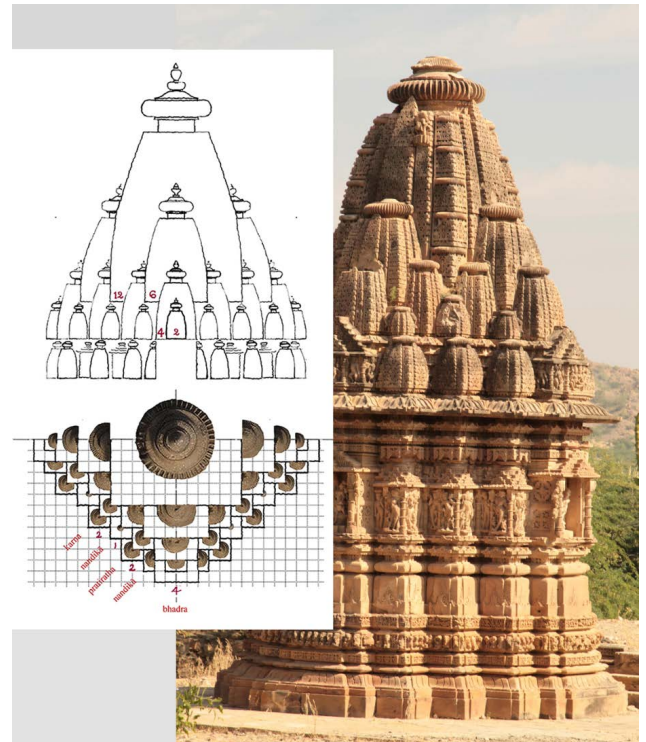
Southeast Asian Aesthetics

PAST PROGRAMMES

The Art and Archaeology of Hindu and Buddhist Southeast Asia

August 4th, 5th, 6th & 7th, 2019, 6:30 - 8:30 pm | Stephen Murphy (Senior Curator for Southeast Asia at the Asian Civilisations Museum)

Dr. Stephen Murphy, an archaeologist and senior curator of Southeast Asia at the Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore conducted four lectures in August to conclude the three-month-long Southeast Asian Art and Architecture programme.

Lecture 1: **Dvaravati and the origins of Buddhism and Hinduism in Thailand**

This lecture took a brief overview of sites that are typically considered the highpoints of Dvaravati culture and art in Thailand. Around the 5th or 6th century, a polity known as Dvaravati emerged in today's central Thailand. Large moated settlements grew out of the late prehistoric cultures of Nakhon Pathom, Lopburi and U Thong. It is still not completely clear whether Dvaravati was an actual kingdom or a confederation of city-states, and though it existed only for a brief period, the art forms produced by it were distinctive and superb. The name Dvaravati first occurs in early Chinese records and coins, possibly influenced by the Indic city of Dwaraka, the land of Krishna.

The lecture first dealt with the famous Bronze Age Thai site of Ban Chiang and the material it produced. Its typical earthenware, bronze bangles and bells indicate indigenous metallurgy and a phase that was clearly anti-Indian. With the gradual arrival of Hindu-Buddhist religious currents, images of Vishnu and Dvaravati wheels of law, similar to the Indian Dharma wheels from the Ashokan period, became noticeable. This is the only region in Southeast Asia where these beautifully carved wheels are found.

The lecture also featured other key objects: Banaspati stones and standing Buddhas in double *vitarka mudra*. The Banaspati stones depict Buddha with two attendants, seated on a monster-like creature, but their significance and function within their society remains a puzzle. There is no Indian parallel to these objects. Along with these objects, Dvaravati architecture produced huge stupas such as Wat Phra Pathom and Khao Khlang Nokand Khao Khlang Nai. The unique culture and style of Dvaravati art continued into the 10th and 11th centuries, though it was gradually politically subsumed into the greater

Angkorian Empire, which emerged in Cambodia in the early 9th century.

Dr. Stephen Murphy speaks during 'The Art and Archaeology of Hindu-Buddhist Southeast Asia'

Lecture 2: **The Buddhist boundaries markers of Northeast Thailand and Laos**

The early spread of Buddhism can be traced across northeast Thailand and Laos, along the river network of Mekong, Chi and Mun. The lecture assessed the spread of Buddhism by focussing on Sema Stones or boundary markers found within the region. The earliest archaeological evidence for these objects dates back to the Dvaravati period, where they are found at numerous sites and settlements throughout northeast Thailand, and central and southern Laos – an area geographically defined as Khorat Plateau. In present-day Thailand, these stones (sometimes 8 or 16) mark the sacred periphery of the Ubosot or ordination halls of Buddhist temples.

Instead of using the conventional evidence of epigraphy or religious texts to understand the object, the lecture focussed on the object itself, so as to understand its possible function in ancient Thai society. By creating an inventory of over 100 sites and over 1,200 objects, the lecture illustrated a unique methodology of tracking the spread of Buddhism within the region. Based on these sacred clusters marked by Sema stones, the usage of Buddhist settlements was ascertained, but whether their purpose was to serve as meditation retreats for monks or as pilgrimage sites is unclear. It also dealt with the reuse and reconfiguration of these boundary markers in present-day Thailand as they now acquire the role of pillars for shrines.

Lecture 3: **Thailand below the winds: Maritime Southeast Asia**

The lecture began with the study of a Mahajanaka *jataka* painting by a contemporary Thai artist. It depicts Prince Mahajanaka suffering a shipwreck and struggling to keep alive by swimming the ocean

for seven days until the gods come to his rescue. It set the background for the early sea travels of the Chinese monks to India in search of Buddhist texts. The lecture discussed the different ports used by Buddhist monks and the development of Buddhism around these.

The role of the great Indian Buddhist monastery of Nalanda in the spread of Buddhism was undisputed, but the emergence of other Buddhist centres in Bujang Valley, Kedah, Malaysia or Srivijaya and Java in Indonesia was equally important. The most celebrated Indian monk Atisha spent considerable time in Bujang Valley under Buddhist monk Dharmakirti, before heading towards Tibet. The recent archaeological excavations held at Sungai Batu in the Bujang Valley area have uncovered around fifty sites. The most interesting structure to be uncovered is a huge circular base of a brick monument onto which a square structure was built with a round hole in its middle. Archaeologists are still trying to determine the nature and function of the monument. Along with archaeological remains, the early Southeast Asian shipwrecks of Belitung, Cirebon, Phanom Surin and Chau Tan add to our understanding of Buddhism in the region. The lecture concluded that instead of looking at the unidirectional model of Buddhism, we must see a multidirectional flow of ideas in the region.

Nalanda Buddhist Society

Lecture 4: **The Buddhist Kingdom of Mainland Southeast Asia: Bagan and Sukhothai**

Carrying forward some threads of the earlier lecture, Dr. Murphy discussed two kingdoms of Bagan, Myanmar and Sukhothai, Thailand. Along with sea routes, Bagan had the advantage of land routes and ancient civilisations such as Pyu and Mon, which grew in the upper and lower regions of Myanmar. Unlike the early moated settlements of Dvaravati, Pyu settlements were walled cities. A unique Pyu stele depicts turbaned figures, which are not really seen in other parts of Southeast Asia. Drawing from Mon and Pyu cultures, Bagan developed between the 11th

and 13th centuries, producing a construction boom in temple building parallel to Angkor. The economic base for both can be found in the production of large surpluses in the rice industry.

The great stupa of Shwe-hsan-daw, built during the reign of Anawratha exemplifies the architectural revolutionary age of the Burmese better than any other structure. The verticality of the design was not only completely novel in Burmese architecture at the time, but was not to be repeated again at Bagan, as the slightly later, squatter Shwezigon demonstrates. The latter was to become the model for the Bagan period stupa in general.

The lecture then compared the art and architecture of Bagan with the Sukhothai kingdom of Thailand which arose at the end of the Khmer dominance in the region. Several temples were erected, which can now be viewed at Sukhothai Historical Park. The religious structures – constructed using brick, laterite and stucco – were intended to serve the royal rituals and social needs of Theravada Buddhism. Design inspiration for Sukhothai architecture came from various cultural sources, with the earliest temple sites attesting Sri Lankan or Khmer influences, yet later becoming distinctively Thai in nature.

Dr. Murphy pointed out the uniqueness of Southeast Asian art and architecture throughout his lectures, using examples such as the wheel of law, Banaspati stones of Dvaravati, Sema stones of northeast Thailand, the true arch of Bagan architecture, complicated techniques of Burmese vaulting, and walking Buddhas of Sukhothai. All these features are distinctively Southeast Asian with no Indian counterparts.

The seminar series was attended by current and past participants as well as many others interested in the subject, and, as is evident below, was captured beautifully in illustrative notes by Prajakti Pai. - *S.C.*
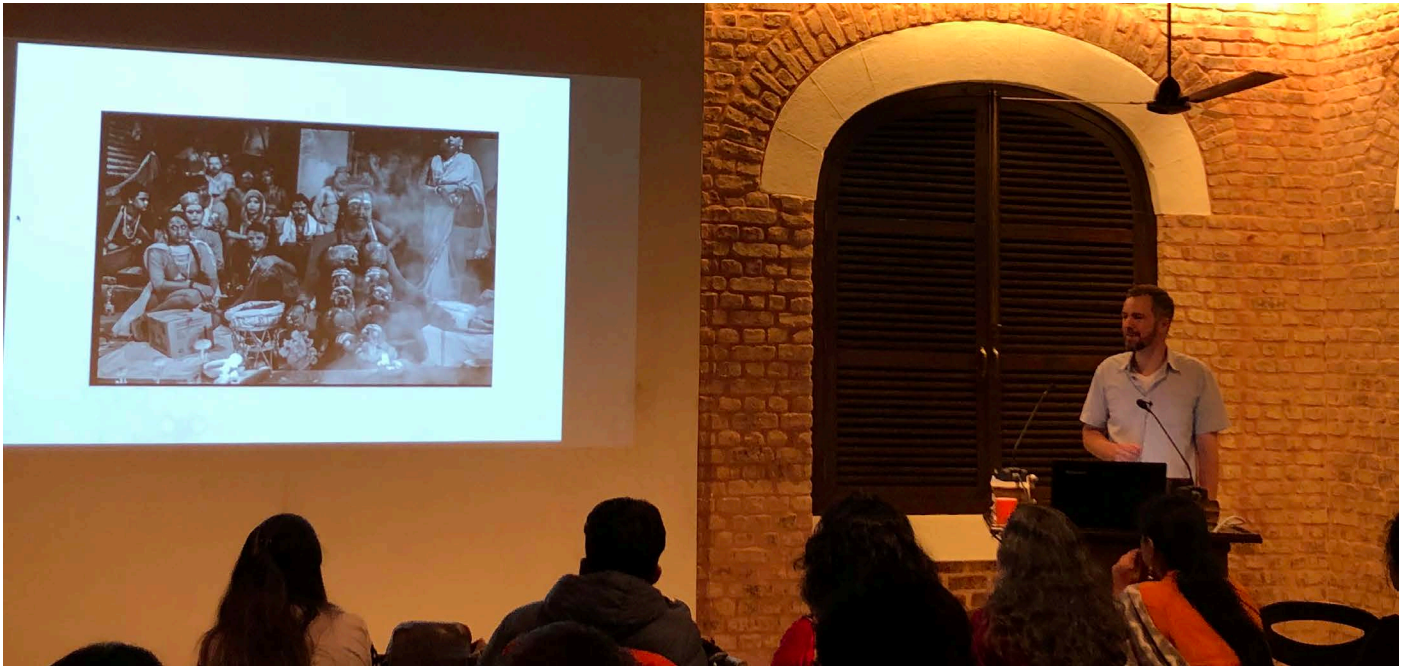
Yoga and Tantra
PAST PROGRAMMES

Models Of The Human In Tantric Hinduism

August 8th, 9th & 10th, 2019, 5:30 - 8:00 pm | Bjarne Wernicke-Olesen (Research Lecturer at the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies at the Theology and Religion Faculty, University of Oxford)

Dr. Bjarne Wernicke-Olesen speaks during 'Models of the Human in Tantric Hinduism'

Dr. Bjarne Wernicke-Olesen, (*currently leading the Śākta Traditions project, an international research project based at the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, OCHS*), over the course of a densely packed three days of an open-to-public seminar, part of the Yoga and Tantra Course 2019 – brought an etic perspective to the history and phenomenology of Hindu *Tantric* traditions, touching upon the stated ontology by practitioners he interviewed and observed in his studies.

From the Age of Ascetic Reformism to the Shaiva Age

We began by looking at what's been called India's Axial Age or the Age of Ascetic Reformism in the 5th or 6th century BCE. The Age of Criticism is defined by the capacity to examine traditionally held assumptions, especially *Vedic* assumptions, beliefs, and worldviews, and the ritualistic interaction with these imaginaries. The lecture series also covered the period in Indian history named the '*Shaiva*' Age, a period when classical *yoga* moved into the world of *Tantric yoga*.

Classical *yoga* is the systematic formulation of the technology of *yoga* as synthesised by Patanjali in the 4th or 5th century CE. In this system, *siddhis* or supernatural powers are considered side-effects or distractions on the path to liberation, whereas in later *Tantric* traditions, they become one of the two aims of practice. They represent *bhukti* (enjoyment of power in the world) alongside that of *mukti* (ending the cycle of transmigration).

The goal of classical *yoga* was to address the main concerns of ascetic reformism – to solve life's suffering through practical methods, and freedom from rebirth via *asamprajnat samadhi* (non-cognitive *samadhi*). It did not pay much attention to *asanas* and showed an aversion to one's body, which was rooted in asceticism. Instead, it focussed on human consciousness and the practical realisation of the truth within or the discovery of the true self, for an experience that transcends language and thought.

We next looked at the chronology of the Hindu traditions (*Vaishnava, Shaiva, Shakta, and Smarta*) along with the four forms of Hindu religiosity (*karma-marga, jnana-marga, bhakti-marga* and *virya-marga*). We then came up to the *Shaiva Tantric* traditions of the: *atimarga* or the outer path, the *Shaiva mantra-marga* or the path of mantras (*Tantric Shaivism*), and finally to the *Shakta kula-marga* (*Tantric Shaktism*).

Shaktism and the Great Goddess

The problem of studying *Shakta* traditions or *Shaktism* is a problem of definition, which seems to differ according to perspective. It is defined differently under the study of religions versus Indology, and while using traditional external terminology versus traditional internal terminology. Some academic perspectives like to call the *Shakta* traditions a sub-sect of extreme *Shaivism*.

Although *Shakta* is an indigenous term, it can be said to be a traditional external term because the practitioners themselves prefer *kula* or *kaula* as self-designation for their tradition, method, or practice.

Hinduism cannot be understood without the Indian great goddess. She is a cosmic force, creating, destroying, revealing, and concealing.

This goddess has many names and forms and is the coming together of various local deities. She has two contrasting aspects – benign and horrific. According to these functions or aspects, the goddesses are divided into mild and wild, *saumya* and *ugra*. The *Shakta* traditions see the rise of the Indian great goddess. While the *Shaiva* Age lasts from the 5th to the 13th centuries, the rise of the great goddess in *Puranik* and *Tantric* traditions makes the *Shaiva* Age look like the *Shakta* Age from a philosophical point of view. The question remains, can this tradition also be viewed as non-*Tantric*? Can *Shaktism* be considered a major branch of Hinduism alongside *Shaiva* and *Vaishnava*, or is it best placed as an esoteric tradition within *Tantric Shaivism*?

Shakta kula-marga and the 15th-century Hathapradipika

The *Tantric* vision rejects the ascetic aversion to the body and looks at ways to cultivate the body into the *divya deha* or the divine body.

The *kula-marga*, rooted in *Shakta kapalika* rituals in the cremation grounds, looked to consort with *yoginis* (divine female beings) who were invited through visualised meditation and offered blood, often from the practitioner's own body, to ascend with them into the sky. The *kula* world of *yoginis* is an external world. The *yoginis* have a strong presence in the body; the practitioner tries to appease, or at best, control these forces through sexual offerings and food. If pleased, they reveal themselves as beautiful women and bestow *siddhis* and immortality. This is the external worship of pacification and control. The presiding deities are *Bhairava* and *Kali* (sometimes only *Kali*) with retinues of *yoginis*.

Kaula-marga involves more domesticated traditions with refined aesthetics. *Kaula-marga* translated the visionary fantasy of *kula-marga* into mystical experience. *Yoginis* became deities of senses and sensations – *kameshwaris*, revelling in the practitioner's sensations. If this intense pleasure of *sadhana* (practice) clouds his internal awareness, the practitioner becomes a plaything, a *pashu*. If, however, the ego is entirely suspended, he becomes *kuleshwara*, of the enlightened consciousness.

The *kaula* process is of internalisation and domestication. But rather than appeasing, it requires communication and negotiation with these forces of *yoginis*. Rituals of cremation grounds become internal and meditational. Matsyendranath, a guru of the *Natha sampradaya* is associated with the western transmission of the tradition. He enters the picture in the 9th or 10th century CE. Gorakshanath is said to be his disciple, even though he arrives three centuries later. Svatmarama, writer of *Hathapradipika* (15th century CE), the locus classicus of the physical *yoga* of *hatha yoga*, is said to belong to this lineage.

After the *Hathapradipika* (same as *Hathayogapradipika*, often mentioned in secondary and later sources), we see a democratisation of *yoga*, after the *Shaiva* Age. It no longer remains the privilege of the ascetics.

Models of the Human in *Tantric* Hinduism *Netra Tantra*

We see the *Tantric* goddess tradition merging new *Tantric* and *Yogic* models of the human to cultivate the body through visualising meditation.

Different traditions imagine the body differently –

On the second day of this seminar, we focussed on the 9th-century text of the *Netra Tantra*, especially chapters 6, 7, and 8, detailing gross meditation (*sthula dhyanam*), subtle meditation (*sukshma dhyanam*), and the ultimate meditation (*para dhyanam*) respectively.

The *Netra Tantra* (*Tantra* of the eye) is divided into 22 chapters and worships *Shiva* as conqueror of death or *Amriteshvara* (Amritsha in Nepal). The text is written as a dialogue between *Shiva* and his consort or *devi*. It is mostly a text for the protection of the king. A strong *Shakta* influence is evident in the text with its many references to deities and practices characteristic of the *kula-marga*.

The 6th chapter refers to gross visualisations or *sthula dhyanam*, which includes practices involving *mandalas* for curing a person of disease, cleansing of the body, etc. The person is visualised on a lotus in a milky

ocean, body filled with *amrita*. Repeating the patient's name, framed by *netra mantra* (*om jum sah*) is said to have the ability to cure the person.

The 7th chapter of *Netra Tantra* is especially significant to understand the esoteric subtle body as explained in the text. It refers to subtle visualisations or *sukshma dhyanam* – the body as a container for the 'elixir of immortality', and different cosmological structures to aid the deification of the body. There are two visualisations that are practiced. One is of a subtle energy rising through the centre of the body and meeting *Shiva* at the crown of the head, known as *tantra prakriya*. And the second is when the same latent energy released at the top floods the body with nectar (*amrita*) on its return, known as *kula prakriya*.

It takes visualisation and breathing techniques to realise the practitioner's full, unlimited potential by realising the mysterious nature of his divine body or *divya deha*. Knowledge becomes practised and is transmitted as ritualised knowledge or *parampara* from guru to disciple. The theoretical aspect embraces cosmological, theological, anthropological elements – creating an overarching religious imaginary that goes beyond a single text or tradition. (Philologically, this shows that single texts become crystallisations of smaller parts of a larger universe.)

The *Netra Tantra* advises the practice of visualising meditation in spots such as a jungle, garden, crossroads, mountaintop, cattle field, riverbank, or home. It further gives an internal architecture of:

3 *shaktis*
3 channels
6 circles
12 *granthis* (knots)
5 voids
3 objects

The 8th chapter refers to the highest form of meditation, *para dhyanam*, and is particularly interesting as it is a reinterpretation of the eight limbs (*ashtanga yoga*) of classical *yoga*, as seen from the perspective and the level of supreme reality of that of Lord *Shiva* .

The *Shakta* Anthropology of the *Hathapradipika*

We learnt from Dr. Wernicke-Olesen that the models of the human were quite arbitrary during the time of the *Netra Tantra*, but seemed to become more established during the time of the *Kubjikamata Tantra* (*Tantra* of the hunchbacked goddess or mother), about 10th century CE. Here, goddess *Kubjika* is shown to be synonymous with the goddess *Kundalini*. We learnt that the vertical axis model of *Kundalini yoga* originates

in a *Shakta* context. And the now standardised and popularised form of the six *chakras* + 1 came from this text.

From the base to the top, these are:
Muladhara – located at the anus, *swadhisthana* – located at the genitals, *manipura* – located at the navel, *anahata* – located at the heart, *vishuddha* – located at the throat, and *ajna* – located at the eyes.

This *chakric* system was extremely influential, to crossover even to the *Shrividya* tradition of the goddess *Tripura Sundari* (southern transmission). Chapter 6 describes the six *chakras* (*sat-chakra-nirupana*) of the 16th century *Shrividya* text *Tattvachintamani*, authored by Purnananda, which was translated by Sir John Woodroffe under his pen name, Arthur Avalon, in 1918 in his book *Serpent Power*. The translation brought instant recognition and credibility to this *chakric* formulation, globally, and is followed in modern *yoga* circles to this day.

The *Tantric* body is a composite body-mind of the initiate/practitioner. It exists in a universe of divine powers. The body is part and representation of this cosmos. Supernatural forces and deities animate this body and cosmos. Shakti is seen as a force made to travel in the middle channel (*sushumna*) to be able to achieve a *divya deha*. The visualising meditation is to imagine this *Tantric* body superimposed on one's observable body.

The *Tantric* belief is that only a god can worship a god, hence the need for the deification of the body.

Like the *Kundalini*, a needle of sound (*nada suchi*) pierces through the obstacles in the *sukshma* body and reaches the abode of *Shiva* at the crown of the head. This makes the body divine and hence bereft of all disease.

In some traditions, what rises through the body is the 'spear of knowledge'.

Referencing the scholarship of Dr. James Mallinson, a previous speaker at the Yoga and Tantra course held in 2016, Dr. Wernicke-Olesen further explained the *Shakta* influence through *laya yoga* techniques being overlaid on the *Hathapradipika*. *Hathapradipika* is a unique text which brings together the disparate traditions of *tapas* and that of *kula-marga*, focussing on the aims of liberation and immortality respectively. In the ancient tradition of *tapas*, the practice is of *bindudharana*, or the retention of semen in the body. *Bindu* can be translated as semen (and menstrual blood sometimes), which is considered the elixir of immortality, *amrita* or nectar. It is seen as vitality

and a life force, and hence, preserving it can lead to immortality, or at least a long and disease-free life.

The practices that help in retention of *bindu* are the *khechari mudra* and the *vajroli mudra*.

The *vajroli mudra* is a kind of hydraulic method of reabsorption of *bindu*/semen/*rajas* back into the body (so you don't lose your life force), to create a situation of having your cake and eating it too, allowing damage control in case of loss of semen by ejaculation, as well as absorbing the life force of a sexual partner through absorbing their *bindu*, a situation of *bhukti* and *mukti* not being mutually exclusive.

The *yogic* body is seen as an instrument to attain liberation from bodily existence, as embodied in the *atimarga* of the ascetics.

For householders and ascetics alike, *Tantra* brought in the idea of *siddhis* and immortality.

The defining factor of the *yogic* process is concentration and then concentration without an object (physical object, mental construct, *mantra*). This concentration leads to a transformative experience which became a great leap in Indian thought and tradition – *asamprajnata samadhi* (non-cognitive *samadhi*) or *samyak dhyana* in Buddhism (proper meditation). Since it is a non-cognitive experience, it is beyond words and beyond thoughts.

The subjective dimension of the *yogic*/ascetic traditions is seen in the individuals who internalise these collective memories or imaginaries by codifying text and tradition-specific knowledge onto the body through yogic practice.

Tradition thus becomes practised knowledge, collective memories transferred across generations. These are not passively received but actively reconstructed in shared imagination, reconstituted in the present as memory. - *A.V.*

Karma, Fivefold Yoga, and Puja in the *Yogabindu*

August 31st, 2019, 6:30 pm | Christopher Key Chapple (Doshi Professor of Indic and Comparative Theology, and Director of the Master of Arts in Yoga Studies at Loyola Marymount University)

Professor Chapple's lecture dwelt on the simplified Jain interpretation of *karma* theory presented in Haribhadra Virahanka's *Yogabindu*, composed in the 6th century CE during the Gupta era. The author is sometimes conflated with Haribhadra Yakini Putra,

writer of the *Yogadrishtisamucchaya*, an 8th century text. Jain cosmology is very specific with reference to *karma*, despite a few apparent parallels with Sankhya philosophy and the Buddhist *Abhidharma* teachings. Jainism, in common with many Indic traditions, posits a singular, primordial life force called *jiva* or *atman*. When the Jain *tapasvin* undergoing the rigorous process of purification attains *kevala* or liberation, this entity ascends into *siddhaloka*, experiencing undying energy, consciousness and bliss. The Jain theory of *karma* was first expounded in the 4th century CE by Umasvati in the *Tattvartha Sutra*. *Karmas*, according to this text, obscure knowledge and insight, delude human beings, produce feelings, hinder power and relate to age, body and heredity. In Jainism, the psychological cosmology of the human body has 148 *prakritis* which are specific manifestations of *karma*.
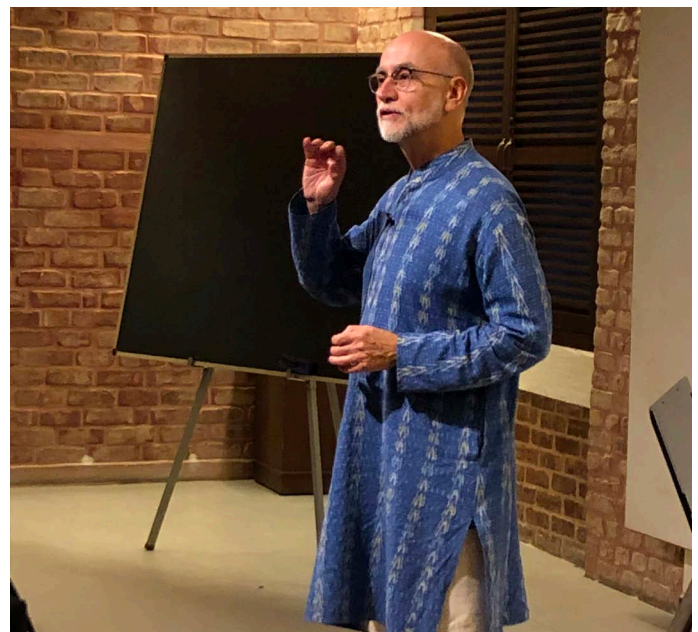
Dr. Christopher Chapple speaks during 'Karma, Fivefold Yoga, and Puja in the Yogabindu'

The *Bhagavadgita*, Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* dated between the 2nd and 4th centuries CE, and the *Yogavashishtha* of the 12th century CE are important texts on yoga and are related to the *Yogabindu* through their subject matter. The translation by Dr. Chapple reveals that the *Yogabindu* includes *chakra* meditation. *Chakras* are energy centres in the body as visualised by yoga, which become points of contact in the course of practice. The text describes the sacred syllable, *mahabhuta* or element, *indriya* or sense organ, and the part of the body associated with each *chakra*. Haribhadra perceives yoga to be the epitome of religious pluralism. The *Yogabindu* considers all types of yoga to be universally beneficial, imbued with truth and enabling of liberation. The intelligent and impartial use yoga to enable a disconnection (*viyoga*) from the self in order to rise above *karma* and *samsara*.

Fivefold yoga in the *Yogabindu* comprises of *adhyatma*,

bhavana, *dhyana*, *samata*, and *vriti samkshaya*. *Japa*, which requires focussing the mind, is the initial practice to attain spirituality (*adhyatma*) through divine grace. Through *adhyatma*, practitioners identify their weaknesses and understand the qualities of these weaknesses to enable suitable actions, thinking about spoken truths and flowing into the practice of loving kindness. (According to the speaker, this *brahma vihara — maitri, karuna, mudita and upeksha —* are present in Jainism, Buddhism and the yoga traditions of Hinduism.) It destroys sins and causes illumination (*sattva*) to arise, bringing about morality (*shila*) and knowledge (*jnana*), leading to the experience of perfection (*siddham*) and even immortality (*amritam*).

Cultivation (*bhavana*) is the result of repeated merit. It connects the mind in the daily practice of *samadhi* which reduces impurity and leads to the practice of purity (*shubha*). The mind state residing in purity is *dhyana* (meditation). It is stable and allows the practitioner to enjoy the subtle (*sukshma*). Equanimity (*samata*) arises when ignorance is conquered and understanding enables the practitioner to abandon likes and dislikes. Equanimity 'cuts the thread' of expectation, allowing the destruction of subtle *karma* and brings about disengagement. When behaviours (*vritti*) that result from involvement with *karma* are stopped, this destroys (*samkshaya*) those *karmas*. This is liberative knowledge.

The *Yogabindu* states that *puja* is to be practiced to willingly honour all 'those who see connections', all gurus and all gods, and should be performed thrice a day. It can also be performed mentally. The *puja* enjoins the following of *dharma*, humility, *shila* and correct behaviour in all situations, and renunciation of undesirable things. Such a *puja* means that the persons performing it have 'controlled their senses and overcome their fears and difficulties'. - *J.K.*

The Bengal-Vaishnava Body and its Yogic Affects

September 5th & 6th, 2019, 5:30 - 8:00 pm | Sukanya Sarbadhikary (Assistant Professor of Sociology at Presidency University)

This is a close view of one side of a *mrdangam* or *khol*, a sacred percussion instrument.

Credit: Sukanya Sarbadhikary

The detailed write up about this seminar series will be featured in our next Quarterly (Jan - Mar 2020).

An Introduction to the Pancharatra Tradition

September 18th, 19th, 20th & 21st, 2019, 5:30 - 8:00 pm | Marion Rastelli (Senior Researcher and Deputy Director at the Institute for the Cultural and Intellectual History of Asia of the Austrian Academy of Sciences)

Dr. Marion Rastelli speaks during 'An Introduction to the Panchratra Tradition'

The four-day seminar on the *Pancharatra* tradition covered its history, key features, scriptures, cosmology, theology, religious practices, rituals and temple worship. The lecture series began with a detailed history and scriptures. The earliest sources of this tradition mentioning *vasudevakas* and *bhagwatas* are Panini's *Ashtadhyayi* (5th century BCE), and coins of King Agathocles (around 170 BCE) with images of *Sankarshana, Vasudeva,* and *Narayana* from the epic *Mahabharata*. Archeological evidence has been found in the inscriptions of the Besnagar pillar and the Naneghat cave. There are over 200 *Pancharatra samhitas* – composed during and after the 9th century CE – that have been found. The three most important texts are *Sattvata Samhita, Paushkara Samhita* and *Jayakhya Samhita*, together known as *Ratnatrayam*. Dr Rastelli based her seminar on the *Jayakhya Samhita* which is the cardinal text among available *Pancharatra* literature.

Some scholars believe that the *Pancharatra* system originated with *Narayana* (Supreme God) himself, who taught it to his disciples in five nights (*Pancharatra*). According to Professor Schrader (Author of the book *'Introduction to Pancharatra and the Ahirbudhnya Samhita'*), the sect took its name from its central idea of *Narayana*, interpreted philosophically as the five-fold self-manifestation of God in terms of his five forms: *para* (highest), *vyuha* (emanatory), *vibhava* (incarnate), *antaryamin* (inner being) and *archa* (image).

The highest deity in the *Pancharatra* is *Vishnu* alone, although he may be addressed with a number of other names – *Narayana, Vasudeva, Bhagavata* or any of his thirty-eight *vibhavas*. This vast pantheon of *Vishnu* can be seen as an assimilation of all the deities in worship

over time. It reflects the manifold origins and religious philosophy of the *Pancharatra* tradition. Although in its earlier phase, this tradition was seen as non-*Vedic*, in its later historical development, it admitted some *Vedic* concepts, using *mantras* from the *Vedas* in its religious worship. Instead of *Vedic* fire worship and the *Vedic* pantheon, *Pancharatra* gave importance to *Vishnu* and included its right-hand *tantric* concepts: *mantras*, *yantras*, *mudras*, *mandalas* and *yoga*. This had the advantage of claiming impressive validity from the *Vedas*, and at the same time, of carrying out popular methods of *Pancharatra* worship. The worship began as an individual endeavor for personal liberation but later turned into public temple worship for the merit of the king and his subjects. Today, the *Pancharatra samhitas* are seen as manuals on religious ritual practices rather than philosophical doctrines.

Yamunacharya (916-1041 CE) conclusively established the *Pancharatra*'s affinity with the *Vedas*. Ramanuja (1017-1137 CE) propagated *Vaishnavism*. The popularity of the *Bhakti* movement of the *Alvars*, along with the ritualistic worship of the *Pancharatrins* further established the cult. Worship in temples became more attractive with the addition of ceremonies, festivals, music and dance, especially in South Indian temples.

The scholar also discussed *Pancharatra* temple worship at Sri Varadharaja Swamy temple in Kanchipuram where the *Jayakhya Samhita* is followed in practice. At Sri Ranganatha Swamy temple in Srirangam, rituals follow tenets of *Pancharatra* worship. The *mahatmyas* of the temples mention the *samhitas*, which are closely connected to temple worship. The four-faced *Vaikuntha Vishnu*, which originated in Kashmir, and is embodied in the Lakshmana temple at Khajuraho, was also studied as an early *Pancharatra* element.

Day two of the seminar was devoted to cosmology and theology as seen in the *Jayakhya samhita*. A brief summary follows:

Although *Vedic* sacrifices, donations, textual studies and other similar disciplines are seen as useful for the fulfillment of worldly wishes, it is only *jnana* (knowledge) of the highest reality or *para tattva* that can bring liberation (*moksha*). For the *Pancharatrins*, the *brahman* of the *Vedas* is *Vishnu*. He is pure consciousness and bliss (*chit*, *ananda*). He is the substratum and support of the universe. He is both transcendent and immanent and as he is too subtle to be perceived by the senses, he can be realised only through the pure mind. This is called *manasika-pratyaksha*. God is also present in the *jiva* or individual soul of man. When the devotee realises this *brahman*, the *jiva* becomes one with him, but also maintains a

subtle difference. The *jiva* is explained as the sparks of the fire and the bubbles in the ocean; of being a part of the same fire and the ocean, and yet distinct from them. The text also says that after liberation, the soul or *jiva* becomes like God.

Regarding creation concepts, three kinds were recognised as existing side by side in the *Pancharatra samhitas*. The first, *brahma-sarga* – the world as a creation by *Brahma* with the help of *Vishnu* – was a generally accepted concept in other Indian traditions too.

The second – creation out of primary matter (*prakriti-sarga*) – was borrowed from the prevalent and popular *Sankhya* philosophy. It involved the three *gunas* of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* and their permutations, which gave rise to the five *karmendriyas*, five elements and five gross elements. Creation is said to arise from a combination of these basic products. The *jiva* gets associated with the body in accordance with their *karmas* and God's will.

The third concept is pure creation (*shuddha-sarga*). This is a characteristic of the *Pancharatra* theory. Here, Vasudeva (supreme being), evolves from himself into three subsidiary forms: *achyuta*, *satya* and *purusha*, which emit *avataras* that inspire the devotee to get out of bondage of *vasanas* and focus on attaining liberation. These emanations possess the divine power and energy of *Vishnu* himself. These divine beings (*vyuhas*, *vibhavas*) and the individual souls are all aspects of God's creation and manifestations of himself. This also means that the material world is also not different from God, but is one of his manifestations.

Thus the *Pancharatras* teach a characteristic pantheon of the four *vyuhas* (*Vasudeva*, *Samkarshana*, *Pradyumna* and *Aniruddha* – all family members); the twelve *vyuhantaras*, which are the tutelary deities of the months; and the thirty-eight *vibhavas* (which include the *avataras*). This group of *vibhavas* includes many well-known forms of *Vishnu* such as *Narasimha*, *Vishwarupa*, *Madhusudana*, *Padmanabha*, *Kurma*, *Varaha* and *Vamana*. Scholars speculate that this wide pantheon was a means of assimilating all the popular deities over time.

These creation-concepts were used in religious practice. The devotee needed the order of origin to visualise the process of *jnana* of God to achieve *moksha*. The path of the seeker to achieve *bhakti* (worldly pleasures or *siddhis*) and *mukti* (liberation from transmigration) is laid down in great detail in this tradition.

Day three began by delineating the intricate and

elaborate rituals which are the most important feature of the *Pancharatra* tradition. The intense practice has various levels of difficulty according to the level of the seeker. The first step is the initiation by a guru with a *mantra diksha*. This is followed by regular religious ritual practices. Elaborate cleansing rituals are demanded of the devotee, followed by *japa* (meditation with beads), *homa*, and *dhyana* on *archa* or the image. The same methods are employed for internal and external worship. The devotee visualises *Vaikuntha* heaven, builds a throne for God in his heart with appropriate *mantras*, places offerings of garlands, food and flowers, and asks God to accept this mental worship and bless him. This was seen as an individual effort by the devotee. What followed next was temple worship, where priests were asked to perform their individual worship and then repeat the rituals with physical offerings on behalf of the king and his subjects. This system is called *panchakala*. They are *abhigamana* (ablutions and morning prayers), *upadana* (collecting worship materials), *ijya* (worship itself), *swadhyaya* (daily study), and *yoga*.

The *mantradhyana* is given importance because the *mantras* are seen as a deity. A focussed repetition of the *mantras* ends with the appearance of the deity itself. *Mantras* can be of two forms – linguistic and visual. The linguistic form can be *Om namo bhagavate vasudevaya* (with semantic meaning) or *hssmlram* (without semantic meaning), as the meaning is lost to us. The *mantra* can take a formless (*nishkala*) visual in the element of light, or an anthropomorphic form (*sakala*). The elaborate *mantra* system includes those for *shakti*, *lanchanas*, and *upangas* (or weapons) of *Vishnu* (*ayudhapurusha*). Another interesting ritual is *nyasa*, where *mantras* are drawn on different parts of the body to energise and purify it.

Day four was spent on studying specific temples in relation to the *Pancharatra* texts. Since everything in the universe is a manifestation of *Vishnu*, temples are also considered a form of *Vishnu*. Some *Pancharatra samhitas* describe a temple as an anthropomorphic body of God, some consider the temple as a representation of the entire universe. Some *samhitas* see the temple as a representation of *Vaikuntha*, the heavenly abode in which *Vishnu* and the liberated souls abide. Thus, the temple offers an opportunity to experience heaven on earth and be close to God. Some *samhitas* contain narratives (*mahatmyas*) about the origin of a specific temple and its great sanctity. They usually explain how the deity that is worshipped within came to that place. And so, although God is all-pervadin g, temples are places of his specific presence. In specific temples of *Srivaishnavas*, rituals are performed according to the *Pancharatra* mode of worship.

Thus we can see a historical development of the *Pancharatra* tradition over the centuries, its adoptions and peculiarities, which remain relevant and a popular mode of worship even today. - *M.M.*

Ekārṇavaśaya, Cummins 2011: 102: Vishnu in His Cosmic Sleep, Central India, Madhya Pradesh, c. 12th century, Sandstone

Buddhist Aesthetics
FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

Great Buddhist Stupas from the Indian Subcontinent

December 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th & 13th, 2019, 6:30 - 8:30 pm | Pia Brancaccio (Professor in the Department of Art and Art History at Drexel University, Philadelphia)

Relief Depicting Worship at the Saidu Sharif Stupa, from Butkara III, Swat
Credit: Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan

Stupas are the quintessential Buddhist monuments: they are not simple relic repositories and places of devotion, but receptacles of cultural memories and hubs of Buddhist identities. The lecture series will explore in details *stupa* sites and related artistic remains spanning from the Gangetic Valley to the Deccan, from ancient Gandhara to Sri Lanka, to better understand the richness and diversity of early Buddhism, its art and communities across South Asia.

Day 1: The Stupa and the Buddha: Monuments from the Gangetic Valley

Day 2: Bharhut and Sanchi: The Blossoming of Early Buddhist Communities

Day 3: Taxila's Dharamarajika and the great stupas of the Swat Valley, Pakistan: Buddhist Art and Patronage in the Northwest

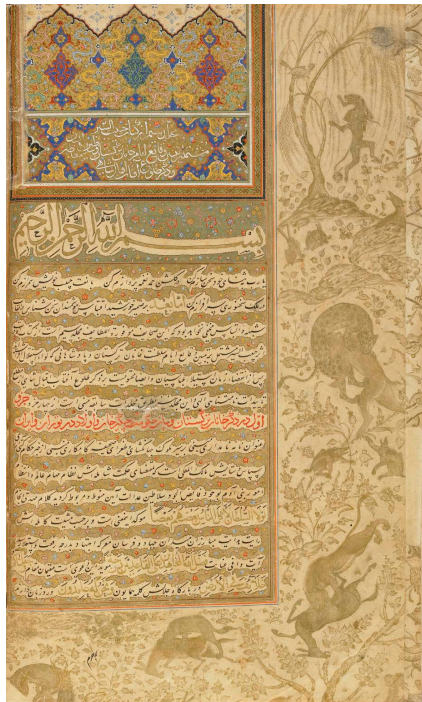Day 4: Amaravati and Kanaganahalli: Buddhism in Western Deccan

Day 5: The Stupas of Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka

Islamic Aesthetics
FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

Narrating the Safavid Past: Religion and Society in Three Iranian Cities

January 6th, 7th & 8th, 2020, 6:30 - 8:30 pm | Sholeh A. Quinn (Associate Professor of History at the University of California, Merced)

Habib al-siyar (Beloved of virtues) by Muhammad Khwandamir (died ca. 1533-37) ca.1590-1600

This seminar presents a historical overview of three phases of Safavid history in the cities of Tabriz, Qazvin, and Isfahan, associated with Shah Isma'il, Shah Tahmasb, and Shah 'Abbas, respectively. The presentations will focus on religious and social developments in the 16th-17th centuries, and include the role of ghulams, Armenians, Georgians, and other religious and social communities. Emphasis will be placed on historical chronicles, one of the most important categories of primary sources for the Safavid period.

Day 1 : Tabriz and Shah Isma'il: The Sufi Who Became King

Day 2 : Qazvin and Shah Tahmasb: The Safavid State Takes Shape

Day 3 : Isfahan and Shah 'Abbas: Narrating Half the World

### Architecture of Persuasion: Safavid cities in the 16th and 17th centuries

January 9th, 10th & 11th, 2020, 6:30 - 8:30 pm | Sussan Babaie (Reader in Islamic and Persian arts at The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London)

These lectures explore the making of a newly configured Shi'i empire through architectural campaigns in capital cities of Tabriz, Qazvin and Isfahan, and the pilgrimage cities of Ardabil and Mashhad. Urban development projects, initiated by royal decree or by individual investments of the new elites—viziers, physicians, Perso-Indian and Armenian merchants; the role of Shi'ism in developing imperial legitimacy for Friday prayer and thus for congregational mosques; Shi'i shrine complexes; royal palaces, gardens, and mansions of the elite; these topics offer views into the social and aesthetic dimensions of Safavid architecture.

Day 1 : Tabriz and Ardabil: Inherited Traditions and Invented Empire

Day 2 : Qazvin: A New Beginning Under Shah Tahmasb

Day 3 : Isfahan: The Jewel in the Safavid Crown
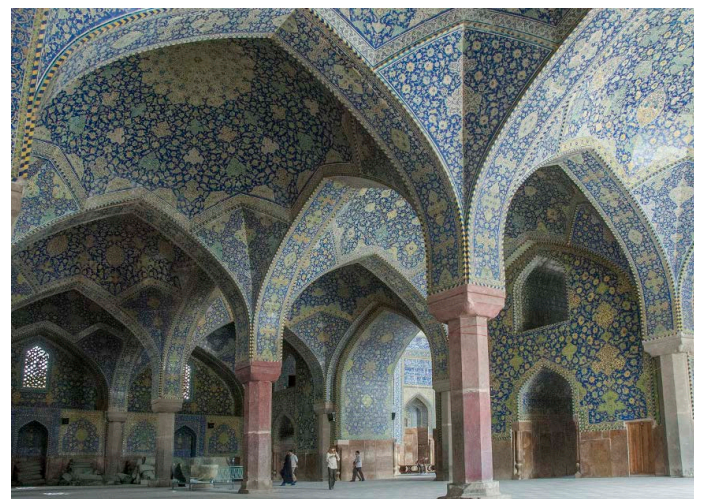
Isfahan, Masjid-i Shah (currently known as the Imam Mosque), view into the prayer hall, 1611-1638. (Photo credit Daniel C. Waugh)

Between Word and Image: Safavid Visual Culture in the 16th and 17th century

January 13th, 14th & 15th, 2020, 6:30 - 8:30 pm | Massumeh Farhad (Associate Curator of Islamic Art, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery)
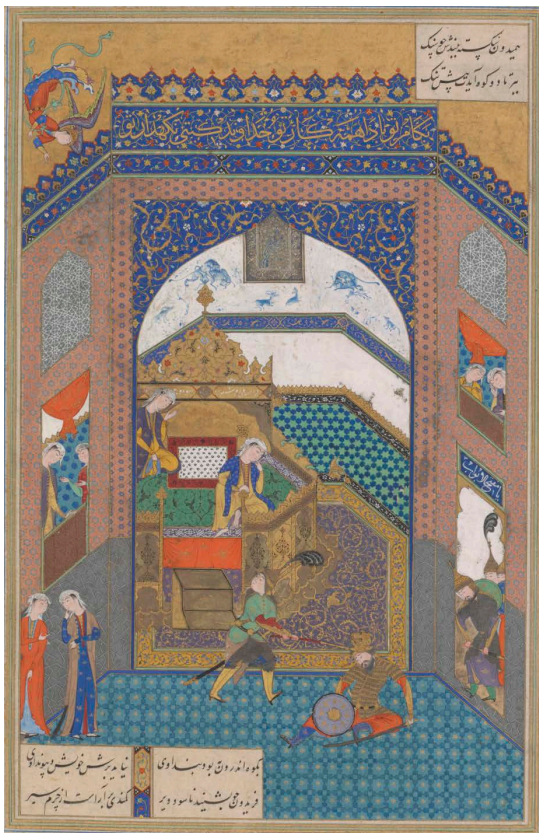
Feridun Strikes Zahhak with the Ox-Headed Mace. Folio from the Shahnama (Book of kings) Iran, Tabriz, ca. 1525. Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper. Freer Gallery of Art F1996.2

The lectures will examine Safavid visual culture, in particular the arts of book, in Tabriz, Qazvin, Isfahan, and Mashhad during the 16th and 17th centuries. They will focus on some of the outstanding illustrated literary texts, illuminated Qur'ans, and albums (murqqa') as well as related objects. The aim is to offer an overview of Safavid artistic production and its patronage and place it in a broader historical and cultural context. Attention will also be given to the rise of a new class of patrons outside the court and their role in the formation of a new Safavid aesthetic and its dissemination.

Day 1 : Tabriz and Ardabil: Production of Safavid Royal Manuscripts

Day 2 : Qazvin and Shiraz: Arrival of the Millennium

Day 3 : Isfahan and Mashhad: Towards a New Aesthetics

Shaykh Abbasi and His Circle: Artistic Exchange Between Iran and India in the 17th century

January 16th, 2020, 6:30 - 8:30 pm | Massumeh Farhad (Associate Curator of Islamic Art, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery)

Numerous painters, calligraphers, and architects migrated from Iran and India over the centuries and especially in the 16th century. Whether searching for new patrons or escaping personal and professional challenges, these individuals were responsible for introducing new artistic ideals, which were selectively adopted and transformed in Mughal India. In the 17th century, however, artistic exchange between Iran and India began to flow in both directions—a topic that has received relatively little scholarly attention. While Mughal painters, and particularly those in the Deccan, drew upon Safavid pictorial traditions, Persian artists became equally fascinated with Indian style and subject matter, which they appropriated to create a new and highly idiosyncratic visual language. This lecture will examine the relationship of Safavid, Mughal, and Deccani art in the 17th century in a broader historical, cultural and economic context.

This seminar is part of the annual Deccan Heritage Foundation Lecture Series.

"Woman in European Costume," Shaykh Abbasi, Iran, Safavid period, 1660s, Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, W 668, f. 18b.

CRITICISM & THEORY____

JPM's Criticism and Theory offerings include (1) a Certificate course in Aesthetics, Criticism, and Theory as well as ongoing public seminars and lectures in the field; (2) an ongoing series of public seminars and lectures in Indian Intellectual Traditions; and (3) occasional academic conferences and workshop in these fields.

Apnavi Makanji | Untitled - Significant Other | 2018 | Courtesy Vadehra Art Gallery

PAST PROGRAMMES

Between Oedipus and the Sphinx: Freud and Egypt

August 27th, 2019, 6:30 pm | Miriam Leonard (Professor of Greek Literature and its Reception at University College London)

Freud's conception of the Oedipus complex marks a paradigm in the study of integrated selfhood and is infamous among certain discourses on psychology and critical theory. However, few studies in the vectors of Freudian thought have considered the 'materiality' of Freud's consulting room and probed the tension between his oeuvre and the dynamics of the space in which his clinical practice emerged.

Freud possessed a formidable collection of antiquities spanning a vast geographical spectrum of premodern cultural production. Quantitatively, however, it is the artefacts from Egypt that are most prominent – an etching of the 'Sphinx at Giza', a print of Abu Simbel, an amulet of Mut, a Sphinx amulet and a terracotta figurine of the Sphinx to name but a few.

Assigning weight to this plethora of 'Egyptian' visual stimuli, and especially to a reproduction of Ingres' painting of Oedipus and the Sphinx which hung above Freud's consulting couch, Dr. Miriam Leonard curated an exhibition at the Freud Museum, London, titled *Between Oedipus and the Sphinx: Freud and Egypt*.

However, 'Egypt' cannot be woven into a study of Freud's oeuvre – where it appears, among other
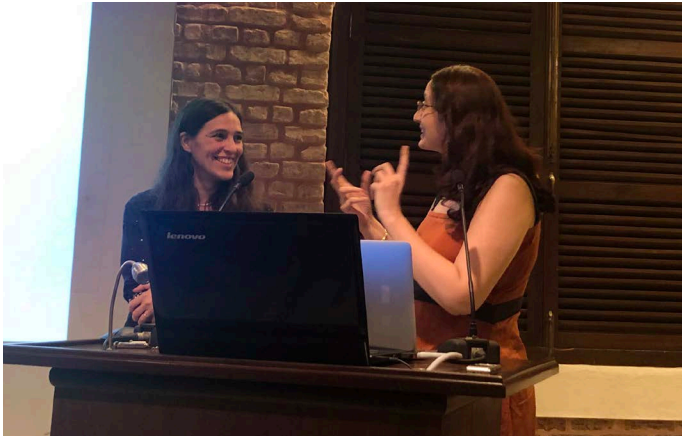
Dr. Miriam Leonard and Ms. Nancy Adajania in conversation during 'Between Oedipus and the Sphinx: Freud and Egypt'

writings, in a letter to his friend and confidante Wilhelm Fliess, in as early as 1899 (Freud referred to his book *The Interpretation of Dreams* as his 'Egyptian Dream Book') and in *Moses and Monotheism*, published in 1939 – through binaries such as 'influence' and 'disavowal'. As Dr. Leonard demonstrated in her lecture at Jnanapravaha, engagements in ideas, societies, and histories are deeply ambivalent.

Indeed, Nancy Adajania, respondent to the lecture, noted that Dr. Leonard's paper reads like a musical score, composed of points, counterpoints, and codas that echo Freud's creative investment in Egyptian histories and mythology.

In the interwar years, Freud first interpreted the Sphinx as a masculine entity, and posited Oedipus's encounter with this figure as a repetition of the annihilation of the father. Gradually, he became sympathetic to Ingres's depiction of the Sphinx, and of Egypt itself, as feminine and gloriously oriental. In an analysis of Leonardo da Vinci's childhood memory, Freud turned toward the iconography of the Egyptian 'phallic mother goddess' Mut' and portrayed Egypt as a space of gender fluidities.

After his emigration to London just before the beginning of World War II, Freud resurrected Egypt as a birthplace of masculine rationality. In *Moses and Monotheism*, he declared that Moses was an Egyptian and a follower of the pharaoh Akhenaten (1351–1334 BCE). The latter abandoned polytheism, initiating the sole reign of the sun god Aten. The new religious paradigm in Egypt, then, was a prototype of Judaic monotheism.

Curiously, Freud looked towards methodologies of archaeology – the combining of evidence and narrative – to validate his own idiosyncratic turns of thought and the gradually developing doctrine of psychoanalysis as scientific. That said, however, he seemed untouched by the archaeological excavations at Amarna, Akhenaten's capital city. This project was

headed in the 1880s and 1890s by Sir Flinders Petrie, the first Professor of Egyptology in the UK. A single sculpture of Akhenaten, Nefertiti and a princess depicts the king as an androgynous figure, a figure who proclaimed himself as a vessel for the male and female divine. Instead, Freud noted carefully the ways in which Petrie's contemporary Heinrich Schliemann catalogued findings from the excavations at Pompeii.

Freud's 'impassiveness' towards Petrie's findings evinces an anxiety regarding his own tenuous narratives of Egyptian history. It is striking, though, that Freud maintained his stance on the masculinity of Egypt late in his career when, in fact, the 'Egyptomania' of the 19th century was underscored not by a will to understand the 'Other' on its own terms but by an anxiety to establish a teleological narrative with Europe as the culmination of patriarchal rationality.

Adajania emphasised that the proper context of Freudian psychoanalysis is inextricably linked to the imperialist, racial, colonial forces that informed the creation of global histories in the 19th and 20th centuries. In light of this, Freud's final attribution of masculinity to Egypt does not bring this civilisation to the forefront of his oeuvre. As Dr. Leonard noted, "Whether one thinks of the occlusion of the Sphinx in the formulation of the Oedipus complex [and], the concealment of Akhenaten behind Moses...Egypt figures in Freud's work as a site of displacement."

Both Dr. Leonard and Adajania left the audience with a burning question: What would psychoanalysis have looked like had it been 'birthed' by Egyptian culture, several manifestations of which lined Freud's 'desktop' like soldiers in rank awaiting their commander-in-chief?

To conclude, Adajania informed the audience that the Indian psychoanalyst Girindrasekhar Bose sent a figurine of Garuda to Freud in honour of the latter's 75th birthday. The questions surrounding the signification of this gift and the nature of Freud's encounter with it merit attention and pave the path to rigorous scholarship on 'Freud and India'.

As such, the academic 'excavation' of the barbed relationship between cultural relativism and psychoanalysis' claim to universality remains air-brushed by the smooth contours of monotheistic, Freudian clinical practice. The truism remains that 'Man' – a Judaeo-Hellenic 'symptom' – eclipses and begs investigation of what Dr. Leonard calls the 'dark continents' seething beneath the canon of psychoanalysis. Her curatorial endeavour and lecture mark a crucial step towards a return of the repressed.
- S.H.

The Literatures of the Roman Empire

August 28th, 2019, 6:30 pm | Phiroze Vasunia
(Professor of Greek at University College London)

Mr. Ranjit Hoskote and Dr. Phiroze Vasunia in conversation during 'The Literatures of the Roman Empire'

The literature of the Roman Empire is widely known as a manifestation of Greek and Latin. The Greek tragedians such as Euripides and Sophocles come to mind as does Cicero, the stalwart of Latin. In the face of this worn-out presumption, Dr. Phiroze Vasunia's lecture considered the geographical diversity of the Empire in order to make an argument for a framework of multilingualism within which to study the languages of the "streets and fields" of provinces that not only flourished on their own terms but also informed the formation of several Greek and Latin texts, some that stand within and others that skirt the territory of works that are considered 'classics'.

Dr. Vasunia's lecture on the Empire covered the period between 27 CE and the late 4th and early 5th centuries CE. During this time, texts were written in Greek, Latin and at least twelve other languages. The spoken and written languages that came in contact with Latin included Umbrian, Etruscan, Celtic, Gallic, Libyan, Aramaic, Hebrew, Hispanic, Egyptian, and Demotic to name but a few. Some of these suffered oblivion while other indigenous tongues persisted for many centuries after the establishment of Roman power. Furthermore, writers of Latin and Greek emerged from Spain, Africa, and Syria among other places. These authors may not have been familiar with the literatures of their regions, but their location, nonetheless, allows for the understanding of cultural and linguistic diversity.

An exemplar of linguistic diversity in the Empire is the *Book of Acts* from the New Testament composed in roughly the 1st century CE. In it, a well-known passage describes the disciples of Jesus celebrating the Pentecostal harvest festival as the Holy Spirit descends on them and enables them to speak in several languages. As Dr. Vasunia noted: "The idea of Babel familiar from the Hebrew Bible is now thrust into reverse so that far from experiencing linguistic confusion, the people who are present at the festival can hear and understand each in his own language the words that are proclaimed." This work is written in simple Greek containing traces of Hebrew and Aramaic. At the level of genre, it draws on Hellenic and Hebrew traditions. It claims to illuminate the lives of people who spoke in Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek and Latin, or some combination thereof.

Dr. Vasunia bolstered his account of linguistic multiplicity in the Empire by explicating the content and context of a classical literary production by the Greek writer Longinus and a Latin novel by Apuleius. The latter, unlike Longinus, was not a classical writer even though he is categorised loosely as a 'Roman' author. Best known for his novel *Metamorphoses* (2nd century CE), Apuleius travelled to Carthage, then across the Mediterranean Sea to Athens and Rome, and finally returned to Carthage during his lifespan. The conceptions of 'identity' and 'home' in his work echo the complexity and fluidity of the cultures he encountered during his travels. The prologue to the novel mentions that its writer "attacked and cultivated" Latin during his stint in Rome, a language of which he was a "raw speaker" and in which he was likely to commit errors. Though the apologetic tone of the prologue is a convention of prefaces to Latin prose, Apuleius' effusive style and the rhythm of his narrative counter the classical texts of Livy and Cicero.

As such, Punic was the language of Apuleius' early education. Punic was spoken during the Roman imperial period well past Apuleius' lifetime, and scholars have shown much interest in the study of Punic-Latin bilingualism. However, little written evidence of Punic survives from the Roman period; an understanding of the language emerges from quotations in the Greek and Latin. Indeed, a Renaissance humanist coined the term 'African-Latin' or 'Africatas' by turning to texts written in the vein of *Metamorphoses*.

However, Dr. Vasunia's lecture was not a simplistic paean to the polyglot world of the Roman Empire. The speaker foregrounded the tensions between the Latin metropolis and the 'provincial vernaculars' emphatically. "To be sure," Prof. Vasunia cautioned, "not all the texts that were composed in the Roman Empire enjoyed the same privileges, prestige, and importance, nor did all languages exert the same power or have the same symbolic political and cultural value as Latin." Latin remained the language of conquest and jurisdiction. Cultural production in both the Western and Eastern provinces was united by the fact that it was cradled by a single empire. Not all the languages of the Empire enjoyed the benefits of textual or manuscript traditions but survive in

fragments, inscriptions, or – like Punic – as references in Greek and Latin.

The complexities, imbalances, and dynamics of colonialism come to the fore when, as the speaker argued, one considers the robust relationship between Greek and Latin and other languages of the Empire. Dr. Vasunia concluded that the need for a framework of 'disparate literatures' – within and across both centres and provinces – locked in combat with obliterating, colonial forces that haunt us even today, is of the essence. In light of this, Prof. Vasunia's lecture may be considered as an 'excavation' of plurality and a rigorous effort in the collation of both extensive and elusive historical records.

Ranjit Hoskote, the respondent to the lecture, cited instances of 'obliterating forces' in the contemporary context – forces evident, for one, in the historic decision to divide the modern Indian nation along linguistic lines and thus maintain the myth of cultural homogeneity within each territory. Furthermore, Hoskote noted that the lecture paved the way for distilling paradigms within which to study linguistic diversity and disparity across histories and geographies. He cited work already done in this field by the seminal scholar Sheldon Pollock who writes of the dynamics between centres and provinces across the 'Sanskrit cosmopolis' in his opus *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*.

To conclude, Mr. Hoskote and Dr. Vasunia both demonstrated that the tension between colonialism and complexity is echoed in the gulf between popular culture and academia of the 20th and 21st centuries. Hoskote cited the 'artistic liberties' claimed by the narrative of the film *Gladiator*. The film's protagonist is Hispanic by birth and yet hungers for a 'pan-Roman' identity as he rises through the ranks of the gladiatorial arena, defeats Commodus – the usurper of the throne – and thus secures posthumous victory for Marcus Aurelius, the hero's 'true' emperor. In contrast, Dr. Vasunia noted that sensitivity to questions of multi-layered cultural identity in contemporary scholarship, such as his own, has challenged the rationale by which certain Greek and Latin texts were included in a canon during the period of the Italian Renaissance, and later, the Romantic era. Authors such as Apuleius are now beginning to receive much merited attention in the study of global literatures. - *S.H.*

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

Seeing-Making-Meaning: An Introduction to Art Historical Methods

November 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th & 8th, 2019, 6:30 - 8:30 pm | Chaitanya Sambrani (Art Historian, Curator and Teacher)

This series of lectures offers an introduction to a range of theoretical approaches to the experience of art. Drawing on European and Asian examples in the history of art and aesthetic theory, the series will enable a discussion of ways in which visual art has been activated and made meaningful. Asking "what if?" and "so what?", the series will seek to relate historical developments to present conditions through questions of visuality, language, politics, gender and psychoanalysis.

Day 1: Introduction: visuality, representation, politics
Day 2: The social history of art: Marxism and critical theory
Day 3:The gendered history of art: feminism, otherness, alterity
Day 4: The gaze: psychoanalytical insights
Day 5: Contemporary art and post-colonial experience

Tallur L.N., Tolerance 3, 2019.
Sandalwood sand stone
175cmX82cmX 36cm

Aesthetics, Criticism & Theory

Homestead, Fletcher Williams III, 2018
Materials: Tin Roof, Picket Fence, Interior Wood Paneling, and Rebar
Dimensions: 44 x 44 x 84 in.

JPM's intensive postgraduate certificate course in **Aesthetics, Criticism and Theory (ACT)** provides students with a rigorous introduction to art history, criticism, aesthetics, critical theory, and contemporary art practice. In-depth seminars at the institute are complemented by film screenings, studio, gallery and museum visits, ensuring a thorough engagement with a breadth of artistic praxes and institutions of the art world. For the duration of the course, students can expect to have three to four sessions per week, both at JPM and across the city.

ACT begins with classes on aesthetics in Western philosophy with careful attention to Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel and Foucault. We then move to an analysis of how the discipline of art history and the practice of art criticism emerged and transformed over time. Students survey the field of art history and criticism in South Asia in relation to developments in the West. These survey lectures will be followed by a week-long seminar on 'Shock and Awe: The Sublime in the 18th and 19th centuries'. The second month of the course also includes a critical writing workshop, allowing the students to practice and engage with a variety of forms for writing about art.

The second section of the course is devoted to the foundations of critical theory with close readings of Marx, Lefebvre and the Frankfurt School, followed by seminars on 'the many lives of images' and 'spaces of colonial and postcolonial modernity'. These seminars prepare students for the final section, which puts theory into direct engagement with practice. Inviting practitioners that consciously move between disciplines, institutions, pedagogy, curating and diverse forms of making and exhibiting, students are exposed to a range of contemporary creative processes.

Seminars on modernism, modernity and postmodernism open the final month of the course. These classes provide tools with which to address and understand contemporary art. Engaging with thinkers such as Geeta Kapur, Arjun Appadurai, Laura Mulvey, TJ Clark, Arthur Danto, Paul Gilroy, Abigail Solomon-Godeau, WJT Mitchell, and Jacques Ranciere, among many others, students enter the charged debates that follow from key moments in art history marked by texts such as *When Was Modernism* and *The Black Atlantic*. Classes on documentary practice, histories of photography and video art, and the unpacking of recent transmedia exhibitions like *When is Space* (Jawahar Kala Kendra, 2018) and *The Boat is Leaking. The Captain Lied.* (Fondazione Prada, 2017) accompany these seminars.

Throughout the course, students engage with the oeuvres of select painters, sculptors, architects, as well as video, performance, sound, digital and multimedia artists. ACT brings the very best faculty of scholars and practitioners from our city, India, and abroad; those experienced in pedagogy that tacks between lecture, discussion, close reading, seeing, and writing. ACT students are introduced to ideas and histories that allow them to develop and evolve their own academic research, writing, and professional interests in the visual arts world imaginatively.

Learning how to read, think and write critically are an essential part of the course. The history of aesthetics and the history of art, media and technology go hand in hand. Scholars have carefully selected texts, films, exhibitions and artists for each session and much of this material is available to the students on our online learning management portal, **JPM Think.** Students are expected to come to class well-prepared.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

JPM's Community Engagement offerings include occasional public lectures and performances in Creative Processes, Curatorial Processes, and Iconic Images as well as book launches, concerts, film screenings, and panel discussions on topics of interest to Mumbai's and India's general public.

PAST PROGRAMMES

Lions on the Throne: The Supreme Court of India and Judicial Independence

Lecture by **Arghya Sengupta** and conversation with Justice **B. N. Srikrishna** | September 24th, 2019, 6:30 pm

The detailed write-up about this lecture & conversation will be featured in our next Quarterly (Jan - Mar 2020).

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

Dancing Women: Choreographing Corporeal Histories of Popular Hindi Cinema

December 20th, 2019, 6:30 pm | Usha Iyer (Assistant Professor of Film and Media Studies program, Department of Art & Art History, Stanford University)

Drawing from her forthcoming book on dancer-actresses in Indian cinema, Usha Iyer discusses how the dancing woman, considered marginal to the history of Indian and indeed most cinemas, is actually a central figure in articulating South Asian cultural modernity. Through Azurie and Sadhona Bose, once-famous, now-forgotten dancing stars of the 1930s-40s, Iyer examines questions of cultural labor, resistance to gender norms, and women's visibility and participation in the public sphere. Situating Bose, the Bengali *bhadramahila,* and Azurie, the mixed-race dancing girl as co-choreographers of new mobilities throws light on cosmopolitan, transnational dance networks that intersected with nationalist projects of modernity.

Azurie in Bal Hatiya (Ram Daryani, 1935)
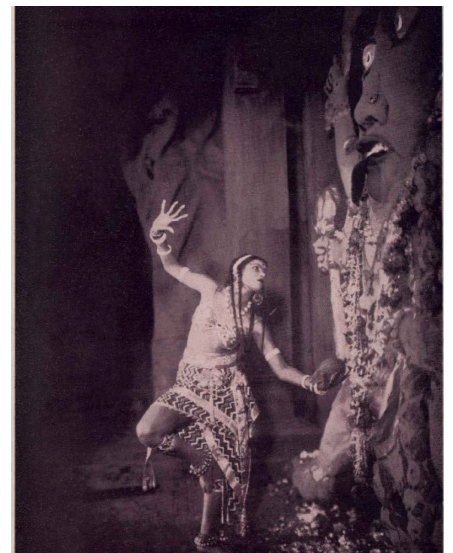
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Announcements

POSTGRADUATE COURSE IN ISLAMIC AESTHETICS

THE MAKING OF SAFAVID IRAN: HISTORY, ART, AND ARCHITECTURE
January 6th to 16th, 2020 | 6:30 – 8:30 pm

Masjid-i Shaykh Lutfallah, Isfahan @ Morteza Aminoroayayo

1 - **Narrating the Safavid Past: Religion and Society in Three Iranian Cities**
Sholeh A. Quinn (University of California, Merced)
Day 1 : Tabriz and Shah Isma'il: The Sufi Who Became King
Day 2 : Qazvin and Shah Tahmasb: The Safavid State Takes Shape
Day 3 : Isfahan and Shah 'Abbas: Narrating Half the World
6th - 8th January 2020 | Registration: INR 3,000

2 - **Architecture of Persuasion: Safavid Cities in the 16th and 17th centuries**
Sussan Babaie (The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London)
Day 1 : Tabriz and Ardabil: Inherited Traditions and Invented Empire
Day 2 : Qazvin: A New Beginning Under Shah Tahmasb
Day 3 : Isfahan: The Jewel in the Safavid Crown
9th - 11th January 2020 | Registration: INR 3,000

3 - **Between Word and Image: Safavid Visual Culture in the 16th and 17th century**
Massumeh Farhad (Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution)
Day 1 : Tabriz and Ardabil: Production of Safavid Royal Manuscripts
Day 2 : Qazvin and Shiraz: Arrival of the Millennium
Day 3 : Isfahan and Mashhad: Towards a New Aesthetics
13th - 15th January 2020 | Registration: INR 3,000

4 - **Shaykh Abbasi and His Circle: Artistic Exchange between Iran and India in the 17th century**
Massumeh Farhad (Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution)
Annual Deccan Heritage Foundation Lecture
16th January 2020 | Registration: INR 1,000

Registration fee for the entire programme: INR 8,000. Certificate of attendance will be given.

POSTGRADUATE COURSE IN AESTHETICS, CRITICISM AND THEORY (ACT)

February 4th – April 29th, 2020
Typically Wednesdays and Thursdays, 6:30 – 8:30 pm

Homestead, Fletcher Williams III, 2018
Materials: Tin Roof, Picket Fence, Interior Wood Paneling, and Rebar
Dimensions: 44 x 44 x 84 in.

Jnanapravaha Mumbai's intensive postgraduate certificate course in Aesthetics, Criticism and Theory (ACT) provides students with a rigorous introduction to art history, criticism, aesthetics, critical theory, and contemporary art practice over three months. Seminars are complemented by film screenings, studio, gallery and museum visits, ensuring an understanding of a breadth of artistic praxes and institutions of the art world.

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Classes devoted to the foundations of critical theory with close readings of Marx, Lefebvre and the Frankfurt School, provide the transition to seminars on modernism, modernity and postmodernism. Engaging with thinkers such as Geeta Kapur, Arjun Appadurai, TJ Clark, Arthur Danto, Paul Gilroy, WJT Mitchell, and Jacques Ranciere, among many others, students enter the charged debates that follow from key moments in art history marked by texts such as *When Was Modernism* and *The Black Atlantic*.

The oeuvres of select painters, sculptors, architects, as well as video, performance, sound, digital and multimedia artists are studied throughout the course. Bridging the gaps between reading, writing and seeing, ACT is unique in providing theoretical depth while remaining critically engaged with diverse practitioners.

For admission, you are required to submit:
A copy of your last degree certificate and a
passport-sized photographs.

Fee: INR 18,000

JPM STUDENT REVIEW

A CRITICAL LOOK AT SOUND ART: THE EFFECT OF SOUND ON THE AUDIENCE'S EXPERIENCE IN SHILPA GUPTA'S INSTALLATIONS

Tarini Ranadive (JPM Alumna)

Shilpa Gupta (1976 - present) is a Mumbai-based multimedia artist who employs found objects, sculpture, performance, sound and light installations in her predominantly research-based practice. Through her works she dismantles constructed notions of identity, and connects it with equally abstract notions of nation, state, boundaries, belonging, and freedom, encouraging her audience to challenge the status quo. Typically regarded as an added effect to her work, the use of sound in Gupta's art allows for critical examination beyond what is now considered to be "sound art". Studying Gupta's work through the lens of sound gives us important insights into the value of sound as a political tool and sound's capacity to be mechanically reproduced.

In *The Audible Past*, Jonathan Sterne attributes the Enlightenment period to have brought with it an "ensoniment"[1], or a shift in scientific rationality, technological advancement and human self-awareness that characterised a period during which the sense of hearing became an object of contemplation that was measured, objectified, isolated and simulated[2]. However, at the time, sound did not receive recognition for its value as a medium of communication, as an object of aesthetic contemplation, a weapon of power; in fact, we can argue that this perception towards sound studies has not changed. In an interview with *The Guardian*, Gupta mentioned that the process of collecting and recording sounds and voices was "a bit like making music or a feature film... it stretched my brain a little."[3] This is because sound is considered parochial or too specialised a concern, restricting itself to scientific or engineering fields. Still, sound was briefly considered within critical thought in Theodor Adorno's *Regression of Listening* (1934), which defines "industrialised music" as music that is "characterised by a highly standardised and uniform menu of musical styles and themes," and further generalises music as "consistently familiar and compositionally simplistic... as a commodity and phenomena that requires its audience to make little interpretative effort in its reception of the product."[4] Adorno wrote about the audience's experience during musical performances:

"...the counterpart to the fetishism of music is a regression of listening. It is contemporary listening which has regressed, arrested at the infantile stage. Not only do the listening subjects lose, along with freedom of choice and responsibility, the capacity for conscious perception of music, but they stubbornly reject the possibility of such perception. They are not childlike, as might be expected on the basis of an interpretation of the new type of listener in terms of the introduction to musical life of groups previously unacquainted with music. But they are childish; their primitivism is not that of the undeveloped, but that of the forcibly retarded."[5]

Although Adorno was talking about music within films and the culture industry, he considered all music to be "regressive" or alienating to the audience, who lose their autonomous and individual powers to consciously focus on the sound vibrations, and end up distracted from the art. I will argue that Shilpa Gupta's art does not fall in the category of "industrialised music" and therefore demands conscious listening by the audience. Because the sound objects she employs are a mix of musical tones, recordings of the natural environment and human voices, they do not fall into a singular category, or rather, the vocabulary of sound studies restricts her vocation. In fact, critics of sound art have attributed the misconceptions between sound art and "sound artists" as a product of the confused curation of contemporary experimental and electronic music forms[6].

"Sound art" is increasingly gaining recognition as being capable of criticality, or rather, art that Jacques Ranciere claims "intends to raise consciousness of the mechanisms of domination in order to turn the spectator into a conscious agent in the transformation of the world"[7]. The term 'sound art' itself is young[8] and embodies some elements from art movements such as Fluxus of the 1960s, minimalism, experimentalism, Earthworks, and more, which include sounds recorded from nature and the environment. Alan Licht in his book *Sound Art: Beyond Music, Between*

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1   Jonathan Sterne, "The Audible Past". 2003. Page 2.

2   Ibid. Page 3. Sound was commodified; it became something that can be bought and sold.

3   Andrew Dickson, "Shilpa Gupta: The artist bringing silenced poets back to life".

4   Theodor Adorno, "On The Social Situation of Music". 1978. Page 285-286.

5   Theodor Adorno, "On The Social Situation of Music". Page 286.

6   Matthew Mullane, "The Aesthetic Ear". 2010. The author attributes the misconceptions between sound art and "sound artists" as synonymous with contemporary experimental and electronic music forms found in the "confused" curation of millennial exhibitions and the "scattershot" PR programming of progressive music publishers. His frustration lies in the very language used to describe contemporary works in sound.

7   Matthew Mullane, "The Aesthetic Ear". 2010. Page 2.

8   Alan Licht, "Sound Art: Origins, Development and Ambiguities". 2009.

Categories attributes a rigid set of definitions[9]: "Sound art belongs in an exhibition situation rather than a performance situation"; "sound art rarely attempts to create a portrait or capture the sound of a human being or express something about the interaction of human beings"; "sound art, like visual art has no specified timeline: it can be experienced over a long or short period of time, without missing the beginning, middle or end". Paul Hegarty's book *Noise/Music* traces the history of noise to distinguish between contemporary musical tones. This study would not be complete without considering Mladen Dolar's seminal work aptly titled *The Voice and Nothing More* because Gupta is known to employ voices as sound objects. While Dolar separates voice from meaning under psychoanalysis, Marx's theories on capitalism present the use and exchange value of sound as historically determined to a specific time and place[10]. Sterne offers a constructivist approach to Marx's historisation of the senses, one that acknowledges society, culture, technology and the body as artefacts of human history. For Sterne, "sound is a little piece of the vibrating world"[11], i.e., to appreciate sound aesthetically requires an appreciation of the ear as a primary source of information collection (as opposed to the eye with the visual arts). This helps contextualise sound as a naturally occurring object with physical, biological roots, and paves way for the potential of sound to be mechanically reproduced through technology.

Singing Cloud (2008-9)

A large amoebic-shaped structure hangs low to the ground, suspended from the ceiling. At first glance, it looks like an anxious amorphous being, hovering over spectators, almost like a cloud in a state of "sunken stillness"[12]. Upon closer examination it becomes evident that its "skin" is made up of a combination of four thousand microphones and acoustic elements. The anxiety, sadness and fear it radiates first hits the audience through sound: just as one enters the room, they pick up various tones of shrieks, whispers, words, giggles, singing, and static, almost as if the cloud were reacting to the environment in which it has been placed; there has been a role reversal, the microphones growing out on the skin exist not to record the audience but to make them listen.

This role reversal, for Shilpa Gupta, signifies a "moment of hysteria" wherein the purpose of technology – in this case a sound-recording device specifically created for real-time sound recording – has been tasked to carry out the exact opposite duty, i.e. pre-recorded sound amplification. It becomes more and more obvious that the sounds are whispering and singing to themselves in the absence of a listener. Played on a nine-minute-and-thirty-second audio loop, this 180 x 24 x 60-inch amoebic mass built with forty-eight multi-channel audio contains stories from a multitude of voices "over modes of travel which marked movement of people, the coming together and the clash of histories, where deep desires and unresolved memories rise and fall"[13] in an almost dreamlike state. The voices are actually creating images aloud as the sound rhythmically flutters across the surface of the piece, moving from one side of the cloud to the other. The dream quickly turns into a nightmarish reality when the lyrics become more discernible, when voices are picked up either in song or in whispered conversation,

"I want to fly,
High above in the sky
Don't push me away
We shall all fly
High above in the sky
I want to fly high above
In your sky
Can you let it be
Only your power
And not your greed
A part of me will die
By your side
Taking you with me
High high above
in the sky
While you sleep I shall wake up and fly"[14]

Gupta revealed that she created this piece shortly after the terrorist attack in November 2008, when ten members of the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT)

9   Ibid.

10   In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Karl Marx make clear that "the senses are real, palpable, concrete or available for contemplation, they are already affected and effected through the particular historical conditions that give rise to the subject who possess them,"

11   Jonathan Sterne, "The Audible Past". 2003. Page 11.

12   Shilpa Gupta, "Singing Cloud" 2008. Web.
13   Ibid.
14   Shilpa Gupta, "Singing Cloud" 2008. Web.

carried out a series of twelve coordinated shooting and bombing attacks, lasting four days across her hometown in Mumbai. Gupta mourns for three reasons: the attack on her city, the growing divide between two lands that had previously been unfairly divided, and the increasingly militant society that surveils people rather than listens to their stories. Many of her works[15] involve the India-Pakistan divide trope, not just because of her interest in territorial divides, but also because of her affinity to their similar cultures.

Visually, the gloomy cloud represents Mumbai's noxiously polluted city well. Over the years, the monsoon period in the city has increasingly extended beyond its designated months; it is not unusual to experience rain in typically winter months such as November. Gupta seems to extend this element of surprise (or lack thereof) as the casualness with which Mumbai, and by extension India and the South-Asian subcontinent, has experienced terrorist attacks. When *Singing Cloud* was exhibited at Le Laboratoire, the project was prepared with psychologist and professor Mahzarin Banaji, Harvard Psychology, to explore the power of images and situations as expressed by the behaviour of individuals under the umbrella theme of fear and prejudice[16]. In this case, Gupta explores the power of images that are not exhibited visually, but rather, described orally, through spoken word. As a master of aesthetics, she explores 'what we perceive' and 'how we can perceive' without actually exhibiting the faces, silhouettes or identities of nebulous human voices.

For In Your Tongue, I Cannot Hide (2018)
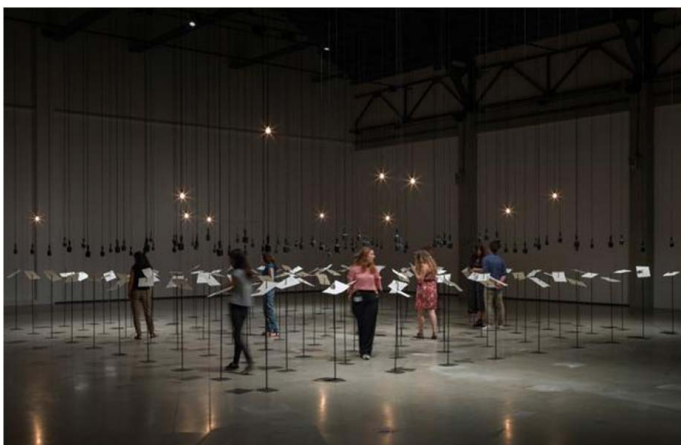
PC: Salil Tripathi, "A different kind of poets society". Livemint. 2018

A row of a hundred speakers are suspended from the ceiling, there is a crackle, and a burst of noise reverberates through the large hall of the Edinburgh College of Art: a man's voice, intoning the words, "without revolution, there can be no proper peace".[17] As the voice dies away, a gentle susurration begins, like the distant rustling of turning pages, or the flapping of bird's wings. It resolves into a chorus of whispering voices. They seem to be coming from everywhere. The hundred microphones are scattered across the hall, hanging above what look like hymn books on a stand. On closer examination it becomes evident that the stands are really tall spikes on which pieces of paper have been pierced, where they lay, as if stabbed in the back by art (or reality?). In a grotesque realisation, it appears almost as if the microphones are hanging heads, and the back-stabbed sheets of paper on spikes are the decapitated bodies, waiting to be connected to each other. They can only be connected through listening — the words transmitted from the disguised speakers (as mics) correspond to the writing on the paper — what you hear is not a dictator's propaganda, but a poet's words, typed on those sheets, and incarcerated by state security through the arrogant spike.

PC: Andrew Dickson, "Shilpa Gupta: The artist bringing silenced poets back to life". The Guardian. 2018

Many of the voices speak English, but alongside them are a babel of other tongues – Chinese, Russian, Arabic, Azeri, Hindi, Turkish, Urdu. In Eastern Europe during the Communist years, it was said that when you can't trust the written word, you believe the spoken word. Words that get passed along, one ear to another, without leaving a paper trace for fear of questioning or fear of crossing lines. The oldest hails from the 7th century; the youngest is the Burmese writer Maung Saungkha, who was arrested by the authorities in 2016, aged 22, for writing a poem in which he claimed to have a tattoo of Myanmar's president on his penis (he didn't, but he served six months)[18]. Another voice reads the text of Mohammad Reza Has Rostam Begloo, who has been repeatedly incarcerated by the Iranian regime, "My heart is now

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15   Gupta has worked with Pakistani-based artists and co-founded the project *Aar Paar* to exchange stories between people living in both countries.

16   Shilpa Gupta, "Singing Cloud" 2008. Web.

17   Salil Tripathi, "A different kind of poet's society". Livemint. 2018.

18   Andrew Dickson, "Shilpa Gupta: The artist bringing silenced poets back to life". The Guardian. 2018.

in my blouse / my blue blouse is now covered with blood."[19] Their words have been transformed into a piece of immersive sound. However, these are not their original voices; instead, Gupta went through a rigorous voice-collecting and voice-recording process through volunteer performances, in addition to an all-consuming process of locating each text and sourcing translations. Then, she had to mix the installation so that it worked on not one or two, but a hundred speakers. Her aim has been to make the composition "as dynamic and intense as the language that makes it up."[20]

Hysterical Reproduction: a cross-examination of *Singing Cloud* (2008) and *For In Your Tongue, I Cannot Hide* (2018)

Both these artworks showcase the microphone, an object vital in the history of sound recording, as deviating from its norm. The deviation for Gupta has psychological implications which she describes as "hysterical" because it alienates and amuses the audiences all at once. Benjamin would be pleased to see Gupta's transformation of sound recording technology into art that makes a statement (literally and figuratively), for *Art of Mechanical Reproduction* was written to propose the use of technology for its potential to politicise art during the time of the pre-World War fascist regime's use of cult imagery. If Gupta is still insistent that her art is not "political", Benjamin would optimistically disagree. For both artworks, Gupta gives a voice to those who don't have one. Both artworks tell plenty about and woefully depicted images of humankind's joys, sorrows, loss and learning, thereby defying Licht's rule that sound art does not create a "portrait of human... nature". In *Singing Cloud* (2008) the voices are unidentified; they do not need names or bodies to come to life. In comparison to *FIYTICH* (2018) in which each microphone is assigned to a specific poet, the voices in *Singing Cloud* seem much more distant and alienated. The fact that both these artworks evolved from Gupta's own previous works (that weren't sound-based) suggests her evolution as an artist isn't linear, it progresses in waves and circles, going back and forth between old and new ideas, just like the sounds she records within the artworks.

Still, Gupta is able to control her audience by luring them with sound effects that cannot be experienced simply by passing through; one is expected to listen consciously. However, because the voices are transmitted from different mics at different times, they may cause the audience to feel distracted and confused. It may take some time for them to really pick up the words that are being spoken and sung. Some sounds recorded in both the pieces are beyond human recognition, they fit in Hegarty's definition of sound art as "noises that are... unexpected and unnamable"[21]. Gupta might agree with Hegarty's argument that these "noises" are employed to "field a sense of violence and strangeness"[22]. Because her work focusses on fear and prejudice within surveillance culture that is increasing its hold on social consciousness, these assumptions may hold up. Next, one could argue that the sounds employed in both, *Singing Cloud* (2008) and *FIYTICH* (2018) do not constitute what Adorno considers "industrialised music" because there are no fixed set of notes or standardised styles such as a chorus or bridge. Temporally speaking, this lack of standardisation makes the art time-based; the audio recording will end, but the visual and physical structures will remain timelessly. The audience member who walks in too late or too early would need to wait for the recording to start again, or play a couple of times to properly experience, much less appreciate, the art. In *FIYTICH* (2018) the art is timeless because its content covers an extremely wide chronology in history, but the form of her art is restricted to its mechanical size: when the audio loop ends, the music stops. This problem of form existed in *Singing Cloud* (2008) as well, wherein the amoebic cloud would linger silently for minutes before the audio loop restarted.

For this reason, Gupta's art defies Alan Licht's definition of sound art when he states that it can be experienced without missing the beginning, middle or end. It does, however, agree with Licht's first rule that sound art belongs in an exhibition (rather than performance) setting. Although the recordings for both art works were created in a performance environment, Gupta does not want to present them visually, only audibly, to create an immersive experience, and most likely to assign the object of the voices as alienated from their bodies and assigned to structures: in the case of *Singing Cloud*, an eerie cathartic cloud; in *FIYTICH*, a violent protest by silent warriors. In *Art of Mechanical Reproduction*, Benjamin uses Marx's categories of use and exchange value to suggest that ritual or cult value is the original value of an artwork; however, with the advent of mechanical reproduction, artworks are finally liberated from this cult value and instead take on an exhibition value[23]. Mechanical reproduction feeds the desire of the masses for things to be brought close, as distinct from the unique work of art which is always at a distance, even when one is 'present' to it in a gallery or other setting. It is difficult to ascribe

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19   Ibid.

20   Salil Tripathi, "A different kind of poets society." 2018.

21   Paul Hegarty, "Come on, feel the noise" The Guardian. 2008.

22   Ibid.

23   Walter Benjamin, "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". 1938.

what the 'aura' of these artworks are, for the recorded voices are not the true representation of the people they speak for, nor does Gupta commodify her own voice for any cultish purposes. One could argue that Shilpa Gupta's process of collecting stories first-hand from people around the world and close to home — all of whom have suffered some form of loss of identity, home, or personally lost people to war and state security — and then replicating those stories into art is her greatest process of mechanical reproduction.[24]

Speaking Wall (2010)

In *Speaking Wall*, sound is the least expected of all the medias Gupta employs, yet, it is the cornerstone of the installation, serving to incapsulate as well as alienate the audience. In this installation, a footpath of bricks is created, leading up to a wall with a small digital screen, in a viewing gallery or exhibition space. The visitor is required to wear a headset and walk along the red bricked path. Then something unexpected happens: a voice in the headset tells the visitor where and when to move along the bricks; the audience member's identity is arbitrarily shifted to performer. He or she is brought forward and backward, as the voice commands, "Move one step forward/ one step back/ step a bit closer, closer, closer..." until the participant is touching or almost touching the wall and there is no space left to go, till he or she is abruptly made to back away.

Gupta created this piece by embedding a motion sensor in the wall, so that it can track the audience, or rather, the performer, when it is issuing commands. This becomes a plaintive and moving performance (excuse the pun) as the voice begins speaking about the shifting borders which render the identities of both human and object ambiguous. The voice on the wall tells the story about a border that was drawn in the dirt and exposed to the wind, thereby shifting by a few centimeters, speaking in the first person, "I am the wall in your house, that you are unable to see." Open to interpretation, the "house" could refer to the world as a place of belonging for all humans equally, and the wall that one is "unable to see" might symbolise border lines that Shilpa Gupta romanticises constantly throughout her works. But the wall isn't just speaking about borders, is it almost creating a checkpoint, where everyone must pass through, colonisers and the colonised alike. "You came, you took, you left." Gupta presents such arbitrary borders as meaningless spaces, which makes even the performer's identity meaningless, "So it's fine/ so I no longer need your ID, no longer need to know your name/ your religion/ your sex/ and the place you come from." There is

no need to know your identity when borders across landscapes are constantly being re-drawn by nature, or more likely, by humankind.[25]

As a piece of sound art, this artwork contains no sound effects, musical intonations or noise interruptions; only Gupta's voice and nothing else. Therefore, it does not fall under the categories of Adorno's industrialised music, Licht's sound art nor Hegarty's definition of noise. Gupta's voice has been employed to incite meaning, as a medium or vehicle carrying meaning. Gupta wants the audience to focus on her words and follow her instructions, making the audience conscious consumers of her art. There may be moments when the eyes drift off, leaving only the ears focussed during pauses, to allow the audience to experience nostalgia for travel, check-points or situations of heightened security and human frisking. This seems intentional since Gupta allows for the eyes to be distracted; the ears are forced to listen due to the headphones.

Shilpa Gupta Speaking Wall, 2010, motion sensor, bricks, LCD screen and headphones

However, an important inclusion in the installation is the digital screen that projects Gupta's spoken word into visual text, so that audience members from around the world are not disillusioned by Gupta's accent. This small feature significantly aids our understanding of the linguistics of the voice within sound studies, especially while considering the meaning of sounds and voices. According to Dolar, accents distract from meaning and the "smooth flow of signifiers"[26] that the voice contains. He considers the voice as a signifier, or that which "possesses no identity of its own"[27] and therefore has a negative value, since it gets its value outside of its form, in meaning, yet, "its mechanisms can be disentangled and explained in that very negativity which produces positive effects of signification."[28] Here, Gupta's voice

24   Walter Benjamin, "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". 1938. Refer to 'aura'.

25   Ronald Jones, "Shilpa Gupta". Frieze. 2012.

26   Mladen Dolar, "A Voice And Nothing More". MIT Press, 2006. Page 20.

27   Mladen Dolar, "A Voice And Nothing More". Page 17.

28   Mladen Dolar, "A Voice And Nothing More". Page 16-17.

signifies the force of surveillance and security, but it is not impersonal: her accent, timbre and intonation retain a fingerprint-like aura of her identity. Still, using a mechanically reproduced sound output, her voice has a touch of mystery and the uncanny, to aid her recurring theme of surveillance culture. I believe many in the audience will be distracted from the words she speaks and focus on her voice "and nothing else" in cultish appreciation. By fetishising her own voice, she is able to entice the audience through familiarity, and Adorno may argue this is the sole reason why the audience members "enjoy" listening to her.

All three installations considered in this essay contain variations of voices recorded by Shilpa Gupta. In *Singing Cloud* (2008), the abstracted quality of the psychologically-testing sound bites echo the strangeness of the hovering dark creature-cloud. The cluster seems to be an ominous floating object representative of modern notions of anxiety, surveillance and security, softly singing to itself in the echoing gallery space. In *FIYTICH* (2018), a moral consciousness takes over because the voices are identifiable, making the unexpected noises all the more haunting, because the audience has been provided information about their fate, but their faces and bodies are still kept mysterious. In *Speaking Wall* (2010), human identity is made obsolete in the face of robotic surveillance, which stands out in contrast to Gupta's own identity being commodified and mechanically reproduced. While Gupta's intentions are not clear, her art stands as a reflection of the real issues faced by real people, yet, she leaves fragments of their identities behind and only reveals the slightest amount that allows for human connection and empathy. Nonetheless, Gupta manages to remain as the middleman, ploughing stories from the world and delivering them to the audience, who don't just receive the art, but are immersed in it. Even though Gupta insists her art is "not political" (in almost every interview she's given yet), Benjamin and Adorno would both disagree — Gupta's art is captivating, reflexive and provocative. It makes a statement, and whoever is able to experience her art is sure to listen.

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Justice B.N. Srikrishna and Prof. Arghya Sengupta in conversation during 'Lions on the Throne: The Supreme Court of India and Judicial Independence'

We know we have made a difference. Our endeavour to encourage and facilitate pedagogy meaningfully continues with the firm belief that the humanities are indispensable to the well-being of the community and the individual.