



JNANAPRAVAHA MUMBAI
QUARTERLY

OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2022

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Director's Note

The academic year which began in July '22 has been satisfying on several fronts. Collapsed geographies with the resultant availability of leading scholars and participation from all corners of the global and local testify to the successful hybrid format initiated with trepidation. The virtual reach along with an active physical presence of students and public in our revitalised space has brought back a buzz which we have so missed.

The flagship Indian Aesthetics course now permits Mumbaikars to attend sessions in person without depriving access to digital participants. Lectures and interaction in the flesh are back! Our first public lecture on Kanheri celebrated the magnificent cave complex in Mumbai's backyard, and the return of a live audience. Upcoming lecture series in the coming winter months have us brimming with joyous anticipation. Mindful of not neglecting any one of our many rubrics, we have and will be addressing topics under Indian Intellectual Traditions, Yoga and Tantra, Buddhist Aesthetics, Islamic Aesthetics, Critical Theory and Southasian Painting. The subject matter as always, continues to be previously unaddressed whether it be Marathas and the British, Shakta Tantra and the Great Goddess, Ayurveda and Yoga, Varieties of Religious Experience in Early India, Ethics and Aesthetics of Gadamer or Multiple Modernisms, to name just a few. In the next few months, we will have trained our lens in particular on the Mughals. The Religious Significance of their Imperial Tombs, The Feminine in Paintings in Mughal India, and Humayun, the Planetary King will be delved into.

Other than the yearlong Indian Aesthetics course, we have two others which are semester-long. The current course, 'Yoga & Tantra: The Mind Meeting the Body in Transformation' has been tracing historical antecedents to modern-day practice. The relationship between Yoga & Tantra through a broad understanding of yogic and *agamic*/tantric traditions in the Hindu, Buddhist and Jain worldviews as well as syncretic traditions of the medieval *Natha yogis* has so far been examined giving us all a very rich, incisive understanding of these formidable and otherwise obtuse knowledge systems.

The latest iteration of the semester-long certificate programme under our rubric Aesthetics, Criticism & Theory (ACT) takes a markedly fresh approach. Its subtitle - 'Thinking Through Constellations' is based on the analogy that ideas are to objects what constellations are to stars. Largely focussed on the latest published research by the scholars the course moves across a grounding in Western philosophy on aesthetics while also engaging with discourses on colonialism, anti-caste movements, multiple histories of modernism and the role of social media.

The detailed reports on the course presentations and public lectures of the past quarter and what is to come in the upcoming one can be perused in the following pages. Hope you enjoy reading about it all. We look forward to your support and active participation.

With my warmest wishes,



Rashmi Poddar Ph.D.
Director

AESTHETICS



A Folio from the Manuscript of Kalpasutra and Kalakacharya Katha: Jaina Tirthankara Enshrined (upper panel), Celestial Dancers (lower panel). c.1475

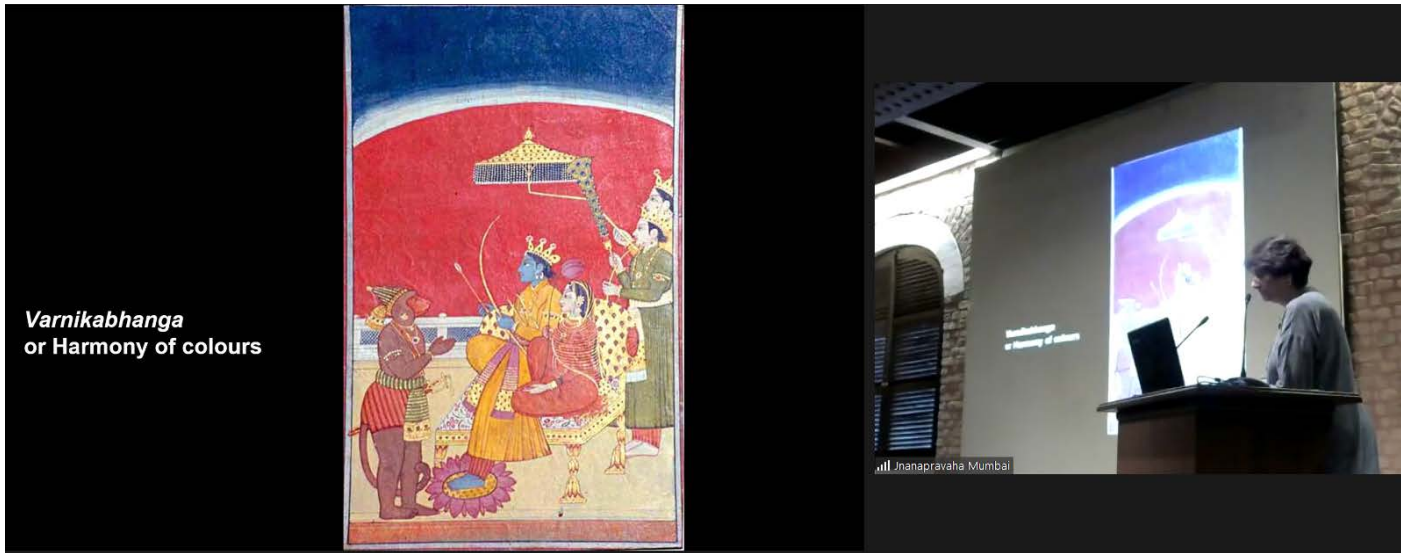
JPM's Aesthetics offerings include:

(1) an academic yearlong 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 & 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; (6) an ongoing series of public seminars in Southasian Painting; and (7) occasional academic conferences and workshops in these fields.

Indian Aesthetics



The Indian Aesthetics (IA) course has been launched in a completely new hybrid format this year. This means we have students joining in online while local students come to class. The move to this dual space continues to reach out to students in other cities and countries while allowing those in Mumbai to experience personal interaction in the special ambience of our space, located in a heritage building in Mumbai's Fort area. Here there is an aesthetically appointed, technologically enabled lecture hall and a reading room and library full of rare, enticing books on the subject of Indian Aesthetics as well as of our other courses. We have close to fifty students registered for the course this year and a special effort is being made to create an inclusive atmosphere for online students, who can address queries directly to each resource scholar, even though the learners are not physically present in class. By making this effort, we have been able to ensure a collegial as well as comfortable atmosphere and a hearteningly personal approach during the Q&A which brings



Dr. Rashmi Poddar speaks during 'Form - Rhythm, Harmony, Iconometry, Materiality Line, Colour, Proportion'

each session to a lively close. Thirty-five students have enrolled in the rigorous IA Diploma where each is already receiving individual attention. It is especially gratifying that as many as five of our participants join us from overseas each week and that the IA class this year, as always, is a cohort of not just interested but extremely accomplished individuals from many diverse fields. Energetic twenty-one-year-olds who have just been awarded a Bachelor's degree share the physical and virtual classroom with seniors boasting a wealth of exposure and experience.

The IA course continuously evolves to include current research and new subjects, and this year is no different. It nevertheless strives for a roughly chronological framework and uses *Rasa* theory as a binding thread, especially in its first half. Built upon strong and well-knit foundations of history, archaeology, architecture, anthropology, literature, philosophy, and theology, the IA course gives students a sweeping introduction to the development of aesthetics in the Indian subcontinent over 5,000 years. A new inclusion in the IA course this year is a session on South Indian temples by a British scholar, Dr. Crispin Branfoot, who has primary research and many publications in the field.

The Indian Aesthetics course began in mid-July 2022. Our course, from very early on, exposes students to philosophical ideas that can be fruitfully used to analyse the art of the region through special foundational lectures by Jnanapravaha's director, Dr. Rashmi Poddar, which form the bedrock of the course. These sessions do not simply introduce the concept

of classical Indian aesthetics, so important in grounding the early part of the course; they also attempt to create an underpinning of knowledge on which an understanding of the form, content and meaning of the art in the region can rest. The course focusses primarily on the visual arts. Dr. Poddar's application of *Rasa* theory draws on Bharata's *Natyashastra*, the dramaturgical text where it is first mentioned, applying the concept of *Rasa* to the visual field. These extensively illustrated sessions shine an illuminating light upon Indian art. They also perform the vital task of introducing students to the sculpture and painting of the subcontinent, enabling them to recognise a variety of iconic and seminal works which illustrate the theoretical scaffolding on which the lectures are stretched. Dr. Poddar creates interpretive connections of these works to the *Vedas*, *Puranas* and the prominent philosophical ideas that were enunciated in the subcontinent over the centuries. The lectures connect many ancient and mediaeval texts to 20th-century scholarship in a manner that is comprehensible to our students. Dr. Poddar's sessions were interspersed with a taste of Sanskrit poetics. This is given to students through Dr. Veena Londhe's highly informative lectures on the subject. Her exposition of Abhinavagupta's understanding of *Rasa* is preceded by a synoptic overview of trajectories on this subject. It familiarises students with the early aesthetic tradition and the works and commentaries of the most important philosophers of the subcontinent who wrote on *Rasa*.

Last year, we introduced a new module on the early art of the subcontinent. This module has

become a vital part of this year's iteration of the IA course, introducing our students to Harappan culture, Satavahana numismatics and Sunga terracotta through the lens of recent research. Presenting the Harappan civilisation through this lens, Dr. Kurush Dalal explained that economic linkages spanning several centuries probably existed between various cities in the region and are apparent in extant material remains. Professor Naman Ahuja explored not only Sunga terracotta, but also ivory and other material remains of this time, showing that 'mass production' or the highly creative use of moulds is apparent in the manufacture of the huge number of terracotta artefacts that belong to this time. Dr. Shailendra Bhandare's lecture elucidated the political history of the Satavahana kings, reading this through the numismatics that belong to their regnal period. His second lecture focussed on the fact that the coinage of this time displays its connectedness to the other artistic production of the period. The sessions justified the view held by both Dr. Bhandare and Prof. Ahuja that viewing objects such as terracotta and numismatics as 'lesser' traditions is highly problematic. The potential to reveal the past is inherent in these 'low' objects to no less a degree than it is in 'high' art.

Dr. Viraj Shah's wide-ranging sessions on Jainism included Jain philosophy and art as well as an exploration of the Jain caves of the Western Deccan which are the subject of her primary research. Additionally, she commented on the inclusion of popular Hindu deities in the Jain pantheon as a means to draw more adherents to this way of life. She discussed the advent of Jainism, recounting the stories of the important *tirthankaras* and the central Jain conception of the hero as ascetic. In this *kshatriya* conception, each *tirthankara* is viewed as a hero. The historical *tirthankara* Vardhamana's very title '*Mahavira*' means 'great hero' or the brave and courageous one.

Dr. Supriya Rai illustrated the life of the Buddha and his teachings through images of the faith's multifarious and extremely famous architectural sites. As a scholar of Buddhism, Dr. Rai offers authentic knowledge of the field; as a practitioner of Buddhism, she is able to explore the subject in a manner rarely available in pedagogical circles. Using images and narratives such as those of the *Jatakas*, Dr. Rai illuminated Buddhist philosophical

concepts, clarifying the notions of Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sangha*, the Noble Truths and the doctrine of dependant origination. Her second session, also beautifully illustrated, differentiated between aniconic and iconic representations of the Buddha and engaged with the notions of sovereignty and compassion in *Mahayana* Buddhism.



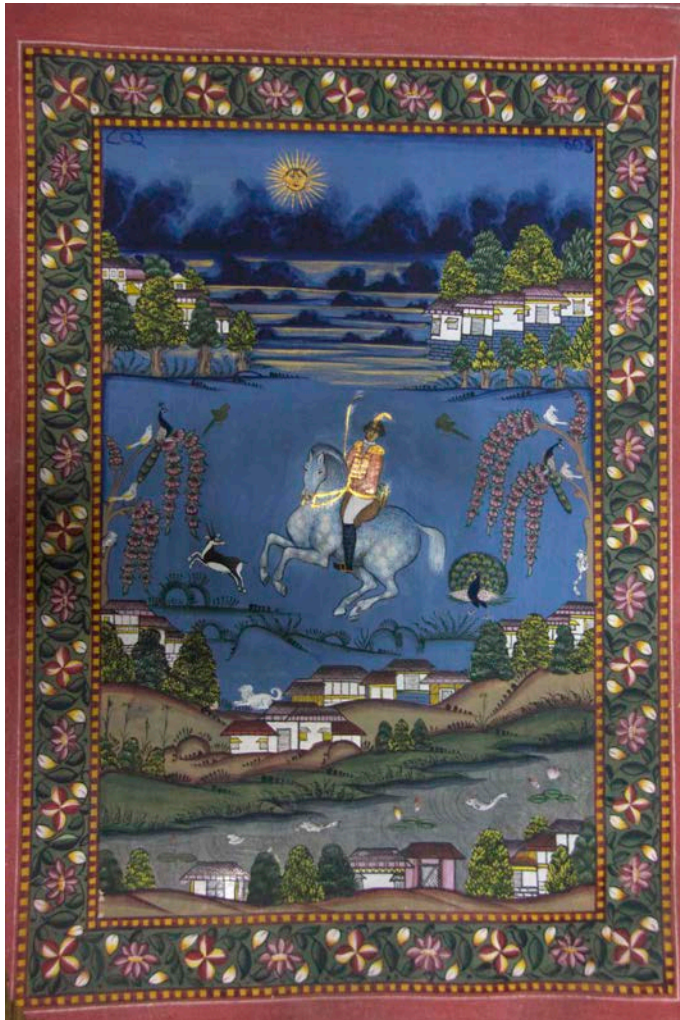
Dr. Kurush Dalal speaks during 'From the Beginnings of Agriculture to the Consolidation of Empire 7000 BC to 2000 BC - Mehrgarh to Rakhigarhi'

Dr. Jaya Kanoria's sessions on the basics of academic writing were designed to help IA diploma students but were open to the entire cohort of enrolled students. The sessions also focussed on reading academic literature in the subject, and used student input and interaction to enliven the process. Since the last six years, we have been providing curated readings to IA students in advance of each lecture, in addition to the synopses, bibliographies and glossaries that are given to them. This authentic, extensive, and enriching material is made available to IA students on our online learning management portal, JPM Think, and adds considerable depth to the course. Over the years, our IA diploma students have taken discernible advantage of this material. We are proud to announce that several essays which were originally written for the IA Diploma have been published by external sources, the most recent one being an essay on *Siva Natesa* by Riddhima Khedkar, IA 2021-22. While no boasts are ever made, the goal of training writers capable of producing publishable material is quietly being realised by the tightly structured, challenging, yet rewarding IA Diploma. . - J.K.

PAST PROGRAMMES

Grafted Arts: Art Making and Taking in The Struggle for Western India, 1760-1910

August 9th & 10th, 2022, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Prof. Holly Shaffer (Assistant Professor of History of Art and Architecture at Brown University)



British Soldier in an Indian Landscape, Britain and Maharashtra, late 18th or early 19th century
 Ink and opaque watercolor on printed paper, approx. 18 x 24 cm
 Bharat Itihas Sanshodhak Mandal, Pune

Professor Holly Shaffer discussed her recently published book *Grafted Arts: Art Making and Taking in the Struggle for Western India, 1760-1910*, which uses the key conceptual framework of 'graft', a medical and botanical term that refers in equal measure to violence and creativity. The scholar came upon the description of an 18th-century incident when an enemy soldier cut off the nose and hand of a Maratha bullock-cart driver called Cowasjee, then in the employ of the East India Company. A Maratha surgeon used sculpted wax and a triangular skin-graft to give the man a new nose. A skilfully etched

portrait of Cowasjee by the British artist Robert Mabon illuminates the term 'graft', apposite in the context of the struggle for power in colonial Western India. The term speaks of the violence and creativity inherent in the colonial interaction across languages, cultures and religions, and the art that emerged from such an interaction, producing unease but also fostering innovation. In the 19th century, the term 'graft' came to mean corruption and illicit gain, both germane to a discussion of coloniality. A Marathi translation of the botanical 'graft' is *kalam* (also Arabic: brush pen, a term connected to writing), additionally used to describe painterly style. These meanings meld into the conceptual framework of violence and suture that Prof. Shaffer employed to analyse the stratified and additive artworks produced in the militaristic context of Western India in the 18th century.

Such violence is apparent in a European print of a soldier overpainted in bright colours, to which an Indian landscape has been added, despite the charm of the layering inherent in the work; and in the hundreds of examples of usually war-damaged Indian art plundered, purchased, looted and 'collected' by East India Company soldiers, officials, and the Maratha generals who overthrew the Peshwas in 18th-century Western India. "This mercenary, predatory yet unboundedly clever model of making and taking art" is disguised from scholars by its mixed nature and the disparately located archives in which such objects are found. The disruptions of war at the time and the hybridity of the objects leads to their dismissal by scholars, hard as they are to trace and decipher. Prof. Shaffer used the contemporary socio-political context to decode these layered objects, understand their ingenuity and "the joints that connect art with empire". The scholar flagged the availability of records or archives as a general determinant of the history that is written in any field.

The Marathas and the British chose to collaborate in the 1790s against Tipu Sultan, not only embedding personnel in each other's armies, but also sharing artists and materials in their patronage of art that spoke to diverse audiences. The scholar examined various characters such as the powerful Maratha minister of the Peshwas, Nana Fadnavis. A generous patron of a wide range of art objects, this "multivalent figure" also sought to acquire them through any means. He was responsible for forging an iconography of Maratha rule, visually establishing its mode of governance, avoiding "immodest and indecent representations". Some leaves of a remarkable album collated by him and his insidious agents enabled by the strong Maratha military presence in Delhi are present at the CSMVS Mumbai. They depict the devotion and piety of various religious denominations (much coveted, along with meditative subjects at the Maratha court) set in intricate gold-bordered folios, showing the patron's desire to emulate Mughal styles and their practice of collecting images in fine albums. Nana Fadnavis's association with the Maratha ruler Mahadji Scindia, who gained the right to collect tribute in Mughal territories including Delhi, Awadh and Jaipur, greatly enabled his access to paintings. Authentic artworks could be procured through legitimate or underhand means in these regions, and master artists could occasionally be wooed to go surreptitiously to Poona to produce the eclectic art desired at the Maratha court. Nana Fadnavis's *wada* or mansion at Menavali also has religious subjects depicted on its walls in a mixed style, blurring the

divine and the worldly, the narratives variously depicting power, pleasure, advisory roles, and statecraft, apparently representing the qualities sought by their patron. Indian and British artists were used by both Maratha and British patrons to create artworks depicting moments that were historically significant but also works that catered to the concept of *darshan*, which metaphorically invested rulers with divine status, deploying a common legitimising tactic used across cultures and time.

The scholar discussed a skilled artist and sculptor named Gangaram Tambat who worked for the British East India Company Resident in Poona, Charles Warre Malet. Malet employed the British artist James Wales (whose drawings and watercolours were adapted into picturesque paintings by the more famous Thomas Daniell in his publication *Oriental Scenery* after Wales's death) and his assistant Robert Mabon, who have left behind written journals – a valuable archive of text and image. As part of an Orientalist colonial project, they trained Gangaram in European techniques and in the use of the camera obscura, commissioning him to draw the life and scenery of Western India, including court scenes and the rock-cut temples of the region, both for political and antiquarian purposes. As a 'Company' painter, Gangaram not only depicted his subject using European modes of representation such as landscape and history painting employing perspectival, realistic depiction and subtle colours, but also influenced his British patrons' decoding and publishing of



A Meeting of the Gods, attributed to Maharashtra, late 18th century, shrub and organic colors and gold on handmade paper, 30 x 42 in. Phadnis Family Collection



A Dancer Balances a Bottle on Her Head. Faizabad, ca. 1770. Watercolor and gold on paper. Chester Beatty Library, Dublin.



Indian art and culture as he mixed into his work intrinsically regional elements as well as a learned courtly style. This gives viewers fresh insight into the role played by Indian artists in the colonial context. Gangaram's varied, experimental, and adaptive oeuvre reveals that so-called 'Company' painters led complex lives where the personal and the professional intersected to produce widely disparate work as they created for both Indian and European patrons. Their art was one of manner rather than of identity, where different rubrics – regional, Mughal and British traditions and styles, innovations and motivations – were grafted upon each other. The scholar expressed the view that British artists such as Wales and the two Daniells should also be called Company painters as their art and views of subjects such as the cave temples of Western India were shaped by their exposure to the work of Indian artists such as Gangaram Tambat.

The plunder or "taking" of art was made possible as armies including mercenary soldiers moved along pilgrim- and trade routes or waited at military posts, and was further enabled by the Anglo-Maratha alliance. The flux, deprivations and depredations of war created conditions in which grafting made collecting a complex activity: goods were plundered, relocated, and sometimes reconstituted. In the speaker's analysis, the spoils, in addition to the millions of gold coins that emerged in Western India, created four types of markets; one for deities made of bronze and precious materials associated with religious sites, often endowed by the Marathas, situated on the routes that soldiers travelled; 'prize', a legalised looting, comprising of plundered items that were officially distributed to their soldiers by the British after a victory; a transregional trade in paintings collected in North India and sold by merchants in Western India; and a market for devotional paintings on walls and paper connected to a ritual calendar.

The Company soldier Edward Moor – embedded in the Maratha army from 1790 to 1792, but in Western India intermittently for more than thirty years – collected, repaired, documented, commissioned, and sold enormous numbers of objects to buyers in these markets. Moor's extensive collection, which includes local deities, establishes the provenance of these objects and is a valuable archive of Western Indian art that

helps to reconstruct the region's history, despite pressing questions regarding the exploitative circumstances of the time. Even though Company soldiers came under the Mutiny Act and the Articles of War from 1754 onwards, many laws that came to regulate plunder or 'prize' came into existence later during the wars against Tipu Sultan as his massive treasury was looted. Moor participated in the procedures that led to the institution of laws but was also engaged in collecting often damaged objects inauspicious for Hindus. Multiple records emphasise the need for laws to regulate distribution of prize but do not document the challenges of evaluation of looted objects. Seeing an opportunity for profit, Moor became an appraiser, dealer and mediator for the sale of these objects as buyers sought to exchange them for currency. Paintings, the speaker pointed out, were ably appraised by the merchants who sold them as there already existed Mughal and Rajput systems of evaluation. Moor may have purchased a pre-existing collection of paintings from Jaipur, but also commissioned a versatile local painter, probably a *chitari* from Poona, to paint local devotional narrative vignettes on European laid paper. Not just a dealer, Moor also collected due to his great curiosity and interest in Indian art, and displayed his treasure in a shrine created in his home in England, another example of graft.

Inspired by William Jones's creation of the Asiatic Society, which encouraged the study of Indian art and culture, and a network of Company officials interested in publishing writings on the subject, Moor, on his return to London, published images of several Western Indian icons in *The Hindu Pantheon* (1810). Here, he tried to classify Hindu gods and icons for a European audience as part of a colonial practice of knowledge acquisition. It was a pan-Indic publication rather than one only pertinent to Western India, in which Moor grafted objects collected by many East India Company officials who also collaborated in other ways in its creation. Moor and his artists transformed the way iconography had been presented thus far: the book emphasised the relationship between the images included and the theological texts published by the Asiatic Society of Bengal; in another example of graft, Moor in collaboration with his publisher and artists, related the Hindu images in the book with the Greco-Roman classical tradition through line engravings in a neo-classical

style, enabling comparison with other traditions. *The Hindu Pantheon* raised debates regarding the interaction of religion, art and empire, and became a model for other European artists to emulate. The process of publication extended across the 18th and 19th centuries, when Moor was a part of the adaptive imperialism espoused by men such as Warren Hastings and William Jones as they tried to facilitate British rule through an understanding of Indian religions and culture. Its final publication in the second decade of the 19th century coincided with the defeat of the Marathas by the British and a more rigid 1913 Act that was less accommodative of Indian customs, allowing missionary and 'civilising' activity through conversion and Western and English language education in India.



Dr. Holly Shaffer speaks during 'Grafted Arts: Art Making and Taking in the Struggle for Western India, 1760-1910'

According to the speaker, the formulation of *The Hindu Pantheon* allowed it to speak to two audiences. Using an Orientalist lens and pedagogical approach, it emphasised that the Hindu religion has many deities but a single godhead, a trope which the scholars of the Asiatic Society considered to be common to pantheistic religions. Moor was mocked because his publication depicted multiple forms of a god's image and was not edited for the sake of clarity. With its staging of the Hindu religion as esoteric, monotheistic and aniconic, and Hindu mythology (which was represented in the publication) as exoteric, pantheistic and iconic, as well as its visual use of emblems and symbols common to many schools of thought and religions, the book became an agent of transformation, inspiring William Blake's turn to other mythologies, yet providing Christian missionaries fodder in their drive to convert 'idolatrous' Hindus, unleashed

by Moor's fascination with the iconic. Blake's observation that empire follows art shows that he was cognisant of the potential of art to be deployed by an ideology of dominance and oppression, even though Moor's publication stimulated the poet's revolutionary, uniting vision in his work *Jerusalem*. *The Hindu Pantheon* also influenced books on Indian design, most notably George C. Birdwood's *Industrial Arts of India*, though it was not acknowledged by him as a source, perhaps because he considered *Puranic* deities to be 'monstrous' in their representation. Christopher Pinney argues that Moor's publication was an early enabler of the "representational transformation" that colonial administrators aimed for: the metamorphosis of the "intimate and interested engagement of the devotee" into the "disinterested and rationalised response of the colonial subject". Accordingly, the devotional object, emptied of meaning, came to be viewed as 'art'.

In the late 19th century, *The Hindu Pantheon* became a source for anti-colonial resistance, when Western Indian nationalists founded the Chitrashala Press to educate the public through chromolithographs that aimed to revive the Maratha past, to sensitise the Indian population to its heritage, and to "pierce the enemy's heart". Nationalists believed that the aesthetic diversity of these chromolithographs, that shifted the meaning of objects and images depicting both gods and heroes, would help to unify various groups as they resisted British colonialism. Chromolithographs formed a 'mobile museum' of colourful pictures, undermining British collections of looted Indian artefacts. Magazines such as *Kavya Itihasa Sangraha*, which revived Marathi and Sanskrit texts, and resuscitated Maratha histories alongside portraits of famous Maratha personalities and Hindu gods, promoted a Hindu concept of the nation which still endures. The Chitrashala Press printed the acme of such accessible portraiture and images, for instance printing chromolithographs of James Wales's portrait of Nana Fadnavis. This deployed him as a Maratha hero in a graft that subverted the colonial project, instigating and encouraging both moderate and extremist elements in the anti-colonial movement. The scholar, too, used a patchwork of materials to reprise and rewrite this history, attempting to leave the gaps between archives visible in her work. - J.K.

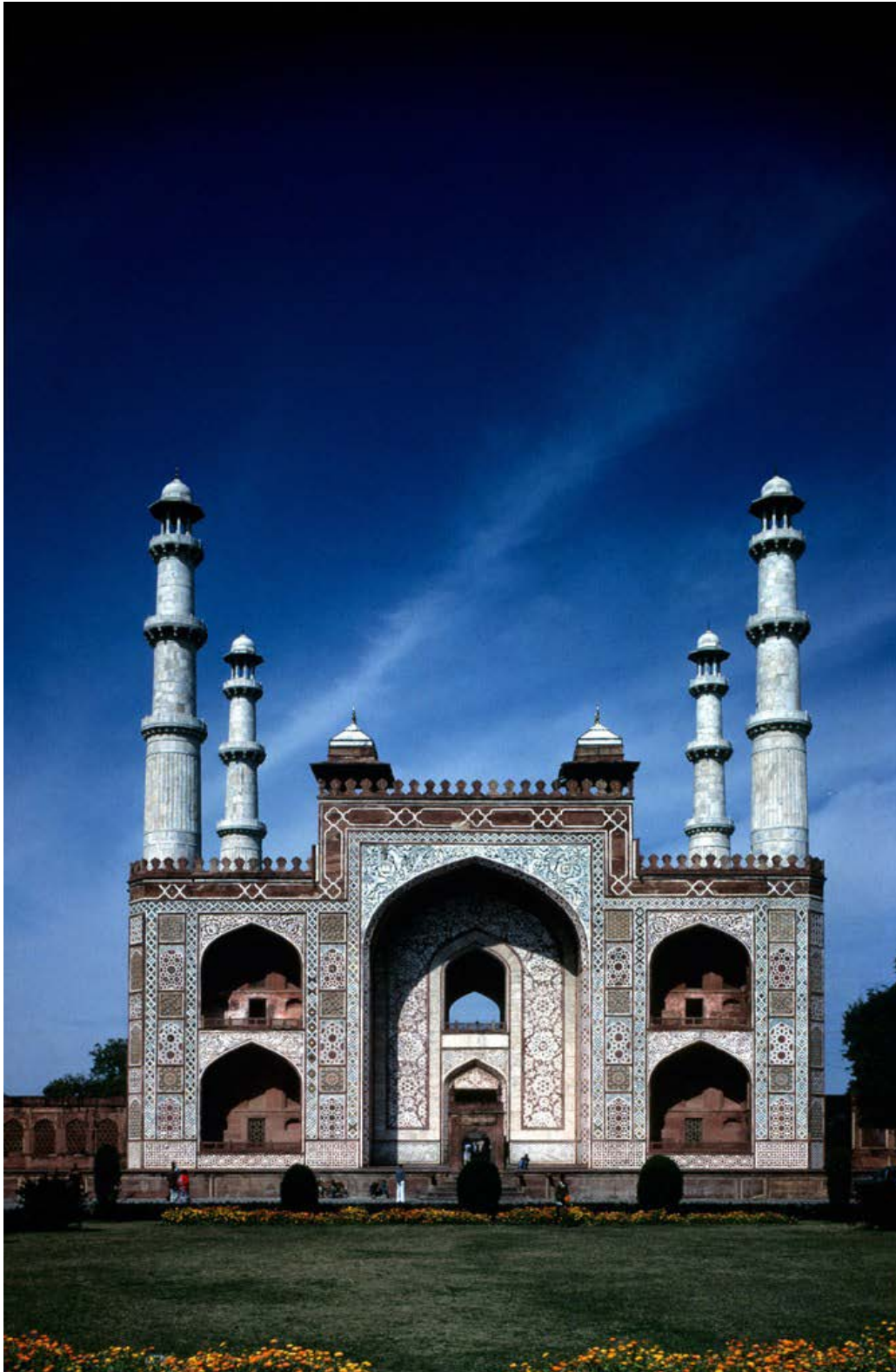
Islamic Aesthetics

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

The Religious Significance of Mughal Imperial Tombs: A Comparative Perspective

November 17th, 2022, 7:00 - 9:00 PM IST | Prof. Azfar Moin (Department Chair and Associate Professor of Religious Studies, University of Texas at Austin)

Online Public Lecture | Platform: Zoom



In this lecture, we will examine the way Mughal tomb architecture developed from the era of Akbar to Aurangzeb and ask what it can tell us about Mughal conceptions of kingship. We will also compare Mughal imperial burial practices with those of the Shi'i Safavid and Sunni Ottoman empires and explore whether this comparative approach can provide new insights into how these dynasties expressed their religious or sectarian identities in their imperial tombs.

Sikandra Bihistabad, 1575-1625, Agra. Photo credit: Robert D. MacDougall

Surface, Depth, Bewilderment: Propositions for Thinking about the Feminine in the Paintings of Mughal India

January 9th, 10th & 11th, 2023, 6:15 - 8:30 PM IST | Prof. Molly Emma Aitken (Associate Professor at The Graduate Center and The City College of New York (CUNY))

Physical with live streaming on ZOOM



Two women sharing a quiet moment, Polier Album, I 4597 fol 39v, Late Mughal, 40 x 28 cm, Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin

Paintings are objects in relief. They are textured by paper, brush strokes, burnishing, and pigments ground to different consistencies. They bear thick dots of white, thin lac glazes, precious metal leaf, sometimes betel wings adhered to their surfaces. Here they glisten; there they are velvety. Hindustan's poets, North and South, liked to imagine paintings to be like women and women to be like paintings. They took inspiration from how painters confounded skin with pigment, hung gold on ears of paint, and let translucent washes drift across bellies of colour to be confused with veils that might be lifted. These lectures are about feminine beauty as image, as paint, as illusion in paintings of precolonial North India and the Deccan. Feminine beauty was an expressive medium for artists of the Mughal era, and paintings of beautiful women invite us to think in fresh ways about what painting meant and enabled for

people in Mughal times. The course moves from surface into depth and from insight into bewilderment. What we think we are holding when we hold paintings of women slips from our grasp. This is a class about unknowing what we think we know, and in the end, it is about women and also not about women at all. It is about the art of being human.

Session 1: Surface

Session 2: Depth

Session 3: Bewilderment

Yoga & Tantra

The *Yoga and Tantra* course is being held online on the Zoom platform for the first time, keeping in step with the times, as well as opening to the opportunity of inviting fellow compatriots across geographies. We have a group of about 20 participants from London, Nepal, and different parts of India. We have had bigger groups in previous in-person courses, but I don't think we could have managed this diversity and reach if we weren't running the course online. Most of our

Yoga traditions, alongside the practices that make for the cultivation and potential transformation of the spiritual adept/seeker. While the course may be theoretical, it does include a praxis-based approach. This is also with an aim to help situate yoga and tantra practices of today in rigorous historical context, denting the popular fallacy that everything spiritually Indian is 5,000 years old if not more.



Dr. Christopher Chapple speaks during 'Yoga and the Luminous - I: Situating Samkhya and Yoga in the Indian Tradition The 25 Principles of Samkhya-Yoga and the category of citta Chapters 1 and 2 of the Yogasutras of Patanjali

participants are practitioners of some tradition: time-honoured and/or modern, many of whom practice yoga in a particular tradition/school. A couple of them are also returning participants of the course, having been with us for all the iterations so far. This gives us joy and helps us recognise that we are doing something right in the way that we are designing these iterations of this vast and rich field of yoga and tantra, as a space that can be returned to, to carry on the journey. Each iteration is unique in the sense that there is no standard curriculum that we pursue. I have been hoping to follow a theme in our iterations and this is the closest that we've come to setting an intention for the purpose of the course. This year, it is christened *Yoga & Tantra: The mind meeting the body in transformation* as we examine premodern ideas of the mind-body complex in different Indic traditions, including Samkhya-Yoga, Jaina and Buddha dhamma. We also study the yogic body in the Shakta Tantric and Hatha

I would like to begin this interim report on a celebratory note that is also one of deep fulfilment. We received generous words from one of our participants of the ongoing *Yoga & Tantra: The mind meeting the body in transformation* course, after the first two weeks with Prof. Christopher Chapple, Founding Director of the Master of Arts in

Yoga Studies at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, California, USA. Prof. Chapple is a well-known face in yoga scholarship, and founded the first ever degree programme on Yoga Studies taught outside India in 2013.

"Chris's [Prof. Christopher Chapple's] stewardship was fundamental for me to join many dots. As an Indian woman specially born and brought up in a very tight patriarchal set up, it was very healing to be in the presence of a male teacher who is compassionate and honourable of the necessity of all viewpoints and perceptions in order to make a whole. In his rendition of the teachings, the balance from the Eastern and Western perspectives really helped shoulder the concepts for me. Also, I felt very safe and held in the gracious and benevolent presence as I think I have never really experienced before, especially when the mention of my family came up. In a deep, cathartic way, honouring the sharing in

such a poignant and meticulous and careful and cautious manner created the bridge over which I could walk into a more healed version of myself. So it was a rite of passage in some sense, as I can see it."

Moonstar Kaur, Earth Wisdom Teacher and Founder of Parshada, a natural health retreat space at the foothills of the Shivalik mountains in Chandigarh

In **week 1**, Prof. Chapple not only recited but also took us along on a journey towards the understanding of the 195 *Sutras* of *Patanjali*. Yes, all 195 *sutras*! It was unimaginable at the start, but was accomplished anyhow by this master-teacher. He taught from his book, *Yoga and the Luminous: Patanjali's Spiritual Path to Liberation*, which he generously shared with us. The book was written after thirty years of practice and was informed by his close association with his guru, Gurani Anjali. The lectures were interspersed with anecdotes from his own practice over the years, especially his early years studying yoga with his guru. The participants were really touched by the personal sharing of an experienced scholar-practitioner, and in his case, a practitioner first who, having gone on to live at his guru's *ashram* at the age of 18, then turns into a scholar in time. We couldn't have asked for a better start to the course!

In **week 2**, we continued with Prof. Chapple, a scholar also dedicated to Jain Studies in the unfolding of his academic career, and following his own commitment on the path of nonviolence and ecology. Prof. Chapple serves on the advisory boards of the Jain Studies Centre (SOAS, London) and the International School for Jain Studies (Delhi) amongst others, and leads annual summer Jain Yoga sessions and trainings in New Delhi. In his lectures in this week, addressing the group with the customary Jain greeting, *Jai Jinendra*, he began explaining the foundational principles of the Jain faith from the key texts, the *Tattvartha Sutra* of the mid-5th century CE. He also shared from the *Acharanga Sutra*, which he posits as the earliest systematic discussion of nonviolence in India and perhaps the world. This session was even more auspicious since it was on the eve of the annual festival of the Jains called *Paryushan*. This time of year is considered sacred for followers who, over 8/10 days, ceremonially

seek forgiveness of any living being whom they might have hurt during the year. He made Jain Yoga quite sensorial in his explanation of the Jain Yoga practice of *Shukla Pindastha* meditation involving the five elements from his book, *Living Landscapes: Meditations on the five elements in Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain Yogas*, which he again shared with us as reading material. As a group, we were honoured to have received so much in two weeks, of his sharing from the texts and his own informed practice, in vulnerability, and holding space for the vulnerability that he inspired. On completion of the first two weeks, it seemed like the course name, an intention, *sankalpa*, 'The mind meeting the body in transformation', from a seed form had now germinated.



Dr. Supriya Rai speaks during 'An Overview of Buddhist Meditation in the Early Tradition | Samatha and Vipassana Dependent Origination'

The baton of practitioner-scholar was safely handed over in **weeks 3 and 4** to Dr. Supriya Rai, Director, KJ Somaiya Institute of Dharma Studies. With her, we were introduced to the Buddhist worldview, including the seminal teaching of dependent origination. We then studied the two aspects of early Buddhist meditation: *samatha* and *vipassana*. In her second lecture, Dr. Rai guided us through a *Metta Bhavana* meditation, giving us a taste of the practice behind the information she had shared in her first lecture. It was very well-received by participants, inviting a very insightful Q&A to follow at the intersection of theory and practice.

In her third and fourth lectures, starting with the *Madhyamaka* school of Nagarjuna, who is revered as the second Buddha by Tibetans, Dr. Rai traced arguments to show us how the school of *Madhyamaka* arose in opposition to *Abhidharma* formulations. Next, she compared and contrasted this school with that of *Yogachara*, a school which takes the *Abhidharma* analysis

forward to present a complex model of the mind. The name of this school, *Yogachara*, indicating an emphasis on meditation practice, and especially pertinent for our study of yoga, is usually studied much less than the *Madhyamaka*. Most famous for its elaborate definition of the *alayavijnana*, storehouse consciousness, it is the material from this school that the Chinese pilgrim, *Xuanzang*, collected from India for his monumental translation exercise in China. Dr. Rai introduced the early *Yogachara* tradition through the text, *Sandhinirmocana Sutra*. We concluded the series with a stunning visual treat of the site of the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang in China on the edge of the Gobi Desert, and along the ancient Silk Road, returning to the *Bodhisattva* ideal that she had introduced us to through the celebrated text in the tradition by *Shantideva* called the *Bodhicharyavatara*. Looking at the mural paintings from Cave 61, with the figures of Vimalakirti, an Indian lay disciple, and Manjushri, the *Bodhisattva* of wisdom, engaged in a legendary debate, very popular in Chinese Buddhist literature.

The lecture series with Dr. Supriya Rai could not have ended on a better note, as we received the following words from our participant in the chat box of the final session. The iteration title of *Yoga & Tantra: The mind meeting the body in transformation* came alive in that moment, validated by other comments of gratitude by fellow participants:

"Thanks a lot, Supriya. You have given me so much to study and think about, and initiated me on a path. You are the kalyan mitra for us <3."

Preksha Sharma, Writer and Editor of a digital publication that focusses on the visual culture of India

With **week 5**, we began the second phase of the course, looking at cutting-edge research on the development of *Hatha Yoga*, which has overturned many ideas that we've had, as have the scholars involved in a pioneering project funded by the European Research Council called the *Hatha Yoga Project*, which ran from 2015 – 2021. Our returning scholar on the course, Dr. James Mallinson, also the lead investigator of the project, presented these ideas in week 5 through textual analysis, starting with an early text from the 11th century CE, the *Amritasiddhi*, which has now been identified as the source text for *hatha yoga*, originating in a Buddhist tantric/*Vajrayana* context. Analysing in detail the early corpus of works on physical yoga, from the earliest, the *Amṛtasiddhi* (c. 11th century CE) to the *Hathapradipika* (c. 1400 CE), showing how the term *hatha yoga* grew in scope from denoting techniques (*mudras*) for manipulating the vital energies to encompassing all methods of physical yoga, including complex postures and methods of breath control. We looked at various texts of the early *haṭha* corpus, including the *Amṛtasiddhi*, *Gorakshashataka*, *Vivekamartanḍa* and *Dattaatreya yoga shastra*, taking us chronologically up to the early 15th century classical text of *Hathapradipika*. The *Hathapradipika* is a compilation of these earlier texts which expands on the term of *hatha*, including for the first time the practices of *asana*, *kumbhaka* and *nadanusandhana*, along with the earlier *mudras* as inscribed in the important verse 1.56 of the text. The practices are to be followed in sequence, starting with *asana* (complex balancing postures), then *kumbhaka* (complex breathing methods), *mudra* (dynamic methods of manipulating the vital energies), and lastly *nadanusandhana* (concentration on the internal sound), corresponding also to the first four chapters of the text in that order. Additionally, the *shatkarmas* or the cleansing techniques feature for the first time in this text. Dr. Mallinson shared these practices also in the context of a **key finding of the Hatha Yoga Project**, now believing and to quote him from the lecture "that actually the physical practices of yoga were an innovation on the Indian scene about a 1,000 years ago. Prior to that, the only evidence we have of the physical practices associated with yoga are that



Dr. James Mallinson speaks during 'The Beginnings of Hatha Yoga | Amritasiddhi and its South Indian Buddhist Origins'

of *tapas*: *urdhvabahu sadhus* and seated postures for meditation; but it's not until a 1,000 years ago that we see any evidence whether textual or art-historical temple sculpture of a practitioner practicing these [complex] postures." He also shared with us that the next project that he's already begun working on is preparing a critical edition of the *Hathapradipika*, which involves looking at over 200 manuscripts, a huge task in itself.

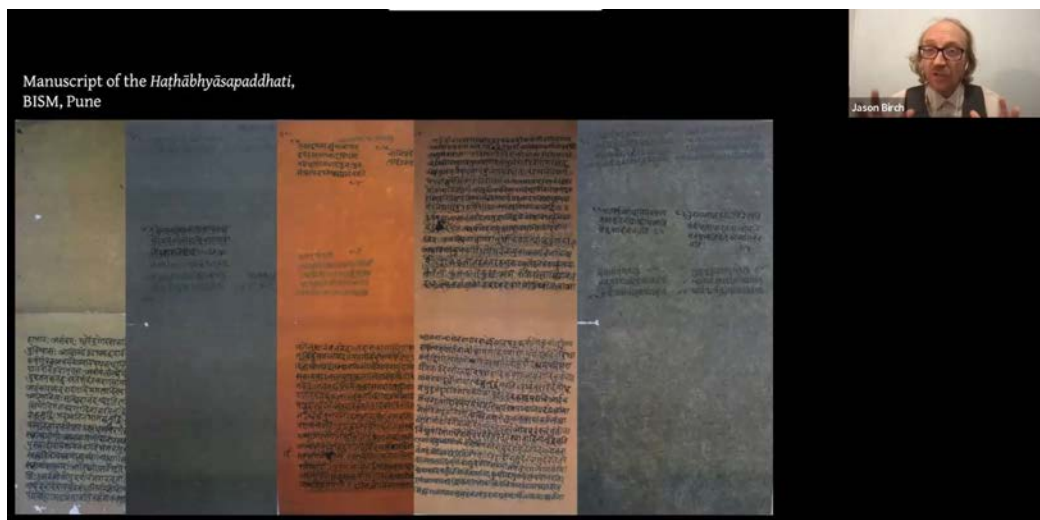
It was an extremely engaging week, rich with material: textual and art historical, also taking us through the site of Kadri, in present-day Mangalore, the likely place where Buddhist methods were co-opted by a *Shaiva* tradition, extending Dr. Mallinson's teaching in the lecture from his 2019 article *Kaalavancana in the Konkan: How a Vajrayana Hatha Yoga Tradition Cheated Buddhism's Death in India*. We hope to return to this discussion in week 9 when we have Dr. Mallinson return on the course to deliver a dedicated lecture on the *Nath Sampradaya*, using his ethnographical and art historical research material collated as part of the *Hatha Yoga Project*.

Tantra but has also opened up new endeavors for further research and contemplation in the field of Asian and Himalayan tradition, traditional devotional arts and practices."

Dr. Renuka Gurung, M.Sc., Ph.D. The Prince's Foundation School of Traditional Arts, London.

We've just completed **week 6** of the course, where we've been introduced to the earliest known text to date that teaches a system of yoga known as *Raja Yoga* called the *Amanaska*, a 12th century text of the common era. This is a text that literally refers to a 'no-mind' state '*a*', referring to the negative in relation to the mind '*manas*'. This text also mentions the *shambhavi mudra* as the technique to achieve this state of mind, a *mudra* which speaks to a relation to *Shaiva/Shakta* tantric roots of the *bhairava/bhairavi mudra*. In this week with the scholar-practitioner Dr. Jason Birch, who wrote his doctoral dissertation on the *Amanaska*, publishing a critical edition of the text, we looked at the interaction between *Hatha Yoga* and *Raja Yoga*, also through the classical text *Hathapradipika*, which explicitly states *Hatha*

Yoga as one of the means to *Raja Yoga*. Moving on to the *Hatha Yoga* tradition in later centuries where we witness a phenomenon of a massive exercise in the textual tradition, where we see for the first-time what Prof. Birch has referred to as the 'proliferation of *asanas* in late-medieval yoga texts in his 2018 article. Prof. Birch heavily expanded on



Dr. Jason Birch speaks during 'The History of Rajayoga'

We had a keen participant, an artist and scholar in her own right share the following as feedback after week 5 and as we entered week 6:

"It's been amazing to embark upon a journey of 'Yoga & Tantra: The mind meeting the body in transformation' course with Jnanapravaha. As a practicing woman-paumba painter and a scholar of the traditional devotional arts, I extend my deep appreciation with a sense of gratitude to all the scholars for their teachings. It has not only given new insight upon the understanding of Yoga and

this article in our second lecture, sharing visual evidence of the *asanas*, also informed from his recent research work as a member of the *Hatha Yoga Project* team. What made the lecture precious was that he shared material from illustrated manuscripts of practice manuals on yoga, the majority of which are unpublished, and that were composed in the 18th-19th centuries.

In our **third lecture of week 6**, we were joined by Ms. Jacqueline Hargreaves who is a yoga practitioner, teacher and an independent

researcher. She is also a collaborator of the *Hatha Yoga Project*, having contributed in the rather unique and creatively imaginative capacity of conceptualising a film that re-enacts and re-constructs the extraordinary postural practice of the 18th-century text, *Hathabhyasapaddhati*. This pioneering project has been described as an experiment in ‘**embodied philology**’, to quote from the *Journal of Yoga Studies* “an innovative way in which philological research can make an impact on the wider community by way of interdisciplinary collaborations that aim to bring to life, via film and other mediums, the unique content of premodern Sanskrit manuscripts.” Segments of this film, a central feature of the exhibition entitled ‘*Embodied Liberation: The Textual, Ethnographical and Historical Research of the Hatha Yoga Project*’, which took place at the Brunei Gallery in London in 2020, were shown in the lecture. The footage was awe-inspiring, demonstrating the skill and physical strength of adept practitioners from both India and the UK, re-enacting and performing some of the dynamic premodern *asanas* of the *Hathabhyasapaddhati*.

Here is the response of another participant from our online group chat during week 6 of the course (shared with her kind permission):

“Folks, thanks to this Jnanapravaha course, I feel more and more encouraged to explore studying Yoga & Tantra in a deeper format – maybe a Master’s or something”

Hetal Sheth, Artist, Writer, Yoga Practitioner in

Śrītattvanidhi

19th century Royal Compendium
Mysore Palace Archives
Mysore, Karnataka, India

Image source:
The Yoga Tradition of the Mysore Palace
by Dr Norman Sjoman (1996)



the Iyengar Yoga tradition, Arhatic Yogi, practicing under Grandmaster Choa Kok Sui

We’re very excited for our first public seminar which will be held next week in **week 7** of the course. It is free and open to all, titled, ‘**New Research on Physical Yoga | Findings from the ERC-funded *Hatha Yoga project* (2015-2020) and Current Research Projects**’. This presentation will cover the most significant research discoveries and developments of the *Hatha Yoga Project*, including new recensions of several *Haṭha* texts and the results of fieldwork that was carried out during the project. The philological work completed by this project has made possible the ‘*Light on Haṭha*’ Project (2021–23), which is aiming to produce a new edition and translation of the 15th-century text called the *Hathapradipika*. The presentation will conclude by discussing recent findings from this new project.

This iteration of the Yoga & Tantra course is the third with me as Course Director (*the course is in its 4th cycle since its inception in 2013*) and is, for the first-time, online. If I can take a pause instead of concluding here, since we’ve just completed week 6 of the 13-week journey, humbled and ‘[staring into the lake] astonished’, borrowing a thought-feeling from the poet David Whyte from his poem, *Tilicho Lake*, to describe an inexplicable and also exhilarating feeling, with the following words shared by Preksha Sharma in personal communication with me on the heels of her earlier response (and with her kind permission):

“From the questions on the group, I realised that most of us feel the void of not having a guru – something that our texts deem foundational to spiritual practice. At least for me, the faculty of the Yoga and Tantra course are the gurus and the Kalyan Mitras who have pointed us to a direction, and hence we now begin our journey.”



In shining the light on yoga and tantra, namaste. - **G.S.**

Prof. Jacqueline Hargreaves speaks during ‘Hatha Yoga on the Cusp of Modernity: Research findings from ‘*The Hatha Yoga Project*’ *The Postural Practice of the Hathabhyasapaddhati*’

TESTIMONIALS

The Yoga & Tantra course was phenomenal in the way that it bridged the gap between my understanding of Indian history, motivations behind each cultural spiritual practice of the subcontinent, and opening doors of rich cross pollination amongst all traditions and teachings in my everyday life. Prof. Chapple grounded us beautifully with a bird's eye view of how cultivating a spiritual practice and invoking the energies of five elements and sacred symbology to further cultivate our spiritual path.

Prof. Chapple's stewardship was fundamental for me to join many dots. As an Indian woman, specially born and brought up in a very tight patriarchal set up, it was very healing to be in the presence of a male teacher who is compassionate and honourable of the necessity of all viewpoints and perceptions in order to make a whole. In his rendition of the teachings, the balance of the Eastern and Western perspectives really helped shoulder the concepts for me. Also, I felt very safe and held in the gracious and benevolent presence as I think I have never really experienced before, especially when the mention of my family came up. In a deep, cathartic way, honouring the sharing in such a poignant and meticulous and careful and cautious manner, created the bridge over which I could walk into a more healed version of myself. So it was a rite of passage in some sense, as I see it.

Furthermore, I had been struggling for two years to connect with both the Sikh spiritual culture as well as the historical context of the Sikh faith, as I find both support each other – the study of history awakens the thirst for spiritual connection, and the deepening of the spiritual path in practice creates a curiosity to study the historical narrative. The first two weeks of this course gave me a lot of insights into this inter-relatedness!

Moonstar Kaur, Earth Wisdom Teacher and Founder of Parshada, a natural health retreat space at the foothills of the Shivalik mountains in Chandigarh

It's been amazing to embark upon a journey of 'Yoga & Tantra: The mind meeting the body in transformation' course with Jnanapravaha.

I joined the course with a curiosity to gain deeper insight into the subject of yoga and tantra, and the role of mind and body in transformation through the lectures of experts. It's been an enriching involvement with Jnanapravaha throughout the course. The scholars not only shared their knowledge generously but also their experiences and thoughts – key for deeper insight!

The lectures and interactions have provided profound understanding of the subject and also variations and parallels underlying the various schools of thoughts and practices.

As a practicing woman paubha painter and a scholar of the traditional devotional arts, I extend my deep appreciation with a sense of gratitude to all the scholars for their teachings.

It has not only given new insight into the understanding of yoga and tantra but has also opened up new endeavors for further research and contemplation in the field of Asian and Himalayan traditions, traditional devotional arts and practices. I look forward to new courses that fit into my area of research and interest in the coming days.

Finally, I would like to wish Jnanapravaha great success in spreading the knowledge of various subjects far and wide in the days to come.

Warmly,
Dr. Renuka Gurung
M.Sc., Ph.D.
The Prince's Foundation School of Traditional Arts, London

PAST PROGRAMMES

New Research on Physical Yoga: Findings from The Erc-Funded Hatha Yoga Project (2015-2020) And Current Research Projects

September 27th, 2022, 5:00 - 7:00 PM IST | **Dr. James Mallinson** - Lead Investigator (Reader in Indology and Yoga Studies at SOAS University of London and chair of the SOAS Centre of Yoga Studies) **Dr. Jason Birch** (Senior research fellow for the 'Light on Hatha Yoga' project, hosted at SOAS University of London and the University of Marburg) & **Ms. Jacqueline Hargreaves** (Programme Convenor for Yoga Studies Online at SOAS University of London)



James Mallinson, Hampi, Vitthala temple, 2016

More details will be made available in our next JPM Quarterly (Jan - Mar 2023).

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

Shākta Tantra and the Great Goddess in Early Medieval India

October 4th, 6th & 7th, 2022, 5:30 – 8:00 PM IST | Prof. Shaman Hatley (Associate Professor of Asian Studies at the University of Massachusetts Boston)

Online Seminar Series | Platform: Zoom



Basohli painting of Kali being paid reverence by Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva (Los Angeles County Museum of Art)

Goddess-focussed or “Shākta” tantric traditions arose in close association with the cult of Bhairava by the 7th century c.e., within the broader tradition of Tantric Shaivism. This series of lectures examines the religious and historical contexts of the Shākta *Bhairavatantras*, the relationships between tantric goddess cults and popular religion, women’s ritual roles and representations, the historical development of chakra systems and *kuṇḍalinī*, and Shākta tantric art and material culture.

Day 1: The *Bhairavatantras* and Tantric Goddess Cults

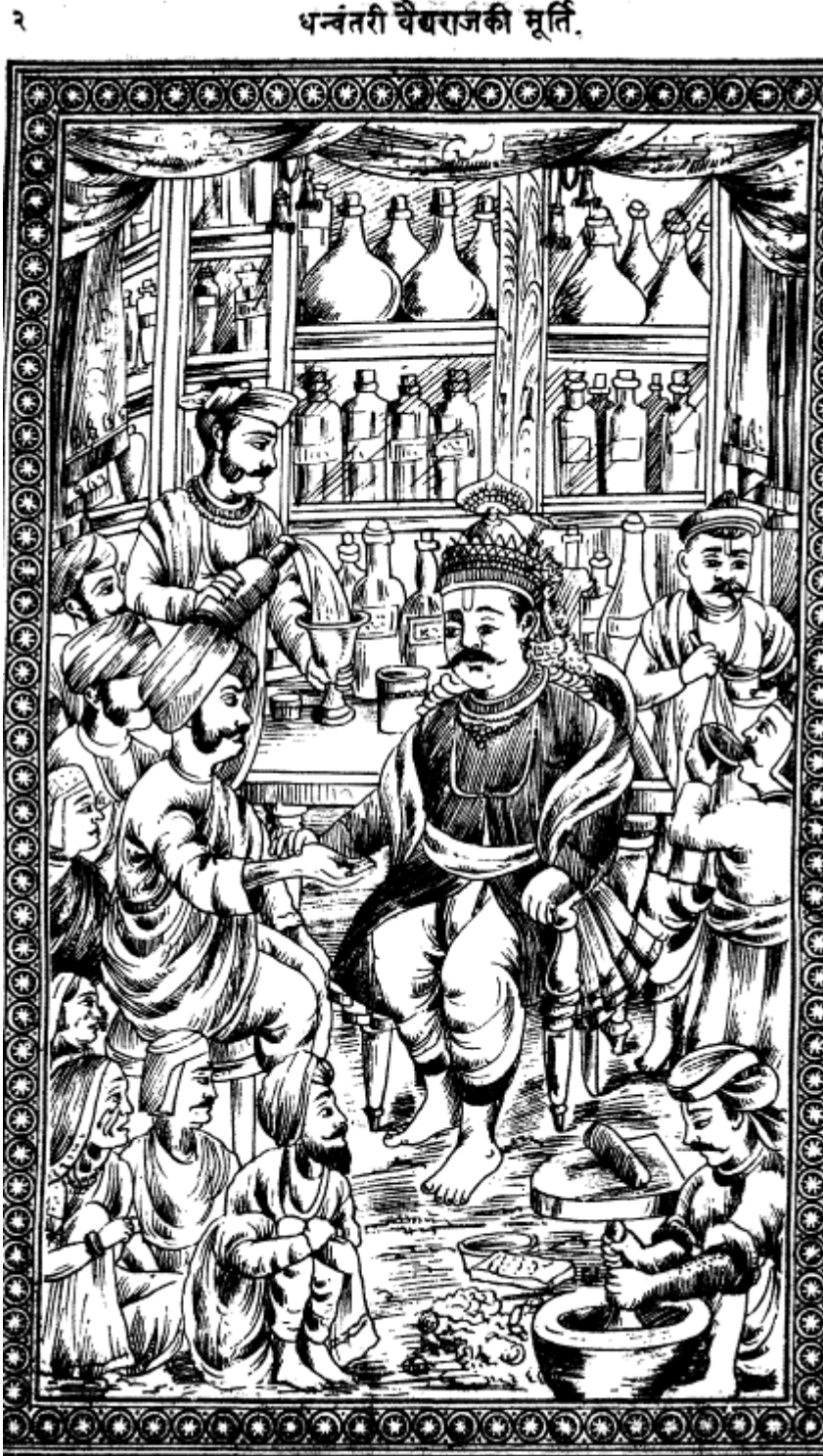
Day 2: The Yogic Body

Day 3: Shakta Art, Ritual, and Material Culture

Yoga and Āyurveda in Ancient India

October 18th & 20th, 2022, 5:30 – 8:00 PM IST | Dr. Philipp Maas (Research Associate at the University of Leipzig, Germany)

Online Seminar Series | Platform: Zoom



Carakasamhitā (Volume 1) Ed. by Vrajvallabh Hariprasad with a Hindi translation by Ravidatta Shastri, Mumbai: Nirnayasagar Press 1911

According to a standard historical narrative, Yoga and Āyurveda are two sister systems of knowledge devoted to maintaining and restoring human well-being and health. Both systems are integrated and share a common history that originated many thousand years ago in Vedic Brahmanism. Modern scholarship has shown, however, that this narrative is historically untenable. After discussing the cultural and religious milieus in which Yoga and Āyurveda originated, the first lecture of this series will focus on the principal aim of Āyurveda and its relationship to Yoga by drawing upon selected passages from the *Carakasamhitā*. The second lecture, which will be devoted to the fundamental aims of Yoga and their relationship to Āyurveda, will concentrate on the evidence of the *Pātāñjalayogaśāstra* and later Yoga texts concerning the role of Āyurveda in premodern Yoga traditions. The two sessions will lead to the conclusion that in ancient India, Yoga and Āyurveda were two largely independent knowledge systems with different aims and methods concerning the prevention of human suffering.

Session 1: Yoga in the Early Āyurveda of the *Carakasamhitā*

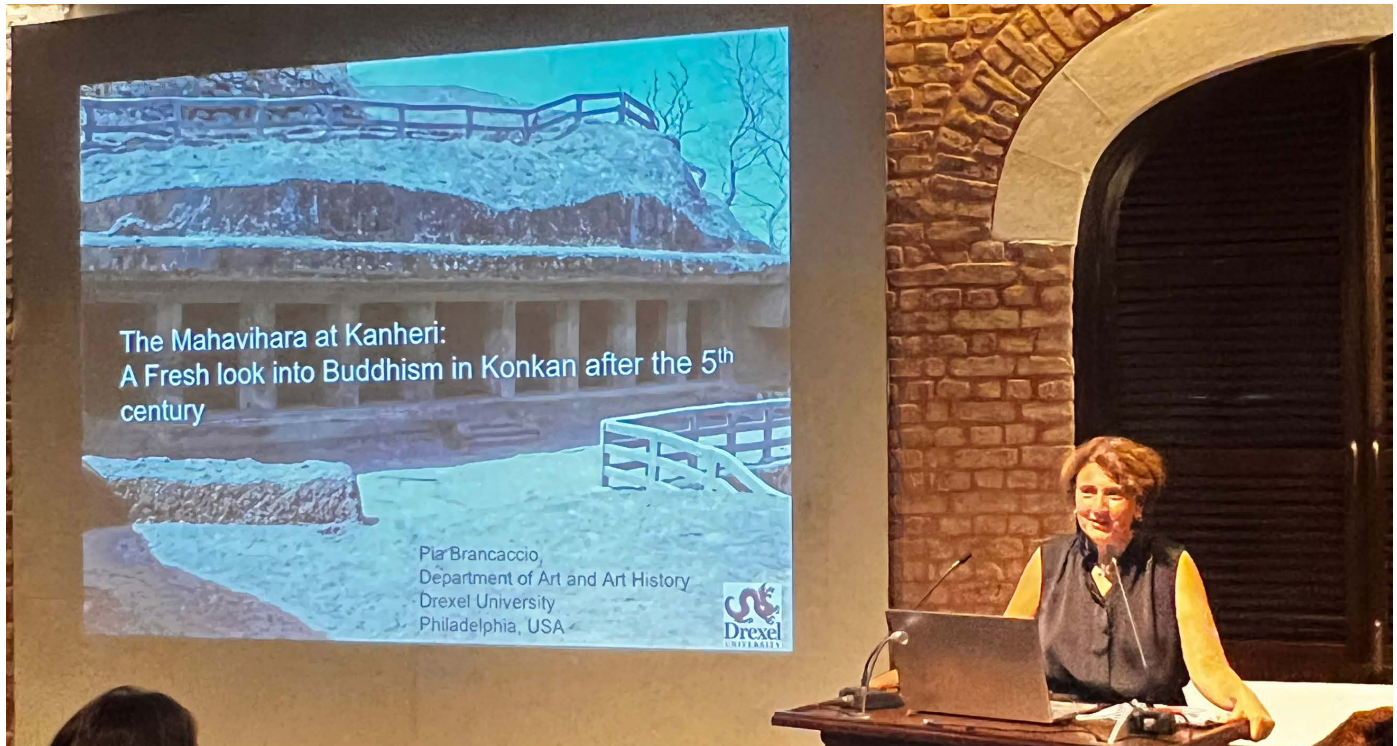
Session 2: Āyurveda and Medical Knowledge in Premodern Yoga

Buddhist Aesthetics

PAST PROGRAMMES

Views from the Black Mountain: The Rock-Cut Mahāvihāra at Kānheri/Kṛṣṇagiri

August 29th, 2022, 6:30 - 7:30 PM IST | Dr. Pia Brancaccio (Professor of Art History, Drexel University, Philadelphia, USA)



Dr. Pia Brancaccio speaks during 'Views from the Black Mountain: The Rock-cut Mahavihara at Kanheri/Krishnagiri'

In her talk entitled 'Views from the Black Mountain: The Rock-cut *Mahavihara* at Kanheri/Krishnagiri', Dr. Pia Brancaccio took a fresh look at Buddhism in the Konkan after the 5th century. During the course of the talk, she connected the developments in Buddhism across the region, in the context of Kanheri, from within the Konkan and across the country to Gandhara, Bengal and the Himalayan regions.

Dr. Brancaccio began with the 5th-century inscription found in a votive *stupa* before *Chaitya* Hall no. 3 at Kanheri, referring to the monastery as the Krishnagiri *Mahavihara*. She pointed out that this terminology of *mahaviharas* begins appearing in the Gupta period. This inscription also mentions the donor coming from the *Sindhu Vishaya*, or the Sindh region, and she emphasised the fact that the donor having had come from a long distance indicated the transregional relevance of the site in the 5th century. She went

on to suggest that the donor might have taken the sea route to Kanheri rather than the land route, considering the ease of access via the sea. This also brings up the maritime connection within the Buddhist network, which she said hasn't yet been much explored.

A *mahavihara* in Buddhist texts usually means a large monastery. Chinese pilgrims speak of *mahaviharas* as large monastic settlements with royal patronage and significant infrastructure set-ups including libraries. Thus, they seem to be learning centres with an international reputation. In this context, Dr. Brancaccio went on to discuss the significance of Kanheri as a *mahavihara*.

To begin with, Kanheri is spread over a large area, and would have needed organisation and infrastructure on a grand scale. The complex water supply system consisting of both water collection and distribution, which has been well-



Views from the Kanheri Caves, Photos: Pia Brancaccio

documented, is an instance of the large-scale infrastructure at the site.

The large number of monks who would have lived at the site is indicated by the open gallery with votive memorial *stupas* by the side of the hill. They were built as memorials for illustrious monks, as evinced by inscriptions. These memorial *stupas* date to the period after the 5th century, which is in agreement with the classification of Kanheri/Krishnagiri as a *mahavihara* during this period.

The *viharas* in Kanheri are different from what is seen at sites like Ajanta, where the monks lived together. At Kanheri, the monks lived individually in separate caves, probably due to the kind of practices they performed which required privacy. Kanheri might thus have represented a kind of Buddhist asceticism, which Dr. Brancaccio said, is mentioned in texts but has not been documented at sites.

The monumental sculptures of Kanheri, especially in cave 3, dating to the concerned period, is another indication of the importance of the site. The inscription relating to these sculptures has two interesting aspects – firstly, it calls the *chaitya* the *Mahagandhakuti*, taking it one step beyond the usually mentioned *Gandhakuti*, the perfumed chamber indicating the presence of the Buddha; and secondly, it also mentions a very advanced teacher living at the site. Together, the inscription serves to paint a picture of Kanheri as an important site with monumental sculptures,

and a great monastic site with advanced teachers.

Dr. Brancaccio connects these colossi with those seen in the North-West, in the Gandhara region. Sindh seems to have been the key between the North-West and Southern regions. Iconography seen in the monasteries of Sindh seems to have a close connection with the caves of the western Deccan, especially Kanheri and Ellora.

Among the Chinese pilgrims, Fa-Hien in the 5th century speaks of the rock-cut Pigeon Monastery, and describes a site that appears to be Kanheri. While it could be secondhand knowledge, the description is remarkably similar to Kanheri, including the small monastic cells, rock-cut stairs cutting across the hill, water twirling and flowing in front of the caves, and the large number of *arhats* living at the site.

Xuanzang in the 7th century talks of a monastery at Bhramaragiri, cut on a slope of rock without intervening valleys, and a huge monastery housing over a thousand monks. The description seems to fit Kanheri perfectly. He also speaks of *viharas* in five levels, which Dr. Brancaccio thinks refers to the alignment of the caves, which are on five levels. Xuanzang also speaks of this monastery having a library with an exceptional collection of books.

An inscription from the 9th century calls the site the Shri Krishnagiri Maharaja *Mahavihara*, an additional level of importance added to it. This

inscription mentions a donor from Gauda country, the heart of Pala-period Bengal. This elaborate nomenclature is reminiscent of the Nalanda *Mahavihara*, and it is possible that Krishnagiri was considered its equal.

Votive plaques found at Kanheri appear similar to those found at Bodh Gaya. Similarly, clay impressions positioned as relics at the centre of clay votive *stupas* are similar to those found in Tibet and Afghanistan. Thus, material evidence connects Kanheri to other regions, including the North-West, Bengal and Tibet.

An inscription in cave 12 mentions a significant donation towards books, indicating the presence of a library. This cave has a structure similar to monasteries of the North-East, and receives a lot of natural light, suggesting that it could have once been the library.

Moving on to textual references of Kanheri, Dr. Brancaccio spoke about the biographies of tantric masters, which speak of Krishnagiri as an important site for esoteric practices. One such master, Jnanapada, before going on to teach at Vikramashila, studied for nine years at Kanheri.

The legendary Buddhist master Atisa's biography

also mentions him visiting Krishnagiri to receive training. The mention of Krishnagiri in Atisa's biography is a clear indicator of the importance of Kanheri during this period.

Other mentions of Krishnagiri are seen in an illustrated *Pragyaparamita* from Nepal, dated 1015 CE. The illustrations represent tantric Buddhist sites. Among all the sites represented, Krishnagiri is the only one shown twice, highlighting its importance. The representation of Kanheri here is remarkably similar to the site.

The text mentions the Khadga *chaitya*, connected to the Khadga (Rhinoceros) *Sutra*, that advocates an asceticism which advises the monks to 'wander alone like rhinos'. This agrees remarkably with the way Kanheri is built in the wilderness, with individual caves for the monks.

Dr. Brancaccio wound up her talk with the image of the eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara in cave 41. While this iconography is seen nowhere else in Central/Southern India, it becomes a popular image in the Himalayan region, from the 9th-11th centuries onwards. Thus, the Krishnagiri *Mahavihara* must have been a key site in the esoteric tradition of Buddhism, and needs to be studied further. – A.S.



Dr. Pia Brancaccio speaks during 'Views from the Black Mountain: The Rock-cut Mahavihara at Kanheri/Krishnagiri'

Indian Intellectual Traditions

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

Varieties of Religious Experience, in Early India

November 14th, 15th, & 16th, 2022, 6:15 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Richard H. Davis (Research Professor of Religion and Asian Studies Programs at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY)

Physical with live streaming on ZOOM



Sanchi Gateway

“In religion, other countries are paupers,” exclaimed the American author Mark Twain during his 1896 speaking tour. “India is the only millionaire.” Where did this fabulous wealth come from? This set of talks will propose an historian’s answer. It will describe six principal modes of religion in early India, from the Vedic period up to the Gupta era. Together these form the foundation for many of the religious developments that have taken shape over the succeeding centuries in India, up to the present time. Each talk will focus on one of these modes, in its early formation, its fundamental ideas, and the debates surrounding it. These are:

- (1) Sacrificial religion
- (2) Renunciatory religion
- (3) Imperial religion
- (4) Disciplinary communities
- (5) Visual religion
- (6) Devotional religion

These talks are based on a book project, titled “Yogis, Monks, Nuns, and Dharma-Kings: Religious Cultures of Early India,” a narrative history of early Indian religious cultures. These talks will explore modes of religion as they are borrowed, shared, transformed, and debated among various religious communities.

CRITICISM & THEORY



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

JPM's Criticism & Theory offerings include (1) a Certificate course in Aesthetics, Criticism & 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 workshops in these fields.

Aesthetics, Criticism & Theory

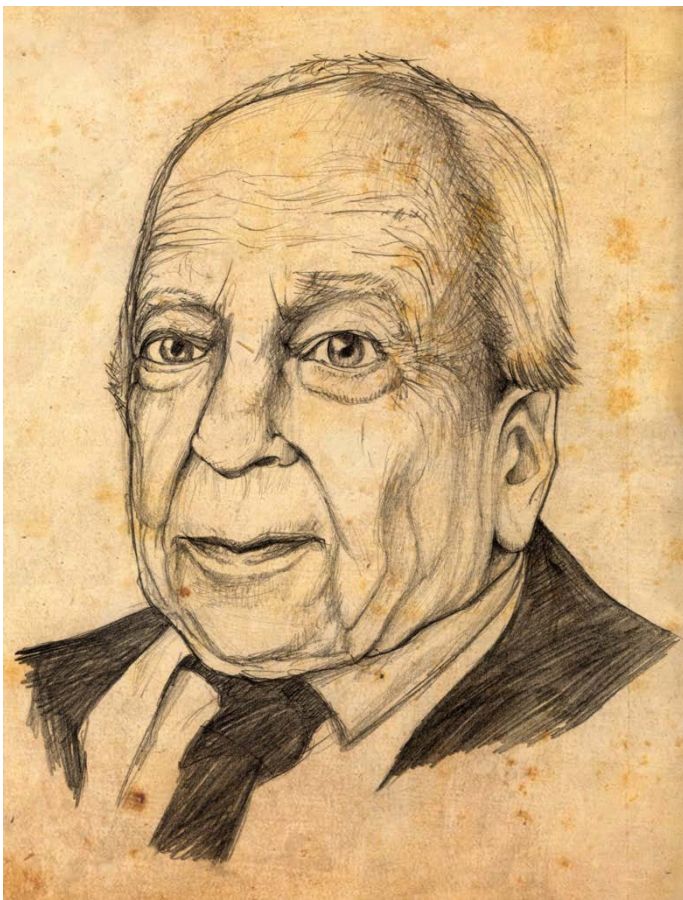
FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

Ethics, Aesthetics and the Historical Dimension of Language

A seminar series on the selected writings of Hans-Georg Gadamer

December 9th, 14th & 16th, 2022, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Prof. Pol Vandavelde (Professor of Philosophy, Marquette University, USA) & Prof. Arun Iyer (Associate Professor of Philosophy, IIT Bombay)

Online Seminar Series | Platform: Zoom



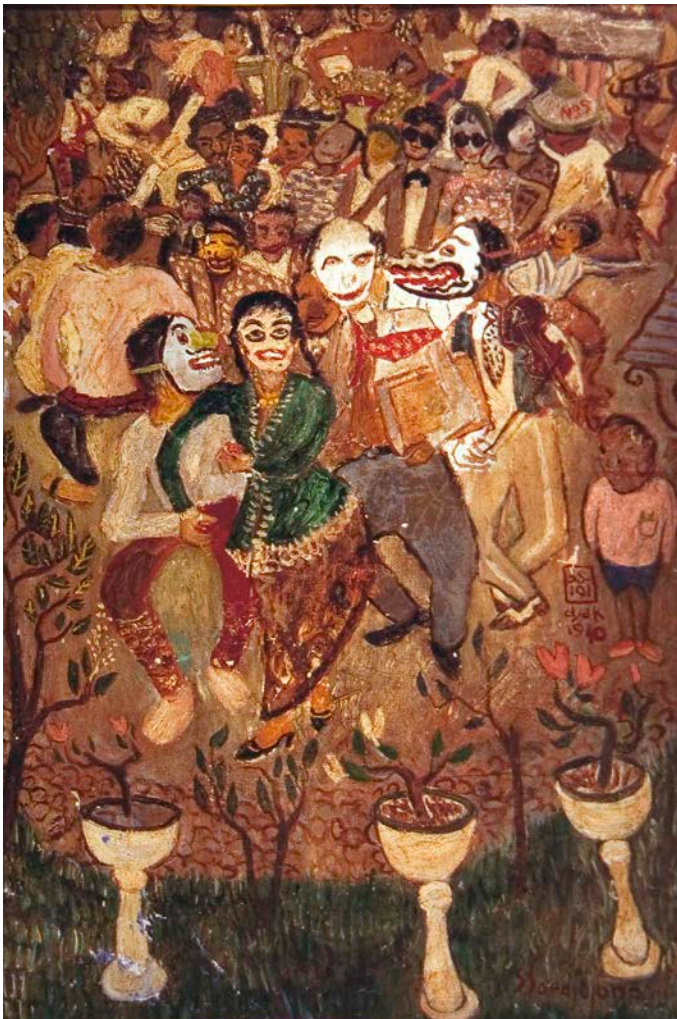
Portrait of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002)

This series of three seminars will delve into some of the most important writings of German continental philosopher Hans Georg-Gadamer on ethics, aesthetics and language. Translated for the first time into English by Profs. Iyer and Vandavelde, these writings form the core of their latest published volume on Gadamer's writing. The seminars will critically explore Gadamer's ethical project and provide an overview of his aesthetic work, focussing especially on his writings on ancient ethics, including the moral philosophy of Aristotle and on practical philosophy. Gadamer's writings on art and language, specifically his examination of poetry, opera and painting among other art forms, and the topics of artistic language and translation will hold particular attention within this series.

Multiple Modernisms: Europe, Asia and Beyond

January 7th, 14th, 21st, & 28th, 2023, 10:30 AM - 12:30 PM IST | Dr. Chaitanya Sambrani (Art Historian and Curator, Australian National University, Canberra)

Online Seminar Series | Platform: Zoom



S. Sudjojono, *Cap Go Meh*, c. 1940, Oil on canvas, 73 x 51 cm
Coll: Galeri Nasional Indonesia (National Gallery of Indonesia), Jakarta

This series of four seminars will explore histories of modernism in the visual arts over a century-long span starting in the late 1860s. It will present an introduction to modernist trajectories in Euro-American art (primarily France, Germany and USA) in juxtaposition to coeval and contrapuntal developments in three Asian contexts (India, Indonesia and Japan). In doing this, the seminars will interrogate the originary mythologies of modernism including the privileged position usually ascribed to white heterosexual masculinity. Having first introduced the mainstream narrative of the 'heroic quarter' characterised by rapid experimentation and multiple 'isms' in European art, the seminars will consider differential developments in Asian art. The three Asian contexts selected for study will be analysed as instances of deep entanglement with the narrative of Euro-American modernity alongside the concomitant invention of



Gulammohammed Sheikh, *Returning Home After Long Absence*, 1969-73, oil on canvas, 122 x 122 cm, Coll: Ram and Bharati Sharma, New Delhi

tradition. The impact of colonisation and imperialism on artistic modernity will be discussed together with anti-colonial and nationalist aspirations, and impulses towards decolonial solidarities. Students will be introduced to the careers of significant artists and theorists even as histories of art are explicated in light of political histories.

Euro-American trajectories

- The analytical revolution: avant-garde; 'heroic quarter'
- Europe and others: expressionism and the 'primitive'; surrealism and the 'unconscious'
- After the rain: trans-Atlantic developments post-1945

Asian Modernisms: India, Indonesia, Japan

- Mimicry, agency and improvisation in the 19th century
- Revival, return and reinvention: nationalism and pan-Asianism
- Vernacular and cosmopolitan modernisms
- Oppositions and alternatives to national trajectories
- Politics and narrative: towards the contemporary

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STUDENT REVIEW

Indian Jewish visual art: A study of a Baghdadi Jewish *megillah* (Scroll of Esther) and *ketubbot* (marriage contracts)

Priyanka Lindgren - JPM Alumna | Indian Aesthetics course 2021-22

Introduction

In 1887 in Calcutta, an unusual illustrated manuscript was commissioned by a member of the Baghdadi Jewish community.¹ It was a copy of the Urdu play *Indar Sabha*, written by Agha Hasan Amanat, a poet belonging to Wajid Ali Shah's court in the princely state of Awadh. Interestingly, this play had not been translated into Judeo-Arabic – the language the Baghdadi Jews brought with them from present-day Iraq and Syria – nor had it been written in the *nastaliq* script. By the late 19th century, the Baghdadi Jewish community had adopted Hindustani as one of their spoken languages, but they would have been less familiar with the script. Accordingly, the language of the manuscript was a compromise that reflected their multilingual context: the play is in the original Urdu that has been transliterated into Hebrew letters. The illustrations in the manuscript are not sophisticated but draw on Indo-Persian visual motifs (Figures 1 and 2), suggesting a familiarity with local Indian artistic traditions.



Left (Figure 1): Opening folio of the *Indar Sabha*; Right (Figure 2): The Sabz Pari and her earthly lover, prince Gulfam, British Library (Or.13287)

The Baghdadis were involved with the theatre community in Calcutta: wealthy members of the community often patronised amateur theatrical programmes.² In 1874, *Indar Sabha* was performed in the city; it is entirely possible that this manuscript was commissioned by a Baghdadi Jew closely

¹ British Library, "*Indar Sabha* - Or 13287," accessed May 20, 2022. bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Or_13287

² Kaustav Chakrabarti, *Glimpses into the Jewish World of Calcutta, 1798-1948* (Kolkata: Readers Service, 2014), 83.

linked to the Calcutta theatre arts or at least someone who was familiar with the local literary scene. The existence of this manuscript, including the effort to transliterate Urdu into a familiar script, reflects the Baghdadi Jewish community's desire to take part in local cultural production. It also complicates the idea that the Baghdadis did not integrate into both Jewish and non-Jewish Indian society, and over time, became increasingly Europeanised and dissociated themselves from other Indian Jewish groups, as is generally suggested in historical accounts.³ Cultural objects such as the *Indar Sabha* manuscript reveal local networks and affiliations that are often forgotten – or worse, marginalised – in national histories.

The unique style of this manuscript raises the question whether this cultural hybridity can be seen in other religious and cultural objects commissioned by the Baghdadi Jews. In this paper, examples of cultural production in the Baghdadi Jewish community will be examined to reveal the various influences that can be found in the works commissioned, whether it is reflections of the artistic traditions from Iraq, the Indian subcontinent, or European Jewish artistic styles. Furthermore, in the case of this small, relatively homogenous group with a strong sense of community, it is interesting to see how Indian – both Indian Jewish and non-Jewish – artistic traditions entered the Baghdadi Jewish visual idiom. This can be seen while analysing an illustrated *megillah* (plural *megillot*) now in the Braginsky Collection. This *megillah* ('scroll' in Hebrew) is the Book of Esther, which is read aloud during the Jewish festival of Purim. The artist of the scroll combined various artistic traditions to produce a unique, hybrid *megillah*. A further examination of illustrated Baghdadi Jewish *ketubbot* (singular *ketubbah*) or marriage contracts in the context of similar traditions from Iraq, Europe, and the Cochin Jewish community shows how Baghdadi Jewish *ketubbot* developed an artistic identity based on the well-established Cochin Jewish tradition in India.

Section 1: The Braginsky Baghdadi Jewish *megillah* (Scroll of Esther)

This section focusses on a Baghdadi Jewish *megillah* that was commissioned in 1900 in India by the prominent Baghdadi Jewish Sassoon family. At present, this *megillah* is located in the largest private collection of Hebrew illustrated manuscripts, the Braginsky Collection.⁴

During Purim, which commemorates Jews being saved from persecution in the 5th century BCE in Ancient Persia, the Book of Esther is read aloud in synagogues. The word *megillah* or scroll comes from the Hebrew root ג-ל-ל (g-l-l), which means 'to roll', and here, specifically refers to how the scroll is stored. The Book of Esther tells the story of Esther, the wife of the Ancient Persian ruler Ahasuerus, who was instrumental in saving Jews from being killed by the Grand Vizier, Haman. The story begins with Ahasuerus asking for his first wife, Vashti, to appear at a royal banquet. When she refuses to do so, she is sent away or – as rabbinic commentary suggests – executed.⁵ Ahasuerus then marries Esther, a young Jewish woman, who keeps her Jewish identity a secret. Her uncle, Mordecai, foils a plot by two fellow courtiers, Bigthan and Teresh, to kill Ahasuerus. Mordecai then angers Haman by refusing to bow down to him. In retaliation, Haman decides to persecute the Jewish population of the kingdom. Meanwhile, Ahasuerus realises that he had not rewarded Mordecai for saving his life, and orders Haman to lead Mordecai on horseback through the capital city of Shushan (present-day Susa in Iran). At this point in the narrative, Esther informs Ahasuerus of her Jewish identity and Haman's plan to kill Jews. In response, Haman and his sons are hanged, and Jews are allowed to defend themselves

3 Elizabeth E. Imber, "A Late Imperial Elite Jewish Politics: Baghdadi Jews in British India and the Political Horizons of Empire and Nation," *Jewish Social Studies* 23, no. 2 (Winter 2018): 48-85.

4 Jewish Museum Berlin, "Invitation to the Press Conference," accessed May 18, 2022, <https://www.jmberlin.de/en/creation-world-illustrated-manuscripts-braginsky-collection-0>

5 Cohen, E.M., Liberman Mintz, S., and E.G.L. Schrijver. *A Journey through Jewish Worlds. Highlights from the Braginsky Collection of Hebrew Manuscripts and Printed Books* (Amsterdam: Bijzondere Collecties, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2009), 226.

from their enemies.

Despite the importance of the Book of Esther and Purim in Judaism, the earliest decorated *megillot* only appear as late as the second half of the 16th century. The 1564 Venice *megillah* (Figure 3), also located in the Braginsky Collection, is the oldest securely dated decorated one.⁶ In general, *megillot* tend to have very little scribal information, which makes it difficult to date them; in the case of the 1564 Venice *megillah*, the colophon explicitly states the date of completion and that the decoration was carried out by a woman, Stellina, who belonged to the Jewish community in Venice.⁷ Even the oldest extant undecorated examples, such as the 1465 Iberian *megillah* recently acquired by the National Library of Israel, can only be dated back to the 15th century (Figure 4).⁸ From the 17th and 18th centuries onwards, *megillot* became a significant component of Jewish art production.⁹ In Judaism, not unlike Islam, attitudes to visual imagery are shaped by religious doctrines.¹⁰ While it is forbidden to decorate Torah scrolls, since the Book of Esther does not mention God in the text, it is generally acceptable to both decorate and illustrate *megillot*.¹¹ From the early 17th century onwards, decorated *megillot* began to include scenes from the narrative of the Book of Esther.¹² The tradition of illustrated *megillot* spread from Northern Italy to the Netherlands, and further to other European Jewish centres in Bohemia, Germany, and France. In the 19th century, it travelled to the Ottoman Empire and Iran where it became a part of local Jewish visual cultures.



Figure 3: Venice *megillah*, 1564, Braginsky Collection

6 Braginsky Collection, "Venice Scroll," accessed May 18, 2022, <https://braginskycollection.com/scrolls/venice-6/>

7 Cohen, Liberman Mintz, and Schrijver, *A Journey through Jewish Worlds. Highlights from the Braginsky Collection of Hebrew Manuscripts and Printed Books*, 227.

8 National Library of Israel, "One of the World's Oldest Esther Scrolls Comes Home," accessed May 20, 2022, <https://blog.nli.org.il/en/one-of-the-worlds-oldest-esther-scrolls-comes-home/>

9 Cohen, Liberman Mintz, and Schrijver, *A Journey through Jewish Worlds. Highlights from the Braginsky Collection of Hebrew Manuscripts and Printed Books*, 227.

10 Vivian B. Mann, *Jewish Texts on the Visual Arts*. (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000)

11 Cohen, Liberman Mintz, and Schrijver, *A Journey through Jewish Worlds. Highlights from the Braginsky Collection of Hebrew Manuscripts and Printed Books*, 227.

12 Sharon Liberman Mintz, "Imagining Esther: The Splendid Illustrated Esther Scrolls in the HUC Collection with Sharon Mintz," YouTube Video, 60:00, December 24, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6WyahwUxl>



Figure 4: Iberian *megillah*, 1465, National Library of Israel

The Braginsky Baghdadi Jewish *megillah* (henceforth the Braginsky *megillah*), measuring 202 × 7020 mm (8" × 276.4"), is created on parchment, on fifteen membranes.¹³ It contains eighteen text columns and twenty illustrations based on the Book of Esther narrative. The format of the 1564 Venice *megillah* (Figure 3), with its floral motifs and text framed within arches, tends to be the standard format followed by decorated examples.¹⁴ Similarly, the 1606 Modena *megillah* (Figure 5) also has text demarcated

by architectural boundaries, here specifically pillars with flowers and foliage. While there are no ornamental arches in the Braginsky *megillah*, each of the text and illustrated columns are bound by red-lined borders containing red and purple flowers and green leaves. It has been suggested that since each scene in the Book of Esther is framed by a particular space, the visual representation of this narrative follows the same principle, as seen in the use of architectural frames.¹⁵ Following the rules outlined in the *Masekhet Soferim*, a treatise that specifies how religious books should be prepared, the entire Braginsky *megillah* contains ruled lines, including two blank ruled columns at the beginning of the *megillah* (Figure 6). The *Masekhet Soferim* (13:2) states: "The Scroll of Esther requires ruled lines as does the real Torah because it is called 'a scroll'".¹⁶ While the Braginsky *megillah* does not have a case – *megillot* cases are usually either wooden or silver – it is rolled around a turned wooden roller.¹⁷



Figure 5: Modena *megillah*, 1606, Hebrew Union College



Figure 6: Baghdadi Jewish *megillah*, 1900, Braginsky Collection

- 13 Braginsky Collection, "India Scroll," accessed May 18, 2022, <https://braginskycollection.com/scrolls/india/>
- 14 Sharon Liberman Mintz, "Imagining Esther: The Splendid Illustrated Esther Scrolls in the HUC Collection with Sharon Mintz," YouTube Video, 60:00, December 24, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6WYahvUxI>
- 15 Mintz, "Imagining Esther: The Splendid Illustrated Esther Scrolls in the HUC Collection with Sharon Mintz," YouTube Video, 60:00, December 24, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6WYahvUxI>
- 16 Sefaria, "Tractate Soferim," accessed May 30, 2022, https://www.sefaria.org/Tractate_Soferim.13.2?ven=The_Minor_Tractates_of_the_Talmud_trans._A._Cohen_London:_Soncino_Press,_1965&vhe=Talmud_Bavli_Vilna_1883_ed.&lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en
- 17 Braginsky Collection, "India Scroll," accessed May 18, 2022, <https://braginskycollection.com/scrolls/india/>

Although the Baghdadi Jews in India came from present-day Iraq and Syria, having once moved to India, the artistic style they favoured tended to diverge quite sharply from the style prevalent in their regions of origin. Examples produced in Islamic regions, such as the 1850 Baghdad, Iraq *megillah* (Figure 7) or the 1920 Jerusalem *megillah* (Figure 8), do not contain figural representation. On the other hand, illustrated European *megillot*, influenced by Christian aesthetics, contain both human and animal forms (see Figure 9). The Braginsky *megillah* contains figural representation, showing that the Baghdadi population adapted and adopted new styles in India, where they were not bound to any overarching religious or stylistic constraints. In addition, the illustrations in the Braginsky *megillah* display characteristics typical of Jewish folk art found in Europe. For instance, two European examples – an 18th-century *megillah* from Alsace (Figure 10) and a 19th-century *megillah* from France (Figure 11) – display the distinctive Jewish folk art style. In both these *megillot*, the artists have depicted local traditions, such as clothing typical of the region. The Braginsky *megillah* also shows local (or more specifically, non-European) elements and clothing styles (Figure 12): some men are wearing *fezes* while the women, in particular Esther, are shown with a *bindi*. This mix of clothing and culture-specific markers – both Indian and broadly West Asian/Middle Eastern – and the adoption of European Jewish aesthetics in the Braginsky *megillah* shows the rich cross-cultural vocabulary of Baghdadi Jewish art in India.



Figure 7: Baghdad, Iraq *megillah*, 1850, Braginsky Collection



Figure 8: Jerusalem *megillah*, 1920, Braginsky Collection

Figure 9: Italian megillah, late-18th century, Hebrew Union CollegeLeft (Figure 10): Alsace megillah, 18th century, Braginsky Collection; Right (Figure 11): French megillah, 19th century, Braginsky Collection

Figure 12: Baghdadi Jewish *megillah*, 1900, Braginsky Collection

A particular feature of Jewish folk art is the labelling of characters (Figure 9). It has been suggested that in the non-European context, these labels were added to help identify figures for those who were familiar with Jewish narratives, but not with European Jewish visual imagery.¹⁸ For example, in the 1846 Bombay *Haggadah* (Figure 13) – the story of the Book of Exodus that is read out loud at the Seder table during Passover – created for the Bene Israel community in the Jewish folk art style, all figures are labelled. This *Haggadah*, printed as a lithograph, was based on the influential 1695 *Haggadah* produced in Amsterdam that circulated through Jewish networks in various forms, including via printed copies.¹⁹ As in this lithograph, characters are labelled throughout the Braginsky *megillah*. In the first image of the *megillah* (Figure 14), Ahasuerus, labelled ‘melech Ahasuerus’ (מלך אחשוורוש) or ‘King Ahasuerus’, is surrounded by his seven eunuchs who are marked as Mehuman, Harbona, Biztha, Abagtha, Zethar, Bigtha, and Carkas. In the second image (Figure 15), which deals with the aftermath of Vashti’s refusal to appear at the banquet, the upper section of the image is labelled ‘ezrat nashim’ (עזרת נשים), referring to the women’s section of a synagogue. Likewise, in the lower section of the image, several characters have been labelled in Hebrew, from the six children, depicted in green and red clothing, that are shown playing the drums to the reader of the scroll, surrounded by a group of people listening to the recitation of the Book of Esther. In this manner, as seen in a later scene featuring the hanging of the king’s courtiers, Bightan and Teresh (Figure 12), not only are characters labelled, such as in the top section which shows Esther (אסתר), Ahasuerus (אחשוורוש), and the king’s scribe (סופר המלך) but also – as in the lower section – narrative scenes are described, such as “Bightan and Teresh were hanged” (בגתן ותרש נתלו).

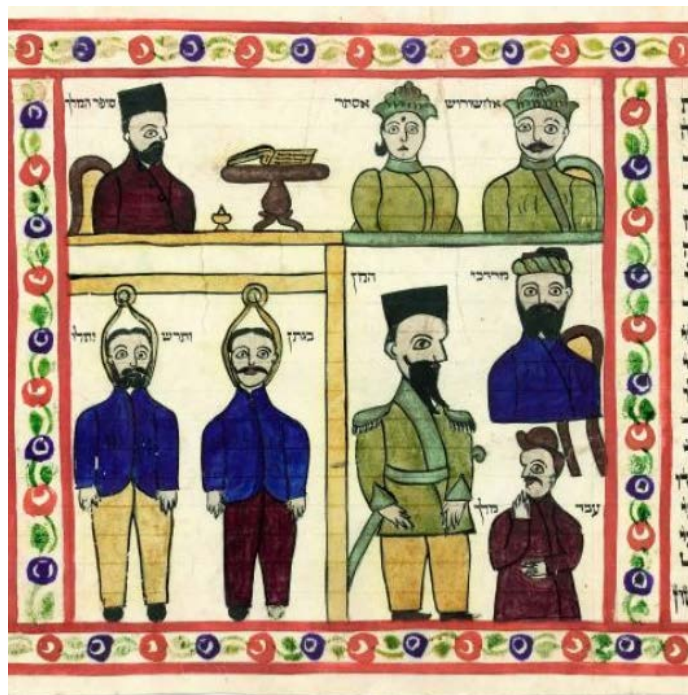
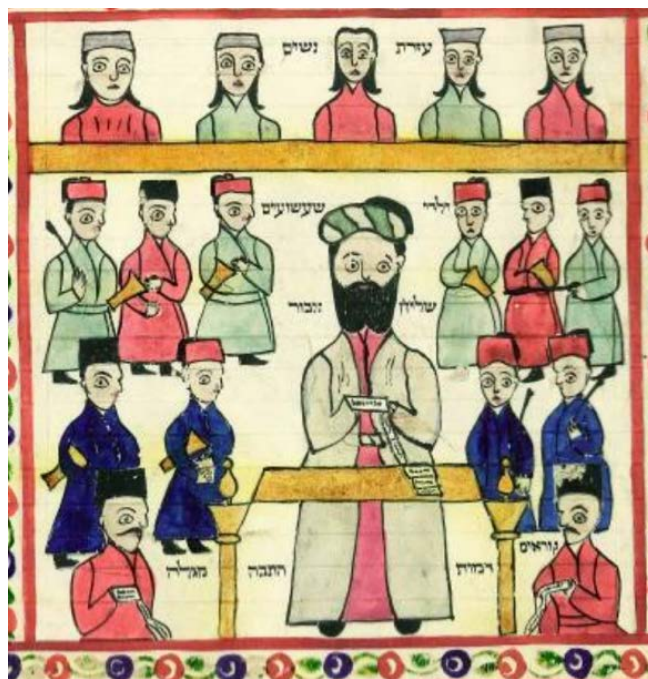
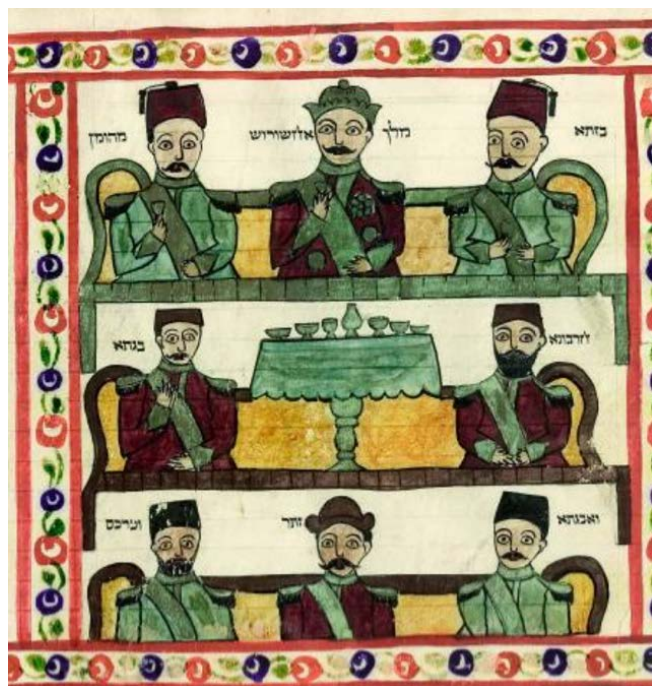


Figure 13: 1846 Bombay *Haggadah*

¹⁸ Shalom Sabar, “From Amsterdam to Bombay, Baghdad, and Casablanca: The influence of the Amsterdam Haggadah on Haggadah illustration among the Jews in India and the lands of Islam,” In *The Dutch Intersection*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2008), 292.

¹⁹ Sabar, “From Amsterdam to Bombay, Baghdad, and Casablanca: The influence of the Amsterdam Haggadah on Haggadah illustration among the Jews in India and the lands of Islam,” 292.



Left (Figure 14): Baghdadadi Jewish *megillah*, 1900, Braginsky Collection; Right (Figure 15): Baghdadadi Jewish *megillah*, 1900, Braginsky Collection

The majority of illustrated *megillot* tend to contain scenes depicting two significant events in the Book of Esther: Haman leading Mordecai on horseback, and the hanging of Haman and his ten sons.²⁰ The Braginsky *megillah* contains both these scenes. In the scene featuring Mordecai and Haman (Figure 16), the upper section shows Ahasuerus and Haman along with a character labelled the 'sofer ha-melech' (סופר המלך) or 'the king's scribe'. This scene depicts the moment when Ahasuerus, after having his chronicles read out to him, realises that he has not rewarded Mordecai for saving his life. The lower section shows Haman leading Mordecai on horseback, followed by a character labelled 'masharet' (משרת) or 'an attendant'. In a comparable image in a European *megillah*, such as in an 18th-century Italian specimen (Figure 17), where the lower margin contains narrative scenes, the scene featuring Haman leading Mordecai is identified in Hebrew as 'And he called in front of him' (ויקרא לפניו). The *Masekhet Soferim* (13:3) stipulates that in the Book of Esther manuscripts, the names of Haman's sons should be "written in the form of a half-brick over a half-brick and a brick over a brick. Such a structure does not endure".²¹ Interestingly, in the Braginsky *megillah*, not only is this rule followed in the format of Haman's sons' names (Figure 18) – this is the standard format found in all illustrated and non-illustrated decorated manuscripts – but also in the depiction of the hanging scene. In Figure 19, Haman and his ten sons are shown arranged – "(half-) brick over a (half-) brick".²² While a similar depiction can be seen in the 19th-century *megillah* from France (Figure 20), the visual imagery of this scene tends to vary. For example, in an 18th-century Italian manuscript, Haman is shown separately while his sons are not shown arranged on top of one another (Figures 21). Given the various visual narrative similarities with European Jewish *megillot*, it can be argued that the artist(s) who created the Braginsky *megillah* had access to a wide range of European specimens, possibly through printed copies. At the same time, since they were most probably local Indian artists – Jewish or non-Jewish – they were able to combine non-European artistic traditions with European Jewish motifs to create a uniquely hybrid *megillah*.

²⁰ Mintz "Imagining Esther: The Splendid Illustrated Esther Scrolls in the HUC Collection with Sharon Mintz," YouTube Video, 60:00, December 24, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6WYahvwUxI>

²¹ Sefaria, "Tractate Soferim," accessed May 30, 2022, https://www.sefaria.org/Tractate_Soferim.13.2?ven=The_Minor_Tractates_of_the_Talmud_trans._A._Cohen_London:_Soncino_Press,_1965&vhe=Talmud_Bavli,_Vilna_1883_ed.&lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en

²² Sefaria, "Tractate Soferim," accessed May 30, 2022, https://www.sefaria.org/Tractate_Soferim.13.2?ven=The_Minor_Tractates_of_the_Talmud_trans._A._Cohen_London:_Soncino_Press,_1965&vhe=Talmud_Bavli,_Vilna_1883_ed.&lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en

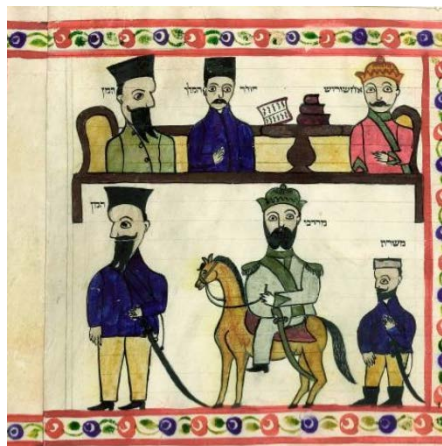


Figure 16: Baghdadadi Jewish *megillah*, 1900, Braginsky Collection



Figure 17: Italian *megillah*, late 18th century, Hebrew Union College



Left (Figure 18): Baghdadadi Jewish *megillah*, 1900, Braginsky Collection; Right (Figure 19): Baghdadadi Jewish *megillah*, 1900, Braginsky Collection



Left (Figure 20): French *megillah*, 19th century, Braginsky Collection; Right (Figure 21): French *megillah*, 19th century, Braginsky Collection

An interesting point of comparison in the Indian context is a 19th-century *megillah* from Bombay that was created for a Baghdadadi Jewish patron. Unlike the Braginsky *megillah*, which only contains Hebrew, this manuscript is multilingual, with an opening inscription in Marathi, and the narrative of Esther in Hebrew (Figure 22).

The inscription in Marathi reads: 'A story for Esther' (एस्तर साठी एक कथा). Given the use of Marathi in the text, one of the primary languages of the Bene Israel community, it is plausible that this *megillah* was made by an artist from this community in Bombay. While the Braginsky *megillah* draws on Jewish folk art for its illustrations, this *megillah* is illustrated in the Indian 'miniature' painting style. The opening illustration (Figure 22), showing Esther approaching an enthroned Ahasuerus, contains both Indian and Biblical symbols of royalty. Ahasuerus is depicted with his sceptre, a Biblical symbol of power and royalty, while behind his throne is an Islamic standard which symbolised both royalty and divinity in the Indian subcontinent. This manuscript has its lower margin illustrated with narrative scenes as is seen in the layout of some European *megillot*, such as in a late-18th-century example from Italy (Figure 9). The artistic style of the illustrations in the Bombay *megillah* is distinctly Indian, as is apparent in the floral motifs in the upper margins, the costumes of figures, and in the architecture depicted, as observed in the scene where Mordecai refuses to bow down to Haman (Figure 23). The blend of artistic styles and motifs in both these Baghdadi manuscripts suggests that the Baghdadis did not have a distinctive *megillot* tradition, but instead were open to adopting and adapting various (seemingly) disparate artistic styles.



Figure 22: Baghdadi Jewish *megillah*, 19th century, Sotheby's



Figure 23: Baghdadi Jewish *megillah*, 19th century, Sotheby's

During their time in India, it is apparent that the Baghdadis showed a remarkable openness towards new *megillot* styles, incorporating a blend of Indian and European motifs and symbols to create manuscripts that were vastly different from those produced in Iraq. A possible reason for their openness may have been their liminal status in Indian society, caught as they were between the European coloniser and the local Indian population, never fully identifying with either. For this reason, they developed multiple affiliations, identifying broadly with a European identity, but at the same time adopting local Indian traditions while retaining those they brought with them from Iraq. The hybrid Braginsky *megillah*, therefore, is symbolic of their cosmopolitan identity and reflects their multicultural heritage. With the emigration of much

of the community following the independence of India in 1947, however, there was a decline in Baghdadi Jewish artistic patronage, particularly for ceremonial objects such as *megillot* that were intended for personal use. More recently, the Indian Jewish artist Siona Benjamin has created a hybrid *megillah*, blending Indo-Persian miniature painting traditions along with Jewish motifs (Figure 24). Her aesthetic sensibility brings together the various strands of her multi-layered identity, drawing on her experience of growing up Jewish in the predominantly Hindu and Muslim society of Bombay. In other words, through her work, especially her *megillah*, she continues the process of the adoption and adaptation of artistic styles that the Baghdadi Jews engaged in whilst in India.



Figure 24: *Megillah*, 2009, Siona Benjamin

Section 2: Baghdadi Jewish *ketubbot* (marriage contracts)

This section will focus primarily on 19th-century Baghdadi Jewish *ketubbot* produced in India. In Baghdadi Jewish communities, hand-painted *ketubbot*, decorated with fertility omens and other Jewish motifs, formed an essential part of the wedding ceremony.²³ These *ketubbot* were displayed at weddings and then stored in metal boxes, which remained unopened unless the couple divorced.²⁴ An examination of the significance of the *ketubbah* in Jewish cultures and the influence of both Iraqi and Cochin Jewish styles on the Baghdadi Jewish *ketubbah* demonstrates that the latter reflect how the community adapted and adopted local Indian Jewish traditions to create a unique visual vocabulary.

Although the *ketubbah* is not mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, the apocryphal Book of Tobias, written in the 3rd or early 2nd century BCE, refers to the concept of a marriage contract.²⁵ The earliest extant Jewish marriage contracts can be dated back to the 5th century BCE. These contracts were written in Aramaic, the language spoken by Jews in Ancient Palestine. During the Talmudic period (3rd to 6th centuries), the concept of the *ketubbah* was introduced by rabbis to protect the rights of married women.²⁶ Accordingly, the *ketubbah* text usually lists the various financial and legal obligations of the bridegroom towards his bride. In traditional Jewish weddings, the *ketubbah* is read aloud in front of guests, and signed by the bridal couple and two male witnesses. Given the centrality of this ceremony in Jewish weddings, the *ketubbah* became a significant object in the corpus of Jewish

²³ Shalvah Vail, *India's Jewish Heritage: Ritual, Art & Life-cycle* (Mumbai: Marg Publications on behalf of National Centre for the Performing Arts, 2002), 105.

²⁴ Vail, *India's Jewish Heritage*, 105.

²⁵ Sabar, Shalom. *Mazal Tov: Illuminated Jewish Marriage Contracts from the Israel Museum Collection* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1994), 11.

²⁶ Shalom Sabar, "This World: Centered on the Home – Women, Marriage, and The Family," in *Skies of Parchment, Seas of Ink: Jewish Illuminated Manuscripts*, ed. Hartley Lachter and Marc Michael Epstein (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), 168.

art. The earliest known illuminated *ketubbah*, discovered in the Cairo Genizah, is dated between the 9th and 12th centuries.²⁷ While the tradition of illuminated *ketubbot* never became popular in Ashkenazi communities, these marriage contracts were extensively illuminated and decorated in Sephardic communities.²⁸ In Europe, the major centre for illuminated *ketubbah* production was in northern Italy where, influenced by the Baroque style, Jewish artists introduced architectural themes, representations of holy sites such as Jerusalem, and Biblical narrative themes into these documents (Figure 25). In Islamic regions, *ketubbot* did not contain figural art, and instead were decorated with architectural and floral motifs (Figure 26).



Figure 25: *Ketubbah* from Casale Monferrato, 1773, Braginsky Collection

While *ketubbot* are primarily legal documents, their form and artistic styles vary from region to region, reflecting the socio-cultural histories of the contexts in which they were produced. For this reason, they become an important object of study in Jewish art. When the Baghdadi Jews arrived in India, there was already an established tradition of illuminated *ketubbot* production in the Cochin Jewish communities. Although no surviving *ketubbot* date back to earlier than the second half of the 18th century – mainly because they were made on paper and not parchment as in Europe – the tradition in India is understood to be much older.²⁹ The Cochin *ketubbot* style dominated in the Indian context: both the Bene Israel and the Baghdadi Jewish examples followed the general layout of Cochin *ketubbot*. Yet, the Baghdadi Jewish community developed a distinctive artistic vocabulary incorporating elements from the Cochin *ketubbot* style while retaining elements of the artistic tradition from their region of origin.



Figure 26: *Ketubbah* from Aleppo, 1771, British Library, OR 12377 P

The layout of a typical 19th-century Baghdadi Jewish *ketubbah* tends to vary from those produced in Iraq. Baghdadi Jewish *ketubbot* are usually divided into two distinct sections: the upper section, known as the superscription, opens with an invocation of God, followed by set formulas of blessings, and psalms and proverbs associated with marriage.³⁰ In India, the Baghdadis replaced the Iraqi superscription with verses found in the Cochin tradition.³¹ The lower section of each *ketubbah* consists of the actual marriage contract, including the signatures of the bridal couple and the witnesses. Typically, the superscription is spread over two columns, bounded by architectonic frames. For example, in one of the earliest extant Baghdadi Jewish *ketubbot*, an 1853 example from Bombay created for the wedding of a member of the Sassoon family, the text of the superscription is split across two columns (Figure 27). As in all Indian Jewish *ketubbot*, the superscription here is written in a square Hebrew script – a

27 Sabar, *Mazal Tov: Illuminated Jewish Marriage Contracts*, 12.

28 Cohen, Liberman Mintz, and Schrijver, *A Journey through Jewish Worlds. Highlights from the Braginsky Collection of Hebrew Manuscripts and Printed Books*, 160.

29 Shalom Sabar, "The Illuminated Ketubbah of the Cochin Jews, Baghdadi Jews and Bene Israel," in *The Jews of India: A Story of Three Communities*, ed. Orpa Slapak (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1995), 168.

30 Sabar, "The Illuminated Ketubbah of the Cochin Jews, Baghdadi Jews and Bene Israel," 170.

31 *Ibid.*, 189.

style commonly found in manuscripts produced in eastern (non-European) Jewish cultures - while the marriage contract is written in a semi-cursive script known as the Rashi script.³²



Figure 27: *Ketubbah* from Bombay, 1853, Sotheby's

The standard layout of the Iraqi *ketubbot*, on the other hand, consists of three sections of writing. In the earliest available example from Iraq, a 1764 *ketubbah* from Baghdad (Figure 28), the sheet is divided into three sections: the uppermost section, consisting of the superscription, is divided into three *mihrab*-shaped frames; the middle section contains a biblical verse in Hebrew, which, in translation, reads: "He who finds a wife has found happiness. And has won the favour of the Lord" (Proverbs 18:22).³³ Incidentally, the same verse appears in Baghdadi Jewish *ketubbot* – as well as other Indian Jewish examples – but there it is located in the superscription. Finally, as in the Baghdadi Jewish *ketubbah*, the lower section contains the marriage contract and signatures of various persons involved in the wedding ceremony.

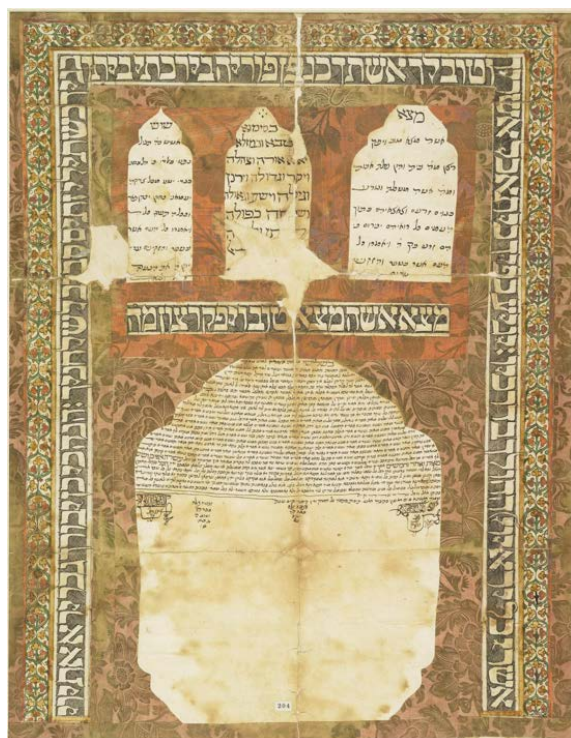


Figure 28: *Ketubbah* from Baghdad, 1764, Benjamin Zucker Family Ketubbah Collection

Nineteenth-century Baghdadi Jewish *ketubbot* have retained some features of the Iraqi style, including the arch-shaped frames, but are eclectic in their approach to Cochin Jewish examples. In a *ketubbah* from Cochin dated 1790 (Figure 29), the page is divided into two sections, with the superscription contained within two frames. In an 1812 *ketubbah* from Chendamangalam (Figure 30) the same layout can be observed. Later in the 19th century, however, this pattern had been discarded by the Cochin community in favour of just one superscription unit. For example, in a *ketubbah* from 1851 (Figure 31), the superscription is enclosed in a single oval frame. Contemporaneous Baghdadi *ketubbot*, on the other hand, maintain the older Cochin split superscription style, as seen in an 1854 document from Calcutta (Figure 32). This style continues in some early 20th-century *ketubbot* (see

Figure 33). A possible reason why this particular design for the superscription was retained by the Baghdadis is that the two-unit superscription pattern was closer to that of three-unit Iraqi *ketubbot*.³⁴ In other words, while the Baghdadi community did adopt an Indian Jewish *ketubbah* layout and the Cochin superscription text, they did not diverge too far from their traditional design, in terms of the overall structure.

32 Ibid, 170.

33 Sefaria, "Mishlei – Proverbs, 18," accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.sefaria.org/Proverbs.18.22?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en>

34 Sabar, "The Illuminated Ketubbah of the Cochin Jews, Baghdadi Jews and Bene Israel," 189.



Left (Figure 29): *Ketubbah* from Cochin, 1790, Private Collection; Right (Figure 30): *Ketubbah* from Chendamangalam, 1812, Private Collection



Left (Figure 31): *Ketubbah* from Cochin, 1851, Private Collection; Right (Figure 32): *Ketubbah* from Calcutta, 1854, Braginsky Collection



Figure 33: *Ketubbah* from Calcutta, 1908, Benjamin Zucker Family Ketubbah Collection

In medieval illuminated manuscripts, architectural motifs are a commonly used decorative device. While in scrolls such as the *Braginsky megillah*, the use of architectural frames is linked to the importance of space in the narrative of the Book of Esther, in *ketubbot*, too, these motifs have particular significance. The earliest extant examples of *ketubbot* containing architectural frames are those found in the Cairo Genizah, dating back to between the 9th and 12th centuries.³⁵ Given that these motifs were first seen in medieval Eastern manuscripts, and later adopted by European Jewish communities in the late-medieval/early-modern period, it has been suggested that the practice of using architectural frames as borders for text originated in Eastern Jewish communities.³⁶ It is, therefore, entirely plausible that architectural motifs in *ketubbot* have their origins in Islamic manuscript cultures, where non-figural ornamentation dominated.³⁷ These motifs then spread to the Iberian Peninsula – where there was a significant Jewish presence until their expulsion in 1492 – and onwards to Italy.

In a Baghdadi *ketubbah* from 1723 (Figure 34), the split superscription and the lower section containing the marriage contract are bordered by a gate-like structure, an architectural motif commonly found in *ketubbot*. The structure here can be read as representing a building or a gateway framed by neo-classical pillars on both sides. Here, the gate motif depicting a house symbolizes a new beginning for the bridal couple, or – drawing on Jewish religious symbolism – it can also be seen as the gateway to the kingdom of God.³⁸ This motif can be seen in *ketubbot* across cultures, both in Europe and non-European regions. In a 1775 Italian example (Figure 35), produced during the period when Italy was an important centre for the making of Jewish art, the text is framed by an arch-shaped structure, bounded by Baroque-themed pillars on both sides. Likewise, in a contemporaneous *ketubbah* from Aleppo from 1771 (Figure 26), the text is also situated within an arched structure. While there are no distinct pillars here, as seen in the other two *ketubbot* (Figures 34 and 35), it is enclosed by a floral border. In India, Cochin *ketubbot* contain the gate motif: in an example from 1851 (Figure 31), the marriage contract is situated within a building-like structure while the superscript, enclosed in an oval frame, has blue-gold pillars on either side.



Left (Figure 34): *Ketubbah* from Bombay, 1723, The Israel Museum; Right (Figure 35): *Ketubbah* from Italy, 1775, Braginsky Collection

35 Sabar, Mazal Tov: *Illuminated Jewish Marriage Contracts*, 19.

36 Sabar, Mazal Tov: *Illuminated Jewish Marriage Contracts*, 20.

37 Sabar, Mazal Tov: *Illuminated Jewish Marriage Contracts*, 20.

38 Sabar, Mazal Tov: *Illuminated Jewish Marriage Contracts*, 23.

Another motif common to Indian Jewish *ketubbot* is an emblem or ceremonial figure in the top half of the manuscript. In Baghdadi *ketubbot*, this tends to be either a floral wreath containing a Hebrew inscription, with an animal on each side, usually a pair of lions (Figure 32), or a crown emblem (Figure 34). This design is not seen in Iraqi examples (See Figure 36) or in other eastern *ketubbot* design traditions. Consider a late-19th-century *ketubbah* from Herat, Afghanistan or a late-18th-century example from Aleppo (Figure 26). Given the constraints on figural representations in Islamic regions, here there are neither animal figures nor any emblems. In both these *ketubbot*, the text is bordered by architectural units decorated with stylised floral patterns. In European specimens, the top half tends to contain some sort of an emblem or architectural symbol connected to figures of power, whether to the monarchy or dominant religious authority.³⁹ Consequently, in Europe, the symbols used are usually palaces, churches, or depictions of sites central to Judaism, such as Jerusalem (Figure 25).



Figure 36: *Ketubbah* from Baghdad, 1838, Benjamin Zucker Family Ketubbah Collection

While it is not possible to demonstrate how this design element entered the vocabulary of Indian Jewish traditions, I believe that since figural art was permissible in this context, patrons and artists may have been more open to adopting new motifs from European *ketubbot* and would have adapted the symbols to their local milieu. It is likely that the design featuring a crown supported by a pair of lions – the Dutch national emblem – was adopted by the Cochin Jews during the period of Dutch control (1663-1795).⁴⁰ The motif was then maintained in *ketubbot* design during the colonial period, presumably to reflect European power. Since Baghdadi Jewish *ketubbot* do have figural representation, it is highly probable that they incorporated this particular element from the Cochin tradition. The British royal

emblem – a coat of arms consisting of a crown supported by a unicorn and lion – was a particularly attractive element to adopt as lions are symbolic of Jewish identity.⁴¹ This is apparent in a *ketubbah* from 1858 where a lion (or tiger?) and a unicorn are shown supporting a flower wreath (See Figure 37).

Figure 37: *Ketubbah* from Calcutta, 1858, Benjamin Zucker Family Ketubbah Collection

Even though Iraqi examples do not feature figural representation, once in India, the Baghdadi Jews did not hesitate to incorporate a wide variety of animal and vegetal motifs in their *ketubbot*. While some of these motifs, such as the previously discussed lion figures, and other vegetal and animal motifs featuring local flora and fauna were adopted from the Cochin tradition, the Baghdadi examples also developed distinct stylistic characteristics. For instance, a motif specific to Baghdadi Jewish manuscripts is a pair of fish, usually located in a strip between the superscript in the upper column and the marriage contract text in the lower column (See Figure 32). This fish motif is not usually seen in



39 Sabar, Mazal Tov: *Illuminated Jewish Marriage Contracts*, 21.

40 Sabar, "The Illuminated Ketubbah of the Cochin Jews, Baghdadi Jews and Bene Israel," 176.

41 Ellen Frankel and Betsy P. Teutsch. *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Symbols* (Lanham, Maryland: J. Aronson, 2004), 99.

Cochin manuscripts, and naturally – given the restrictions on figural art in Islamic regions – does not occur in Iraqi *ketubbot*. In Judaism, fish are symbolic of fertility, making it an appropriate motif for wedding documents especially intended for women. There are several textual references in Judaism that associate fish with abundance or fertility: for example, in the Book of Genesis (48:16), a Hebrew phrase “*ve-yiggu*” stands for ‘to multiply like fish’. The Book of Ezekiel (47:10) mentions “fish of the great sea, exceeding many”.⁴² Incidentally, the fish motif can also be found in an 1880 Baghdadi *ketubbah* produced in Singapore, suggesting that not only did this motif become the standard within Baghdadi *ketubbot* produced in India but also spread eastward with the Baghdadi Jewish diaspora (See Figure 38).



Figure 38: *Ketubbah* from Singapore, 1880, The Israel Museum

The Baghdadi Jews brought along with them the tradition of using floral motifs in illuminated manuscripts. In Iraqi *ketubbot*, as in examples from other Islamic regions, floral motifs serve as purely decorative elements. In India however, the Baghdadis moved away from the typical stylised floral motifs of the Iraqi genre (See Figure 28), and instead, adopted the Cochin tradition of including specific Indian flora and fauna, and flower wreaths. A possible reason for this is the importance of flowers in Indian wedding ceremonies. Over time, flower decorations and the custom of brides wearing flowers entered Indian Jewish wedding ceremonies, particularly in the Bene Israel and Cochin Jewish communities.⁴³ Baghdadi *ketubbot* began to incorporate animals and birds typically found in India as well. For example, in an 1896 example from Calcutta (Figure 39), there are two blue peacocks facing each other – another regular feature in Baghdadi *ketubbot* in India – and lions have been replaced by tigers.



Figure 39: *Ketubbah* from Calcutta, 1896, The Israel Museum

In India, the Baghdadis, while adopting a Cochin-style layout that was closest to the original Iraqi style, for most other decorative elements discarded older Iraqi traditions. At the same time, their overall style remained conservative: they do not seem to have been influenced by the innovations present in European Jewish *ketubbot*. Their *ketubbot* do not contain narrative scenes or human figures, elements that are commonly found in European examples (Figure 40). The level of artistic conservatism they display here in comparison to their openness to new *megillot* styles is striking. A possible reason for this is that the Cochin style was long established in India, and itself drew on Sephardic design styles that were incorporated during Portuguese rule. During this period, the Paradesi Jews of the Cochin community – Sephardic Jews who had been expelled from the Iberian Peninsula and had migrated to India in the 15th

and 16th centuries – served as mediators between the Portuguese and Cochin Jews. It has been suggested that Sephardic elements could have been absorbed into Cochin *ketubbot* traditions through

42 Joseph Shadur, Yôsēf Šādūr, Yehudit Shadur, *Traditional Jewish Papercuts: An Inner World of Art and Symbol* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2002), 99.

43 Vail, *India's Jewish Heritage*, 98.

this link between the two communities.⁴⁴

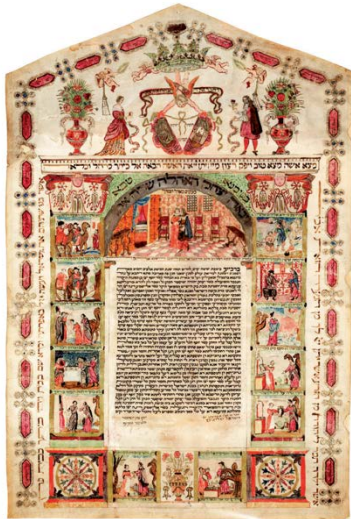


Figure 40: *Ketubbah* from Padua, 1828, Braginsky Ketubbah Collection

Another reason for Baghdadi conservatism could be the centrality of *ketubbot* to weddings, as religious legal documents that would have been displayed in front of wedding guests. The Cochin tradition, with its relatively conservative style and Indo-European elements, would have provided a suitable level of stylistic difference for the Baghdadis to emulate. Therefore, even though there was a divide between the Indian Jewish communities along linguistic, socio-economic, and ethnic lines, with the Baghdadi Jews occupying the upper strata of Indian Jewish society, they may have preferred to follow the Cochin *ketubbot* tradition.

Conclusion

The category of Jewish art is difficult to define. During the period of European nationalism, when ideas of a singular national culture and identity were being debated, the question of a national Jewish style was raised.⁴⁵ Since Jewish art, both in Europe and non-European regions, has always been influenced by local dominant artistic styles, there is no single definition that encapsulates its diversity. Neither can it be understood in the context of any single national artistic paradigm. For this reason, any study of Jewish art requires a transcultural approach that accounts for influences of not only local non-Jewish and Jewish artistic styles but also wider trends in Jewish art. Therefore, to understand the mixed artistic styles of Baghdadi Jewish visual production, it is necessary to consider it in the context of Indian, Iraqi, and European traditions, both Jewish and non-Jewish. In many ways, with their hybrid style that draws on various artistic traditions, Baghdadi Jewish art forms are characteristic of Jewish art.

In India, the Baghdadis were regarded as distinct from the rest of the local population, both Jewish and non-Jewish. At the same time, as demonstrated in this paper, they engaged in a lengthy process of adaptation and adoption of various artistic styles for their *ketubbot* and *megillot*. This is especially significant given the power dynamics between the Indian Jewish groups. Since the Baghdadi Jews occupied the upper layer of Indian Jewish society, it does seem remarkable that they would borrow so heavily from a group they considered to be of lower standing. On the other hand, this also invites a reconsideration of accepted ideas of Indian Jewish histories by taking into account networks of influence that cut across socio-economic hierarchies.

44 Sabar, "The Illuminated Ketubbah of the Cochin Jews, Baghdadi Jews and Bene Israel," 176.

45 Eva Frojmovic and Marc Michael Epstein, "The Problem of 'National Style,'" in *Skies of Parchment, Seas of Ink: Jewish Illuminated Manuscripts*, ed. Hartley Lachter and Marc Michael Epstein (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), 77.

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Contributors to the Quarterly:

AS - Anuradha Shankar

GS - Gazala Singh

JK - Jaya Kanoria

Text Editor: Suchita Parikh-Mundul

Design and Layout: Sharon Rodrigues



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